



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## August 9-15, 2018



### Main events of the week

- ▶ The Syrian army campaign to take over the ISIS enclave northeast of As-Suwayda **is about to end. ISIS operatives have been repelled to the area of Al-Safa**, their main stronghold, and are now surrounded and cut off from supplies. The expected takeover of the enclave **marks the end of the Syrian army's campaign in the south of the country and will enable it to turn its attention to the Idlib area**, the last significant remaining outpost of the rebel organizations in Syria.
- ▶ This week, the Syrian army **continued to reinforce its troops in key areas around Idlib**. At the same time, leaflets were dropped over Idlib and in towns and villages in the area, calling on residents to join local reconciliation arrangements, with the aim of driving a wedge between them and the rebel organizations. The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, and possibly other organizations as well, recently launched a steadily increasing number of UAVs at the Russian airbase in Hmeymim (to date with no damage or losses). At the same time, **diplomatic talks continue, mainly between Russia and Turkey**, two key players in the Idlib region, in order to reach an agreed formula that will facilitate the Syrian army's takeover of the area.
- ▶ **In Jordan, an IED was detonated this week against a security patrol southeast of the city of As-Salt**. One member of the patrol was killed and six others were wounded. The terrorist squad that carried out the attack fled to a building in the nearby city of As-Salt. During the exchange of fire between the squad operatives and the Jordanian security forces, the building was blown up. Four other Jordanian security operatives were killed and about 20 security operatives and civilians were wounded. In the ITIC's assessment, the modus operandi of the attack matches that of ISIS, **but it has not claimed responsibility so far**, possibly due to considerations related to the security of additional operatives who are wanted by the Jordanian security forces. **This is the first terrorist attack in Jordan in around two years** (the previous attack was carried out by ISIS in the city of Al-Karak, in southern Jordan, on December 18, 2016).

► **In Afghanistan, fighting continues between ISIS and the Taliban.** Recently, ISIS appears to be in distress, manifested in the massive surrender of its operatives in the north of the country to the Afghan army (more than 150 operatives turned themselves in). In view of the above, **ISIS called on Muslims around the world to volunteer and go to Khorasan** (Afghanistan/Pakistan) if they are unable to go to Syria and Iraq. In the ITIC's assessment, **this call is an indication of the current set of priorities of ISIS's activity in its various provinces around the world: Syria and Iraq** continue to be the main focus of the organization's activity, followed by **Afghanistan** and then the other provinces. **This, in the ITIC's opinion, requires international security cooperation to improve the supervision of young Muslims traveling to Afghanistan.**

## Russian involvement in Syria

### Increasing the frequency of UAV attacks against the Hmeymim base

► The Russian Center for Reconciliation between the Warring Parties in Syria reported that **between August 9 and August 13, eleven UAVs were launched** from sites under the control of "illegal armed formations" in the Idlib region and in the northern part of the Latakia Province (where the Hmeymim base is located). It was reported that **in all cases, the Russian air defense systems located the aircraft at a considerable distance from the base and destroyed them.** There were no casualties and no damage was caused as a result of these attempted attacks (Russian Ministry of Defense Website, August 9-13, 2018).

Since the withdrawal of most of the Russian forces from Syria (November 2017), the Hmeymim airbase, one of the main permanent bases of the Russian forces in Syria, has constituted a **major target for attacks by the rebel organizations in the Idlib area**, mainly **the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** (formerly the Al-Nusra Front). Initially the attacks were carried out by firing rockets and mortar shells, **and subsequently by UAVs launched at Hmeymim.** In recent weeks, **the attacks on the Hmeymim base have increased in frequency**, apparently in view of the imminent Syrian attack in the Idlib area. **In July, at least 25 UAVs reportedly attempted to enter the Russian base's airspace** (TASS News Agency, August 9, 2018). Some of the aircraft carried explosives and others were on reconnaissance missions. According to reports, in most of the attacks the aircraft were intercepted at a considerable distance from the Russian base, with no casualties or damage.

## The Russian Foreign Minister's remarks on the situation in Idlib during his visit to Ankara

► On August 13-14, 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Ankara and met with his Turkish counterpart. According to what Lavrov said at a press conference held by the two foreign ministers, **the situation in the de-escalation zone in Idlib is more complex than in other areas due to the dominance of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, whose operatives in the region are estimated at tens of thousands.** He stressed that the key point is **the ongoing difficulty in separating the “moderate” rebel organizations from the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham operatives,** who are not displaying willingness to negotiate. Lavrov noted that in the past, the situation in the Idlib region had stabilized following the deployment of Turkish outposts in the area, but recently, “violent actions” have been carried out there once again, **mainly by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham.** These actions include firing at positions of the Syrian forces **and launching UAVs at the Russian base in Hmeymim on a daily basis.** According to Lavrov, **the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham should constitute a legitimate target for all forces fighting against the terrorist organizations and extremist organizations in Syria** (Russian Foreign Ministry website, August 14, 2018).

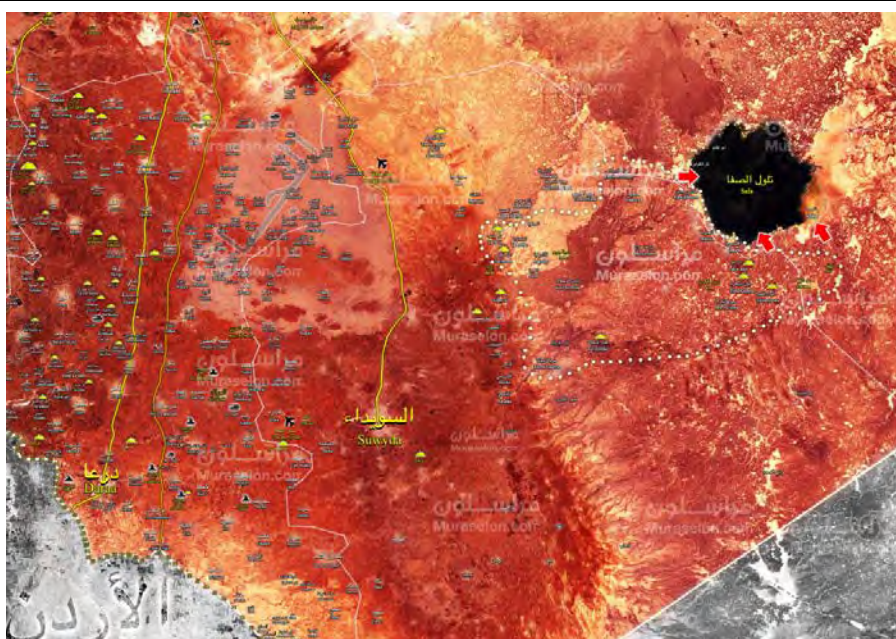


Press conference held by the Russian foreign minister (left) and his Turkish counterpart (Russian Foreign Ministry website, August 14, 2018)

## Syria

### Syrian army's attack against the ISIS enclave in As-Suwayda

On August 5, 2018, the Syrian army launched a ground attack against the ISIS enclave in the desert area northeast of As-Suwayda. The attack took place southeast, southwest, and west of the enclave. **After fighting which lasted for about a week, the Syrian army took over most of the territory of the enclave.** Now it is besieging the **Al-Safa area**, a volcanic, mountainous area which is considered ISIS's main stronghold in the region (suwayda24.com, August 11, 2018). The Syrian army's ground attack is carried out with the support of airstrikes and artillery fire. According to reports, **many ISIS operatives are now being besieged in the Al-Safa area, encircled on all sides and cut off from supplies.**



**The Al-Safa area, where ISIS operatives are being besieged (marked in black). ISIS still controls this area (Muraselon, August 12, 2018)**

► For three days, the Syrian forces advanced to a distance of 30 km into the eastern As-Suwayda Desert. The Syrian troops searched the areas which they had taken over. At the same time, fighter plane airstrikes and artillery fire at ISIS targets continued (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 9, 2018). On August 10, 2018, it was reported that the Syrian forces had reached the **As-Safa area** after fierce clashes with ISIS (Al-Masdar News, August 10, 2018). ISIS attacked with small squads the Syrian army troops and the forces supporting it. Those ISIS squads were partly hit by the army while trying to retreat to the Al-Safa area (suwayda24.com, August 11, 2018).



**Right: Syrian army tank during activity against ISIS (SANA, August 8, 2018). Left: Syrian army column of forces moving in the As-Suwayda Desert (from a video of the Syrian Army's Information Office) (Twitter account of Hezbollah's Central Military Information Office, August 8, 2018)**



**A force of the Syrian army in the western part of the As-Safa area (suwayda24.com, August 11, 2018)**



**Right: Motorized Syrian army force in the As-Suwayda Desert (suwayda24.com, August 11, 2018). Left: A force of the Syrian army in the As-Suwayda Desert (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, August 12, 2018)**

► **On August 11, 2018**, the Syrian army and the Syrian forces supporting it started **to besiege the Al-Safa area**. **On August 12, 2018**, the Syrian army announced that after fierce fighting, during which many ISIS operatives were killed, **the army had completed its takeover of the As-Suwayda Province**, except for the area of Al-Safa, **which was besieged from all directions and cut off from supplies**. **Other ISIS operatives fled the area towards Jordan and the area of the Al-Tanf crossing, where a manhunt was carried out after them** (SANA,

August 12, 2018; Sama TV, August 12, 2018; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 13, 2018).



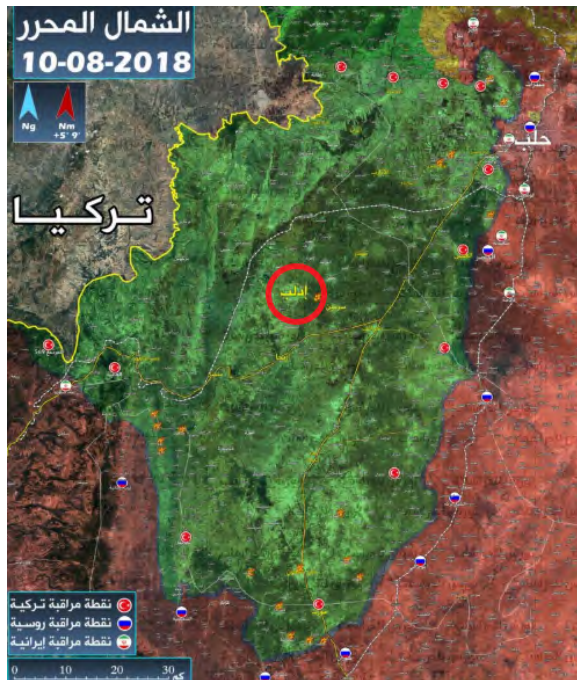
**Right: Syrian army armor forces on the outskirts of the Al-Safa area. Left: ISIS position on the outskirts of Al-Safa, seized by the Syrian army and the forces supporting it (Sama TV, August 12, 2018)**

## Negotiations continue to release the Druze abducted by ISIS

► **Informal negotiations continue between ISIS and the Syrian regime and representatives of the As-Suwayda Province, to bring about the release of the 30 Druze abductees held by ISIS.** The Syrian regime is trying to have them released in return for ISIS operatives and detainees affiliated with ISIS which are being held in Syrian prisons and detention facilities (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 9, 2018). Another option raised in the negotiations was allowing ISIS operatives besieged northeast of As-Suwayda to be evacuated to the Homs Desert in return for the release of the hostages (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 9, 2018).

## The Idlib area

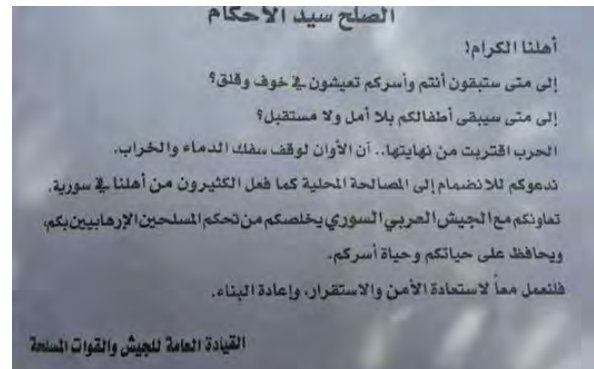
**This week, the Syrian army continued to reinforce its troops in the Hama region and in other areas surrounding the rebels' control area in the Idlib Province.** The area north of Hama was reinforced with the "Tiger Forces" and with additional Syrian units (Al-Jazeera, August 11, 2018; Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, August 10, 2018). This is carried out as part of the Syrian army preparation in advance of a campaign to take over the region (Nabras Al-Ard, a website supporting the Syrian regime; YouTube, August 5, 2018). At the same time, **diplomatic negotiations** mainly between **Russia and Turkey** continue with the aim of making it easier for the Syrian forces to take over the Idlib area and preventing unnecessary losses (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, August 10, 2018).



The control areas in the Idlib region (updated to August 10, 2018): The Syrian army and the forces supporting it (in red); The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the rebel forces (in green); Russian and Turkish supervision posts (indicated by flags). The city of Idlib is marked with a red circle (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, August 10, 2018)

## Leaflets dropped over the Idlib area calling on residents to join surrender agreements

► On August 9, 2018, Syrian army aircraft dropped leaflets over the city of Idlib and other towns and villages in the area controlled by the rebels. The leaflets call on residents to join local reconciliation agreements (i.e., surrender arrangements) as soon as possible to stop the bloodshed and have security and stability reinstated by the Syrian regime (Muraselon, August 9, 2018; Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, August 8, 2018).



Left and right: Leaflets dropped by Syrian aircraft over the city of Idlib. The leaflet on the left uses photographs to compare the situation of the residents before the “beginning of terror” (i.e., the uprising against the Assad regime) and the situation after the regime’s victory over the rebel organizations (Muraselon, August 9, 2018)

## Eastern Syria

### SDF forces prepare for the attack on the ISIS-controlled Hajin

► On August 10, 2018, reinforcements of the SDF forces arrived from the area south of Al-Hasakah **to the area of the ISIS-controlled city of Hajin**, about 25 km north of Albukamal (Euphrates Post, August 10, 2018). **The SDF forces are preparing to attack the city**, thus completing the mopping up of the desert area between the Euphrates River and Iraqi-Syrian border.



ISIS-controlled Hajin (Google Maps)

## Main developments in Iraq

### ISIS activity

- Following are the main activities carried out by ISIS during this week:
- ◆ A **shooting attack** was carried out in a football stadium **about 7 km north of Shirqat** (Al-Sumaria News, August 10, 2018). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. According to ISIS's announcement, seven people were killed and wounded in the attack (Amaq, August 11, 2018).
  - ◆ ISIS claimed responsibility for **the detonation of an IED** against a military vehicle of the Tribal Mobilization in the **area of Shirqat**, about 90 km south of Mosul, wounding three Tribal Mobilization fighters (Amaq, August 1, 2018).
  - ◆ ISIS claimed responsibility for destroying an Iraqi army vehicle **by an IED in the Al-Anbar Province**. Four soldiers were killed in the attack (Amaq, August 12, 2018).



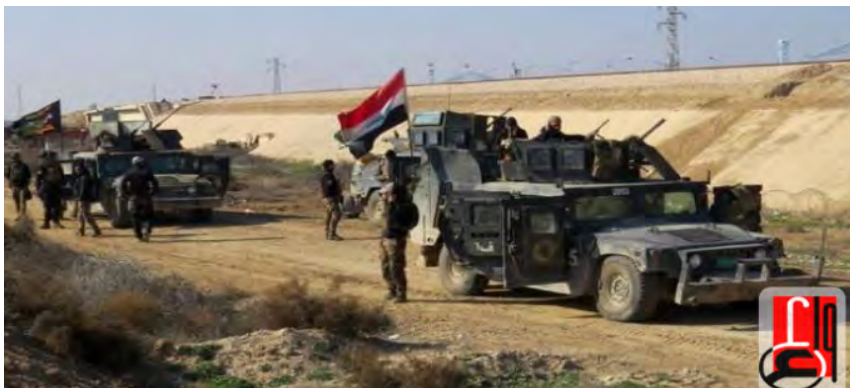
- ◆ ISIS announced that its operatives had killed an intelligence operative **north of Baghdad by an IED planted near his vehicle** (Amaq, August 12, 2018).
- ◆ ISIS reported that its operatives had captured several Tribal Mobilization fighters **near the city of Baiji** ([www.k1falh.ga](http://www.k1falh.ga) ISIS-affiliated website, August 13, 2018).
- ◆ ISIS announced that its operatives had detained several Tribal Mobilization fighters about 90 km south of Mosul. ISIS released photos showing its operatives executing several detainees ([www.k1falh.ga](http://www.k1falh.ga) ISIS-affiliated website, August 14, 2018).



**Execution of the Tribal Mobilization fighters by ISIS operatives**  
([www.k1falh.ga](http://www.k1falh.ga) ISIS-affiliated website, August 14, 2018)

## The activity of the Iraqi security forces

- ▶ Following are the main activities carried out this week by the Iraqi security forces:
  - ◆ An Iraqi Federal Police force killed two ISIS operatives **southwest of Kirkuk**. One of the operatives killed **was wearing an explosive belt**. The force uncovered a network of tunnels in the area, as well as four IEDs (Al-Sumaria News, August 9, 2018).
  - ◆ An Iraqi Border Police force killed five ISIS operatives and detained two others while thwarting an infiltration attempt **north of the Al-Qaim District in Iraq**, near the Iraqi-Syrian border (near the Albukamal area) (Iraqi News Agency, August 10, 2018).



**The Iraqi troops during security activity  
(Iraqi News Agency, August 10, 2018)**

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

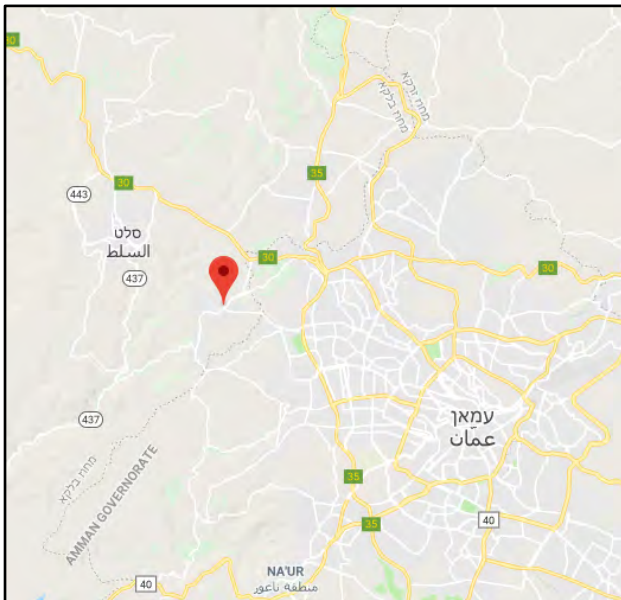
### ISIS operatives killed in the Al-Arish area

► According to the Egyptian media, intelligence obtained by the Egyptian National Security pointed to the area of Al-Malaha, west of Al-Arish. There were 12 “terrorist operatives” in the area, who were killed by the Egyptian security forces in an exchange of fire. Four assault rifles, a shotgun, ammunition and two IEDs ready for use were found in the possession of the operatives killed (Al-Masry Al-Youm, August 12, 2018).

## Jihadi activity in other countries

### An IED was detonated against a patrol of Jordanian security personnel in the area of the city As-Salt (northwest of Amman)

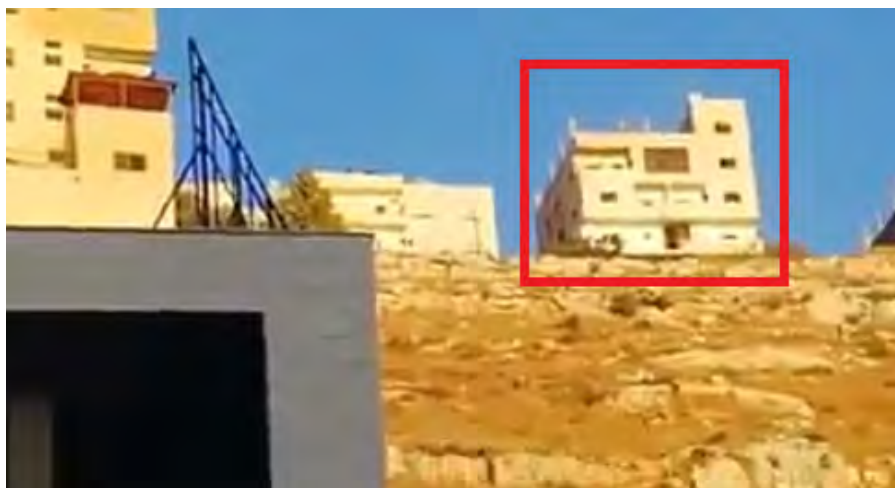
► On August 10, 2018, **an IED was detonated against a security patrol in the area of Fuheis** (southeast of the city of As-Salt). The patrol included six operatives of the Gendarmerie and the Jordanian General Security Service. **One member of the security patrol was killed and six others were wounded** (Petra News Agency, August 11, 2018).



**Right: Patrol vehicle damaged in the IED explosion (Al-Ghad Channel, August 11, 2018).**

**Left: The Fuheis area, where the IED exploded (Google Maps)**

► The terrorist squad involved in the attack **fled to the city of As-Salt** (about 6 km northwest of the scene of the attack in Fuheis). The squad operatives positioned themselves inside the building, booby-trapped it and exchanged fire with the Jordanian security forces. At the end of the incident, the terrorists blew up the building, causing its collapse. In the exchange of fire, **four security operatives were killed and 20 people were wounded**, about half of them civilians. **Three “terrorist operatives” were killed while breaking into the building and five “terrorist operatives” were detained when they attempted to flee the building after its collapse.**



**The building in which the terrorist operatives barricaded themselves in the city of As-Salt**



**The building after its collapse (Twitter, August 11, 2018)**

► **The Jordanian interior minister** said at a press conference **that there were additional intentions to attack security targets and public gatherings**. He said that the terrorists who carried out the attack were ISIS supporters with a “*takfir*” (i.e., Salafist Jihadi) ideology (from the press conference in Amman, August 13, 2018). According to a report on the France 24 channel, **17 ISIS operatives were detained by Jordanian intelligence on August 8, 2018. The operatives had planned to carry out attacks against security, military, commercial and media centers in November 2017. Some of the attacks were supposed to be carried out simultaneously, in order to create panic and chaos.** Weapons and equipment intended for use in the planned attacks were found in the network operatives’ possession. In order to finance the attacks, the network planned to rob banks and steal cars (France 24, January 8, 2018).

According to Jordanian security officials and experts on Islamic organizations in Jordan, ISIS was behind the attack. ISIS, however, **has not yet claimed responsibility for the attack**. In the ITIC’s assessment, **the modus operandi of the attack matches ISIS’s conduct**. It is possible that ISIS’s failure to claim responsibility for the attack stems from its **unwillingness to make things harder for other ISIS operatives in Jordan**, who are now being sought by the Jordanian security forces. If this assessment is correct, **ISIS may issue a claim of responsibility at a later date**.

► This terrorist incident took place in Jordan **after nearly two years of security calm**. On December 18, 2016, the Jordanian media reported that **“terrorist operatives” had killed 10 people and wounded 21 others in the city of Al-Karak, in the south of the country. The dead included four operatives of the General Security Service, three of the Gendarmerie,**

**two civilians and a Canadian tourist. After an exchange of fire with the terrorists, the Jordanian security forces killed four terrorists who had barricaded themselves in Al-Karak Castle.** Large quantities of weapons were found in their possession, including explosive belts and Kalashnikov assault rifles (Al-Ghad, December 18-19, 2016; Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 20, 2016). On December 20, 2016, **ISIS issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack in Al-Karak.**

### Fighting between ISIS and the Taliban near the Afghan-Pakistani border

► On August 11, 2018, ISIS's Amaq News Agency announced that the organization's operatives in Afghanistan had **exchanged fire with operatives of the Taliban in the Kunar and Nangarhar provinces near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.** According to ISIS's announcement, **64 Taliban operatives were killed and wounded** (Amaq News Agency, August 11, 2018).

## The battle for hearts and minds

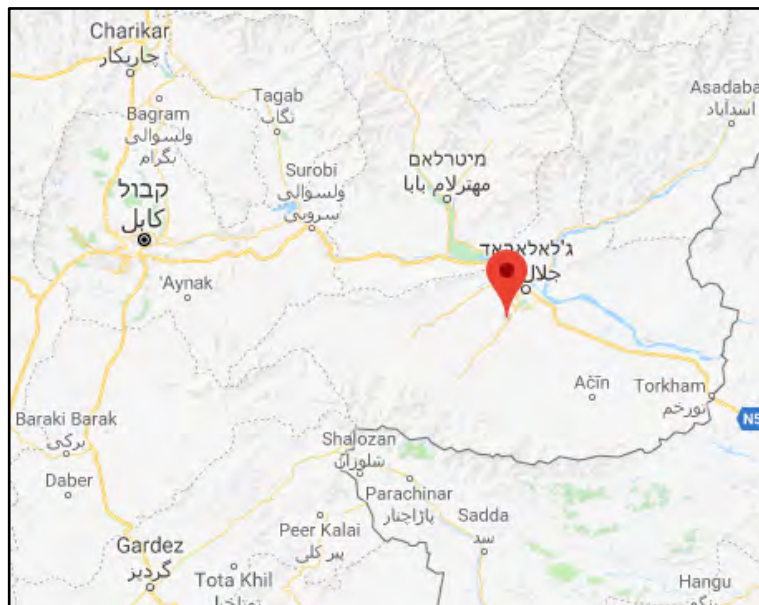
### Video issued by ISIS's Khorasan Province (Afghanistan/Pakistan) calls upon Muslims around the world to join its ranks



**The title of the video, “Respond to Call 2” of ISIS’s Khorasan Province (Al-Ghurabaa ISIS-affiliated website, August 12, 2018)**

► On August 12, 2018, ISIS's Khorasan Province (Afghanistan/Pakistan) issued a 17-minute video called “Respond to Call 2”. The video **calls on all Muslims to “respond to Allah’s call” and join jihad.** The film criticizes many Muslims who are preoccupied with commerce and world affairs, and “leave their brothers the jihad fighters to deal alone with the infidels, who attack them from all corners of the world.” The video also calls on its audience to help the jihad fighters with money and any other means (Al-Ghurabaa ISIS-affiliated website, August 12, 2018).

The video features an operative codenamed Mansur al-Khorasani, a leg amputee who **calls upon all Muslims in the world to immigrate to Syria and Iraq and help the jihad fighters there**. He adds that **those unable to reach Syria and Iraq should immigrate to the Khorasan Province because the route to there is open**. The video shows other ISIS operatives, including some who are blind and some who limp, who also call on Muslims to immigrate to Khorasan. This video includes photos of the fighting carried out by ISIS operatives against Taliban operatives in the Jalalabad area of the Nangarhar district in eastern Afghanistan.



**The area of Jalalabad, a scene of fighting between ISIS and the Taliban near the Afghan-Pakistani border. Photos from the fighting in this area were included in the video (Google Maps)**

It is possible that the call to come to the aid of the ISIS operatives in Afghanistan reflects **an urgent need to reinforce ISIS's Khorasan Province, due to the intensive terrorist attacks, and the fighting they are waging against the Taliban**. The priorities of ISIS and the various provinces reflected in the video are also noteworthy: **the top priority is Syria and Iraq** (even after the collapse of the Islamic State), and the **second priority is the Khorasan Province**, to which ISIS attaches **greater importance than the other provinces** (Al-Ghurabaa ISIS-affiliated website, August 12, 2018).

Below is a selection of photos from the video



Right: A call on all Muslims to respond to Allah’s call and join the jihad. Left: “No one has an excuse to hide in his house like maidens” (Al-Ghurabaa ISIS-affiliated website, August 12, 2018)



Right: Operative codenamed Mansur al-Khorasani, a leg amputee, calling on Muslims who are unable to immigrate to Syria or Iraq to immigrate to the Khorasan Province and help jihad fighters (Al-Ghurabaa ISIS-affiliated website, August 12, 2018).



Right: ISIS operative and the inscription: “We must work shoulder to shoulder with our Mujahidin brothers.” Left: ISIS activity in mountainous terrain (Al-Ghurabaa ISIS-affiliated website, August 12, 2018)