



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## April 12-17, 2018



### Main events of the week

- ▶ With the takeover of the city of Duma and the evacuation of the last fighters from its territory, **the Syrian army effectively completed the takeover of eastern Al-Ghouta**. Now the Syrian army and the forces supporting it are shifting the center of operations **to the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp in southern Damascus**, where an enclave controlled by ISIS remains. The Syrian army has sent reinforcements to the area and has begun attacking ISIS's positions and outposts in the camp.
- ▶ On April 14, 2018, **the United States, France, and Britain** attacked three targets in Syria used for producing and storing chemical weapons and materials. The three countries stressed that the attack was carried out in response to the chemical attack carried out by the Syrian regime in Duma on April 7, 2018, and that it was intended to deter the Syrian regime and to enforce the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, under international law. The United States made it clear that this act **does not represent a change in US policy, and that the objective of the US military activity in Syria is still to defeat ISIS**.
- ▶ **In Iraq**, the security forces continued to operate against a number of areas where pockets of ISIS operatives remained. ISIS continued its guerrilla activity against the Iraqi security forces, primarily the Popular Mobilization fighters (the Shiite militias). This is the second week that **ISIS operatives have been carrying out attacks against candidates in the Iraqi elections scheduled for next month**.
- ▶ The Egyptian security forces, which have been working for around two months to eradicate the presence of ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula, suffered losses **in an attempt by ISIS operatives to infiltrate one of the army bases in Sinai**.

## US and Coalition involvement in Syria

### Attack on Syrian regime targets in response to Assad's chemical attack

► In the early morning of April 14, 2018, **the United States, France, and Britain attacked three targets in Syria used for producing and storing chemical weapons and materials.**

The three countries stressed that the attack was a response to the chemical attack carried out by the Syrian regime in Duma (east of Damascus) on April 7, 2018, and that it was intended to deter the Syrian regime and to enforce the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, under international law.

► Sources at a Pentagon briefing said that the naval attack was carried out by a French frigate, an American submarine and American destroyers. The aircraft used in the airstrike were French Rafale and Mirage, American B-1, and British Tornado and Typhoon. A total of 105 missiles of various types were launched. US Director of the Joint Staff **Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.** detailed the targets that were attacked: **a scientific center in Damascus** that conducts experiments and research, and develops and manufactures biological and chemical weapons; **a chemical weapons storage facility** in west Homs which, according to Pentagon estimates, contained sarin and rudimentary equipment for the production of sarin; **a chemical weapons storage facility** and a command post near Homs (US Department of Defense website, April 14, 2018).

► **Pentagon Spokesperson Dana W. White** said that every precaution was taken to ensure that the attack would be carried out against the defined targets. According to White, **all the targets were hit successfully and with great accuracy.** The United States made it clear that this act does not represent a change in US policy or an attempt to depose the Syrian regime, and that the **objective of the United States in Syria is still to defeat ISIS** (US Department of Defense website, April 14, 2018). **The French** said that there was no intention of harming Syria's allies and citizens, but rather the Assad regime after it had made use of chemical weapons. **The British prime minister** stressed that the military operation **was not intended to intervene in the civil war in Syria or to replace the regime** (The Guardian, April 16, 2018).

► According to **Col. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy, Chief of Operations at the Russian General Staff**, the Syrian air defense systems intercepted 71 of 103 missiles that were fired at it by

Western countries. He said that no military personnel were wounded in the attack. **Russia strongly condemned the attack. Russian President Vladimir Putin** called it a “**violation of international law**” that would worsen the humanitarian disaster in Syria (TASS News Agency, April 14, 2018). According to **Col. Gen. Rudskoy, in the wake of the attack**, Russia may reconsider its decision (made at the request of Western countries) not to sell S-300 surface-to-air missile systems to Syria (RIA Novosti, April 14, 2018).

## Syria

### Overview

► **Upon the takeover of the city of Duma and the evacuation of the last fighters from its territory**, the Syrian army has actually completed the takeover of eastern Al-Ghouta. The army and the forces supporting it are now shifting their **focus towards the Yarmouk refugee camp in south Damascus**, where there is still an ISIS-controlled enclave.

### Takeover of eastern Al-Ghouta completed

► According to an announcement by official Syrian sources on April 12, 2018, **the city of Duma and the entire eastern Al-Ghouta**, the rebels’ last enclave in the area, **are now under full control of the Syrian regime army** (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, April 12, 2018).

► **Maj.-Gen. Yuri Yevtushenko, head of the Russian Peace and Reconciliation Center in Syria**, reported that Russian Military Police units had started to operate in Duma. Yevtushenko stressed that the activity in the city was not only military but also consisted of preventing provocations, enforcing the law, safeguarding security and organizing aid for the civilian population in the city (TASS, April 13, 2018).



**Syrian civilians celebrating in Duma, with the Syrian flag in the background (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, April 12, 2018)**

► The city has been declared **empty of armed operatives** after the last convoy left Duma on April 14, 2018, on its way to Jarabulus (Suriya Al-Hadath, April 14, 2018) as part of the evacuation of Army of Islam operatives and their families. The Russian Reconciliation Center announced the end of the operation for their evacuation. On April 13, 2018, 107 buses evacuated the last 3,976 armed operatives. **In total, 21,455 armed operatives were evacuated from Duma during the operation**, along with their families. Since the beginning of the humanitarian operation in eastern Al-Ghouta, 67,680 armed operatives and their families were evacuated with the assistance of the Russian Reconciliation Center (Russian Defense Ministry website, April 14, 2018).



**Buses evacuating the last Army of Islam operatives and their families from Duma (SANA, April 13, 2018)**

### **South Damascus: preparation to take over ISIS's control area south of Damascus**

► Now that eastern Al-Ghouta is in the hands of the Syrian regime, the Syrian forces are preparing **to eliminate the ISIS presence at the Yarmouk refugee camp in south Damascus**. As part of this effort, reinforcements of vehicles and fighters of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it were sent to the area. The forces intend to encircle the area close to the Yarmouk refugee camp and the neighborhoods of Al-Qadam and Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, which are held by ISIS (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, April 12, 13, 2018). In order to allow for the entry of tanks and military equipment into the area, the Syrian troops and the forces supporting them started to remove the debris in the Yarmouk refugee camp (Mukhayyam Al-Yarmouk Facebook account, April 1, 2018).



**Right: Military reinforcements en route to the outskirts of the Yarmouk refugee camp and the Al-Qadam neighborhood, in advance of the beginning of the campaign against ISIS (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, April 12, 2018). Left: Syrian soldiers near a tank carried on a truck on the outskirts of the Yarmouk refugee camp (YouTube, April 12, 2018)**



**Deployment of the forces around the Yarmouk refugee camp: ISIS (marked in grey) controlling the western part of the camp; The rebels (marked in green) in the western part; And in the north (marked in red), the forces of the Assad regime. The Al-Qadam neighborhood, west of the Yarmouk refugee camp, is also divided between the above three sides (Qasiyoun, April 13, 2018)**

► **Inside the refugee camp**, in the areas held by ISIS, in preparation for the expected campaign, ISIS operatives controlling the Shuhada area reportedly reinforced their lines of defense and dug tunnels. Before that, they forced all the inhabitants to leave the area and turned it into a strictly military zone (Mukhayyam Al-Yarmouk Facebook account, April 11, 2018). ISIS has distributed leaflets among the residents, calling on them to prepare for an emergency and store food products and medications for two weeks (Mukhayyam Al-Yarmouk Facebook account, April 11, 2018).

► **The troops of the Syrian regime and the forces supporting them started with a preparatory bombardment.** They attacked ISIS positions and outposts in several sites in the refugee camp (Mukhayyam Al-Yarmouk Facebook account, April 16, 2018).

► **ISIS's Damascus Province released a video** in which it accused the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (the former Al-Nusra Front) of “abandoning Islam as well as

defeatism.” This is because last month they reached a settlement with the regime on the evacuation of parts of the Al-Qadam neighborhood (west of the Yarmouk refugee camp) while ISIS operatives chose to continue fighting. The video included excerpts showing ISIS fighting against the Syrian army in the Al-Qadam neighborhood last month (Nasher, April 11, 2018).



**From the video: ISIS operative fighting against Syrian army forces in the Al-Qadam neighborhood (Nasher, April 11, 2018)**

## Deir ez-Zor

► **Following several weeks of an undeclared ceasefire, clashes in the area resumed.** On April 13, 2018, the SDF forces, supported by planes and helicopters of the US-led International Coalition, attacked the city of Hajin, an ISIS stronghold 24 km north of Albukamal. In response, ISIS operatives attacked the outskirts of the village of Al-Bahrah, controlled by the SDF forces (about 2 km northwest of Hajin) and detonated four car bombs in the area (Furat Post, April 14, 2018).

► Almost at the same time, the Syrian forces attacked the village of Al-Sha’fah, north of Albukamal, on the east bank of the Euphrates River, which is held by ISIS (Deir ez-Zor 24 Facebook page, April 15, 2018). ISIS’s Amaq News Agency released a video documenting the launch of an anti-aircraft missile by one of the operatives. The missile hit a Syrian army bulldozer on the outskirts of Albukamal (Amaq, April 13, 2018).



**Anti-aircraft missile launched by an ISIS operative at a Syrian army bulldozer on the outskirts of the city of Albukamal (Amaq, April 13, 2018)**

► In the Al-Sha’fah area, **internal struggles reportedly took place among the ISIS operatives**. Confrontations began between foreign operatives fighting in the ranks of ISIS and Iraqi operatives. The confrontations broke out due to a demand raised by the foreign operatives to pledge allegiance to a new leader of the organization, as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi hasn’t appeared in public since the summer of 2017. The Iraqi operatives, who considered this an act of treason, called for the elimination of the foreign operatives. The clashes between the two sides were stopped by the mediation of two clerics, who called on the parties not to be dragged into a civil war (Furat Post, April 14, 2018).

### Palmyra area

► **The Syrian army, Hezbollah forces and the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade** (handled by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards) launched a counter-attack to bring about the withdrawal of ISIS operatives from positions which they had seized near the **city of Al-Sukhnah**, about 61 km northeast of Palmyra (Al-Masdar News, April 12, 2018).

## Main developments in Iraq

### Iraqi security forces’ activity against ISIS

- The Iraqi security forces continue to operate against local ISIS networks throughout Iraq:
- ◆ **Al-Anbar Province:** In the plants area **in southwest Ramadi**, several dozen IEDs were found and detonated. In addition, the Iraqi security forces mopped up a route of 4 km in the area (Iraqi News Agency, April 15, 2018).
  - ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** Popular Mobilization forces (the Shiite militias) attacked an ISIS staging zone in the areas around **Al-Riyadh**, about 45 km southwest of Kirkuk. Several ISIS operatives were killed or wounded, and the rest fled the area (Iraqi News Agency, April 15, 2018). The Iraqi security forces found **a cache of ISIS** weapons, stored

underground in an apartment about 54 km west of Kirkuk (Iraqi News Agency, April 15, 2018).



**ISIS weapons cache found by the Iraqi security forces  
(Iraqi News Agency, April 15, 2018)**

- ◆ **Nineveh Province:** The Iraqi Interior Ministry announced that police forces **had arrested six ISIS operatives**. Two were arrested **in the Tal Afar area and four others in the city of Mosul**. One of the detainees was a woman (Al-Sumaria News, April 13, 2018).
- ◆ **Salah Al-Din Province:** The Popular Mobilization forces declared the end of the first stage of mopping up **Al-Siniyah area**, about 9 km southwest of Baiji, from the presence of ISIS (Iraqi News Agency, April 15, 2018).



**Popular Mobilization forces conducting security activity  
(Iraqi News Agency, April 15, 2018)**

## ISIS activity

► This week, ISIS operatives throughout Iraq continued to carry out attacks against the Iraqi security forces, mainly against Popular Mobilization fighters. Following are the details, as published by ISIS's Amaq News Agency:

- ◆ **Nineveh Province:** ISIS's Dijla Province reported that its operatives had set up an ambush at the Sudayrah cemetery **south of Mosul** against Popular Mobilization fighters attending the funerals of their comrades. According to ISIS reports, **17 fighters were killed in the ambush and 30 others were wounded** (file-sharing website, April 12, 2018).
- ◆ **Salah Al-Din Province:** ISIS's North Baghdad Province announced that **six Popular Mobilization fighters had been killed and wounded** by ISIS machine gun fire in a village south of Tikrit. At the same time, another ISIS force attacked a **Popular Mobilization training camp** nearby, **killing and wounding four fighters** (iarchives.name.ng file-sharing website, April 12, 2018).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** Several Iraqi army soldiers were killed in an attack carried out by ISIS operatives **against an army camp in the northern part of the province**, about 58 km north of Baqubah (Amaq, April 13, 2018). A day later, ISIS released an announcement on the assassination of a member of the Iraqi Emergency Police, **who was shot south of Baqubah** (Amaq, April 14, 2018).
- ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** **Four members of the Iraqi federal police were killed** and their vehicle was destroyed in an ambush set up by ISIS operatives on the road between Al-Riyadh and Kirkuk, about 47 km southwest of central Kirkuk (Amaq, April 12, 2018).

### Assassination attempt against an election candidate

- ▶ On April 15, 2018, **an assassination attempt was carried out against Turkmen Front member Ammar Kahyah and his entourage**. Kahyah is one of the candidates in the elections scheduled for next month in Iraq. A car bomb exploded **in central Kirkuk**. One man was killed and additional 11 were wounded. Ammar Kahyah was not hurt (Al-Ahed Channel, April 15, 2018). **ISIS's Kirkuk Province claimed responsibility** for the assassination attempt (Nasher, April 15, 2018).
- ▶ **This is the second time that ISIS operatives are trying to disrupt the course of the elections in Iraq.** On April 7, 2018, two ISIS suicide bombers carried out a suicide bombing and shooting attack against the headquarters of the Iraqi Al-Hall Party in central Hit, Al-Anbar province.



**Right: Scene of the car bomb explosion (Al-Sumaria News, April 15, 2018). Left: Ammar Kahyah, member of the Turkmen Front (center) (Ammar Kahyah YouTube Channel, April 22, 2014)**

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

► **Operation Sinai 2018 for eradicating the presence of ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula continues.** The general headquarters of the Egyptian security forces continues to announce about its successes in the operation. According to an announcement from April 14, 2018, several dozen “terrorist operatives” were killed and over a hundred suspects were detained. In addition, a training camp was destroyed, including firing ranges, an obstacle course, a tunnel leading to underground lecture halls, and several weapons caches. During the operation, weapons were seized, firearms were confiscated, and IEDs were neutralized (Facebook page of the Egyptian Armed Forces spokesman, April 14, 2018).

► The Egyptian Armed Forces spokesman reported that the Egyptian security forces **had managed to foil a large-scale terrorist attack that was to be carried out by a group of 14 terrorist operatives**, including four operatives wearing explosive belts, all armed with rifles, medium machine guns and an RPG. The operatives had attempted to break into **an army camp in central Sinai**. According to him, the forces managed to prevent the attack, and in the confrontation with them, all 14 operatives were killed. Those who were wearing explosive belts blew themselves up near the camp. He also reported that **20 Egyptian army soldiers were killed and several others were wounded in the attack** (Egyptian armed forces spokesman, April 14, 2018; Mada Masr, April 15, 2018).



**Egyptian army soldiers in Sinai (Al-Watan, April 15, 2018)**

- ▶ According to a medical source at the military hospital in Suez, the number of soldiers killed in the attack at the army camp **had risen to 30 and the number of injured was 40**. The dead included the camp commander and his deputy (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, April 14, 2018).
- ▶ ISIS's Sinai province claimed responsibility for the attack. According to ISIS, **the attack was carried out by two brothers**, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and Abu Bakr al-Muhajir, who were armed with automatic rifles and wearing explosive belts. They attacked an Egyptian army camp in central Sinai. According to the claim of responsibility, the operation ended when they blew themselves up with their explosive belts (Amaq News Agency, April 14, 2018).



**ISIS's claim of responsibility with photos of the terrorists who carried out the attack (Aamaq News Agency, April 15, 2018)**

## The conduct of the Islamic State

► The Da'wa and Mosques Center in south Damascus announced the start of a **new da'wa campaign** on April 14, 2018, in which compulsory intensive courses on Islamic law will be held for all residents. The courses will last for 10 days and will include a final exam. Such courses have been held for some time, as well as courses for women, but this is a comprehensive mandatory program for all men in south Damascus (Al-Nabā', April 12, 2018). It should be noted that for the past few months, ISIS has not published documentation of daily life in the Islamic State, as it frequently did before the campaign against it and before it had lost most of the territory that it had controlled.

## Activity in other countries

### Afghanistan

► ISIS claimed responsibility for a number of attacks ostensibly carried out by its operatives in Afghanistan:

- ◆ According to a report by the Amaq News Agency, ISIS operatives **killed an Afghan officer and a policeman opposite the entrance to Nangarhar University in Jalalabad, eastern Afghanistan** (Nasher, April 15, 2018).
- ◆ ISIS's Khorasan Province reported that **two Christians had been killed and seven wounded** in an attack carried out by its operatives against a Christian place of worship in the city of Quetta, western Afghanistan (Nasher, April 15, 2018).

### ISIS training camp in Afghanistan

► ISIS's Khorasan Province published photos showing a **group of ISIS operatives undergoing training at the Sheikh Abu Malik al-Tamimi training camp in the province**. The photos show operatives receiving training in the use of weapons, including mortars, recoilless guns, and rocket launchers (file-sharing website, April 15, 2018).



**ISIS operatives undergoing training at the camp (file-sharing website, April 15, 2018)**

## Tunisia

► **Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb** (AQIM) issued an announcement addressing the residents of Tunisia, signed by the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion, stressing that despite the revolution in Tunisia, the regime remained corrupt and subordinate to the West and especially to France. Therefore, according to the announcement, the residents of Tunisia must take part in demonstrations and protests against the regime, which is a tool for the West. The announcement also calls on the citizens of Tunisia **to carry out jihad, each according to their ability**. According to the announcement, the West must know that all their interests and all forms of their presence in Islamic countries constitute legitimate targets and that AQIM will not leave them alone (Andalus Media Foundation, April 7, 2018)

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### British counterterrorism and preventive activity in the field of cybersecurity

► Speaking at the CyberUK 2018 cyber conference held in Manchester on April 12, 2018, **Jeremy Fleming, head of the British Government Communications Headquarters**, discussed the exploitation of technology by terrorist organizations. Fleming noted that ISIS's use of technology is a prominent example of this. According to Fleming, ISIS understands the value of strategic communications and the power of social media and messaging applications for the purpose of radicalization and threats. Therefore, ISIS has invested considerable time and energy in technology in order to produce better media content than any other terrorist organization. Fleming noted that ISIS knows which platforms to use in order to address its target audiences because it understands the audience and knows that potential supporters respond well to unfiltered content that can be downloaded and viewed on mobile phones. He noted that in recent years, they have seen the effect of ISIS's use of technology throughout Europe, **mainly in its ability to direct**

**and inspire attacks.** According to Fleming, the simple tactics employed by ISIS make it very difficult to thwart attacks.

► According to Fleming, the rise in the threat has led Britain to place greater emphasis on fighting ISIS on the Internet. In this context, the British Government Communications Headquarters, together with the Ministry of Defence, led a cyber operation against ISIS. Fleming noted that **the operation contributed significantly to the Coalition’s efforts to suppress ISIS’s propaganda, prevent its ability to coordinate attacks and protect the Coalition forces on the battlefield.** On several occasions in 2017, the operation also prevented ISIS from spreading its propaganda on the internet and making use of its regular channels. Fleming noted that this was the first time that Britain had conducted a systematic and consistent cyber operation as part of a broader military operation.

► Fleming warned, however, that the effectiveness of cyber attacks against ISIS was not permanent and that ISIS would eventually manage to overcome them. He stressed that ISIS continues to aspire to carry out terrorist attacks and to inspire others to do so. According to him, ISIS is now searching for new places where a governmental vacuum has been created that will enable it to establish its activity.<sup>1</sup> Fleming predicts that **other terrorist organizations will adopt ISIS’s operating methods,** since its legacy is expected to remain online (British Government Communications Headquarters website, April 12, 2018).



**Jeremy Fleming, head of the British Government Communications Headquarters, at the CyberUK 2018 cyber conference in Manchester  
(Twitter account of the British National Cyber Security Centre, April 12, 2018)**

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, Russia has reported several times that terrorist operatives, including ISIS operatives, have become increasingly active in Central Asian countries in general, and in Afghanistan in particular.

## Germany

► **German police** in Saarland (in western Germany, on the French-German border) arrested **three Syrian refugees** after an 18-month-long investigation of their ties with terrorist organizations. The investigation began after an employee of the refugee center reported seeing **one of the suspects in a video armed with hand grenades and other weapons**. According to the investigators, one of the suspects used the Internet **to try to recruit operatives from Germany to join the fighting in Syria alongside Ahrar Al-Sham. The other two suspects were ISIS operatives in Syria**. According to official sources, during the investigation a large quantity of evidence was found linking them with terrorist activity, including mobile phones and computers. The three suspects, who lived in Saarland, **came to Germany in 2015 as refugees from Syria** and applied for asylum in Germany (Deutsche Welle, April 13, 2018).

## Turkey

► According to a report by official Turkish sources, Turkish police throughout the country have arrested 70 foreigners suspected of belonging to ISIS. A total of 51 foreign citizens were arrested in Istanbul. In addition, ten Iraqi citizens, including a senior ISIS operative, were arrested in **Eskişehir**. Eight suspects were arrested in the Izmir Province and another suspect in the Malatya Province. Large quantities of ISIS-related documents and digital materials were reportedly found in the raids (Anatolia News Agency, April 14, 2018).

## Afghanistan

► **Afghan security forces with US support continue to operate against areas under ISIS's control throughout the country**. According to reports, at least 16 ISIS operatives were killed and more than 20 were injured in airstrikes by American and Afghan aircraft against ISIS hiding places in the Darzab District in northern Afghanistan. The dead reportedly included **Mohammad Yusuf AKA Khanjar**, who was considered one of ISIS's most prominent commanders. One of the injured was **Shabir Ahmad**, another ISIS commander. In the Khogyani Province, southwest of Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan, at least six ISIS operatives were killed in an attack carried out by American UAVs (Khaama Press News Agency, April 14, 2018).

## The Philippines

► The Philippine army announced that 12 ISIS operatives had been killed in air and ground attacks on the island of Mindanao in the southern part of the country. This counterterrorism activity was intended to prevent attacks by operatives against various cities in the Philippines (Al-Bawaba, April 11, 2018).