



Spotlight on Global Jihad (August 31 - September 6 2017)

Main events of the week

- ▶ ISIS continues its string of setbacks:
 - ◆ **In Syria** - on 1 September 2017 the SDF announced they had completed the capture of the Old City of Al-Raqqah. According to the SDF, they are now in control of 65% of the city. At the same time the Syrian regime forces and its supporters, with Russian support, have continued their advance toward Deir ez-Zor. On 2 September 2017 the Russian Defense Ministry reported that the Syrian forces, supported by the Russian air force, completed the capture of Uqayribat, and that with this they have wrested control of ISIS's last pocket of resistance in central Syria. Also, the ISIS siege of the Syrian regime enclave in Deir ez-Zor has been breached.
 - ◆ **In Iraq**, Iraqi Premier Haider al-Abadi announced that after ten days of fighting Iraqi forces have completed the capture of Tal Afar, ISIS's last stronghold in northern Iraq.
- ▶ The international coalition fighting ISIS has been preventing, through air strikes, the transit of hundreds of ISIS operatives and their families from the Qalamoun area to eastern Syria. According to a spokesman of the United States Department of Defense, the transit is being blocked due to concerns that the operatives would join the fighting in eastern Syria and in Iraq. He stressed that since the coalition was not party to the agreement, it is not bound by it.

Russia and the Coalition Countries

The De-Escalation Zones

- ▶ Following joint Russian and Jordanian efforts, Russia has announced that an **operations room in Amman, Jordan**, has begun operations and is intended to oversee the implementation of the agreement on Syrian de-escalation zones. In its announcement, Russia stressed the room's important role in maintaining the ceasefire and implementing the agreement (Al-Arabiya, 31 August 2017).

► Speaking with students and lecturers from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), **Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister**, said that the de-escalation zones agreement in Syria **is not harmful to Israel's security**. Lavrov pointed out that the decision on setting up these zones was not blind to Israel's security concerns and that when it was reached all of the partners were updated, including Israel. He also said that in all decisions related to the Middle East they assume the security interests of Israel must be upheld, as the interests of the rest of the countries in the region (Tass, 1 September 2017).

The International Coalition against ISIS

► In his final statement prior to leaving his post, in a conference call from Bagdad, **Stephen Townsend, commander of the International Coalition against ISIS**, made it clear the United States would continue its cooperation with the YPG forces operating as a part of the SDF forces in the Al-Raqqah area. Referring to the continuation of the fight against ISIS he said the final battle with the organization was likely to take place in the Euphrates valley in the area between Deir ez-Zor in Syria and the district of Rawa in Iraq. He added that the SDF forces, numbering about 50,000 fighters, would be taking part in the battle. He said the SDF forces are a lightly-armed force in possession of only a small number of armored vehicles but that they are the most effective force in the battle against ISIS. As for the capture of ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, Townsend said he **does not think the ISIS commander was dead** (Hurriyet Daily News, 2 September 2017).

► In an interview with **Staffan de Mistura, UN special envoy to Syria**, he said there were still **three significant areas of instability in Syria**: Deir ez-Zor, Al-Raqqah and Idlib. He said the Syrian regime and the Syrian forces were expected to take over **Deir ez-Zor** before October 2017. **Al-Raqqah** is expected to be taken over as well more or less at the same time by the United States and the SDF. Regarding **Idlib**, he said there was a presence there of Fateh al-Sham Front operatives (Al-Nusra Front) and that its fall was expected several months after the fall of Al-Raqqah an Deir ez-Zor. Such events would mark the beginning of the end of the crisis in Syria (Reuters, 2 September 2017).

Main developments in Syria

The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

On 1 September 2017 the SDF announced they had completed the capture of the Old City of Al-Raqqah (Dimashq al-Aan, 1 September 2017). According to the forces, now that they have taken over the Old City **they are in control of 65% of the city** (Al-Sham Network, 3 September 2017). At the same time fighting continues in the southwest of the city to complete its capture.

- During the week the main clashes were between the SDF, assisted by the coalition's airstrikes, centered on several hot spots, including: Al-Dar'iyah, the Al-Murour neighborhood to the southwest and on the fringes of the Old City (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2 September 2017). ISIS announced that in clashes in the Al-Murour neighborhood, 18 SDF fighters were killed and ten more were wounded (Twitter account @gareb42, 3 September 2017).

The campaign to take over the Deir ez-Zor area

Syrian regime forces and its supporters, with Russian support, have continued their advance toward Deir ez-Zor. On 2 September 2017 the Russian Defense Ministry reported that the Syrian forces, supported by the Russian air force, completed the capture of Uqayribat, and that with this they have wrested control of ISIS's last pocket of resistance in central Syria. The Russian Defense Ministry stated that the elimination of ISIS in the Deir ez-Zor area and its capture would amount to a strategic blow to the organization's presence in Syria (Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, 2 September 2017).



ISIS vehicles hit by Russian Air Force strikes while attempting to withdraw from Uqayribat (Twitter account The'Nimr'Tiger @Souria4Syrians, 4 September 2017).



Google Maps.

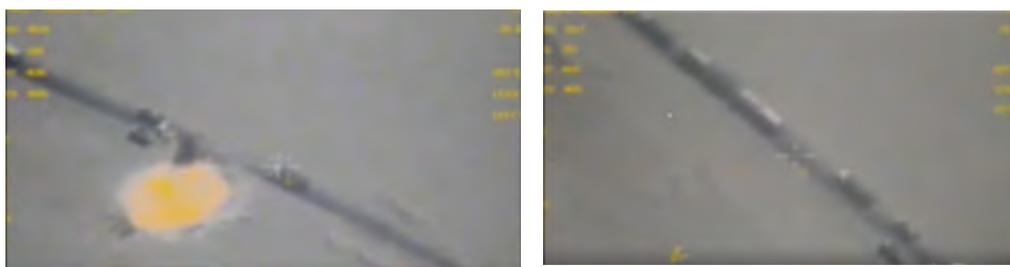
- ▶ After the capture of Uqayribat, the regime forces are mopping up the city ahead of pressing on to capture the entire district. The forces, aided by Russian Air Force airstrikes, continued their advance in the western part of the enclave. On 4 September 2017 the Syrian forces reached the brigade 137 compound (which had been used by the Syrian army), about 7 km west of the town, where they clashed with ISIS operatives. Another Syrian force advanced along the Mount Bishri route. ISIS operatives withdrew from the Al-Sukhnah-Deir ez-Zor route, including the area of Kobajjep, and Al-Shoula, southwest of Deir ez-Zor, where the route passes (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 4 September 2017).
- ▶ These moves by the Syrian army and their supporters has breached the siege on the Deir ez-Zor enclave. An official Syrian army announcement said the forces had completed the second stage of their campaign in the Syrian desert thanks to aerial support from Syrian and Russian aircraft. It added that they had succeeded in lifting the blockade from Deir ez-Zor. The announcement emphasized that the lifting of the blockade is of substantial strategic importance for the war against terror (Syrian television, 5 September 2017).
- ▶ ISIS operatives attempted to stall the Syrian forces' advance. To achieve this the operatives fired artillery toward concentrations of Syrian army forces. In addition, a suicide bomber carried out an attack using a car bomb (Twitter account [سلطان علماء](#) @abdullahulwan5, 3 September 2017).



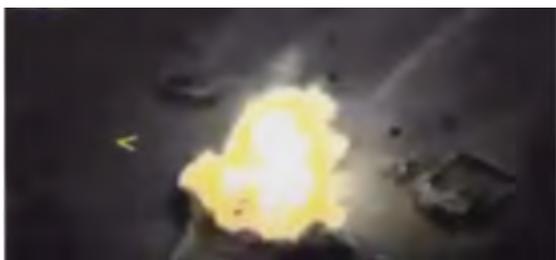
Right: ISIS artillery fire toward a concentration of Syrian army forces northeast of Uqayribat (<https://justpaste.it/1au4r> 3 September 2017). Left: an ISIS car bomb detonation against a concentration of Syrian army forces north of the village of Al-Nuaimiya (Twitter account سلطان علماء الشام @abdullahulwan5, 3 September 2017).

Russian Involvement in Syria

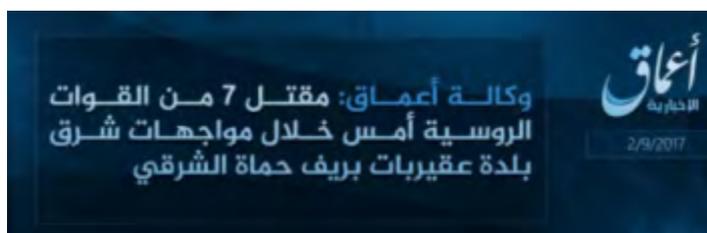
► The Russian army has assisted the regime forces and their supporters. Through attacks carried out by the Russian forces during the fighting, an ISIS convoy, which consisted of 12 trucks, weapons, ammunition, off-road vehicles fitted with machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons and mortars - was destroyed. In other attacks they destroyed armored vehicles, artillery positions, control positions and ISIS communication centers (Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, 2 September 2017). On 4 September 2017 the Russians also launched cruise missiles from their frigate Admiral Essen, which is in the Mediterranean (Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, 6 September 2017). ISIS claims that in clashes in the village of Al-Mushrefa, southwest of Uqayribat, its operatives killed several Russian soldiers (Al-Sham Network, 30 August 2017). The Russian Defense Ministry reported that after the area was captured they were able to corroborate the information, received through various channels, that the fortified area had been held by ISIS operatives who had arrived from Russia and from the Commonwealth states (Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, 6 September 2017).



Russian aerial attacks against ISIS targets (Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, 2 September 2017).



**Cruise missile attack by Russian forces on Deir ez-Zor
(Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, 5 September 2017).**



**ISIS announcement of its killing of seven Russian soldiers east of Uqayribat
(Aamaq, 2 September 2017).**

Attack on ISIS convoy by coalition forces

- ▶ Aircraft belonging to the International Coalition against ISIS, headed by the United States, are preventing a **convoy of 17 buses** carrying ISIS operatives and their families, who had been evacuated from the Qalamoun area, from reaching its destination in the town of Abu Kamal in eastern Syria on the Iraq-Syria border, one of ISIS's last strongholds in the area. **In the convoy are some 300 ISIS operatives and a similar number of their family members** who had been evacuated from Lebanon as a part of a withdrawal agreement between the Syrian regime and Hezbollah on the one hand and ISIS on the other. The operatives said at least 12 people were killed in the attack (Zaman Al-Wasl, 1 September 2017).
- ▶ The Coalition forces carried out an aerial assault against the convoy in the Al-Hmimah, south of Deir ez-Zor. Following this attack, and after the convoy changed direction, the Coalition forces carried out another attack. The Iraqi government also refused to allow the convoy to pass through its territory (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2 September 2017). Following the attack, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah began seeking an alternative route for the convoy, which has been stranded for several days in a desert area north-east of Palmyra (Qasioun, 2 September 2017). Syrian opposition sources reported that dozens of ISIS operatives and civilians had abandoned the buses and attempted to reach ISIS-controlled areas in the Deir ez-Zor area by car (Washington Post, 2 September 2017).



Area of the attack on the convoy in the Syria-Iraq border area (Google Maps).



ISIS operatives' bus convoy en route (Al-Arabiya channel, 3 September 2017).



Hezbollah operative escorting the ISIS convoy
(Twitter account Qasioun News Agency@QASIOUN_NEWS, 2 September 2017).

- **Hezbollah** released an official announcement according to which American aircraft are preventing the buses carrying the ISIS operatives and their families, who left an area under government control, from proceeding and that they have imposed a desert siege on them. They further said the Americans were preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the sick, the injured and the elderly. Coalition spokesmen made it clear that the International

Coalition forces would not allow the ISIS convoy to come near the Syria-Iraq border. They also said they had asked Russia to make the Coalition's intentions for the convoy clear to the Assad regime. Iraq announced that should the convoy approach the border area it would take military action against it (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, 2 September 2017).

► **A spokesman of the United States Department of Defense** said that the coalition had not been party to the said agreement and that it was therefore not bound by it. However he pointed out that the coalition had attacked the convoy in accordance with international law. The spokesman further pointed out that the Coalition would act anywhere and anytime against ISIS without harming civilians. **International Coalition spokesman Ryan Dillon** said the attack on the convoy was intended to prevent the ISIS operatives from advancing eastward toward Iraq. He also declared that the Coalition would continue to track the convoys in real time and hit them when they were in open areas where there are no civilians (Reuters, 1 September 2017).

Main developments in Iraq

Tal Afar

► **Haider al-Abadi, the Iraqi prime minister**, declared on 1 September 2017 that after ten days of fighting **Iraqi forces have completed the capture of Tal Afar and the entire Nineveh Governorate** (Twitter account of Iraqi prime minister, 2 September 2017). In the northern area of the Tal Afar district, dozens of ISIS operatives surrendered to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces after having fled the Iraqi security forces (Al-Prat channel, 30 August 2017). Iraqi engineering forces are continuing their operation to diffuse IEDs in the city of Tal Afar (Al-Iraqiya channel, 3 September 2017).

► The Iraqi army has announced that in the course of capturing the Tal Afar district from ISIS, **over two thousand ISIS operatives were killed including fifty suicide bombers**, 77 car bombs were neutralized and 990 IEDs laid by the organization's operatives in the area had been detonated. In addition, 71 boobytrapped structures were neutralized, 46 motorcycles that had served the ISIS operatives and 66 tunnels were destroyed. Large quantities of weapons and 13 car-bomb-making workshops were found. According to the Iraqi army, 150 Iraqi servicemen were killed in the campaign to capture Tal Afar and some 600 were injured (Al Sumaria, 2 September 2017).



Iraqi security forces in the city of Tal Afar (Al Sumaria, 2 September 2017).



ISIS operatives surrendering to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces (Al-Prat channel, 30 August 2017).

Continuing the rehabilitation of Mosul

- ▶ On 30 August 2017 a pontoon bridge was inaugurated to connect the east side and the west side of Mosul. The bridge was laid by the Iraqi army's corps of engineers. At the same time the rehabilitation of the **fourth bridge** connecting the eastern and western parts of the city also began (Nineveh Media Center, 30 August 2017).



Right: An Iraqi soldier at the bridge inauguration ceremony. Left: Beginning of the rehabilitation works on the fourth bridge (Nineveh Media Center, 30 August 2017).

Fears in ISIS over the continued war in Iraq

► After the capture of Mosul and Tal Afar, ISIS operatives fear that the Iraqi security forces will continue their conquests to capture more ISIS strongholds in Iraq: a local source reported that each night families of ISIS operatives leave the town of **al-Sharbat** (an ISIS stronghold some ninety km south of Mosul) to unknown destinations. This comes in view of expectations that the town will soon be attacked by the Iraqi security forces (Al Sumaria, 3 September 2017). A local source in **Al-Hawija** mentioned that most of the ISIS commanders and their families have left the city, which is under ISIS control, in anticipation that the city, some 55 km southwest of Kirkuk, will soon be attacked by the Iraqi security forces (Al Sumaria, 2 September 2017).

Further fighting in other areas of Iraq

- **Anah** – an Iraqi security source has said that the US-led International Coalition aircraft have attacked a convoy of ISIS operatives which was en route from **Al-Qa'im to Anah**, in the desert region near the Iraq-Syria border. 22 ISIS operatives were killed in the attack (Al Sumaria, 2 September 2017).
- **Samarra** - ISIS announced that three of its operatives, carrying weapons and suicide vests, attacked the **power station south of the city of Samarra**. At first the operatives fired and then they detonated their suicide vests. The attack killed ten security guards and Iraqi security personnel and injured twenty more (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 2 September 2017).
- **Al-Waleed/Al-Tanf** - ISIS reported that it attacked a vehicle belonging to the Al Hashed Al Shaabi militia - a pro-Iranian militia assisting the Iraqi government in its fight against ISIS in the Al-Tanf crossing area between Iraq and Syria. Some of the passengers were killed and some were taken prisoner (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 2 September 2017).



Right: The vehicle which came under attack. Left: One of the militia men who were taken prisoner (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 2 September 2017)

Sinai Peninsula

► A Twitter account reporting on events in the Sinai Peninsula released an announcement from ISIS, threatening the workers in an El-Arish concrete factory and declaring the site a legitimate target for attack. According to the announcement the factory is one of the tools of war of the infidel army against the Muslim worshippers of Allah and therefore it is a legitimate target. The announcement warns all of the workers and vehicle owners transporting the factory's products or raw materials to the factory (Twitter account @sinai_news_1, 3 September 2017).

Other countries

The Philippines: Fighting between ISIS and the Philippines army in Marawi drawing to a close

► According to a report from the Reuters news agency, which relies on Philippine military sources, the campaign for the city of Marawi on Mindanao Island, which has been going on for over a hundred days, is now in its final stages. According to the agency, the area in which the two sides are clashing has been reduced and is now focused on the city's commercial district. The number of ISIS operatives taking part in the fighting has diminished substantially. As a result, women and children are also being involved in the fighting. Over 800 ISIS operatives, mostly armed, have been killed in the clashes since 23 May 2017. ISIS operatives are holding 56 Christian hostages, most of them women, and also 80 male residents of the city who have been forced to bear arms and fight against the Philippine army (Reuters, 4 September 2017). On 2 September 2017 ISIS reported that some fifty Philippine soldiers were killed in clashes with ISIS operatives in several of the city neighborhoods (Al-Zuaram, 2 September 2017).

Myanmar

► The Al-Malahem media organization belonging to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released a clip entitled "Burma (Myanmar) the forgotten wound". The clip shows Sheikh Khalid Bin Umar Batrafi, spokesman of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, mentioning the suffering of the Muslims in Burma, who are being oppressed by the Buddhist government there. He said **the only solution to this crisis was jihad**. He called on Muslims in Burma to

prepare themselves. He also called on Muslims in all neighboring countries (Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Indonesia) to assist their brothers in Burma and to wage jihad (Al-Malahem, 2 September 2017).

The conduct of the Islamic State

Senior ISIS operative declared “Wanted Terror Operative”

► On 29 August 2017 the US Department of the Treasury declared **Salim Mustafa Mohammed Al-Mansur, ISIS finance man (emir) in Mosul**, a wanted terror operative. The declaration was in coordination with the Iraqi government, which decided to freeze all his assets in Iraq. Mansur has been known since 2009, when he was a senior figure in Al-Qaeda. In 2014 Mansur was involved in the transfer of thousands of Iraqi Dinars to ISIS in Mosul. In 2016 he was in charge of the sale of petroleum and its products, which ISIS was producing from the oil fields they had taken over in Iraq and Syria. According to the Department of the Treasury, he had **recently moved from Iraq to Turkey** and he may be in one of three places: Mersin, Istanbul, or Adana. It is unclear how he escaped to Turkish without being arrested by the authorities. John E. Smith, head of foreign assets supervision in the Department of the Treasury, said the Department was continuing to work in close cooperation with the Iraqi government to eliminate ISIS’ financial networks inside and outside Iraq (US Department of the Treasury website, 29 August 2017).

ISIS operatives celebrate Eid Al-Adha in Southern Damascus

► For Eid Al-Adha, the ISIS information bureaus in the various districts released photographs and video clips describing the festive atmosphere. The clips included instructions on the permitted and forbidden festival customs and stated that **fighting and jihad are an integral part of the festival:**

- ◆ In a clip released by the ISIS information bureau in Al Khayr district the holiday customs and which ones are permitted according to the ISIS concepts and which are not. At the end of the clip, a masked man is shown exhorting Muslims who are unable to emigrate to lands of Islam to amplify the holiday cheer by waging jihad in the lands of the Jews and Crusaders (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 31 August 2017).
- ◆ The ISIS Damascus district posted pictures documenting ISIS operatives celebrating the holiday in south Damascus (possibly in the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp, although the

exact location was not specified). The pictures show the ISIS operatives praying and listening to an imam's sermon in a mosque. In addition, pictures were posted showing distribution of sweets to the local population and sheep being led to slaughter (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 2 September 2017).



Right: ISIS operatives praying in a mosque in south Damascus during Eid Al-Adha. A light weapon can be seen laid on the carpet in the mosque. Left: An ISIS Islamic Police man (Al-Khasba) handing out sweets to the locals (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 2 September 2017).

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Russia

- ▶ The Federal Security Bureau (FSB) in Russia arrested two central Asian ISIS operatives who were **planning a terror attack in Moscow** on 1 September 2017. One of the suspects, **Murodbek Kadirov**, admitted he planned to carry out a suicide attack in the midst of a large crowd. A search in his apartment found a powerful IED and a clip posted on the web in which he swore allegiance to ISIS. A search through his mobile phone found information on other recruits and instructions on carrying out the attack. The second suspect had planned a stabbing attack (Sputnik, 1 September 2017).
- ▶ In this context it is worth mentioning the statement from Valery Gerasimov, Russian chief of staff at the opening ceremony of the General Staff's military academic year for fighting terrorism, that international terrorism and the spread of conflicts among local armed men, require **a fresh approach that would guarantee security and the continued training of the military forces** (Tass, 1 September 2017).

Turkey

- ▶ The anti-terror unit in the Izmir police, Turkey, **arrested six suspects** including three Syrian nationals, **on suspicion of being members of ISIS**. According to the police, they found in their possession "digital materials and documents" containing ISIS propaganda material. Turkey noted that so far it has arrested over 5,000 suspects, deported more than

5,000 suspected members of the organization and refused entry into Turkey of over 53,000 individuals suspected of terrorism (Daily Sabah, 29 August 2017)

The Battle for Hearts and Minds

► The ISIS information bureau posted a clip showing an English-speaking boy of about ten telling how he had arrived in Al-Raqqah two years ago with his mother from the USA and had begun to learn the laws of Islam. The child said his father was an American soldier fighting the Jihad fighters in Iraq. He introduces his friend Abdullah, seven years old, who lives with him in the same house. Abdullah speaks Arabic and tells that he had arrived from Sinjar (northwestern Iraq) and that he had been brought to Al-Raqqah by ISIS operatives and that now he was learning the laws of Islam. Youssef directs his words at **US President Donald Trump** “the puppet of the Jews” and told him **the battle would not end in Al-Raqqah or Mosul but “in your lands”** (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, 23 August 2017).



Youssef the American boy who appeared in the clip (Al-Suwaram, 23 August 2017).