Main events of the week

- In the Idlib enclave there is still no progress in the establishment of the demilitarized zone. Local clashes occur between the Syrian army and the rebel organizations. While Syrian figures continue to declare Syria’s determination to restore Idlib to the bosom of the regime, Russia and Turkey continue to issue calming declarations about alleged progress in removing the heavy weaponry and “terrorist operatives” from the demilitarized zone.

- In eastern Syria strong fighting continues in the ISIS enclave in the Euphrates Valley. SDF forces, supported by the United States and the coalition countries, succeeded in occupying the village of al-Sousah (north of Albukamal) in a counterattack (under the cover of a sand storm). The SDF suffered heavy losses and 20 of its fighters were taken captive (according to an ISIS report).

- In the al-Ghurabaa’ region fighting was renewed in the al-Safa enclave after a ceasefire which was used for the exchange of prisoners (abducted Druze women in return for the wives of ISIS operatives). Other deals are on the agenda, as part of which ISIS may receive a large amount of money in return for releasing prisoners.

- While ISIS is under strong pressure in Syria, it continues attacking in other provinces: In Afghanistan ISIS operatives carried out a suicide bombing attack in Kabul, targeting the election committee (six wounded); in Libya there was a raid on a police station in the center of the country (four killed, ten abducted); in Tunisia a suicide bombing attack was carried out near a theatre, possibly to prevent a meeting dealing with the future of the Islamists (ten injured). So far ISIS has not claimed responsibility.
Four-Way Summit Meeting Held in Istanbul

On October 27, 2018, a four-way summit meeting was held in Istanbul with the participation of President Erdogan from Turkey, President Putin from Russia, Chancellor Merkel from Germany and President Macron from France. Also present was Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy to Syria. A spokesman for the Turkish president said their priority will would be to focus on finding new methods, and a political, not a military solution for Syria (Hurriyet Daily News, October 27, 2018).

At the end of the meeting a joint statement was issued saying they had examined developments in Syria, expressed a common worry about regional security, and agreed to cooperate to resolve the crisis in Syria. The statement also related to the Idlib region, saying all four were committed to defeating ISIS, the al-Nusra Front (i.e., the Headquarters for the Liberation of al-Sham) and all the “terrorist operatives” in Syria. They praised the Idlib agreement and the progress that had been made in removing heavy weapons and “extremist groups” from the demilitarized zone (whose establishment was declared at the Russia-Turkey Sochi summit) (Elysee Palace website, October 28, 2018).

After the summit meeting Vladimir Putin said the terrorist organizations continued to carry out attacks from the Idlib region and that the Russian air force had intercepted dozens of drones near the Heimimim air base in recent months (Tass, October 28, 2018).
Implementation of the Sochi Agreement in the Idlib Region

Preparations for joint Russian-Syrian patrols in the demilitarized zone

This past week reports were received about Russian and Turkish preparations for making joint patrols along the demilitarized zone in Idlib, in accordance with the Sochi Agreement. Each side will operate along the side close to its allies: the Russians will patrol along the area controlled by the Syrian army, and the Turkish forces along the area controlled by the rebel organizations (Orient News, October 24, 2018).

Local clashes continue between the Headquarters for the Liberation of al-Sham and the Syrian army

On October 24, 2018, the Headquarters for the Liberation of al-Sham fired dozens of rockets at neighborhoods in western and northwestern Aleppo and at several Syrian army posts in the area. In response the Syrian army fired artillery at Liberation of al-Sham posts northwest of Aleppo (Butulat al-Jaysh al-Suri, October 25, 2018).

On October 26, 2018, the Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that seven civilians had been killed in an attack of Syrian regime forces in the rural area southeast of Aleppo. It was also reported that there were exchanges of fire between the Syrian army and the rebel organizations in the western outskirts of Aleppo (al-Nashra, October 26, 2018).
威胁性声明来自叙利亚官员和安抚声明来自俄罗斯

高级叙利亚官员继续表示，他们将从伊德利卜地区消除恐怖主义，并恢复该地区为国家的一部分。

- **Bashar al-Ja’afari, Syrian representative to the UN**, 在联合国安全理事会发表讲话。他称伊德利卜是叙利亚的一部分，叙利亚不会允许它成为新的“恐怖主义巢穴”，并且叙利亚会为恢复其主权而斗争（Sana, October 26, 2018）。

- **Field Marshal Ali Abdallah Ayoub, Syrian defense minister**, 在叙利亚议会会议上表示，伊德利卜省像叙利亚的其他地区一样，会回到叙利亚的怀抱。他补充说，叙利亚会与那些仍然受美国支持的其他地区（即叙利亚东部的东耶路撒冷地区）进行谈判，或者被叙利亚军队解放（Syrian TV, October 25, 2018）。

- 俄罗斯媒体表示，“一位高级叙利亚军方官员”曾**威胁说如果武装团体继续在哈马特和伊德利卜地区升级局势，叙利亚政府军将发动军事行动**。根据该官员的说法，最近该地区北部发生了升级，尤其是由[激进组织]Preservers of the Faith (Huras al-Din)主导的升级。据该官员称，土耳其尚未成功阻止武装团体或说服他们从非军事化区撤出（Syrian TV, October 25, 2018）。

- 在叙利亚外交部长Walid Mualem表示土耳其方面未履行协议的声明之后，以平息局势，克里姆林宫的一名发言人说，**他们尚未看到对实施《索契协议》在伊德利卜地区的非军事化区的危险**（Sputnik, October 30, 2018）。

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Southern Syria

**ISIS and the Syrian army exchange bodies in the Suwayda region**

In the al-Safa area the ceasefire continues. Before the deal it was declared that abducted Druze women would be released. The ceasefire was exploited for an exchange of bodies, possibly in preparation for a broader agreement that would include the release of other Druze women held by ISIS (Almuden, October 25, 2018). On **October 28, 2018, the fighting was renewed**. ISIS reported that it had killed at least ten Syrian soldiers near the al-Safa region (A’maq, October 28, 2018).

On October 24, 2018, ISIS transferred the bodies of about 100 Syrian army soldiers and forces supporting the Syrian army, including the bodies of Hezbollah operatives. In return ISIS received the bodies of about 20 its operatives and permission to pass food to its operatives besieged in the al-Safa region. Hezbollah received the bodies of five of its operatives who were killed in an ISIS ambush in January 2018 east of Homs (Almuden, October 25, 2018). In addition, the bodies of 13 Palestine Liberation Army operatives were returned, and ten bodies of the National Defense Forces (Almuden, October 25, 2018).

Eastern Syria

This past week the fighting continued between the SDF and ISIS. It focused on the northern part of the enclave controlled by ISIS (the town of Hajin) and in the south (the area of al-Sousah and Baghouz). The area of the village of al-Sousah was occupied by the SDF, but ISIS carried out a counterattack and retook it, inflicting heavy losses on the SDF. Clashes also continue in the region of the town of Hajin, ISIS’s power center. Even after the fighting the situation on the ground has apparently not fundamentally changed.

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1 According to different sources, ISIS transferred the bodies of fifty Syrian army soldiers and the forces supporting it, and the bodies of five Hezbollah operatives in return for fifteen bodies of ISIS operatives. After the exchange four vehicles carrying food were permitted to enter the al-Safa area (al-Badia Facebook page, October 24 and 25, 2018).
The ISIS enclave (brown) after confrontations this past week with SDF forces (yellow). The Syrian army and the forces supporting it are marked in red (SyriaInfo@syria_map Twitter account, apparently affiliated with the Iraqi administration, October 28, 2018).

**ISIS reoccupies the al-Sousah area**

In the village of al-Sousah, located about seven kilometers northeast of Albukamal, this week as well there were fierce clashes between SDF forces and ISIS operatives. **Al-Sousah was occupied by SDF forces on October 24, 2018.** On October 26, 2018, ISIS issued a statement saying that its operatives had attacked SDF posts in al-Sousah and killed more than 25 SDF fighters. ISIS also blew up a building where there were eight SDF fighters. Six of them were killed and two were taken prisoner (al-Ghurabaa’, October 26, 2018). Later on, **it was reported that al-Sousah and several villages near it were reoccupied by ISIS** (al-Badia Facebook page, October 24 and 27, 2018; Enab Baladi, October 27, 2018).
Right: Two SDF fighters taken prisoner by ISIS in al-Sousah (al-Ghurabaa', October 26, 2018).  
Left: One of the SDF fighters taken prisoner by ISIS in al-Sousah (al-Sham-al-Baraka district, October 26, 2018).

Following its success ISIS issued a video announcing the occupation of al-Sousah and several villages around it. It also reported on attacks carried out in the region of Gharanij, about 13 kilometers northwest of Hajin. The video shows car bombs being detonated and SDF bodies and prisoners. One of the prisoners is photographed saying, “I call on the Arab tribes and the young people who join the SDF to leave them, because the Islamic State is capable of reaching your homes.” ISIS claimed it killed more than 183 SDF fighters in the clashes, that dozens of fighters were wounded and twenty had been captured (A’maq, October 29, 2018).

Right: SDF vehicles destroyed during ISIS’s counterattack. Left: A mobile ISIS force preparing during a sandstorm for movement to carry out the counterattack to retake the al-Sousah area (A’maq, October 29, 2018).

The entrance to al-Sousah, with an inscription reading “Al-Sousah welcomes you” (A’maq, October 29, 2018).
The area around the town of Hajin

In the Hajin area the clashes between ISIS and the SDF continue. The Kurdish militias (YPG) reported their fighters had destroyed car bombs that ISIS tried to detonate. In one instance ISIS reported that a suicide bomber blew himself up with an explosive belt in a train station in the Hajin region, where SDF fighters were concentrated (al-Ghurabaa’, October 26, 2018).

An ISIS car bomb damaged by SDF fighters in the Hajin region. In the rear of the vehicle containers of explosives can be seen (YouTube channel of YPG Press Office, October 26, 2018).

Attack on an SDF position in the al-Tanak oil field

ISIS’s A’maq news agency announced that a squad of ISIS operatives had attacked an SDF forces’ position near the oil well of the al-Tanak oil field (about 37 kilometers southeast of al-Mayadeen). According to the reports, in the clashes at least 15 SDF fighters were killed and several others were wounded (A’maq, October 25, 2018).

The al-Tanak oil field (Google Maps)

The Iraq-Syria border

On October 27, 2018 “the popular mobilization” (the Shi’ite militias) in al-Anbar Province announced they were reinforcing their forces in the Iraqi-Syrian border region. That came after positions of SDF forces along the border were attacked by ISIS squads, who
exploited the bad weather conditions in the region. As a result SDF soldiers left the border region (al-Sumaria News, October 27, 2018; the “popular mobilization” website, October 27, 2018).

Following that, Iraqi planes dropped flysheets over the village of al-Baghouz, one of the focal points of clashes between ISIS and the SDF (located in the southern part of the ISIS’s enclave, near the Iraq-Syria border). The flysheets called on ISIS operatives to surrender and reach an arrangement because they were surrounded. “The border of Iraq,” according to the flysheet, “is barricaded by the Iraqis, who will not allow you to approach it” (Facebook page of Furat Post, October 29, 2018).

Losses

The Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that since the beginning of the attack on the ISIS enclave north of Albukamal, at least 471 ISIS operatives and 239 SDF fighters were killed (Syrian Human Rights Observatory, October 25, 2018). It was reported that SDF headquarters received more than a hundred names of fighters killed during ISIS’s most recent counterattacks against al-Sousah and al-Baghouz (Facebook page of Furat Post, October 29, 2018).
Main Developments in Iraq

Activities of the Iraqi security forces

This past week the Iraqi security forces continued their activities against ISIS in the various provinces:

- **The Kirkuk region**: A force of the Iraqi federal police set up an ambush on one of the roads south of Kirkuk were ISIS operatives drive and killed three ISIS operatives. Found at the scene were explosive belts, two IEDs and various weapons (al-Sumaria News, October 27, 2018).

- **Al-Anbar province**: Iraqi security forces carried out a broad operation in the refugee camps south of Fallujah. They detained six ISIS operatives who had infiltrated into the refugee camps with displaced families. The operatives had been involved in terrorist attacks on civilians and security forces operatives (Iraqi News, October 25, 2018).

- **Al-Anbar province**: An Iraqi army force located four ISIS tunnels north of the al-Rutba area and destroyed them. There were a number of ISIS operatives in the tunnels. In addition, the army force found and neutralized dozens of IEDs and quantities of explosives, and confiscated various weapons (Iraqi News Agency, October 27, 2018).

- **Al-Anbar province**: An Iraqi security force in Fallujah detained operatives of a “terrorist squad” (apparently an ISIS squad) that specialized in placing IEDs. According to the claims of Iraqi security sources, the operatives of the squad had carried out many attacks against members of the security forces and civilians (Iraqi News, October 28, 2018).

- **Nineveh province**: A police force in Nineveh province detained twelve ISIS operatives in southeastern Mosul. They had worked in various administrative institutions of the...
Islamic State when it controlled Mosul. One of them was an operative in the Islamic morality police, one worked for the organization’s ministry of justice and the rest for the ministry of the army (Iraqi News Agency, October 26, 2018).

*Nineveh province:* In the Old City of Mosul Iraqi army intelligence force located eleven explosive belts, and equipment and materials used to manufacture explosives (Iraqi News Agency, October 28, 2018).

*Nineveh province:* A force of the Nineveh province police detained three ISIS operatives in the al-Zaharaa’ and al-Antsar neighborhoods in the southeastern part of Mosul. One was an operative in ISIS’s morality police, and another worked for the organization’s religious law system (the sharia) (Iraqi News Agency, October 28, 2018).

*The Sinai Peninsula and Egypt*

ISIS announced that on the afternoon of October 27, 2018, its operatives had attacked Egyptian army soldiers, shooting at them with and throwing hand grenades. The attack took place east of the Balaa’ region south of Rafah. Two soldiers were wounded. In addition, ISIS operatives detonated an IED, damaging an army bulldozer (ISIS’s Radio al-Bayan, October 28, 2018).

An article in al-Araby al-Jadeed (October 26, 2018) reported that after several months of relative calm, since the end of September there has been an increase in the number of attacks carried out by ISIS against the Egyptian security forces in the northern Sinai Peninsula. The attacks include car bombs, sniper fire and firing armor-piercing shells. An expert on Sinai Peninsula affairs told a reporter for the newspaper that one of the reasons was the merging of ISIS’s Sinai Province with the al-Qaeda province in Rafah and al-Sheikh Zuweid.
Jihadi Activity in Other Countries

ISIS suicide bombing attack on members of the elections committee in Kabul

► On October 29, 2018, a suicide bombing attack was carried out in Kabul, Afghanistan, near the office of the Independent Election Commission (IEC). Four members of the committee and two policemen were wounded (khaama.com, October 29, 2018). A spokesman for the Afghan ministry of the interior said the suicide bomber had been identified by police, who shot and killed him before he could reach his car (Ariana News Afghan TV channel), October 29, 2018). ISIS announced the suicide bomber exploded an explosive belt he was wearing. The target of the attack was three vehicles of security forces and IEC employees (Khorasan Province, October 29, 2018).

Right: Afghan security forces at the scene of the suicide bombing attack near the headquarters of the election committee in Kabul. Left: A fire truck at the scene of the attack (Ariana News Twitter account, October 29, 2018).

ISIS attack on the police station in the village al-Fuqaha, central Libya

► On the morning of October 28, 2018, ISIS attacked the police station in the central Libyan village of al-Fuqaha (about 376 kilometers south of Sirte). An ISIS force of 25 vehicles stormed the village, attacked the police station and clashed with local residents. Four people were killed and dozens were abducted, most of them probably local police. Five buildings and six vehicles were set on fire (Bawabat al-Wasat, October 30, 2018).
ISIS issued an announcement saying its operatives had patrolled the town of al-Fuqaha looking for “wanted people” – policemen, soldiers and agents of the Haftar army. According to the announcement, ISIS operatives attacked the local police station, killed policemen and burned the building. They also detained a number of “wanted people” and burned their houses (al-Ghurabaa’, October 29, 2018). ISIS announced it had destroyed a vehicle that tried to follow ISIS operatives along desert routes (ISIS’s Baraqah Province, October 29, 2018).

After attacking al-Fuqaha, ISIS operatives attacked a security roadblock near the village of Hun in central Libya. One soldier was killed and another wounded (Bawabat al-Wasat, October 30, 2018). ISIS announced a suicide bomber blew himself up in a car bomb at a
roadblock on the al-Jafra-Subha road. ISIS operatives then attacked the roadblock and killed all those who had survived the explosion (al-Ghuraba’a, October 29, 2018).

**Suicide bombing attack in Tunisia**

On October 29, 2018, a female suicide bomber blew herself up in front of the municipal theater in Tunis. Nine security operatives and one civilian were wounded (al-Aruk, October 29, 2018). So far ISIS has not claimed responsibility for the attack. Pictures of the body of the suicide bomber indicate she was apparently carrying a relatively small improvised bomb and not an explosive belt of the kind ISIS suicide bombers usually wear. According to Dr. Ashraf Sabar, an expert on extremist organizations, the objective of the attack was to prevent a meeting that was supposed to discuss the future of the Islamists in Tunisian politics (Sputnik, October 30, 2018).

The body of the suicide bomber in Tunisia
(Hany Salama’s Twitter account, October 29, 2018).

**Counterterrorism Activities**

Exposure of ISIS cell in Moscow that planned to carry out terrorist attacks

Russian security service detained, on October 26, 2018 in Moscow, six operatives of an ISIS terrorist cell. They planned to carry out large terrorist attacks in Moscow using chemical weapons and improvised explosives. During searches automatic weapons were found, as were money, communications equipment, instructions for planning terrorist attacks and a guide for preparing homemade IEDs. The cell was funded by money sent from
abroad and local criminal activity. The cell was handled by operatives from central Asia who are currently in Syria (Sputnik, Tass, Russia Today, October 26, 2018).

From a video showing the member of the cell immediately after their arrest (YouTube page of Russia Today, October 26, 2018).