



Spotlight on Global Jihad

(March 17-23, 2016)



Main events of the week

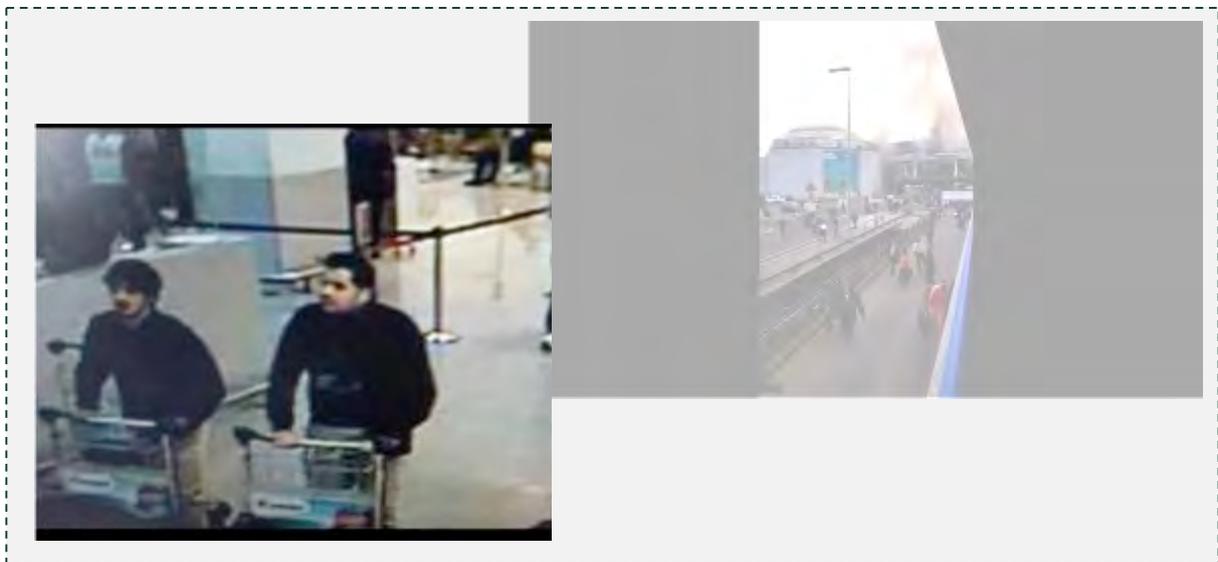
- This week was marked by a **series of attacks** carried out by ISIS, demonstrating the operational capabilities of the terrorist and guerrilla infrastructure that ISIS has built outside the core area of its rule in Syria and Iraq. Local ISIS branches and networks were involved in the attacks that were carried out in Turkey, Belgium, Egypt and Libya. This may indicate **a deliberate effort to carry out showcase attacks at a time of increasing pressure on ISIS in Syria and Iraq.**
- **On Istiklal Street in the heart of Istanbul**, a suicide bomber blew himself up among a group of tourists (four dead, including three Israelis, and 39 injured, including 11 Israelis). **At the international airport in Brussels**, two suicide bombers blew themselves up and, at approximately the same time, there was an explosion at **the metro station close to the European Union institutions** (the two attacks killed at least 34 people and wounded at least 250). **In the northern Sinai Peninsula (Al-Arish, Rafah)**, an attack was carried out on a checkpoint and a military camp belonging to the Egyptian security forces (18 dead).
- **In Syria**, the ceasefire continues with its familiar characteristics **for the fourth week**. At the same time, the Syrian Army's efforts to take over the city of Palmyra from ISIS continue, with Russian air support. In Iraq, the Iraqi Army began an operation to liberate the city of Hit, on the banks of the Euphrates River, about 70 km northwest of Ramadi (where Iraqi security forces continue to cleanse the area). **In Mosul**, the core of ISIS's rule, ISIS's communications facilities were damaged in a US Air Force airstrike.

Terrorist attacks in Brussels

(Initial situation assessment)

- **On the morning of March 22, 2016**, terrorist attacks were carried out in **two locations in the city of Brussels**. The attacks **killed more than 34 people and wounded more than 200**;

- At around 09:00, two suicide bombers blew themselves up, one after the other, **in the departures hall at the international airport in Brussels**. One terrorist blew himself up with an explosive belt near a bank branch and the other near a café in the terminal. Eleven people were killed and a few dozen were wounded. A Kalashnikov assault rifle was found next to one of the dead terrorists. An unexploded explosive belt was also found (it is possible that the belt was supposed to be detonated by a third terrorist, but something went wrong). According to eyewitnesses, before the explosion, a man was heard calling out something in Arabic.
- About an hour later (at around 10:00), **there was another attack** (by a suicide bomber?) **at the Metro station near the European Union headquarters**. More than 20 people were killed and many were injured. The explosion occurred in one of the carriages.



Left: The two suicide bombers as they were photographed by the airport's security cameras. Right: People fleeing from the airport after the blasts (YouTube, March 22, 2016).

- ISIS's media foundation issued a statement on social media **claiming responsibility for the attack**. According to the statement, the attacks in Belgium were carried out in response to Belgium's involvement in the war against Islam. According to the statement, the attacks were carried out using explosive belts, IEDs, and machine guns. The statement noted that the sites of the attack were carefully selected in order to kill "Crusaders" (i.e., Christians, Europeans). **It also included a threat to carry out additional attacks.**



ISIS's claim of responsibility in Arabic and French (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, March 22, 2016).

■ Immediately after the incidents, Belgium raised its alert level and other European countries adopted emergency measures. The Belgian police released images from the airport's security cameras showing three men. They are probably **two suicide bombers and a third man, who apparently changed his mind and fled**. They arrived at the airport by taxi with concealed explosives in their suitcases. **The two terrorists were identified as the Al-Bakraoui brothers, who are known to the local security services**. The Belgian security forces are carrying out a manhunt for the third terrorist. The security forces raided a neighborhood in northeastern Brussels, where an IED containing nails was found alongside an ISIS flag.

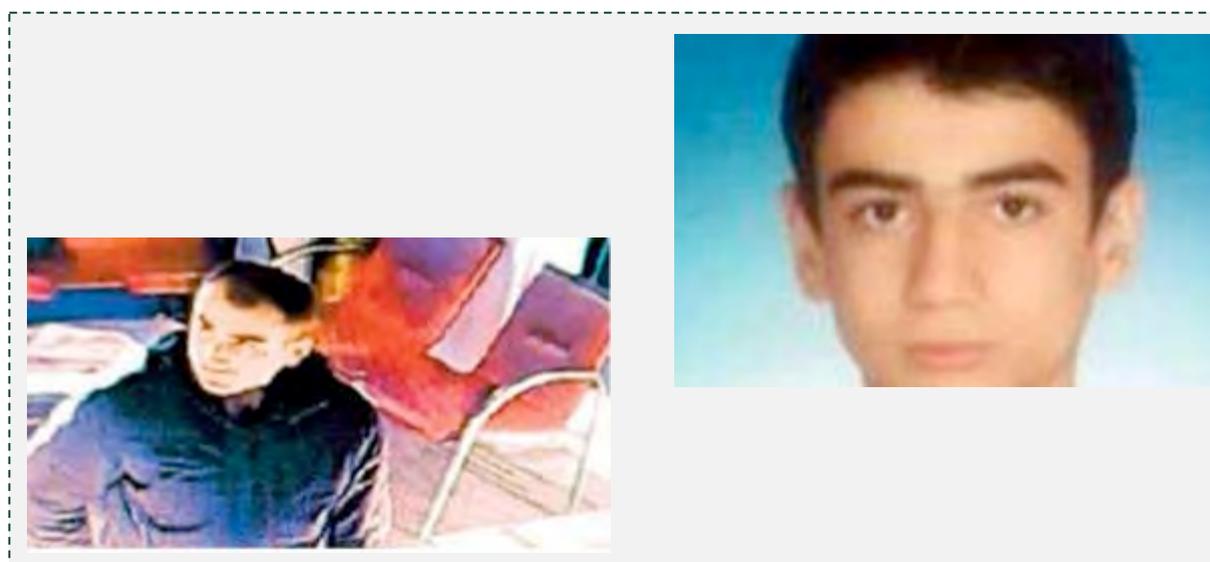
ISIS suicide bombing attack in the heart of Istanbul

■ On the afternoon of March 19, 2016, a **suicide bombing attack was carried out in Istiklal Street**, one of the main streets in Istanbul, Turkey, where many tourists visit. A terrorist wearing an explosive belt blew himself up among a group of Israeli tourists who were walking in the street. Four people were killed in the attack, **three of them Israelis and one Iranian**. In addition, 39 people were wounded, **including 11 Israelis**.

■ According to **Turkish Minister of the Interior Efkan Ala**, a DNA test has revealed that the suicide bombing attack was carried out by **Mehmet Öztürk**. The suicide bomber was a 24-years-old Turkish citizen from the city of Gaziantep in southeastern Turkey. According to the Turkish media, **he is known to the authorities as an ISIS operative who had spent time in Syria** (Sky News; Daily Sabah, March 19, 2016). The terrorist's father and brother were arrested. The father claimed that he had reported his son's

disappearance to the police back in 2013. It turned out that in that year, **he moved to Syria and joined ISIS**. He returned to Turkey in 2015, possibly under a false identity (Hürriyet, March 20, 2016).

■ An analysis of the security cameras footage at the restaurant where the Israelis dined before their deaths, which documented the attack, indicates that the terrorist was waiting outside the restaurant. When the Israelis left the restaurant, he approached them and then detonated his explosive belt. According to several Turkish press reports, the terrorist followed the Israeli group **from the moment they left their hotel until they arrived at the restaurant** (Habertürk, March 21, 2016)¹. **At this stage, this information has not been verified**. The Turkish security forces are **trying to locate three other operatives who they claim are planning to carry out an attack in Turkey** (Sabah; Hürriyet, March 21, 2016). There have also been reports of arrests by the Turkish security forces in the wake of the attack.



Left: The terrorist as seen in the restaurant's security camera footage (Radikal, March 21, 2016)
Right: Suicide bomber Mehmet Öztürk (haber7.com, March 20, 2016).

¹ According to the testimony of one wounded Israeli, the terrorist followed the Israeli group for quite some time: "... I remember looking at him and saying: Why is he walking around here? Why is he sticking so close to us? ..." (Haaretz Israeli daily, citing an eyewitness report issued by Israel's Channel 2 TV, March 23, 2016).

■ **So far, ISIS has not claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to information published in the Turkish media, this was a **planned attack carried out by an ISIS network** operating in Turkey and consisting of several operatives (for whom a manhunt is now underway). This network supplied the suicide bomber with the **logistics necessary for carrying out the attack, including the explosive belt.** In the ITIC's assessment, the attack was intended to **damage a tourist spot** in order to deter Turkey from its counterterrorism against ISIS. As for the target of the attack, there are two possibilities: one is that the choice of a group of tourists was random. **If the report that the terrorist followed the Israeli group from the time they left the hotel is verified,** this would increase the likelihood that he blew himself among the group deliberately in order to kill Israelis.

The ceasefire - overview

- **The ceasefire agreement has entered into its fourth week.** It continues to be maintained with the familiar characteristics, i.e., a significant decrease in the intensity of the clashes, local and insignificant violations, continued airstrikes against ISIS and other organizations that are not included in the ceasefire, and the Syrian Army's continued widespread military action against ISIS in Palmyra, with Russian air support. The continued maintenance of the ceasefire enabled the resumption of the Geneva talks for resolving the crisis in Syria (March 14, 2016).
- The commander of the Russian coordination center in Hmeymim said that there were no significant ceasefire violations. The coordination center also reportedly transferred humanitarian aid to various places in Syria (Sputnik, March 19, 2016). An average of 5-10 ceasefire violations per day were recorded in the daily reports published by the Russian Ministry of Defense last week. The center reported that 43 "armed groups" have joined the ceasefire agreement to date (RT, March 21, 2016)².

Russia's involvement in the fighting in Syria

- According to a report from **March 16, 2016**, additional aircraft have left Hmeymim base and returned to Russia (RT, March 16, 2016). The Russian Defense Minister reported that after the withdrawal of a large part of the Russian force, the Russian force remaining at Hmeymim base would consist of 20 fighter planes and bombers, an S-400

² According to **the head of the Russian National Antiterrorism Committee (NAC)**, Russia will not ignore instances of terrorist operatives masquerading as moderate opposition organizations and declaring that they have joined the ceasefire (Sputnik, March 21, 2016).

air defense system, and 2,000 staff members and personnel. The goals of the remaining force will be the war against terrorism, support for Syrian President Bashar Assad, and monitoring the ceasefire (Sputnik, March 20, 2016).

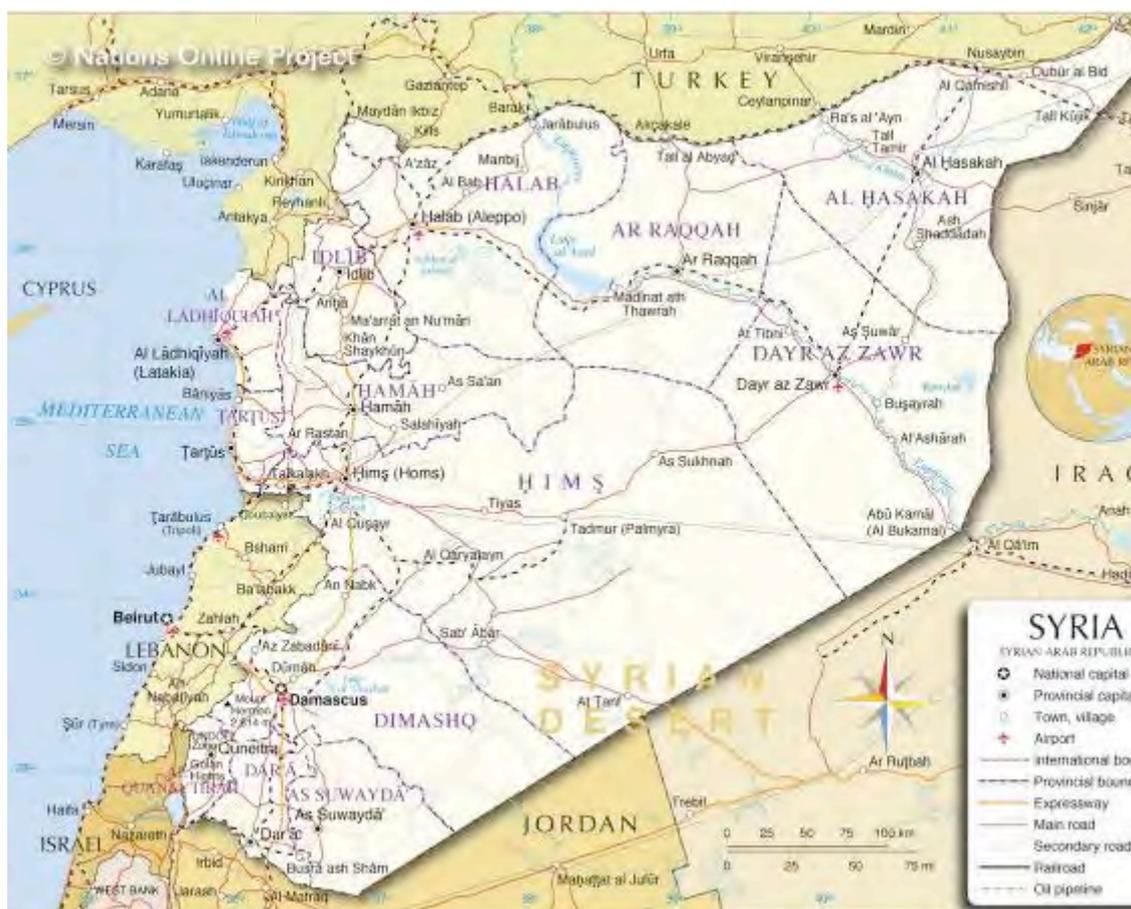
■ In a speech to soldiers who returned from the campaign in Syria, **Russian President Vladimir Putin made it clear that Russia had not completely abandoned the Syrian arena**. According to him, Russia will continue to attack terrorist organizations in Syria, as defined by the UN Security Council. He added that Russia would not attack those who join the ceasefire agreement. According to Putin, Russia's main goal is **promoting the proximity talks [in Geneva]** (TASS News Agency, March 17, 2016).

■ According to Putin, following the ceasefire agreement, the number of airstrikes dropped from 60-80 per 24-hour period to 20-30. This enabled Russia to reduce the number of aircraft stationed in Syria. According to him, the step was coordinated with Syrian President Bashar Assad. The Russian forces remaining in the area will monitor the ceasefire and help the Syrian Army with operational planning, intelligence, training, defending Russian bases and carrying out airstrikes against ISIS and Al-Nusra Front targets. The Russian President stressed that **Russia could increase the scope of its force in Syria within hours**, in accordance with developments.



Left: Russian President Vladimir Putin awarding certificates of merit to combatants who returned from Syria at an event held at the Kremlin. Right: The Russian President speaking to the combatants (Russian Defense Ministry website www.eng.mil.ru).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (www.nationsonline.org).

Homs Province

Syrian Army's efforts to take over the city of Palmyra

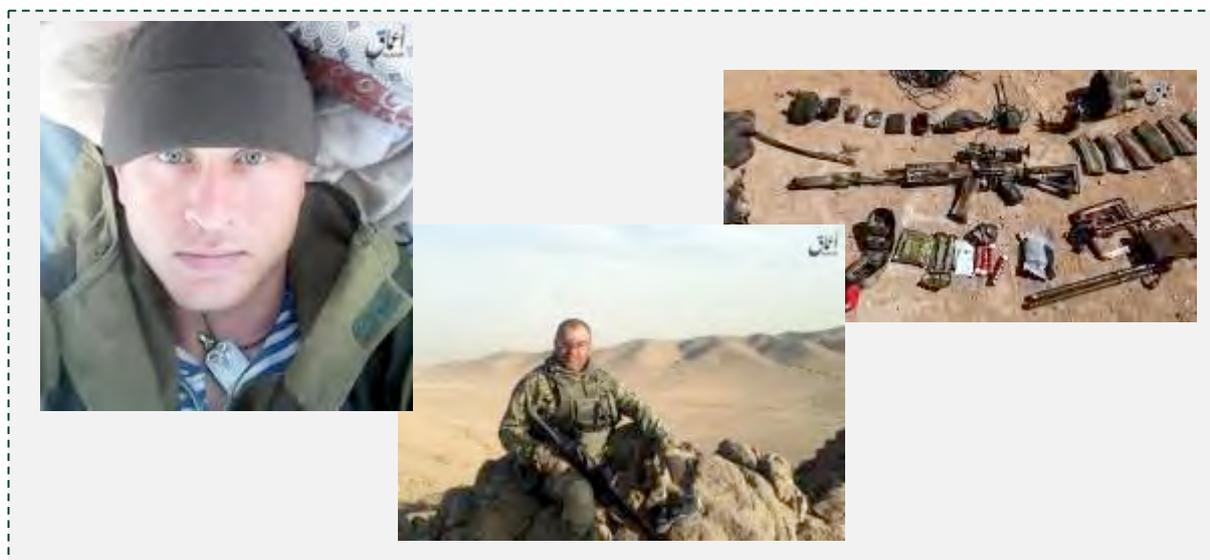
■ The Syrian Army's campaign to take over the city of Palmyra from ISIS, which began on March 4, 2016, **continued for the third week**. The efforts of the Syrian Army and the forces that support it concentrated on seizing strategic areas in Palmyra and encircling the city (the encirclement has not yet been completed). Fierce fighting and casualties on both sides have been reported. ISIS has sent dozens of reinforcements from Al-Raqqah to Palmyra and is working to bolster the spirits of the local population.

■ ISIS is accompanying the Palmyra campaign with a **propaganda campaign** designed for the fighting forces and the local population in Palmyra. To this end, ISIS's media foundation has released a video comparing the situation of Palmyra before and after it was taken over by ISIS ("Emerging from darkness into light.") The video also contains scenes documenting the Syrian Army's campaign to reconquer the city. The video ends

by saying that **Palmyra will be the “graveyard of the Russians, Bashar [Assad] and his allies.”**

Russia’s involvement in the attack on Palmyra

■ According to **Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces**, Russian warplanes carry out 20-25 sorties a day against targets in Palmyra in support of the Syrian Army (TASS News Agency, March 18, 2016). On March 17, 2016, ISIS announced that **its operatives had killed a Russian Army advisor** in the area of Al-Dawa³ (the rural area west of Palmyra). ISIS’s propaganda machine released a video showing the advisor’s body and the weapons and equipment he had carried (Aamaq, March 17, 2016). ISIS previously reported the killing of four Russian soldiers in the area of Qasr al-Hallabat, some 15 km southwest of Palmyra (Russian President Vladimir Putin said in his speech that four Russian soldiers had been killed in Syria).



From a video produced by ISIS. Bottom left: Photos of Russian soldiers killed by ISIS. The photos of the Russian soldiers were apparently taken from the mobile phone of one of them (Aamaq, March 17, 2016). Right: Weapons and equipment in the possession of the Russian military advisor who was killed by ISIS operatives (vid.me, March 17, 2016).

Hezbollah’s involvement in the attack on Palmyra

■ According to Syrian media reports, **a Hezbollah force was actively participating in the battle over Palmyra**. According to the reports, **the unit fighting in the area is**

³ Riad Haddad, the Syrian ambassador to Russia, said that a group of Russian soldiers remained in Syria and continued to support the ground operations carried out by the Syrian Army for the liberation of Palmyra. Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in response that the operation to take over Palmyra was being carried out independently by the Syrian Army and that the Russian Army was not taking part in it (Sputnik, March 18, 2016).

Hezbollah's Radwan force (an elite Hezbollah unit) (Al-Durar al-Shamiya, March 17, 2016). ISIS reportedly killed 10 Hezbollah operatives in the area of Palmyra (Syria Mubasher, March 18, 2016). ISIS reported that it had detonated a car bomb and managed to divert Hezbollah operatives into a minefield in the area of Al-Dawa, west of Palmyra. According to ISIS, 10 Hezbollah operatives were killed and another 20 were injured (Aamaq, March 17, 2016).

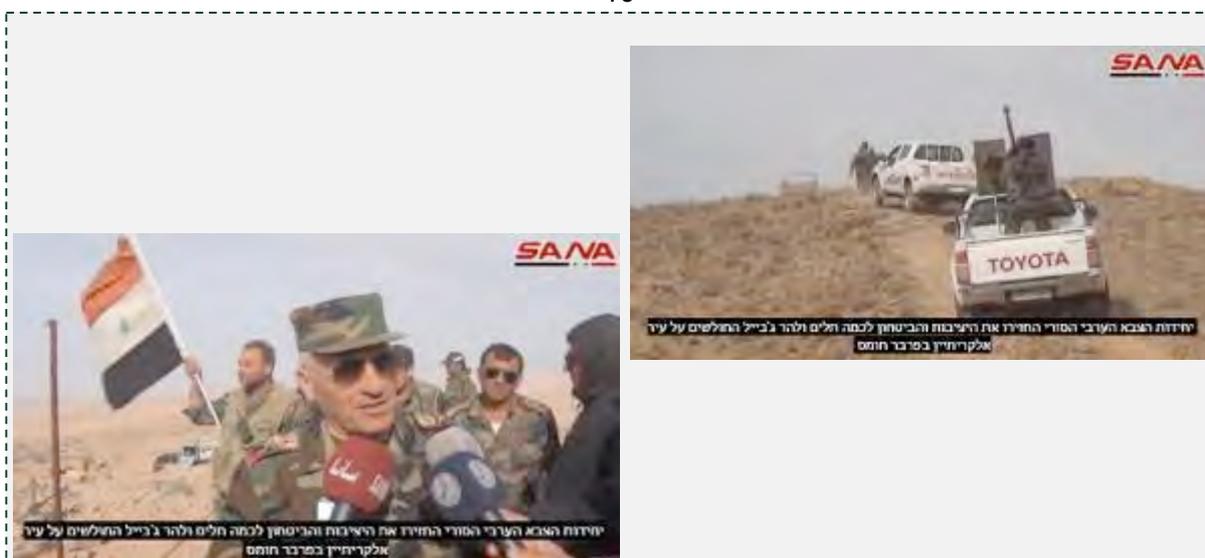
■ **A senior Hezbollah operative denied rumors reported in the media about Hezbollah leaving Syria following the Russian move. Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary general,** said that Russia's partial withdrawal would not affect the Hezbollah force supporting the Syrian regime in the fighting against ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and the organizations that support them. According to him, Hezbollah is still in the area and has no intention of changing its plans (Al-Ahed, March 18, 2016).

The city of Al-Qaryatayn

■ In the area of the city of Al-Qaryatayn, southeast of Homs, **clashes continue between the Syrian Army and ISIS.** ISIS, which holds Al-Qaryatayn, has managed to take control of several strategic areas east of the city (Al-Durar al-Shamiya, March 20, 2016). The Syrian Army has also seized several strategic areas in the region and has taken control of the roads leading from Al-Qaryatayn to Palmyra and from Palmyra to Damascus (Dimashq al-Aan, March 20, 2016).



Left: A Syrian Army position in Jabal Muhassah, a strategic area east of Al-Qaryatayn that was taken over by ISIS. Right: ISIS operatives on Jabal Muhassah (Aamaq News Agency; vid.me, March 20, 2016)



Left: The commander of Division 3 of the Syrian Army, which is participating in the attack on Palmyra. The interview took place in Jabal Jubail, some 6 km southeast of Al-Qaryatayn, after it was taken over from ISIS. Right: Syrian Army soldiers moving on foot and by vehicle in the mountainous area overlooking Al-Qaryatayn (SANA News Agency; YouTube, March 19, 2016)

Clashes in other provinces throughout Syria

■ In other provinces in Syria, including provinces where the ceasefire applies and areas where it does not, local clashes continued between the various forces, with no significant changes on the ground:

- **Aleppo Province:** In the rural area north of Aleppo there were local skirmishes involving ISIS operatives and rebel organizations.
- **Al-Hasakah Province:** Local skirmishes continued in the area of the city of Al-Shadadi (which was taken over by the Kurdish forces) and along the roads leading to and from the city. ISIS continued to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Kurdish forces, by detonating a motorcycle bomb and several car bombs (Local Coordinating Committees, March 19-20, 2016).
- **Hama** - Along the eastern periphery of Hama there were clashes between the Syrian Army and ISIS operatives (Dimashq al-Aan, March 17, 2016). The Al-Nusra Front reportedly sustained losses as a result of the clashes with the Syrian Army (Hussein Mortada's Twitter page, March 17, 2016).
- **Deir al-Zor:** Clashes continued in the area of the military airbase. The Syrian Army foiled an attack near the airbase. The Syrian Air Force attacked targets in the northern and southern neighborhoods of Deir al-Zor (the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), March 18, 2016).

Al-Anbar Province

Campaign for the liberation of the city of Hit

- The Iraqi Army began an operation **to liberate the city of Hit**, on the west bank of the Euphrates River, about 70 km northwest of Ramadi⁴. This is part of Iraq's strategy, which seeks to liberate the Sunni Al-Anbar Province from the hands of ISIS.
- Severe clashes have taken place between the Iraqi Army and ISIS operatives around the city of Hit. According to reports by Iraqi military sources, the Iraqi Army has taken control of the area of **Al-Muhammadi**, about 13 km southeast of Hit (Al-Jazeera, March 18, 2016). The Iraqi Army also took over **the town of Kabisa**, west of the city (Al-Hayat, March 20, 2016). ISIS, on its part, carried out two suicide bombing attacks against the Iraqi Army in the area of Hit (Amaq News Agency, March 20, 2016). At the same time, ISIS announced that it had executed five collaborators with the Iraqi authorities in the city of Hit (Amaq News Agency, March 18, 2016).



Iraqi Army forces moving toward the city of Hit (Al-Sumaria, March 19, 2016)

⁴ The city of Hit has a population of around 75,000 people, with another 50,000 in its environs. This population is composed of Sunni tribespeople. ISIS took over the city in October 2014 and has controlled it ever since.



Five people who were executed by ISIS in the city of Hit on charges of collaboration with the Iraqi authorities (Amaq News Agency, March 18, 2016)

Ramadi

■ This week as well, ISIS continued to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Iraqi Army in and around the city of Ramadi, using car bombs:

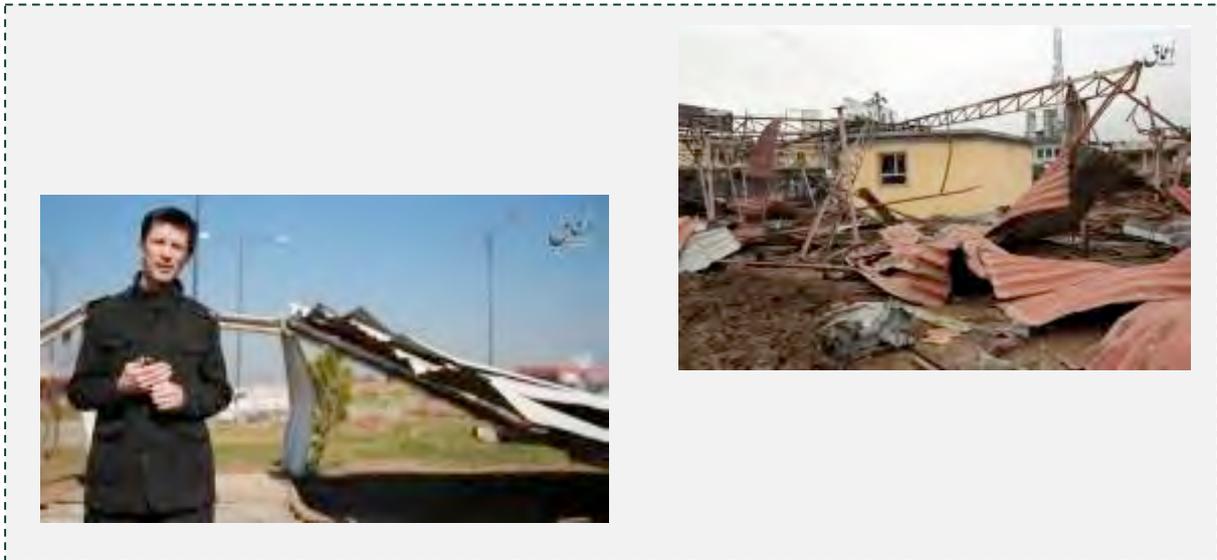
- **On March 21, 2016**, the Iraqi Army announced that it had foiled an attempt by ISIS to deploy four booby-trapped vehicles against the Iraqi forces in eastern Ramadi. A “security source” added that one car exploded, wounding seven soldiers (Al-Sumaria, March 21, 2016).
- **On March 20, 2016**, ISIS announced that it had detonated a car bomb driven by a suicide bomber against an Iraqi Army outpost in the area of Al-Hamidhiyah, northeast of Ramadi. According to ISIS, 20 Iraqi soldiers were killed in the blast (Amaq News Agency, March 20, 2016).
- **On March 19, 2016**, an airstrike by the US-led international coalition against ISIS destroyed two car bombs west of the city of Ramadi (Al-Sumaria, March 19, 2016).

Nineveh Province

Mosul

■ **This week, the US Air Force attacked ISIS targets in central Mosul** (Al-Jazeera, March 20, 2016). According to ISIS, the US Air Force planes attacked **seven of its communications facilities in the city** (Amaq News Agency, March 17, 2016). Two days later, ISIS released a propaganda video featuring **John Cantlie, the British journalist captured by ISIS and utilized for its propaganda machine**. John Cantlie, speaking from Mosul, ridicules these airstrikes, saying that five billion dollars were

invested in an airstrike on communications facilities... This indicates, according to Cantlie, that Americans are so desperate that these are the only targets of the Islamic State that their intelligence can detect (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, March 19, 2016).



Right: One of ISIS's communications facilities attacked from the air in the city of Mosul (Amaq News Agency, March 17, 2016) Left: British journalist John Cantlie, who was captured by ISIS, standing alongside the ruins of one of ISIS's positions that was destroyed in the airstrike (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, March 19, 2016).

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

■ During the week, the Egyptian security forces continued their activity against ISIS's Sinai Province, mainly in the areas of Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish and Rafah. According to reports, a few operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province were killed and many more were injured. Operatives were reportedly detained and weapons and materials for manufacturing weapons were confiscated. At the same time, ISIS operatives continued their guerrilla activities against the Egyptian security forces.

■ On **March 17, 2016**, operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province carried out two mass casualty attacks:

- **Thirteen members of the Egyptian security forces were killed**, including four officers, and more than 10 were wounded, in a **combined terror attack carried out by ISIS operatives at the Al-Safa checkpoint south of Al-Arish**. The attack began when armed operatives fired mortar shells at a police position. Immediately afterwards, a car bomb exploded at the entrance to the police station. Shots were also fired at ambulances and police who arrived to evacuate the casualties. The Sinai Province of the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.

- **Five Egyptian soldiers were killed and 10 were wounded in an attack on a military camp in Rafah. Mortar shells were fired at the camp.** ISIS's Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the attack. The claim of responsibility states that two **IEDs planted near the camp** exploded, killing 10 members of the Egyptian security forces (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, March 17, 2016).

- In light of the attack at the Al-Safa checkpoint, Egyptian experts on security matters pointed out a **number of security failures at checkpoints in Sinai and in the coordination between the Army and police forces.** The Egyptian President ordered the security forces to take immediate action to improve security at all the security checkpoints in the northern Sinai Peninsula. The head of the Engineering Division of the military forces reported that the checkpoints would be equipped with technical security measures to protect them from rocket and mortar shell fire (Al-Masry al-Youm, March 21, 2016).

- **In Egypt itself, the security apparatus in Port Said exposed two terror squads numbering nine people.** The goal of the terrorist squads was recruiting young operatives from Egypt to ISIS and persuading them to carry out attacks against the police, the Army and state institutions and churches throughout Egypt. **Their interrogation revealed that they had intended to go to Libya for training and reenter Egypt illegally** (Al-Youm al-Sabea, March 20, 2016).

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

Preparations for an attack on the oil infrastructure?

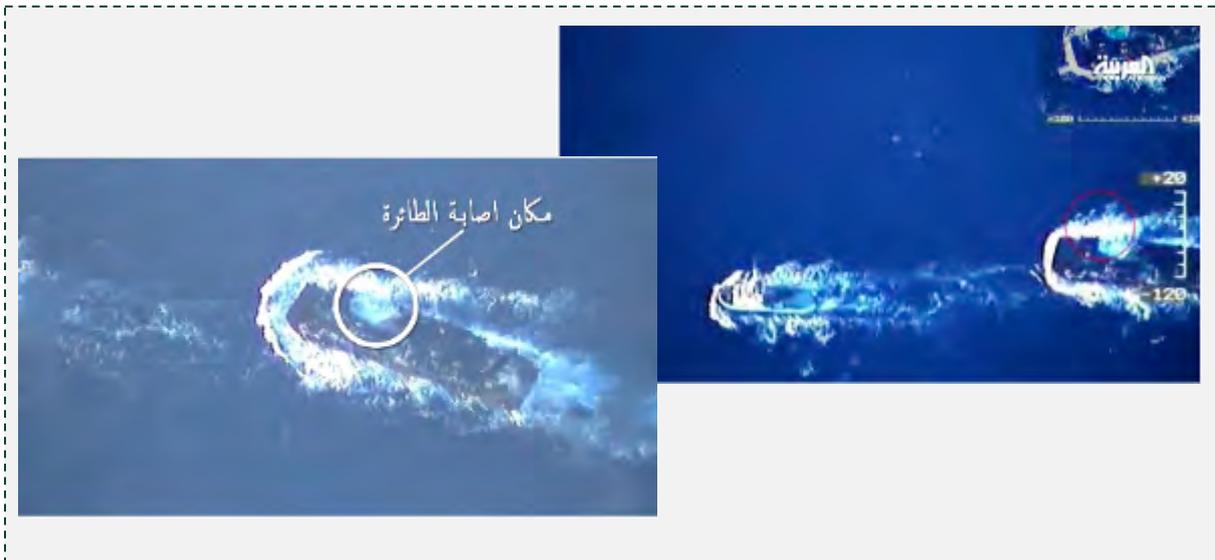
- According to Libyan sources, an ISIS convoy numbering about 30 vehicles flying ISIS flags **left the city of Sirte southward** (Bawabat Al-Wasat, March 19, 2016). Sources in the town of Bin Jawad, located 120 km east of Sirte and controlled by ISIS, said that **ISIS was concentrating operatives from the towns of Bin Jawad and An-Nawfaliyah in Bin Jawad, along with vehicles and weapons, in preparation for a planned attack on the oil infrastructure in As-Sidr and Ra's Lanuf** (Bawabat Al-Wasat, March 17, 2016). According to a report from March 16, 2016, an IED apparently planted by ISIS on the main highway between Ra's Lanuf and Bin Jawad was neutralized (Bawabat Ifriqya al-Ikhabariya, March 16, 2016).



The towns of Bin Jawad and An-Nawfaliyah (held by ISIS). They are located west of the oil infrastructure in As-Sidr and Ra's Lanuf, which ISIS seeks to control (Google Maps).

Benghazi

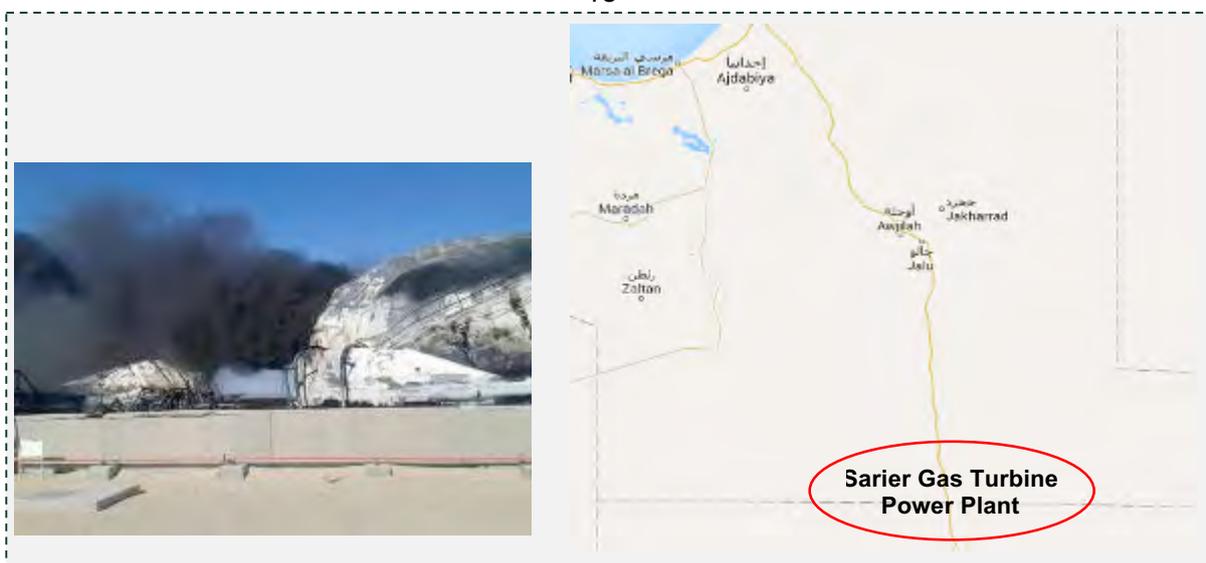
■ **The Libyan Army under the command of Khalifa Haftar continues its operation to cleanse the city of Benghazi from the presence of ISIS and other Islamic militias.** The battles are being fought in the city neighborhoods and around the city. According to the commander of the operations room of Haftar's army in Benghazi, the **Tobruk government's air force attacked a barge off the coast of Benghazi that had arrived from western Libya.** On the barge, there were 15 tanks, armored vehicles, fighters and three shipping containers of ammunition. According to the reports, the target was hit accurately. People who were on the barge and tried to escape in rubber boats were shot (Libyan News Agency, March 18, 2016; Facebook page of the Air Force Headquarters of Haftar's army, March 19, 2016). At this point, it is not clear to whom these weapons were intended.



Right: The damaged barge being towed by a Libyan Army vessel. Left: The place where the barge was hit (Facebook page of the Air Force Headquarters of Haftar's army, March 19, 2016; alarabiya.net, March 19, 2016)

Attack on a power plant south of Ajdabiya

■ In mid-March 2016, ISIS operatives attacked the **Sarier Power Plant** (or the artificial river plant project), located 320 km south of Ajdabiya. **The gunmen allegedly came from Ajdabiya, in northern central Libya, where ISIS is engaged in power struggles against the Libyan Army and rival militias.** They burned the fuel reserves at the plant, and the facilities and vehicles found there. According to the commander of a battalion stationed in the area, a suicide bomber tried to blow himself up at the gate of the power plant. The attack caused damage to the supply of electricity to the pumps of the “artificial river” project that supplies water to eastern Libya. Following the attack, a high alert was declared at all the oil fields in southeastern Libya (Bawabat Al-Wasat, March 15, 2016; Libyan national oil company website, March 17, 2016; Akhbar Libya 24, March 15 and 16, 2016).



Right: The site of ISIS's attack on March 14, 2016, (Wikimapia). Left: The results of ISIS's attack on the power plant (Facebook page of the Waha Oil Company Dahra Field, March 15, 2016).

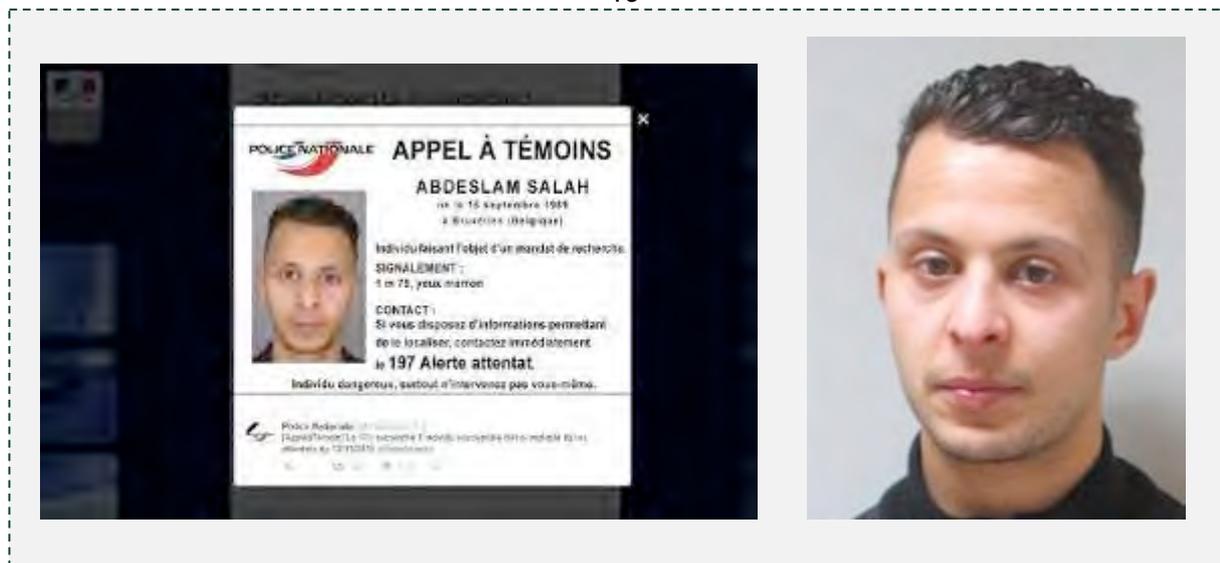
Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Russia

- In the south of the Republic of Dagestan, the Russian police detained three ISIS-affiliated operatives who were planning to carry out attacks on Russian soil. According to the National Antiterrorism Committee (NAC), the three detainees mentioned the location of a weapons cache in an abandoned house on the outskirts of a village. In the house, the authorities found one ton of explosives and five kilograms of TNT, intended for self-manufacture of bombs (RT, March 17, 2016).

Belgium

- On the evening of March 18, 2016, **Salah Abdeslam**, a member of the network that perpetrated the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, was caught in the Brussels quarter of Molenbeek. He was caught near his family's home. His initial interrogation revealed that according to the preliminary planning, he was supposed to blow himself up at the Stade de France football stadium but changed his mind at the last minute. The French authorities are expected to demand his extradition.
- **Salah Abdeslam**, a French citizen born in Belgium, fled after the attack in Paris and was detained for questioning near the border with Belgium. He was released after a few hours, apparently due to a lack of coordination among the various security agencies. Since then, he has apparently been staying in the area of Brussels, alternating between several safe houses organized for him by jihadi operatives, his partners in the ISIS terrorist network.



Right: Salah Abdeslam (Nabd al-Nahda, March 19, 2016). Left: The French police request from the public for help in finding Salah Abdeslam (Twitter account of the French police, November 15, 2015).

- **The Molenbeek quarter of Brussels, where Salah Abdeslam was caught, is a prominent jihadi bastion in Belgium, and apparently also in Europe as a whole.** Some of the terrorists who participated in the attack in Paris **came from Molenbeek**, and a few collaborators who were involved in the attacks in Paris escaped to this quarter. The quarter has a large Muslim population from which Belgian operatives left to fight in the ranks of ISIS⁵. It can be assumed that many operatives returned to the quarter in the past year after fighting in the ranks of ISIS and that collaborators recruited by ISIS also operate there⁶. **It seems, therefore, that there is a jihadi infrastructure in Molenbeek that operates in Belgium and may have been involved in the terror attack in Brussels on March 22, 2016.**

⁵ According to the Belgian Ministry of the Interior's estimate from November 2015, **a total of 270 operatives left Belgium to fight in the ranks of ISIS** (Israeli daily Haaretz correspondent in Brussels, November 16, 2015).

⁶ **Saliha Bin Ali**, a local activist in the Involved Parents organization, is the mother of Sabri, who went to Syria in 2013 to join the ranks of the jihadists. She told reporters that in 2013, when her son went to Syria, "the authorities permitted young people like him to go. They thought that they were removing the burden from their shoulders, that their problems were taking off for Syria via Turkey with a one-way ticket and estimated that they would never return." But all that changed in 2015, when they began to return. "Now the authorities are finally starting to react... But only because it affects them directly" (Haaretz, March 22, 2016).