



Spotlight on Global Jihad

July 26 – August 1, 2018

Main events of the week

- ▶ **On July 31, 2018, the Syrian army almost completed its takeover of the Yarmouk Basin from ISIS.** ISIS's attempts to delay its progress by carrying out suicide bombing attacks and a large-scale attack against the civilian population in the area of As-Suwayda failed. There are apparently **still ISIS operatives in the area of the village of Al-Qusayr**, near the Syrian-Jordanian border. **Around 100 ISIS operatives reportedly surrendered** towards the end of the fighting. A total of 25 were executed, and the rest were transferred to a Syrian army interrogation facility. This is the first surrender of its kind, and it may undermine the ethos of “victory or martyrdom” cultivated by ISIS.
- ▶ **At the same time, the Syrian Army completed its takeover of the area of Quneitra.** Syrian soldiers entered the old city of Quneitra and raised the Syrian flag (a “victory picture”). The Syrian Army also took control of the Quneitra border crossing. From there the army continued to extend its control northward, towards the village of Jubata al-Khashab in the buffer zone north of Quneitra. The rebels in the village surrendered without a fight and handed over their heavy and medium weapons as part of a local surrender agreement.
- ▶ In order to ease the pressure exerted on it in the Yarmouk Basin, **ISIS carried out a combined attack against the Druze civilian population in the city of As-Suwayda and several villages in its vicinity.** The attack was carried out by operatives **who came from the ISIS enclave northeast of As-Suwayda. Around 250 people were killed, most of them locals.** In addition, **ISIS took 36 women hostage** in order to use them as bargaining chips. **However, the attack did not prevent the Syrian army from continuing to advance, and the collapse of the Yarmouk Basin.**
- ▶ In light of the approaching end of the campaign for the takeover of southern Syria, **the rebel organizations are preparing for an attack by the Syrian army in the Idlib region** (the last significant stronghold of the Syrian rebel organizations). **The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) is carrying out intensive training**

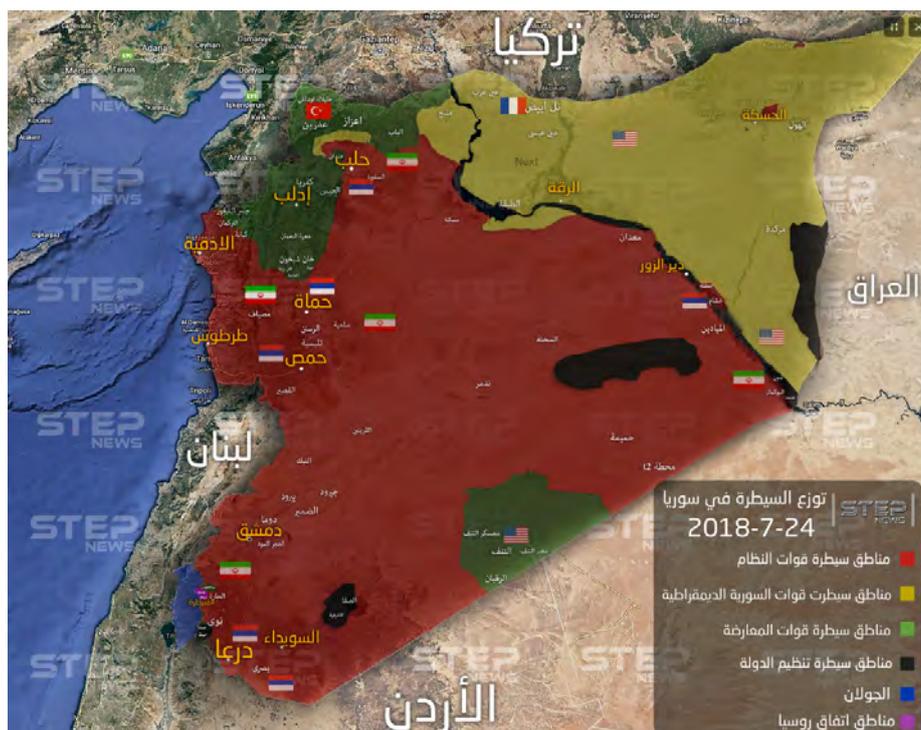
activity and is promoting cooperation between the rebel organizations. According to reports from this week, **the rebel organizations have established a new umbrella organization and set up a joint war room.** According to Syrian and Arab media reports, **Turkey has held talks with Russia and the rebel organizations in the Idlib region to try to promote a solution that would prevent a military campaign.**

Russian involvement in Syria

Statement by the Russian ambassador to Israel regarding the Iranian presence in Syria

► **Russian Ambassador to Israel Anatoly Viktorov** was interviewed by the Israeli media and addressed, inter alia, the issue of the presence of foreign forces in Syria. Viktorov announced that in the future, **only Syrian forces would be present in the buffer zone in southwestern Syria.** He added that **it was unrealistic to demand that the “foreign forces” be removed from Syrian territory.** According to him, **at this stage Russia and Syria are in need of assistance from Iran’s military advisers and the Iranian militias,** which, he said, were playing a very important role in the joint struggle against terrorist operatives in Syria. According to Viktorov, Iran maintains a presence in Syria at the request of the Syrian government, and this presence **is legitimate** under UN resolutions and the UN Charter. The Russian ambassador further clarified that **Russia’s influence on Iran’s decision-making in Syria is limited** and that Russia cannot force Iran to take action (Channel 10, July 30, 2018).

Syria



Control areas in Syria (updated to July 24, 2018). The Syrian army and forces supporting it (red) control most of Syria's territory. ISIS's control areas (marked in black) are in part of the Yarmouk Basin (which in the meantime has been almost completely taken over by the Syrian army), 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

The Syrian army enters Old Quneitra and neighboring villages

On July 27, 2018, the Syrian regime announced that **the Syrian army had completed its takeover of the (old) city of Quneitra**. According to the announcement, the army neutralized car bombs and mines left behind by the rebel organizations. A "victory picture" from Quneitra shows Syrian army soldiers and civilians waving Syrian flags (SANA, July 27, 2018). A day earlier, on July 26, 2018, the Syrian forces took over **the Quneitra crossing**. After they entered the villages, **the Syrian army removed embankments and opened the roads for traffic** (Syrian TV, July 26, 2018). From the Quneitra area, the Syrian army continued to **extend its control northward**, to the **village of Jubata al-Khashab** (about 11 km north of Quneitra), where a local surrender agreement was reached.



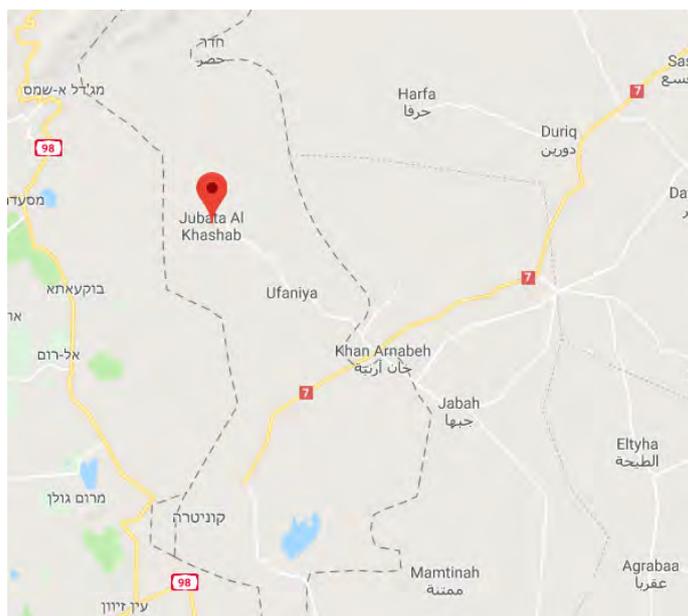
Right: Syrian flag and a picture of Bashar Assad on Tahrir Square in Old Quneitra (SANA, July 27, 2018). Left: Syrian flag and the Palestinian flag waved at the Quneitra crossing, defiance of sorts against Israel and an expression of Syrian support for the Palestinians (Al-Quneitra Al-Youm, July 27, 2018)



Syrian army soldiers deploying near the Syrian-Israeli border (Al-Quneitra Al-Youm, July 26, 2018)

Rebels surrender in Jubata Al-Khashab, north of Quneitra

► On July 28, 2018, Syrian official sources announced that **the rebel organizations in the village of Jubata Al-Khashab in the buffer zone**, about 11 km north of Quneitra, had handed over the medium and heavy weapons in their possession to the Syrian army. The weapons were handed over as part of **a surrender agreement** reached there (SANA, July 28, 2018). The Arab media reported that according to an agreement signed with the Syrian opposition (i.e., the rebel organizations), **the Russian Military Police would temporarily receive observation positions belonging to the UN (i.e., UNDOF) along the ceasefire line, until the return of UN soldiers to those positions** (Asharq Al-Awsat, July 24, 2018).



The village of Jubata Al-Khashab (Google Maps)

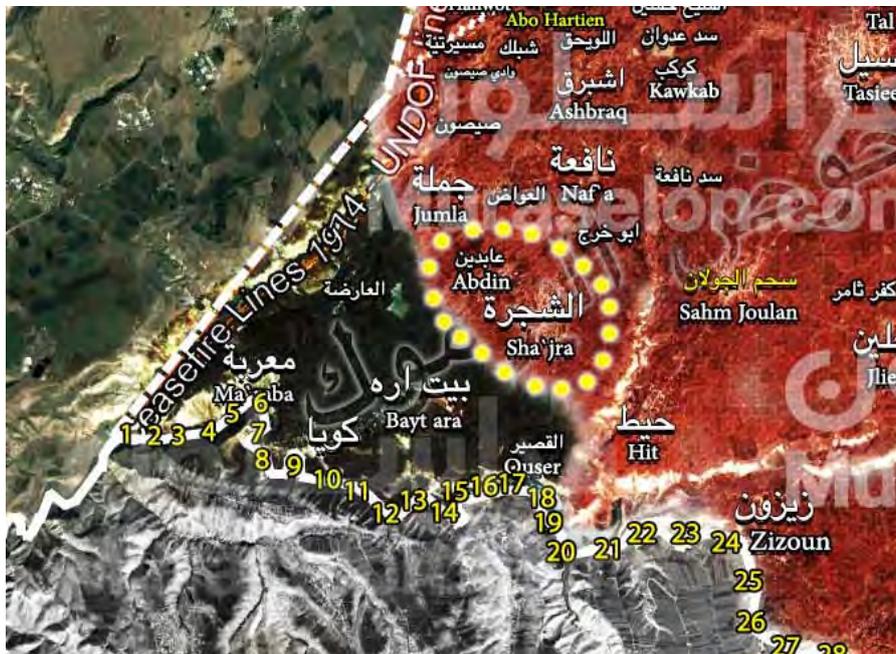


Right: Tank of the rebel forces handed over to the Syrian army in the village of Jubata Al-Khashab. Left: Multiple rocket launcher of the rebel forces, handed over to the Syrian army (SANA, July 28, 2018)

Campaign to take over the Yarmouk Basin from ISIS is nearing its end

The Syrian army's campaign to take over the Yarmouk Basin from ISIS is coming to a **close**. On July 30, 2018, **the village of Al-Shajara**, ISIS's stronghold in the area, was taken over. ISIS operatives carried out **a number of deadly suicide attacks** but could not prevent the continuation of the Syrian army advance. ISIS also carried out a combined, large-scale attack in As-Suwayda and its rural area **to detract the Syrian army's attention from the fighting in the Yarmouk Basin and ease the pressure exerted on the ISIS operatives in this area**. However, on the ground, the suicide attacks and the attack on the As-Suwayda area **had no real impact on the advance of the army and they did not prevent the collapse of the ISIS-controlled Yarmouk Basin**.

► On July 29, 2018, the Syrian army attacked the village of Al-Shajara, the main stronghold remaining in the hands of ISIS in the Yarmouk Basin. **On July 30, 2018, the village was taken over.** The Syrian army continued to attack and repelled the ISIS operatives to several villages near the tri-border area. **ISIS now reportedly controls only the area of the village of Qusayr, near the border with Jordan** (Syrian TV, July 31, 2018). Shortly before the fighting ended, **a hundred ISIS operatives surrendered to the Syrian army. Twenty-five of them were executed on the spot. The rest were taken to an investigation facility of the Syrian regime. This is the first time in ISIS's history that the organization operatives surrender.** One of ISIS's slogans is **“victory or martyrdom,”** and the organization has developed an ethos of relentless fighting until death (Enab Baladi, July 31, 2018); Syria TV, July 31, 2018). However, ISIS hasn't commented yet on the surrender of its operatives and the collapse of the Yarmouk Basin.



ISIS's control area remaining in the tri-border region after the takeover of the village of Al-Shajara (Muraselon, July 30, 2018). The region fell into the hands of the Syrian army. Only the village of Qusayr, near the border with Jordan, is still controlled by ISIS.



Right: Syrian soldiers in Al-Shajara. Left: Destruction in Al-Shajara in the wake of its takeover by the Syrian army (Hezbollah's Military Information Office, July 30, 2018)

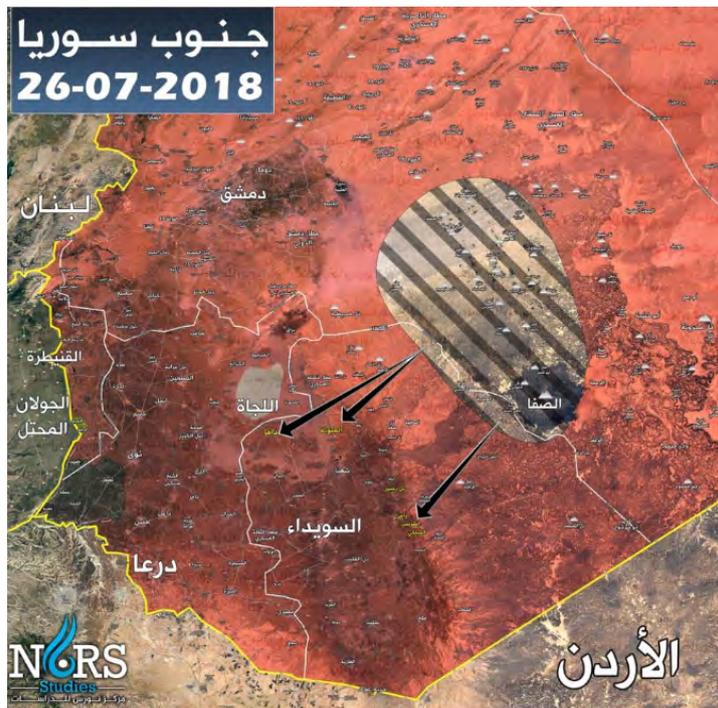
► The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights stated that since the beginning of the attack against the Yarmouk Basin, **at least 86 Syrian army soldiers and members of the militias supporting it were killed. In addition, over 268 ISIS operatives were killed** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 30, 2018). According to a local website, **in the Yarmouk Basin there were close to 650 ISIS operatives. About 250 of them were either killed or wounded** in the Syrian army attack. About 100 of them, including 57 wounded, tried to flee the area through the village of Hayt (southeastern part of the enclave) but were caught by local residents (website of Tajammu' Ahrar Hawran, August 1, 2018).

Combined ISIS attack in As-Suwayda and its rural area

Overview

On July 25, 2018, ISIS carried out a sudden combined attack in the city of As-Suwayda and villages to its north and east. In July 27, 2018, there were **255 killed, most of them civilians** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 27, 2018). **Most of the fatalities, if not all of them, were Druze living in the area.** In addition, **36 women were abducted**, some of them died or managed to escape. **The attackers came from the ISIS enclave northeast of As-Suwayda**, which has been reinforced by operatives evacuated from Damascus's southern neighborhoods.¹ In the ITIC's assessment, **the attack was intended to detract the Syrian army's attention from the attack taking place in the Yarmouk Basin and ease the pressure exerted on ISIS. This goal was not achieved and the Syrian military activity in the Yarmouk Basin was not hindered.**

¹ More than 800 operatives were reportedly transferred from southern Damascus to the ISIS enclave in the As-Suwayda Desert (Enab Baladi, July 25, 2018).



The attack against As-Suwayda and its rural area by operatives from the ISIS enclave in the Al-Safa area, northeast of As-Suwayda (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, July 26, 2018)

Main events

- On July 25, 2018, at 05:00-07:00, ISIS operatives attacked the city of As-Suwayda. The operatives entered the city **on motorcycles**. Some of them shot indiscriminately at civilians. **Four of them blew themselves up with explosive belts in four sites.**



Car on fire in the open market in the city of As-Suwayda, one of the sites attacked by ISIS (Khotwa, July 25, 2018)

- **At the same time, at around 04:30, ISIS operatives attacked eight towns and villages east and northeast of As-Suwayda (see map).** The attacking force split into several groups, each numbering 30-50 people. Each of the groups was equipped with small arms, machine guns, and explosive belts. Other ISIS squads, equipped with sniper guns and mortars, spread

on the outskirts of some villages to support the attacking groups. **The ISIS operatives were faced with fierce resistance by armed villagers and local militiamen.** The latter fought against the ISIS operatives, **causing them heavy casualties** (dozens of fatalities).



Eight villages east and northeast of As-Suwayda, attacked by ISIS (Google Maps)

ISIS claims responsibility

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the combined attack in the area of As-Suwayda.** According to its announcement, its operatives carried out a large-scale attack against concentrations of the Syrian army and forces supporting it **in several villages in the rural area of As-Suwayda.** In addition, according to ISIS, **its operatives attacked Syrian army troops on the Damascus-As-Suwayda highway and set up ambushes to the Syrian reinforcements dispatched to the area.** ISIS claimed that 140 Syrian army soldiers and members of the forces supporting it had been killed in the attacks (the ITIC believes this number to be exaggerated) and dozens wounded (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 26, 2018)

Number of casualties

► On July 27, 2018, it was reported that **in the attack in the As-Suwayda area there were 255 fatalities**, including **142 civilians, consisting of 38 women and children and 113 “armed men”** (most probably armed local residents carrying weapons who fought against ISIS and sustained heavy casualties). **In this attack, ISIS sustained 63 fatalities**, including

seven suicide bombers who blew themselves up in As-Suwayda and the rural area around it (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 27, 2018).



**Right: Coffins of some of the Druze who were killed in the ISIS attack (Enab Baladi, July 26, 2018).
Left: Body of one of the ISIS operatives who had carried out the attacks against the towns and villages in the As-Suwayda area (As-Suwayda 24, July 25, 2018)**

Clashes between ISIS operatives and armed residents in the rural area of As-Suwayda

► On the night of July 26-27, 2018, **clashes took place between ISIS operatives and militants who are residents of the rural area east of As-Suwayda, on the road leading to the village of Al-Shabki** (about 25 km east of As-Suwayda). ISIS fired artillery at the village (in the ITIC's assessment, from the enclave northeast of As-Suwayda). On the morning of July 27, 2018, fighter planes carried out several airstrikes near Tal Al-Shabki (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 27, 2018).

ISIS takes hostages

► During the attack, **ISIS captured 36 hostages to serve as bargaining chips vis-à-vis the Syrian government**. According to Rami Abdurrahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, these hostages are **36 women**. Four of them managed to escape, and two others were killed (Al-Arabiya, July 30, 2018). ISIS distributed photos of 14 women who were abducted from the village of Al-Shabki. It was reported that **ISIS was carrying out negotiations with the families of the abductees** (Suriyati, July 28, 2018). However, in practice, **ISIS's demands are addressed to the Syrian regime**.

► On July 29, 2018, a video was released. The video (22 seconds), which was shot a day earlier, shows a woman named **Su’ad Adeeb Abu Amar**, stating that she is being held hostage by operatives of the Islamic State. She demands from the Syrian president **to release all ISIS prisoners and stop the military operation in the Yarmouk Basin**. The woman adds, **“If these demands are not met, then they [i.e., ISIS operatives] will kill us”** (Al-Masdar News, July 29, 2018).



Right: Su’ad Adeeb Abu Amar who appeared on the video and conveyed ISIS’s demands (from the ISIS video, July 28, 2018; YouTube, July 29, 2018). Left: Photos of 14 abducted women, distributed by ISIS (vetogate.com, July 28, 2018)

The Idlib area

The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (formerly the Al-Nusra Front), the dominant rebel organization in the Idlib area, is preparing for the imminent campaign by the Syrian army against the rebel organizations in the Idlib area, upon the completion of the takeover of southern Syria. So far, the organization’s preparations consisted of intensive training activity and the establishment of a new umbrella framework and a joint operations room of the rebel organizations in the Idlib area.

► On July 27, 2018, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham announced that in view of Syrian President Bashar Assad’s threats, **it had renewed the activity of its training camps in advance of the forthcoming campaign against the Syrian army and the forces supporting it** (Ibaa, July 27, 2018).

► On July 29, 2018, it was reported that a new umbrella framework called **The New Al-Fateh Army** was established. This framework is expected to include the rebel organizations operating in the Idlib area, with the intention of addressing any possible attack by the Syrian army and the forces supporting it. **This umbrella framework reportedly consists of about 79,000 skilled fighters.** According to the report, the formal announcement on the establishment of the new framework will be issued in the coming days (the Syrian opposition website “Suriya kama nahlam,” July 29, 2018).

Turkish proposals for avoiding the Syrian army attack in Idlib

► The newspaper Al-Quds Al-Araby (July 27, 2018) reported, based on Russian and Syrian sources, that **Turkey had submitted to Russia proposals with the intention of reaching a solution that would ensure that no military campaign was launched in Idlib.** The Turkish plan consists of supplying electricity and water to the city of Idlib, providing essential services, opening the Aleppo-Damascus road, and removing roadblocks and embankments. In return, in the coming days, Turkey will hold meetings with all the organizations operating in Idlib, **trying to convince them to hand over their heavy weapons. Turkey will also guarantee that the Syrian regime does not attack these regions, and that they remain under Turkish administration in the days ahead.** According to another report, **commanders in the rebel organizations operating in the Idlib Province are supposed to meet in Ankara, based on a Turkish initiative, in order to draw a “roadmap” of the future of the province** (Enab Baladi, July 29, 2018).

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS activity

- ISIS’s main terrorist and guerrilla activity during the past week:
 - ◆ **On July 26, 2018,** ISIS announced that **20 Iraqi soldiers** had been killed as a result of the detonation of two IEDs against a bus in which they were traveling **west of Ramadi** (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 26, 2018).
 - ◆ According to Iraqi media reports from **July 29, 2018,** ISIS operatives **blew up a power plant southwest of the city of Kirkuk** (Iraqi News, July 29, 2018). The background of the explosion is a popular protest against the Iraqi government due to the absence of a regular supply of electricity, high unemployment, corruption, and lack of adequate services for the public.

- ◆ According to an announcement by ISIS from **July 27, 2018**, three members of the Iraqi Federal Police were killed and the vehicle they were traveling in was destroyed by an IED planted by ISIS operatives **northwest of Kirkuk** (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 27, 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 July 29, 2018**, the Iraqi media reported that nine ISIS operatives, including a suicide bomber, had been killed during an operation by Iraqi security forces **some 90 km north of Baqubah** (Al-Sumaria News, July 29, 2018).
- ◆ According to a report from **July 29, 2018**, four ISIS operatives were killed by Iraqi security forces in the Samarra District (some 98 km north of Baghdad). The Iraqi security forces identified **ISIS operatives wearing explosive belts**, fired at them and killed them. A fifth operative was captured west of Samarra (Al-Sumaria News, July 29, 2018).



The Iraqi security forces during security activity against ISIS
(Al-Sumaria News, July 29, 2018)

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

Armed Forces Spokesman praises achievements of Operation Sinai 2018

► In an interview, **Egyptian Armed Forces Spokesman Colonel Tamer al-Refai** listed the achievements of the Egyptian security forces' campaign against ISIS (Al-Ahram Al-Arabi, July 26, 2018):

- ◆ **The leadership of (ISIS's) Sinai Province in northern and central Sinai was harmed:** terrorist bases were destroyed and many wanted men and operatives were apprehended. The number of “terrorist operatives” decreased significantly and their ability to carry out terrorist attacks was impaired.
 - ◆ **The infrastructure of (ISIS's) Sinai Province was destroyed:** among other things, weapons depots, ammunition centers, and many vehicles and motorcycles were destroyed. In addition, large quantities of explosives and various weapons were confiscated.
 - ◆ **In total, more than 321 terrorist operatives were eliminated, and more than 1,000 IEDs, 548 vehicles and 881 motorcycles were destroyed.**
- ▶ The armed forces spokesman also noted that **civilian life had begun to return to normal.** According to him, the presidential elections and the matriculation exams in northern Sinai were carried out safely. The students returned to the University of Al-Arish. The security forces are now working together with state institutions and the private sector to carry out projects for the development of Sinai. The Egyptian media also reported that the security situation had improved and that life in Sinai had returned to normal (Al-Ahram Al-Masa'i, Al-Masry al-Youm). However, contrary to Egyptian media reports, **the situation in northern Sinai has not yet stabilized, and ISIS has actually stepped up its attacks against the Egyptian security forces in recent weeks.**²

The killing of a senior ISIS operative in northern Sinai

- ▶ An Egyptian security source reported the killing of **Abu Ja'far al-Maqdisi**,³ **ISIS's leader in Sheikh Zuweid** (Reuters, July 23, 2018). Previously, on July 22, 2018, ISIS published a photo of Al-Maqdisi with the inscription “The Caravan of the Shahids” (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 22, 2018).

² See the ITIC's Information Bulletins, Spotlight on Global Jihad, from the past few weeks.

³ Based on his codename, Al-Maqdisi, he may have been a Palestinian.



Abu Ja'far al-Maqdisi, ISIS's leader in Sheikh Zuweid, who was killed in Sinai (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 22, 2018)

Jihadi activity in other countries

Shooting attack in Toronto, Canada

- ▶ On the evening of July 22, 2018, a suspect opened fire on Danforth Street, an entertainment district in central Toronto. An 18-year-old girl and 10-year-old girl were killed. Another 13 people (adults and children) were wounded, some of them seriously. The suspect was killed in an exchange of fire with the security forces. It is not clear whether he was killed by the security forces or killed himself (Toronto Police website, July 23, 2018; CBC, a Canadian news website, July 26, 2018).
- ▶ The Ontario Special Investigations Department identified the shooter as **Faisal Hussain**, a 29-year-old Canadian citizen **of Pakistani descent** living in Toronto. According to an official statement issued by his family after the incident, he had mental problems (Ontario Special Investigations Department website; globalnews.ca, July 23, 2018). Two days after the attack, Western media reported that according to a “security source,” **Faisal Hussain had been in contact with ISIS-affiliated websites and may have also expressed support for the organization** (CBS, July 24, 2018).
- ▶ **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** The claim of responsibility stated that the attack in Toronto “was carried out by a soldier of the Islamic State who carried out the attack in response to calls to attack the citizens of the countries of the International Coalition” (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 25, 2018). **Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders** said that the authorities had no information verifying ISIS's claim of responsibility and that the investigation was continuing. **Canada's Minister of Public Safety Ralph Goodale** said that

Hussain was not known to the authorities as a potential national threat (The National Post, July 25, 2018).



**Perpetrator Faisal Hussain in a photo provided by his family
(The National Post, July 25, 2018)**

ISIS suicide bombing attack at a midwifery training center in Jalalabad, Afghanistan

► **On July 28, 2018, a combined suicide bombing attack was carried out** by two ISIS terrorists **at a midwifery training center near the Public Health Administration in Jalalabad**. Two security guards and a driver from the training center were killed. Eight people were wounded (Khaama Press, July 28, 2018).

► **ISIS's Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for the attack**. According to the claim of responsibility, the attack was carried out by two terrorists wearing explosive belts, who broke into the headquarters of the USAID aid organization in Jalalabad. The two exchanged fire with the security guards at the scene, which included light weapons fire, hand grenades and IEDs. One of the terrorists detonated his explosive belt and the other was killed in the exchange of fire, which lasted for six hours. According to ISIS, 33 members of the Afghan security forces and officials of the USAID aid organization were killed in the attack. In addition, 15 people were wounded (ISIS-affiliated website www.k1falh.ga, July 29, 2018).



The scene of the attack in Jalalabad (Al-Alam, July 28, 2018)

Attack on a police station in northeastern Libya

► On July 24, 2018, ISIS operatives reportedly attacked and set fire to the **police station in the village of Al-Aqila** (some 120 km south of Ajdabiya, in northeastern Libya). Two soldiers were killed and three were wounded in the attack. ISIS operatives searched the apartments in Al-Aqila and broke into several shops and a gas station in the area (Ayn Libya, July 24, 2018; Asharq Al-Awsat, July 25, 2018). According to a report from July 25, 2018, after an exchange of fire between the sides, **all twelve operatives of the ISIS squad that carried out the attack were killed by the Libyan security forces** (Akhbar Libya, July 24, 25, 2018).