



Spotlight on Global Jihad

September 17 – October 3, 2018



Main events of the week

- ▶ On September 17, 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met in Sochi, Russia. Their talks centered on **the Syrian regime's planned attack on the rebel organizations in the Idlib area**, the preparations for which were nearing completion. According to the agreement that was reached, **a demilitarized zone 15-20 km wide will be established in the Idlib area, separating the areas controlled by the Syrian army and the areas controlled by the rebel organizations.** According to the agreement, **the demilitarized zone will be established by October 15, 2018**, and the heavy weapons of the rebel organizations will be removed by October 10.
- ▶ The Sochi agreement marks a breakthrough in the contacts between Russia, Turkey, and Iran to resolve the situation in Idlib, after disputes developed between them at the Tehran summit. The one to gain the most from the agreement is apparently Turkey, which managed to prevent the planned attack on the Idlib area. However, in the ITIC's assessment, this gain **is temporary, since the possibility of the attack still remains**, and spokesmen for the Syrian regime have made this very clear. On the ground, however, **there is no significant progress towards the implementation of the agreement.** The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the Turkish-sponsored rebel organizations have made it clear that they do not intend to remove their forces and weapons from the demilitarized zone and to permit the entry of Russian and Turkish forces.
- ▶ On September 22, 2018, five armed operatives in Ahwaz, southern Iran, attacked a parade by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commemorating the 38th anniversary of the Iran-Iraq War. At least 25 people were killed and around 60 others were wounded, most of them members of the Revolutionary Guards. **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** As a result, Iran responded by **firing missiles and carrying out drone attacks against ISIS targets in the Albukamal area.**

► In addition to the **desire for revenge**, the Iranian attack was intended to **convey a deterrent message to the US administration and its allies in the region**. The Iranian leadership sought to express its readiness to respond to any possible attack that is liable to compromise its national security and to use its advanced missile capabilities in the event of a future military confrontation. Last month, Iran took the unusual step of launching ballistic missiles at the headquarters of the Democratic Kurdish Party of Iran in northern Iraq. Then, too, senior Iranian officials stressed that the missiles were intended to convey a message to Iran's enemies not to try to realize their intentions vis-à-vis Iran.

The Russian-Turkish agreement on Idlib

The Sochi agreement between Russia and Turkey

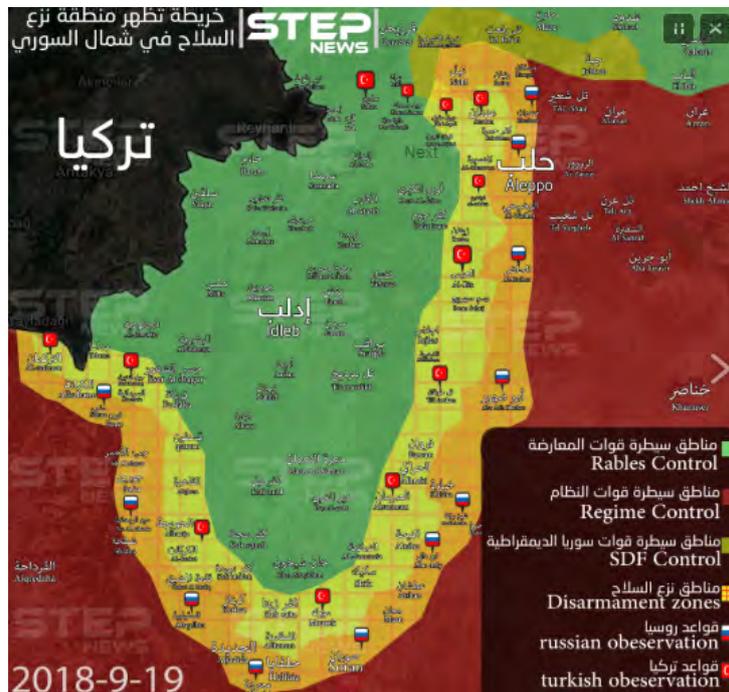
► On September 17, 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met in the city of Sochi, Russia.¹ One of the focal points of the conversation was regulating the situation in the de-escalation zone in Idlib. At a press conference following the meeting, Russian President Putin said that Russia's main concern today was the threat posed by the armed forces concentrated in the Idlib region on the Aleppo Province and on Russian military installations in Syria (Tartus and Hmeymim).

► Putin said that both sides had decided to **establish a demilitarized zone 15-20 km wide along the line of contact between the forces of the Syrian regime and the opposition forces, which would be carried out by October 15, 2018**. This would be accompanied by **the removal of the "extremist armed forces"** (including those belonging to the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham) **from the demilitarized zone** (which will be established, as implied by the decision, in an area under the control of the rebel organizations). In addition, at the suggestion of the Turkish President, **by October 10, 2018, the heavy weapons, tanks, rocket launchers, rifles and mortar shells of all opposition groups will be removed from the demilitarized zone**. Supervision of the demilitarized zone will be carried out by Turkish mobile patrol groups and Russian Military Police units. Until that time, Turkey will reinforce its observation posts in the area.

¹ This meeting, like other recent meetings, was held following the political summit in Tehran (September 7, 2018) between Russia, Turkey and Iran (the countries in charge of maintaining the ceasefire in Syria). At a meeting in Tehran, differences of opinion broke out between the three countries.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at a press conference following their meeting in Sochi (Russian President's website, September 17, 2018)



The demilitarized zone and the various control areas: the control area of the rebel organizations, including the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (green); the control area of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it (red); the demilitarized zone agreed between Russia and Turkey (yellow and orange); Turkish and Russian supervision posts (marked by the flag of the country) (Khotwa, September 19, 2018)

- In the ITIC's assessment, the Russian-Turkish agreement prevented the mounting of the Assad regime's planned attack on the Idlib region at this stage. However, according to the assessment, this is only a temporary timeout, since the Syrian regime strives to impose its authority over all the Idlib area and to uproot the rebel organizations, primarily the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, the dominant jihadi organization in the region.

Evidence of this can be found in the statement by Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Miqdad, who announced after the signing of the Russian-Turkish agreement that **Syrian soldiers would win in Idlib and that they would come to the region by war or by peaceful means**. In addition, he noted that **Syrian sovereignty would be imposed on all of Syria** (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, September 25, 2018). According to a “senior source” in the Syrian Foreign Ministry, the agreement **is only temporary** and is part of the agreements related to the reduced-tension areas within the framework of the Astana Process (Syrian News Agency, September 18, 2018).

► **Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem** gave an interview on the margins of the UN General Assembly meeting in which he referred to the Russian-Turkish agreement. He said that the “terrorist operatives” who had come to Idlib did so **via Turkey** and **the Turks knew where they came from**. Therefore, according to him, **they must leave Syria and return to their countries of origin via Turkey**. As for the Syrian “terrorist operatives,” Muallem noted that **they could be granted a pardon**, participate in the local reconciliation process, hand over their weapons, and return to where they came from. He noted that the Syrian government preferred for the agreement to be implemented **but stressed that it had the right to also use “other means”** (RT Arabic, September 30, 2018).

Implementation of the agreement

The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham rejected the agreement. Other rebel organizations are also highly suspicious of the agreement itself and Russia’s role in formulating it. It appears that the rebels have not yet removed their forces and heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone. The Syrian army and the forces supporting it are maintaining a high level of alert in the areas bordering on the Idlib region, and **so far there have been no indications of the dilution of the Syrian forces** which were concentrated in the area in preparation for the anticipated attack on Idlib. No deployment of forces or patrols of the Russian Military Police or Turkish troops in the buffer zone has been identified to date, although this is scheduled to take place by October 15, 2018.

► Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced several days after the agreement that **the extremist rebel organizations in Idlib had begun to leave the demilitarized zone and that Russian Military Police and the Turkish gendarmerie forces would be deployed there in their place** (Muraselon, September 26, 2018). However, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), most of the **rebel organizations refuse to assent to**

Turkey's demand to remove the armored vehicles and heavy weapons from their positions in the demilitarized zone.

► Since the Sochi Agreement, there has been a flimsy ceasefire in the Idlib region and **there have been several local incidents** between the rebel organizations and the Syrian army. The Syrian regime's media reported that the Syrian army had foiled an attempt by the rebel forces to attack its positions in the area of the village of Al-Lataminah, located in the southern part of the demilitarized zone (66 km south of Idlib), which was reported to be **considered the stronghold of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham**. The Syrian army responded with artillery fire, killing and wounding many rebel operatives (Syrian TV, September 26, 2018; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 30, 2018). It was also reported that the Syrian army had fired rockets at the **Jisr al-Shughur area**, which is controlled by the rebel organizations (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 30, 2018)².

The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continues its military preparations and propaganda campaign

Despite the announcement of the Russian-Turkish agreement, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, the dominant jihadi organization in the Idlib area, continued its military activity preparing for a possible military campaign. This activity was accompanied by **propaganda campaign among the population, mentally preparing them for the fighting against the Syrian regime**.

► **Following are the main activities carried out by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham:**

- ◆ **Establishing three military frameworks.** The units established were Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Army, Umar bin al-Khattab Army, and Uthman bin Affan Army. These units were established as part of a **reorganization which included setting up large military frameworks** by joining together factions and small army units (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 30, 2018).
- ◆ **Training first aid personnel:** The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham started a campaign to train a thousand people to administer first aid in Jabal al-Zawiya, 21 km south of Idlib, due to the very small number of medical teams in this

²ISIS and the Turkestan Islamic Party in Syria (the Uighur operatives of Chinese descent) announced that they had taken control of the Jisr al-Shughur area. This area is located in the demilitarized zone southwest of Idlib (Sputnik, September 29, 2018).

area. The purpose of the training is to enable the initial treatment of casualties, mainly those hit by the Syrian army (Ibaa, September 30, 2018).



Class where people are trained in first aid in Jabal al-Zawiya (Ibaa, September 30, 2018)

- ◆ **Propaganda campaign entitled “Life Boat:”** The campaign took place in the city of Al-Dana, north of Idlib. Its purpose was to increase Islamic awareness among the youth **as mental preparation for the continuation of the fighting against the Syrian regime** (Ibaa, September 27, 2018).



Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham patrolling in one of the open markets in the city of Al-Dana as part of the Life Boat propaganda campaign (Ibaa News Agency, which is affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, September 27, 2018)

Free Syrian Army’s response to the agreement

- **The Free Syrian Army’s National Liberation Front**, which is **affiliated with Turkey**, distributed a leaflet praising the agreement reached in Sochi. According to it, the agreement prevented an imminent attack against the areas controlled by the rebel organizations, which could have caused a humanitarian crisis. In addition, it expressed **great appreciation for Turkey, for its “diplomatic victory,” which protected the cause of the rebel forces and rendered them part of the Turkish national security.** However, the leaflet expressed

distrust towards Russia, which they claimed does not honor agreements (Twitter account of the National Liberation Front, September 22, 2018).

► At a later stage, the Free Syrian Army's National Liberation Front announced that **it would not accept several clauses in the agreement**, even though it welcomed it. According to the announcement, **it does not accept the principle that Russian forces would be able to enter the demilitarized zone since it is concerned that Syrian forces would subsequently be allowed to enter as well** (Syrian TV channel of the Syrian opposition, October 1, 2018).

The campaign in the As-Suwayda area

In spite of optimistic statements issued time and again by the Syrian regime, the Syrian army has yet to complete the takeover of the ISIS enclave in As-Suwayda. In the ITIC's assessment, it is taking time for the Syrian army to advance due to the fierce fighting of the ISIS operatives there. The volcanic terrain also makes it difficult for the Syrian forces to advance.

► According to Syrian regime media, **the Syrian army and the forces supporting it advanced in the Safa area, ISIS's stronghold**. The Syrian army is gradually taking over tunnels and caves used by ISIS, as well as water sources (Al-Ikhbariya channel, Syria, September 29, 2018). On September 30, 2018, it was reported that Syrian Air Force aircraft had carried out an airstrike in the Safa area, killing Ahmad al-Mutlaq, senior ISIS commander in southern Syria, and four of his escorts (Al-Masdar News, September 30, 2018). On the other hand, it was reported that *Amid* (Brigadier General) Walid Kurdi, commander of the Palestinian Liberation Army's Special Forces (handled by Syria), was killed in the clashes with ISIS (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, September 25, 2018).



Right: Syrian army tank during the fighting in the Safa area (Syrian TV, September 26, 2018). Left: Syrian army artillery fire at ISIS targets in the Safa area (Syrian Army Central Information Office, September 27, 2018)



Right: Syrian army soldiers in the volcanic area of Safa. Left: One of the tunnels used by ISIS in the Safa area (Syrian Al-Ikhbariya channel, September 29, 2018)

Eastern Syria

SDF attack against ISIS north of Albukamal continues

The SDF attack launched on September 10, 2018, against ISIS outposts north of Albukamal continues. ISIS carried out several counterattacks, using car bombs. Several villages were taken over by the SDF. However, **fighting continues in ISIS's main outposts.**

► Following are the main battle zones:

- ◆ **The village of Al-Baghouz Fawqani (east of Albukamal):** After ten days of fighting, the SDF forces took over the village on September 22, 2018. The takeover was carried out with artillery support and Coalition air support (Enab Baladi, September 17, 2018). ISIS operatives mounted a counterattack, during which 25 operatives were killed (Sputnik in Arabic, September 23, 2018).



Right: The village of Al-Baghouz Fawqani (Deir ez-Zor 24 Twitter account, September 27, 2018). Left: SDF fighters in Al-Baghouz Fawqani (official Twitter account of the SDF forces, September 20, 2018)

- ◆ **ISIS's counterattack against the village of Al-Baghouz Fawqani:** On September 29, 2018, ISIS launched a counterattack, during which two car bombs were detonated and four ISIS operatives blew up themselves. ISIS claimed responsibility for sending the suicide bombers (ISIS's Barakah Province, September 29, 2018). Both

sides continued to exchange artillery fire and sustained casualties (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 29, 2018).



Right: ISIS car bomb (marked in red) on its way to a staging zone of the SDF forces in the village of Al-Baghouz Fawqani (ISIS's Barakah Province, September 29, 2018). Left: ISIS suicide bomber named Abu Mohammad al-Shami, who attacked the SDF forces in the village (ISIS's Barakah Province, September 29, 2018)

- ◆ **Al-Shajalah (north of Al-Baghouz Fawqani):** On September 25, 2018, the SDF forces took over the village of Al-Shajalah, north of Al-Baghouz Fawqani. Many ISIS operatives were reportedly killed, and the rest fled the scene. A large amount of weapons and ammunition was found there. SDF sapper teams mopped up the village and deactivated mines (SDF Media Center, September 25, 2018).
- ◆ **Al-Susah (north of Al-Shajalah):** In late September 2018, clashes took place in the village of Al-Susah between ISIS and the SDF, apparently with neither party getting the upper hand. On September 26, 2018, ISIS operatives attacked positions of the SDF forces and killed eight fighters. Three other fighters were killed when an antitank missile hit their vehicle (interview with a Euphrates Post reporter in the Orient News website, September 26, 2018).



Four ISIS operatives captured by the SDF forces in Al-Susah (Twitter, September 30, 2018)

◆ **The villages of Al-Sha'fah and Hajin**, ISIS's main strongholds north of Albukamal: The SDF forces attacked targets in the Al-Sha'fah area **with Syrian army artillery support** (Deir ez-Zor 24 Twitter account, September 24, 25, 2018). Thus, the Syrian army joined the campaign against the ISIS enclave north of Albukamal, albeit **indirectly and on a limited scale**. In the area of **Hajin**, where ISIS's regional command is probably located, clashes continued between ISIS and the SDF forces.



Right: Main battle sites north of Albukamal: Al-Baghrouz Fawqani (1); Al-Shajalah (2); Al-Susah (3); Al-Sha'fah (4); Hajin (5) (Wikimapia). Left: A vehicle and a bulldozer of the SDF forces taking part in the fighting north of Albukamal (SDF Media Center, September 28, 2018)

ISIS network in Al-Raqqah uncovered

► On September 29, 2018, **the SDF Internal Security forces uncovered an ISIS network in Al-Raqqah** (ISIS's former "capital city" in Syria). Internal Security operatives raided two apartments in the city, killed two ISIS operatives and detained five others. Hand grenades, handguns and explosives were found in the apartments. A car bomb was found nearby, as well as a large amount of weapons and mines planted in the ground. **The network operatives had planned to carry out showcase attacks around Al-Raqqah** (Reuters, September 30, 2018).

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS activity

- ▶ Following are the main operations carried out by ISIS in Iraq:
 - ◆ **Blowing up a high-voltage pylon** about 55 km west of Kirkuk (Iraqi News, September 20, 2018). The Iraqi security forces deactivated **an IED attached to a high-voltage pylon west of Kirkuk.**



IED consisting of two mortar shells, attached to one of the bases of a high-voltage pylon (Twitter, October 1, 2018)

- ◆ **Setting fire to homes of collaborators with the Iraqi regime**, south of Kirkuk. ISIS operatives set fire to the houses of a *mukhtar* (village chief) and of another man who allegedly served as an agent of the Iraqi regime (ISIS's Kirkuk Province, October 1, 2018).



ISIS operatives setting fire to houses of collaborators with the Iraqi regime (ISIS's Kirkuk Province, October 1, 2018)

- ◆ **Blowing up two minibuses** by IEDs in the **Al-Sha'ab area, northern Baghdad**. One man was killed and four others were wounded (Iraqi News Agency, October 1, 2018). So far, ISIS did not claim responsibility for the attack, but it is reasonable to assume that its operatives were responsible.



**One of the minibuses where an IED exploded
(Twitter, October 1, 2018)**

- ◆ **Detonation of IEDs against vehicles of the Iraqi security forces (September 30, 2018)** southeast of Samarra (north of Baghdad), west of Kirkuk, and south of Mosul.

Counterterrorism activity by the Iraqi security forces

► During the last two weeks, the Iraqi security forces carried out intensive counterterrorism activity, supported by the International Coalition. Following are the main operations (according to Iraqi media reports):

- ◆ **Airstrikes and ground attacks against ISIS operatives:**
 - Six ISIS operatives were killed in an airstrike west of Kirkuk. Three ISIS operatives were killed by the Popular Mobilization forces in the Salah Al-Din Province. The Iraqi security forces killed 15 ISIS operatives inside a tunnel near the Iraqi-Syrian border. Iraqi Air Force aircraft killed several ISIS operatives in the Salah Al-Din Province. The Iraqi army killed four ISIS operatives in the Mosul Province. Popular Mobilization forces killed three ISIS operatives and destroyed three motorcycles near the Iraqi-Syrian border. An Iraqi police force detained eight ISIS operatives in eastern Mosul. An Iraqi federal police force killed 18 ISIS operatives southwest of Irbil.



**Iraqi army armor column during activity against ISIS
(Iraqi News Agency, September 23, 2018)**

- ◆ **Destroying tunnels:** International Coalition fighter planes carrying out an airstrike destroyed three ISIS armored vehicles and a tunnel and killed several ISIS operatives in the Rawa area (near the border between Iraq and Syria), about 80 km east of Al-Qaim. Iraqi Air Force aircraft destroyed six tunnels about 200 km northwest of Baghdad. Ten IEDs were found in the tunnels. In an operation carried out in the desert areas between the Al-Anbar Province and the Salah Al-Din and Nineveh provinces, the Iraqi army destroyed 16 ISIS tunnels. Operatives who were inside were killed, and dozens of IEDs and explosives were deactivated.



**Iraqi army force near the opening of an ISIS tunnel
(Iraqi News Agency, September 24, 2018)**

- ◆ **Iraqi security forces uniforms found:** Operatives of the Popular Mobilization forces found uniforms of the Iraqi security forces in an ISIS hiding place in the Hamrin Mountains, northeast and northwest of Baqubah. These uniforms were used by ISIS operatives **when setting up mock checkpoints**, where people were abducted and murdered (Al-Sumaria News, September 25, 2018).

ISIS deputy leader executed

► **Ismail Alwan Salman al-Ithawi, who served as ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's personal aide,** was sentenced to death by hanging by an Iraqi court. Al-Ithawi, who fled to Syria and from there to Turkey, was captured during an intelligence operation conducted in coordination with Turkey. Al-Ithawi served as the personal aide of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in charge of transferring funds to ISIS's bank accounts in various countries. The Iraqi intelligence agents used the Telegram app installed on his mobile phone to lure Ismail al-Ithawi (and four other ISIS commanders) into coming from Syria to Iraq (Reuters, May 10, 2018).³



Ismail Alwan al-Ithawi, one of five senior ISIS commanders captured by the Iraqi army (Al-Alam, Iran, May 11, 2018)

Sinai Peninsula and Egypt

Tribespeople reportedly armed to fight against ISIS

► As part of the fighting against ISIS, **the Egyptian army has started to take advantage of the Sinai tribespeople's** familiarity with the terrain and armed them. The tribespeople patrol deep into the Sinai Peninsula and provide intelligence. They also man checkpoints (Fox News, September 27, 2018).

³ See Spotlight to Global Jihad from May 16, 2018: “Five senior ISIS commanders captured in a combined Turkish, American and Iraqi intelligence operation.”



Right: Jabal al-Halal (Google Maps). Left: Armed tribespeople of the Sinai Tribal Union riding off-road vehicles (Sinai Tribal Union's Facebook page, September 27, 2018)

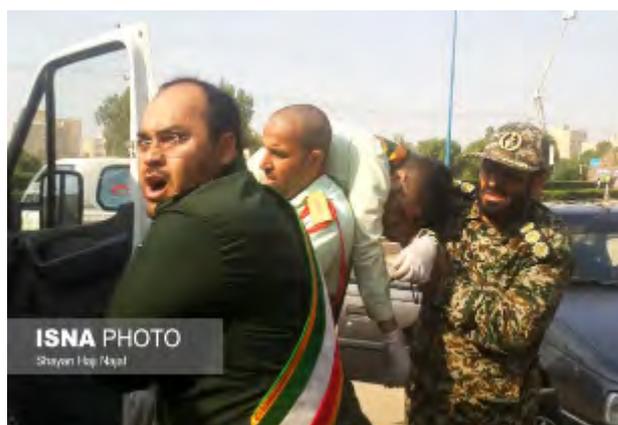
Jihadi activity in other countries

Terrorist attack in Ahwaz, Iran, at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the Iran-Iraq war

- ▶ On the morning of September 22, 2018, five men armed with light weapons attacked the VIP seating and members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards taking part in a military parade marking the 38th anniversary of the Iran-Iraq War in Ahwaz, southwest Iran. **At least 25 people were killed and around 60 others were wounded, most of them members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.**
- ▶ Separatist organizations in Ahwaz were quick to claim responsibility for the attack. The Iranian Ministry of Defense announced (September 24, 2018) that the perpetrators belonged to terrorist organizations supported by Arab countries (Tasnim News Agency, September 22-25, 2018). In the wake of ISIS's claim of responsibility, **Iran responded by firing missiles at ISIS targets in the Albukamal area** (see below).



Right: Iranian military personnel and civilians fleeing the area of the attack (Tasnim News Agency, September 22, 2018) Left: Bodies of soldiers killed in the attack (shabnamnezami@ShabnamNezami Twitter account, September 22, 2018)



Right: Member of the Revolutionary Guards helping to evacuate one of the wounded (Fars News, September 22, 2018). Left: Iranian security personnel, the VIP seating and part of the route of the military parade shortly after the attack (Tasnim News Agency, September 24, 2018)

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack and launched a campaign aimed at making propaganda profit from it:**

- ◆ A statement issued by ISIS's Amaq News Agency said that the organization's operatives had attacked a gathering area of Iranian forces in Ahwaz, southwestern Iran. According to the initial statement, the Iranian president was present. On the same day, a correction was issued stating that the Iranian president had not been present (Amaq News Agency, September 22, 2018).
- ◆ An additional statement issued by ISIS's Khorasan Province stated that a squad of operatives had attacked a parade of Basij, Iranian army and Iranian Revolutionary Guards forces in Ahwaz. ISIS operatives opened fire with automatic weapons, killing more than 40 people and wounding 60 others. The claim of responsibility ends with a threat: "We are telling the Shiites that we have committed ourselves to avenge the

Sunni [Muslims] in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Khorasan [Afghanistan and Pakistan]. Soon you will reap the results of your tyranny. We will lie in wait for you and what will come [to you] will be worse and more bitter, with the help of Allah” (ISIS’s Khorasan Province, September 22, 2018).

◆ On September 23, 2018, the Amaq News Agency released a video showing three of the perpetrators on their way to carry out the attack. One of the operatives is seen **wearing an Iranian army uniform and speaking in praise of jihad**. The second operative, speaking in Arabic, is wearing **an Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ visor cap** and states that he has obeyed the call of Allah. The third operative, speaking in Farsi **and also wearing an Iranian Revolutionary Guard visor cap**, says that he hopes that many Iranian Revolutionary Guards and members of the Iranian security and government forces will be killed in the attack (Amaq News Agency, September 23, 2018).



**Two ISIS operatives who carried out the attack in Ahwaz
(Amaq News Agency, September 23, 2018)**



**Five ISIS operatives who carried out the attack in Ahwaz, with an ISIS flag in the background
(Iranian Mehr News Agency, September 29, 2018)**

◆ On September 26, 2018, ISIS’s Al-Furqan Media Foundation published an audiotape entitled “An Attack of the Monotheists on the Fortress of the Polytheists” [i.e., the

Shiites]. The voice on the tape is that of ISIS Spokesman Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, who refers to the attack in Ahwaz, noting that **it would not be the last one**. He also notes that this attack demonstrates the **fragility of Iranian security, which he likens to a spider web**. Al-Muhajir threatens that “what will come [later] will be more bitter and difficult” (SITE, September 26, 2018).

The Iranian response: An act of revenge against ISIS targets in the area of Albukamal

► On October 1, 2018, the IRGC Public Relations Department announced that Revolutionary Guards forces had attacked “armed groups” east of the Euphrates River (the Albukamal area) with six ballistic missiles. The attack was carried out in response to the incidents in Ahwaz. It was reported that the missiles fired were Zulfaqar ballistic missiles, with a range of up to 700 km, and Qiam ballistic missiles with a range of up to 800 km. The missiles bore the inscription “Death to the United States,” “Death to Israel” and “Death to Saudi Arabia.” Immediately after the attack, **seven military drones were launched, attacking terrorist targets** (Tasnim News Agency, October 1, 2018).



Right: The area north of Albukamal where, according to the Iranians, the headquarters of the perpetrators of the attack in Ahwaz are located.
Left: Launching a ballistic missile by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards at the headquarters in the Albukamal area (Tasnim News Agency, October 1, 2018).



Launch of one of the six Iranian missiles (Tasnim News Agency, October 1, 2018)

- ▶ The Iranian attack reportedly **killed eight ISIS operatives and/or members of their families** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, October 2, 2018).

The missile attack can be seen **as the realization of the threats made by senior Iranian officials to avenge the terrorist attack**. Along with the desire for revenge, the Iranian response was intended to **convey a deterrent message to the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel in light of the growing pressure exerted on it by the US administration and its allies in the region**. The Iranian leadership **sought to express its readiness to respond to any possible attack that is liable to compromise its national security and to use its advanced missile capabilities**. Last month, Iran took the unusual step of launching ballistic missiles at the headquarters of the Democratic Kurdish Party of Iran in northern Iraq. Then, too, senior Iranian officials stressed that the missiles were intended to convey a message to Iran's enemies not to try to realize their intentions vis-à-vis Iran.

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Afghanistan

- ▶ **Twenty-six ISIS operatives who planned to carry out attacks on Ashura were arrested in Kabul**. The arrests were made by the Afghan Intelligence Directorate (www.khaama.com, September 18, 2018). Ashura is a day of mourning observed by the Shiites in memory of Imam Hussein bin Ali, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala (680 CE).

Germany

- ▶ German police arrested a 21-year-old Syrian of Palestinian descent in Berlin. He is suspected of **planning to carry out a chemical attack in Israel and recruiting operatives for ISIS**. According to the website of the German newspaper Bild, some months ago the German intelligence service (BND) received information from a foreign intelligence service about the detainee, **who flew to Germany from Libya and entered the country on a forged passport** (Mail Online, September 28, 2018).

The Netherlands

- ▶ On September 27, 2018, the Dutch police arrested seven people **planning to carry out showcase attacks at mass events in Europe**. It was reported that the leader of the network was an Iraqi (The Washington Post, September 28, 2018). **The identity of the detainees is still unclear**.