



Spotlight on Global Jihad

October 11-17, 2018



Main events of the week

- ▶ The establishment of the demilitarized zone in the Idlib region, which was agreed upon between Russia and Turkey at the Sochi summit, **was not actually carried out on the ground** (it was supposed to end on October 15, 2018). The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, which is the Jihadi organization controlling most of the area of the demilitarized zone, **refused to remove its heavy weapons or withdraw its operatives. The Syrian Foreign Minister**, on his part, declared that the **Syrian army was determined to uproot terrorism from Idlib**. However, on October 16, 2018, **Russia announced that an extension for the implementation of the agreement had been granted** (the duration of the extension is unknown at this stage).
- ▶ In eastern Syria, **the SDF continues its offensive against the ISIS enclaves in the Euphrates Valley north of Albukamal, with the support of the United States and the Coalition**. The forces participating in the offensive are encountering many difficulties, partly due to the sandstorms in the area, which are being utilized by ISIS for counterattacks. An officer in the SDF admitted that the campaign would take longer than planned due to weather difficulties and ISIS's counterattacks.
- ▶ ISIS continues to carry out a propaganda effort **aimed at encouraging terrorist attacks around the world by local supporters**, especially in **Western countries**. This week, a new ISIS-affiliated magazine called The Youth of the Caliphate was launched. The first issue of the magazine included a poster **encouraging lone wolf attacks in Australia**.

Russian involvement in Syria

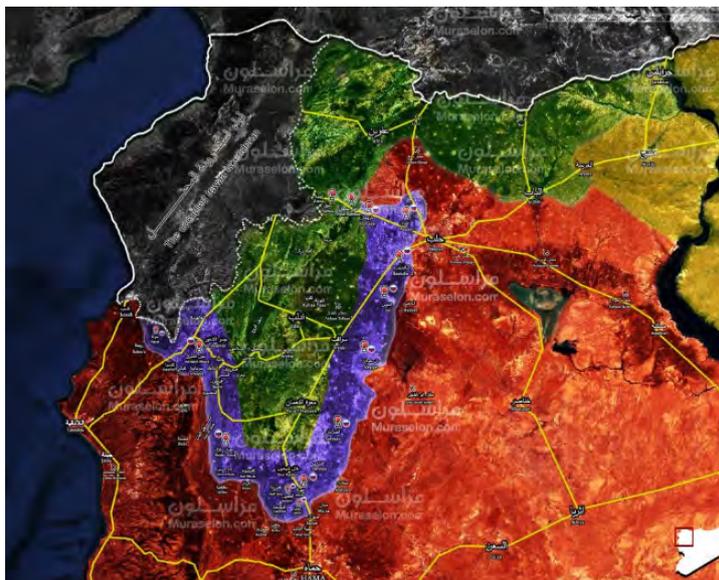
Extension for the implementation of the Sochi Agreement

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted in the global media as saying on Tuesday, October 16, 2018, that **the agreement in Idlib is in force and the [Russian] army is pleased with the way the Turkish side is acting on this issue.** One cannot expect everything to go smoothly with absolutely no difficulties, but the work is being carried out (Daily Mail, October 16, 2018; Hürriyet, October 16, 2018; Press TV, October 16, 2018)¹. According to Arab media reports, **an extension for the implementation of the agreement has been granted** (the duration of the extension is unknown at this stage) (Al-Rai, October 17, 2018; Al-Hurra, October 16, 2018).

Implementation of the Sochi Agreement

The Russian-Turkish agreement that was reached in Sochi calls for the establishment of a demilitarized zone in the Idlib area and the removal of the heavy weapons in the zone by the rebel organizations. **The establishment of the demilitarized zone was supposed to end by October 15, 2018. The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham**, the dominant jihadi organization controlling most of the area, announced that **it was strongly opposed to the removal of its weapons from the demilitarized zone.** The other rebel organizations, most of which operate under the protection of Turkey, have apparently removed their heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone, **but their operatives remained there.** In general, a tense quiet prevails in the Idlib region, interrupted by sporadic incidents. It was reported **that the Syrian army was in a state of readiness for an attack in the Idlib area if the rebel groups do not adhere to the timetable set for their withdrawal from the demilitarized zone** (Al-Arabiya al-Hadath, October 16, 2018).

¹ At this stage, the wording of the announcement in the Russian media has not been located.



The control areas in the Idlib region (updated to October 10, 2018): the rebel organizations, including the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (green); the Syrian army and the forces supporting it (red); the demilitarized zone agreed between Russia and Turkey (blue); Turkish and Russian supervision posts (marked by the flag of the country) (Muraselon, October 10, 2018)

The Syrian regime

Syrian Foreign Minister threatens to “uproot” the terrorist organizations from the Idlib area

► **Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem** took part in a press conference on the day the Russian-Syrian agreement was supposed to come into effect (October 15, 2018). According to him, **“the Syrian army is prepared to uproot terrorism [from Idlib] in the event that the agreement regarding Idlib is not implemented, and Idlib, like any other area in Syria, will eventually be under Syria’s sovereignty once again.”** He added that **there was no choice but to uproot the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** since it is a terrorist organization on the United Nations list of terrorist organizations. He noted that **after the liberation of Idlib from terrorism, the Syrian army’s goal would be to take control of the eastern Euphrates River** [an area controlled by the Kurds and the SDF, which operate with the support of the US and the International Coalition] (Syrian TV, October 15, 2018).



Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem at a joint press conference with Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari (Syrian TV, October 15, 2018)

► The Syrian army issued warnings to civilians in the Idlib area by telephone and SMS. The civilians were warned not to approach the places where the rebel forces were deployed and not to let them use them as human shields. The rebel forces **were called on to withdraw from the demilitarized zone by October 15, 2018**, the last day for the implementation of the Sochi Agreement (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, October 13, 2018). The Syrian army also threatened that the rebel forces would be killed in airstrikes if they did not withdraw from the demilitarized zone and remove their heavy weapons (Muraselon, October 11, 2018; Al-Modon, October 13, 2018).

The rebel organizations

The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham adamantly objects to the removal of its heavy weapons

► On October 14, 2018, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham released a leaflet entitled “The Syrian revolution will never die.” According to the leaflet, **the jihad and the fighting are the way to realize the goals of the revolution, mainly toppling the Syrian regime**. It stated that the operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham are defending the “liberated areas” and the Sunni Muslims. It emphasized that **any attempts by the Syrian regime and its allies to force the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham to surrender its weapons were doomed to failure** (Ibaa News Agency affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, October 14, 2018). Sources close to the rebel organizations said that **the operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham had hidden their heavy weapons in the demilitarized zone**. These weapons include tanks, heavy artillery, and rocket launchers (Al-Watan, October 10, 2018).

Removing the heavy weapons and preparations in advance of the Syrian army attack

► **Naji Mustafa, spokesman for the National Liberation Front** affiliated with the **Free Syrian Army**, announced that the organizations comprising the Front had decided to take out the heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone and transfer them to the rear headquarters. According to Mustafa, the process was supposed to take several days. However, he stressed that **the heavy weapons would remain in the hands of the organizations** (Asharq Al-Awsat, October 8, 2018). On October 10, 2018, the Turkish Ministry of Defense announced that the “opposition groups” in Turkey had finished removing the heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone (Enab Baladi, October 13, 2018).

► **The National Liberation Front** released a video showing the training of commando fighters (*Al-Saeqah*). It seems that the National Liberation Front is taking into account that the Syrian army will launch a campaign to take over the Idlib area and is preparing for it.



Training of commando fighters (Al-Saeqah) of the National Liberation Front (National Liberation Front YouTube channel, October 14, 2018)

► On October 14, 2018, a day before the deadline for the implementation of the Sochi Agreement, it was reported that the **Free Syrian Army fighters were deployed in combat positions in the demilitarized zone in the rural area of northern Hama and southern Idlib** (Furat Post Facebook page, October 14, 2018).



Free Syrian Army fighters in their positions in the demilitarized zone in the rural area of northern Hama (Furat Post Facebook page, October 14, 2018)

Incidents between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and ISIS

► Around October 15, 2018, operatives of the security apparatus of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham raided an ISIS hideout north of Idlib. There they found hundreds of IEDs, explosive belts, materials and equipment for making IEDs, **a drone used for surveillance**,² and communications devices (Ibaa, October 15, 2018). On the other hand, it was reported that “terrorist operatives” (probably ISIS operatives) had killed four commanders of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the Idlib Province (three of them Tunisian, Uzbek, and Egyptian) (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, October 15, 2018).



Explosives, equipment for making IEDs, and explosive belts, found in an ISIS hideout by the security apparatus of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (Ibaa, October 15, 2018)



ISIS's equipment seized by the security apparatus of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham. Right: Drone for surveillance and equipment for the detonation of IEDs. Left: Dozens of communications devices (Ibaa, October 15, 2018)

Demonstrations against the Syrian regime and its allies

► On October 12, 2018, a demonstration was held in the village of Kafararouq, north of Idlib. A video that was released shows the demonstrators carrying Free Syrian Army flags and posters calling for the removal of the Syrian regime and Bashar Assad (Ibaa, October 12,

² According to the photo of the drone, it is possibly a DJI Phantom 4 Advanced. DJI is a Chinese technology company, prominent manufacturer of drones for civilian purposes.

2018). Another demonstration calling for the ousting of Bashar Assad, with Free Syrian Army flags as well, was held in the town of Sarmada, about 29 km north of Idlib (Ibaa, October 12, 2018).



Demonstrators carrying Free Syrian Army flags in the village of Kafararouq, calling for the toppling of the Syrian regime and the removal of Russia and Iran from Syria (Ibaa, October 12, 2018)

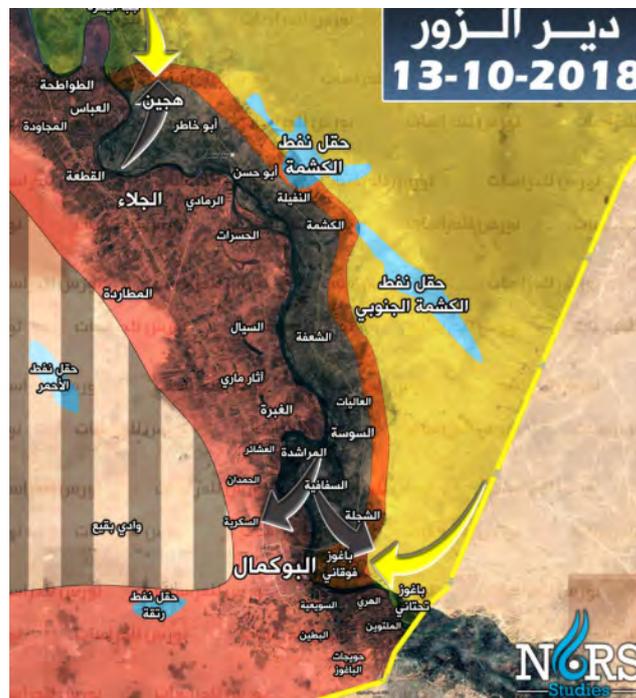
Southern Syria

The campaign in the area of As-Suwayda

- ▶ **In the Al-Safa area**, fierce fighting continues between the Syrian army and the ISIS operatives. The Syrian army activity included artillery fire and airstrikes against traffic arteries and ISIS forces. According to the Syrian News Agency, these attacks destroyed ISIS hideouts, weapons, and ammunition (SANA, October 14, 2018). ISIS, on its part, announced that its operatives had halted Syrian army attacks in the Al-Safa area and killed and wounded several soldiers (Al-Sham-Damascus Province, October 14, 2018).
- ▶ According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (October 12, 2018), **about 356 ISIS operatives and 186 Iraqi army soldiers and operatives of the forces supporting them were killed** since the beginning of the attack in the Al-Safa area (July 25, 2018).

Eastern Syria

This week, **the SDF forces' attack** with International Coalition support against **the ISIS enclave in the Euphrates Valley north of Albukamal continued**. The SDF forces and Coalition planes fired artillery and carried out airstrikes against ISIS targets. ISIS, on its part, carried out counterattacks, taking advantage of the dust storms in the area. **The ISIS operatives are fighting fiercely, mainly in the area of the town of Hajin, the ISIS stronghold in the northern part of the enclave**. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (October 13, 2018), **at least 325 ISIS operatives and 176 SDF fighters were killed** since the beginning of the attack. An SDF officer reported to a Western news agency that the campaign to drive ISIS away from the area of eastern Syria **would take longer than planned**, due to the weather conditions and ISIS's counterattacks (AP, October 17, 2018).



Deployment of the forces in the Albukamal area (updated to October 13, 2018): the area controlled by the SDF (marked in yellow); the area controlled by the Syrian army and the forces supporting it (marked in red); areas controlled by ISIS (marked in dark grey); areas where there are clashes (marked in orange). The yellow arrows mark the directions of the SDF attacks, while the grey ones mark those of ISIS. Oil fields are marked in light blue (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, October 13, 2018)

► In their attacks, the ISIS operatives **took advantage of dust storms in the area.**³ Their attacks included car bombs and suicide bombers who blew themselves up with explosive belts. ISIS also fired artillery at SDF positions and staging areas (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, October 12, 2018).



Right: ISIS operatives attacking SDF positions east of the village of Al-Sha'fah, under the cover of a dust storm. Left: ISIS operative inside an SDF position which was taken over and set on fire in Al-Sha'fah (Amaq, October 11, 2018)



SDF weapons seized by ISIS operatives during the attack north of Al-Sha'fah (ISIS's Al-Sham-Al-Barakah Province, October 14, 2018)

Fighting around the town of Hajin

This week, **fighting continued around the town of Hajin, ISIS's stronghold in the area north of Albukamal.** ISIS continues to hold on in Hajin, and even carried out several counterattacks. So far, the SDF attempts to take over the town and the nearby area have failed.

³ This is not the first time that ISIS takes advantage of desert dust storms to carry out its attacks. In the past, ISIS took advantage of dust storms in the area of the Al-Tanak oil field, carrying out an attack in which 20 SDF fighters were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 15, 2018).



The town of Hajin, ISIS's stronghold north of Albukamal (Google Maps)

- On October 12, 2018, **ISIS operatives attacked the SDF forces northwest of Hajin, taking eight SDF fighters prisoner.** A video released by ISIS shows ISIS operatives firing machine guns and an anti-aircraft gun mounted on an off-road vehicle and storming an SDF trench in a desert area (Amaq, October 13, 2018).

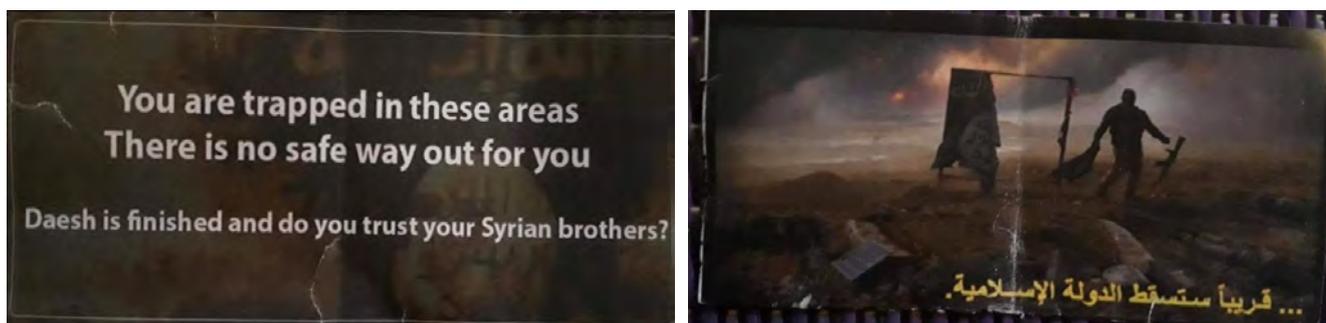


Eight SDF fighters captured by ISIS north and east of Hajin. Some of the prisoners were wearing civilian clothes (Amaq, October 13, 2018)

- On October 12, 2018, **ISIS operatives attacked the SDF-controlled Al-Bahra refugee camp, about 7 km northwest of Hajin.** The ISIS operatives **abducted about 130 families**, most of them wives of operatives who left ISIS and foreign women who were married to ISIS operatives who were killed. The abductees were taken to areas controlled by ISIS (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, October 13, 2018).

Dropping leaflets by Coalition planes

► The Coalition planes dropped leaflets over the ISIS enclave north of Albukamal, calling on the operatives to surrender. Following are two examples:



Right: One of the leaflets dropped by the International Coalition planes, which reads in Arabic, “The Islamic State will soon fall.” A torn ISIS flag is seen in the background, and an operative laying down his arms. Left: Another leaflet, in English (Furat Post Facebook page, October 15, 2018)

Main developments in Iraq

The activity of the Iraqi security forces

► The Iraqi security forces continued their intensive activities against ISIS. Following are the main operations carried out by the Iraqi security forces this past week:

- ◆ **The Al-Anbar Province:** The Iraqi security forces detained eight ISIS operatives in the city of Al-Qaim, near the Iraqi-Syrian border. The operatives, who had planned to carry out terrorist attacks, entered the city with fake IDs, taking advantage of the return of displaced persons to their homes in the areas taken over from ISIS (Iraqi News, October 10, 2018).
- ◆ **The Diyala Province:** The Iraqi security forces apprehended a boy who belonged to ISIS. He had undergone training to carry out a suicide bombing attack and planned to carry out such an attack in the Khanaqin region, west of the Iraqi-Iranian border (Al-Sumaria News, October 11, 2018).
- ◆ **The Nineveh Province:** An Iraqi army force spotted 34 IEDs near the Euphrates River and detonated them in a controlled manner (Iraqi News Agency, October 14, 2018).
- ◆ **The Mosul area:** An Iraqi army force destroyed six tunnels west of Mosul. The tunnels had been used by ISIS operatives as hiding places (Iraqi News Agency, October 14, 2018). In the Al-Qayyarah area, about 57 km south of Mosul, the Iraqi security forces

detained 19 ISIS operatives. They found weapons, including hand grenades, in their possession (Iraqi News Agency, October 11, 2018).



**The Iraqi security forces during activity against ISIS
(Iraqi News, October 11, 2018)**

◆ **The Salah al-Din Province:** The Iraqi security forces found an ISIS hideout in the Samarra District north of Baghdad. They found there uniforms which had been used by the organization operatives (Al-Sumaria News, October 15, 2018).

ISIS activity

► **The Al-Anbar Province: ISIS operatives attacked the Akkas gas field** south of Al-Qaim, near the border between Iraq and Syria, killing 11 Iraqi security guards (Iraqi News, October 11, 2018). The Akkas gas field is the largest in Iraq (Wikipedia). ISIS operatives also **attacked an Iraqi army vehicle**, killing an Iraqi army officer in northwestern Al-Anbar Province, **near the Iraqi-Syrian border** (Al-Sumaria News, October 10, 2018).

► **The Kirkuk Province police** reported that two people were wounded **in the detonation of a car bomb in Kirkuk**. Photos released show the wreckage of the car bomb and damage sustained by a building (Al-Sumaria News, October 13, 2018). So far, ISIS did not claim responsibility for the attack but it is reasonable to believe that its operatives were responsible for it.



Right: Wreckage of the car bomb detonated in Kirkuk. Left: Damage sustained by a building in Kirkuk (Al-Sumaria News, October 13, 2018)

The Sinai Peninsula and Egypt

Egyptian Armed Forces Spokesman: Life in Sinai has returned to normal

► **Egyptian Armed Forces Spokesman Akid (Colonel) Tamer al-Refai** said in a TV interview that **life in Sinai had returned to normal**. According to him, most of the areas in Sinai are under the control of the security forces and residents can now move freely within the various areas. In another interview, he said that since the beginning of Operation Sinai 2018, more than 450 “terrorist operatives” had been killed in Sinai and their infrastructure had been destroyed (Al-Masry al-Youm, October 13, 2018; Al-Youm al-Sabea, October 16, 2018).

Egyptian army vehicle hit by IED

► On October 13, 2018, an IED was detonated against an Egyptian army force south of Al-Arish. According to Arab media reports, two soldiers were killed and several wounded (Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, October 14, 2018). It may be assumed that the attack was carried out by ISIS, although the organization has not yet claimed responsibility.

Jihadi activity in other countries

Indonesia

► According to **Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu**, **63 terrorist organizations in Southeast Asia have pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**. He called for improved sharing of intelligence in order to protect the lives of civilians. **Australian Defense Minister Christopher Pyne** said that he hoped his visit to

Indonesia would expand the counterterrorism cooperation between Jakarta and Canberra (Mail Online, October 11, 2018).

Libya

There are around fifty ISIS operatives led by Abu al-Baraa (the Libyan) in central Libya

► ISIS's leader in Derna, **Hisham Ali Ashmawi Masad Ibrahim**, was recently arrested by the Libyan army. According to information which he revealed in his interrogation, **there are around fifty ISIS operatives led by Abu al-Baraa the Libyan in central Libya** (their precise location was not stated). In addition, Ashmawi noted that more than 50 of the organization's wounded operatives are staying in abandoned apartments in the city of Derna and have insufficient food, following the severe injuries that they sustained at the hands of the Libyan army (Al-Masry al-Youm, October 14, 2018).

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Russia

► The Russian media reported that **the security forces recently uncovered a terrorist cell of a jihadi organization by the name of Jamaat al-Tawheed wal-Jihad in the Tomsk region of western Siberia** (this is apparently a reference to an ISIS-affiliated cell). According to the report, the cell operatives were involved in the fighting in Syria against the Syrian army. The cell leader encouraged his acquaintances to carry out terrorist attacks in Syria and contacted them via Telegram and personally (TASS News Agency, October 10, 2018).

► The National Anti-Terrorism Committee announced that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) had conducted an operation in the rural areas of Dagestan, in southern Russia. Two ISIS operative who barricaded themselves in a house were killed in the operation. Two Kalashnikovs and ammunition were found in their possession. Two members of the FSB and a member of the Russian National Guard were wounded in the exchange of fire. The dead men were reportedly responsible for the deaths of a number of civilians, the bombing of a mosque, and the destruction of the grave of a senior cleric (Russia Today, October 13, 2018).

The battle for hearts and minds

► The first issue of a new ISIS-affiliated magazine came out this week. **The magazine is called Shabab al-Khilafah** ("The Youth of the Caliphate"). Its first issue was published on October 10, 2018. The magazine's cover states that it is not an official publication of ISIS **but**

is intended to serve as a platform for the organization’s supporters (file-sharing website archive.org, October 10, 2018). The magazine includes articles in support of ISIS as well as posters urging readers to watch the organization’s videos and carry out terrorist attacks on behalf of the organization. The first issue of the magazine included a poster **encouraging lone wolf attacks in Australia** (file-sharing website archive.org, October 10, 2018).



The cover of the magazine. The caption reads “Youth of the Caliphate” in Arabic and English. Underneath it is written: “The Youth of the Caliphate magazine [constitutes] a platform for all the supporters [of the Islamic State], an unofficial magazine that publishes collaborative material that comes from those who help [ISIS] under the supervision of the Al-Abd al-Faqir [media?] foundation”⁴ (file-sharing website archive.org, October 10, 2018)

The name of the magazine, “The Youth of the Caliphate,” **indicates that its goal is to enlist support among young Muslims affiliated with the organization and to encourage them to take part in its activities.** This is in line with ISIS’s desire **to increase the scope of its attacks abroad**, precisely at a time when it is under heavy pressure in its core countries, Syria and Iraq.

⁴ An ISIS media foundation by the name of Al-Abd al-Faqir is unknown.



Poster encouraging lone wolf attacks in Australia, below the inscription “Australia – the time has come for the harvest season in your territory” (file-sharing website archive.org, October 10, 2018).