



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## November 9-15, 2017



### Main events of the week

- ▶ **In the city of Albukamal**, a fierce battle is being waged over the last stronghold of the Islamic State in Syria. The Syrian forces took over the city (and were quick to announce the completion of its liberation) but were forced to leave because of a counterattack by ISIS operatives hiding in tunnels that they had dug in the city center. The Syrian armed forces and Shiite militias supporting them are preparing for another attack on Albukamal.
- ▶ The Iraqi army, which liberated **the city of Al-Qaim** and the surrounding villages, has now turned eastward **and is preparing to take over the city of Rawa**, the last stronghold of the Islamic State in Iraq. The Iraqi army announced that within a few days it would declare a complete victory over terrorism in Iraq.
- ▶ **Russia, the United States, and Jordan have signed a Memorandum of Principles** (November 8, 2017). The Memorandum states, among other things, that in order to strengthen the ceasefire **in southwestern Syria** (an area that also includes Quneitra), **the foreign forces must be reduced and ultimately eliminated from the area**. The reference in the Memorandum to the removal of the foreign forces **is vague**. The Memorandum does not specify the identity of the foreign forces, refrains from setting a timetable for their withdrawal and does not indicate the places to which they will be transferred.
- ▶ Moreover, **the Memorandum of Principles deals with southwestern Syria and does not mention the removal of foreign forces from Syria**. In this context, **Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov made it clear that in the view of the Russians, the presence of the Iranian forces in Syria is legitimate**, since they were invited by a legitimate Syrian government, and the issue was not discussed at all during the talks in Amman.

## Russia and the Coalition countries

### Memorandum of Principles between Russia, the United States, and Jordan regarding the ceasefire in southern Syria

- ▶ On November 8, 2017, a **Memorandum of Principles** was achieved in Amman **between the United States, Russia, and Jordan**. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the Memorandum of Principles establishes a mechanism for the de-escalation zone's operation in Syria's southwest (TASS News Agency, November 14, 2017)<sup>1</sup>. The memorandum states the following: **“This memorandum reinforces the success of the ceasefire initiative, to include the reduction, and ultimate elimination of foreign forces and foreign fighters from the area to ensure a more sustainable peace”** (statement by the spokesperson of the US Department of State, November 11, 2017, US Department of State website. The same sentence appeared on the Kremlin website on November 11, 2017). **The reference in the Memorandum of Principles to the removal of the foreign forces is vague.** The Memorandum **does not specify the identity of the foreign forces, refrains from setting a timetable for their removal from southwestern Syria and does not indicate the places to which they will be transferred.**
- ▶ In this context, **Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said that the presence of the Russian and Iranian forces in Syria is legitimate, since they were invited by a legitimate Syrian government. According to him, the withdrawal of Iran or the “pro-Iranian forces” from Syria was not discussed in the talks held by Russia [in Amman] with the US.** He said: **“Seeking non-Syrian units’ withdrawal from the line of engagement in this difficult region of Syria is that what [sic] we agreed on”** (TASS News Agency, November 14, 2017).
- ▶ **Israel refrained from issuing an official comment on the Memorandum of Principles, even though it has a direct bearing on the Golan Heights and Israel’s security interests.**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This refers to the de-escalation agreement in southwestern Syria, which was achieved between the US and Russia on July 9, 2017. Jordan was 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 the areas of **Daraa, As-Suwayda, and Quneitra.**

<sup>2</sup>Following the de-escalation agreement in southwestern Syria (July 7, 2017), Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued an official statement. He said that Israel welcomed a genuine ceasefire in Syria. He noted, however, that **such a ceasefire must not enable the consolidation of Iran and its proxies 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. **Israel will continue to monitor the developments across its borders and will prevent**

Unofficially, the Israeli media reported that the Israeli defense establishment was concerned about the possibility that the Memorandum (and the secret understandings that may have been reached between the parties) only guaranteed the removal of the Iranians and their subordinate militias only a relatively short distance from the border with Israel on the Golan Heights. In addition, Israel is concerned by the fact that at the moment there is no willingness on the part of the superpowers to take real action that would lead to the removal of the Iranians from Syria in general, and from the south in particular (Amos Harel's article in the Israeli daily Haaretz, November 13, 2017).

### **Joint statement by the Presidents of the United States and Russia (November 10, 2017)**

- ▶ In a joint statement after a **meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the margins of the APEC conference in Vietnam**, the two expressed their satisfaction with successful US-Russia enhanced **de-confliction efforts between US and Russian military professionals that helped defeat ISIS**. The Presidents agreed **to maintain open military channels of communication** to help ensure the safety of both US and Russian forces and de-confliction of partnered forces engaged in the fight against ISIS. They confirmed these efforts would continue until the final defeat of ISIS.
- ▶ In addition, the Presidents emphasized that **there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria**. They called on all parties involved **to take part in a political process** based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and on the Geneva Process. President Trump and President Putin expressed their commitment **to maintain the de-escalation zones in Syria and confirmed the Memorandum of Principles of de-escalation in southern Syria signed in Amman on November 8, 2017, between Jordan, Russia, and the United States** (US Department of State website and the Kremlin website, November 11, 2017).

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**the Hezbollah forces and the Iranian forces from establishing a presence near its border** (Israel's Prime Minister's Office website, July 9, 2017).



**The Trump-Putin meeting on the margins of the APEC conference  
(Kremlin website, November 10, 2017)**

### **Summary of the fighting in Syria by the Russian Chief of Staff**

► In a speech to the staff of the Russian Defense Ministry, **Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov summed up the campaign in Syria**. Following are a number of statements that he made about the fighting in Syria (Russian Defense Ministry website, November 7, 2017):

- ◆ **The Russian army fought in Syria against large terrorist networks that were well equipped with weapons, including 1,500 tanks and armored vehicles and more than 1,200 guns and mortars.** Most of the weapons were taken from the Syrian and Iraqi forces. These networks also had large quantities of ammunition and supplies, which were replenished throughout the fighting.
- ◆ **The level of cohesion and training of the terrorist organizations was on a par with that of the Syrian army.** From a strategic standpoint, the terrorist networks operated intelligently and unconventionally, especially in urban areas. Every populated area where these networks fought included fortified zones with a well-laid-out fire system, concrete constructions, sophisticated system of engineer obstacles and underground communications.
- ◆ **At the start of the Russian involvement in Syria, the terrorist organizations controlled 70% of the country's territory.** During the Russian intervention, which lasted for two years, the Russian forces managed not only to divert the fighting to the Syrian forces, **but also to eliminate large forces of terrorist organizations and liberate key cities.** Altogether, more than 1,000 cities and towns were liberated and

**54,000 operatives of the terrorist organizations were eliminated** (including more than 2,800 born in Russia and 1,400 born in the CIS).



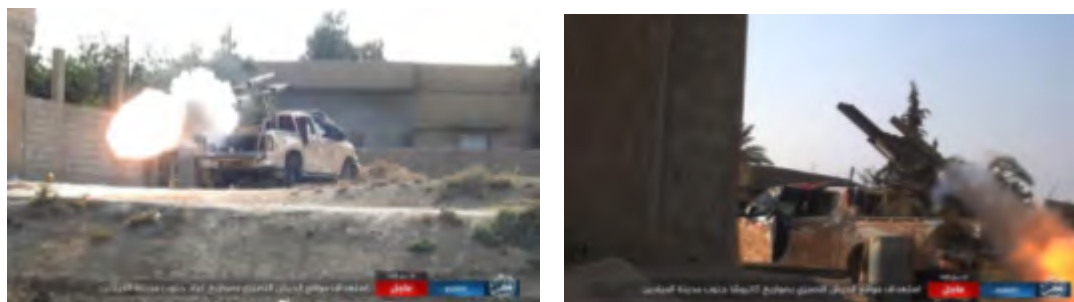
**Valery Gerasimov addressing the staff of the Russian Defense Ministry**  
(Russian Defense Ministry website, November 7, 2017)

## Main developments in Syria

### Deir ez-Zor area

After the liberation of the city of Deir ez-Zor and mopping up its environs from ISIS, the Syrian regime began **to restore life to normal as quickly as possible**. The governor of the Deir ez-Zor Province, Mohammad Ibrahim Sammara, said that government ministries were called upon to step up the restoration of basic services as well as agricultural and industrial manufacture. The Syrian army returned to the Syrian regime thousands of tons of flour stolen by ISIS as well as three flour mills (SANA, November 11, 2017). **At the same time, ISIS continues to carry out terrorist attacks in areas allegedly liberated by the Syrian forces, demonstrating that it still has considerable operative capabilities.**

- In the area between Deir ez-Zor and Albukamal, **ISIS operatives continue to carry out guerrilla warfare against the Syrian troops**. This week, ISIS operatives **fired rockets** at Syrian army positions south of Al-Mayadeen (November 9, 2017). In addition, they carried out **a complex suicide bombing attack at the Deir ez-Zor military airfield** (November 13, 2017).



**Rockets fired by ISIS operatives at Syrian army positions south of Al-Mayadeen (Haqq, November 9, 2017)**

► On November 13, 2017, an ISIS Chechen suicide bomber blew up a car bomb at the Deir ez-Zor military airfield. Thereafter, **five ISIS Chechen operatives, wearing Russian army fatigues, entered the airfield by vehicles.** They got off the vehicles and opened fire in all directions. They were killed in the exchange of fire, but one of them managed to blow himself up with his explosive belt. **At least 13 Russian military personnel were reportedly killed** in the attack (Khotwa, November 13, 2017; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 14, 2017).

### The battle for Albukamal

**A fierce battle is being waged in the city of Albukamal over the last stronghold of the Islamic State in Syria.** The Syrian army and Shiite militias supporting it took over the city **but were forced to withdraw** after a counterattack by ISIS operatives, who were hiding in tunnels which they had dug in the center of the city. **The Syrian forces and the Shiite militias are now preparing for an additional attack on the city.**

► In the city of Albukamal, ISIS's last stronghold in Syria, fierce fighting takes place between the Syrian army and Iranian-affiliated Shiite militias supporting it on the one hand, and ISIS on the other. According to the ITIC's assessment, in this battle, a major role is played by Lebanese Hezbollah and the Shiite militias, including fighters from the Fatemiyoun Brigade (the Afghan militia), from the Zeynabiyoun Brigade (the Pakistani militia), and Iraqi militias.

► **At this stage (the morning of November 15, 2017), the city of Albukamal is still controlled by ISIS.** The current situation is as follows:

- ◆ **On November 9, 2017,** the Syrian forces, supported by the Shiite militias, took over Albukamal (Syrian TV, November 9, 2017). The Syrian General Staff and the commander of the Russian troops in Syria Sergey Surovikin released announcements on the liberation of the city (Syrian TV, November 9, 2017; website of the Russian Defense Ministry, November 10, 2017).



**The announcement of the Syrian General Staff on the liberation of Albukamal; ISIS operatives retook the city after the announcement (Syrian TV, November 9, 2017)**

- ◆ **On November 11, 2017, ISIS operatives retook Albukamal.** They **launched a counterattack using tunnels** which they had dug in the center of the city, where they hid before the attack. Both sides sustained heavy losses. The militias supporting the Syrian army withdrew to areas south and east of the city, where they are now preparing for a new attack. The Syrian army and the militias supporting it fired heavy artillery at Albukamal, and (Russian?) fighter planes attacked targets in the city (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 12, 2017; Al-Jazeera, November 13, 2017).

### **The Syrian troops joining forces the Shiite militias on the border between Syria and Iraq**

- A video from Hezbollah's Military Spokesman's Office shows **Hezbollah operatives joining forces with Popular Mobilization militias** (umbrella framework of the Shiite militias in Iraq) **on the border between Syria and Iraq.** According to the caption in the video, this was "a meeting of the Syrian and Iraqi forces." They joined forces before they encircled the city of Albukamal. The video shows the flags of the Iraqi Shiite militia **Al-Nujaba Movement**,<sup>3</sup> **Hezbollah**, and **Syria**, waved by the fighters (Twitter account of Hezbollah's Military Spokesman's Office, November 8, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> The Al-Nujaba Movement (Movement of the Noble) is an Iraqi Shiite militia active mainly in the Baghdad area. Part of it was sent to Syria to fight side by side with the Syrian army against the rebel organizations.



**Right: Hezbollah fighters and the Iraqi Popular Mobilization joining forces before the encirclement of Albukamal. Left: Flag of the Popular Mobilization's Al-Nujaba Movement waved at the point where they joined forces with Hezbollah (Twitter account of Hezbollah's Military Spokesman's Office, November 8, 2017)**



**The flags of Al-Nujaba Movement, Hezbollah, and Syria, waved in a group photo at the point where they joined forces before the encirclement of Albukamal (Twitter account of Hezbollah's Military Spokesman's Office, November 8, 2017)**

## Al-Raqqah

► The BBC reported a secret deal **allowing hundreds of ISIS fighters and their families to flee Al-Raqqah after it was taken over by the SDF forces.** The deal was apparently carried out under the supervision of the International Coalition and the Kurdish forces that took over the city. As a direct result of the deal, **a convoy of ISIS operatives, including senior members of the organization,** fled the city. In addition, foreign fighters fled to various places in Syria and some of them even reached Turkey. Photos taken secretly documented around 10 trucks of operatives carrying weapons and ammunition. Following the BBC's investigative report, the Coalition forces admitted that they had been involved in the deal and that **around 250 ISIS fighters and their families had left the city** (BBC, November 14, 2017).

## Aleppo

► According to reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) and Syrian and Arab media, **around 90 civilians were killed and dozens were wounded** in three airstrikes **carried out by the Russian Air Force in the heart of an open market in the city of Atarib (west of Aleppo).** The area **under attack was declared a de-escalation zone and is**



controlled by rebel organizations, including the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (ABC News, November 13, 2017). The Russian base in Hmeymim denied reports that Russian planes had attacked civilians in the area of Atarib (Facebook page of the Hmeymim Base, November 13, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

### Preparations to take over the city of Rawa, ISIS's last stronghold in Iraq

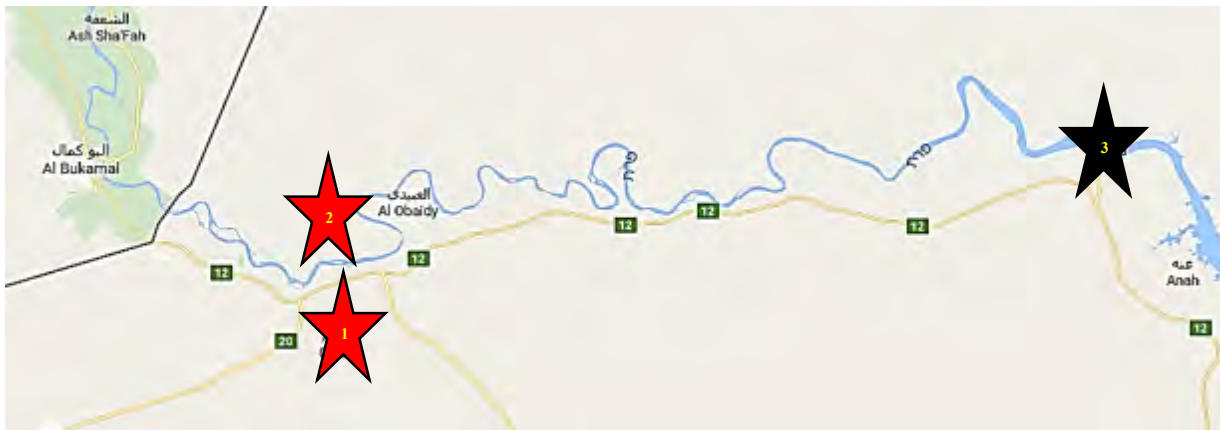
After the takeover of the city of Al-Qaim, the Iraqi army announced that it had liberated the city of Rummaneh, north of Al-Qaim, and dozens of villages in the area. Now **the Iraqi army is preparing to take over the Rawa District**, about 70 km east of Al-Qaim, **the Islamic State's last stronghold in Iraq**. The Iraqi army announced that within a few days **it would declare a complete victory over terrorism in Iraq** (Twitter account of the Iraqi National Army, November 11, 2017).



**The Iraqi army's announcement of its takeover of the city of Rummaneh and dozens of villages in the western part of the Al-Anbar Province (Twitter account of the Iraqi National Army, November 11, 2017)**



**Iraqi forces in the area of Rummaneh  
(Al-Sumaria News, November 12, 2017)**



**Al-Qaim (1), Rummaneh (2), and Rawa, some 70 km east of Rummaneh (3)**

### **Actions by the Iraqi security forces against ISIS networks around Iraq**

- ▶ In spite of ISIS's defeat in Iraq, there still remain local ISIS networks in various parts of Iraq. **Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi warned against ISIS operatives moving between Kirkuk Province and Salah al-Din Province.** He demanded that the Iraqi security forces carry out searches for dormant ISIS networks in those areas (Al-Arabiya, November 11, 2017).
- ▶ Following are the main actions taken by the Iraqi security forces against ISIS:
  - ◆ **The Iraqi security forces killed 13 suicide bombers** who barricaded themselves in a tunnel **west of Tikrit**, about 158 km north of Baghdad. Based on intelligence received from Iraqi security sources, an Iraqi police force arrived at the scene, supported by the Iraqi Air Force, and killed the operatives (Al-Sumaria, November 11, 2017).
  - ◆ **The Iraqi army attacked gatherings of ISIS operatives** in three villages in the Tuz Khurmatu district, Saladin Province, killing and wounding several operatives. Others fled towards the desert (Al-Arabiya, November 11, 2017).
  - ◆ **Iraqi General Muzher al-Azawi** announced the beginning of an extensive military operation intended to expose ISIS cells in nine areas **south of Ba'qubah**, about 55 km

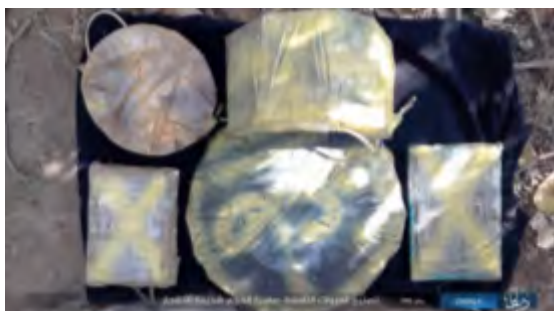
north of Baghdad. The operation is conducted with the participation of the Iraqi army, Iraqi police, and the Popular Mobilization forces (Iranian-affiliated Shiite militias), supported by the Iraqi Air Force (Al-Sumaria News, November 12, 2017).

### Instructions on the preparation of explosive charges

In ISIS's Diyala Province, **detailed explanations with photos showing how to prepare small but powerful explosive charges** were published this month (Haqq, November 13, 2017). In the ITIC's assessment, **this may indicate the beginning of ISIS's shift to the modus operandi of a terror and guerrilla organization, following the collapse of the Islamic State.**



**Right: Preparation of an explosive charge – Stage 1. Left: Preparation of an explosive charge – Stage 5 (Haqq, November 13, 2017)**



**Right: Preparation of an explosive charge – Stage 7. Left: Five explosive charges ready for activation (Haqq, November 13, 2017)**

### Finding mass graves of people executed by ISIS in Kirkuk Province

► **Many mass graves with at least 400 bodies** were found close to Hawija, about 58 km west of Kirkuk. According to **Kirkuk Province acting governor Rakan Sa'id**, the bodies were found in the area of the Al-Bakarah base, which served as one of the US Army headquarters in Iraq. According to him, **those people were executed by ISIS**. The bodies were found dressed in civilian clothes or in orange jumpsuits, in which ISIS used to dress those about to be executed (Sawt Al-Iraq, November 13, 2017).

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

### Egyptian security forces attacked by ISIS operatives

- ▶ **On November 10, 2017, it was reported that nine truck drivers were shot dead by ISIS operatives on the Al-Sukhnah road in central Sinai.** The drivers were taken out of their cars, shot dead, and the trucks were set on fire. The trucks carried oil products used to operate the cement factory in Al-Arish. The ISIS operatives who had set up a checkpoint on the Al-Sukhnah road **also killed an Egyptian army lieutenant colonel and an Egyptian army soldier**, who were in the trucks' escort car (Al-Fajr, November 10, 2017; Haqq, November 11, 2017; Al-Masry Al-Youm, November 10, 2017).
- ▶ ISIS released an announcement stating that an operative codenamed **Amar al-Ansari** attacked an Egyptian army staging zone where Egyptian soldiers were preparing to attack ISIS operatives **south of Al-Sheikh Zuweid**. According to the announcement, the terrorist penetrated the area where the soldiers were staying and exchanged fire with them until he was killed. In these clashes, several Egyptian soldiers were killed and wounded, including the Egyptian army commander of the 228th Battalion (Haqq, November 11, 2017).

### The border between Egypt and Libya

The Egyptian army announced that the Egyptian Air Force along with border police forces and the military intelligence had destroyed a convoy of vehicles carrying arms and ammunition, which was attempting to enter Egyptian territory from Libya. A video released by the Egyptian army showed the vehicle convoy attacked by missiles from an Egyptian aircraft (official Facebook page of the Egyptian army spokesman; Al-Masry Al-Youm, November 11, 2017). **The destination of the weapons is unclear.**



**Right: Vehicles carrying arms and ammunition which were trying to enter Egypt, before they were eliminated by missiles from an Egyptian aircraft. Left: The vehicles being hit (official Facebook page of the Egyptian Army Spokesman; Al-Masry Al-Youm, November 11, 2017)**

## ISIS's activity in other countries

### (Another) ISIS suicide bombing attack in Yemen

► On November 14, 2017, ISIS's Aden Abyan Province announced that an ISIS suicide bomber codenamed Abu Hajer al-Adani had detonated a car bomb at the **headquarters of the United Arab Emirates in central Aden**. The headquarters was completely destroyed. **Nine soldiers were killed and several other soldiers and civilians were wounded** (Haqq, November 14, 2017; Akhbar Al-Yaman, November 14, 2017).



**Suicide bomber Abu Hajer al-Adani (November 14, 2017)**

This attack was preceded by a combined attack by ISIS against a building of Yemen's Interior Ministry, which included the detonation of a car bomb by a suicide bomber (November 5, 2017). The execution of these two attacks almost simultaneously is, **in the ITIC's opinion, a "message" indicating the intention of ISIS's provinces in Yemen to continue to operate, and even to increase their activity, despite the collapse of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.**

## The battle for hearts and minds

### Poster encouraging attacks in France

► A poster entitled “**Advice to Jihad Fighters in Enemy Places**” appeared on page 12 of Issue No. 105 of **ISIS’s weekly magazine Al-Nabā’**. **Part of the Eiffel Tower and its surroundings appear in the background of the poster**. The poster details the steps that an attacker should take during the various stages of the attack (Haqq; file-sharing website, November 10, 2017):

- ◆ **Before planning the attack** – the **purity of religion** must be preserved. The attack must be carried out for the sake of Allah and not for the sake of fame.
- ◆ **While planning the attack** – **carefully choose the target**, timing and operating method. Choose a **target that will cause the enemy the most damage at the lowest cost and with the simplest means**; prepare an alternative plan in the event that the original plan goes awry and look for escape routes if it is impossible to carry out the planned attack.
- ◆ **While carrying out the attack** – leave the scene of the attack **safely and, if this is impossible, then fight to the death**. Use violence and make sure the enemy sustains as many losses as possible.



ISIS's poster entitled "Advice to Jihad Fighters in Enemy Places." Part of the Eiffel Tower and its surroundings appear at the top of the poster (Haqq; file-sharing website, November 10, 2017)