



Spotlight on Global Jihad (May 18-24, 2017)



Main events of the week¹

- The main event of the week was the US airstrike on a Syrian mechanized force advancing towards the Al-Tanf border crossing in the Syrian-Jordanian-Iraqi tri-border area. The force was composed of Syrian soldiers, Hezbollah operatives and Shiite militias handled by Iran. The force's takeover of the Al-Tanf area could have significantly harmed the efforts of the United States and Jordan to create a security buffer zone along the Syrian-Jordanian border and could have enabled the Syrian regime and the Iranians to control an important section of the Damascus-Baghdad highway.
- The airstrike led to media confrontations between the US and Russia. However, when the dust settled, senior officials from both armies began to discuss the question of **how to prevent friction between Russia and the US in eastern Syria** (in light of the imminent campaign to take over Al-Raqqah, ISIS's so-called capital in Syria). According to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US Army, the US has given Russia a detailed plan on this issue, which is currently under discussion.
- In Manchester, Great Britain, a terrorist attack was carried out following an American pop singer's performance, leaving 22 people dead and about 60 wounded. The attack was carried out by detonating an IED while the audience was on its way out. The terrorist killed was identified as a Manchester native of Libyan descent. **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.**

The coalition countries

Riyadh Declaration: Close cooperation between the US and Arab and Islamic countries in the fight against terrorism

- On May 21, 2017, a **summit conference** was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, **with the participation of US President Trump and leaders or representatives from 55 Arab and Islamic countries.** At the end of the summit a declaration was issued, focusing on cooperation between the various countries in the fight against terrorism

¹ Due to the holiday of Shavuot, publication of next week's Information Bulletin will be delayed.

and extremism. Following are the main points of the declaration (SPA, Saudi Arabia's official news agency):

- **Establishing a close partnership** between the leaders of the Arab and Islamic countries and the US leader **to confront extremism and terrorism**, achieving peace, stability and development, on regional as well as international stages.
- **The countries are committed to combating terrorism in all its forms.** The leaders affirmed the commitment of their States to combat terrorism in all its forms, address its intellectual roots, dry up its sources of funding and take all necessary measures to prevent and combat terrorist crimes in close cooperation among their states.
- **The leaders welcomed the establishment of a global center for countering extremist thought to take base in Riyadh.** The center's strategic objectives are to combat **intellectual, media and digital extremism** and promote coexistence and tolerance among peoples.
- **Exchanging information on foreign fighters** and their movements between the terrorist organizations, in order to prevent terrorist attacks.
- **Forming an Islamic Military Coalition to combat terrorism, which will provide a reserve force of 34,000 fighters.** The objective of the force will be **to support operations against terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria, when needed.**
- **Fighting against the financing of terrorism, including the establishment of a terrorist financing targeting center to be hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh.**
- **The leaders explained their countries' rejection of any attempt to draw a link between terrorism and any religion, culture or race,** affirming their determination to protect and promote a culture of tolerance, coexistence and constructive cooperation among different countries, religions and cultures. **The leaders emphasized the importance of renewing and rationalizing intellectual discourse to be consistent with moderate Islam, which calls for tolerance, love, mercy and peace, stressing that the misconceptions about Islam (i.e., those linking Islam to terrorism) must be addressed and clarified.**
- **The leaders confirmed their absolute rejection of the practices of the Iranian regime designed to destabilize the security and stability of the region and the world at large.** The leaders condemned the Iranian regime's hostile positions and continuing interference in the domestic affairs of other

countries. The leaders underlined the dangerous Iranian ballistic missile program. The leaders who participated in the summit **called for fighting against Iran's subversive activities through cooperation between the countries.**

- In order to realize these principles, the leaders called for **following-up the programs and activities** in areas of partnership between the United States and the Arab and Muslim countries.



Participants in the Arab-Islamic-American summit in Riyadh (the official Twitter page of the summit, May 21, 2017)

■ In the ITIC's assessment, this detailed statement reflects **a step up, at least declaratively, by Arab and Islamic countries regarding strengthening cooperation with the United States in the fight against terrorism** (including in concrete areas such as financing terrorism and intelligence cooperation). The declaration also calls for the formulation of plans and the establishment of specific mechanisms for its implementation (which will be based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia). The practical test of the Riyadh Declaration **will be the willingness of the various countries to implement it and to inject practical content into its various clauses** (mainly the strengthening of cooperation in the campaign against ISIS and the jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq, and in all matters related to curbing Iran's terrorism and subversion).

■ In the ITIC's assessment, what is behind the declaration is a deal of sorts between the US and Saudi Arabia: **President Trump** has agreed to stop linking terrorism with Islam, recognized Saudi Arabia's senior status in the Arab and Muslim world, and gave great prominence to the struggle against the Iranian regime. **The Saudis**, on their part, have helped the US mobilize dozens of Arab and Islamic countries to join the

partnership against extremism (at least declaratively), join the fight against the ideological roots of terrorism, and promote moderate and tolerant Islam.

Turkey's President: Turkey will not take part in the campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

■ After his meeting with US President Donald Trump, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that Turkey cannot be prevented from taking part in making decisions regarding Syria **because Turkey is present in the war zones in Syria and Iraq** (Hürriyet Daily News, May 18, 2017). Erdoğan added that Turkey **would not take part in the campaign to take over Al-Raqqah because the US intends to include Kurdish forces in it**. He added that **Turkey would not hesitate to launch another operation like Operation Euphrates Shield in northern Syria** (Reuters, May 18, 2017).

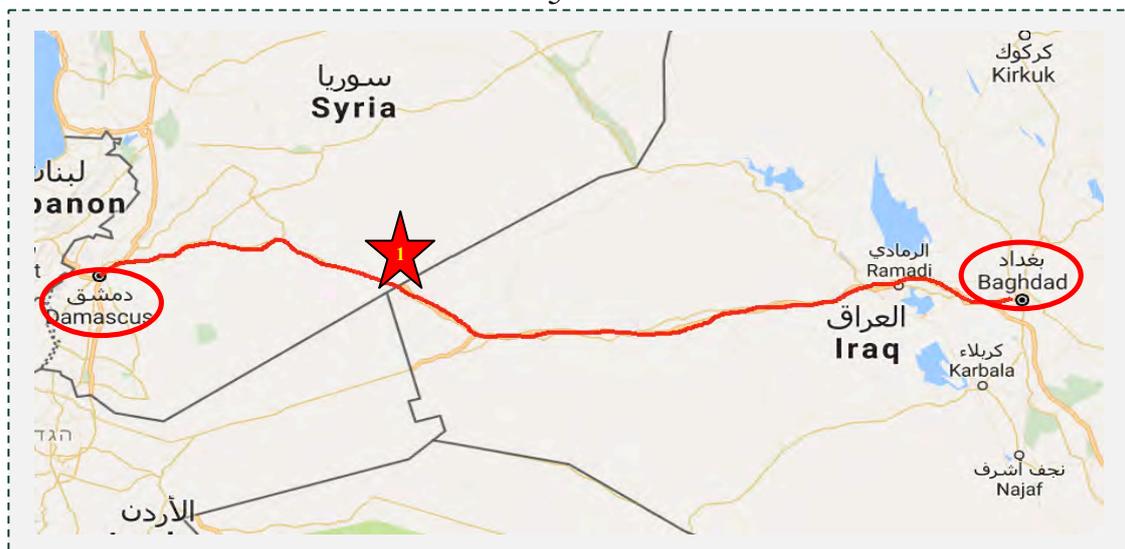
Main developments in Syria

Status of the ceasefire (the Astana Agreement)

■ The ceasefire in the four fighting zones designated in the Astana Agreement as de-escalation zones **is still mostly observed**. However, local confrontations continued in the various zones, mainly in Daraa and the Damascus area.

The tri-border area of Syria, Iraq, and Jordan

■ On May 18, 2017, the coalition warplanes attacked a mechanized Syrian force which **advanced toward the area of the Al-Tanf crossing in the tri-border area of Syria, Jordan, and Iraq**. According to various reports, the force also included operatives from Hezbollah and the Shiite militias operating in Syria on behalf of Iran. Sources in the Syrian opposition reported about eight fatalities and two wounded among the Syrian Army (Zaman Al-Wasl, May 19, 2017). According to another source, the Syrian Army, Hezbollah and the Iraqi Shiite militias had 35 fatalities (Local Coordination Committees, May 19, 2017). According to Syrian sources, the Syrian Army (i.e., implicitly, the force attacked by the US) **was on the Damascus-Baghdad highway, about 100 km from the Al-Tanf border crossing** (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, a website affiliated with the Syrian Army, May 21, 2017; Yusha Yuseef Twitter account, May 24, 2017).



Damascus-Baghdad highway passing through Al-Tanf (1) (Google Maps)



The Syrian Army on the Damascus-Baghdad highway, about 100 km from the Al-Tanf Crossing (Yusha Yuseef Twitter account, May 24, 2017)

■ The attack had wide-spread media repercussions and triggered an exchange of accusations between the US on the one hand, and Russia and Iran, Syria's allies, on the other:

- According to an American official source, the US attacked Syrian forces loyal to the Assad regime at the Al-Tanf area. According to the source, these forces entered the de-escalation zone without authorization **and therefore were perceived as a threat**. According to an announcement by the coalition forces, those forces posed a threat to the US troops, and the attack was preceded by warning shots (AP, May 19, 2017). According to US administration officials and experts, the attack at Al-Tanf was carried out against the backdrop of **Iran's attempt to achieve strategic control of an area which represents a corridor**

of sorts leading to Baghdad from Lebanon and Syria, and from there – to Tehran. US Secretary of Defense James Mattis said at a press conference that the force which was attacked was advancing in a manner that threatened a rebel camp near the Jordanian border, where American advisors were staying (Washington Post, May 20, 2017).

- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** said at a press conference that the US attack was illegal and violated Syria's sovereignty. According to Lavrov, the purpose of the attack was to encourage the opposition and the radical organizations to fight against the Syrian government. He expressed his concern that the idea of fighting against ISIS was starting to erode (TASS; the Russian Foreign Ministry's website, May 19, 2017).



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the press conference (Russian Foreign Ministry's website, May 19, 2017)

■ In the ITIC's assessment, **the objective of the Syrian force was to take over the Al-Tanf region, thereby significantly compromising the US and Jordanian efforts to establish a security buffer zone along the Syrian-Jordanian border.** Taking over the Al-Tanf region would have allowed the Syrian regime and the Iranians to monitor the Damascus-Baghdad highway, which passes near the tri-border area. In addition, such a takeover would have cut off the rebel force ("Revolution Commando") which was dispatched, under US support (May 14, 2017), from the Al-Tanf area to the city of Abu Kamal held by ISIS.²

² The incident at Al-Tanf apparently stalled or curbed the advance of the force to the city of Abu Kamal. In the meantime, ISIS reportedly booby-trapped the roads leading to Abu Kamal and dug trenches to protect its operatives (Orient News, May 23, 2017).



Left: Insignia of the “Revolution Commando,” a rebel organization operating in the Al-Tanf region under US support (Twitter account). Left: A “Revolution Commando” force (Baladi News, May 18, 2017).

■ Noteworthy is the **participation of Hezbollah and Shiite militias (in the ITIC's assessment, under Iranian instruction) in the Syrian Army's attempts to take over key areas in east Syria.** A Hezbollah force takes part in the Syrian Army's advance toward Lake Assad and the Euphrates Valley (as noted above), and another force has been integrated into the Syrian force which was dispatched to take over the Al-Tanf area. According to the Iranian **Fars News Agency, 3,000 Hezbollah operatives were brought from sites along the Syrian-Lebanese border and in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley to take part in operations in the Syrian Desert.** Fars News Agency also reported, based on an informed source, that **forces loyal to the Syrian regime would not allow the US and its allies to establish a buffer zone in southern Syria to serve as a shelter for the “militants”** (Fars, a news agency affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, May 18, 2017).

■ Confrontations in the media aside, it seems that the incident in Al-Tanf prompted **the US and Russia to start intense negotiations between senior officials of the two armies, which were intended to prevent an armed confrontation between the two countries in east Syria.** US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff **Joseph Dunford** said at a press conference that **the US had offered Russia a detailed plan,** which is now discussed between the two countries. This plan was intended to avoid friction and separate the operations of the two armies, ensure that the US campaign is conducted against ISIS, and protect the lives of the Americans stationed in the area. According to Dunford, **the Russian military is eager to find a way to prevent an**

armed confrontation between Russia and the US in the Deir ez-Zor area and the Euphrates Valley (Washington Post, May 20, 2017).

The campaign for the takeover of Al-Raqqah

Mopping up the Tabqa area

■ **This week, the SDF forces continued mopping up the Tabqa area**, after taking over the city and the dam on the Euphrates River. Local clashes occurred between the SDF and ISIS. SDF forces reportedly took over several additional villages north and east of Tabqa (Sham Network, May 18, 20, 2017). Another fighting zone between the SDF forces and ISIS was the area of Hanida, **about 16 km east of Tabqa**, on the southern bank of the Euphrates River (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 20, 2017).

The Syrian Army's advance towards the Euphrates Valley

■ After the Syrian forces had taken over the Al-Jarrah airfield last week, **they continued their advance toward the town of Maskana, west of Lake Assad** (about 17 km southeast of Al-Jarrah). The Syrian Army fired artillery at territories held by ISIS in the rural area near the town. At the same time, Russian warplanes carried out airstrikes (Sham Network, May 17, 2017; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 20, 2017).



The advance of the Syrian Army forces toward the town of Maskana (3). The map shows the Al-Jarrah airfield (2) and the town of Deir Hafer (1) (Google Maps)

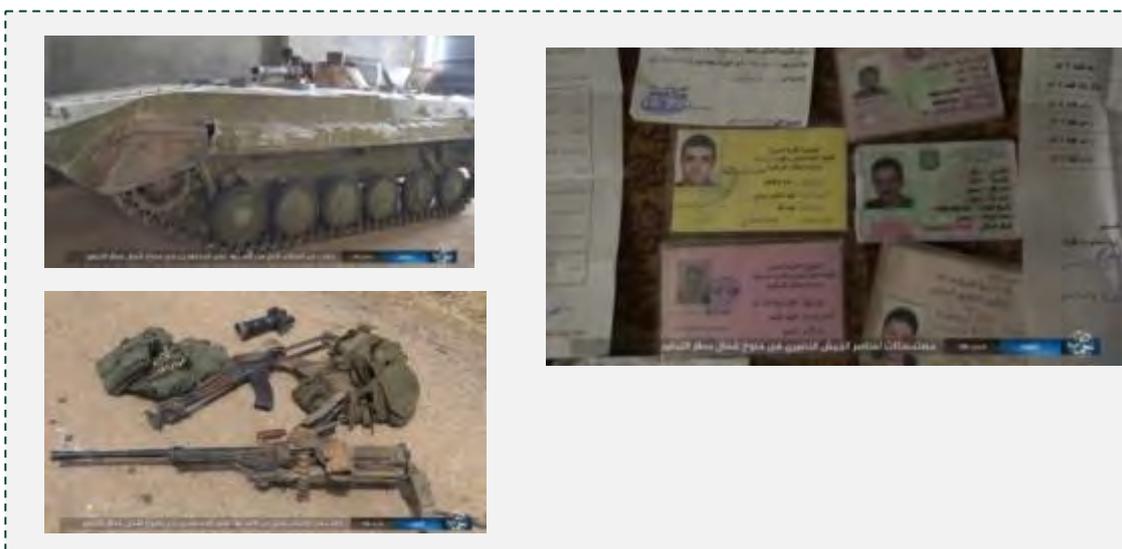
■ ISIS announced that over 22 Syrian Army soldiers and operatives of the [Shiite] militias operating with them had been killed and others had been wounded in clashes that took place south of the Al-Jarrah airfield. According to ISIS, during the clashes, its operatives detonated a car bomb near a village situated about 2.5 km south of the airfield. A tank and an APC of the Syrian Army were damaged, and an off-road vehicle was destroyed (Haqq, May 20, 2017).



Right: Detonation of an ISIS car bomb near the village of Al-Mazyunah, south of Al-Jarrah (Haqq, May 20, 2017). Left: An ISIS mortar shell hitting a Syrian Army's outpost south of the Al-Jarrah airfield (Al-Sawarim, May 20, 2017)

Palmyra area

■ **The Syrian Army still hasn't been able to stabilize the situation in the Palmyra area.** ISIS released photos showing weapons and equipment seized from the Syrian Army by ISIS operatives after a battle waged in the area north of the T-4 military airfield (west of Palmyra). The photos show personal weapons and ammunition, anti-tank missiles and a launcher, an APC, a bulldozer and a truck, as well as military ID cards and bodies of the Syrian soldiers (Haqq, May 19, 2017).



Right: ID cards of Syrian Army soldiers killed fighting with ISIS north of the T-4 military airfield.
Left: Tank and weapons seized (Haqq, May 19, 2017)

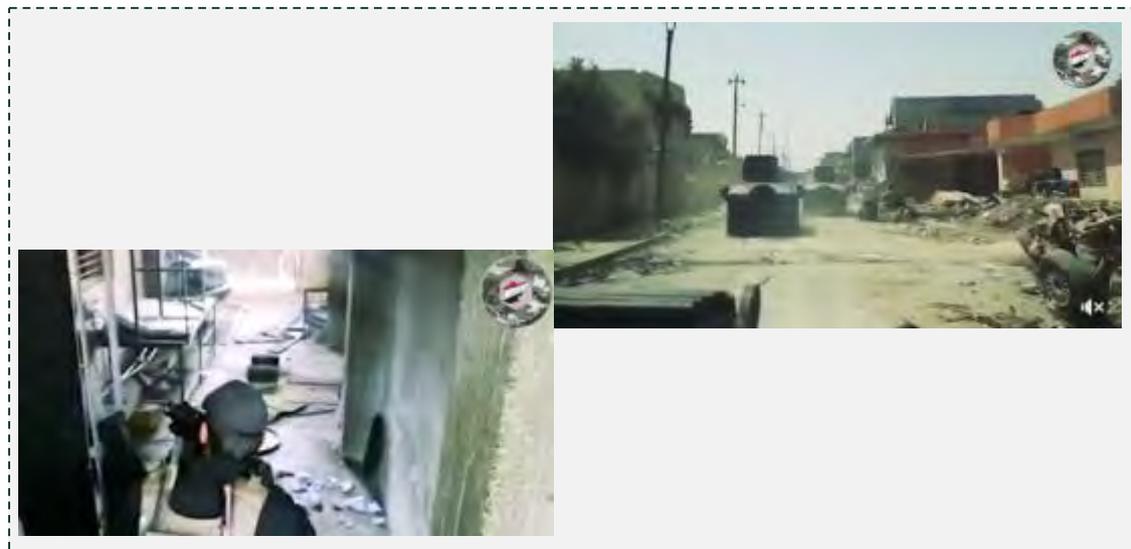
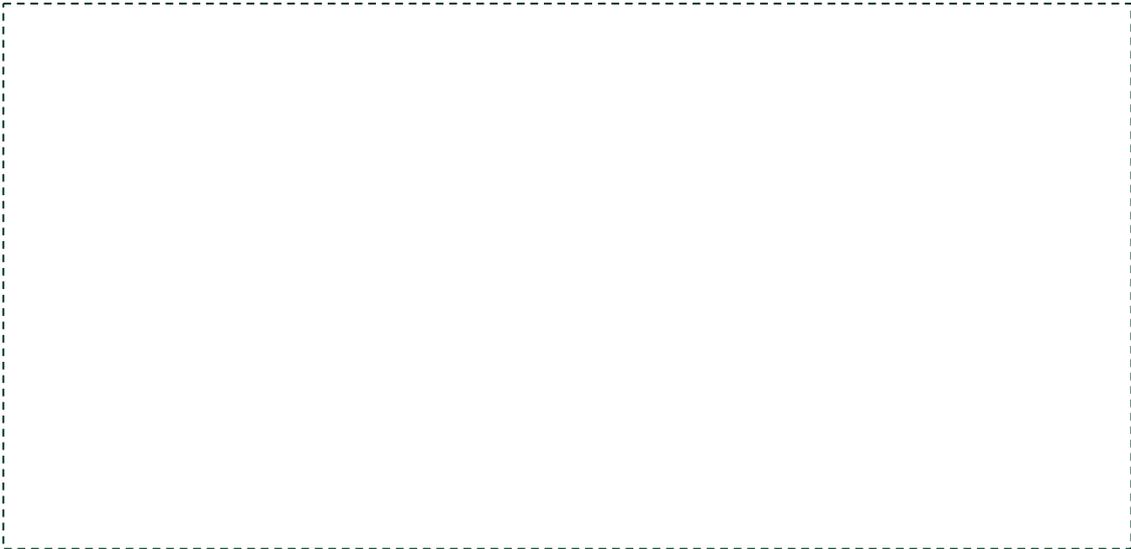
Damascus area

■ According to Syrian media reports, **ISIS has started to prepare for evacuating its strongholds south of Damascus, mainly the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp and the town of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad** nearby (Al-Watan, May 21, 2017). ISIS opened registration centers for the evacuees (Al-Sham Network website, May 21, 2017). The operatives and residents who will be evacuated will be transferred to ISIS's territories in the east, including the areas of Al-Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor (Rai Al-Youm, May 21, 2017).

Main developments in Iraq

The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ **This week, the Iraqi security forces took over additional neighborhoods in west Mosul. ISIS's enclave is shrinking.** According to a report by an Iraqi forces commander on May 20, 2017, ISIS is now holding a territory of mere 8 km in west Mosul (AP, May 20, 2017).



The Iraqi forces fighting in west Mosul (Nineveh Information Center, May 20, 2017)

ISIS's response

- ISIS continued to carry out terror and guerrilla activities both in west Mosul and outside the city. On May 21, 2017, a senior Iraqi official announced that six Iraqi Army soldiers had been killed and four others had been wounded as a result of the detonation of a car bomb by a suicide bomber northwest of Mosul. In yet another suicide bombing attack in the western part of the city, eight soldiers were killed and nine others were wounded (Anatolia, May 21, 2017).



Right: ISIS fighting in west Mosul's Al-Fatah neighborhood (Haqq, May 18, 2017). Left: Abu Khattab al-Iraqi, an ISIS suicide bomber who blew himself up in west Mosul (Haqq, May 16, 2017)



Infographic released by ISIS on May 24, 2017, summing up the terrorist organization's activity in Mosul between April 18, 2017, and May 17, 2017. According to ISIS, it has carried out a variety of terrorist attacks, including 44 suicide bombing attacks, causing 750 fatalities among the Iraqi security forces (Haqq, May 24, 2017)

- In addition, ISIS operated in several other cities in Iraq:
 - **Baghdad:** On May 19, 2017, two car bombs exploded **in the south Baghdad neighborhood of Al-Dora**. One of them was driven by a suicide bomber, and the other, which exploded immediately after the first, was driven by two suicide bombers. As a result of the attack, 13 people were killed and 15 others were wounded (Al-Sumaria, May 19, 2017). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks (Haqq, May 20, 2017; Al-Sawarim, May 20, 2017).



The scene of the attack at the Al-Dora neighborhood in Baghdad (Sumar News, May 19, 2017)

- **Kirkuk Province:** The Kurdish forces announced that they had repelled a large-scale ISIS attack south of the city of Kirkuk (Kurdistan 24, May 18, 2017). That same day, an Iraqi source reported that two Peshmerga soldiers had been killed in the area, as well as another soldier from a Turkmen force, operating in coordination with the Peshmerga (Al-Quds Al-Araby, May 18, 2017).
- **Basra Province:** A suicide bomber detonated his vehicle at the Rumeila checkpoint on the highway near the city of Basra. Eight people were killed, including two soldiers (Al-Arabiya, May 19, 2017). ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing attack by a car bomb in the city of Basra (Haqq, May 20, 2017; Al-Aan Channel, May 19, 2017).



The scene of the attack near the city of Basra (Al-Aan Channel, May 19, 2017)

- **The area of the city of Baiji:** ISIS claimed responsibility for killing three Iraqi soldiers in an attack carried out by the organization’s operatives against Iraqi Army outposts in the area of Jabal Makhul, about 10 km north of Baiji (Haqq, May 20, 2017).

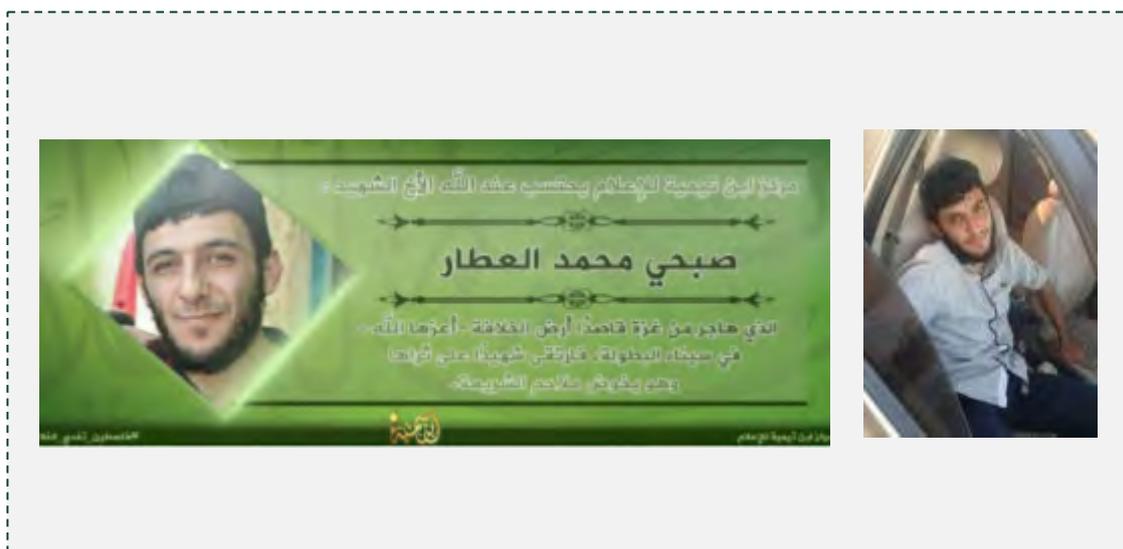
Sinai Peninsula

- **ISIS claimed responsibility for a series of terrorist attacks carried out against the Egyptian security forces in Al-Arish:** On May 20, 2017, ISIS announced that four Egyptian policemen were killed by sniper fire at a checkpoint in south Al-Arish. An IED was activated in south Al-Arish against an Egyptian Army armored vehicle. An IED activated in Al-Bahr Street in Al-Arish destroyed an Egyptian Army bullet-proof vehicle. Yet another IED was activated against an M-113 APC in central Al-Arish (Haqq, May 20, 2017).



Operatives of ISIS’s Sinai Province (Haqq, May 20, 2017)

- **Ibn Taymiyyah Center** (an institute affiliated with the Salafist-jihadi movement in the Gaza Strip) and ISIS’s Haqq website reported that **Subhi Mohammad al-Attar had been killed in Sinai “fighting the Sharia wars.”** Subhi al-Attar is the nephew of Ra’ed al-Attar, Hamas military wing commander who was killed during Operation Protective Edge. According to ISIS’s Haqq website, Subhi Mohammad al-Attar “migrated” to ISIS’s Sinai Caliphate State several months ago, along with other young Palestinians, including operatives of Hamas and its military wing. Several years ago, Subhi al-Attar tried to move to Sinai but was returned to Rafah by the smugglers (Ibn Taymiyyah Center; Haqq, May 20, 2017).



Right: Subhi Mohammad al-Attar, ISIS operative killed in Sinai. Left: Poster released by the Ibn Taymiyyah Center in Gaza, announcing that Subhi Mohammad al-Attar was killed fighting in Sinai (Ibn Taymiyyah Center, May 20, 2017)

■ The ITIC believes that **Subhi al-Attar's** move to Sinai represents a phenomenon of Gaza Strip Palestinians, mainly belonging to Hamas, joining the ranks of ISIS's Sinai Province. Recently, ISIS reported that another Gaza Strip Palestinian, called **Ibrahim Daoud Abu Mohsen**, was killed in Sinai. The scope of this phenomenon is not clear, but it is evident that **ISIS is trying to attract media coverage to the Palestinians joining its ranks, to spite Hamas and try to drive a wedge between it and Egypt.**

The conduct of the Islamic State

The Islamic State's financial conduct

■ According to the head of the currency authority in the Islamic State, the **“Islamic currency” project announced by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is continuing**, despite the obstacles facing the organization. This project has reached the important stage of **beginning to trade in three types of coins: gold, silver and copper**. According to him, all the ministries and offices of the Islamic State are using the currency. All the goods in the Islamic State can be purchased in this currency alone. He called on all Muslims to get rid of any currency that was not issued by the Islamic State and added that one of the goals of the project was to destroy the “Jewish-controlled” world economy (Al-Naba, May 18, 2017).

Global jihad activity in other countries

Deadly terrorist attack in Manchester (updated to May 24, 2017)

■ On the night of May 22, 2017, at the end of a performance by American pop singer Ariana Grande, a deadly terrorist attack was carried out as the audience was leaving the Manchester Arena. **A total of 22 people were killed in the attack, many of them teenagers, and about 60 were wounded.** Greater Manchester Police Chief Constable Ian Hopkins said that at this stage he believed the explosion was carried out by one person, **who detonated an IED at the scene of the attack** (BBC, May 23, 2017). **Prime Minister Theresa May** convened the British government for an emergency session. She noted that **this was the deadliest incident since July 2005**, when four Muslims, all of them British citizens, killed 52 people in a suicide bombing attack in London's transport system (BBC, May 23, 2017).

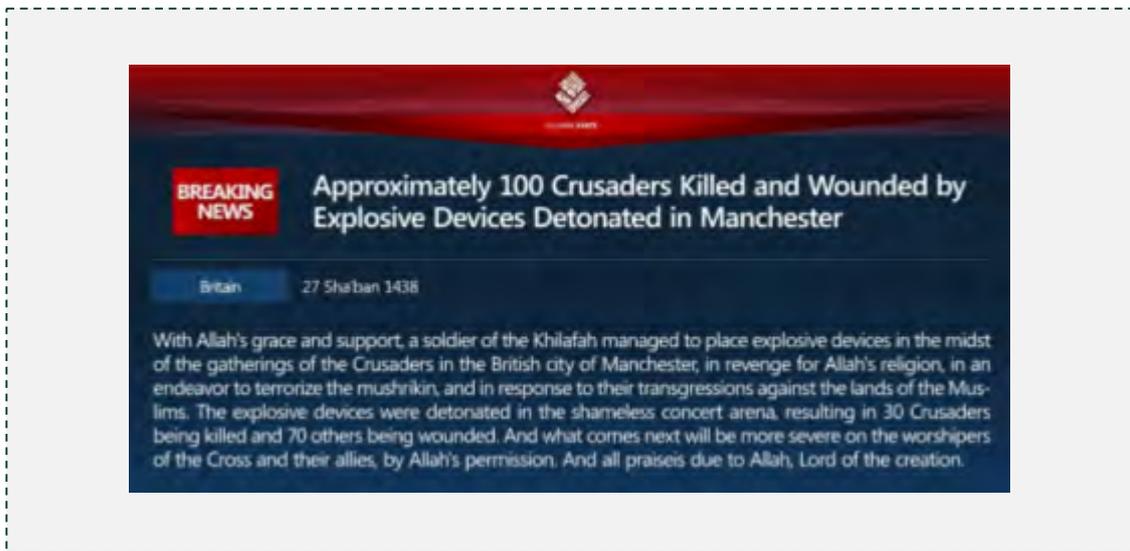
■ Speaking at a press conference (May 23, 2017), Chief Constable Hopkins said that **the terrorist killed in the attack was Salman Ramadan Abedi**. The terrorist was born in Manchester in 1994 to parents who had fled Libya during the Qaddafi regime. He was the second of four brothers. The family initially lived in London and later moved to Manchester. He attended a local school and began studying business administration at Salford University in 2014. At some point he abandoned his studies. **He was known to the British security services. About three weeks ago, he visited Libya, returning a few days before he carried out the attack.** He may have also visited Syria. Security sources believe he was trained in Libya. He recently underwent a process of religious radicalization, wearing a jellabiya and praying at a local mosque. His elder brother Ismail is a teacher of Quranic studies. The British security services are investigating his recent trips to Libya (The Telegraph, May 24, 2017).

■ **ISIS claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack.** On May 23, 2017, ISIS's Aamaq News Agency issued a **claim of responsibility in Arabic, English and other languages**. The claim of responsibility reads: "[...] a soldier of the Khilafah managed to place explosive devices in the midst of the gatherings of the Crusaders in the British city of Manchester [...]. The explosive devices were detonated in the shameless concert arena, resulting in 30 Crusaders being killed and 70 others being wounded." The claim of responsibility ends with the threat: **"And what comes next will be more**

severe on the worshipers of the Cross and their allies [...]” (Amaq, May 23, 2017).



ISIS’s claim of responsibility for the attack in Manchester (Amaq, May 23, 2017).



The English version of the claim of responsibility (Amaq, May 23, 2017).



Infographic published by ISIS following the attack in Manchester, with the heading “The attack in Manchester, one of the most deadly attacks against the Crusaders in Britain.” The text on the bottom reads: “62 days after the vehicular operation in front of the Parliament in London on March 22, 2017.” On the upper left, there is a picture of the Manchester Arena. The text on the lower left reads: “One of the soldiers of the Islamic State planted explosive devices in the Arena in Manchester, killing 30 and wounding 70 others” (Al-Sawarim, May 23, 2017).

Attack on the state radio building in Afghanistan

■ The Khorasan Province of the Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack on the Afghan state radio building in the eastern part of the city of Jalalabad, in the Nangarhar Province. The attack killed at least six people, apparently including two policemen, and wounded at least 17 others. Four operatives reportedly participated in the attack. One of them blew himself up at the entrance to the building. Three others were killed in an exchange of fire that lasted 3-4 hours (Reuters, May 17, 2017). **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack**, which was carried out by two brothers who were ISIS operatives (Haqq, May 17, 2017).