



Spotlight on Global Jihad

June 21-27, 2018

لا اله الا الله



Main events of the week

- ▶ **The battle in southern Syria has begun:** After a few weeks of preparation, the Syrian army launched an attack against the rebel organizations in southern Syria. **The attack is concentrated** on a rebel-controlled enclave **northeast of Daraa**, extending from the Syrian-Jordanian border to a distance of about 70 km northwards. The objective of the attack, in the ITIC's assessment, is to **divide the enclave by taking over the village of Basr al-Harir** (located around 40 km from the Syrian-Jordanian border). The Syrian army claimed to have **taken over the village**, while the rebel organizations claimed that the fighting in the area was still ongoing. The battles are causing residents to flee from their homes, some in the direction of Jordan and others elsewhere (Quneitra).
- ▶ **At the same time, the Syrian army continues to take control of desert areas and mop them up from the presence of ISIS.** This week, the Syrian army continued fighting against the ISIS enclave **northeast of As-Suwayda**; the Syrian army mopped up extensive areas **between Albukamal and the T-2 station**; the Syrian army also took control of a large area **along the Syrian-Iraqi border northeast of the Al-Tanf border crossing** (near the Syrian-Jordanian border). The takeover of this area is liable to create friction between the Syrian army and the US-supported rebel organizations controlling the Al-Tanf enclave.

Russian involvement in Syria

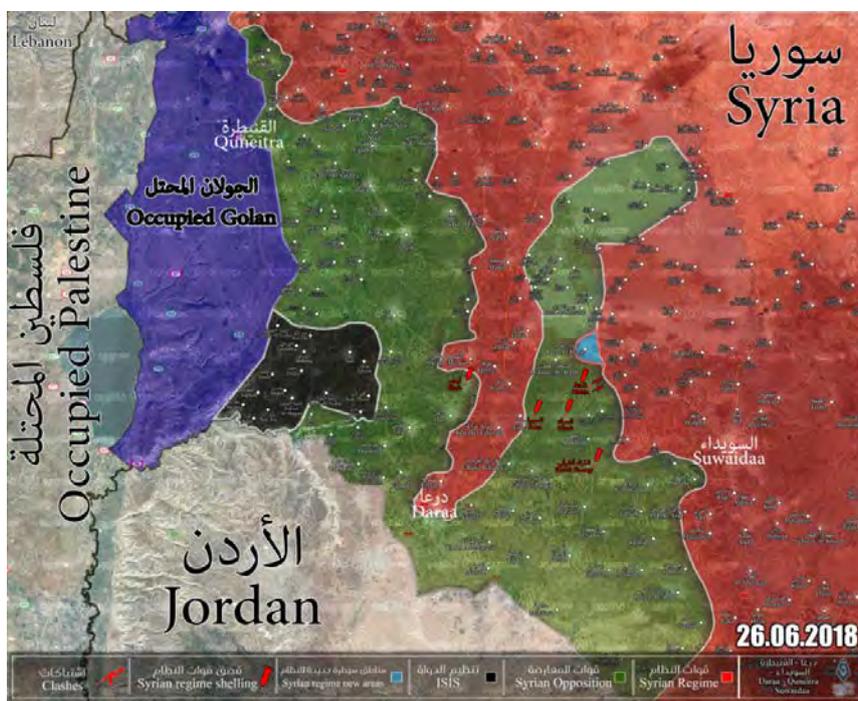
Russian Deputy Foreign Minister: Terrorist organizations control more than 40% of the de-escalation zone in southern Syria

- ▶ Speaking at a session of the UN Security Council on the Middle East and North Africa, **Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin** said that **the Al-Nusra Front (i.e., the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham) and ISIS control over 40% of the de-escalation zone in southwestern Syria**. He added that negotiations were underway with the "moderate rebel groups" in the de-escalation zone (he was apparently referring to the Free Syrian Army). He stressed that at the same time, the struggle against the terrorist operatives

in Syria should continue until they are completely wiped out (TASS News Agency, June 25, 2018).

Syria

After a few weeks of preparations, **the Syrian army launched an attack against the rebel organizations in the area east of Daraa**. In this area, the rebel organizations control an enclave from the Syrian-Jordanian border towards the east, **up to a distance of about 70 km from the border** (see map). In the ITIC's assessment, **the Syrian army seeks to divide the enclave around the village of Basr al-Harir** (where it's 7 km wide). The Syrian army claims that its troops **took over the village of Basr al-Harir and its surroundings**, and even released photos from the area. On the other hand, the rebel organizations, which sent reinforcements to the area, claim that **around Basr al-Harir, fighting is still ongoing**.



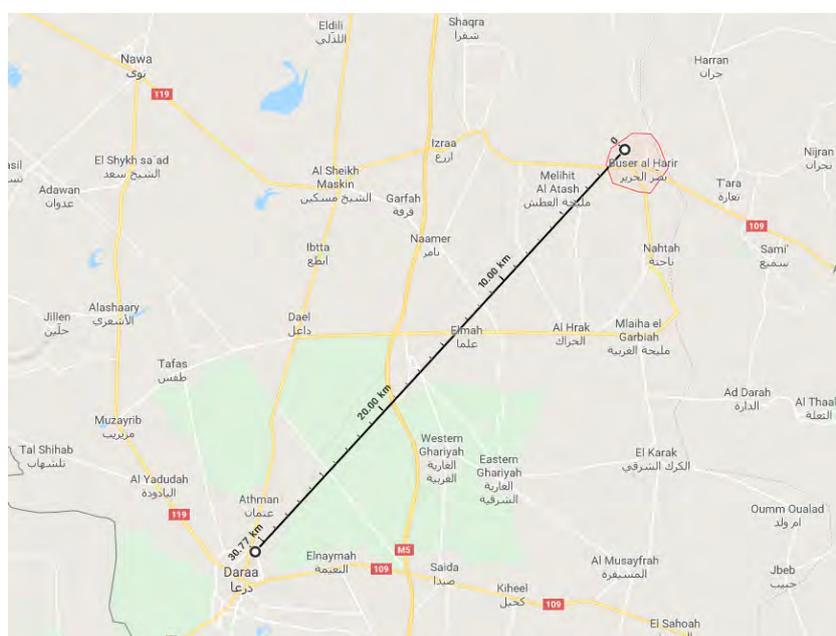
Deployment of the forces in the Daraa area, according to a website affiliated with the rebel organizations (updated to June 26, 2018). Areas controlled by the rebel organizations are marked in green; areas controlled by the Syrian army are marked in red; the Basr al-Harir area is marked in light blue; and the area controlled by ISIS is marked in black (Qasiyoun, June 26, 2018)

► The attack against the village of Basr al-Harir was preceded by **artillery shelling and airstrikes**. On June 26, 2018, **the Syrian army reported that it had taken over the village**. In addition, it was reported that **the village of Milhat Al-Atash**, about 2.5 km southwest of Basr al-Harir, **had been taken over** (SANA, June 26, 2018). According to a Syrian military

source, many operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham were killed and large amounts of weapons were seized (SANA, June 26, 2018). On the other hand, according to the rebel organizations, fighting is still ongoing in the area of Basr al-Harir (Qasiyoun, June 26, 2018).



Right: The village of Basr al-Harir under bombardment (Al-Naba, June 20, 2018). Left: A Syrian soldier with ruined buildings in the background reporting that he is in central Basr al-Harir (YouTube account of the Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 26, 2018)



The village of Basr al-Harir, about 30 km northeast of Daraa (Google Maps)

The rebel organizations

► The rebel organizations, mainly **the Free Syrian Army, established on June 24, 2018, a central operations room called “The Central Operations Room in the South.”** This operations room concentrates control over the operations rooms of the various organizations in southern Syria. The unification of the operations rooms was intended to maintain greater coordination between the various organizations in order to cope more effectively with the Syrian army offensive (Tajammu’ Ahrar Hawran, June 24, 2018).

► On June 25, 2018, the Central Operations Room in the South announced that **reinforcements of the Free Syrian Army had arrived in the area of Basr al-Harir**, where fighting is taking place to curb the advance of the Syrian army. Photos which were released show convoys of tanks, APCs and artillery pieces moving towards the battlefield. The Central Operations Room in the South published a leaflet according to which the Syrian forces had sustained casualties in the area of Basr al-Harir.



Rebel reinforcements moving to the zones of confrontation with the Syrian army in the area of Basr al-Harir (southoperations Twitter account, June 25, 2018)

Residents flee from the fighting zones

► Following the fighting in the Daraa area, **about 20,000 residents reportedly fled from their homes** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 25, 2018). Some of the residents **fled towards the Jordanian border** (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath Channel; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 21, 2018). **It was also reported that 800 families had fled to refugee camps in the area of Quneitra**, where they suffer from lack of tents and basic equipment (Smart News Agency, June 21, 2018).

Daraa

► The Central Operations Room in the South announced on June 27, 2018, that the rebel organizations **had repelled an attack by a Hezbollah force around the city of Daraa**. According to the announcement, the organizations had cut off the road through which equipment and fighters were transferred (Twitter, June 27, 2018).

Mopping up the ISIS enclave northeast of As-Suwayda (Al-Safa area)

► **This week, the Syrian army continued fighting against the ISIS enclave northeast of As-Suwayda**. ISIS claimed that on June 20, 2018, a Syrian army officer and about twenty soldiers had been killed in an ISIS ambush near Tell Ghanem, northeast of As-Suwayda (Amaq, June 21, 2018). ISIS also announced that other ambushes that it had set up destroyed

Syrian tanks (Amaq, June 21, 2018). On June 24, 2018, ISIS reported that its operatives had killed at least nine Syrian soldiers in an attack in the area of Al-Safa (Haqq, June 24, 2018).



Right: Syrian army artillery fire in the desert area of Al-Safa (Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018). Left: Syrian army force advancing in the desert area of Al-Safa (Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018)



Deserted ISIS position in the area of Al-Safa (Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018)

Eastern Syria

Mopping up the desert area between Albukamal and the T-2 station from ISIS

- Syrian media outlets reported that **the Syrian army had mopped up last week a desert area of 1,800 square kilometers**, in the area between the city of Albukamal and the T-2 station. In this activity, many ISIS operatives were reportedly killed and large quantities of equipment were destroyed (SANA, June 20, 2018; Syrian TV, June 25, 2018).



Right: Anti-aircraft gun mounted on a Syrian army vehicle in the area of the T-2 station (SANA, June 20, 2018). Left: Fighters (apparently belonging to the Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade) searching a trench and a cave previously used by ISIS (SANA, June 20, 2018)



T-2 station west of Al-Bukamal (Google Maps)

ISIS sustains heavy losses in an Iraqi airstrike north of Al-Bukamal

► On June 23, 2018, **Iraqi planes attacked a compound of three buildings interconnected by a tunnel, in the area of the village of Hajin (about 25 km north of Al-Bukamal).** The airstrike took place **while ISIS commanders were meeting there.** Iraqi and Lebanese media outlets reported that **45 ISIS operatives were killed in the airstrike, including senior ISIS commanders:** ISIS's war minister, deputy war minister, a senior information official, ISIS's police commander, and a senior commander who had previously served in Al-Qaeda (Al-Sumaria News; Al-Manar, June 23, 2018).

Another Iranian officer killed in battle with ISIS in Al-Bukamal

► The Iranian media reported that **Shahrakh Dai Poor, a senior officer in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, had been killed in battle with ISIS in the area of Al-Bukamal.** He

had reportedly trained the Hezbollah forces in the use of anti-tank missiles in Albukamal (Zeina Karam Twitter account, June 22, 2018).



Right: Shahrakh Dai Poor, commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who had been killed in the area of Albukamal (SufianSamarrai@ Twitter account, June 23, 2018). Left: Amid (Brigadier General) Shahrakh Dai Poor, commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who had been killed in the area of Albukamal (Bani_Omaia@ Twitter account, June 22, 2018)

This is the fourth Iranian officer recently killed in battle with ISIS in the area of Albukamal. In ISIS attacks in the area of Albukamal in early June 2018, two members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were killed, one of them an officer.¹ The many losses among Iranian officers serving in the Albukamal area and among Shiite militias handled by Iran **are an indication of the difficulties which Iran and its allies are facing in their activity to secure their control of this important area.**

The airstrike in the Albukamal area (update)²

► **On June 18, 2018, an airstrike was carried out near Albukamal against Iraqi Shiite militias belonging to the Popular Mobilization, handled by Iran. Abu Ali al-Muhandis, deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Directorate, commented on the airstrike in a TV interview (Iraqi Al-Ayyam TV Channel, June 24, 2018).**

► Following are the main points that he made:

- ◆ **The airstrike against the Popular Mobilization 45th and 46th Brigades which were on a “defense mission” near Albukamal was “definitely” carried out by the**

¹ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from June 17, 2018: “Officer and fighter from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, senior Hezbollah officer, and Shiite militia operatives killed in ISIS attacks in Albukamal. The Albukamal border crossing is of major importance to Iran since a route promoting Iran’s strategic interests in Syria and Lebanon passes through it.”

² Following up on Spotlight on Global Jihad from June 14-20, 2018.

US Air Force. According to Al-Muhandis, **the airstrike was carried out by a missile whose wreckage is in the hands of the Popular Mobilization.**

◆ **The activity of the forces which were attacked had been coordinated with the Iraqi army.** The Iraqi army joint operations headquarters' response that the forces attacked were not related to it and it was an incident which took place outside Iraq was "hasty and embarrassing."

◆ **The US forces are taking advantage of Iraqi soil to serve their own needs.** Al-Muhandis addressed the Americans directly, pointing out that the Popular Mobilization units are subordinate to the Iraqi government and to the Iraqi Prime Minister. He said that the **Popular Mobilization would not let this airstrike carried out against it go unpunished.**

◆ **The Iraqi government and Parliament must take a stand regarding the attack.**

The Iraqi forces' treatment of the Popular Mobilization is unacceptable.



Abu Ali al-Muhandis, deputy head of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Directorate, comments on the airstrike on the border between Iraq and Syria (Iraqi Al-Ayyam TV Channel, June 24, 2018)

Mopping up the Syrian-Iraqi border and Syrian-Jordanian border areas from ISIS operatives

Takeover of the area northeast of the Al-Tanf crossing

► The Syrian army reported that this week, its forces had taken over an area of **about 2,500 square kilometers previously held by ISIS, northeast of the Al-Tanf border crossing.** During the fighting, many ISIS operatives were killed and weapons were seized (Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018; Muraselon, June 21, 2018). **The takeover of the area may result in friction between the Syrian army and the US-supported rebel organizations which control the Al-Tanf enclave** (see map).

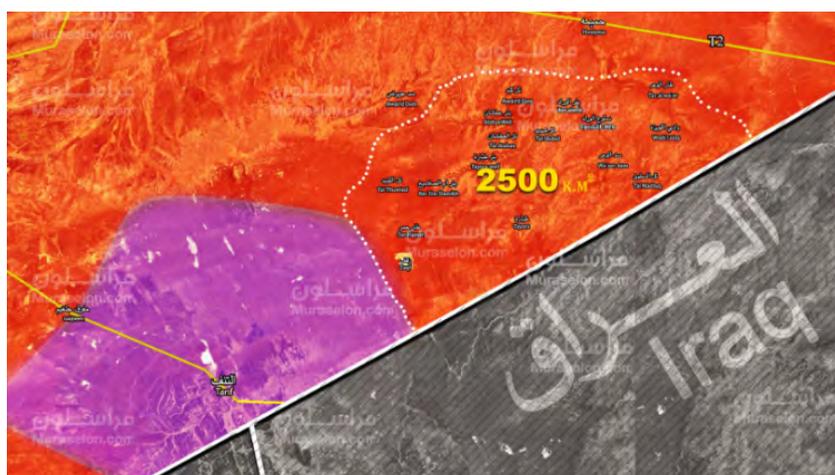


Army liberates a wide area of the Syrian Badyi



Army liberates a wide area of the Syrian Badyi

Right: Syrian army activity northeast of Al-Tanf. Left: ISIS weapons seized by the Syrian army (Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018)



The control areas along the Syrian-Iraqi border: The Syrian army and forces supporting it (orange); Area taken over from ISIS (orange, delimited by a dotted line); Forces of the International Coalition in the Al-Tanf border area (violet) (Muraselon, June 21, 2018)

Mopping up the Syrian-Iraqi border

► On June 22, 2018, the Kurdish SDF forces took over the Tell Safouk border crossing between Syria and Iraq (about 55 km southeast of Al-Al-Hasakah). At the border crossing, they joined forces with Iraqi troops on the other side of the border, apparently from the Popular Mobilization Shiite militias. The Kurdish forces (SDF) and the Shiite militias (handled by Iran) continue to cooperate in mopping up the border area on both sides from ISIS operatives.



Syrian Democratic Forces and Iraqi military officials came together to discuss the new offensive against Daesh to secure the border area



SDF commander leading the operation said that the campaign would continue with participation of Iraqi Security Forces Until ISIS is completely ousted from the region

Right: SDF fighters and an Iraqi force in the area of the Tell Safouk border crossing, with the Iraqi flag on the background. Left: SDF commanders with Iraqi commanders in the area of the Tell Safouk border crossing. The sides are seen discussing a new attack to mop up the border area between Syria and Iraq from ISIS operatives (YPG Press Office YouTube channel, June 22, 2018)



Tell Safouk border crossing (Google Maps)

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS activity

Rescue of prisoners captured by ISIS

- ▶ On June 23, 2018, ISIS's Amaq News Agency issued a video showing six Iraqi policemen and members of the Popular Mobilization who were taken prisoner while traveling on the Baghdad-Kirkuk highway. ISIS presented the Iraqi government with an **ultimatum, demanding the release of all Sunni female prisoners within three days**, otherwise the captives would be executed (www.k1falh.ga, an ISIS-affiliated website, June 23, 2018). On

June 25, 2018, an Iraqi security source announced that a force from the counterterrorism unit had rescued the six hostages. The six were rescued after an exchange of fire lasting several hours (Al-Arabiya, June 26, 2018).



Right: Iraqi policemen and members of the Popular Mobilization captured by ISIS operatives on the Baghdad-Kirkuk highway. Left: Two ISIS operatives next to the ISIS flag. The operative on the right (whose face has been blurred) is presenting the Iraqi government with an ultimatum (www.k1falh.ga, June 23, 2018).

Prisoners captured and executed by ISIS

► **At least five operatives of the Tribal Mobilization were captured and executed by ISIS operatives southwest of Baiji** (June 22, 2018). ISIS released several photos of their execution (www.k1falh.ga, June 22, 2018).



Right: Tribal Mobilization operatives captured by ISIS. Left: Five Tribal Mobilization operatives before being shot to death (www.k1falh.ga, 22 June 2018).

Additional ISIS attacks

► At the same time, ISIS's media reported additional attacks against Iraqi security forces and the Popular Mobilization in the Nineveh, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces. Some of the attacks were **targeted killings**. Following are the main incidents:

- ◆ The liquidation of an Iraqi military intelligence officer around 90 km west of Mosul (June 21, 2018).



**ISIS operative near the body of the Iraqi military intelligence officer
(www.k1falh.ga, ISIS-affiliated website, June 22, 2018)**

- ◆ The liquidation of an agent of the Popular Mobilization in Mosul (June 21, 2018).
- ◆ An attack by ISIS operatives in which at least eight Iraqi army soldiers were wounded, 57 km north of Baqubah (June 22, 2018).
- ◆ The liquidation of an agent of the Iraqi Federal Police around 40 km southwest of Kirkuk (June 20, 2018).

The activity of the Iraqi security forces

► Following are the main activities carried out by the Iraqi security forces against ISIS this week:

- ◆ On June 22, 2018, Iraqi security forces detained 12 ISIS operatives in the area of Hatra (an archaeological site around 110 km southwest of Mosul). In addition, two tunnels were destroyed and 23 IEDs were blown up (Iraqi News, June 22, 2018).
- ◆ On June 21, 2018, the Iraqi army located an ISIS weapons depot around 36 km south of Mosul. The weapons depot contained rockets and mortar shells, which were blown up by the Iraqi army (Twitter, June 21, 2018).



ISIS self-manufactured mortar shells found in the Al-Shura area south of Mosul (Twitter, June 21, 2018)

ISIS infographics summarizing activity in Kirkuk

► ISIS recently published an infographic summarizing the attacks carried out by its operatives in Kirkuk between May 21 and June 21, 2018. The attacks included ambushes, clashes, mortar fire and the deployment of IEDs. As part of ISIS's activity, **38 fields were set on fire, 20 houses were blown up and one camp was attacked.** ISIS claims that 58 people were killed in the attacks, 93 were wounded and 17 were taken prisoner (Beit al-Massader, June 22, 2018).



Infographic summarizing ISIS's activity in Kirkuk between May 21 and June 21, 2018 (Beit al-Massader, June 22, 2018)

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

After a period of keeping a low profile in the wake of the campaign being waged against it by the Egyptian security forces, **ISIS recently stepped up its activity in the Sinai Peninsula.** This week, ISIS operatives attacked an Egyptian army checkpoint, detonated IEDs near a concentration of soldiers, and carried out a widely-reported public execution of individuals suspected of collaborating with the Egyptian army.

Attack against an Egyptian army checkpoint in the Rafah area

► On June 25, 2018, ISIS's Sinai Province announced that **its operatives had attacked an Egyptian army checkpoint near Rafah** (www.k1falh.ga, ISIS-affiliated website, June 25, 2018). According to eyewitnesses, armed men, apparently operatives from ISIS's Sinai Province, attacked the checkpoint from several directions. The Egyptian army suffered casualties, as did the attacking force (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, June 25, 2018).

IEDs detonated among Egyptian soldiers south of Sheikh Zuweid

► According to reports from Egyptian sources, a number of IEDs were detonated in the midst of a concentration of Egyptian soldiers **south of Sheikh Zuweid.** A number of Egyptian army soldiers were killed and wounded (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, June 25, 2018). So far, no claim of responsibility for the incident was published by ISIS's Sinai Province.

Execution of suspected collaborators with the Egyptian army

► On June 21, 2018, ISIS released photos showing the execution of two men suspected of collaborating with the Egyptian army in Sinai. The photos show the two men digging their own graves and then being beheaded by ISIS operatives (Haqq, June 21, 2018).



Suspected collaborator with the Egyptian army digging his own grave before being beheaded by ISIS operatives (Haqq, June 21, 2018)

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Afghanistan

► On June 21, 2018, **the Afghan army carried out extensive ground security activity against ISIS in the Nangarhar Province.** The activity was accompanied by **airstrikes**, apparently carried out by the US-led International Coalition forces. According to the Afghan Defense Ministry, **at least 23 ISIS operatives were killed in various districts of the Nangarhar Province.**



Afghan army forces during the security activity
(www.elbalad.news, June 24, 2018)

Libya

► According to Libyan media reports, **the Libyan army loyal to General Haftar has taken over extensive areas in the city of Derna** in eastern Libya. According to an announcement in the Libyan media from June 25, 2018, **the Libyan army is on the verge of completing its takeover of the city**, which in recent years has been controlled by Salafist-jihadi operatives affiliated with Al-Qaeda (Al-Unwan website, Libya, June 25, 2018).

► **The Libyan army announced that it had captured an ISIS car attempting to flee from Derna.** In the car there were rubber stamps of ISIS provinces in Libya (Barqa, Sirte and Tripoli), hit lists, and other documents. The car also contained IEDs, remote-detonation devices, and silencers (Akhbar Al-Aan, June 21, 2018; Libyan Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018).



Right: Libyan army soldier displaying ISIS rubber stamps and weapons seized in the car (Libyan Army Military Information Office, June 20, 2018). Left: Civilians in the city of Derna celebrating the army's takeover of the city, carrying photos of General Haftar (Al-Unwan, Libya, June 25, 2018).

Data on terrorist attacks published by the European Union

► On June 20, 2018, Europol reported that **in 2017, a total of 68 civilians were killed and 844 people were wounded in terrorist attacks in the European Union.** During the year, **975 people were detained throughout the European Union on suspicion of terrorist activity.** It was noted that although the number of casualties dropped during this year, **the number of jihadi-inspired attacks increased significantly**, from 13 in 2016 to 33 in 2017 (Europol, June 20, 2018).

The battle for hearts and minds

ISIS's threats against the World Cup Games continue

► Following ISIS's previous threats, an English-language poster was distributed this week, reading: "Russia 2018 – We will not let you reach your stadiums" (Telegram, June 21, 2018).



The poster that reads: "Russia 2018 – We will not let you reach your stadiums" (Telegram, June 21, 2018)