



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (July 6-12, 2017)



### Main events of the week

■ About three years after ISIS declared the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in Mosul, and after around nine months of persistent fighting, **the city of Mosul fell into the hands of the Iraqi forces**. The Iraqi prime minister arrived in Mosul on July 9, 2017, and declared its **complete liberation**. The commander of the International Coalition against ISIS declared that the Iraqi forces **had complete control of Mosul**. However, it is apparently still necessary to remove the IEDs planted in the city by ISIS and complete the mopping up of the city from ISIS operatives, who are liable to hide among the residents.

■ **Mosul has been taken over. What next?** Following are some initial implications and insights in the wake of the takeover of Mosul:

- **The concept of the Islamic State with its jihadi nature based on territorial areas of control has suffered a severe symbolic and practical blow.** This blow is expected to increase **with the takeover of the city of Al-Raqqah, ISIS's stronghold in Syria**. In light of this, in the ITIC's assessment, ISIS is expected **to switch to a modus operandi of a terrorist and guerilla organization** that carries out terrorist attacks and hit-and-run operations, **as it did in the past**. It should be noted that ISIS **still retains areas of control throughout Iraq that it could use for launching large-scale operations**. It can be assumed that the main targets of these operations will be the capital Baghdad, the Iraqi security forces, and Shiite population centers, with the aim of harming the Iraqi regime and provoking inter-ethnic tension in the country.

- **The most significant challenge** facing the Iraqi regime and the international community is **the rehabilitation of Mosul, where about 700,000 residents have become displaced persons**. This rehabilitation is **expected to be protracted and costly**, in view of the extensive damage caused to the city's homes and infrastructure (water systems, schools, hospitals, bridges). **Any failure or delay in the rehabilitation process** could intensify **inter-ethnic tension and play into the hands of ISIS**, which will make an effort to renew its activity among the Sunni population in the liberated areas. **The experience accumulated to date with regard to the speed of rehabilitation of the Sunni cities liberated from the hands of ISIS does not bode well.**

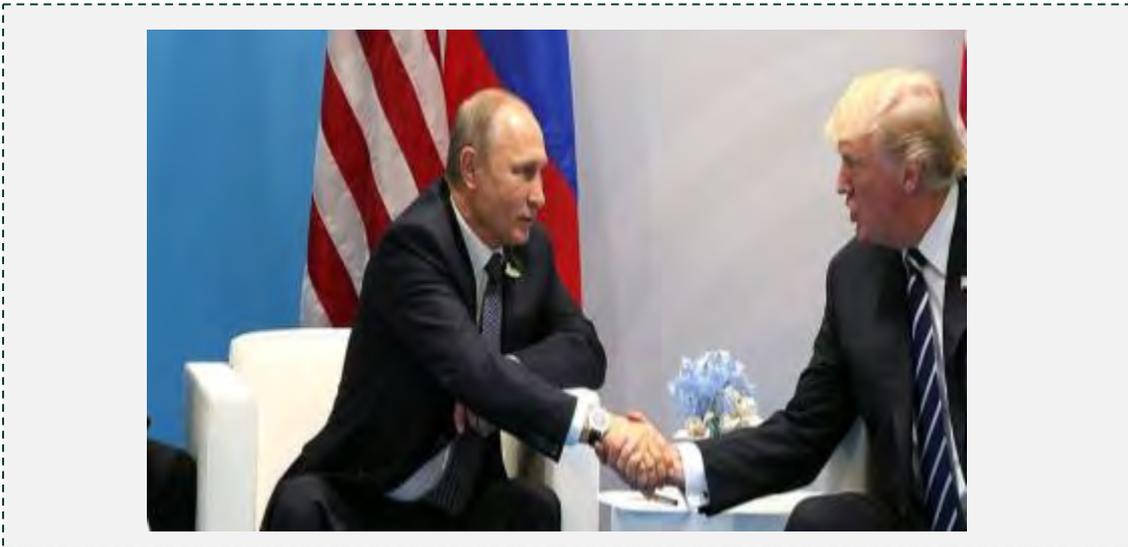
- **ISIS still has areas of control in northern Iraq, along the Syrian-Iraqi border, and in the northern Euphrates Valley.** These are areas that are disconnected from each other **without a prominent center of gravity**, as was the case during ISIS's control of Mosul. It appears that **the cities of Tal Afar** in northern Iraq and **Al-Qaim** in the Euphrates Valley, near the Iraqi-Syrian border, may serve as ISIS's new control centers in Iraq. If the momentum of the Iraqi forces in the campaign against ISIS is not maintained, and these centers of gravity continue to exist, **ISIS is liable to regain strength** once it has regrouped following the fall of Mosul.
- **A struggle for control and influence in the liberated areas, and in Iraq in general, is expected to develop between Iran, on the one hand, and the United States and the West on the other.** Iran aspires to **prevent the US from advancing in Iraq, take control of the Iraqi-Syrian border area, and create a logistical route from Damascus to Baghdad** (which will enable land traffic from Iran to Syria and Lebanon via Iraq). The Americans want to retain their influence in Iraq, but without massive involvement on the ground, and this places them in a position of weakness vis-à-vis Iran. **The main proxy through which Iran is expected to realize its interests in Iraq is the Popular Mobilization, an umbrella framework of Shiite militias handled by Iran.**

## Russia and the Coalition countries

### Announcement of a de-escalation agreement in southwestern Syria

- **On July 9, 2017, a de-escalation agreement between the US, Russia and Jordan entered into effect in southwestern Syria.** As at July 10, 2017, there were six violations of the agreement by the Syrian Army, which attacked targets of the rebel organizations in the areas of Quneitra and Daraa.

**The agreement on de-escalation in southwestern Syria was announced by the US and Russia on July 7, 2017** (after Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump met on the occasion of the G20 summit in Hamburg). **Jordan is also a party to the agreement.** The agreement includes a cessation of hostilities between the forces of the Syrian regime and the rebel groups in southwestern Syria **in the areas of Daraa, As-Suwayda and Quneitra.**



**Meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in Hamburg, during which they agreed on the de-escalation agreement (The Russian President's website, July 7, 2017)**

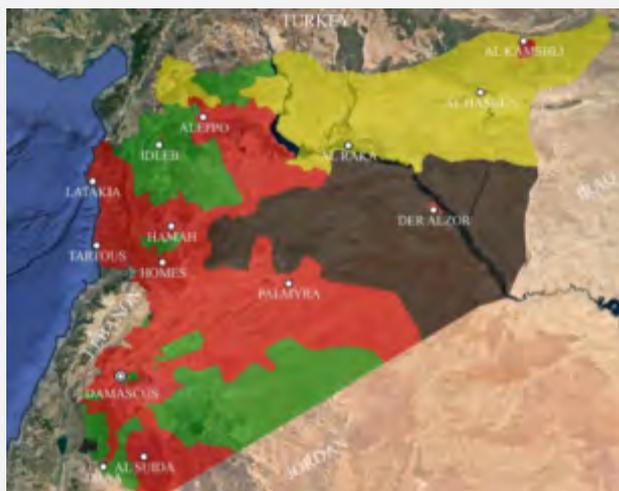
■ Following are the principal statements about the agreement made by the US and Russia:

- **US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson** said that the agreement was aimed at curbing the violence on the Syrian-Jordanian border. He added that the details of the implementation of the agreement were now being discussed between Jordan, the United States and Russia and that the **United States hoped to expand the agreement to additional areas in Syria**. Rex Tillerson also noted that this agreement is different from previous agreements because this time Russia has displayed a new level of commitment. He also noted that the ceasefire agreement with Russia **is the first indication that the United States and Russia are capable of working together in Syria** (The Washington Post, July 7, 2017).
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** said that the agreement would be monitored by the Russian military police, which would be deployed in the region and would be responsible for the security of the areas, in coordination with the United States and Jordan (AP, July 7, 2017). Lavrov also stressed the importance of the fact that the agreement affirms the commitment of Russia, Jordan and the United States to Syria's territorial sovereignty and territorial integrity, in accordance with UN resolutions (Russian Foreign Ministry website, July 7, 2017).
- **Alexander Lavrentiev, the Russian president's special envoy to Syria**, said that the establishment of safe areas in Syria would begin within two to three

weeks after the signing of the relevant documents. He noted that a **key aspect of the Astana talks would be the establishment of a joint coordination headquarters that would monitor the safe areas** (TASS News Agency, July 4, 2017). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia, the United States and Jordan had agreed **to establish a control center in Amman that would monitor the ceasefire in southwestern Syria** and would maintain direct contact with representatives of the opposition and government groups (Sputnik, July 10, 2017).

**Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** said that Israel welcomes a genuine ceasefire in Syria. He noted, however, that **such a ceasefire must not enable the consolidation of Iran and its satellites in Syria in general, and in southern Syria in particular**. He said that he had discussed the issue with the US Secretary of State and with President Putin and that they understood Israel's positions. According to him, Israel would continue to monitor the activity across its borders **and would prevent the Hezbollah forces and the Iranian forces from establishing a presence near its border** (Israeli Prime Minister's Office website, July 9, 2017).

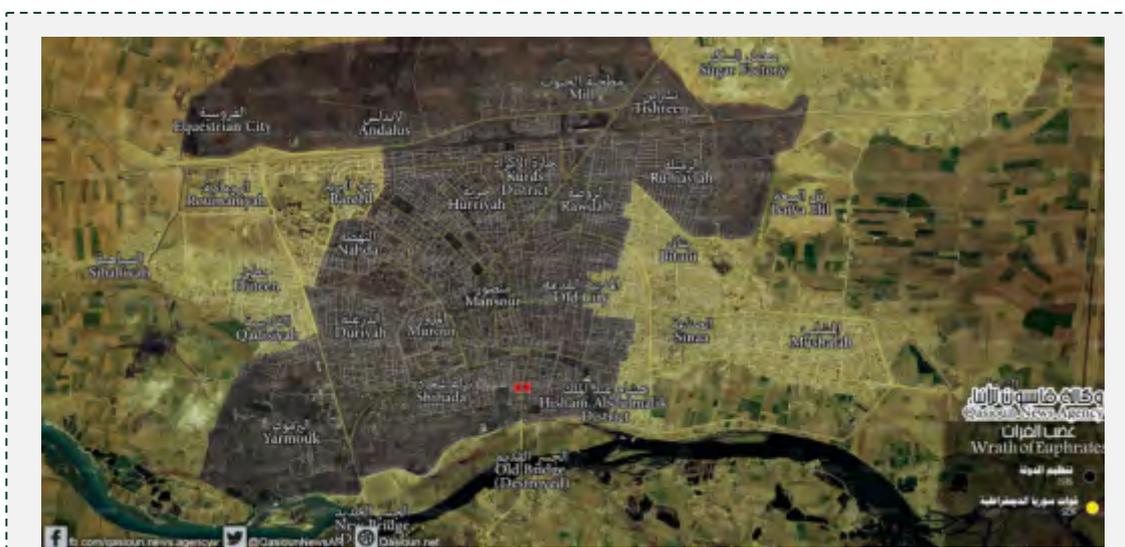
## Main developments in Syria



**The control zones in Syria (updated to July 9, 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 9, 2017)**

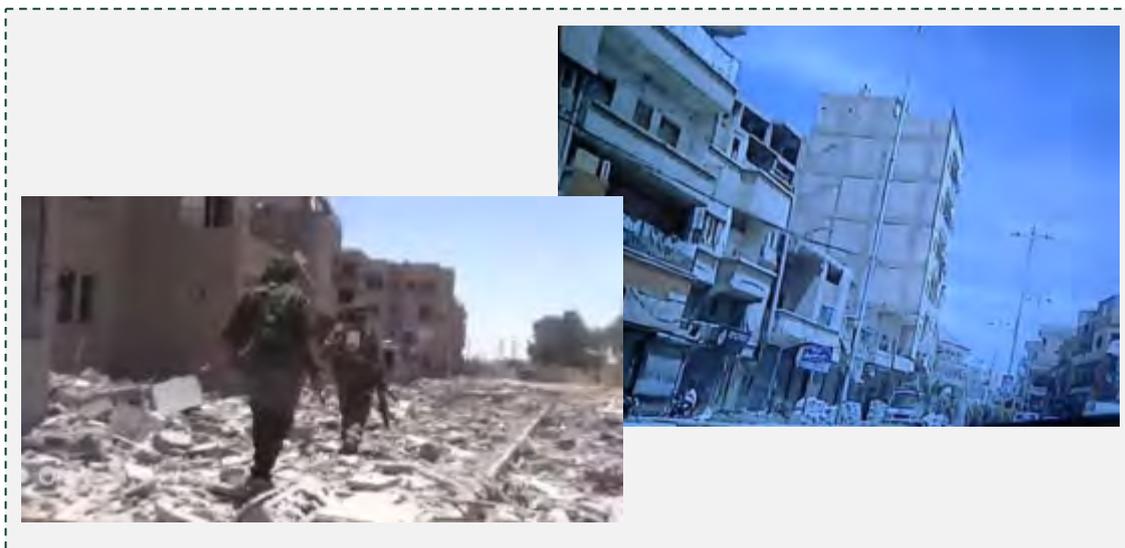
## The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

■ The fighting in Al-Raqqah's Old City still continues. According to Luqman Khalil, an SDF commander, **ISIS has so far lost about half of the Old City's territory** (Akhbar Al-Aan, July 8, 2017). Fighting also continued in several sites in west and south Al-Raqqah and on the city's outskirts. The SDF forces received air support from the US-led Coalition aircraft, which carried out airstrikes against ISIS-controlled targets.

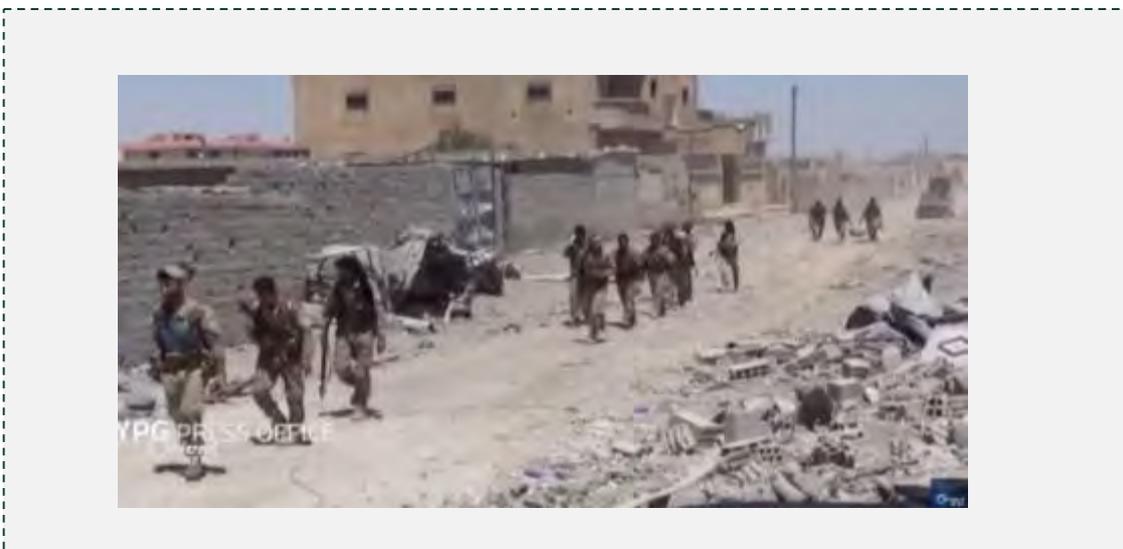


Deployment of the forces in Al-Raqqah (updated to July 9, 2017): Neighborhoods in east and west Al-Raqqah and part of the Old City held by the SDF forces (marked in yellow) (Qasiyoun, July 9, 2017)

■ ISIS operatives **continue to detonate car bombs** (as they have done in Mosul) **and attack the SDF forces**. On July 7, 2017, ISIS operatives detonated a car bomb near the SDF outposts in east Al-Raqqah. There were reports on fatalities among the SDF forces (Sham Network, July 7, 2017). In the western part of the city, ISIS operatives planted an IED in an SDF vehicle. Several fighters were killed and wounded (Khotwa, July 5, 2017). Also, SDF forces reportedly downed an ISIS drone in Al-Raqqah's neighborhood of Al-Sina'ah (Khotwa, July 5, 2017).



Right: Main street in Al-Raqqa recently photographed secretly. Sandbags are visible at store entrances (Al-Aan Channel, July 5, 2017). Left: SDF operatives making their way through the debris in Al-Raqqa (Orient News, July 4, 2017)

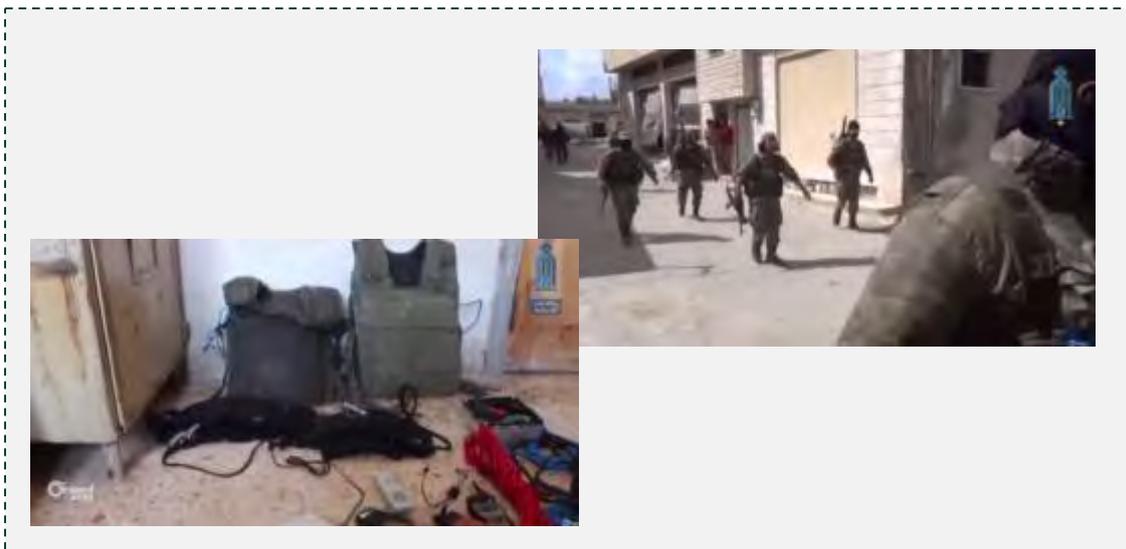


SDF fighters in Al-Raqqa (Orient News, July 4, 2017)

## Idlib Province

■ **The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham**, a coalition of several organizations led by the Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly known as the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda branch in Syria), **launched a large-scale operation against ISIS** due to the numerous attacks by ISIS operatives against organizations which are party to the coalition. During their activity, they exposed a large network of ISIS operatives which had operated in the western area of the Idlib Province. The network commander and eight operatives were detained. Weapons and car bombs were found in the possession of the detainees. Their interrogation revealed that **the network was**

**directly handled by ISIS.** The network operatives admitted to **carrying out over twenty terrorist attacks** against military and civilian targets.



**Right: Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham detain ISIS operatives (Orient News, July 10, 2017). Left: Explosive vests found during the detention campaign (Orient News, July 10, 2017)**

■ Following the exposure of the network, **the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham began a large-scale detention campaign in the Idlib Province, during which they detained over a hundred ISIS operatives.** Among the detainees are **Abu Suleiman the Russian**, ISIS governor in northern Syria; **Abu al-Qa'qa al-Janubi**, the ISIS official in charge of Sharia in northern Syria; and **Abu al-Sawda al-Masri** (i.e., the Egyptian). Several operatives **who were to serve as suicide bombers** were also detained in the campaign (Ibaa News Agency, the news agency of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, July 10, 2017).

## Palmyra

■ Fighting continues between the Syrian Army and ISIS in **the area of the Aarak and Al-Hail oil and gas fields**, northeast of Palmyra. **The Syrian forces advanced toward the city of Sukhnah (northeast of Palmyra) and reached a distance of about 10 km from the city** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 8, 2017). The Syrian forces were supported by airstrikes against ISIS targets in the area of Sukhnah and the desert area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 9, 2017).



ISIS photo: A car bomb detonated near a Syrian Army staging zone east of the Aarak gas field (Al-Sawarim, July 7, 2017)

■ According to media reports, **Qassem Soleimani, Qods Force commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, recently visited the area south of Deir ez-Zor, near the border between Syria and Iraq.** There are also photos testifying to his presence there. Qassem Soleimani was there apparently **in order to monitor closely the military activity of the Syrian forces and the Shiite militias in the Syrian Desert** (Qasiyoun, July 8, 2017).



Qassem Soleimani (left, wearing a hat) visiting near the Syrian-Iraqi border, south of Deir ez-Zor. Next to him is Khaled al-Marei, commander of the Al-Baqer Brigade, a Shiite militia from the Aleppo area supporting the Syrian regime (Qasiyoun, July 8, 2017).

■ **The city of Sukhnah, which has about 22,000 inhabitants (updated to 2004), is on the highway from Homs to Deir ez-Zor, about 125 km from Deir ez-Zor. The advance of the Syrian Army towards this city may indicate that the city of Deir ez-Zor (where a Syrian Army force is besieged by ISIS) is targeted by the Syrian**

**forces**, as part of the Syrian forces' advance in several sectors **eastward, towards the Euphrates Valley and the Syrian-Iraqi border**. The fact that Qassem Soleimani is present south of Deir ez-Zor may also indicate **the importance attributed to this area by the Iranians, as well as the Syrians (Qassem Soleimani customarily appears and has his picture taken at important fighting zones)**.

## Southern Syria

■ A little while after the announcement on the de-escalation agreement in the provinces of Al-Suwayda, Daraa and Quneitra, **six violations were recorded** as the Syrian regime forces attacked rebel organizations in several villages **in the Quneitra and Daraa areas** (All4Syria, July 10, 2017).

■ “Syrian political sources” told a correspondent of the Al-Quds al-Arabi daily that **Syria would not agree to include villages in the area of Quneitra, near the border with Israel, in the de-escalation agreement**. According to these sources, this is because it may **help the rebel organizations settle and control the villages in the Quneitra area and create a “security zone” for Israel**. The sources said that the objective of the Syrian Army in its fighting there was **to regain control of the villages in the Quneitra area**. According to the sources, the purpose of the airstrikes carried out by Israel against the Syrian Army outposts in the Quneitra area is to prevent the Syrian Army from reaching the border. According to the sources, **Russia agrees with Syria on this issue**, and it will not pressure Syria to accept Israel’s position regarding the front in the Quneitra area (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, July 8, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

### The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ After nine months of fighting, and at the end of a fierce fighting in the Old City, **the campaign for the takeover of Mosul ended**. The Iraqi forces reportedly finished mopping up sporadic pockets of resistance in Mosul’s Old City (Nineveh Information Center, July 10, 2017). **Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi arrived in the city on July 9, 2017, and announced its complete liberation from ISIS** (Al-Sumaria, July 9, 2017; Nineveh Information Center, July 9, 2017). According to an announcement by **Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of the International Coalition against ISIS**, the Iraqi forces are in full control of the city (AP, July 10, 2017).

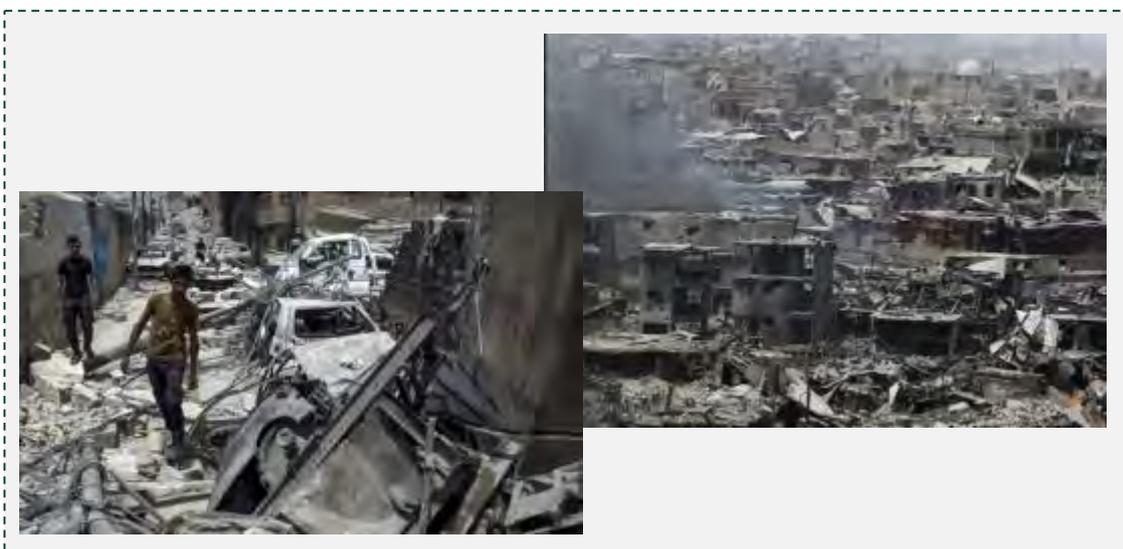


Right: Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi (center) in Mosul (Al-Sumaria, July 9, 2017). Left: Soldiers celebrating the liberation of the city (Nineveh Information Center, July 9, 2017)

■ According to Iraqi police, over one thousand ISIS operatives were killed in the Old City, having fought their last battle after the rest of the city neighborhoods had fallen in the hands of the Iraqi forces. Dozens of armed operatives who tried to flee the city through the Tigris River were shot and killed. In addition, 65 vehicles carrying arms, twenty car bombs, a total of 24 motorcycles that served ISIS and 28 buildings used by the organization operatives were destroyed. Moreover, eight tunnels were uncovered (Al-Sumaria, July 9, 2017). However, the Iraqi security forces still need to complete the removal of IEDs from the city and searching for armed operatives that may have remained there.

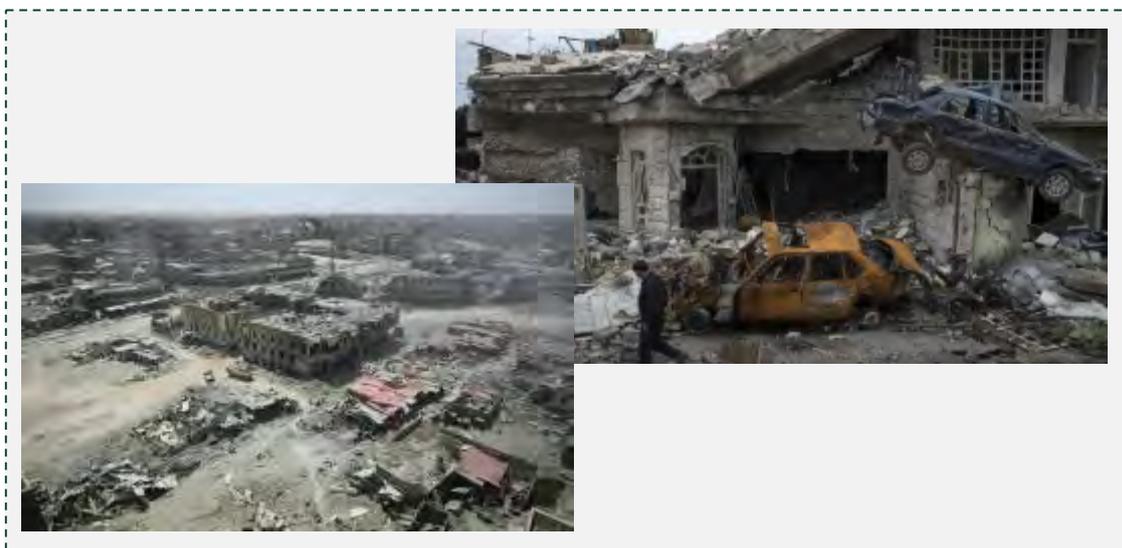


The destruction sustained by the city of Mosul (Al-Alam, July 10, 2017)



**Devastation in the city of Mosul (Al-Alam, July 10, 2017)**

- Before the beginning of the campaign to liberate Mosul, the city had about 1.5 million inhabitants. **According to UN data, about 920,000 inhabitants became displaced persons since the beginning of the campaign.** About 220,000 have already returned, so **about 700,000 remain displaced persons.** The western neighborhoods of the city sustained the most damage, mainly the Old City, where persistent fighting took place, while in the east part of the city, life has begun to return to normal. According to **UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande**, “fighting in the city did end, **but not the humanitarian crisis**, as many of the displaced persons have lost all their property and they need a place for living, food, medical treatment, water and medical supplies. The levels of mental suffering are extremely high. One cannot imagine what these people have gone through” (Al-Ghad Channel, July 10, 2017).
- **There are still more and more reports of senior ISIS operatives being killed in the campaign for Mosul**, including the head of ISIS’s health department, codenamed **Dr. Abdallah** and his deputy **Dr. Khaled Qardash** (Al-Naba, July 6, 2017); and **Abu Yahya al-Iraqi**, who served as ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s senior aide (Al-Mayadeen, July 6, 2017). **Iraqi and Syrian sources keep releasing news of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s death, but so far there is no reliable proof for that.**
- **The UN Secretary-General** declared that **the rehabilitation of Mosul is a significant step in the fighting against terror and extremism.** According to him, the UN is willing to support the Iraqi government in the rehabilitation of territories taken over from ISIS (the UN website, July 10, 2017). A report released by the UN assesses that **the rehabilitation of the city of Mosul will cost over USD 1 billion** (Al-Rafidayn, July 6, 2017).



Scenes of destruction in Mosul  
(Right: Al-Rafidayn, July 6, 2017; Left: Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, July 9, 2017)

### ISIS attacks in other fighting zones in Iraq

- Before the announcement on the completion of the takeover of Mosul, ISIS operatives attacked the Iraqi security forces in the area south of the city. On July 5, 2017, the Iraqi Army announced that it had **repelled a massive attack by ISIS operatives in the area of Shirqat, about 90 km south of Mosul**. According to the report, a total of 43 ISIS operatives were killed in the attack (Iraq Times, July 5, 2017).
- On July 5, 2017, ISIS operatives carried out an attack in the **village of Imam Gharbi, about 70 km south of Mosul**, where several suicide bombers took part. Three operatives of the Tribal Mobilization (*Al-Hashed Al-Ashaeri*), a tribal force operating in support of the Iraqi government, were killed and 14 others were wounded (Shafaq News, July 5, 2017). ISIS released a message claiming responsibility for the attack (Sawarim, July 8, 2017).



ISIS operatives launch a missile at a militia of the Tribal Mobilization in the village of Imam Gharbi, south of Mosul (Sawarim, July 8, 2017)

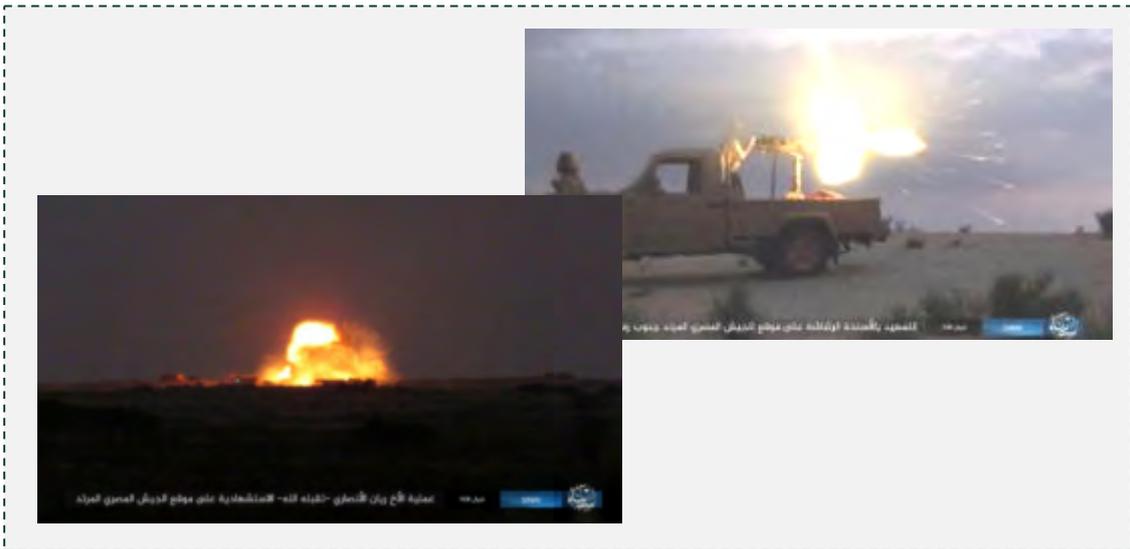
## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

### The Sinai Peninsula

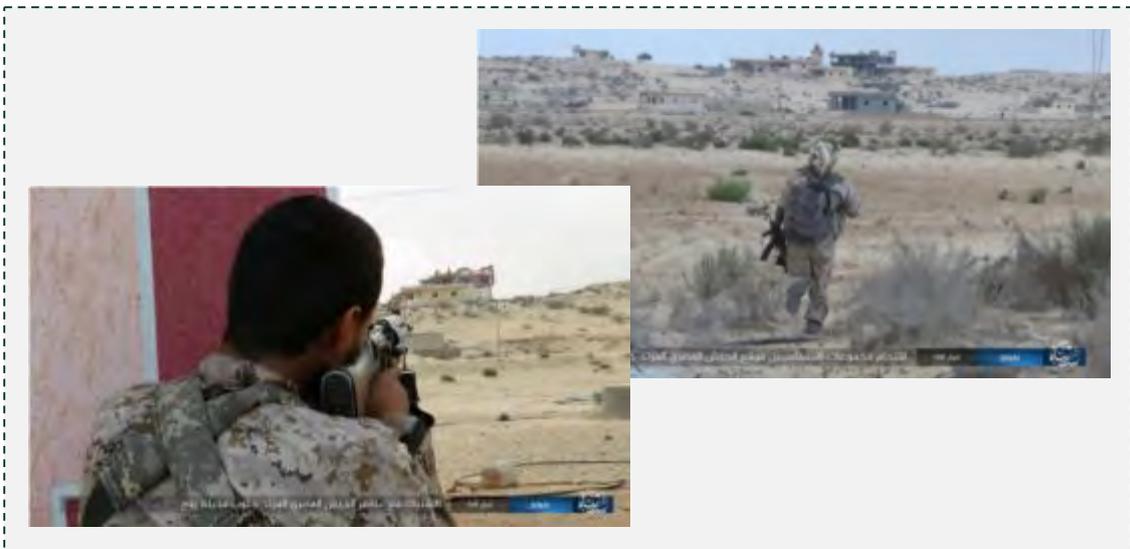
■ **The Egyptian security forces reported that they had foiled a large-scale attack by operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province against an Egyptian Army outpost in the village of Al-Barth, south of Rafah.** During the attack, **a car bomb reportedly exploded, killing 23 soldiers and wounding 33 others.** The commander of the 103th Battalion was among those killed (Facebook page of the Egyptian Armed Forces, July 7, 2017). According to Egyptian sources, **about forty ISIS operatives were killed in the attack, and six vehicles were destroyed.**

■ The attack started when a suicide bomber drove a car bomb toward a checkpoint near the village of Al-Barth. This is a village of **Tarabin tribesmen, who have been in an ongoing violent confrontation with ISIS's Sinai branch.** The village is **situated on an important junction connecting central Sinai to the area of Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid.** Other vehicles, with dozens of ISIS operatives, including another suicide bomber, also attacked the Egyptian security forces.

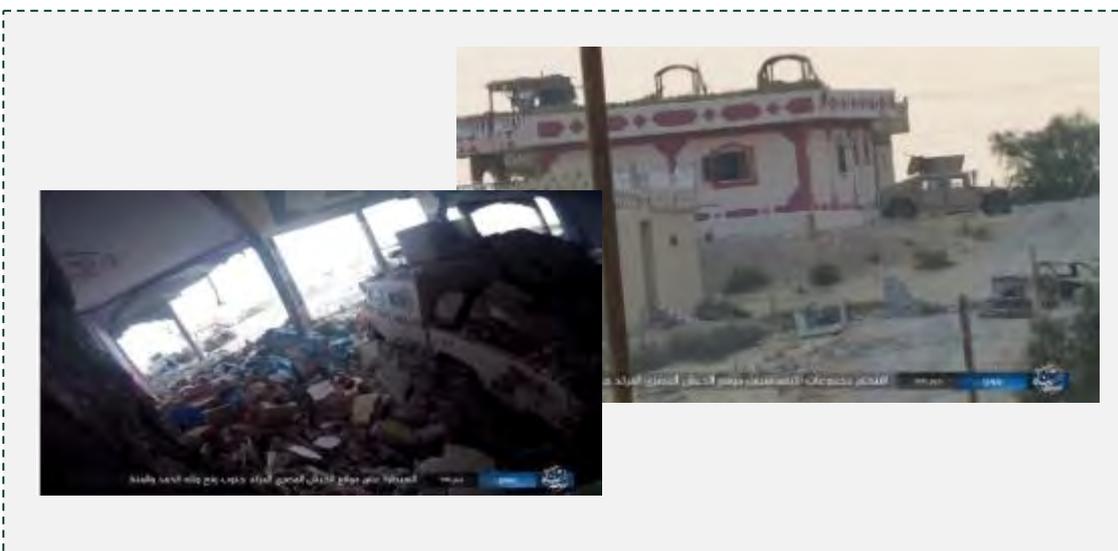
■ **ISIS's Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to the announcement, the attack was carried out by **two suicide bombers who blew themselves up with car bombs.** Several other ISIS operatives also participated in the attack, storming the Egyptian forces and their collaborators (i.e., Tarabin tribesmen) who had been staying in a building there.



Photos released by ISIS. Right: The attack on the village of Al-Barth. Left: Detonation of a car bomb (Haqq, July 9, 2017)



Photos released by ISIS. Right: Getting closer to the building which was attacked. Left: Exchanges of fire with Egyptian Army soldiers near the building (Haqq, July 9, 2017)



Photos released by ISIS. Right: The building which was attacked. Left: The building from the inside, after ISIS operatives took control of it (Haqq, July 9, 2017)

- Following the terrorist attack, **the Egyptian forces carried out airstrikes against ISIS targets in the Sinai Peninsula.** In addition, the Egyptian security forces reinforced their presence on the ground, set up numerous roadblocks and carried out searches in vast areas in order to round up ISIS operatives. They raided ISIS operatives' hidings places and detained operatives (Al-Youm Al-Sabea, July 8, 2017; Al-Akhbar, July 9, 2017).

In view of the many casualties in the terrorist attack in the village of Al-Barth, the Egyptian Information Authority issued an announcement in several languages, according to which the Egyptian Army forces had managed during the first half of 2017 **to drastically decrease the number of terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula and in Egypt proper.** They said that six terrorist attacks had been carried out in Sinai and 25 in Egypt proper during that time, whereas 120 terrorist attacks had been carried out in Sinai and 532 in Egypt proper during the corresponding period last year. According to the announcement, the number of terrorist attacks decreased thanks to the intense activity of the Egyptian security forces (Al-Youm Al-Sabea, July 8, 2017). In spite of the optimistic figures, the **Egyptian Army finds it difficult to subdue the operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province.** The Al-Barth terrorist attack proved once again that those operatives are **capable of carrying out complex attacks, causing many losses to the Egyptian security forces.**

## Thwarting activity in Egypt proper

- **The Egyptian Interior Ministry announced that 14 ISIS operatives had been killed in clashes with the police in Alexandria.** This happened after the police had detained,

based on prior information, a group belonging to ISIS operatives in the Sinai Peninsula, which was engaged in training operatives in a training camp. The purpose of the camp was to receive new operatives from various provinces in Egypt, have them undergo military training, and put them in courses whose purpose, among other things, was to train suicide bombers. The police reportedly found seven automatic guns, a machine gun, a pistol, military equipment, and propaganda materials in the possession of the operatives in Alexandria (Al-Watan, July 8, 2017).

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### The weakening of ISIS

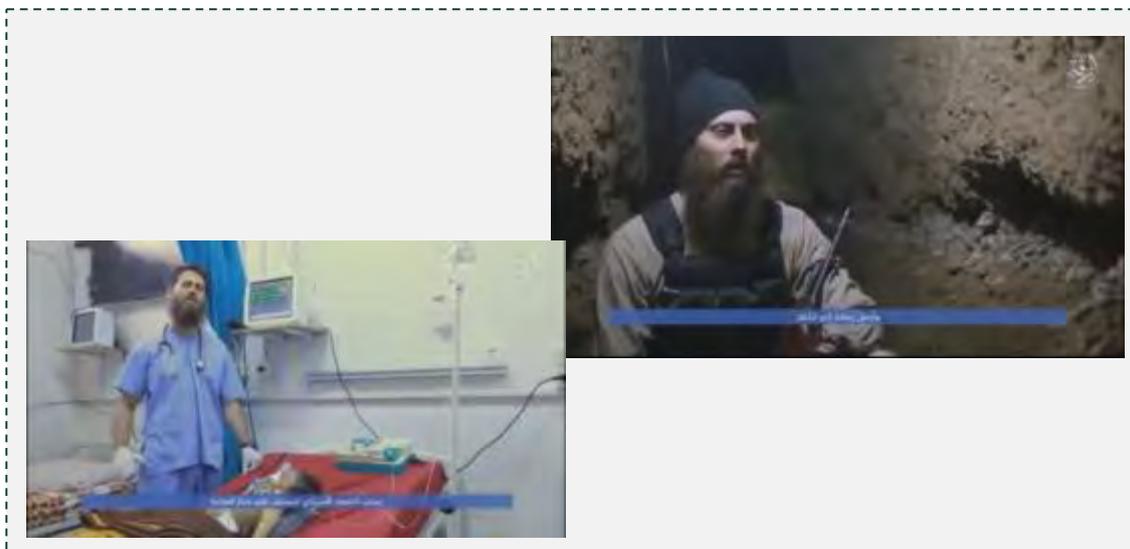
- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), three years after ISIS announced the establishment of the Islamic State, there is now evidence of **the significant weakening of the Islamic State in all areas - economic, military and social**. The Islamic State, which managed to establish eight provinces in Syria in its first year, and whose territory amounted to half of the territory of Syria, **lost extensive territory in its third year**. Moreover, after Turkey joined Operation Euphrates Shield, **the Islamic State lost its remaining last gateway to the world outside Syria**.
- The loss of its territory has transformed ISIS from an offensive, unbridled force into a **defensive force that relies on counter-reactions, lone-wolf terrorism and assassinations**. All the elements fighting against ISIS also tried to **compromise its economic ability**. **As a result, its financial resources dropped by 80%**. In order to compensate for its financial losses, ISIS began to take over merchants' money, imposed fines and even minted new coins.
- **At the same time, ISIS suffered from a drop in the number of fighters joining its ranks**. This drop caused ISIS to recruit Syrian adolescents and men and even children. **The SOHR documented the recruitment of some 5,000 children to the Lion Cubs of the Caliphate. These children took part in suicide bombing attacks, fighting, and executions. Calls for general mobilization by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi also failed to improve the situation**. At the same time, the number of detainees held by ISIS also dropped. Some were executed, some were released in exchange for fighting in the ranks of ISIS, and some were released in prisoner exchanges. The SOHR estimates that **ISIS still holds around 4,000 detainees and abductees** (SOHR, June 29, 2017).

## Turkey

■ Turkey recently carried out a series of detentions of persons suspected of activity and ties with ISIS. According to the Turkish security forces, several dozen people were detained throughout the country (Al-Arabiya; Anatolia News Agency, July 5, 2017). In Istanbul, Turkish police detained 29 people suspected of activity in ISIS. Most of the detainees are foreign nationals (Hürriyet Daily News, July 7, 2017).

### The battle for hearts and minds

■ ISIS's Al-Raqqah Province released a video in English featuring an **Australian doctor**. The doctor criticizes the Western countries for the aggressiveness of the Coalition airstrikes and the damage and injustice that they cause. He calls on ISIS operatives to remain strong and carry out **attacks in the West** (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, July 3, 2017).



Photos from the video released by ISIS (YouTube, July 3, 2017)

The same Australian doctor also appeared in a video released by ISIS in April 2015, showing the advanced medical services that it provided to the residents of the Al-Raqqah Province after taking control of the city. A number of foreign doctors were featured in the video, including the Australian doctor, codenamed Abu Yusuf the Australian. In the video, Abu Yusuf says that he works in the department of pediatrics at the hospital in Al-Raqqah and perceives his work at the hospital as part of jihad which is intended to help the Islamic nation. He also calls on Muslim doctors in the West to join the Islamic State (Daily Mail, April 26, 2015; YouTube, April 24, 2015).



The Australian doctor in a previous ISIS video from 2015 (YouTube, April 24, 2015)