



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## December 13-19, 2018



### Main events of the week

- ▶ **In eastern Syria**, the SDF forces, with Coalition air support, managed to **take over most of the city of Hajin** (ISIS's main stronghold in the enclave under its control east of the Euphrates River). Fighting is still ongoing on the eastern outskirts of Hajin. The takeover of Hajin **placed the SDF in a convenient position for further mopping up of the enclave controlled by ISIS**. However, **threats by the Turkish president** to launch a military operation against the Kurdish forces in the area of Manbij (west of the Euphrates River) are liable to curb the momentum of the SDF offensive and divert the Kurds' attention to Turkey (Note: President Trump's statement about the removal of the American forces from Syria, which was issued after the writing of the current document, may also impact negatively on the Kurdish forces' motivation).
- ▶ ISIS continues its terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare in in the various provinces **in Iraq**, despite the preventive actions of the Iraqi security forces. This week, **there was a significant increase in attacks on Iraqi intelligence personnel in their homes and the planting of IEDs against Iraqi security forces' vehicles on the main roads**.
- ▶ While ISIS is facing heavy pressure in its "core countries" (Syria and Iraq), **it carries on its intensive activity in its various provinces**. Prominent incidents in the first half of December 2018 included ISIS's terrorist acts in **Somalia** (directed mainly against Al-Qaeda) and **West Africa** (the killing of dozens of Nigerian soldiers in six incidents, mainly in the area of Lake Chad).
- ▶ This week, ISIS claimed responsibility for **the shooting attack in the Christmas market in Strasbourg** (five killed). The terrorist who carried out the attack was killed in an exchange of fire with local police in one of the neighborhoods in the southern part of the city. French security forces are checking whether others were involved in the attack.

## The Idlib area

### Incidents in the Idlib area continue

► This week as well, incidents in the Idlib area continued between the Syrian army and the jihadi organizations. Following are the main events:

- ◆ **The Syrian army** fired artillery at concentrations of “armed operatives” in several villages southeast of Idlib (Facebook page of the Syrian army’s Central Military Information Office, December 15, 2018).
- ◆ **A force of the “Battalions of Glory,”** affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, attempted to infiltrate into Syrian army positions 18 km northwest of Hama. The Syrian army responded with machine gun fire and the force retreated (SANA, December 12, 2018).
- ◆ A Syrian army observation post spotted squads of **“terrorist operatives”** firing mortar shells about 24 km north of Hama. The Syrian army responded with light firearms and machine gun fire at the squads, causing them many casualties (SANA, December 16, 2018).



**Right: Operatives of the Guardians of Religion Organization (affiliated with Al-Qaeda) moving along the contact lines with the Syrian army. Left: Sniper of the Guardians of Religion Organization in a firing position at the contact line with the Syrian army (Sham al-Ribat Media Foundation, December 16, 2018)**

### Detention of ISIS operatives by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham

► The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reported that its security apparatus had detained two ISIS operatives from the city of Saraqib, about 15 km south of Idlib. The two were engaged in killing operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and

other rebel organizations operating in the Idlib area. Their modus operandi was planting IEDs in the vehicles of the targeted people (Ibaa, December 15, 2018).

## Eastern Syria

### Hajin, ISIS's stronghold, falls into the hands of the SDF forces

► **On December 14, 2018, the SDF forces managed to take over most of the territory of the city of Hajin**, ISIS's stronghold in the area north of Albukamal. The takeover of Hajin was preceded by fierce battles which went on for about a week, with many casualties on both sides. The ISIS operatives, pushed to the outskirts of the city, attacked the SDF forces by mortar fire. Clashes continue mainly **on the eastern outskirts of the city**. After mopping up the city from ISIS operatives and the remaining IEDs, the SDF forces intend to take over other towns and villages in the ISIS enclave (Al-Sharqiya 24, December 15, 2018).



**Right: An armored SDF vehicle in the city of Hajin (Deir ez-Zor 24, December 13, 2018). Left: SDF fighters carrying flags walking in the streets of Hajin (YPG Press Office YouTube channel, December 15, 2018)**

### Clashes on the eastern outskirts of Hajin

► Since December 16, 2018, clashes have continued **on the eastern outskirts of Hajin**, where ISIS operatives withdrew after the takeover of the city by the SDF forces. ISIS operatives attacked front SDF positions and fired artillery at them. The SDF fired rockets at the ISIS positions. On December 17, 2018, an ISIS squad attempted to infiltrate into the city. It was surrounded by the SDF forces, supported with Coalition airstrikes, and all the squad operatives were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 18, 2018).



**Right: ISIS operatives during the clashes with the SDF forces in Hajin. Left: ISIS operative firing a heavy machine gun mounted on a motorcycle (Amaq, December 17, 2018)**



**Right: An ISIS suicide bomber, codenamed Abu Najm al-Iraqi, in a car bomb which he detonated against the SDF forces near the hospital in Hajin. Left: An armored car on its way to the SDF forces near the hospital in Hajin. Four IEDs can be seen on the upper part of the car (Al-Sham – Baraka Province, December 12, 2018)**

► The takeover of most of Hajin’s territory **places the SDF forces at a convenient position to continue mopping up the ISIS enclave north of Albukamal.** However, **the pressure exerted by the Turks on the Kurdish forces may disrupt the continued attack and divert the Kurds’ attention to Turkey.** Turkish President Erdoğan recently stated **that they were intending to open a military campaign against the Kurdish forces in the Manbij area** (west of the Euphrates River) if the US was not going to evacuate the Kurds from that area (Anatolia, February 14, 2018).

### **ISIS attack against the SDF forces in the southern part of the enclave**

► On the morning of December 16, 2018, ISIS operatives attacked SDF positions in the southern part of the ISIS-controlled enclave (the area of the village of Al-Baghouz Tahtani). According to an SDF report, they halted the attack and caused ISIS dozens of casualties. In the evening, the attack was resumed. The SDF reported that ISIS had sustained further fatalities and that weapons were seized. **In the ITIC's assessment, ISIS carries out attacks in the southern part of the enclave to relieve the SDF pressure in the north.** On December

18, 2018, ISIS attempted to carry out another attack, in which a car bomb was detonated (SDF Press, December 16, 2018).

### Coalition air support

► The US army tweeted that on December 15, 2018, Coalition planes had carried out a precision strike against an ISIS command center **which operated from a mosque in southeast Hajin**. According to the tweet, “ISIS continues to have no regard for innocent lives and protected sites” (Operation Inherent Resolve’s Twitter account, December 15, 2018).



**Right: Smoke rising after a Coalition airstrike in the city of Hajin. Left: Coalition combat helicopter flying over Hajin (Al-Sham – Baraka Province, December 14, 2018)**



**ISIS operative firing at a Coalition aircraft flying over Hajin (Al-Sham – Baraka Province, December 14, 2018)**

### Losses sustained by ISIS and the SDF

► The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that **since the beginning of the attack on the ISIS enclave, 956 ISIS operatives and 545 SDF fighters had been killed** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 18, 2018).

## Foreign fighters in the ranks of ISIS

► An ISIS operative taken prisoner by the SDF in Hajin revealed in his interrogation that **many ISIS operatives operating north of Albukamal** were Iraqis or foreigners referred to as “migrants” (Al-Muhajirin). **Some of the foreigners are from Britain, Germany and Bosnia.** One of the foreigners, who had served as a senior commander, was killed in the fighting. Other foreign fighters were killed in the recent battles taking place in Al-Baghouz (in the southern part of the ISIS-controlled enclave, near Albukamal) (SDF Media Center, December 12, 2018).

## Main developments in Iraq

### Iraqi army artillery fire at Hajin

► This week, the Iraqi army **carried out massive artillery fire at targets in Hajin.** In the ITIC’s assessment, the attack on the city took place in coordination with an attack by the SDF forces (Iraqi News Agency, December 16, 2018).



Iraqi army artillery fire at ISIS targets in Syrian territory, in the border area (Iraqi News Agency, December 16, 2018)

### The activity of the Iraqi security forces



Armored column of the Iraqi Federal Police during a security operation against ISIS (Iraqi News Agency, December 16, 2018)

- ▶ Following are the main activities carried out by the Iraqi security forces this past week:
  - ◆ **Baghdad:** An Iraqi counterterrorism force killed Majed Abd al-Rahman Musa, security chief of ISIS's North Baghdad Province. Twelve ISIS operatives were killed along with him (Al-Sumaria News, December 13, 2018).
  - ◆ **Al-Anbar Province:** Iraqi security forces found 50 IEDs in one of the neighborhoods of Fallujah. The IEDs were neutralized (Iraqi News Agency, December 15, 2018).
  - ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** A Federal Police force found two ISIS tunnels in the Al-Hawija District (around 51 km west of Kirkuk). They also found a workshop for making IEDs in the area. The two tunnels and the workshop were destroyed (Iraqi News Agency, December 16, 2018).
  - ◆ **Nineveh Province:** Iraqi security forces located a tunnel west of Mosul, where ISIS operatives were hiding. The tunnel was destroyed in an Iraqi Air Force airstrike. Four ISIS operatives were killed.
  - ◆ **Nineveh Province:** Iraqi security forces uncovered weapons in the Old City of Mosul. They also found 40 mines and 45 IEDs west of the city (Iraqi News Agency, December 16, 2018).
  - ◆ **Al-Anbar Province:** An Iraqi force that was dropped by air force aircraft in the desert some 280 km west of Ramadi detained four ISIS operatives. According to Iraqi intelligence, there are still ISIS squads in the desert areas (Iraqi News Agency, December 13, 2018).



**ISIS operative detained by Iraqi security forces (Iraqi News Agency, December 13, 2018)**

- ▶ **This week, there has been an increase in the number of attacks carried out by ISIS operatives against Iraqi intelligence personnel in their homes. In addition, there were increasing incidents of IEDs being planted against vehicles of the Iraqi security forces on the roads.** Following are the main acts of terrorism and guerrilla warfare carried out by ISIS in the past week (most of which rely on ISIS reports):

- ◆ **Nineveh Province:** ISIS operatives broke into the home of an Iraqi intelligence officer in the city of Mosul. The intelligence officer and his son were executed by shooting (Iraq – Nineveh Province, December 18, 2018).



**ISIS operative wearing fatigues near an Iraqi intelligence operative just before the latter was executed along with his son (Iraq – Nineveh Province, December 18, 2018)**

- ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** On December 14, 2018, ISIS operatives broke into the home of one of the intelligence officers of the Popular Mobilization, around 70 km west of Kirkuk. The intelligence officer was shot to death (Iraq – Kirkuk Province; Amaq News Agency, December 18, 2018).
- ◆ **Nineveh Province:** On December 14, 2018, ISIS operatives detonated an IED against an Iraqi army vehicle in east Mosul. The vehicle was destroyed and three of the passengers were killed (Amaq News Agency, December 15, 2018).
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** On December 15, 2018, ISIS operatives detonated two IEDs against an Iraqi army column about 80 km north of Baghdad. Two vehicles were destroyed and some of the passengers were killed or wounded (Iraq – Salah al-Din Province; Amaq News Agency, December 16, 2018).
- ◆ **Al-Anbar Province:** On December 15, 2018, an IED was detonated against an Iraqi Police vehicle on the international highway around 130 km west of Ramadi. The blast killed three of the passengers, including an officer with the rank of major (Al-Sumaria News, December 15, 2018). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** On December 16, 2018, ISIS operatives fired small and medium arms at two Popular Mobilization ATVs in Jazirat Samarra. According to a report by ISIS, the passengers in the vehicles were killed or wounded (Iraq – Salah al-Din Province; Amaq News Agency, December 17, 2018).

◆ **Nineveh Province:** On December 16, 2018, ISIS operatives detonated an IED against a vehicle of the Tribal Mobilization, some 40 km south of Mosul. One of the passengers in the vehicle was wounded (Iraq – Dijla Province; Amaq News Agency, December 17, 2018).

◆ **Kirkuk Province:** On December 16, 2018, ISIS operatives blew up the homes of four Iraqi Federal Police officers 28 km west of Kirkuk. They also blew up the home of a local village chief (Iraq – Kirkuk Province, December 17, 2018).

◆ **Al-Anbar Province:** ISIS operatives threw hand grenades at a house in central Ramadi where a gathering of Iraqi military personnel was taking place. Three soldiers, including an officer, were killed and two others were wounded (Iraq – Al-Anbar Province, December 17, 2018).

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

### ISIS ambush against an Egyptian army force

► ISIS announced that on December 16, 2018, its operatives had placed an ambush consisting of several IEDs against a motorized column of the Egyptian army Border Police in Jabal al-Maghara, in central Sinai (about 57 km southwest of Al-Arish). The ISIS operatives detonated the IEDs and shot at the Egyptian force. ISIS reported that about 20 soldiers of the Egyptian force were either killed or wounded, and several vehicles were destroyed (Amaq News Agency and ISIS's Sinai Province, December 17, 2018).



Jabal al-Maghara (Wikimapia)

► According to **an Egyptian security source**, the ISIS attack was carried out against a force of the Al-Maghara checkpoint. An Egyptian officer was killed and three other soldiers were wounded. An Egyptian force which searched the area killed two ISIS operatives who had taken part in the attack (Mada Masr, December 18, 2018). According to another version, several “terrorist operatives” who detonated an IED against an Egyptian Border Police vehicle in central Sinai on December 17, 2018, were killed. Two Egyptian soldiers were killed as a result of the explosion (Omar\_halemi1@ Twitter page).



**The body of an ISIS operative who took part in detonating an IED against an Egyptian army armored vehicle in the Al-Maghara area (islamsaeed1976@ISLAMOVIC1976 Twitter page, December 17, 2018)**

- **Other terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS in northern Sinai (according to ISIS reports):**
- ◆ South of Al-Arish, an Egyptian army soldier was killed by sniper shooting (Amaq News Agency, December 17, 2018).
  - ◆ An IED was detonated against an Egyptian army bulldozer in the Rafah area. The bulldozer was damaged (ISIS’s Sinai Province, December 17, 2018).

### **Execution of operatives supporting the Egyptian regime**

- ISIS announced that on December 14, 2018, it had executed in southern Rafah two militiamen loyal to the Egyptian regime. A video released by ISIS shows their execution by slitting their throats (Amaq, December 15, 2018).



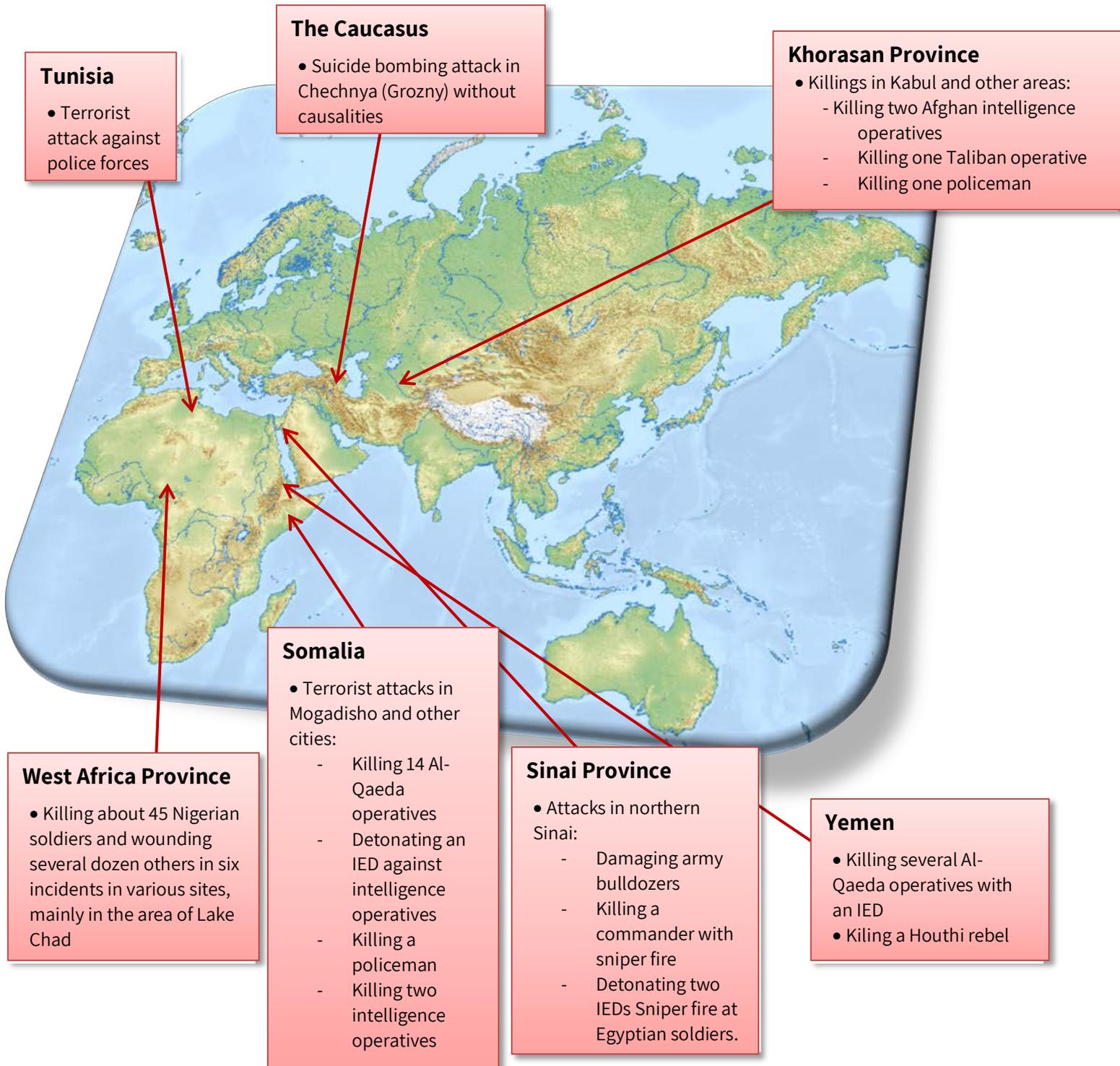
One of the operatives executed by ISIS (Amaq, December 14, 2018)

## Jihadi activity in other countries

### ISIS's guerrilla and terror activity around the world (summary for the first half of December 2018)

While ISIS remains under heavy pressure in its core countries (Syria and Iraq), **the organization's intensive activity in its provinces around the world continues** at varying levels of intensity. Especially prominent in the first half of December 2018 was the activity in the **Somalia Province and the West Africa Province in Nigeria** (which has been intensively active in recent months); **ISIS's Sinai Province** continues its guerrilla warfare against the Egyptian security forces, mainly in northern Sinai, despite the heavy pressure exerted on it by the Egyptian security forces. ISIS's other provinces around the world continued their "routine" offensive and defensive activities at a lower level of intensity.

## The Islamic State's activity around the world (December 1-16, 2018)



## Shooting attack in the Christmas market in Strasbourg (update)

► On the evening of December 11, 2018, a shooting attack was carried out near the Christmas market in the city of Strasbourg, killing five people. On December 13, 2018, the French interior minister announced that in one of the neighborhoods in south Strasbourg, three police officers had encountered the terrorist Chérif Chekatt during a patrol. Chekatt opened fire at them and was shot and killed in the exchange of fire with the police (France 24, December 13, 2018).

**ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** On December 13, 2018, ISIS issued the routine version of its announcement, as follows: “A security source told the Amaq News Agency that the one who carried out the attack in the city of Strasbourg in eastern France on Tuesday [December 11, 2018] was one of the soldiers of the caliphate who carried out the operation [the attack] in response to calls to attack the citizens of the Coalition” (Amaq News Agency, December 13, 2018).

► **In an interview with France 2 Television**, Abd al-Karim Chekatt, father of the terrorist Chérif Chekatt, said that **his son had supported ISIS** and claimed that the organization was “fighting for a just cause.” The father denied that he had known that his son was planning to carry out a shooting attack and claimed that he had tried to dissuade him from [adopting] extremist ideologies. The perpetrator’s parents and two of his brothers are among a group of people who were detained by the French police as part of an investigation to find out whether other people were involved in the attack. The four members of the perpetrator’s family (including his father) were released after no incriminating evidence against them was found (The Independent, Britain, December 16, 2018).



**Poster published by an ISIS supporter showing Santa Claus bleeding on the ground in central Strasbourg (P J Media, December 14, 2018)**

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Terrorism-financing network exposed in Russia

► The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced that it had **uncovered an underground network whose operatives had raised money for operatives of the Islamic State** and the Al-Nusra Front (the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham) in Russia. The network operated **in the Moscow Region, Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia**, providing financial support to the Islamic State and the Al-Nusra Front. It was headed by an extremist Islamist named I. S. Akhmednabiyev (TASS News Agency, December 13, 2018).

According to the statement issued by the FSB, **two charitable societies by the name of Muhajiroun and Salsabil have raised money allegedly to build a mosque in Moscow and to help needy Muslims**. However, these donations were actually **transferred to terrorist organizations**. The network operatives transferred money to two Russian women who joined ISIS units in Syria. The two women are wanted for financing terrorism and participating in terrorist activities. According to the statement issued by the FSB, since 2016, more than 38 million rubles (\$573,000) have been transferred to women for the purpose of financing terrorism (TASS News Agency, 13 December 2018).