Main events of the week

- Even after the fall of ISIS’s “pocket” in the Al-Baghouz region, **SDF forces continue to mop up the village and the surrounding area.** There are still a number of ISIS operatives hiding in trenches and tunnels and occasionally attempting to attack the SDF forces.

- In the meantime, ISIS continues to carry out acts of terrorism and guerrilla warfare in the **Syrian arena.** This week, ISIS’s activity focused on the Euphrates Valley (the areas of Al-Mayadeen and Deir ez-Zor) and the deserts between Al-Sukhnah and Deir ez-Zor. Their modus operandi is mainly ambushes and shooting attacks against SDF or Syrian Army vehicles and fighters. In one case, a car bomb exploded near an SDF convoy in the area of Al-Mayadeen. Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham took the unusual step of attacking a Syrian army force in Deir ez-Zor in what the organization called an “operation behind enemy lines.”

- The Syrian army and the security forces of the SDF are employing counterterrorism measures against ISIS’s guerrilla activity. According to reports, the Syrian army reinforced its troops in the deserts of Al-Sukhnah and set up dozens of roadblocks on the road from Al-Sukhnah to Deir ez-Zor. In the cities of Al-Raqqa and Manbij, the Kurdish security forces uncovered ISIS networks which had been involved in attacks against the SDF forces.

- This week, terrorist and guerilla operations in ISIS’s various provinces continued: In the **Iraq Province**, large-scale guerrilla operations continue, mainly detonating IEDs and shooting attacks; The **East Asia Province** continues to wage fierce fighting against the Philippine army on the island of Mindanao, in the south; The **Sinai Province** continued to carry out guerrilla operations against the Egyptian security forces in northern Sinai; The **West Africa Province** attacked a Nigerian army compound this week and may have also carried out a suicide bombing and shooting attack in southeastern Niger; The **Libya Province** abducted collaborators with the Libyan government; The **Somalia Province** detonated an
IED against an army force northwest of the capital Mogadishu; and the Yemen Province has recently been involved in fierce fighting against Al-Qaeda’s branch in Yemen.

The Idlib area

Exchanges of fire continue between the Syrian army and the jihadi rebel organizations

- This week as well, exchanges of fire continued between the Syrian army and the jihadi rebel organizations. Following are the main incidents:

  - **The Syrian army** fired artillery at the forces of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the southern part of the Al-Ghab Plain and south of Idlib. Many “terrorist operatives” were reportedly killed and wounded. The Syrian army also fired artillery at operatives of the Islamic Turkestan Party (the Uyghur operatives from China) in the central and southern part of the Al-Ghab Plain. “Terrorist squads” and hiding places of the organization were destroyed (SANA, March 28, 29, 2019).

  - **The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** announced that it had fired mortar shells at Syrian army positions in the southern part of the Al-Ghab Plain (about 40 km south of Jisr Al-Shughur) (Telegram, March 29, 2019). In an additional announcement, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham stated that its operatives had fired artillery at Syrian army positions around the town of Mahrada, about 20 km northwest of Hama (Ibaa, April 1, 2019).

Right: Firing a mortar shell at Syrian army positions (Telegram, March 29, 2019). Left: Artillery fire by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham at Syrian army positions around the town of Mahrada (Ibaa, April 1, 2019)
SDF forces continue to mop up the Al-Baghouz area

Even after the Al-Baghouz area was taken over, the SDF forces continue to mop up the village and its environs. Remaining ISIS operatives hiding in trenches and tunnels still continue to attack the forces every once in a while.

In this context, it was reported that on March 27, 2019, about 20 SDF fighters were killed and many others wounded in an attack carried out by ISIS operatives who barricaded themselves in a tunnel in the village of Al-Baghouz. Coalition fighter jets carried out nine airstrikes against the tunnel where the attacking ISIS operatives were hiding (Deir ez-Zor 24, March 28, 2019). On March 28-29, 2019, there were clashes between SDF fighters and ISIS operatives who barricaded themselves in one of the trenches near Mount Al-Baghouz (Deir ez-Zor 24, March 28, 2019). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Coalition fighter jets had attacked trenches and tunnels where ISIS operatives who refused to surrender were hiding. ISIS operatives are reportedly hiding in tunnels on the slopes of Mount Al-Baghouz (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, April 2, 2019).

Al-Sukhnah desert area reinforced by the Syrian army

Syrian opposition sources reported that several Syrian soldiers had been killed and wounded in clashes with ISIS in the desert south of Deir ez-Zor. According to one of the reports, the fatalities include two Syrian officers, one with the rank of Aqid (colonel) (Deir ez-Zor 24, April 1, 2019; MENA Media Monitor, April 2, 2019). For the time being, official Syrian sources did not comment on this information.
Due to ISIS’s guerrilla activity in the desert area in the Al-Sukhnah region, it was reported that the Syrian army recently reinforced the area with forces of the 11th Division. The Syrian forces reportedly deployed about 50 soldiers in the Al-Sukhnah Desert and on the Al-Sukhnah-Deir ez-Zor road (Khotwa, March 30, 2019). It was reported that the Syrian Air Force attacked ISIS operatives who were hiding in the area (Khotwa, March 30, 2019).

**Senior ISIS operative detained**

A US Marine force operating on behalf of the Coalition reportedly detained one of ISIS’s senior operatives, codenamed Abu Suhaib al-Iraqi. He was detained in the Al-Baghouz area by a force deployed from a helicopter. Al-Iraqi, considered no. 3 in the ISIS hierarchy, reportedly served as the person in charge (emir) of military training in the organization and the Islamic propaganda activity. Along with him, five other operatives were detained as well. He was transferred to the area of the Omar oil field (10 km east of Al-Mayadeen), where a detention facility was set up for ISIS operatives and their families (Al-Sumaria, March 31, 2019; Khotwa, March 31, 2019).

Northeastern Syria

**ISIS guerrilla attacks in the Euphrates Valley**

This week as well, ISIS continued its guerrilla activity against the SDF forces in the Euphrates Valley, in the Al-Mayadeen and Deir ez-Zor areas. Following are the main attacks:

- Shooting attack against SDF fighters 24 km east of Deir ez-Zor. Two SDF fighters were killed (announcement by ISIS’s Al-Sham-Al-Khayr Province through Telegram, March 28, 2019).
Shooting attack against an SDF vehicle about 5 km east of Al-Mayadeen. Two SDF fighters were killed (ISIS’s Al-Sham-Al-Khayr Province through Telegram, March 28, 2019).

Shooting attack against SDF fighters in the village of Tiyanah, about 8 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. An SDF fighter was killed (Drexl Spivey@RisboLensky Twitter account, March 30, 2019).

Deir ez-Zor

In the village of Tiyanah, an SDF checkpoint was shot at. No ISIS claim of responsibility was found. The SDF forces searched the village (Deir ez-Zor 24, April 1, 2019).

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**Unusual attack by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham against the Syrian army in Deir ez-Zor**

- This week, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham announced that **it had carried out a terrorist attack against a Syrian army force in Deir ez-Zor**, “behind enemy lines.”

This is an unusual attack, which requires extensive guerrilla capabilities, as the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham is not active in the Euphrates Valley and its activity focuses on the Idlib area.

- On March 28, 2019, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham announced that its operatives had attacked a group of officers of the Syrian army 4th Division in Deir ez-Zor. An officer and a Syrian army soldier were killed, and additional soldiers were wounded.

According to an announcement of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, the attack...
was carried out in response to the extensive attacks of the Syrian army against the Idlib enclave (“the liberated areas”) (Ibaa website through Telegram, March 28, 2019).

**Northern Syria**

**Kurdish counterterrorist activity in Al-Raqqah and Manbij**

- The Kurdish security forces continued their counterterrorist activity in Al-Raqqah, aiming to uncover secret ISIS networks and put an end to the terrorist attacks in the area. On March 31, 2019, the Kurdish security forces reportedly detained nine operatives who belonged to an ISIS network in Al-Raqqah (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 31, 2019). In addition, the Kurdish security forces detained the squad which, on the night of March 25, 2019, had carried out the attack against the SDF checkpoint at one of the entrances to Manbij (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 26, 2019).

**Main developments in Iraq**

**ISIS’s terrorist and guerrilla activity**

- Following are highlights of ISIS’s activity in the past week (based on ISIS reports):
  - **Al-Anbar Province**: ISIS operatives detonated an IED against an Iraqi army vehicle south of Al-Qaim. An Iraqi soldier was killed and three others were wounded (@TRACterrorism Twitter account, March 30, 2019).
  - **Al-Anbar Province**: Four Iraqi soldiers were killed and their vehicle was destroyed by detonating an IED in the Ramadi area (@TRACterrorism Twitter account, March 30, 2019).
  - **Nineveh Province**: A hand grenade was thrown at the house of an Iraqi police officer around the town of Zummar (Telegram, March 31, 2019).
  - **Diyala Province**: An IED was detonated against an Iraqi army vehicle southeast of Baqubah. Two Iraqi soldiers were wounded (Shabakat Shumukh, April 1, 2019).
  - **Baghdad Province**: A police commander and a Tribal Mobilization commander were killed and additional operatives were wounded in exchanges of fire about 50 m north of Baghdad (Shabakat Shumukh, April 1, 2019). Iraqi military sources confirmed the incident (Araby21, March 31, 2019).
  - **Kirkuk area**: There were exchanges of fire between ISIS operatives and Popular Mobilization fighters and Iraqi policemen southeast of the city of Kirkuk. A Popular
Mobilization fighter was killed and another was wounded. In addition, in the same area, ISIS detonated IEDs against vehicles of the Iraqi police and the Tribal Mobilization. Rockets were fired at buildings used by the Iraqi security forces, causing damage to those buildings (Shabakat Shumukh, March 31, 2019).

**Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces**

- Following are the main counterterrorist activities carried out by the Iraqi security forces:
  - **Al-Anbar Province**: The Popular Mobilization detained two ISIS operatives in eastern Al-Anbar Province. The detainees, who admitted to being ISIS operatives, noted that their superior was a foreign national (al-hashed.net, March 27, 2019).
  - **Salah al-Din Province**: The Peace Battalions Shiite militia announced that in the eastern Samarra District, its operatives had killed Mohammad Intikhab, who had served as ISIS’s military governor. According to Iraqi media, he was responsible for training suicide bombers, had planned many terrorist attacks, and was the contact person between ISIS’s Salah al-Din Province and the North Baghdad Province. Along with him were killed four of his aides. A rubber boat, weapons and ammunition were seized (Al-Sumaria, March 29, 2019).
  - **Al-Anbar Province**: A Tribal Mobilization sapper team located and neutralized several IEDs in the Akashat area, about 70 km north of Al-Rutba (al-hashed.net, March 30, 2019).
Controlled detonation of IEDs located by a Popular Mobilization sapper team in the Al-Anbar Province (al-hashed.net, March 30, 2019)

- **Al-Anbar Province**: The Iraqi Defense Ministry announced that Coalition fighter jets had carried out an airstrike against two ISIS positions in the Al-Jazeera Desert, Al-Anbar Province, killing several ISIS operatives and destroying their positions (Iraqi News Agency, March 31, 2019).

- **The city of Mosul**: The Iraqi security forces detained an ISIS squad which was responsible for detonating IEDs in the eastern part of Mosul (Al-Sumaria, March 31, 2019).

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The Sinai Peninsula and Egypt

- ISIS continues its guerrilla activity against the Egyptian security forces in northern and central Sinai. Following are a number of operations carried out during the week:

  - **ISIS's Sinai Province** announced that it had executed an Egyptian army soldier who was captured in the Gifgafa area in central Sinai. The soldier was shot to death (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, March 27, 2019).
ISIS’s Sinai Province announced that its operatives had detonated an IED against an Egyptian army tank south of Sheikh Zuweid. The tank crew members were killed and wounded (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, March 28, 2019).

ISIS’s Amaq News Agency announced that ISIS had destroyed an Egyptian army bulldozer in Rafah by firing a rocket (@TRACTerrorism Twitter account, March 27, 2019).

ISIS operatives killed two people who were working for the Egyptian army, by detonating an IED in southern Rafah (Shahed Sinaa, March 27, 2019).

Activity of ISIS provinces around the world

East Asia Province

In late March 2019, intensive fighting continued between ISIS operatives and the Philippine army on the island of Mindanao, in the south of the country. The Red Cross announced that more than 50,000 civilians had been displaced from their homes on Mindanao following the intensification of the Philippine army’s activity against ISIS in late March 2019 (Minda News – a website dealing with Mindanao, March 27, 2019).
ISIS’s West Africa Province reported that on March 29, 2019, the organization had attacked a Nigerian army compound in the village of Miringa, in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. In the clashes between the sides, a number of Nigerian army soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. The compound was set on fire, a tank was destroyed, and weapons and ammunition were seized (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, March 29, 2019).

ISIS’s Amaq News Agency released a video documenting the execution of Nigerian soldiers. The video shows five masked ISIS operatives executing five Nigerian army soldiers. The execution was carried out in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. The speaker in the video addresses the “infidels” around the world and says that they will not stop fighting until the religion of Allah spreads everywhere (Telegram, April 1, 2019).
Niger

On March 26, 2019, a shooting and double suicide bombing attack was carried out by women in the city of N’guigmi, in southeastern Niger. According to the mayor of N’guigmi, the first suicide bomber blew herself up with her explosive belt in the yard of the home of a policeman located inside a police compound. A second suicide bomber detonated her explosive belt between the municipality building and the police compound. At the same time, an armed operative fired at civilians. At least 10 people were killed and seven or eight were wounded. No claim of responsibility was published (Al-Jazeera, March 27, 2019). The attack was probably carried out by ISIS’s West Africa Province.
Libya Province

- On March 27, 2019, an abduction and shooting attack was carried out in the town of Ghadwa, 60 km south of the city of Sabha (around 650 km south of Tripoli). Ten vehicles carrying a group of masked gunmen arrived in the town in order to abduct “wanted men” (i.e., collaborators with the Libyan government). The group killed one of the civilians who resisted the abduction and abducted three others. The group is affiliated with ISIS’s Libya Province (The Libya Observer – a local news agency, March 27, 2019).

Somalia Province

- ISIS’s Somalia Province announced that its operatives had detonated an IED in the city of Afgooye, some 21 km northwest of the capital Mogadishu in southern Somalia. Three soldiers were killed (Pastethis file-sharing website, March 28, 2019).

Yemen Province

- Recently, there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of the clashes between ISIS operatives and Al-Qaeda operatives in the area of Al-Bayda. Al-Qaeda announced that its operatives had taken control of the Al-Hamidah area of Al-Bayda (95 km southeast of Sana’a) and killed a squad of ISIS operatives (Telegram, April 1, 2019). On the other hand, ISIS’s Amaq News Agency announced that the organization’s operatives had killed and injured at least 10 Al-Qaeda operatives in clashes in northwestern Al-Bayda (Telegram, April 1, 2019).
The site of the clash between ISIS and Al-Qaeda in northwestern Al-Bayda (Wikimapia)

The Al-Bayda area of ISIS’s Yemen Province released a video encouraging operatives to immigrate to Yemen. The video includes documentation of ISIS’s activity in Yemen and a number of other places in the Muslim world. At the end of the video, the announcer calls on those who want to reach the Islamic State to take precautions in order to arrive safely. The announcer calls on those who cannot immigrate to carry out attacks in the “infidel” country where they are located (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 1, 2019). In the ITIC’s assessment, the video was issued in light of the Yemen Province’s desire to expand its ranks, against the backdrop of the struggle against Al-Qaeda and a number of other enemies operating in Yemen.

Right: ISIS operative in Yemen: “Every Muslim must live in Dar al-Islam (i.e., the country where the government is Islamic). If he lives outside Dar al-Islam, he must immigrate to it... For in the infidel countries, he will not be allowed to practice his religion. Only the Islamic State permits him to do so” (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 1, 2019). Left: ISIS operative in Yemen: “Hurry to the Islamic State” (Akhbar al-Muslimeen, April 1, 2019).
Afghan MP Hazrat Ali announced that ISIS had expedited the recruitment of new operatives to the organization in the provinces of eastern Afghanistan: Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman, and Nooristan. According to the MP, the new recruits to ISIS are sent for training in Pakistan and are subsequently transferred to areas in eastern Afghanistan. He added that residents of the Nangarhar and Nooristan provinces had called on the government to mount military operations to prevent the entrenchment of ISIS operatives (Afghanistan Times, March 29, 2019).