



Spotlight on Global Jihad

(December 14-20, 2017)



Main events of the week

► Following President Putin's announcement about the removal of a "substantial portion" of the Russian forces in Syria, **the evacuation process began this week**. According to Russian media reports, warplanes, various ground forces and military equipment have been removed from Syria. The Pentagon spokesman said in response that the US had not noticed a significant reduction in the size of the Russian force in Syria. However, according to the spokesman's announcement, US and Coalition forces will continue to support the "local forces" in order to stabilize the situation in the liberated territories and complete the victory over ISIS.

► **In the campaign for the takeover of Idlib**, battles continued between the Syrian forces and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the area northeast of Hama. ISIS, on its part, continues to carry out acts of terrorism and guerrilla attacks in various parts of Syria. Prominent among them were the attack on the positions of a militia affiliated with the Syrian regime **in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Damascus**, which included the use of suicide bombers, and **the killing of two Revolutionary Guards commanders** in the rural area of Deir ez-Zor. **Throughout Iraq**, clashes continue between the Iraqi security forces and ISIS operatives, as Iraqi forces continue to carry out mopping-up operations in the various provinces.

► **Abroad, ISIS's terrorist campaign continued**, with noteworthy attacks in the **Khorasan Province** (Afghanistan/Pakistan). This week there was a **combined attack** which included the use of suicide bombers against **the training center of the Afghan National Directorate of Security in the capital Kabul**; **In Pakistan**, ISIS suicide bombers carried out a **mass-killing attack in a church**; **In Egypt**, a missile hit Al-Arish Airport during a visit by the ministers of defense and interior. A lieutenant colonel and a colonel were killed. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack (December 20, 2017). **In St. Petersburg, Russia**, a

suicide bombing attack in a church (Kazan Cathedral) was foiled following information given to the Russians by the CIA. The Russian President thanked his American counterpart.

Russia and the United States

Incident between Russian and American planes in the area of the Euphrates River

► A senior Pentagon official confirmed that on December 13, 2017, a pair of American warplanes fired warning flares at a pair of Russian warplanes that had strayed from their course and were flying east of the Euphrates River over a **“safe zone” agreed upon between the two sides**. After the warning flares were fired, the two Russian planes left the area (Washington Examiner, December 14, 2017). **The Russian Ministry of Defense** denied these reports, which were published in the US and British media. According to its version, the two planes were escorting a “humanitarian aid convoy” near the city of Al-Mayadeen, on the west bank of the Euphrates River. According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, the US planes disrupted the flight of the Russian planes, but when another Russian plane was sent to the area, the US planes left (Facebook page of the Russian Ministry of Defense, December 14, 2017).

► **Lt. Col. Damien Pickart, a spokesman for the US Air Force Central Command**, noted that according to an oral agreement between the US and Russia from early November, **the Russian forces would operate on the western side of the Euphrates River and the US forces on the eastern side** (where the SDF forces operate). According to him, the Russian forces violated this agreement several times in the past **and moved to the eastern side of the Euphrates River without advance warning**. **US Defense Secretary James Mattis** said that it was not yet possible to determine whether this and similar incidents in the past had been caused by an error, lack of coordination between the sides, or for some other reason (CNN, December 15, 2017; US Department of Defense website, December 15, 2017; Radio Liberty, December 16, 2017).

The evacuation of the Russian forces in Syria

► **On the orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the evacuation of the Russian forces in Syria has begun**. According to a report by the **Russian Ministry of Defense**, after completing their mission in Syria, the Su-34 aircraft stationed at Hmeymim Base returned to Khurba Air Force base in Russia. Members of engineering units, including sappers, experts

and field engineers, also returned to Russia (TASS News Agency, December 14, 2017, and December 17, 2017). In addition to the engineering units, weapons, armored vehicles, robotic systems and special heavy machinery were also sent back to Russia (TASS News Agency, December 17, 2017). On the other hand, **Alexey Borodavkin, the Russian envoy** to the Geneva talks, said that **the Russian army would remain at Hmeymim Base and in Tartus in order to support the Syrians in the fight against terrorism, and especially against the Al-Nusra Front (the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham), which is still active in Syria** (TASS News Agency, December 15, 2017).



Russian soldiers receiving a warm welcome in Moscow after their return from Syria (Russian Defense Ministry website, December 17, 2017)

► **Pentagon Spokesman Major Adrian Rankine-Galloway** said that **the US had not noticed a significant reduction in the size of the Russian forces in Syria since President Putin's declaration** (December 11, 2017). However, he added that the withdrawal of the Russian forces **would not affect US priorities in Syria** and that the Coalition forces would continue to operate and support the "local forces." This is in order to **complete the military victory over ISIS and stabilize the situation in the liberated territories** (Radio Liberty website, funded by the US government, December 13, 2017).

Evacuation of Russian civilians from Syria and Iraq

► Concurrently with the evacuation of military forces from Syria, Russia is **evacuating its civilians from the areas of the former Islamic State**. Over the past four months, **over 90 women and children**, including **citizens of Chechnya**, Dagestan and other regions of the Russian Federation, have reportedly been evacuated to Russia.

► On December 14, 2017, **Ramzan Kadyrov, Head of the Chechen Republic**, announced on his Telegram page that on President Putin's orders, he would continue the efforts to bring Russian citizens back from Syria and Iraq. **Kheda Saratova, a member of the Human Rights Council of Chechnya**, said that Chechnya plans to **evacuate 104 women and**

children from Syria and Iraq. According to Saratova, most of these women and children are from Russia and Kazakhstan. According to her, **around 700 people have expressed their desire to return to their home countries and are in need of assistance** (TASS News Agency; Kremlin website, December 14, 2017).

In the ITIC's assessment, the women and children to be evacuated are the widows and children of ISIS operatives who died in the fighting. Their return to their home countries is liable to cause serious problems in the future **since at least some of them have undergone a process of jihadi indoctrination during their stay in the Islamic State.**

Main developments in Syria

ISIS's guerrilla activity in the Deir ez-Zor area continues

► ISIS's news agency reported that **two Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders had been killed in clashes with ISIS operatives in the Deir ez-Zor rural area.** The commanders, whose photos had been released, are **Mahdi Qarah Mohammadi and Mahdi Imani** (Haqq, December 15, 2017).



Two Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders killed in the clashes with ISIS in the Deir ez-Zor rural area (Haqq, December 15, 2017)

The campaign to take over Idlib

Preparations of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in advance of the campaign in Idlib

► Upon the beginning of the campaign for the takeover of Idlib, **the Sharia Council of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** (formerly, the Al-Nusra Front), the dominant organization in the region, announced **a general mobilization in order to halt the**

advance of the Syrian forces. The Syrian troops reportedly crossed the border of the Idlib Province, **with the interim objective of reaching the military airfield of Abu Ad-Duhur** (Al-Mayadeen, December 14, 2017). The Abu Ad-Duhur airfield, southeast of Idlib, is probably the first interim target of the Syrian forces.

► According to a source of the Shura Council of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, **efforts are being made to set up a joint operations room of most rebel organizations in northern Syria.** According to the source, a meeting was held to this end with the participation of **Abu Mohammad Al-Julani**, commander of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, and other commanders. **During the meeting, a reconciliation agreement was reached between the organizations** (Zaman Al-Wasl, December 13, 2017). In the wake of the agreement, on December 14, 2017, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reportedly released most of the Ahrar Al-Sham operatives whom it had detained (Al-Durar Al-Shamiya, December 14, 2017).

Clashes with the Syrian regime forces

► According to reports by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, on December 15, 2017, there were clashes between the Syrian forces and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in several sites southeast of Idlib (northwest of Hama). Battles took place around the village of **Al-Mushayrifa**, about 61 km **southeast of Idlib**, and elsewhere. According to Syrian sources, the Syrian army took over the town (SANA, December 16, 2017). A day later, it was reported that the forces had been forced to retreat for fear of losses of soldiers and military equipment. Russian Air Force planes carried out several airstrikes against targets in the town, in preparation for its takeover once again by the Syrian regime troops (Al-Bawaba News, December 18, 2017).



Right: The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham firing at Syrian army positions in the village of Abu Lafa, northeast of Hama (Haqq, December 15, 2017). Left: Artillery fire by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham at a staging zone of the Syrian forces during their attempt to advance towards the town of Al-Mushayrifa (Ibaa News Agency website, December 15, 2017)

Clashes between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and ISIS operatives

► While at war with the Syrian army, **the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham is also fighting against ISIS operatives in an enclave about 50 km northeast of Hama** (see map). Thus, even when the operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham are fighting for their own existence, **hostility between them and ISIS, the rival jihadi organization, persists, finding expression in clashes in the rural area northeast of Hama.**



Right: Tank shell fired by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham at an ISIS staging zone in the village of Al-Sheehah, in the ISIS enclave (Haqq, December 15, 2017). Left: Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham setting out to halt the advance of ISIS operatives towards the Rasm Al-Hamam Hill in the ISIS enclave (Ibaa News Agency website, December 15, 2017)



The Al-Sheehah Village (in red) on the outskirts of the ISIS enclave (Google Maps)

Senior Chechen commander killed

► A senior military operative codenamed **Salah al-Din al-Shishani (i.e., the Chechen)** was reportedly killed in the clashes between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and ISIS. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Chechen commander was killed in a Russian airstrike (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 17, 2017; Mourassiloun, December 18, 2017).

► Salah al-Din the Chechen has been the most senior among the commanders from the Caucasus operating in Syria. In 2014-2015, he headed a military unit called **Jaysh Al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar**, which was subordinate to the Al-Nusra Front's command (the latter subsequently became the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham). One of the groups of this units, headed by Omar the Chechen (who has since been killed), broke away and joined ISIS, and **Salah al-Din the Chechen followed suit and joined ISIS as well**. In 2014, he tried to convince ISIS to join forces with the Al-Nusra Front in fighting against the Syrian regime, but ISIS refused. Subsequently, Salah al-Din the Chechen headed a military framework called **Jaysh Al-'Usrah, comprising jihadists from the Caucasus who seceded from Jaysh Al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar**. It seems that the group that he headed tried to remain neutral in confrontations between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the rebel forces on the one hand, and ISIS on the other (Al-Bawaba, December 19, 2017; Enab Baladi, December 18, 2017).



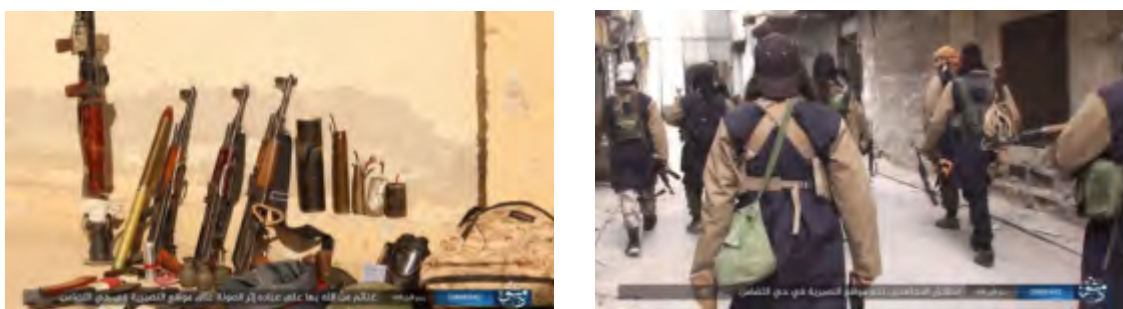
Salah al-Din the Chechen (Al-Bawaba, December 19, 2017)

ISIS's suicide bombing on the outskirts of Damascus

► On December 13, 2017, ISIS operatives attacked **positions of the National Defense Militia, affiliated with the Syrian regime, in the Tadamoun neighborhood in south**

Damascus, near the Yarmouk refugee camp (which is under ISIS's control). **Three suicide bombers**, who arrived in the neighborhood in a bullet-proof vehicle, **blew themselves up with explosive belts**. Other operatives, who were making their way on foot, took over buildings of the National Defense Militia for a short while. Five militia operatives were killed and several others were taken prisoner. The ISIS operatives retreated after the Syrian army and the militias supporting it sent reinforcements (Orient News, December 16, 2017).

► **ISIS's Damascus Province** released photos where its operatives are seen attacking the positions of the Syrian militia. According to ISIS, at least two Syrian army soldiers were killed in the attack, and weapons were seized (Haqq, December 15, 2017).



Right: ISIS operatives on their way to attack the Syrian militia positions in the Tadamoun neighborhood in south Damascus. Left: Some of the weapons seized by ISIS (Haqq, December 15, 2017)

In the ITIC's assessment, this suicide bombing attack was carried out from the Yarmouk refugee camp, south of Damascus, which is under ISIS's control. It indicates that **ISIS still possesses high operational capabilities and high motivation to carry out such attacks**, even after the fall of the Islamic State.

Main developments in Iraq

Disarming the Shiite militias

► Following Iraqi Prime Minister Haydar Al-Abadi's announcement on the complete liberation of Iraq from ISIS, **Muqtada Sadr, a senior Iraqi Shiite leader, announced that the war against ISIS was over**. He instructed his forces to surrender their arms and dismantle most of their outposts (Al-Nahar, December 11, 2017). **Qais Al-Khaz'ali, the leader of Asa'eb Ahl Al-Haqq movement**, also announced that he was placing his operatives under the Iraqi prime minister's command and that he contented himself with the organization's political arm as a political party (RT, December 14, 2017).

These statements are part of an **internal Iraqi debate** on the future of the Shiite militias, mobilized on a large scale for the campaign against the Islamic State (which, according to the Iraqi prime minister's announcement, came to an end). Against the voices calling for dismantling the Shiite militias and transforming them into political parties, **there is also objection to that**. This objection is **nurtured by Iran, which considers the Shiite militias an important tool to promote its interests in Iraq and Syria**. The Al-Nujaba Movement (The Nobles Movement), a large Shiite militia maintaining close ties with the Iranian Qods Force, has already started to establish legitimacy for itself for the continuation of its existence in Syria and even in Iraq (an analysis of the Nujaba Movement will be issued soon).

ISIS guerrilla warfare and terror attacks and Iraqi counterterrorist activities

Even after the Iraqi prime minister's announcement on the complete liberation of Iraq from ISIS presence, **clashes continue between the Iraqi security forces and ISIS operatives in the various provinces of Iraq**. ISIS's operatives in the various provinces **continue their terror and guerrilla activities**, while the Iraqi security forces **continue to mop up various areas from ISIS operatives and thwart terrorist attacks**.

► Following are the main events of the passing week:

- ◆ **Al-Ramadi area:** At least 17 ISIS operatives, including foreign fighters, who were hiding in a tunnel around Wadi Al-Qadhaf, were killed in an airstrike carried out by an Iraqi aircraft. Hitting the target was made possible through intelligence received (Iraqi News Agency, December 17, 2017).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** The Headquarters of the Iraqi Army Ground Forces reported **that 25 villages** on the border between the Diyala and the Salah Al-Din provinces **had been cleared from ISIS presence**. Units of the Popular Mobilization (Iranian-affiliated umbrella framework of Shiite militias) also took part in the operation. The Iraqi forces detonated 15 IEDs and destroyed three tunnels. The Iraqi Air Force, which provided the troops with air support, destroyed two motorcycle bombs (Al-Sumaria News, December 17, 2017).
- ◆ **The city of Kirkuk:** The counterterrorism forces detained two ISIS operatives and seized vehicles and weapons. The detentions were carried out **only minutes after ISIS operatives had attacked a security forces outpost and the headquarters of the**

Iraqi Turkmen Front in the neighborhood of Al-Musalla in Kirkuk (where there is Turkmen majority) (Al-Sumaria News, December 16, 2017).¹



Right: The security forces detain two operatives who had attacked the headquarters of the Turkmen Front and a security position in Kirkuk. Left: Car and weapons used by the ISIS operatives (Al-Sumaria News, December 16, 2017)

◆ **The border between Iraq and Syria:** ISIS announced that its operatives had set fire to three positions of the Popular Mobilization operatives and took over three additional positions near the Iraqi-Syrian border, close to the Tell Safouq border crossing in northern Iraq. According to ISIS's message, seven Popular Mobilization fighters were killed and several others were wounded. A number of APCs were hit (Haqq, December 17, 2017).



ISIS operatives preparing to attack positions of the Popular Mobilization forces (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, December 16, 2017)

¹ This terrorist attack is one of a series of attacks which have been carried out recently against **targets affiliated with the Turkmen population in Iraq:** On November 28, 2017, the head office of the Turkmen TV station Türkmeneli TV north of Kirkuk was attacked (a security guard was wounded). On November 21, 2017, a car bomb exploded in the vegetable and fruit open market in Tuz Khurmatu, a city with Turkmen-Shiite and Kurdish majority, about 69 km south of Kirkuk (25 people were killed and 62 others were wounded).



**Setting fire to one of the Popular Mobilization positions
(Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, December 16, 2017)**

- ◆ **The Mosul area:** An ISIS suicide bomber **who tried to blow himself up near the apartment of the province officer** was killed when a hand grenade that he held in his possession exploded. **He was wearing an explosive belt.** The incident took place in the village of Rafaylah, about 46 km south of Mosul (Iraqi News Agency, December 17, 2017).
- ◆ **The border between the Diyala Province and the Salah Al-Din Province:** The Popular Mobilization announced that its forces, along with the Iraqi security forces, **had mopped up the Al-Mutaybeejah Basin area from ISIS operatives.** This area is situated about 66 km north of the city of Baqubah (north of Baghdad). They then headed to the nearby villages to complete the mopping up (Popular Mobilization website, December 17, 2017).



IEDs found by the Popular Mobilization's 2nd Division. They were found in an ISIS IED manufacturing workshop. The workshop was destroyed (Popular Mobilization website, December 17, 2017).

- ◆ On December 17, 2017, ISIS announced that its operatives had detonated several IEDs in the **Al-Urayj area**, about 13 km south of Mosul. Thirteen Popular Mobilization operatives were killed and wounded (Twitter, December 17, 2017).

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

Missile hits the airport in Al-Arish

► On December 19, 2017, a missile was launched at the airport in Al-Arish. The missile hit a helicopter at the airport during a visit by **Defense Minister Sedki Sobhy and Interior Minister Magdy Abdel Ghaffar**. The two men had come to inspect the security situation in the city. **Two Egyptian officers – a lieutenant colonel and a colonel** – were killed in the blast, one of whom was apparently the helicopter pilot. The defense and interior ministers escaped unharmed. The helicopter was damaged. The Egyptian security forces searched the area for the perpetrators. ISIS claimed responsibility (December 20, 2017).

Securing Christian institutions against attacks in advance of the holiday season

► At the end of a meeting with senior security officials, **Egyptian Interior Minister General Magdy Abdel Ghaffar** ordered the forces to raise the level of security alert to **the highest level during Christmas and New Year's**. As part of the elevated state of alert, the presence of security forces in Christian places of worship will be increased and ongoing searches will be carried out in the areas adjacent to all churches (Al-Masry Al-Youm, December 17, 2017). Christian places of worship were the target of several deadly terrorist attacks by ISIS operatives in Egypt proper and the Sinai Peninsula. The Egyptian security forces apparently estimate that the danger of attacks on churches has increased in light of the threats made by ISIS operatives to carry out attacks against Christians during the holiday season.



Egyptian Interior Minister General Magdy Abdel Ghaffar at the meeting in which he gave orders to increase the level of security alert to its highest level in advance of Christmas and New Year's

ISIS activity in other countries

ISIS suicide bombing attack at the training center of the National Directorate of Security in Kabul

► On December 18, 2017, ISIS carried out a complex attack against the **training center of the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) in the capital Kabul**. In the morning, three suicide bombers entered the high-rise building currently under construction **above the training center**. The three men hid inside the building, from which they intended to attack the training center. All three were killed in an exchange of fire that began when they were discovered. Two Afghan security personnel were slightly wounded (Afghanistan Times, December 18, 2017).

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack** and published a statement that was **completely different from the official Afghan version**. According to ISIS, 150 Afghan intelligence personnel were killed. According to ISIS's version, two of its operatives wearing explosive belts attacked the training center. They passed the security checks, set up a car bomb, and opened fire with light weapons. In addition, hand grenades were thrown and RPG rockets were launched. During the exchange of fire, the ISIS operatives **detonated the car bomb** against a group of trainees. **At the end of four hours of fighting, the two operatives detonated their explosive belts** (Haqq, December 18, 2017). **The ISIS version may be exaggerated and intended to intensify the attack and its results.**



Right: Scene of the attack at the training center (Haqq, December 18, 2017). Left: The two terrorists who attacked the training center, in a photo distributed by ISIS. The two operatives in the photo look very young (Twitter, December 19, 2017)

Mass attack at a church in Pakistan

► On December 17, 2017, two suicide bombers attacked a Methodist church in the city of **Quetta**, the capital of the Baluchistan Province in southwest Pakistan (approximately 62

km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border). The attack was carried out early in the morning, **when around 400 worshipers were attending Sunday prayers at the church.** The two terrorists **arrived at the church wearing explosive vests containing about 15 kg of explosives each.** One of the terrorists blew himself up near the front door. The other attacker was unable to detonate the explosives and was shot by the security forces. **Nine people were killed and more than 50 others were wounded** (Pakistan Times, December 17-18, 2017; pakistantoday.com, December 18, 2017). **ISIS's Aamaq News Agency published a claim of responsibility for the attack.**



Right: People leaving the church after the attack (Twitter, December 17, 2017). Left: The church in the city of Quetta after the attack (Twitter, December 17, 2017)

The establishment of ISIS in Central Asia

► Speaking at a meeting of the Russian Federation Council, **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that ISIS was expanding its presence in the Central Asian countries bordering on Russia.** According to him, after ISIS's defeat in Syria and Iraq, **the organization has marked Central Asia as its next target.** According to Lavrov, this is particularly evident in **Afghanistan, where the operatives aspire to reach the north of the country.** Lavrov stressed that the Afghan forces are responsible for the fight against the growing presence of ISIS in Afghanistan. Russia is actively supporting them by equipping them with weapons. According to **Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu,** ISIS's expansion into Central Asia is a complex problem that all those involved **must cope with jointly.** According to him, a number of forums and working groups have been set up in order to find ways of coping with the problem (Russian Foreign Ministry website, December 15, 2017).

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Suicide bombing attack foiled in St. Petersburg

- ▶ **The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced that it had foiled a terrorist attack planned by operatives who support ISIS.** The planned attack was to be carried out in **St. Petersburg on December 16, 2017, and included a suicide bombing attack at a city church (Kazan Cathedral) and the detonation of IEDs in a crowded area.** The attack was directed by **senior ISIS operatives abroad** via the **Telegram messaging app.**
- ▶ Raids carried out by the Federal Security Service (FSB) led to the arrest of seven members of the squad, **one of whom admitted that he had planned the attack.** Searches revealed a **significant amount of explosives, parts of IEDs, automatic weapons, ammunition, and propaganda materials.** In addition, **a laboratory for manufacturing explosives** was found. The investigation is still ongoing (Russian Federal Security Service website, December 15, 2017).



**Searches carried out by the Russian Federal Security Service
(Russian Federal Security Service)**

- ▶ **Russian President Vladimir Putin** spoke with **US President Donald Trump** and expressed his appreciation of the information about the attack in St. Petersburg that Russia had received from the CIA. This information led to the arrest of the squad and the thwarting of the attack. Putin promised that the assistance between the intelligence agencies would be reciprocal, and if Russia receives information about a planned attack in the United States, it will pass on the information to the United States (Kremlin website, December 17, 2017).

Indictment in the United States regarding the transfer of money to ISIS

► The US Department of Justice announced the arrest and filing of an indictment against **Zoobia Shahnaz**, a US citizen who sent money to finance ISIS **using Bitcoins and other virtual currencies**. Shahnaz, 27, was born in Pakistan and lives on Long Island. She has been charged with money-laundering **by converting money into Bitcoins and other virtual currencies in order to transfer the money to ISIS**. According to the indictment, she transferred **\$85,000**. Zoobia Shahnaz was caught **trying to fly from the United States to Istanbul and from Turkey to Syria**. She was arrested and charged (US Attorney General’s Office website, December 14, 2017)².

The battle for hearts and minds

Video threatening the Russians, the Shiites and the Alawites in Syria

► ISIS has released a video around 6 minutes long, translated into English. This is the fifth in a series of videos called “Inside the Khilafah.” The video shows an ISIS operative codenamed **Abu al-Abbas al-Shami** standing next to a mosque that was apparently destroyed in Syria **and calling on the organization’s operatives to “rise up against the infidels”** or else they will be punished by Allah. Al-Shami then addresses the Russians, Shiites and Alawites, promising them that **ISIS operatives will reach them from the desert** (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, December 17, 2017).



Right: The title of the fifth video in the series In Side (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, 17 December 2017).

Left: Abu al-Abbas al-Shami calling on the organization’s operatives to “rise up against the infidels” and threatening that if they fail to do so, they will be punished by Allah (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, December 17, 2017).

² For further information about raising funds for ISIS through the use of Bitcoins, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from December 6, 2017: “Drive for Bitcoin Donations on an ISIS-affiliated website”