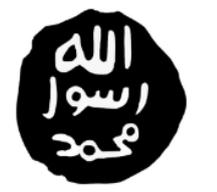




*Spotlight on Global Jihad*  
(May 25-June 1, 2017)



## Main events of the week

### ■ ISIS continues to face mounting pressure in Iraq and Syria:

- **Iraq:** The battle for the takeover of Mosul is nearing its final stages; The Popular Mobilization forces (the Shiite militias supported by Iran) reached the Iraqi-Syrian border (west of Sinjar). They began to move south towards the city of Al-Qaim, on the Euphrates River, in order to mop up the border area from ISIS forces (a process that creates tension with the Kurds, who control the Syrian side of the border).
- **Syria:** The siege on the “capital city” Al-Raqqah is growing tighter, leaving ISIS operatives with only one remaining escape route to the south, apparently with permission from the SDF. The Russians fear that ISIS operatives who flee from Al-Raqqah will find their way to the Palmyra area, where the Syrian army is conducting intensive activities against ISIS. As a result, this week the Russians attacked ISIS convoys and targets in the Al-Raqqah area, using their Air Force and cruise missiles launched from a frigate and a submarine in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. ISIS sustained heavy losses.
- **The heavy losses that ISIS continues to sustain affect its operational and media systems, among other things.** This week, coalition aircraft killed three senior operational operatives and a senior media operative in an airstrike against ISIS targets in the city of Al-Mayadeen, on the Euphrates River.

**ISIS’s response is reflected in the increase in terror and guerrilla attacks, despite the month of Ramadan** (dubbed by ISIS “the month of invasions and conquests that have changed the course of history.”) Deadly mass-casualty terrorist attacks **were carried out in Baghdad** (and in other cities throughout Iraq) **and abroad** (the most noteworthy attacks were the mass-casualty shooting attack against a bus carrying Coptic Christians in Egypt, and the detonation of a tanker bomb in the diplomatic quarter of Kabul in Afghanistan, apparently carried out by ISIS). It should be taken into account that **during the month of Ramadan, ISIS operatives or supporters will try to carry out terrorist attacks in Western countries as well.**

## The coalition countries

■ The US Department of Defense published the findings of an investigation into an attack carried out on March 17, 2017 in the Al-Jadida neighborhood of Mosul, resulting in the deaths of 107 civilians. According to the findings of the investigation, **the civilians were killed as a result of a secondary explosion of IEDs planted by ISIS operatives in the area, which they activated following the airstrike.** The Department of Defense emphasized that the weapons used by the United States could not cause this type of damage (US Department of Defense website, May 25, 2017).

■ ISIS continues to suffer casualties among its senior operatives who are involved in planning operational activities in Syria, Iraq and abroad. **These losses compromise ISIS's operational capabilities.** This week, the US Central Command reported **the killing of three senior foreign fighters** in coalition airstrikes (Centcom website, May 26, 2017):

- **Mustafa Gunes:** an operative in ISIS's external terrorist operations arm, who operated based in Syria. He was killed in an airstrike on Al-Mayadeen on April 27, 2017. Gunes was identified as having recruited operatives to the ranks of ISIS in Konya, central Turkey. He was also involved in transferring money for planning attacks against the West outside Syria and Iraq.
- **Abu Asimal-Jazaeri:** he was killed in a coalition airstrike near Al-Mayadeen on May 11, 2017. He was also an operative in ISIS's external terrorist operations arm and operated based in Syria. He was involved in training a new generation of ISIS youth ("the Lions of the Caliphate").
- **Abu Khattab al-Rawi:** a senior military operative killed in an operation in Al-Qaim, Iraq. He operated in the Al-Anbar Province in western Iraq and was responsible for coordinating airstrikes by ISIS's drones in the Al-Anbar Province.

## Main developments in Syria

### The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

■ **The SDF forces continue tightening the siege on Al-Raqqah from the north, the east and the south.** According to the Lebanese Al-Nour broadcasting station, which is affiliated with Hezbollah, they are now at a distance of 1 km east of the Al-Mashlab neighborhood, in east Al-Raqqah (Al-Nour Station, May 31, 2017). **However, there are still escape routes through which ISIS operatives and their families can leave the city southward.** Syrian media reported that the SDF forces called on ISIS

operatives to lay down their arms until late May 2017, before the beginning of the planned attack (Sham Network, May 25, 2017). In the meantime, coalition warplanes attack ISIS targets in Al-Raqqah while SDF forces fire artillery at the city (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 31, 2017).

■ ISIS operatives attempt to stop the advance of the SDF forces (supported by US Special Forces and air support) **towards Al-Ba'ath Dam** (about 23 km west of Al-Raqqah). ISIS sends reinforcements to the southern bank of the Euphrates River. If the SDF forces take over this dam, it will be the third that they have taken, after **Tishreen Dam and Tabqa Dam** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 27, 2017).



Tishreen Dam (1) and Tabqa Dam (2) which were taken over by the SDF forces. Al-Ba'ath Dam (3), towards which the SDF forces are advancing (Google Maps).

## Communications facilities in Al-Raqqah hit and senior media figure killed

■ ISIS released a video showing the results of the airstrike carried out by coalition planes **against two communications centers in Al-Raqqah**. According to ISIS, the attack was intended to cut off Al-Raqqah from the outside world. **ISIS admitted that the communications centers had been put out of commission** (Haqq, May 31, 2017).



**Top: Transmission tower that collapsed at one of the communications centers of Al-Raqqah, which were attacked by the coalition planes. Bottom: One of the Al-Raqqah communications centers destroyed in the airstrike (Haqq, May 31, 2017)**

■ In the ITIC's assessment, destroying ISIS's communications center may **hinder ISIS's communications from its capital Al-Raqqah with its operatives in Syria and Iraq**, and maybe even with **the rest of the world**. This was in addition to the **killing of senior ISIS media figures** which played key roles in ISIS's propaganda machine. The most recent of them is **Rayan Mashaal**, a high-ranking media operative killed in the coalition airstrike against Al-Mayadeen. He joined ISIS in 2013 and was one of the founders of **Amaq, ISIS's news agency** (Haqq, May 31, 2017).



**Rayan Mashaal, one of the founders of ISIS's Amaq information agency, killed in an airstrike in Al-Mayadeen (Haqq, May 31, 2017)**

## Opening escape routes for ISIS operatives from Al-Raqqah, and the Russian response

■ According to Russian media, the SDF forces allowed ISIS operatives to flee Al-Raqqah in order to reduce the expected resistance during the takeover of the city. Talal Selo, SDF spokesman, denied that and said that there was no agreement between them and ISIS (Al-Jazeera, May 27, 2017). The Russian media claimed that ISIS was offered two escape routes: one southward (towards Palmyra) and the other westward (towards Idlib). The Russian media added that **the SDF forces instigated ISIS operatives to leave Al-Raqqah mainly southward because this route is considered safer** (Interfax; Sputnik; 1tv.ru, May 27, 2017). **The Russians announced that they would not allow such an agreement and that the Russian Air Force and Special Forces would prevent the exit of the operatives from Al-Raqqah southward.**

■ It seems that the Russians are concerned that ISIS operatives fleeing Al-Raqqah would find their way to the Syrian Army's activity areas, mainly in the Palmyra region, where intense activity against ISIS is taking place. According to TASS News Agency, after receiving the information on this matter, **the headquarters of the Russian forces in Syria took a series of steps to prevent the withdrawal of ISIS operatives from Al-Raqqah** (TASS, May 27, 2017).

■ A source in the Russian Ministry of Defense reported that **on May 25, 2017, the Russian Air Force attacked a convoy of ISIS operatives which included 39 vans, en route from Al-Raqqah to the Palmyra area. As a result, over 120 ISIS operatives were killed, and 32 vans with heavy machine guns were destroyed.** The same source further added that **any attempt by ISIS to move toward Palmyra and reinforce its operatives there would be thwarted.** According to the Russians, **the attack surprised ISIS**, because they expected the Russian Air Force to attack stationary targets such as warehouses and training camps, and because the route was presented to them as a safe retreat route (Interfax; Sputnik; 1tv.ru, May 27, 2017).



A Russian Defense Ministry video showing the attack on ISIS's convoy claimed to be en route to the Palmyra area (May 27, 2017)

- **On May 31, 2017**, a source in the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that during the night, ISIS operatives **had made another attempt to advance from Al-Raqqah towards the city of Palmyra**. They left Al-Raqqah under cover of darkness and advanced in alternative roads. Their movement was traced by the Russian intelligence. The Russian Air Force carried out several airstrikes, **killing over 80 ISIS operatives** and destroying vehicles and weapons. **The Russian Defense Ministry warned that any attempt by ISIS to leave Al-Raqqah towards Palmyra would be foiled** (TASS, June 1, 2017).
- **On May 30, 2017, four cruise missiles** were launched from a frigate and a submarine stationed in the eastern Mediterranean. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, the attack was directed at **ISIS targets in east Palmyra and ISIS forces which were transferred from Al-Raqqah**. Furthermore, it was reported that Russia had informed the commands of the US, Turkey and Israel on the attack through the joint communications channels (website of the Russian Defense Ministry, May 31, 2017).



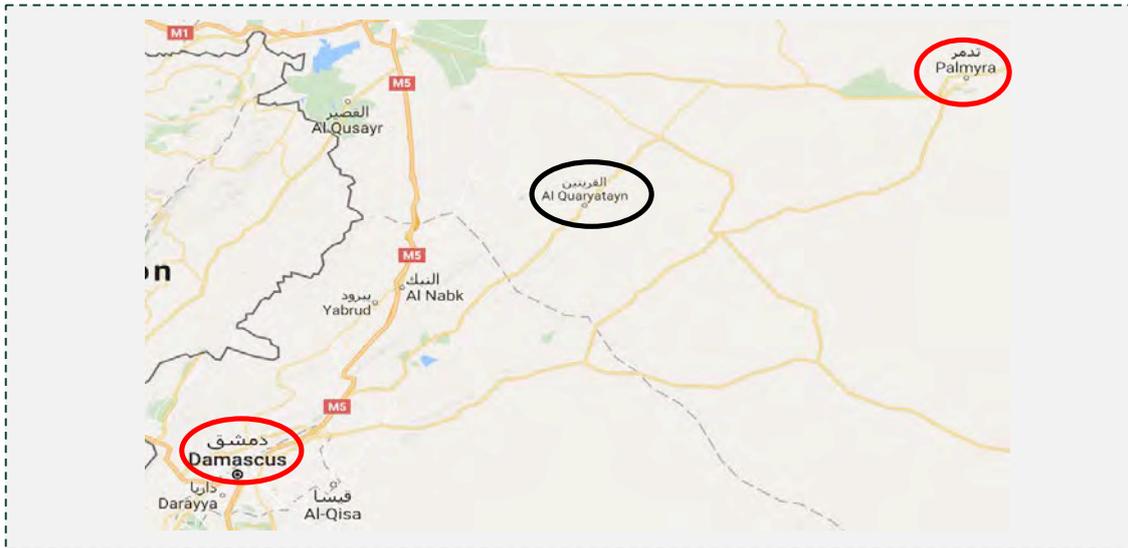
Photo from a video showing the launch of the cruise missiles (website of the Russian Defense Ministry, May 30, 2017)

## The border between Syria, Iraq, and Jordan

■ This week, the “Commando of the Revolution” rebel force, with US support, continued to advance toward the city of Abu Kamal, which is an important rear base for ISIS (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, May 28, 2017). This was carried out after a short break due to the US airstrike on a Syrian mechanized force heading towards Al-Tanf. According to reports, the coalition planes scattered leaflets warning the Syrian force (which in the meantime stopped its advance) not to get closer to the Al-Tanf area in the tri-border region of Syria, Iraq, and Jordan (Enab Baladi, May 29, 2017).

## The Palmyra area

■ The Syrian forces continued to intensify their control over the Palmyra area. They took over the Damascus-Palmyra route and started to advance towards the Al-Qaryatayn area (about 70 km southwest of Palmyra). ISIS reportedly retreated from several positions south of Palmyra and in south Al-Qaryatayn (Al-Durar Al-Shamiya, May 25, 2017).



The city of Al-Qaryatayn, destination of the Syrian forces (Google Maps)

## The Syrian Army's advance towards the Euphrates Valley

- The Syrian forces continued to advance towards the town of Al-Maskana, west of Lake Assad. They are now near the town. The Syrian Army fired artillery at the town. In addition, routes leading to it were attacked from the air (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 31, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

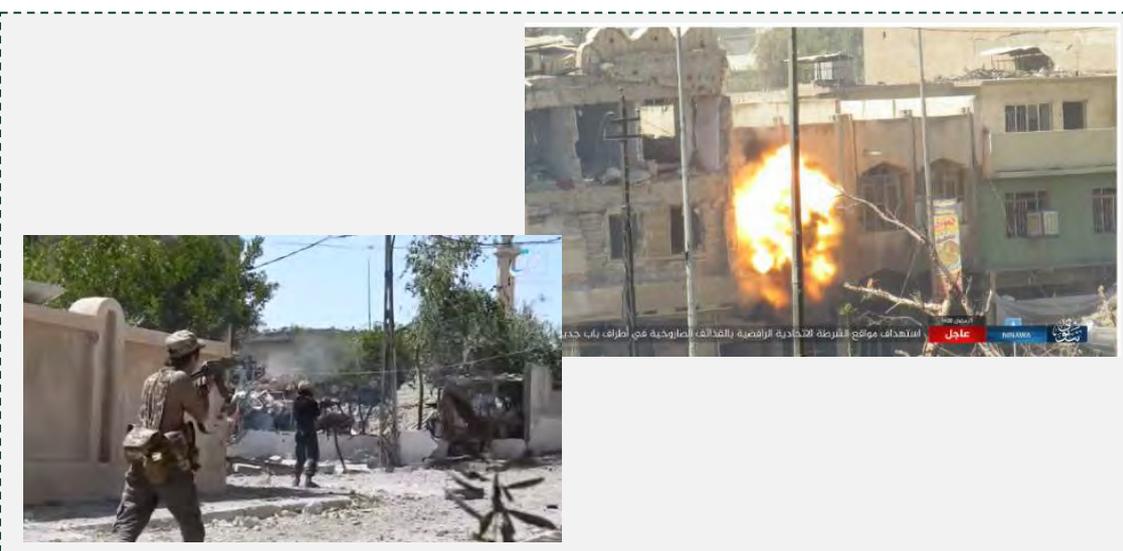
### The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

- The campaign for the takeover of Mosul is approaching its final stages. In the passing week, the Iraqi forces took over additional neighborhoods in west Mosul. The last stronghold of resistance remains in the Old City. According to Iraqi estimates, less than 10% of the city area is still held by ISIS (Nineveh Information Center, May 28, 2017).



Map of west Mosul (updated to May 30, 2017): The area marked in white and gray is the only area in the city which is still under ISIS's control (Nineveh Information Center, May 28, 2017)

■ On May 27, 2017, the Iraqi forces launched an attack to take over ISIS's last stronghold in the Old City of Mosul and three adjacent areas near the western bank of the Tigris River (Reuters, May 27, 2017). Before that, the Iraqi forces scattered leaflets asking the residents of the Old City to evacuate before the beginning of a new military attack (Al-Arabiya, May 26, 2017). ISIS deployed snipers, suicide bombers, and car bombs in the Old City (AP, May 28, 2017).



Right: Missile which, as claimed by ISIS, hits the Iraqi police forces in west Mosul (Haqq, May 28, 2017). Left: ISIS operatives fighting against the Iraqi security forces (Haqq, May 25, 2017)

■ Shaaban Nasiri, an Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander, was reportedly killed in battle in Mosul. According to an Iraqi Army source, Nasiri had been the advisor of Qassem Soleimani, Qods Force commander, on the affairs of the Popular Mobilization Units (Shiite militias) in Iraq (Mashreq; AP, May 27, 2017).

## ISIS's terror and guerrilla activities throughout Iraq

■ While ISIS is losing control in Mosul, **terror and guerrilla attacks are intensified throughout Iraq**. Maybe the background for this tendency is **ISIS's efforts to increase the volume of its attacks during the month of Ramadan**, which ISIS has dubbed "**the month of invasions and conquests that have changed the course of history**" (Haqq, May 30, 2017). These attacks indicate **that ISIS still possess highly operational capabilities outside of Mosul, which it is going to employ even after the fall of the city**.

■ Noteworthy events during the week:

- **Baghdad:** On May 30, 2017, a car bomb exploded **in central Baghdad, close to the Shuhada Bridge**. Nine people were killed, and 36 others were wounded (Al-Sumaria, May 30, 2017). ISIS was apparently behind the attack.
- **Hit:** On May 30, 2017, a suicide bomber wearing an explosive belt blew himself up **near a checkpoint in the city**. Fourteen people were killed, and 23 others were wounded (Al-Sumaria, May 30, 2017; Al-Aan Channel, May 31, 2017).



Scene of the suicide attack in the city of Hit (Al-Aan Channel, May 31, 2017)

- **Baghdad:** On May 29, 2017, a car bomb exploded **in the Al-Karadah neighborhood, at the bustling center of Baghdad, near a food store**. A total of 27 people were killed, and about 30 others were wounded (Al-Aan Channel, May 30, 2017). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that it was carried out by a car bomb which exploded among a gathering of Shiites (Haqq, May 30, 2017).



Scene of the attack in central Baghdad (Al-Aan Channel, May 31, 2017)

- **Al-Ramadi:** ISIS claimed responsibility for detonating a car bomb **at the center of Al-Ramadi**. According to ISIS, at least seven Iraqi policemen were killed (Haqq, May 26, 2017).
- **Baqubah:** ISIS claimed responsibility for carrying out a suicide bombing attack **among a gathering of policemen in the city of Baqubah**, about 50 km northeast of Baghdad. According to ISIS, at least 13 policemen were killed, and 18 others were wounded (Haqq, May 28, 2017).
- **South of Kirkuk:** ISIS announced that it had killed at least 10 Peshmerga operatives **in the area of the Tuz Khormato airport** (Haqq, May 28, 2017).

## Shiite militia activity near the Iraqi-Syrian border

- In late May 2017, forces of the Popular Mobilization Units (Shiite militias supported by Iran) arrived near the Iraqi-Syrian border west of Sinjar. The militias started mopping up the border area and moving to the south **towards the city of Al-Qaim**, which is held by ISIS (Al-Jazeera, June 1, 2017; Dimashq Al-Aan, May 29, 2017). On June 1, 2017, the Popular Mobilization forces were reportedly advancing **towards the town of Al-Ba'aj**, about 32 km southwest of Sinjar (Twitter account of the Popular Mobilization Spokesperson's Office, June 1, 2017).



The town of Al-Ba'aj (marked in red), destination of the Popular Mobilization forces (Google Maps)

■ **Karim al-Haqqani, commander of the Popular Mobilization's 2nd. Brigade,** said that this move was carried out on instructions by Iraqi President Haidar al-Abadi (Iraqi News Agency Sada, May 30, 2017). Iraq's president announced on a plan carried out in coordination with the Popular Mobilization Units, whose objective is to monitor the Iraqi-Syrian border (Al-Mayadeen, May 30, 2017).



Column of mechanized Popular Mobilization forces near the Iraqi-Syrian border (Twitter account of the Popular Mobilization Spokesperson's Office, May 30, 2017)

■ SDF forces, which are in control of the Syrian side of the border, **warned the Popular Mobilization militias not to enter Syria** (Al-Jazeera, June 1, 2017). On the other hand, **Popular Mobilization Spokesman Karim al-Nuri** declared that they were going to fight against ISIS **on Syrian soil as well, in coordination with the Syrian regime** (Dimashq Al-Aan, May 29, 2017). The ITIC believes that in case the Iranian-affiliated Shiite militias cross the border into the Syrian side, **it will create a**

**new tension between the US-supported Kurds and the Iranian-supported Shiite militias.**

## Sinai Peninsula and Egypt

### Sinai Peninsula

■ ISIS operatives in Sinai are reportedly operating against smugglers in the tunnels that still remain between the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. In this context, ISIS operatives detonated, for the first time, a tunnel serving to smuggle food products. Most of those engaged in smuggling to the Gaza Strip from Sinai are the Tarabin tribesmen. The activity against the tunnel takes place as part of the confrontation between ISIS operatives and the Tarabin tribesmen (Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, May 27, 2017).

### Egypt

■ **On May 29, 2017, a shooting attack was carried out against a bus carrying Copts who were on their way to the Monastery of Saint Samuel, north of Al-Minya (south of Cairo).** According to Egyptian reports, the shooting was carried out from three vehicles by ten masked operatives, some wearing military uniform. They shot at the bus indiscriminately. At least 29 Coptic Christians were killed (Al-Masry Al-Youm, May 26, 2017). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.



The attacked bus and the scene of the attack (Al-Masry Al-Youm, May 27, 2017)

■ **Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry stated that those ISIS operatives who carried out the attack had trained in Libyan training camps** (Al-Masry Al-Youm, May 27, 2017). **In retaliation, the Egyptian Air Force attacked several times targets in the area of Derna, northeast Libya** (Al-Arabiya; Facebook page of

the Egyptian Armed Forces Spokesman, May 27, 2017). According to the Libyan News Agency, **Abdel Mun'im Salam (Abu Talha)**, one of the leaders of **Derna's Shura Council** affiliated with **Al-Qaeda**, and four of his operatives were **killed in the airstrike** (Al-Youm Al-Sabea, May 27, 2017). Libyan warplanes from Haftar's army also took part in the airstrike.

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### ISIS manufactures shoulder launchers for standard rockets

■ Issue No. 82 of ISIS's weekly **Al-Naba** features an article about **ISIS's capability of self-manufacturing various kinds of disposable shoulder launchers**. The launchers manufactured by ISIS are intended for standard short-range and medium-range rockets. According to the article, the launchers are manufactured by the Islamic State's **Manufacture and Development Administration** since October 2016 (Haqq, May 26, 2017; **Al-Naba**, May 25, 2017).



Shoulder launchers manufactured by ISIS's Manufacture and Development Administration (Haqq, May 26, 2017; **Al-Naba**, May 25, 2017)

### Campaign for recruiting ISIS soldiers

■ According to an article in ISIS's weekly **Al-Naba**, **hundreds of people** arrived in **ISIS's recruitment centers** to join the fighters. This was part of a campaign by ISIS in the provinces of **Al-Khayr (Deir ez-Zor)**, **Al-Raqqah**, and the **Euphrates**. According to the head of the recruitment center in Al-Khayr Province, **most of the recruits are youngsters**, but there are a considerable number of adults among them. According to the official, **there are many women** among the recruits, most of them residents of Deir

ez-Zor who asked to join the fighting. At the same time with the recruitment campaign, there is also a **campaign to instigate Muslims, men, women and youngsters, to carry out suicide attacks**. The campaign is conducted using posters, books, recordings and videos, and also through meetings with the residents (Al-Naba, May 25, 2017).

## Libya

■ Security sources in Libya reported that after they were driven out of Sirte, Benghazi and Derna thereby losing their sources of income, **ISIS operatives joined Libyan criminal elements and started engaging in illegal trade and smuggling goods, mainly fuel**. According to the reports, the smuggling activity is carried out through **the Libyan border with Tunisia, Niger, Chad and Sudan** (Akhbar Libya 24, May 25, 2017). In early May 2017, a local force seized at a checkpoint in the border area with Tunisia 14 tankers which were on their way to Tunisia full of fuel, diesel oil and other fuel products. According to the above sources, **smuggling fuel has become one of the main sources of income of ISIS operatives in the area south of Sirte** (Akhbar Libya 24, May 25, 2017).

## Global jihad activity in other countries

### Afghanistan

■ On May 31, 2017, a car bomb **exploded in the secure diplomatic quarter of the capital, Kabul. More than 90 people were killed and 463 others were wounded, including 11 Americans**. The explosives used in the explosion **were hidden inside a tanker for pumping sewage** (Reuters, May 31, 2017). A Kabul police spokesman said the explosion occurred **in a square near the German Embassy**. An Afghan security guard guarding the embassy was killed. Some employees of the German Embassy were injured. The embassies of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt were also damaged. The Taliban movement denied any connection to the attack (Saudi News Channel; Afghanistan Times, May 31, 2017). According to a number of Arab media reports, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. These reports are as yet unverified.

### The Philippines

■ **The President of the Philippines declared martial law in the southern part of the island of Mindanao after ISIS-affiliated militants took control of most of the capital city of Marawi**. The gunmen released Muslim prisoners, arrested Christians and burned many buildings. ISIS operatives entered the capital after the Philippine forces carried out an operation to capture Isnilon Hapilon, who is apparently ISIS's leader in Southeast

Asia. For the time being, the capital is in the hands of ISIS operatives. The residents have been asked to remain in their homes (Newsweek, May 27, 2017). The island of Mindanao has a population of 22 million. A number of armed networks affiliated with ISIS and the global jihad operate there.



Armed ISIS operatives in the city of Marawi, on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines (Haqq, May 24, 2017)

■ On May 30, 2017, ISIS announced that **seven Filipino soldiers had been shot to death by ISIS sniper fire in the city of Marawi** (Haqq, May 30, 2017). Earlier, on May 27, 2017, a video was released showing ISIS operatives patrolling the streets of the city of Marawi. The video photographer greeted the operatives in Arabic (Twitter account of the Kuwaiti news website, May 27, 2017).



Right: ISIS operatives in the streets of the city of Marawi, in the southern Philippines (Twitter account of the Kuwaiti news website, May 27, 2017). Left: ISIS operatives on one of the armored vehicles of the Philippine army seized by them in the city of Marawi, in the southern Philippines (Haqq, May 31, 2017).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### ISIS network in Moscow exposed

■ **On May 25, 2017, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested four ISIS operatives in Moscow on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack on Russian transport system.** The press office of the Russian Federal Security Service said the suspects were **Russian citizens and citizens of Central Asia, who planned to detonate IEDs at Moscow transportation facilities**, after having been ordered to do so by ISIS in Syria. After the terrorist attack, the suspects planned to leave Russia and join the ranks of ISIS in Syria. According to reports, a search of the suspects' apartment revealed an explosives laboratory, and IED ready to be used, materials for manufacturing additional IEDs, automatic weapons, and incitement materials (TASS News Agency, May 25, 2017).