



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (May 11-17, 2017)



### Main events of the week

- The ceasefire which entered into effect on May 6, 2017, in four regions (the Astana Agreement) **is usually observed**. According to the UN envoy to Syria, there are talks between Syria and the United States about the expansion of the safe zones.
- **The pressure on ISIS increases in Iraq and Syria, and the territory under its control is shrinking.**
- Noteworthy developments in the passing week:
  - **Takeover of additional neighborhoods in Mosul:** The Iraqi security forces **took over additional neighborhoods in the western part of the city.**
  - **Advance of a rebel force from Al-Tanf (the tri-border area of Syria, Iraq, and Jordan) towards the city of Abu Kamal (on the Syrian-Iraqi border).** The objective of the rebel force, **which is supported by the US**, is to take over the city of Abu Kamal, which dominates the border crossing between Syria and Iraq and represents an important rear base for ISIS.
  - **Takeover of the Al-Jarrah airfield, which is on the route leading from Al-Bab to the Assad Lake, by the Syrian forces.** The Syrian troops may proceed towards the Euphrates River on this route.
  - **Takeover of the Tabqa Dam by the SDF forces:** After the takeover of the city of Tabqa, the dam area has also been taken over. ISIS's operatives withdrew from these areas, and the US-supported SDF encirclement of the city of Al-Raqqah, ISIS's stronghold in Syria, is growing tighter.

### Assessment of the status of the new ceasefire (the Astana Agreement)

- **The ceasefire** declared in four fighting zones in Syria, which were defined as de-escalation zones, **is still mostly observed**. On May 12, 2017, the Russian coordination center in Hmeymim reported that the situation in the de-escalation zones is estimated as "stable" (TASS, May 12, 2017). **The UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura** said in an interview that in relation to the issue of safe zones, it is

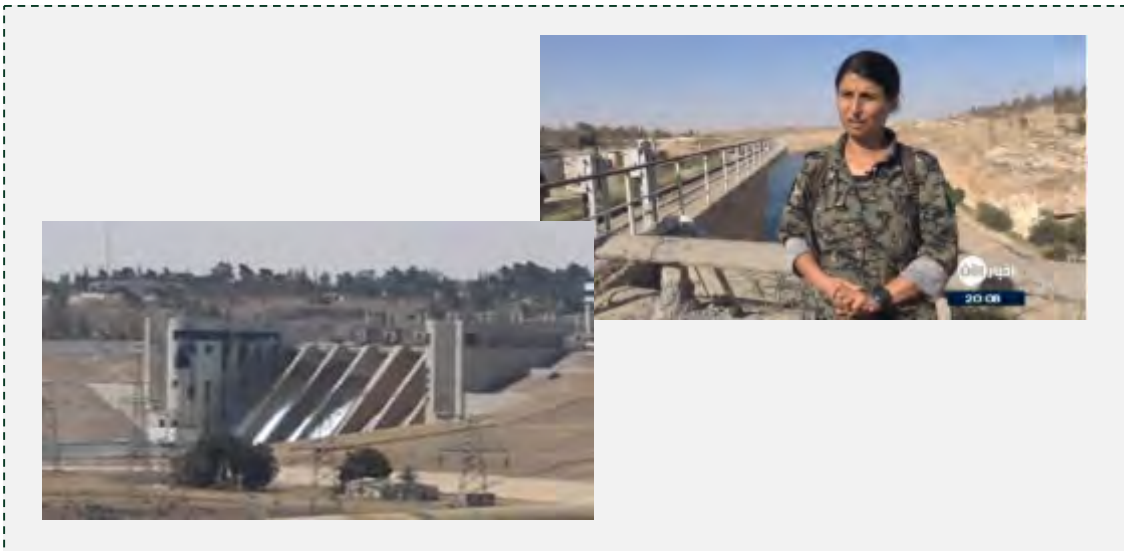
possible, in his opinion, to reach an understanding **between Syria and the US**. According to de Mistura, there are **ongoing negotiations between the two countries on that issue** (Corriere della Sera, May 14, 2017).

■ According to an Arab TV channel report based on Turkish sources, **Turkey intends to open a military operation under the codename “Idlib Shield,” similar to Operation Euphrates Shield which has recently been completed**. The operation will be carried out by rebel organizations in northern Syria, with Turkish assistance. Its objective is to **take over the Idlib Province completely and remove terrorist organizations such as ISIS and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, May 14, 2017). **The ITIC is not sure about the credibility of this report**. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reinforced its presence in the border area between Syria and Turkey in preparation for the Turkish operation.

## Main developments in Syria

### The campaign for the takeover of Al-Raqqah

■ **On May 4, 2017, the SDF forces took over the city of Tabqa and then the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates River**. In a press conference held by the SDF, they declared that **when all the mines and IEDs have been removed from the city, it will be handed over to the Tabqa Civilian Council and the internal security forces in the city**. According to their announcement, **the Euphrates River dam which they have taken over is a national facility that must serve all of Syria**. The SDF forces called on all young Syrians in the area to join their ranks in protecting the city and the region (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, May 12, 2017).



Right: Jihan Sheikh Ahmad, spokeswoman of Operation Euphrates Wrath, standing near the Tabqa Dam, reports about the liberation of the city of Tabqa and the Tabqa Dam from ISIS (Al-Aan Channel, May 10, 2017). Left: Tabqa Dam (SMART, May 12, 2017).

■ At the same time, **the SDF forces continued their slow advance toward the city of Al-Raqqah**, ISIS's stronghold in Syria, intensifying the siege. Their advance was supported by US Special Forces and the coalition planes. The SDF forces reportedly took over several areas outside the city and they are now **a mere 6 km or so from Al-Raqqah** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 13, 2017; Rusiya Al-Youm, May 13, 2017).

## ISIS's preparations for the campaign over Al-Raqqah

■ **ISIS continues its intense preparations for the imminent campaign over the city of Al-Raqqah.** ISIS commanders and operatives **declared general mobilization.** ISIS operatives reportedly barricade themselves in a camp that belonged to the Syrian Army, about 1 km north of Al-Raqqah (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 13, 2017; Rusiya Al-Youm, May 13, 2017). They notified the inhabitants living on the outskirts of Al-Raqqah that they had to leave their homes within five days due to the fighting that is expected to take place in the area (Khotwa, May 14, 2017). Residents of Al-Raqqah were prohibited from leaving the city, and boats used to carry residents out of the city, through the Euphrates River, were confiscated (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 8, 2017).

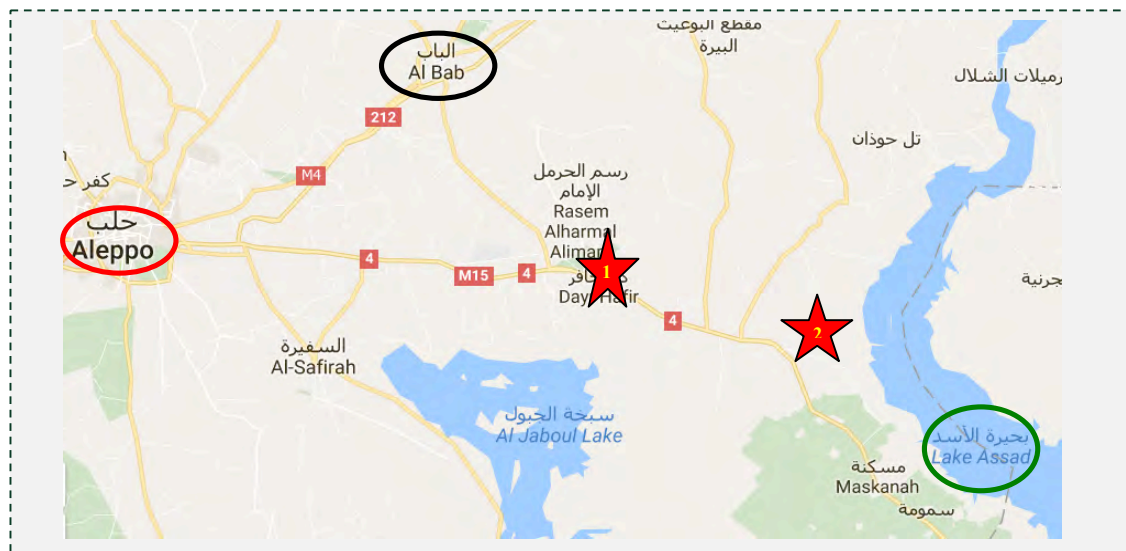
## The Syrian Army advances toward Lake Assad

■ **The Syrian Army and Hezbollah elite forces (Al-Nukhba) took over this week the Al-Jarrah airfield**, which is on **the route from Al-Bab toward Lake Assad.** The airfield was taken over from ISIS's operatives, who had been holding it for about nine weeks. The Syrian forces also took over several villages in the vicinity of the airfield

(Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 13, 2017). A month and a half ago (March 29, 2017), the Syrian forces took over **the town of Deir Hafer**, about 22 km west of the Al-Jarrah airfield. At this stage, it is not clear whether and to what extent the Syrian forces will continue advancing on this route **toward Lake Assad**.



Syrian Army soldiers at the Al-Jarrah military airfield (Twitter account, May 13, 2017).



The town of Deir Hafer (1) and the Al-Jarrah airfield (2) (Google Maps).

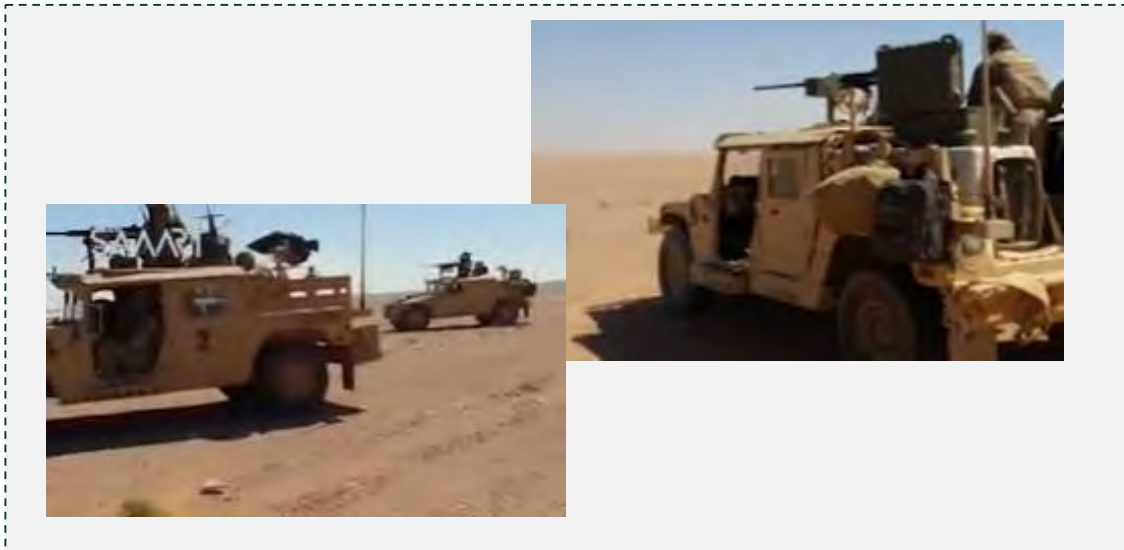
## Rebel force supported by the West advances from Al-Tanf to Abu Kamal

■ According to Syrian media reports, on May 14, 2017, a rebel organization called “the Revolution Commando” (*Maghawir Al-Thawra*), with US support, started a military move with the intention of taking over the city of Abu Kamal. A force of this organization started to move toward Abu Kamal from the Al-Tanf border crossing situated on the Syrian-Iraqi border, near the tri-border area of Syria, Iraq and Jordan. Battles had reportedly been waged between this force and ISIS operatives in the outlying desert areas south of Abu Kamal (Khotwa, May 14, 2017; Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, May 14, 2017; SMART, May 14, 2017).



Al-Rukban refugee camp (1), Al-Tanf border crossing (2), and the city of Abu Kamal (3) (Google Maps).

■ At the same time, airstrikes were carried out against ISIS targets in Abu Kamal: On May 15, 2017, Iraqi warplanes reportedly carried out airstrikes in the city that caused the death of at least 30 people and wounded about 50 others. American sources denied that there had been a coalition airstrike. In addition, coalition warplanes reportedly attacked an ISIS target in a village on the outskirts of Abu Kamal (Orient News, May 15, 2017). ISIS on its part presented the Iraqi airstrike in Abu Kamal as a massacre committed against civilians (Amaq, May 15, 2017).



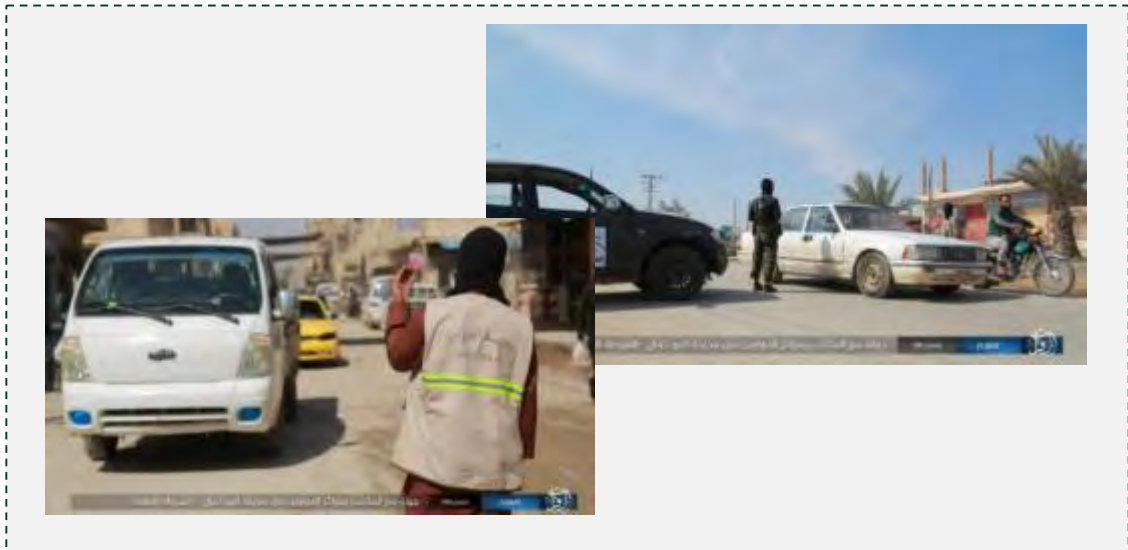
A force of the Revolution Commando fires at ISIS outposts (SMART, May 14, 2017).

■ **The city of Abu Kamal**, in the Euphrates Valley, has a population of 120,000. In January 2014, ISIS took over the city. Abu Kamal is **of great important to ISIS**, as it **dominates the Syrian-Iraqi border crossing**. It represents an **ISIS rear base**, a shelter for operatives who fled Mosul and Al-Raqqah, ISIS strongholds which are under increasing pressure. On the other side of the border is **the Iraqi city of Al-Qaim**, also an ISIS stronghold. Until late 2016, the US-supported Revolution Commando rebel forces had been called “the New Syrian Army,” operating mainly in the desert areas of eastern Syria. **The force comprises tribes residing in the area**, and many of its operatives formerly belonged to the New Syrian Army.

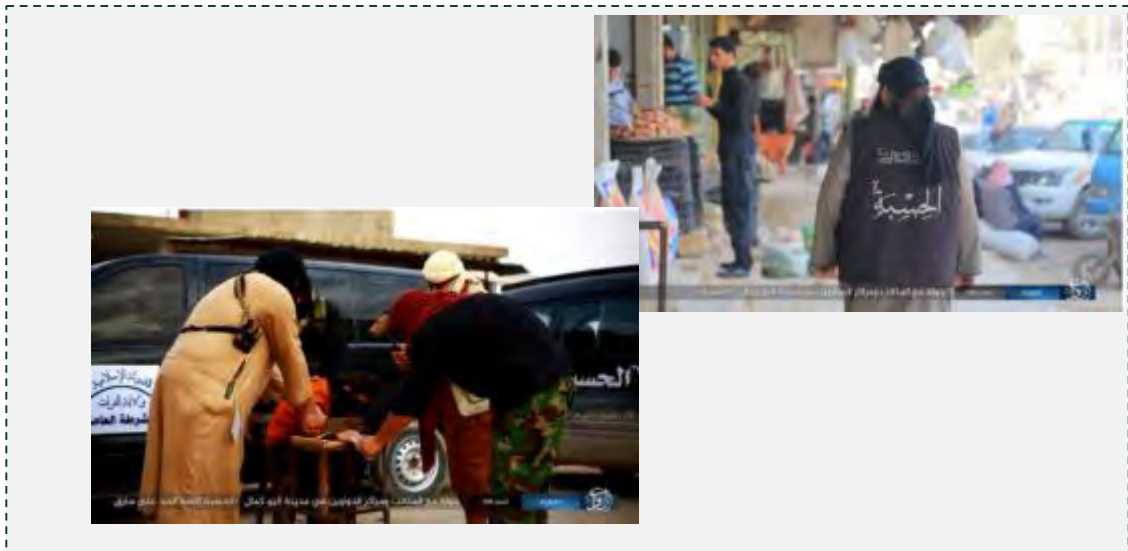
### ISIS’s response

■ ISIS tried to convey an atmosphere of business as usual. On May 15, 2017, it released photos which were supposed to demonstrate that life continues normally in Abu Kamal (Haqq, May 15, 2017). It is not clear when these photos were taken.





ISIS's traffic police in Abu Kamal (Haqq, May 15, 2017).



Right: An operative of Al-Hisba (ISIS's morality police) observing an open market (Haqq, May 15, 2017). Left: Cutting off the hand of a thief, in accordance with Sharia law, by Al-Hisba operatives (Haqq, May 15, 2017).



Laying sidewalks in Abu Kamal (Haqq, May 15, 2017).

■ On May 15, 2017, a car bomb exploded near a gas station at Al-Rukban refugee camp, near the tri-border area of Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. The camp is home to about 80,000 refugees who had fled Syria. The attack was aimed to hit a patrol of “The Army of the Free Tribes” (*Jaysh Ahrar Al-Ashaer*), a local tribal organization cooperating with the Revolution Commando (Al-Jazeera, May 15, 2017; Akhbar al-Aan, May 16, 2017). ISIS claimed responsibility. The attack may have been carried to try to deflect attention and resources from the force advancing to Abu Kamal.



Right: The scene of the attack in Al-Rukban refugee camp (Al-Jazeera, May 15, 2017). Left: Al-Rukban refugee camp (Akhbar Al-Aan, May 16, 2017).



## Main developments in Iraq

### The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ The Iraqi security forces **took over additional neighborhoods in the west Mosul, and ISIS's enclave is shrinking**. According to a senior Iraqi Army official, **the territory held by ISIS in Mosul has shrunk to 9% of the west Mosul neighborhoods** (Reuters, May 14, 2017). In the Iraqi defense minister's assessment, the Mosul area will be under the Iraqi Army's full control by the beginning of Ramadan, i.e., late May 2017 (Al-Arabiya, May 11, 2017). According to reports by local sources, an estimated **600 ISIS operatives remain in west Mosul** (Press TV, May 13, 2017).



Map of west Mosul (updated to May 15, 2017): the white and gray areas are still under ISIS's control (Nineveh Information Center, May 14, 2017).

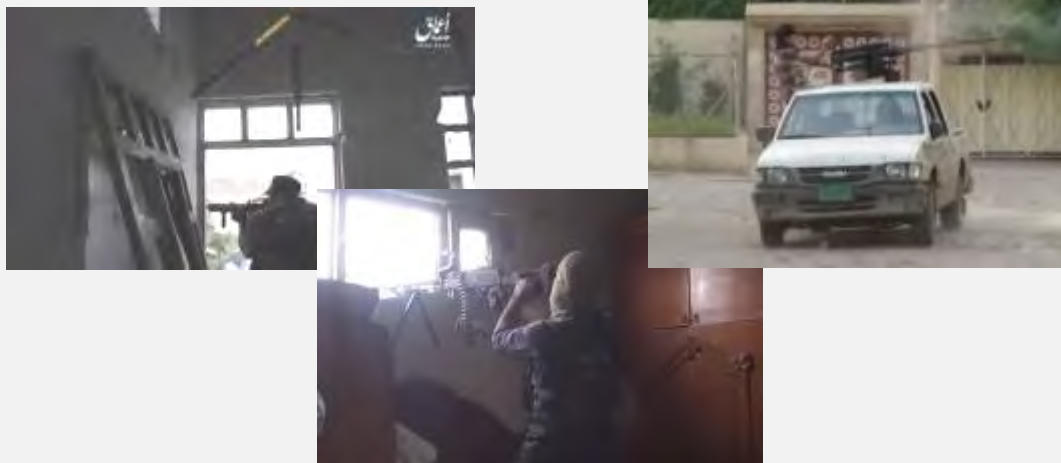
■ Iraqi police announced that its men took over **ISIS's largest plant for manufacturing chemical IEDs in the area of the July 17 neighborhood** (one of the neighborhoods taken over by the Iraqi forces in northwestern Baghdad, near the Tigris River). According to the announcement, dozens of IEDs were deactivated there (www.alliraqnews.com, May 8, 2017).



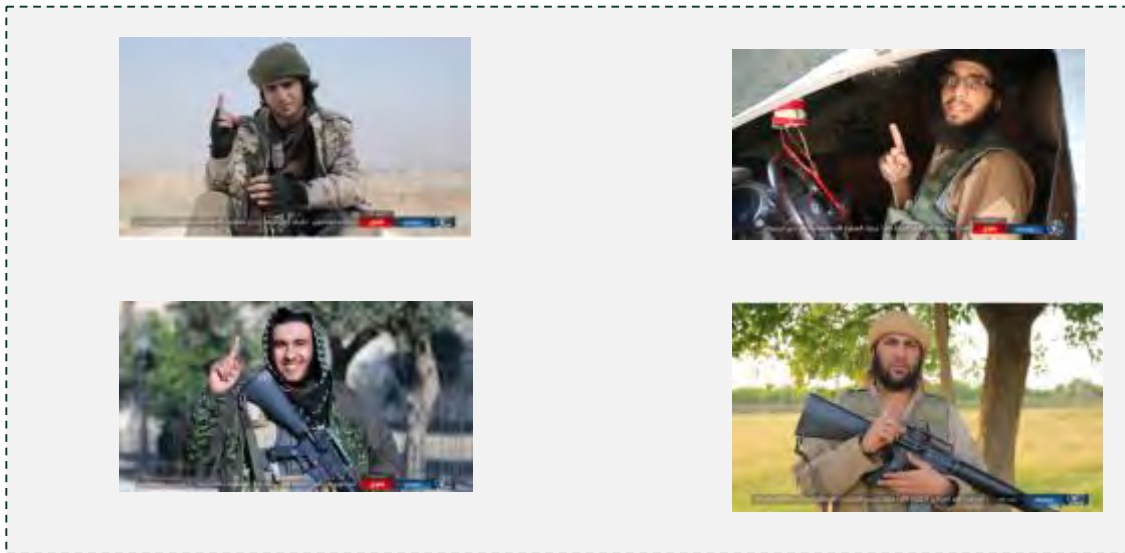
**Barrels containing chemical substances, seized in the plant by the Iraqi forces (www.alliraqnews.com, May 8, 2017).**

### **ISIS's response**

- ISIS continues to disseminate videos documenting the fighting waged by its operatives in Mosul. On May 11, 2017, ISIS media arm Aamaq released a video documenting the organization operatives fighting in the west Mosul neighborhoods of Al-Haramat and Al-Thawra (Aamaq, May 11, 2017). ISIS continues to report about suicide bombing attacks carried out by its operatives against the Iraqi forces in the western part of the city (Haqq, May 12, 2017).



**ISIS operatives fighting in west Mosul (Aamaq, May 11, 2017).**



Top left: Suicide bomber called Khattab from Mosul, who carried out a suicide bombing attack in the neighborhood of Al-Haramat. Bottom left: Abu Daoud al-Iraqi, who carried out a suicide bombing attack in the neighborhood of Al-Haramat. Top right: Suicide bomber codenamed Abu Sajjad al-Iraqi, who carried out a suicide bombing attack in the Al-Yarmouk neighborhood. Bottom right: Abu Abdallah al-Iraqi, who carried out a suicide bombing attack in the Mushayrafa neighborhood (Haqq, May 12, 2017).

## Sinai Peninsula

### Violent clashes between ISIS and the Al-Tarabin tribe continue

■ According to tribal sources, **on May 10, 2017, violent clashes took place** between ISIS's Sinai Province and the Al-Tarabin tribesmen in south Rafah and south Al-Sheikh Zuweid. The Egyptian Army provided the forces on the ground with air support (Al-Araby Al-Jadid, May 10, 2017). **On May 13, 2017, the Egyptian Army and squads of the Al-Tarabin tribesmen carried out a joint military activity against ISIS in south Rafah and Al-Sheikh Zuweid** (Al-Araby Al-Jadid, May 13, 2017). Mahmoud Nimr al-Zughra was reportedly killed in these clashes. **He had been an ISIS senior operative in charge of training.** In addition, the Al-Tarabin tribe captured many ISIS operatives, some of them senior (alarabiya.net, May 12, 2017).



An ISIS ambush against the Al-Tarabin tribesmen (Haqq, May 11, 2017).

■ On May 14, 2017, the Egyptian security forces raided a house in south Rafah where **Ibrahim Daoud Abu Mohsen** was staying. He had been a **Gaza Palestinian, ISIS operative who infiltrated into Sinai to fight in the ranks of ISIS**. He was killed. In his house, the forces found a large amount of explosives, communications devices, ammunition, and substances for making IEDs (Al-Watan, May 15, 2017). The Abu Taymiyyah Center in Gaza (affiliated with Salafi-jihadists) and ISIS's Haqq website announced that **Ibrahim Daoud Abu Mohsen had been killed in Sinai, "fighting the Sharia wars."** The Haqq website added that during recent days, **additional young Palestinians had "migrated" to ISIS's "Caliphate State."** They included young men belonging to **Al-Nukhba, the elite unit of Hamas's military wing** (Ibn Taymiyyah Center; Haqq, May 15, 2017).



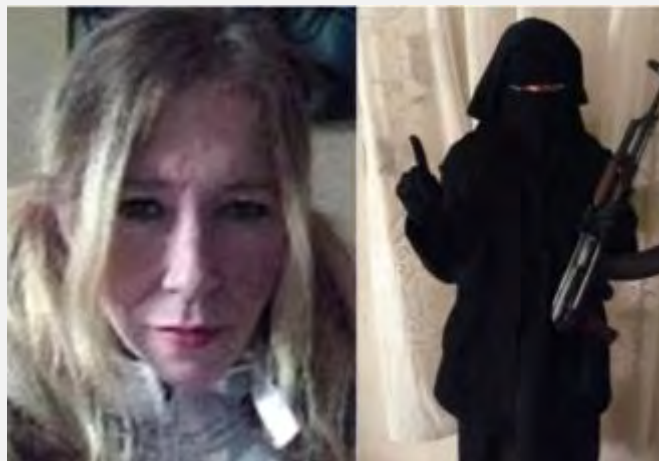
Right: Ibrahim Daoud Abu Mohsen, an ISIS operative in Sinai (Haqq, May 15, 2017). Left: Poster released by Ibn Taymiyyah Center in Gaza, noting that Ibrahim Daoud Abu Mohsen had been killed fighting in the ranks of ISIS's branch in Sinai (Ibn Taymiyyah Center, May 15, 2017).

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### Recruitment of Western women to the ranks of ISIS

■ According to US media reports, **ISIS is recruiting Western women, who call themselves “the lionesses of Allah.”** It is estimated that **more than 600 women have been recruited to date.** The main function of these women, some of whom are living in Syria and Iraq, is to nurture the next generation of ISIS and to ensure a future generation for the organization, many of whose operatives are being killed in the fighting. The women who are recruited receive a regular stipend of \$25 a month per child. They receive a \$400 maternity bonus for every child that they bear, and a \$500 marriage bonus. The women encourage their husbands to carry out suicide bombing attacks. If their spouse is killed, they become heroines and are rewarded by ISIS.

■ **Some of the women take an active part in the fighting,** and many of them undergo training, including specialized training. According to recent reports, ISIS has begun to use an all-female sniper squad to assist the fighters in Mosul. ISIS has also issued a special marriage license permitting women married to ISIS operatives to carry out suicide bombing attacks with the approval of ISIS’s leader. In this case, the husband should not prevent his wife from carrying out the attack. There are those who perceive the women operating in the ranks of ISIS as a **significant security threat.** This is because, unlike men, women generally do not arouse suspicion among the authorities. **They can pass security more easily, sneaking into public places carrying weapons or wearing bombs without raising suspicions, even strapping explosives around their waists to appear pregnant** (New York Post, May 13, 2017).



The British Sally Jones, one of ISIS’s most prominent widows (Twitter).



## Global jihad activity in other countries

### Pakistan

■ On May 12, 2017, a suicide bombing attack was carried out by detonating explosive belts against a convoy in which **Senator Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, Deputy Chairman of the Pakistani Senate**, was traveling. The attack took place near the city of Mastung in the province of Balochistan (about 55 km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border). **ISIS claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack**. Twenty-five people were killed and at least 35 were injured. The Senator, who was slightly injured, believes that he was the target of the attack. Haideri's party is a member of the coalition headed by Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (Reuters, May 12, 2017).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Reward for information leading to the capture of Abu Mohammad al-Julani

■ The US Department of State's Rewards for Justice Program, designed to prosecute international terrorists and prevent international terrorist activity, **has issued a statement offering a \$10 million reward for information leading to the capture of Abu Mohammad al-Julani**. Al-Julani heads the Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly the Al-Nusra Front), Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, which has been declared a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations Security Council (rewardsforjustice.net, May 10, 2017).



Poster announcing a reward for information about Abu Muhammad al-Julani (rewardsforjustice.net, May 10, 2017).

## The battle for hearts and minds

### ISIS claims to have carried out 82 suicide bombing attacks in Syria and Iraq in April

■ According to an infographic published by ISIS's media foundation, the Aamaq News Agency, ISIS carried out **82 suicide bombing attacks in Syria and Iraq** in April 2017. Fifty-six of the attacks were carried out in Iraq against the Iraqi security forces, and 26 in Syria (one against the Syrian regime, 19 against the Kurdish forces, and 6 against rival opposition elements). **Most of the suicide bombing attacks were carried out in and around the city of Mosul, where ISIS claims to have carried out 33 attacks.** The second largest number of **suicide bombing attacks (17) was carried out in the area of Al-Raqqah.** Two of the suicide bombing attacks were carried out with car bombs, 51 with explosive belts, and 26 with explosive vests (Aamaq News Agency, May 11, 2017).



Infographic issued by ISIS, about the suicide bombing attacks that it carried out in April 2017 (Aamaq News Agency, May 11, 2017).

### Al-Qaeda issues recommendations for perpetrators of terrorist attacks in the West

■ The Al-Sahab Foundation, Al-Qaeda's official media institution, released an audiotape titled "**Recommendations for those willing to sacrifice their lives in the West.**" In the tape, Osama bin Laden's son Hamza bin Laden calls on Muslims in the United States, the West and "occupied Palestine" to carry out attacks against Jewish and Western interests. He says that priorities should be set with regard to the targets of the attack: the highest priority is those **who harm the religion [i.e., Islam] and the Prophet**, after which **Jewish interests everywhere should be**

**attacked.** If there is no possibility of harming them, then the **Americans and the Crusaders** (i.e., the West) should be harmed. He says that **Russia** should also be included in the targets because it is once again intervening in Islamic affairs. Addressing the potential perpetrators, he advises them to maintain secrecy, take precautions, learn how to use the weapons that they choose, and choose the target carefully in order to harm the maximum number of “enemies” (Al-Sahab, May 13, 2017).