



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## August 10 – 16, 2017



### Main events of the week

- ▶ Following are the main developments in Syria and Iraq:
  - ◆ **Syria** – the fighting in **Al-Raqqah** is still bogged down, and the SDF forces are encountering fierce resistance. The Syrian forces are mopping up the area **north of Al-Sukhnah, a preparatory stage for their advance towards Deir ez-Zor**. This week, **Syrian and Russian helicopters landed a Syrian army force in Al-Kadir**, north of Al-Sukhnah. At the same time, a Syrian force advanced from Al-Sukhnah (whose takeover was completed) towards the landing site. In the ITIC's assessment, this was done in order to join up with the landing force.
  - ◆ **Iraq** – the campaign **to take over the city of Tal Afar from ISIS** began, with the participation of the Iraqi army and the Iranian-affiliated Shiite militias ("the Popular Resistance"). The campaign began with an airstrike by the Iraqi Air Force, as a preliminary stage **for a subsequent ground attack**. The takeover of the ISIS enclave in the area of Tal Afar, which is situated on the road leading from Mosul to the Iraqi-Syrian border, will facilitate mopping up the border by the Iraqi forces and Shiite militias.
- ▶ **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)** published an article in its **Inspire Magazine** calling on its operatives **to carry out terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe on their own initiative ("lone jihad warrior")**. A special section was devoted to attacking **trains** which, according to the article, is a simple but highly effective measure.

### Russia and the United States

#### The de-escalation agreements in Syria

- ▶ Relative calm has been maintained this week in the three areas that have been declared de-escalation zones (with the exception of a few violations, mainly by the forces of the Syrian regime). With regard to the inclusion of the Idlib region in the de-escalation agreements,

there are still difficulties due to the fact **that the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, which is not included in the agreements, has taken over large parts of the area.**

► In this context, **senior Russian political commentator Gevorg Mirzayan** claims that the establishment of a fourth de-escalation zone in Idlib is apparently encountering difficulties. According to him, the original plan was for the agreements to be implemented by the **Ahrar al-Sham organization**, which operates under Turkey's protection. However, **the organization has been defeated in its confrontation with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham**, which has grown significantly stronger, and many organizations operating in the area have joined its ranks (RIA Novosti, August 7, 2017).

► **Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu** said that the establishment of de-escalation zones is an expression on the ground of the **separation between the war on terror and the civil war, in which the opposition is fighting against the Syrian regime.** According to the Minister, when the de-escalation zones were decided upon, it was known that they contained only opposition forces (both moderate and not moderate) without the presence of terrorist organizations. According to him, the announcement of these zones enabled the release of significant forces to be allocated in favor of the war on terrorism. Sergey Shoygu added that if terrorist operatives are found in the de-escalation zones, the opposition forces in these zones would have to fight them (Russia-24 website, August 13, 2017).

## Main developments in Syria

### The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

After more than two months of fighting, the International Coalition announced that **the SDF forces had taken over more than half the territory of the city.** An SDF commander estimated that **the campaign is expected to last for more than four additional months** (suriya.net, August 10, 2017). This week, fighting continued in **the area of the Old City, mainly around the Grand Mosque situated in southwest Al-Raqqah.** In addition, the SDF forces took over the neighborhoods of Al-Mahdi and Al-Rafiqah, in east and southeast Al-Raqqah (Al-Sham Network, August 13, 2017). The SDF forces are supported by Coalition airstrikes. Both sides reportedly sustain heavy losses (Al-Sham net, August 13, 2017).

► ISIS continues to attack the SDF forces, **mainly by car bombs**. On August 11, 2017, ISIS reported that nine SDF fighters were killed and 12 wounded near the Grand Mosque in the Old City as a result of a car bomb explosion. The car was driven by a suicide bomber codenamed **Abu Talha al-Maqdisi** (Haqq, August 11, 2017).



**ISIS operatives preparing for an attack against the SDF forces in Al-Raqqah**  
(Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, August 10, 2017)



**ISIS operatives fighting against the SDF forces in Al-Raqqah**  
(Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, August 10, 2017)

## Mopping up the area north of Al-Sukhnah

### A Syrian force landed by helicopter in an ISIS-held area north of Al-Sukhnah

The Syrian army landed soldiers in an area held by ISIS. The landing was carried out **south of the village of Al-Kadir, about 42 km north of Al-Sukhnah**. The landing of the force **is yet another step in mopping up the Al-Raqqah-Al-Sukhnah area as a prior stage before advancing eastward, towards Deir ez-Zor**. **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoygu noted that Deir ez-Zor, besieged by the terrorists, is a key point in Syria** and its liberation would be a **crucial factor in the struggle against ISIS** (Facebook page of the Russian Defense Ministry, August 13, 2017).

► According to a report on Syrian TV, the forces were landed by **four Syrian Air Force helicopters and three Russian Air Force helicopters**. Prior to the landing, the Syrian

artillery carried out preparatory bombardment. The Syrian Air Force also carried out **preparatory bombardments and attacked ISIS-affiliated targets** (Syrian satellite TV, August 12, 2017).

► Following the landing, the Syrian regime forces took over **Khirbet Mikman** and the villages of Al-Kadir and **Bir Al-Rahum** (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, August 11, 2017). Over 25 ISIS operatives were reportedly killed, and others were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 13, 2017).



**The village of Al-Kadir (1), south of which Syrian soldiers were landed from helicopters of the Syrian and Russian air forces (Google Maps)**



**Right: Syrian soldiers before leaving for the landing operation (@syrianarmy.sy Facebook page, August 13, 2017). Left: A moment before the operation starts (Syrian TV, August 13, 2017)**



**Right: Hitting an ISIS tank by an airstrike. Left: One of two ISIS car bombs neutralized by Syrian sappers (Syrian TV, August 13, 2017)**



**ISIS operatives preparing for an attack against one of the Syrian army outposts north of Al-Kadir (Akhbar Al-Muslimeen, August 11, 2017)**

## **Completion of the takeover of Al-Sukhnah and mopping up the Al-Sukhnah area**

According to the Syrian army announcement on August 12, 2017, **the army is in full control of the city of Al-Sukhnah**, northeast of Palmyra, about a week after its forces had entered the city (August 5, 2017). The Syrian army also **finished clearing the mines and IEDs planted by ISIS operatives in the city** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 12, 2017). During the fighting in Al-Sukhnah, many ISIS operatives were reportedly killed and a large amount of weapons and equipment was destroyed. Several hundred ISIS operatives fled the city towards the Abu Kamal area, southeast of Deir ez-Zor (Al-Hadath, August 12, 2017).



**Right: An ISIS sign that reads “The Islamic State, Homs Province, the City of Al-Sukhnah.” Left: A building where ISIS’s Islamic police was headquartered in Al-Sukhnah (YouTube account of the Syrian Army Spokesperson's Office, August 12, 2017)**



**Right: Syrian army soldiers raising the Syrian flag in Al-Sukhnah (Al-Hadath, August 12, 2017). Left: Syrian army soldiers in Al-Sukhnah (YouTube account of the Syrian Army Spokesperson's Office, August 12, 2017).**

► After the takeover of Al-Sukhnah, the Syrian forces continued **mopping up the area north and south of the city**. The Syrian forces **advanced to an area held by ISIS about 35 km north of Al-Sukhnah, probably in order to join the Syrian force landed in the Al-Kadir area**. The Syrian forces **took over several villages in the area and a gas field nearby**. ISIS tried to mount a counter-attack north of Al-Sukhnah. It also attacked a Syrian army outpost southeast of Al-Sukhnah (Syria-victory, August 10, 2017).

### **Preparations of the Lebanese army and Hezbollah to mop up Baalbek and Al-Qaa ridges**

► **The Lebanese army and Hezbollah continue their preparations to open their joint campaign in the area of Ras Baalbek and Al-Qaa ridges in the northern Bekaa Valley**. Units from the Lebanese army reportedly began deploying in dominant areas in the region (Lebanon 24, August 14, 2017). The Lebanese army fired artillery on ISIS targets in the ridges of Ras Baalbek. The Iranian News Agency praised the Lebanese army attacks against outposts of the “terrorists of the Islamic State” in Ras Baalbek. The news agency claimed that this was a **preceding step** in advance of the attack planned by Hezbollah and the Lebanese army

against territories occupied by ISIS in the region during the past three years (IRNA, August 10, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

### The situation in Mosul

► The **humanitarian situation in Mosul continues to be grave**. The electricity and water supply is disrupted, and some of the houses are completely without water and electricity. Hospitals use generators provided by humanitarian aid organizations (Nineveh Information Center, August 12, 2017).



**Transferring fuel products and generators to the forensic medicine department in Mosul by an aid organization (Nineveh Information Center, August 12, 2017)**

► **There are still sporadic attacks by ISIS operatives against the security forces in Mosul.** On August 12, 2017, an ISIS operative attacked with Kalashnikov fire and hand grenades a police outpost in west Mosul's Yarmouk neighborhood. He was killed by the policemen. It then turned out that he also wore an explosive belt, which was not activated (Al-Sumaria, August 12, 2017).

### The campaign for taking over Tal Afar has begun

**Mohammad al-Khudari, the spokesman for the Iraqi Interior Ministry, announced that on the night of August 14-15, 2017, the campaign for the liberation of Tal Afar had begun** (Al-Sumaria, August 15, 2017). It is an enclave held by ISIS, about 70 km west of Mosul. According to the Special US Envoy to the Coalition, there are about 1,000 ISIS operatives in the Tal Afar area. The enclave hinders movement between Mosul and the Syrian-Iraqi border

area. Its takeover **will allow mopping up the border area (which has already begun) by the Shiite militias (the Popular Mobilization) and the Iraqi army.**



**The city of Tal Afar on the road from Mosul to the Syrian-Iraqi border (Google Maps)**

► The Iraqi Interior Ministry spokesman added that the campaign for Tal Afar had begun with **an Iraqi Air Force airstrike on ISIS targets**. The airstrike is a **preliminary stage for the ground attack planned to take place subsequently** (Al-Sumaria, August 15, 2017). At the same time, it was reported that six loud explosions were heard in Tal Afar. One of them took place in an ISIS explosives workshop (Al-Sumaria, August 15, 2017). Units from the Iranian-affiliated Shiite militias also take part in the attack on Tal Afar.



**Right: Photo from the Iraqi Air Force airstrike in Tal Afar (Al-Sumaria, August 15, 2017; source: Iraqi Defense Ministry). Left: Iraqi army ground forces on the outskirts of Tal Afar (Al-Aan Channel, August 14, 2017)**



**Right: Iraqi army ground forces on the outskirts of Tal Afar (Al-Aan Channel, August 14, 2017).  
Left: Forces of the Shiite militias operating as part of the Popular Mobilization prepare for the campaign to take over Tal Afar (Nineveh Information Center, August 15, 2017)**

► The city of Tal Afar is in the northern Iraqi Nineveh Province, about 48 km west of Mosul. Its population is mostly Sunni-Muslim, **of a Turkmen origin** (Turkish speaking people, Turkish by culture, regarded by Turkey as its protégés). In 2003, the city population numbered over 200,000. However, inter-ethnic confrontations and violent incidents decreased the number of inhabitants to 80,000 (2007). In June 2014, the city was occupied by ISIS. Following the occupation, many of its inhabitants, mostly Turkmen, fled the city. Today, it is not known how many residents there are in the city, but their number does not exceed 50,000 (Wikipedia).



**Photo of the city of Tal Afar (Al-Ghad, archive photo, October 31, 2016)**

## The Syrian-Iraqi border

► **The Sayyid Al-Shuhada Battalion** (named after Hussein bin Ali, referred to as the master of martyrs), which belongs to the Popular Mobilization militias, announced that **four of its**

**fighters had been killed and thirty wounded** in an International Coalition airstrike. It was reported that the attack targeted a convoy of the battalion trying to cross the border between Iraq and Syria. The battalion commander called on the Iraqi government to launch an investigation (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath; Al-Mayadeen, August 8, 2017). According to **Abu al-Walaa al-Walai**, the battalion commander, **after the Coalition airstrike, ISIS attacked the organization operatives** (Al-Alam, August 8, 2017).

► **ISIS** was quick to announce that **it was its operatives who attacked the militia forces**. ISIS even released a video documenting the attack. The video ends with **the execution of an Iranian prisoner** (Haqq, August 1, 2017). Sources in the International Coalition against ISIS **denied reports** that they attacked the Popular Mobilization forces on the Syrian-Iraqi border (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath website in English, August 9, 2017).



**ISIS operatives attack the outpost of the Sayyid Al-Shuhada Battalion. Left: An Iranian prisoner who was executed by ISIS (Haqq, August 11, 2017)**

The Iranian Al-Alam Channel reported that **ISIS had executed Mohsen al-Hajji, IRGC fighter who was captured on August 8, 2017, in the Al-Tanf area near the Syrian-Iraqi border** (suriya.net, August 9, 2017). Following the prisoner's execution, **the Qods force commander pointed out that the Iranian nation would avenge his death** (Tasnim, August 10, 2017).

## Further fighting in other areas of Iraq

- Fighting continues in various areas of Iraq:
- ◆ **Hawija:** On August 12, 2017, **there was an explosion at an ISIS outpost in Hawija**, which is controlled by ISIS (the city is situated about 55 km southwest of Kirkuk). Fourteen members of the Lion Cubs of the Caliphate were killed (Al-Sumaria, August 12, 2017).
  - ◆ **Salah Al-Din Province:** A local source reported that a local ISIS commander had been killed in an airstrike against **an ISIS hostel in the eastern Salah Al-Din Province**

(no specific location was mentioned) (Al-Sumaria, August 12, 2017). Coalition planes attacked **a staging area of ISIS operatives in the area of Tuz Khurmatu, in the eastern part of the province**. Dozens of ISIS operatives staying there were killed and wounded (Al-Sumaria, August 13, 2017).

◆ **Karbala:** A car bomb exploded at a military checkpoint **west of the city of Karbala**, near a cement factory. After the explosion, there were exchanges of fire between the security forces and the ISIS operatives. **An ISIS operative activated an explosive belt during the attack**. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack and noted that about fifty members of the Iraqi security forces were either killed or wounded (Haqq, August 12, 2017).



**The scene of the attack west of Karbala (Al-Waqe' Online, August 13, 2017)**

◆ **Baghdad:** ISIS claimed responsibility for the **detonation of a car bomb on Filastin Street in central Baghdad**, home to a **Shiite population**. According to ISIS, a total of 27 Shiites were hit, some of them were killed and others wounded (Haqq, August 13, 2017). On the other hand, the Iraqi Interior Ministry announced that the Iraqi security forces had detained two suicide bombers in central Baghdad **and neutralized a car bomb** (Al-Sumaria, August 13, 2017).

## **American casualties in the fighting in northern Iraq**

► The International Coalition forces reported that **two Americans had been killed and five others wounded in combat activities in northern Iraq**. Preliminary reports indicate that their death was not caused by direct contact with the enemy. **Pentagon Spokesman Army Col. Rob Manning** said that the soldiers who had been hit were part of an artillery unit which

was carrying out a mission against an ISIS mortar site. He said that **they were killed in an accident** and that there were no findings indicating that ISIS had anything to do with the incident. He added that the case was under investigation (website of the US Department of Defense, August 13, 14, 2017).

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the incident.** In the announcement that it released, ISIS claimed that it had killed and wounded ten American soldiers by Grad rocket fire near the village of Al-Buwayr, east of Tal Afar (Site, August 13, 2017).



ISIS's claim of responsibility (Site, August 13, 2017)

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

► **ISIS's Sinai Province** announced that the organization's operative **Ahmad al-Hallaq**, AKA **Abu Asid al-Maqdisi**, a resident of the Al-Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, was killed in battle in the Sinai Peninsula (Haqq, August 11, 2017).



**Ahmad al-Hallaq, from the Gaza Strip, who was killed in battle in the Sinai Peninsula (Haqq, August 11, 2017)**



**Hiding places used by operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province in central Sinai. These places were uncovered by Egypt's security forces (official website of the Spokesman for the Egyptian Armed Forces, August 12, 2017)**

## Other countries

### Israel

► In July 2017, the Israel Security Agency detained **two brothers from the village of Umm al-Fahm, supporters of ISIS. An improvised Carlo submachine gun** was found on the roof of the home of **Mahmoud Jabarin**, 25, and **Naim Jabarin**, 20. Photos and materials were found in their possession that reinforce suspicions that **they support ISIS's ideology**. Mahmoud Jabarin intended to leave Israel and join the ranks of the ISIS operatives in Syria. To this end, he was in contact with an ISIS operative in Syria, a former resident of Umm al-Fahm who joined the fighting in 2014. His brother Naim pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### Mandatory recruitment in Deir ez-Zor

► **An interview with the head of the ISIS Volunteers and Recruitment Office appeared in an issue of Al-Nabā'**. According to him, the Shiites and the Alawites are **concentrating their forces for an attack in the Al-Khayr Province (Deir ez-Zor)** and therefore volunteers are needed. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has already called on the residents of the province several times to enlist, and many have done so. However, according to the announcement, **additional fighters are needed, and therefore mandatory recruitment was decided upon.**

According to him, it is better for the residents to enlist than to fall into the hands of the Alawites, who will desecrate their honor, steal their property and force them to serve in their army.

► The mandatory recruitment order applies to residents **aged 20-30** and is subject to change according to the situation on the ground. After enlisting, the recruits will participate in a course in Islamic law and a military course. The duration of the service is four months, including the time spent on courses. After four months, the recruits will be able to decide whether to continue or not. Enlistment is mandatory, and anyone who refuses or does not receive an exemption from service will be penalized (Al-Nabā', Issue 93, August 10, 2017).

ISIS's mandatory recruitment of the residents of Deir ez-Zor is part of **its preparations for the imminent battle for the city (and the region)**. In recent months, the Syrian forces have mopped up the area east of Deir ez-Zor **and their forces are approaching the city**. From ISIS's perspective, **Deir ez-Zor, a key city in the Euphrates Valley, is of major importance** and the Syrian forces are expected to encounter strong resistance.

### Operatives from Dagestan join the ranks of ISIS

► According to the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Dagestan Republic, **there have been 213 reported cases of parents leaving the country, taking their children and joining the ranks of ISIS**. According to the commissioner, the figure may actually be much higher, perhaps even twice or three times as high, because the relatives of those who enlist in ISIS are often afraid to contact the authorities for fear of being accused of collaborating with terrorist organizations (Sputnik, August 11, 2017).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Turkey

► During the week, the Turkish security forces carried out a number of counterterrorism activities against jihad operatives throughout the country<sup>1</sup>:

- ◆ According to a Turkish police source, twelve suspected members of the **Fateh al-Sham Front** (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) were arrested in a police raid in **the city of Diyarbakir** in the southeast of the country (Anatolia News Agency, August 9, 2017).

<sup>1</sup> Turkish officials have reported that over the past few years, security forces have arrested **more than 5,000 suspected members of ISIS**, deported around 3,290 foreign extremists from 95 countries and denied entry to at least 38,269 people (Reuters, August 10, 2017).

- ◆ Turkish security forces detained a **Russian ISIS operative named Renat Bakiev, who planned to shoot down an American aircraft at Incirlik Air Force Base in southern Turkey with a drone.** According to reports, Bakiev confessed that he was an ISIS operative and said that in addition to this attack he had planned to carry out another attack against American citizens (Reuters, August 10, 2017).
- ◆ In a nationwide security operation, Turkey detained 22 suspected members of ISIS (Reuters, August 11, 2017). In the raids, which were carried out in the provinces of **Malatya, Gaziantep, and Sanliurfa** (in eastern and southeastern Turkey), three men suspected of belonging to ISIS and planning terrorist attacks were detained. The suspects used chat sessions in game apps in order to communicate with ISIS operatives (The Washington Post, August 12, 2017).
- ◆ Turkish police detained a man suspected of belonging to ISIS **who carried out observations in Istanbul** in preparation for terrorist attacks (Hürriyet, August 13, 2017).

## Russia

- ▶ Three ISIS operatives were detained in a special operation in which Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) forces raided an explosives laboratory. **According to the FSB, the suspects had planned to carry out suicide bombing attacks in crowded places throughout Moscow.** The squad members included **two suicide bombers, an explosives expert and an ISIS operative sent from Syria.** Three of the detainees are residents of Central Asia, and one of them is a Russian citizen. According to the FSB, the organization's operatives planned to carry out attacks in crowded places, transportation lines and large shopping areas in Moscow (RT; Sputnik, August 14, 2017).

## The battle for hearts and minds

### Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula calls on its operatives to carry out terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) released Issue 17 of **Inspire Magazine**, which is published by Al-Malahem Media in English and Arabic. The article states that the issue is devoted to the subject of **damaging trains throughout the United States and Europe, a simple but highly effective measure.** According to the article, the idea was discussed in

detail for more than a year **by a special team** that outlined a thorough but simple method that would embarrass the West from a security, military and economic perspective.

- ▶ According to the article, operatives can choose one of three attack methods:
  - ◆ **Directly targeting the train**, either from the inside or the outside
  - ◆ **Targeting the rail itself so as to derail the train**
  - ◆ **Targeting train stations**, which are always crowded, thereby causing large numbers of casualties
  
- ▶ The article focuses on the second type of attack **and provides readers with detailed instructions for making a tool that will derail the train**. According to the article, this tool has several advantages, including its ease of assembly and the ease of hiding the evidence after carrying out the attack. The article also stresses that this type of attack does not require the perpetrator to sacrifice himself and therefore it can be repeated more than once (The Long War Journal, August 13, 2017).
  
- ▶ This issue of Inspire Magazine also includes an interview with **Abdelmalek Droukdel (Abu Mus'ab Abdul-Wadoud), the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**. According to him, just as the United States is fighting terrorism all over the world, so ISIS operatives are fighting against the United States all over the world by damaging its vital interests. He stresses that the best thing is to **harm the United States within its borders**. According to him, **the “lone jihad warrior” method has proven its effectiveness and its deterrent power**. He details the advantages of the method and calls upon all Muslims to encourage and disseminate this type of jihad everywhere (He also mentions Gaza and Jerusalem). According to him, **attacking members of the International Coalition such as the United States and France is the top priority**. Addressing France, he says that it must start preparing to pay what it owes to Muslims, in cash and in kind.