



Spotlight on Global Jihad

July 19-25, 2018



Main events of the week

- ▶ The Syrian army is completing its takeover of the Syrian Golan Heights while establishing its presence along the border with Israel. The only remaining area of resistance is the ISIS-controlled Yarmouk Basin, which is under attack by the Syrian army, including artillery shelling and airstrikes (in one of which a Syrian plane was shot down by the Israeli Air Force after having mistakenly entered Israeli airspace).
- ▶ Most of the areas under the control of the rebel organizations fell into the hands of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, **without significant fighting** but rather through surrender agreements (so-called reconciliation agreements) involving the Russians. The most prominent area where a surrender agreement was reached was the **area of Quneitra**. The agreement that was reached included a ceasefire, the return of the Syrian army to all the positions that had been under its control before the civil war, and the evacuation of rebel operatives who did not want to join the agreement to the Idlib region in northern Syria. As a result, Syrian soldiers entered the towns and villages in the area without any fighting, including the village of Al-Rafid, near the border with Israel.
- ▶ Hence, the takeover of southern Syria is coming to an end, and the Syrian regime (and the Russians) are setting their sights on other areas controlled by the rebel groups. The three most prominent areas are **the Idlib region**, where the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham is dominant; **the area along the border with Turkey**, controlled by Turkish-backed rebel organizations; and the **Al-Tanf region**, where rebel organizations operate under the protection of the United States. While the issue of the Al-Tanf region and the Syrian-Turkish border area may be resolved through diplomatic talks, **the Idlib region** in northern Syria **is expected to be the site of the significant “final battle” between the Syrian regime and the rebel organizations.**

Russian involvement in Syria

Security talks between Israel and Russia

► On July 23, 2018, a Russian delegation headed by **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov** visited Jerusalem. The delegation met with senior Israeli officials, including the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Chief of Staff. The meeting was held at the request of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Inter alia, **issues related to Iran and Syria** were discussed at the meeting. Special emphasis was placed on **ending the campaign in southern Syria and guaranteeing security along the Syrian-Israeli border, based on the implementation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement** (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website; Russian Foreign Ministry website, July 23, 2018).



Meeting of the Israeli delegation and the Russian delegation in Jerusalem. The photo shows (from left to right) Russian Chief of Staff Gerasimov, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Israeli Defense Minister Lieberman, and Israeli Chief of Staff Eizenkot (Israeli Prime Minister's Twitter account, July 23, 2018)

► At the end of the meeting, no official announcement on the content of the talks was published. According to Western and Israeli media reports, Russia proposed to have the Iranian forces withdraw to a distance of around 100 kilometers from the Syrian-Israeli border. On the other hand, according to media reports, the Israeli side demanded a total withdrawal of the Iranian forces from Syria. According to an Israeli “political source,” **the withdrawal of the Iranian forces should also include additional elements: the removal of long-range weapons and other arms of strategic importance, such as air defense systems; the cessation of the manufacture of precision weapons; and the closure of the**

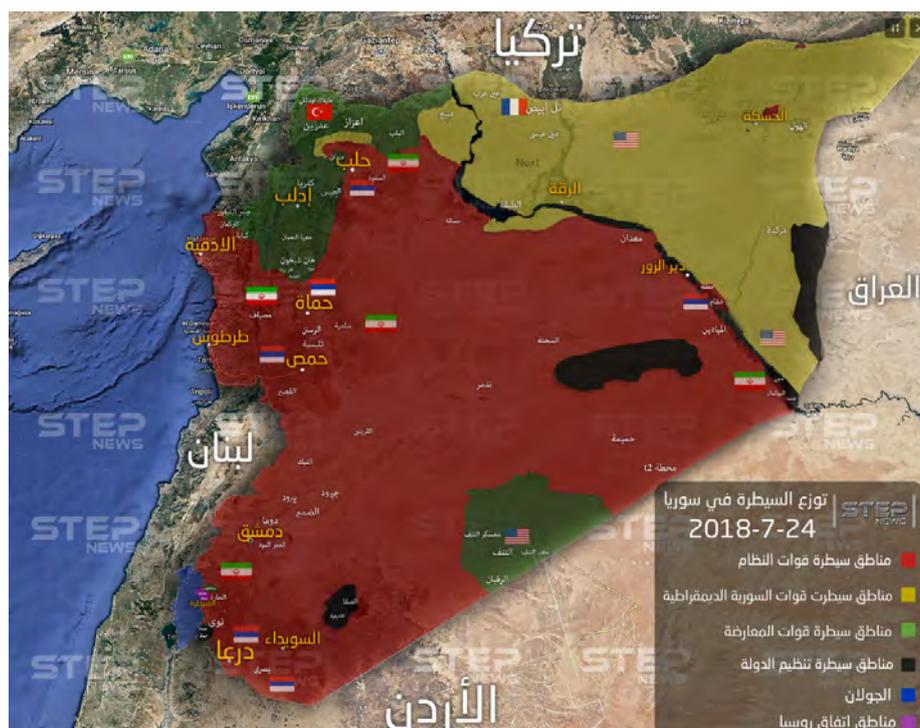
border crossings between **Syria and Lebanon** and between **Iraq and Syria**, through which arms are smuggled (Reuters, July 23, 2018; Ynet, July 24, 2018; RIA, July 24, 2018).

Statement by the Russian ambassador to Syria regarding the Idlib region

► In an interview to the Russian media, Russian Ambassador to Syria Alexander Kinshak spoke about the **de-escalation zone in Idlib**. According to Ambassador Kinshak, the situation in the area is highly complex and **it contains the highest concentration of militants and terrorist operatives**. Ambassador Kinshak stressed that UAVs were launched from the Idlib area in the direction of Hmeymim (Russian's main permanent base in Syria), posing a genuine threat to the Russian forces.¹ The Russian ambassador noted that the discussions on the Idlib issue were not simple because each of the countries involved in reconciliation in Syria (Russia, Turkey, and Iran) had its own national interests. He said that **the countries (involved) were making efforts to reach a common denominator on the Idlib issue** and expressed his confidence that they would manage to cooperate in this region as well (TASS News Agency, July 19, 2018).

¹ Since the retreat of most of the Russian forces from Syria (December 2017), the Hmeymim airbase and the Russian Navy logistics center in Tartus have been the target of attacks by the rebel organizations (in the Idlib area). In the past seven months, there have been eight attacks against the Russian base in Hmeymim. The two most recent attacks were carried out on July 21 and 22, 2018. In these attacks, Russia's air defense systems intercepted UAVs approaching the base. In one of the attacks (July 21), the UAVs were reportedly launched from the Latakia Province (RT, July 22, 2018).

Syria



Control areas in Syria after the Syrian army had taken over most of southern Syria (updated to July 24, 2018). ISIS's control areas (marked in black) are in the Yarmouk Basin, Al-Safa area northeast of Suwayda, the desert area between Albukamal and Palmyra, and along the Syrian-Iraqi border. The rebel organizations' control areas (marked in green) are in the Idlib area, along the Syrian-Turkish border, and in the Tanf area (Khotwa, July 2018)

The campaign in southern Syria

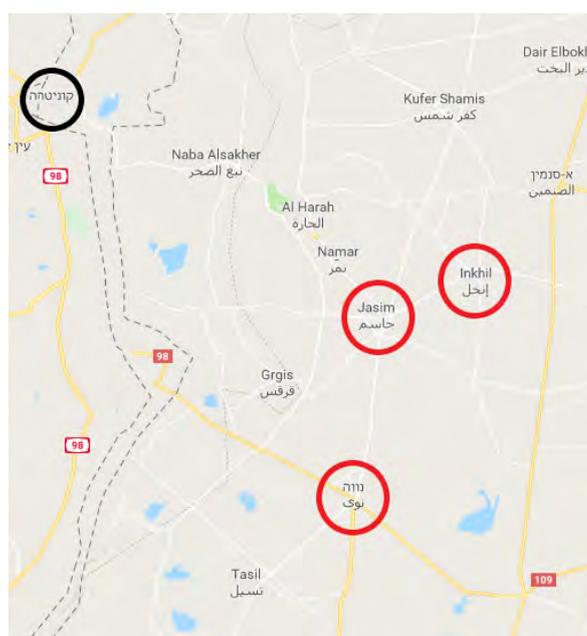
Overview

The Syrian army is rapidly completing the takeover of the Syrian Golan Heights, and the campaign to liberate southern Syria is nearing its end. The rebel forces, including the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, **have stopped conducting themselves as an organized military force**. Most of the towns under the rebel control **have surrendered without significant fighting, by surrender agreements brokered by Russian mediation**. Noteworthy surrender agreements were reached **in the cities of Nawa and Quneitra**, following which other villages joined as well. Operatives who didn't agree to join these agreements **were evacuated to the Idlib area**. The Syrian army is now completing its deployment in areas previously held by the rebel organizations, including **villages near the border with Israel**. The only pocket of resistance in the Syrian Golan Heights area **remains the Yarmouk Basin controlled by ISIS, currently under attack by the Syrian army, which uses artillery fire and airstrikes**.

The takeover of the Syrian Golan Heights

- **The Syrian army took over the city of Nawa through a surrender agreement which was reached after massive airstrikes and artillery attacks, causing many casualties.**

The negotiations to achieve a surrender agreement were conducted with Syrian and Russian representatives. As part of the agreement, heavy and medium weapons had to be surrendered, and the personal status of the rebel operatives was regulated (including the option of soldiers and officers returning to the Syrian army). According to the agreement, operatives who were not interested in accepting it will be able to be evacuated to Idlib (Khotwa, July 18, 2018). At the same time with the agreement with Nawa, **local surrender agreements were also signed with other villages north of Nawa, including Inkhil and Jassem.** Thus, the Syrian army has taken control of a vast area previously held by the rebels.



The city of Nawa and the villages of Jassem and Inkhil, where surrender agreements have been reached (marked in red) (Google Maps)

On July 20, 2018, a surrender agreement was signed in the Quneitra area, by Russian mediation. The agreement handed over additional vast areas to the Syrian army and terminated the organized military presence of the rebel organizations in the Syrian Golan Heights, and in southern Syria in general (excluding the Yarmouk Basin held by ISIS, which still continues fighting against the Syrian army). The agreement includes a **ceasefire in the Quneitra area and the return of the Syrian army to all positions which had been under its control before the civil war.** The agreement stipulated that those who refused to join it, mainly operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and Ahrar Al-Sham, **would be evacuated to northern Syria** (Muraselon, 20, 21, 2018).

► Following the agreement, and as part of the preparations for their evacuation to northern Syria, the operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham destroyed their headquarters and set fire to depots, vehicles and documents, in Quneitra and neighboring villages (Hezbollah's Military Information Office, July 21, 2018). Operatives who did not accept the terms of the surrender agreement were transferred from Quneitra and its environs to the village of Umm Batinah, about 7 km east of the city. From there, they were evacuated northward (Hezbollah's Central Military Information Office; Khotwa News Agency, July 21, 2018).

► **The evacuation of the operatives northward was implemented in several phases.** The first phase was carried out on July 20, 2018: Operatives and their families were evacuated from Umm Batinah northward, toward the Idlib Province (Al-Jazeera, July 20, 2018). The second phase was carried out on July 21, 2018 (Ibaa, news agency affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, July 21, 2018). SANA, the Syrian official news agency, reported that about 250 operatives of the rebel forces and their families were evacuated to northern Syria in the second phase (SANA, July 21, 2018). The Syrian media reported that one of the convoys was delayed for several hours by Shiite pro-Iranian militias, including Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haqq (Al-Durar Al-Shamiya; Suria.net, July 22, 2018).



Right: Buses evacuating from the Quneitra area rebels who did not agree to the surrender agreement. Syrian army soldiers are standing on the embankment (Hezbollah's Central Military Information Office, July 21, 2018). Left: The second phase: Buses setting out, evacuating operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham to Idlib (Ibaa, news agency affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, July 21, 2018)

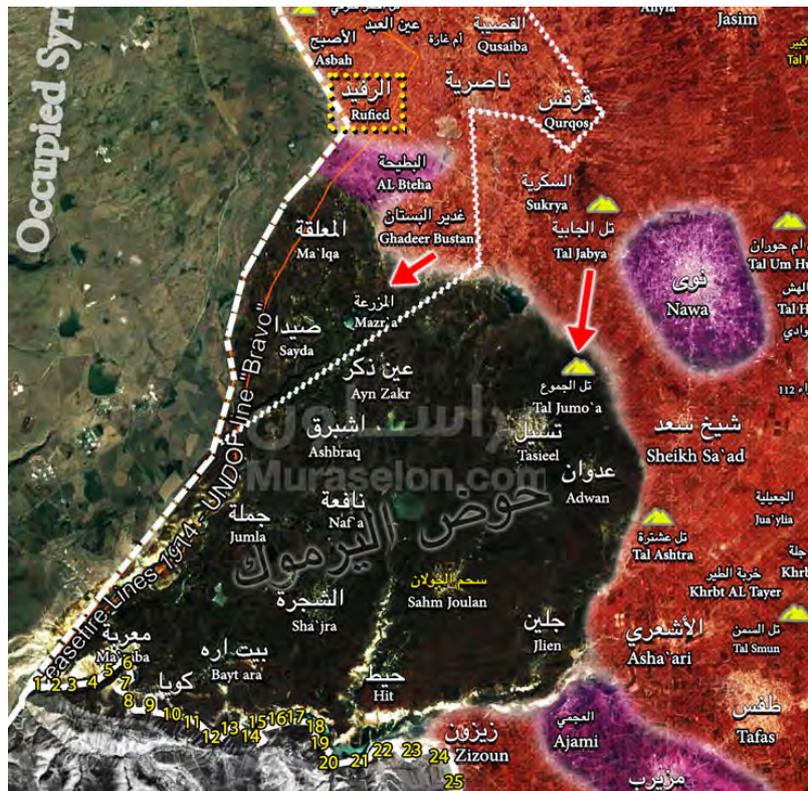
- After the evacuation of the rebel organizations from Quneitra and its environs, **the Syrian army began to enter the villages near the border with Israel.** On July 23, 2018, it was reported that **during the morning hours the Syrian army had entered the village of Al-Rafid**, about 20 km south of Quneitra, after the village had also joined the surrender agreement (Muraselon, July 23, 2018).



Syrian army soldiers and the forces supporting it entering the village of Al-Rafid (Al-Quneitra Al-Youm, July 23, 2018)

The Syrian army attacks the ISIS enclave in the Yarmouk Basin

On July 19, 2018, the Syrian army launched an attack against the ISIS enclave in the Yarmouk Basin. The attack takes place north and southeast of the enclave. At the same time, **the enclave is subjected to massive artillery fire and airstrikes.** In one of these airstrikes, the Israeli Air Force intercepted a Syrian fighter plane which entered Israeli airspace by mistake. The ISIS operatives, on their part, are making local efforts to curb the attack, **but the military balance of power is clearly against them.**



The contact line between the Syrian army and ISIS in the Yarmouk Basin (Muraselon, July 23, 2018)

- On July 19, 2018, the Syrian army attacked the villages of Jilen and Tell Ashtara, on the southeastern outskirts of the ISIS-controlled Yarmouk Basin. The ISIS operatives halted the attack (Ghurabaa, a website affiliated with ISIS, July 19, 2018). ISIS claimed that over 24 Syrian soldiers had been killed in the fighting in Jilen. The Syrian army also attacked the village of Tasil, northeast of the enclave. At the same time, the Syrian army fired artillery at targets in the enclave, including the villages of Jilen, Tasil and Sahn Al-Jawlan, in ISIS's control area. The villages sustained heavy damage (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 20, 2018). During the attack, the Syrian Air Force carried out airstrikes against ISIS targets (media outlets affiliated with the rebel organizations claimed that Russian aircraft were also involved in the attacks).



Syrian army airstrikes and artillery fire against Tell Jamou', northeast of the ISIS enclave (Khotwa, July 23, 2018)



Right: Clouds of dust billowing from the village of Tasil northeast of the ISIS enclave after an airstrike allegedly carried out by Russian aircraft (Tasil Al-Ikhbariya YouTube channel, July 19, 2018). Left: Ruins in the village of Tasil as a result of airstrikes allegedly carried out by Russian aircraft (Tasil Al-Ikhbariya YouTube channel, July 19, 2018)

► On July 24, 2018, the Israeli Air Force shot down a Syrian fighter plane which had flown 2 km into Israeli airspace. The plane fell in the ISIS-controlled enclave. According to media outlets affiliated with the Syrian regime, it was a **Syrian fighter plane which attacked ISIS targets in the area of the village of Saida, in the northwestern part of the enclave** (SANA, July 24, 2018).



Right: Fighter plane on fire, possibly the Syrian fighter plane which was downed by Israel (Ibaa, news agency affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, July 24, 2018). Left: ISIS artillery fire at the Syrian army and the forces supporting it in the Yarmouk Basin (from a video of the Amaq News Agency, Twitter, July 24, 2018)

► On July 24, 2018, it was reported that since the beginning of the attack in the Yarmouk Basin, on July 19, 2018, **at least 43 soldiers of the Syrian army and members of the militias supporting it were killed.** In addition, **at least 61 operatives of the ISIS-affiliated Khaled bin Al-Walid Army were killed.** Since the beginning of the campaign, there were over 2,085 sorties by Russian and Syrian planes. So far, the artillery fire included hundreds of rockets, shells from field guns and tanks, and mortar shells (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 24, 2018).

Evacuation of the residents of Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya in the Idlib area

An agreement recently achieved was implemented this week to evacuate residents of Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya, two Shiite villages north and northeast of Idlib, which had been besieged by the rebel organizations for over three years. The parties to the agreement are **the Syrian regime and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham,** but it seems that **Iran** (with which the villages were affiliated), **Russia and Turkey** were also involved.

► The agreement stipulates that the residents, about 7,000 people, will be evacuated to Aleppo or to any other destination of their choice. In return, **1,500 detainees held by the Syrian regime and Hezbollah will be released.** Among those released are also operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and other rebel organizations. The agreement also stipulates the return of abductees held by the rebel organizations **from the village of Ashtabraq (about 32 km southwest of Aleppo).** They were abducted by the Al-Nusra Front and other organizations on April 26, 2015, after a massacre of the village residents (SANA, July 19, 2018).



**The villages of Al-Fu'ah, Kafraya, and Ashtabraq (marked in red)
(Google Maps)**

- ▶ On July 19, 2018, the residents of Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya were evacuated with about 120 buses and dozens of ambulances of the Syrian Red Crescent. Most of the evacuees were transferred, in several phases, to temporary residence centers in Aleppo, and some of them to Latakia (SANA, July 19, 21, 2018). **Following the evacuation of the residents, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, the dominant rebel organization in the Idlib area, took over the two villages.**



Right: Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the village of Al-Fu'ah after its evacuation. Left: Weapons found by the operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the villages of Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya. One of the crates on the left has an inscription in Farsi, reading: 107mm rockets (Ibaa, a news agency affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, July 20, 2018)



Fighters of Shiite militias with their personal weapons, standing near the buses about to evacuate them from Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya. On the ground there are weapons collected in a search conducted by operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, since taking them along runs counter to the agreement reached (Ibaa, a news agency affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, July 19, 2018)

- ▶ The operatives released from Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya included **five Hezbollah fighters and a senior Hezbollah commander**. The six men were transferred to Damascus and from there to Lebanon. A welcome ceremony was held for them in Beirut's southern suburb, Hezbollah's stronghold. Hassan Nasrallah called them and praised them for their steadfastness (Al-Akhbar, July 19, 2018).

Eastern Syria

ISIS activity in the Albukamal area

► This week, too, **ISIS continued to carry out guerrilla operations against the Syrian army in the Albukamal area**. On July 16, 2018, ISIS fired mortar shells at Syrian army posts west of Albukamal (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 16, 2018). ISIS also allowed civilians living in three villages under its control to leave **their homes**. The villagers in question are residents of **Hajin** (about 25 km north of Albukamal), **Al-Sha'fah** (about 10 km north of Albukamal), and **Al-Sousa** (about 7 km northeast of Albukamal) (Khotwa, July 21, 2018).



Right: The villages of Hajin (1), Al-Sha'fah (2) and Sousa (3), whose residents were evacuated with ISIS's permission (Google Maps). Left: ISIS operative aiming a mortar at Syrian army positions in the village of Al-Khairat, west of Albukamal. The mortar was wrapped in a blanket for camouflage purposes (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 16, 2018)

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS activity

- On July 19, 2018, **six ISIS suicide bombers** attacked forces of the Petroleum Police and the Popular Mobilization at the K2 Pumping Station. The attack took place six kilometers west of Baiji. As a result of the explosions, several members of the Petroleum Police were wounded but there were no fatalities (Iraqi News Agency, July 19, 2018).
- In addition, ISIS's guerrilla operations against the Iraqi security forces continued, albeit at relatively low intensity this week. Noteworthy incidents: the killing of a Popular Mobilization operative by sniper fire northeast of Baqubah (July 20, 2018); the detonation of an IED against vehicles of the Popular Mobilization in the Salah al-Din Province (July 21,

2018); the killing of members of the Federal Police some 77 km north of Baghdad (July 22, 2018); and the detonation of IED's against vehicles of the Federal Police west of Kirkuk (July 22, 2018).

The activity of the Iraqi security forces

- ▶ According to Iraqi media reports, 15 ISIS operatives were killed in an airstrike carried out against a concentration of ISIS operatives **some 90 km northeast of Baqubah** (Al-Sumaria News, July 22, 2018). In addition, Operation Second Revenge of the Shahids continued in the **area of Samarra**, around 100 km north of Baghdad. During the operation, IEDs were destroyed and neutralized, hideouts of ISIS operatives were destroyed and a tunnel that had been used by ISIS was also destroyed (Twitter account affiliated with the Iraqi army, July 20, 2018).
- ▶ According to a report from July 23, 2018, a total of 23 ISIS operatives were detained by Iraqi police in the Al-Quds neighborhood on the east part of the city of Mosul. The detainees include the official responsible for collecting ISIS's charity funds in the areas south of Mosul, ISIS's real estate official, and an operative who served in the Islamic police when Mosul was under ISIS's control (Iraqi News Agency, July 23, 2018).

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

ISIS continues its terrorism and guerrilla activities against the security forces in northern Sinai

- ▶ On July 21, 2018, the Amaq News Agency reported that an Egyptian army soldier had been killed and a minesweeping vehicle had been hit by two IEDs planted by ISIS operatives near the Rafah border crossing (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 21, 2018). On July 21, 2018, the Amaq News Agency reported that an Egyptian army officer and a soldier had been killed by ISIS sniper fire in the Al-Ghaza area southwest of Sheikh Zuweid (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 21, 2018). **ISIS recently stepped up its attacks against the Egyptian security forces in the northern Sinai Peninsula**, despite the extensive security activity being carried out against it by the Egyptian security forces.

Jihadi activity in other countries

ISIS suicide bombing attack at an airport in Kabul

- ▶ On July 22, 2018, **an ISIS terrorist carried out a suicide bombing attack near the entrance gate to the airport in Kabul**. The attack took place a few minutes after the convoy of Afghanistan's vice president left the airport². The attack **killed at least 14 people and wounded 60 others** (Afghanistan Times, July 23, 2018).
- ▶ **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack**. According to the claim of responsibility, the attack was carried out by a terrorist codenamed **Akrama al-Khorasani**, who blew himself up with an explosive vest. According to the claim of responsibility, the attack was directed at the guests at a reception held in honor of the vice president of Afghanistan. According to the organization, the attack killed and wounded at least 115 members of the Afghan security forces and supporters of the vice president (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 22, 2018).

²The first deputy of the president of Afghanistan, **General Abd al-Rasheed Dostum**, returned from 14 months in exile in Turkey after his political rival Ahmad Ischi accused him of acts of rape and torture. He was apparently the target of the attack (Afghanistan Times, July 23, 2018).