



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (June 29 – July 5, 2017)



### Main events of the week

- The campaign for the takeover of Mosul is coming to its end. This week, the Iraqi prime minister announced “the elimination of the imaginary state of ISIS.” However, the end of the campaign is being delayed due to the persistent fighting in the Old City by ISIS operatives, even in view of their desperate situation. A series of terrorist attacks carried out this week by ISIS operatives throughout Iraq demonstrates (once again) that **ISIS has considerable operational capabilities in the western and northern parts of Iraq (mainly in the Sunni provinces). Therefore, ISIS’s terrorist and guerrilla activity throughout Iraq is expected to continue even after the takeover of Mosul, although there will be changes in the organization’s modus operandi.**
- This week, Syrian forces took over the area of Khanaser, southeast of Aleppo, **ISIS’s last stronghold in the Aleppo Province. The Syrian forces continue to advance eastward, with the aim of threatening ISIS’s strongholds in the Euphrates Valley.** In Al-Raqqah, SDF forces with Coalition air support managed to **enter the Old City** through the ancient wall surrounding the city after destroying the wall in two places. Persistent fighting is going on at the site. In the **area of Quneitra** in the Syrian Golan Heights, clashes continued between the rebel organizations (dominated by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, formerly known as the Al-Nusra Front) and the Syrian forces, without significant changes on the ground. Once again, Israel responded to the spilling over of shells into Israel by attacking Syrian Army targets.

### Russia and the Coalition countries

#### Coalition aircraft attack on an ISIS prison

- According to a report by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), aircraft apparently belonging to the Coalition forces **attacked a building that served as an ISIS prison in the city of Al-Mayadeen**, in the lower Euphrates Valley. According to the report, the prison was divided into two parts. One part contained civilian inmates, and the other – ISIS inmates. In total, there were 100 inmates in the prison. The airstrike killed 42

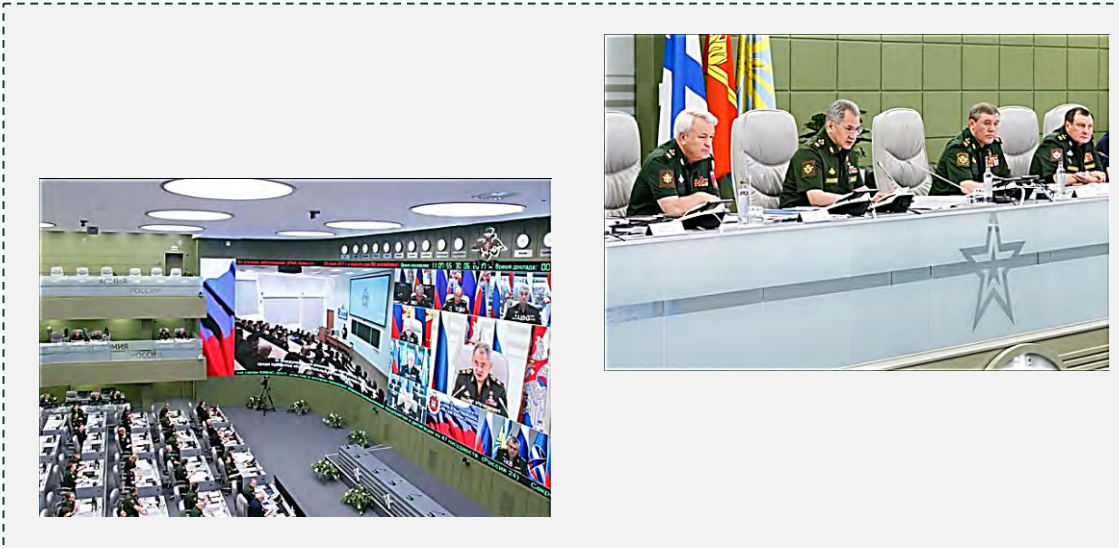
civilian inmates and 15 ISIS inmates and prison guards. The number of fatalities will apparently rise, because some people are still missing, and some of the wounded are in critical condition (SOHR, June 27, 2017).

■ In response to allegations made against the US that civilians were harmed in the prison, Colonel Joe Scrocca, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman, said that at the time in question, Coalition aircraft had indeed carried out airstrikes against ISIS's command and control facilities in Al-Mayadeen. According to him, the operation was carefully planned and carried out so that the chances of harming civilians would be low. However, he added that the allegations that civilians were harmed in the airstrike would be examined (Reuters, June 27, 2017).

### **Statement by the Russian defense minister regarding the actions of the Coalition against ISIS**

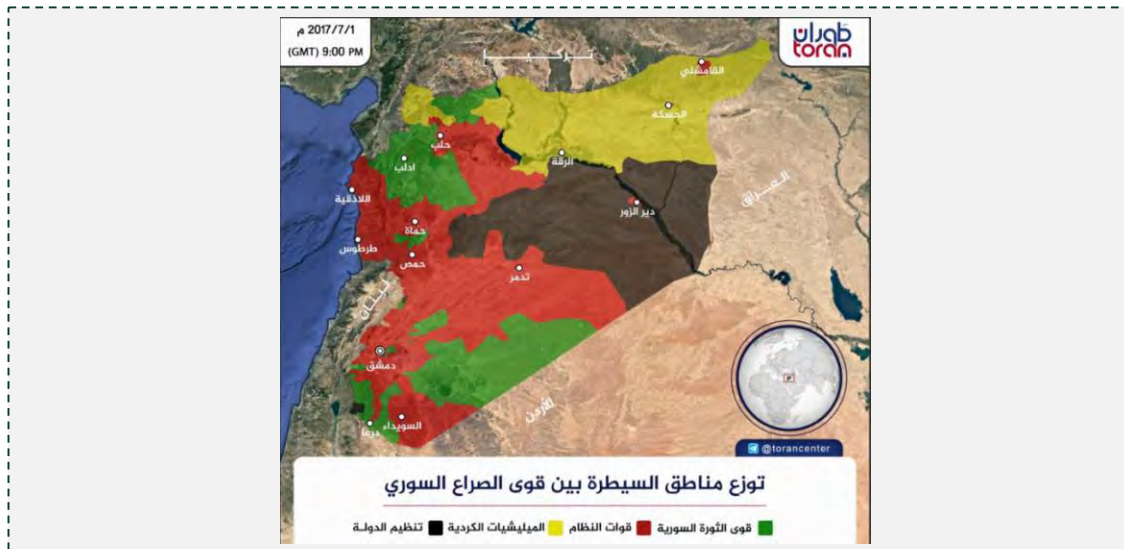
■ In a conference call held at the Russian Federation's National Defense Management Center between **Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu** and the Russian military command, the defense minister discussed the situation in Syria. According to him, the "provocation" by the Coalition against ISIS in Syria has led to an expansion of the activity of the terrorist organizations in the country. The defense minister also mentioned that after the interception of the Syrian aircraft by the Coalition forces, Russia stopped coordinating with the US regarding air safety in Syria. He noted that **the Coalition's activity is now limited to agreed areas in the Al-Tanf region in southern Syria and east of the Euphrates River.**

■ The Russian defense minister noted that in the past month, the Syrian regime forces with Russian air support recorded successes, northeast of the Aleppo Province, in the Palmyra area, and in southern Syria. According to him, the forces liberated 69 population centers and 12,177 square kilometers from ISIS in June, **and are now advancing along the Syrian-Jordanian border and the Syrian-Iraqi border** (Facebook page of the Russian Ministry of Defense, June 30, 2017).



Conference call at the Russian Federation's National Defense Management Center (Facebook page of the Russian Ministry of Defense, June 30, 2017).

## Main developments in Syria



The control zones in Syria (updated to July 1, 2017): The area controlled by the Syrian regime is marked in red; The area controlled by ISIS is marked in black; The area controlled by the rebel organizations is marked in green; The area controlled by the Kurds is marked in yellow (Turan Syrian research institute, July 1, 2017).

## The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

■ On July 3, 2017, the SDF forces fighting in Al-Raqqah entered Al-Raqqah's Old City, with Coalition air support. This occurred after two weeks of the forces being bogged down due to ISIS operatives' persistent fighting, which caused them casualties and slowed down their advance.

■ The spokesman for the US-led Coalition announced that **on July 3, 2017, the SDF forces entered the Old City of Al-Raqqah**. The forces, which ran into persistent ISIS

resistance, enjoyed Coalition air support (Twitter page of the spokesman for the International Coalition, July 4, 2017).

- The Coalition spokesman said that the SDF forces managed to break through the ancient wall surrounding Al-Raqqah in two places.<sup>1</sup> The attacking forces overcame ISIS resistance, which had fighting positions on the wall and used heavy machine guns, mortar fire, rocket launchers, sniper fire and car bombs in the fighting.

- Concurrently with the face-to-face fighting, **ISIS operatives continued their suicide bombing attacks against the SDF forces**. Five SDF commanders were reportedly killed by an explosion of a car bomb detonated by ISIS operatives in the town of Al-Mansura, west of Al-Raqqah (Khotwa, June 29, 2017). On June 28, 2017, there were reports on 11 fatalities among the SDF forces following the detonation of an IED in the village of Hamra Nasser, east of Al-Raqqah (Dimashq Al-Aan, June 28, 2017).

## Syrian regime achievements in eastern Syria

- The Syrian forces continue to record successes in their efforts to clear vast areas in eastern Syria from ISIS presence. This week, they have taken over the area of Khanaser, southeast of Aleppo, thereby completing the removal of ISIS operatives from the Aleppo area. They also completed their takeover of the Ithriya-Al-Rasafah road, after putting an end to **ISIS's threat on the main supply route to Aleppo** (Aleppo-Ithriya-Hama). In the ITIC's assessment, their objective now is to advance eastward, **toward the Euphrates Valley, where they will threaten ISIS's strongholds** (as a counter-balance to the campaign for Al-Raqqah, conducted by the SDF forces and the Coalition countries).

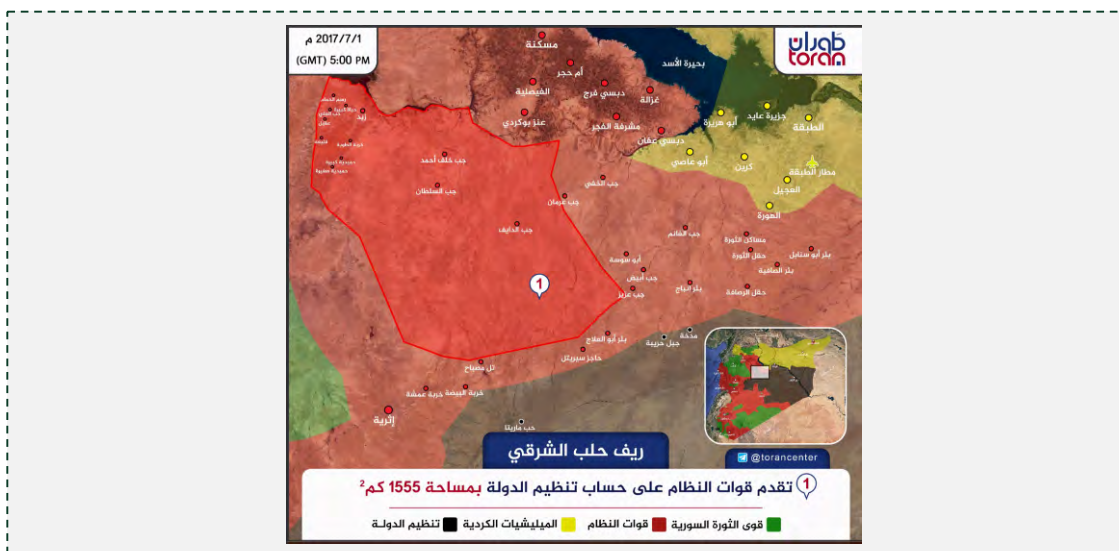
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<sup>1</sup>A wall built in the period of the Abbasid Caliphate, during the 8<sup>th</sup> century.



Khanaser (1), Ithriya (2), Rasafah (3) (Google Maps).

■ On June 29 and July 1, 2017, the Syrian Army announced that **it had taken over a series of villages east and northeast of Khanaser** (north of the town of Ithriya). Thus, **the Syrian Army completed its takeover of the entire area southeast of Aleppo** (Turan Syrian strategic research institute, July 1, 2017). The Syrian Army is now mopping up the seized area from IEDs and looking for weapons left on the ground (Al-Mayadeen, July 4, 2017). ISIS operatives retreated from the area towards territories under their control in the Syrian Desert (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 30, 2017).



An area of 1,555 square kilometers in the vicinity of Khanaser, taken over by the Syrian Army from ISIS (1) (Turan Syrian Institute for Strategic Research, July 1, 2017).

■ The Syrian forces also announced that they had taken over villages, farms and other key sites along the Ithriya-Al-Rasafah road, thereby **completing the takeover of the road southwest of the Euphrates River**. According to the announcement, the

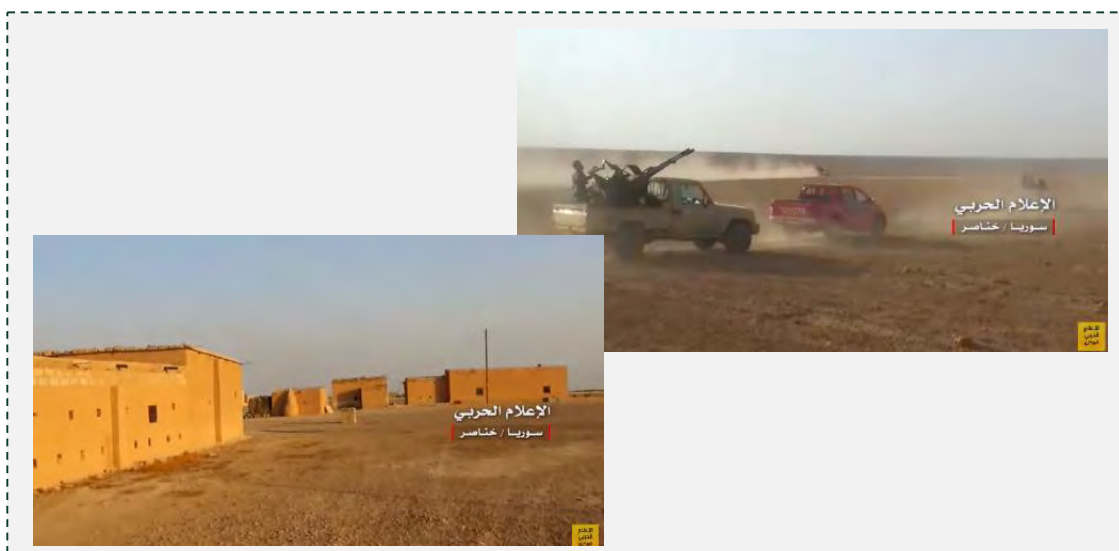
**Syrian forces are now in complete control of the Aleppo-Khanaser-Ithriya road**  
(Sham Network, June 30, 2017; Syrian TV, July 1, 2017).



**Segment of the Al-Rasafah-Ithriya road**  
(SyriaTVChannels7 Syrian TV YouTube account, June 30, 2017).



**Right: Convoy of the Syrian forces on the Ithriya-Khanaser road. Left: Syrian tanks on the Ithriya-Khanaser road** (Syrian Army Spokesperson's Office, June 30, 2017)



Right: The battles in central Khanaser. Left: The town of Khanaser (Syrian Army Spokesperson's Office, July 3, 2017)

## Palmyra

■ Fighting continues between the Syrian Army and ISIS in **the area of the Aarak oil and gas field**, northeast of Palmyra. The Syrian forces announced that they had taken over an area three kilometers northeast of the oil field (Sham Network, June 30, 2017).

## Deir ez-Zor

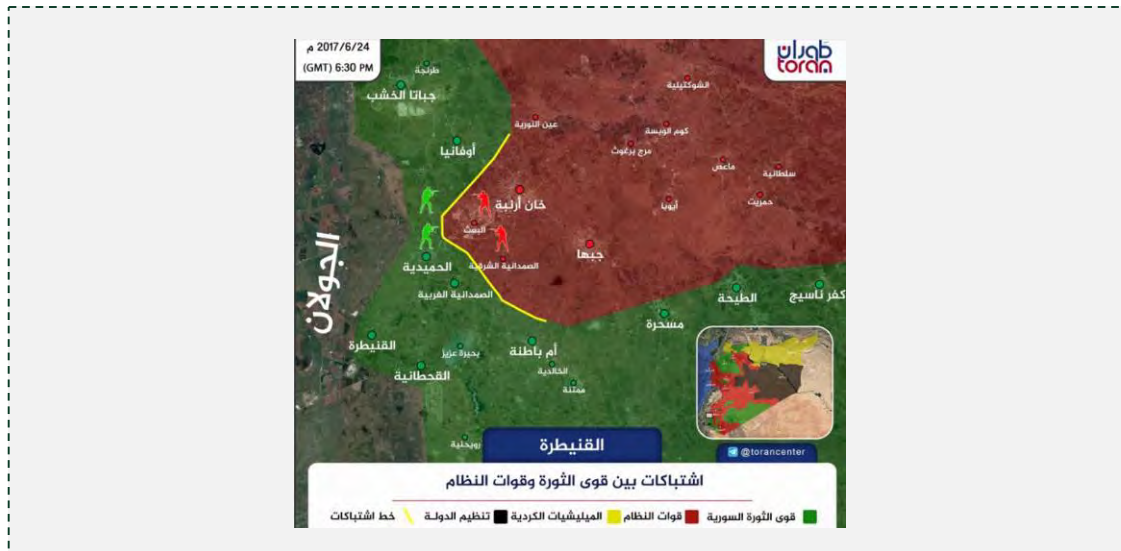
■ ISIS announced that **it had forbidden entry to the area leading from Deir ez-Zor to the Syrian Desert and that all the roads leading to it had been booby-trapped**. The terrorist organization warned the inhabitants of the villages and cities **not to leave their homes** (Khotwa, June 29, 2017).

■ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least twenty ISIS operatives had been killed in an airstrike against an ISIS convoy in the area of the Conoco gas field, northeast of Deir ez-Zor. Several ISIS vehicles were destroyed in the airstrike. So far, it is unknown whether it was carried out by the International Coalition forces or by any other party (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 30, 2017).

## Clashes between the Syrian Army and the rebel organizations in the Golan Heights

■ Fighting continues in **Madinat Al-Baath** between the Syrian forces and the rebel organizations, including the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (formerly known as the Al-Nusra Front). The Syrian Army reported that it had managed to regain control of two outposts infiltrated by operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation

of Al-Sham west of Madinat Al-Baath (*Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri*, July 2, 2017). Apart from that, **there were no other significant changes on the ground this week.**



**Battle zone in the area of Madinat Al-Baath: The area controlled by the Syrian Army is marked in red, while the area controlled by the rebels is marked in green. The confrontation line between them is marked in yellow (Turan Syrian research institute, June 24, 2017).**

■ During the fighting, several shells fired by the Syrian forces fell once again in Israeli territory. In response, Israel attacked several Syrian Army targets in the area. According to Syrian media, the IDF attacked Syrian regime outposts in the area of the 90th Brigade, near the village of Al-Samdaniya (Al-Durar Al-Shamiya, July 1, 2017). No casualties were reported (Dimashq Al-Aan, July 1, 2017).

## Appointments in the Khaled bin Al-Walid Army (ISIS's branch in the Yarmouk Basin)

■ On June 29, 2017, it was reported that **Wael Fa'our al-Eid**, codenamed **Abu Taym Inkhil**, was appointed as the new emir of the **Khaled bin Al-Walid Army**, ISIS's branch in the Yarmouk Basin. This was after **Abu Hashem al-Rifai**, the previous **commander**, appointed on June 6, 2017, was killed (Enab Baladi, June 29, 2017). Wael Fa'our al-Eid is from the town of Inkhil, **north of Daraa** (hence his codename). He served as a senior commander in the Free Syrian Army. Two years ago, due to his contacts with ISIS, he left and joined a jihadi framework called Jaysh Al-Jihad (The Jihad Army). After this framework was dismantled, Al-Eid served as a commander in the Shuhada Al-Yarmouk Brigade, which subsequently merged with the Al-Muthanna movement and became part of the Khaled bin Al-Walid Army (Enab Baladi, June 29, 2017).





**Wael Fa'our al-Eid (Abu Taym Inkhil), the new emir of the Khaled bin Al-Walid Army (Enab Baladi, June 29, 2017).**

■ At the same time, **Karem al-Masri**, codenamed **Abu Osama**, was appointed **the general military commander of the Khaled bin Al-Walid Army**. Al-Masri is from the **village of Abedin**, in the southern Golan Heights (the Yarmouk Basin). He served in the past as a commander in Jaysh Al-Mu'taz bi-Allah, a network which operated as part of the Free Syrian Army west of Daraa (Enab Baladi, June 29, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

### The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ **The campaign for the takeover of Mosul is nearing its end.** On June 29, 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announced that **the Nuri Mosque in the Old City of Mosul had been liberated from ISIS and that “ISIS’s imaginary state was eliminated”** (Al-Sumaria, June 30, 2017).<sup>2</sup> The Iraqi government’s Counter-terrorism Service announced that only about 400 meters were separating between its troops and the Tigris bank in the Old City and that **the complete liberation of the Old City was imminent** (Al-Sumaria, July 2, 2017). On July 3, 2017, the Iraqi Army announced that **it was still waging a persistent battle against ISIS operatives remaining in the Old City** (Al-Sumaria, July 3, 2017). **This fierce fighting delays the completion of the campaign for Mosul.**

<sup>2</sup>Before the Iraqi Army forces took over the Al-Nuri Mosque, ISIS’s operatives blew up the mosque where ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in 2014. The mosque was blown up apparently in order not to provide the Iraqi Army with a “Victory photo.”



**Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi declares the end of “ISIS’s imaginary state” (Al-Aalam, June 29, 2017).**



**Right: Iraqi security forces searching for ISIS operatives in the Old City of Mosul (Nineveh Information Center, July 1, 2017). Left: Devastation in the Old City (Al-Sumaria, July 2, 2017).**



Scenes of destruction in the Old City of Mosul (Al-Sumaria, July 3, 2017).

## Interview with the commander of ISIS's military bureau in Mosul

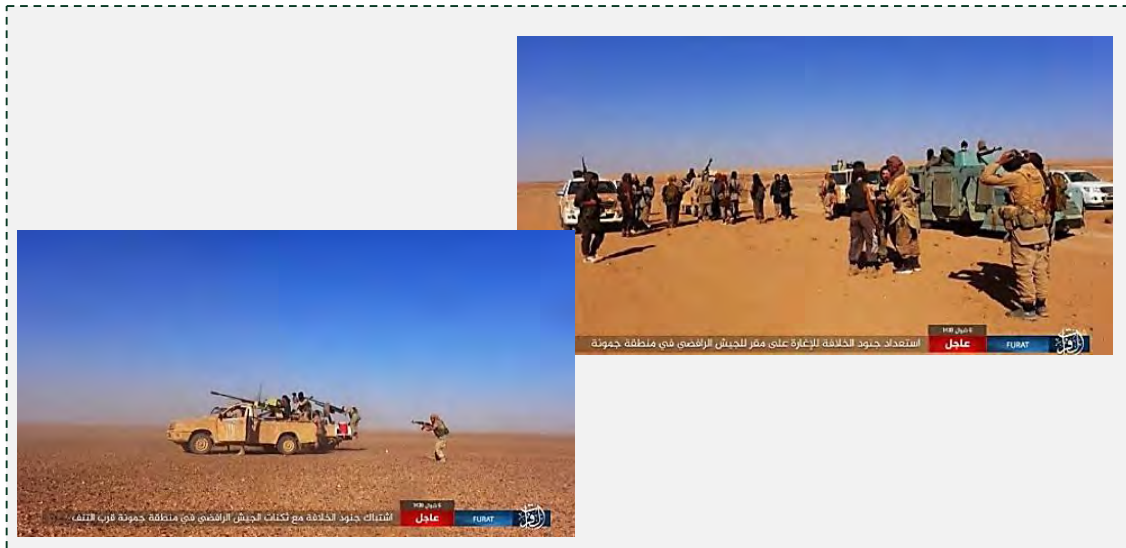
■ ISIS's propaganda machine, which during the fighting for Mosul focused on disseminating unfounded propaganda messages, released an **unusual interview with the commander of the military bureau in Mosul, describing ISIS's fighting methods** (Al-Naba, June 28, 2017). In the interview, the commander avoids addressing ISIS's desperate situation in Mosul.

■ In the interview, ISIS's military bureau commander noted that the campaign conducted by ISIS in Mosul **is of a clear defensive nature**, even though it includes offensive tactics. According to him, ISIS's fighting plan was based on wearing down the enemy in several stages: first, ISIS focused on wearing down the enemy by hitting its weapons **with various kinds of armor-piercing weapons, suicide bombing attacks, and laying mines in vast areas**. Afterwards, when the Iraqi forces entered the city, ISIS operatives began face-to-face fights, **including sniper shooting, planting IEDs, suicide bombing attacks, and attacking Iraqi soldiers**. The campaign was planned and overseen from a **central war room set up by ISIS, where sector commanders, military experts and decision makers were present**. ISIS's military bureau commander added that the other provinces in Iraq also played a role in the campaign by engaging and wearing down Shiite fighters. He added that ISIS would adopt these tactics **in additional fighting zones** (Al-Naba, June 28, 2017).

## ISIS's actions in other fighting zones in Iraq

■ Following are actions carried out by ISIS in other areas throughout Iraq:

- **Al-Waleed crossing:** ISIS announced on July 1, 2017, that it had killed 28 Iraqi Army soldiers and members of the Popular Mobilization Units (Iranian-affiliated Shiite militias), in an attack carried out by its operatives against an Iraqi Army outpost **in the area of the Al-Waleed crossing along the Iraqi-Syrian border** (on the Iraqi side of the Al-Tanf crossing) (Haqq, July 1, 2017).



**Right:** ISIS operatives prepare for an attack against the Iraqi Army in the area of the Al-Waleed crossing. **Left:** The attack on an Iraqi Army outpost (Haqq, July 1, 2017).

- **Diyala Province (northeast of Baghdad):** The Iraqi Army carried out a military operation in the area of **the town of Naft Khaneh, near the border between Iraq and Iran**. The purpose of the operation was to eliminate ISIS operatives present there (Al-Sumaria, July 3, 2017). The Iraqis announced that their troops had finished the operation, during which **seven ISIS hostels were destroyed** (Al-Sumaria, July 3, 2017). The Iraqi Army also announced that a weapons cache was found in the area of **the city of Mandali, in the Diyala Province, not far from the border between Iran and Iraq** (Al-Iraqiyya, July 3, 2017).



The Iraqi Army in the area of the town of Naft Khaneh, in the Diyala Province (Al-Marbad Radio website, July 3, 2017).



Weapons found in the area of the city of Mandali, Diyala Province (Al-Iraqiyya, July 3, 2017).

- **Ramadi area:** In an ISIS suicide bombing attack carried out on July 2, 2017, in the displaced persons camp “the 60th kilometer” **west of the city of Ramadi**, **a total of 14 people were killed and 13 others wounded**, mostly women and children. A suicide bomber wearing an explosive belt blew himself up among the displaced persons. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, and noted that the suicide bomber had blown himself up among soldiers in an Iraqi Army roadblock in the camp area (Mujaz Al-Iraq, July 2, 2017; Al-Sumaria, July 2, 2017; Haqq, July 3, 2017).



The scene of the suicide bombing attack (Al-Rafidayn Channel, July 3, 2017).

- **Baiji area:** On July 2, 2017, the Iraqi Air Force attacked an ISIS car bomb workshop in the town of **Safra, about 35 km northeast of Baiji**. Four ISIS operatives were killed in the attack, one of them a regional commander (Al-Sumaria, July 3, 2017).

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### Drop in ISIS's revenues

- Researchers and security experts at **HIS Markit** estimate that after the loss of its territory in Syria and Iraq (an estimated 60% of territory), **ISIS's revenues have dropped significantly**. The authors of the report estimate that **ISIS's revenues have dropped by 80% over the past two years**. For example, in the second quarter of 2017, ISIS's revenues totaled a mere **\$16 million a month**, compared to \$81 million in the corresponding period of 2015.
- The researchers noted that most of the loss of income was from profits on oil and oil products (since 2015, the average income from oil and oil products has dropped by 88%). This was compounded by the loss of control over the population in Mosul, Iraq, and in both the Al-Raqqah region and Homs, Syria, leading to a significant 79% drop in ISIS's revenues from taxes and from the confiscation of assets. However, the authors of the report claim that **there is still evidence of some economic activity by ISIS, especially in the field of oil production**. There are indications that ISIS is trying to increase its financial reserves by transitioning from a centralistic bureaucratic economy to a "war economy" (CNN Money, June 29, 2017).

## The battle for hearts and minds

■ On July 1, 2017, ISIS published an infographic summing up its activity **during the month of Ramadan** (May 26 to June 24, 2017). According to the infographic, 3,150 Christians, Jews and Sunnis who had deviated from the path of Islam were killed and wounded in ISIS's operations during the month of Ramadan. In addition, 280 military vehicles were destroyed. **ISIS listed its most prominent operations in the month of Ramadan:** the attack on a bus of Coptic Christians in Egypt; combined attacks in London, Tehran and Manila; and four attacks in Iraq (two suicide bombing attacks in Babel and Karbala, an attack in Baqubah, and a suicide bombing attack in the city of Hit) (Haqq, July 1, 2017).

The operations carried out by ISIS in the month of Ramadan caused many casualties and received extensive media coverage. **However, they had no significant effect from a strategic perspective, since they did not divert attention and resources from the battle for Mosul and the battle for Al-Raqqah, and did not change the process of ISIS losing territories and becoming weaker in Syria and Iraq.**



Infographic summing up ISIS's terrorist activity during the month of Ramadan (Haqq, July 1, 2017).