



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

March 22-28, 2018



## Main events of the week<sup>1</sup>

► In the two main fighting zones in Syria, **the Syrian regime and Turkey recorded achievements:**

◆ **The Syrian forces took control of most of eastern Al-Ghouta** and are completing its takeover from the rebel organizations. The southern enclave of the rebels is on the verge of collapse, and the main outpost still remaining is the city of Duma, northeast of Damascus. At the same time, arrangements for evacuation are underway. **More than 100,000 civilians and thousands of rebel operatives have been transferred**, mainly to Idlib.

◆ **In the north, the Turkish army and the Syrian forces supporting it are completing the takeover of the Afrin enclave.** According to Syrian media reports, **they entered the city of Tall Rifat**, some 20 km east of Afrin, in order to receive it from the Kurdish forces that are holding it (apparently under Russian patronage). **In the Euphrates Valley**, ISIS is taking advantage of the transfer of SDF forces to Afrin, in order to carry out guerrilla activity against the Syrian army forces that support it.

► In addition to the fighting being waged by ISIS in Syria and Iraq, **its supporters abroad continue to carry out ISIS-inspired attacks in Western countries**, proving that **the jihadi ideology and the ISIS brand are still highly attractive**. This week a Moroccan French terrorist carried out a shooting and bargaining attack in the South of France. Four people were killed. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. The attacks abroad, and in Western countries in particular, **are fueled by an incitement campaign carried out by ISIS** calling on Muslim supporters around the world to carry out attacks in their places of residence. **A similar campaign is being carried out by Al-Qaeda**. This week its leader called on Muslims **to continue the jihad against the United States** everywhere.

---

<sup>1</sup> Spotlight on Global Jihad will not be published next week due to the Passover holiday. The ITIC wishes all its readers a happy holiday.

# ISIS-inspired terrorist attack in the South of France

## Highlights of the incidents<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ On March 23, 2018, a Moroccan French terrorist carried out an **ISIS-inspired shooting and bargaining attack** in the South of France. **Four people were killed in the attack**, three of them when the terrorist took control of a supermarket in the village of Trèbes near Carcassonne. Another 15 people were wounded. The attack began in the city of Carcassonne, when the terrorist commandeered a parked vehicle, shot the passenger to death, wounded the driver and took the car. While driving the car, the terrorist fired at four policemen, seriously wounding one of them.
- ▶ The terrorist drove to the village of Trèbes (about 8 km east of Carcassonne), where he entered a supermarket shouting “Allahu Akbar” and “revenge for Syria.” The terrorist was armed with a pistol, a knife and possibly also IEDs. As he entered, he shot a customer and an employee to death. Dozens of people in the supermarket fled and about 20 people hid in a refrigeration room behind the supermarket.



**Super U Trèbes Supermarket (Twitter account of The Crime Terror Nexus@CrimeTerror, March 23, 2018)**

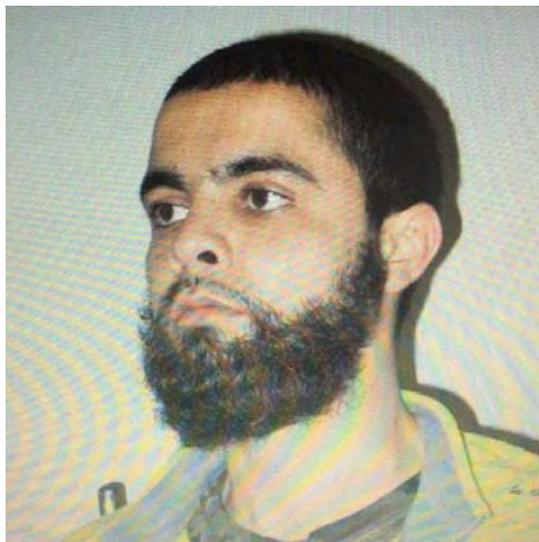
- ▶ The terrorist seized a hostage in the supermarket. He later accepted gendarmerie officer Arnaud Beltrame’s offer to change places with her. After the exchange was made, the police officer left his mobile phone on so that the security forces could monitor what was happening

---

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from March 26, 2018: “ISIS-inspired Terrorist Attack in the South of France.”

inside the supermarket. The gendarmerie officer was wounded and died of his injuries when a special police force broke into the supermarket. The force shot and killed the terrorist.

► The terrorist who carried out the attack is a 25-year-old Moroccan Frenchman from the city of Carcassonne named **Redouane Lakdim**. He demanded the release of **Salah Abdeslam**, who took part in the deadly ISIS attack at the Bataclan Theater in Paris (November 2015, 89 dead). **ISIS's Amaq News Agency issued a claim of responsibility** calling the terrorist a “soldier of the Islamic State” (Haqq, March 24, 2018).



**Redouane Lakdim, perpetrator of the shooting and bargaining attack in the town of Trèbes (Haqq, March 24, 2018)**

## Main developments in Syria

### The campaign in eastern Al-Ghouta

According to Syrian sources, **the Syrian army has taken over more than 90% of the control areas of the rebel organizations in eastern Al-Ghouta**. The Syrian troops have taken control of several rebel strongholds in the southern enclave and **it seems to be on the verge of collapse**. Most of the resistance remains in the city of Duma, which is encircled by the Syrian forces. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that since the beginning of the campaign in eastern Al-Ghouta, **1,644 people had been killed, including 344 children and 213 women**. Most of the residents were killed **in airstrikes and by Syrian army artillery fire** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 25, 2018).



**Demonstration of the situation in eastern Al-Ghouta. The Syrian army encircles two enclaves held by the rebels (Nabras Al-Ard, website supporting the Syrian regime, YouTube, March 23, 2018). The southern enclave is about to fall.**

► Following are several prominent incidents in the **southern enclave**:

- ◆ Most of the resistance in the southern enclave remains in **the city of Duma**. The Syrian army has reportedly **encircled the city and is preparing for its takeover**. This is after negotiations which did not produce a “peaceful solution” due to what had been described as unacceptable demands by **Jaysh Al-Islam (the Army of Islam)** which holds the city (Mourasiloun, March 27, 2018).
- ◆ During searches conducted by the Syrian forces in the **village of Ayn Turma**, about 3.5 km east of Damascus, which has been taken over from the rebels, the forces uncovered **a workshop for manufacturing rockets and IEDs**. In addition, they uncovered **a network of tunnels** intended for the transportation and storage of weapons (Syrian News Agency, March 23, 2018). In the village, the Syrian army freed 28 abductees held by the rebel organizations for a year and a half. The Syrian army has also taken over the city of **Harasta**.



**Several abductees liberated by the Syrian army (SANA YouTube channel, March 26, 2018)**

## Evacuation of civilians and operatives of the rebel organizations

► Concurrently with the fighting, there are **local arrangements**, under which civilians as well as rebels and their families are being evacuated from various sites in eastern Al-Ghouta. On March 22, 2018, Al-Rahman Corps (one of the rebel organizations) announced a **ceasefire in the area after signing an agreement with Russia**. It has been reported that the purpose of the agreement, which entered into effect on the night of March 22-23, 2018, is **to evacuate the Corps operatives to northern Syria and also allow civilians to leave the area if they wish to do so** (Al-Durar Al-Shamiya, March 23, 2018).

► The Syrian News Agency reported that **the Syrian army had secured the departure of over 105,000 residents from eastern Al-Ghouta**. The residents passed through four humanitarian crossings (SANA, March 24, 2018). Before the Syrian army took control of the city of **Harasta**, it was reported that 5,000 of the rebels and their families **had been evacuated from the city towards Idlib** (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, March 24, 2018).



**Syrian soldier waving goodbye at Syrian residents evacuated from eastern Al-Ghouta (SANA, March 24, 2018). Left: Live broadcast from one of the humanitarian crossings in eastern Al-Ghouta (website of the Russian Defense Ministry, eng.mil.ru)**



**Right: Buses which arrived to evacuate the rebels and their families through the Arbin Crossing towards Idlib (Suria Al-Hadath, March 25, 2018). Left: Release of eight Syrian army personnel held by the rebel forces. They were handed over to the Russian side in the village of Arbin (Furat Post Facebook page, March 24, 2018)**

## The Yarmouk refugee camp, south of Damascus

► Following ISIS's successful takeover of the Al-Qadam neighborhood west of the Yarmouk refugee camp, **hundreds of residents left the camp** and fled to areas out of ISIS's control south of Damascus. This occurred following extensive attacks causing massive damage to the camp in the fighting between the Syrian army and ISIS operatives (Al-Aqsa, March 24, 2018). ISIS and the Syrian regime achieved an agreement **to evacuate the bodies of supporters of the regime and militia operatives supporting it from the Al-Qadam neighborhood** (suria.net, March 23, 2018). ISIS's Moata news agency reported that the bodies would be evacuated under the supervision of the Red Crescent, in exchange for an unknown number of female (ISIS) operatives detained in the Syrian regime prisons. The agreement was reached **during negotiations between the sides to reach an agreement to evacuate ISIS operatives from southern Damascus to the area of Bir Al-Qassab**, in the Syrian Desert, about 50 km southeast of Damascus (Orient News, March 25, 2018).

According to estimates, **there currently remain about 6,000 Palestinian/Syrian residents** in the Yarmouk refugee camp (in 2002, the number of camp residents was estimated at 112-120 thousand). The residents remaining in the camp are suffering from shortage of food and medical services. In the ITIC's assessment, the Yarmouk refugee camp and the neighborhoods surrounding it, which are held by ISIS, **will be in the crosshairs of the Syrian regime after the complete takeover of eastern Al-Ghouta.**

## The Albukamal-Deir ez-Zor area

► According to ISIS media outlets, **ISIS operatives attacked positions of the Syrian regime forces and detonated a car bomb on the outskirts of Al-Mayadeen** (Furat Post Facebook page, March 24, 2018). The Al-Mayadeen Channel reported that ISIS had recently resumed its attacks against **Syrian army bases in Al-Mayadeen and Albukamal** (Al-Mayadeen, March 22, 2018). It was reported that in one of those ISIS attacks on **the outskirts of the city of Albukamal**, many fighters of the **Fatemiyoun Brigade** (a Shiite Afghan brigade **handled by Iran** in support of the Syrian army) had been killed (Deir ez-Zor Facebook page, March 26, 2018).

► Al-Manar Channel, citing Syrian opposition sources, reported that **ISIS was once again training children in the Deir ez-Zor area**. To this end, ISIS set up a military base for the "Lion Cubs of the Caliphate" unit (i.e., ISIS's children's unit). It was reported that the

organization recruits a large number of Syrian as well as foreign children to the unit to carry out suicide bombing attacks (Sputnik, March 23, 2018).



**Photo from an ISIS video. Antitank rocket hitting the target after being fired at a Syrian army position on the outskirts of Albukamal (Amaq, March 23, 2018)**

► American sources **reiterated their concern that ISIS operatives would establish their presence** in the area evacuated by the SDF forces (i.e., the lower Euphrates Valley). According to Kurdish sources, **about 1,700 SDF fighters** joined in the fighting against Turkey in Afrin. Following are relevant US statements:

- ◆ **Heather Nauert, Spokesperson for the United States Department of State**, calls on all forces in the Syrian arena to continue focusing on the fighting against ISIS because **the organization is successfully rehabilitating itself in various areas in Syria** (US Department of State website, March 19, 2018).
- ◆ **Col. Ryan Dillon, Spokesman for the US-led Coalition against ISIS**, says that Turkey's military activity in the Afrin area in northern Syria has caused the transfer of many SDF forces to the Afrin area **and a delay in the fighting against ISIS**. Dillon further notes that **the air operations of the Coalition forces against ISIS in Syria have significantly decreased, and the number of (ground) attacks is significantly smaller**. According to him, stopping the activity **allows ISIS to reestablish itself in the area** (Rudaw, a Kurdish news website, March 24, 2018).

## Main developments in Iraq

### Iraqi army operation against ISIS in the desert in western Al-Anbar Province

► **The Iraqi army has launched an operation against ISIS in the desert in western Al-Anbar Province.** This operation, which is intended to locate ISIS operatives' hiding places, includes the forces of the Sunni Tribal Mobilization in the Al-Anbar Province, the Iraqi Air Force, and International Coalition aircraft. The activity takes place in two routes: In the desert area **south of Rutba**; and in the area **west of Rutba, up to the Tabil border crossing** between Iraq and Jordan (Al-Sumaria, March 27, 2018).



Tabil border crossing leading from Rutba to Jordan (Google Maps)



Iraqi army vehicles and helicopter during the operation against ISIS (Al-Sumaria, March 27, 2018)

## Iraqi security forces' activity against ISIS

► This week, Iraqi security forces continued to operate against local ISIS networks throughout Iraq:

- ◆ **Diyala Province:** The Popular Mobilization forces announced that they had launched a “security operation” against ISIS **about 63 km northeast of Baqubah**. According to an Iraqi report, four ISIS hideouts were found and destroyed in the Diyala Province. They contained IEDs, mortar shells, rubber dinghies, gas tanks, and old army uniforms (Iraqi News Agency, March 25, 2018).
- ◆ **The city of Mosul:** The province police arrested twenty ISIS operatives, including an ISIS commander, around the Al-Intisar neighborhood **in southeast Mosul** (Iraqi News Agency, March 25, 2018). An Iraqi security source reported that **Abu Sayf al-Iraqi, the editor of ISIS’s Al-Nabā' weekly, was arrested in Mosul**. Before that, several ISIS operatives **who had been part of ISIS’s Amaq agency** had been arrested (Iraqi News Agency, March 25, 2018).<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ **Eastern Nineveh Province:** Two ISIS operatives were killed and weapons were destroyed in an Iraqi security forces activity about 72 km south of Mosul. Twelve ISIS operatives were killed in an airstrike carried out by the Iraqi Air Force (Iraqi News Agency, March 26, 2018).

## ISIS’s response

- ISIS media outlets reported on **several attacks carried out by ISIS operatives against the Iraqi security forces, mainly the Popular Mobilization fighters (Shiite militias):**
- ◆ Four Iraqi army soldiers were killed and a Humvee was destroyed in an attack carried out by ISIS against an army camp **about 7.5 km west of the border between Iraq and Iran** (Amaq, March 23, 2018).
  - ◆ Nine Popular Mobilization fighters were killed and three military vehicles were hit by the explosion of three IEDs **in three different sites in the northern Diyala Province** (Haqq, March 24, 2018).
  - ◆ Five Popular Mobilization fighters were killed and a military vehicle was destroyed in an ambush set up by ISIS operatives **about 48 km southwest of Kirkuk** (Amaq, March 23, 2018).

---

<sup>3</sup> For further information on ISIS’s media network, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from January 28, 2018: “ISIS’s Media Network in the Era after the Fall of the Islamic State.”

- ◆ Six Iraqi Border Police soldiers were killed and a military vehicle was destroyed in an ambush set up by ISIS operatives **near the Tabil border crossing between Iraq and Jordan** (Amaq, March 22, 2018).
- ◆ ISIS operatives set up an ambush to Popular Mobilization fighters **in Al-Sa’adiyah District, northeast of Baqubah**. Three Popular Mobilization fighters were killed and two others wounded (Amaq, March 26, 2018).



Popular Mobilization fighters carrying out security activity in a desert area  
(Iraqi News Agency, March 26, 2018)

## The Sinai Peninsula

### Report questioning the reliability of the Egyptian announcements

► The Egyptian security forces continue to report successes in the campaign against the presence of ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula as part of Operation Sinai 2018. On the other hand, **various sources continue to question the reports of the Egyptian security forces regarding their successes**. According to “observers,” **Egyptian reports on the success of the operation are exaggerated**. In this context, a researcher of Islamic movements wonders **where ISIS operatives are**; According to him, it doesn’t make sense that whenever a terrorist site or a weapons depot are exposed, **there are no reports on operatives being arrested or killed**. The same researcher further notes that according to the photos released by the Egyptian security forces, most of the weapons seized by the Egyptian troops are light and outdated and, he says, **are definitely not the kind of weapons held by ISIS’s Sinai Province** (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, March 22, 2018).

► **ISIS's Sinai Province** released a video entitled “Unsuccessful Confrontation,” presenting its successes in the fighting against the Egyptian security forces. According to a speaker in the video, the Egyptian propaganda on the success of the operation is false. At the end of the video, Egyptian army soldiers are called upon to desert and join the ranks of ISIS (March 24, 2018).

### Securing the presidential elections

► According to an announcement by Colonel Tamer Refai, Spokesman of the Egyptian Armed Forces, the Egyptian security forces are securing the election centers of the Egyptian presidential elections throughout Egypt proper and the Sinai Peninsula. He also released photos in support of his statement (Egyptian Armed Forces Spokesman, March 25, 2018). **So far (March 27, 2018), the elections were conducted without any unusual security incidents.**

## Attacks in other countries<sup>4</sup>

### Shooting attack in Chechnya

► On March 20, 2018, a suspect arrived at the entrance to a police station in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic. After refusing to show his documents to a policeman, **the suspect opened fire and wounded him.** Other policemen at the scene shot and killed him. The investigation is still ongoing (Chechen Interior Ministry website; TASS News Agency, March 20, 2018; Telegram channel of the Commission of Inquiry of the Russian Federation, March 22, 2018).

► **ISIS's Amaq News Agency issued a claim of responsibility for the attack.** The agency released a short video of **the perpetrator, speaking in Russian, pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before the attack.** In the video, the terrorist is shown holding a knife, with a small ISIS flag made of paper hanging on the wall behind him. Following are the main points that he made (Amaq News Agency, March 21, 2018):

- ◆ **An attack on Muslim operatives in social media, who refrain from acting,** while “the honor of your brothers is being insulted and your brothers [the Muslims in Syria] are being bombed.” The operative calls on them, **“start a jihad, abduct them and kill those who have strayed from the religion (*murtaddin*) wherever you find them.”** He quotes a statement by the Prophet Mohammad: “An infidel and his murderer will

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of the shooting and bargaining attack in the South of France, see pages 1-2.

never meet in the fire [of Hell]. **Carry out jihad [holy war] for the sake of Allah and save yourselves from the fire [of Hell].”**

◆ **A threat to kill those who have abandoned religion:** “By Allah, we see your dread of us. By Allah, you will not feel calm and secure wherever you are. By Allah, **we will slaughter you; we will kill you, we will booby-trap your cars, we will drink your blood,** you will not be secure as long as you remain infidels, until you return to the religion of Allah [...]” (Amaq News Agency, March 21, 2018).



**ISIS operative’s pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi**  
(Amaq News Agency, March 21, 2018)

## Afghanistan

### Attacks against Shiite targets in Afghanistan

► ISIS operatives in Afghanistan (Khorasan Province) carried out two attacks this week against Shiite targets:

- ◆ On March 21, 2018, **a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Shiite shrine in the capital Kabul**, while many people were celebrating Nowruz, the Persian New Year. According to the Afghan authorities, **at least 31 people were killed and 65 others were wounded** (Afghanistan Times, March 21, 2018). **The Khorasan Province of the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing attack.** According to the claim of responsibility, 100 people were killed or wounded in the attack. The suicide bomber, who blew himself up with his explosive vest, was codenamed **Talha al-Bishawari** (i.e., from Peshawar) (Haqq, March 21, 2018). Judging by his codename, the terrorist is from Pakistan.
- ◆ On March 24, 2018, **there was an explosion at the Nabi Akram Mosque in the city of Herat, in western Afghanistan** (Khaama Press, March 25, 2018). The attack killed at least three people and wounded at least nine. According to a statement issued by the

Khorasan Province, two operatives of the organization, Abdullah al-Khorasani and Bilal al-Khorasani, attacked the worshipers at the mosque with automatic weapons and hand grenades, killing and wounding around 12 worshipers.



**Right: The two operatives who carried out the attack at the Nabi Akram Mosque. They look very young (Haqq, March 25, 2018). Left: The devastation at the mosque (Twitter, March 25, 2018)**

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Dagestan: Commander of a local ISIS squad detained

- ▶ During an operation by the Russian security forces in the Republic of Dagestan, information was received that an armed man who had committed a number of terrorist offenses had barricaded himself in a house in Andi, about 100 km from Makhachkala (the capital of Dagestan). Acting on the information, the forces surrounded the house where the suspect was hiding and called on him to lay down his arms and surrender. After he refused, they opened fire and killed him. A sniper rifle, ammunition, a hand grenade, wireless communications device and night vision equipment were found at the site.
- ▶ The gunman who was killed was **Yunus Khabibob**, whose name appears on Russia's federal wanted list. **Khabibob pledged allegiance to ISIS and headed a local squad** that used to operate in a mountainous forest area in Dagestan (Russian National Counterterrorism Commission website, March 24, 2018).



**Right: Russian security forces at the house where the ISIS operative barricaded himself. Left: The weapons found during the operation (Russian National Counterterrorism Commission website, December 24, 2018)**

## Yemen: ISIS media operatives apprehended and IEDs and weapons found

► Yemeni security forces **apprehended a squad of operatives of ISIS's media outlet in Aden**. In their safe house, the security forces **found IEDs**, including some ready to be detonated remotely, explosive belts, a quantity of plastic explosives, mines, rockets, weapons and ammunition. Earlier, a senior ISIS operative was arrested, and admitted that he had been behind two explosions carried out by the organization in Aden and the killing of officers at the security directorate in Aden (Anbaa Yamaniyyah, March 25, 2018).

## Algeria: ISIS squad exposed

► The Algerian security forces **uncovered a terrorist squad of 11 operatives** who called themselves the Lone Wolves. The squad operatives were in contact with the leadership of ISIS, and their aim was to recruit young people to their ranks. According to a representative of the General Prosecutor's Office, the network operatives praised terrorists on social media, enabling the police to trace them. Their interrogation also revealed that the network operatives used encrypted apps used by terrorist groups. According to a representative of the prosecution, nine people were identified and arrested, and an ISIS flag and communications devices were found in their homes (Akhbar Libya, March 24, 2018).

## Malaysia: Arrest of ISIS operatives who planned to carry out attacks

► Malaysian police **arrested seven ISIS-affiliated operatives** who had planned to carry out attacks against non-Muslim holy sites and other targets in the country. Six of the operatives are Malaysian citizens, and the seventh is a Filipino citizen affiliated with the ISIS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf terrorist organization. Malaysia has been on highest alert since January 2016, after ISIS-affiliated operatives carried out a series of attacks in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia (Reuters, March 24, 2018).

## Afghanistan: Arrest of a Russian wanted man

► Forces of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), in cooperation with their Afghan counterparts, **arrested a Russian citizen who was wanted and was hiding in Afghanistan**. The arrest was made as part of an investigation into the financing of terrorist activities and the recruitment of operatives to fight alongside international terrorist organizations. On March 19, 2018, with the assistance of the Russian

delegation at Interpol, the suspect was extradited to Russia for further interrogation and prosecution (Russian Federal Security Service website, March 20, 2018).

## Al-Qaeda's battle for hearts and minds

### Al-Qaeda leader attacks the United States and calls to fight it

► On March 20, 2018, Al-Qaeda published a **speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri** entitled: **The United States is the Number One Enemy of the Muslims**. In his speech, Al-Zawahiri explains that President Trump is a “blatant crusader” who exposed the true face of the United States and the position of the majority of the American people towards Muslims. According to him, **the only way to fight the United States is through jihad and preaching, since every other way has proved to be a failure**. He calls on **the Islamic nation to carry out jihad against the US everywhere**, just as the United States attacks Muslims everywhere.

► Al-Zawahiri goes on to emphasize the need for **unity and cooperation among Muslims everywhere in the struggle against the US**. He warns against any division and dispute, **since the Muslim nation is one single nation that does not recognize borders or maps**. He notes that the attempt to present the hostility against the United States as a matter that is confined to the issue of East Jerusalem as the capital of the secular Palestinian state is misleading since all of Palestine belongs to the Muslims. **Grozny, Manila and Andalusia (Spain)** are Muslim countries (Al-Qaeda's Al-Sahab media foundation, March 21, 2018).

### Call to desist from internal wars within Al-Qaeda

► On March 23, 2018, Al-Qaeda's Al-Sahab media foundation published **an issue of a new newspaper called Al-Nafir**. The editorial discusses the fighting in Syria between the various organizations. In the opinion of the newspaper, the dispute between the various organizations in northern Syria only serves and supports the regime of Bashar Assad and his supporters. According to the author of the editorial, one argument leads to another, and the publication of new *fatwas* by the organizations only contributes to the disagreement. **In view of the above, Al-Qaeda calls on all those involved to desist from internal wars, implement Islamic religious law (Sharia) and fight together** (Al-Nafir, March 23, 2018).