



Spotlight on Global Jihad (May 25 – June 1, 2016)



Main events of the week

- On May 30, 2016, the Iraqi forces, led by the counterterrorism force, mounted an attack on the city of Fallujah. Previously the forces had taken over the rural area surrounding the city and tightened the siege on it. The battles are apparently concentrated in the southern outskirts of Fallujah, and the Iraqi forces are meeting with fierce resistance. **In Syria**, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) mounted an attack **designed to take over the city of Manbij, an ISIS stronghold west of the Euphrates River.**
- ISIS responded to the attack on Fallujah by increasing its terrorist activity and guerrilla warfare: **in the area of Fallujah**, its operatives carried out several suicide bombing attacks against the Iraqi forces; **in the city of Hit**, which was liberated by the Iraqi Army, ISIS operatives carried out a surprise attack that was repulsed by the Iraqi Army; and **in the capital Baghdad**, ISIS continued to carry out terrorist attacks directed against the Shiite population.
- In addition to the military pressure exerted on ISIS's strongholds in Iraq and Syria, **ISIS is under heavy pressure in Libya.** The forces loyal to the Government of National Accord took over **areas that had been controlled by ISIS west and east of the city of Sirte**, ISIS's stronghold in Libya. The Libyan forces (led by the Libyan Dawn militias), which have reached the outskirts of Sirte from the west, announced that they were **surrounding the city. ISIS's forces are apparently being forced into the city of Sirte** and are preparing to defend it.

The ceasefire in Syria

- During the week, Russia's Defense Ministry reported that the monitoring center in Hmeymim recorded several violations of the ceasefire, mostly in the Damascus area. According to the report, 60 groups and organizations have expressed their consent to join the agreement and the number of towns that have joined so far is 125 (TASS News Agency, May 29, 2016). **In practice, the fighting continued (although its intensity varied) in the various provinces in Syria, particularly in the area of Aleppo.**

The US-led campaign against ISIS

Airstrikes

■ The US-led international coalition continued to carry out many dozens of airstrikes against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria. **In Iraq, the airstrikes were concentrated in the area of Fallujah**, as air support for the Iraqi Army's campaign to take over the city. Airstrikes were also carried out in Rutba, Kisik, Mosul, Sinjar, Sultan Abdullah, Tal Afar, Baghdadi, and Haditha. **In Syria**, the airstrikes were concentrated in the areas of Al-Raqqah, A'zaz, Ain Issa and Palmyra.

Russia's involvement in the fighting in Syria

■ Russian planes continued to attack targets in Syria, **particularly the city of Aleppo and its environs**. Airstrikes were also carried out in the area of Deir al-Zor. According to **Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces**, since May 20, 2016, Russia has increased its airstrikes, **which are carried out against oil production facilities and against the smuggling routes of ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front** (Sputnik, May 29, 2016).

■ During the week, the preoccupation continued with **the Russian proposal to carry out joint operations with the US** against organizations that violate the ceasefire in Syria. So far, the US has rejected this proposal. According to an announcement by the Russian Foreign Ministry, **US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov** have discussed the proposal (Sputnik, May 29, 2016). **Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces**, accused the US of delaying the campaign against the Al-Nusra Front. According to him, the Al-Nusra Front continues to take advantage of the ceasefire to rehabilitate its military capabilities (TASS News Agency; Sputnik, May 27, 2016).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (www.nationsonline.org).

The Aleppo area

■ There were battles between ISIS and the rebel organizations in the region north of Aleppo, near the Turkish border. ISIS is apparently trying to establish its control near the Turkish border and to cut off the rebel organizations from the border. At the same time, the Turkish Army continued its attacks against ISIS targets south of the Turkish-Syrian border.

■ One of the sites of the fighting was **the city of Marea**, southeast of A'zaz, which is controlled by the rebel organizations. ISIS operatives reportedly took over the rural area surrounding Marea. According to reports, ISIS operatives have reached the outskirts of the city of A'zaz. ISIS's Aleppo Province reported that its operatives had detonated four car bombs in the suburbs of Marea, killing about 20 people (Haqq, May 28, 2016).



The cities of A'zaz and Marea, south of the Syrian-Turkish border, an area where ISIS is trying to establish its control at the expense of the rebel organizations (Google Maps).

- **The Turkish Army continued to attack ISIS targets** south of the Syrian border, mainly with artillery fire. Turkish military sources claim to have killed more than 100 ISIS operatives on Syrian territory (Anatolia, May 28, 2016). On the other hand, a car bomb detonated on the Syrian-Turkish border caused deaths and injuries among the Turkish soldiers (Dimashq al-Aan, May 27, 2016).

Activity of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) The SDF's attack on the city of Manbij

- In late May 2016, the Syrian Democratic Forces (**SDF**), a Kurdish-Arab umbrella framework that operates with US support, **launched a military attack to take over the city of Manbij**, ISIS's stronghold west of the Euphrates River. According to the Arab media, the launching point of the attacking forces is the Tishreen Dam area, and the campaign is being carried out with US support.

- According to Arab media reports, one of the attacking forces is **advancing along Lake Assad** in order to **cleanse its west bank**. **Another force is advancing westward**, with the aim of reaching the main road connecting Manbij to **Al-Khafsa** and **Maskana**, and cutting off the southbound road leading to the city (Al-Aan, May 31, 2016; Al-Arabiya, June 1, 2016). According to a Syrian website, the SDF forces are around 17 km east of Manbij (Al-Durar al-Shamiya, May 31, 2016).



The town of Ain Issa

■ Last week, **the** SDF managed to take over the town of Ain Issa and its environs, about 50 km north of Al-Raqqah. This week it was reported that the SDF troops, with massive American air support¹, had managed to take over several other villages near the town that had been held by ISIS. There were also reports of intensive fighting between the SDF forces and ISIS in the suburbs of the town of Ain Issa (Al-Alam, May 31, 2016).



Images from a video produced by the SDF documenting clashes with ISIS operatives in the rural area north of Al-Raqqah. The voice of a man speaking Kurdish can be heard on the video. He is speaking on a two-way radio adjacent to the photographer (SDF Facebook page, May 29, 2016).

■ **The SDF and ISIS continue to prepare for the next stages of the campaign.** The SDF reportedly transferred large quantities of weapons and armored vehicles

¹ According to reports from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), since the beginning of the SDF's campaign to take over Al-Raqqah, the coalition forces have carried out around 150 airstrikes against ISIS targets in northern Syria (SOHR, May 29, 2016).

from the town of Ain Issa to the south, towards the routes leading to the city of Al-Raqqah. On the other hand, ISIS operatives in Al-Raqqah are preparing for the attack, digging tunnels and trenches, mining the outskirts of the city and preparing large quantities of car bombs (SOHR; ARA News, May 27, 2016). ISIS's propaganda machine is trying to present an image of normal daily life in Al-Raqqah.



ISIS video from the city of Al-Raqqah attempting to portray an image of “business as usual”. Right: The Al-Raqqah city center. Left: Patrol car of ISIS’s women’s morality police (*Hisba*) (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, May 29, 2016).

Fighting in other areas

■ In other areas in Syria, fighting continued without significant changes on the ground:

- **Deir al-Zor:** Clashes continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army in the city of Deir al-Zor and its environs.
- **The area of Damascus:** Clashes continued between ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front **in the area of the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp**. In addition, there were clashes between the Syrian Army and Al-Nusra Front **operatives in the rural area east of Damascus**.
- **The area of Daraa:** Clashes continued between the Al-Nusra Front and other rebel organizations on the one hand, and the Al-Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, west of Daraa, on the other.

Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (www.nationsonline.org).

The campaign to take over the city of Fallujah (Updated to May 31, 2016)

■ This week, the activity of the Iraqi Army and the forces that support it was concentrated on cleansing the rural area surrounding Fallujah from ISIS operatives. The second phase of the campaign began on the morning of May 30, 2016 (at around 04:00 local time). The Iraqi Army forces, led by a counterterrorism force trained in urban warfare, entered one of the neighborhoods on the southern outskirts of the city of Fallujah. The situation is **still not clear**, but the ITIC's impression is that **the Iraqi forces are meeting with fierce ISIS resistance**.

■ According to a report on Al-Jazeera (May 29, 2016), **about 33,000 Iraqi Army soldiers**, supported by Shiite militias and Sunni tribesmen, are participating in the campaign to take over Fallujah². The **elite counterterrorism force** is playing the central role in the takeover of the city. The Iraqi forces are facing **between 400 and 1,000 ISIS operatives**, including operatives with extensive operational experience (**Note: Based on another version, according to the AP and Reuters news agencies, there are at least 2,000 ISIS operatives in the city**). In addition, **about 50,000 residents** are trapped in the city (Al-Jazeera, May 31, 2016).



Right: The Iraqi Army on the outskirts of Fallujah (Al-Jazeera, May 29, 2016). Left: Mortar shells fired by ISIS at an Iraqi Army base south of Fallujah (Amaq, May 29, 2016)

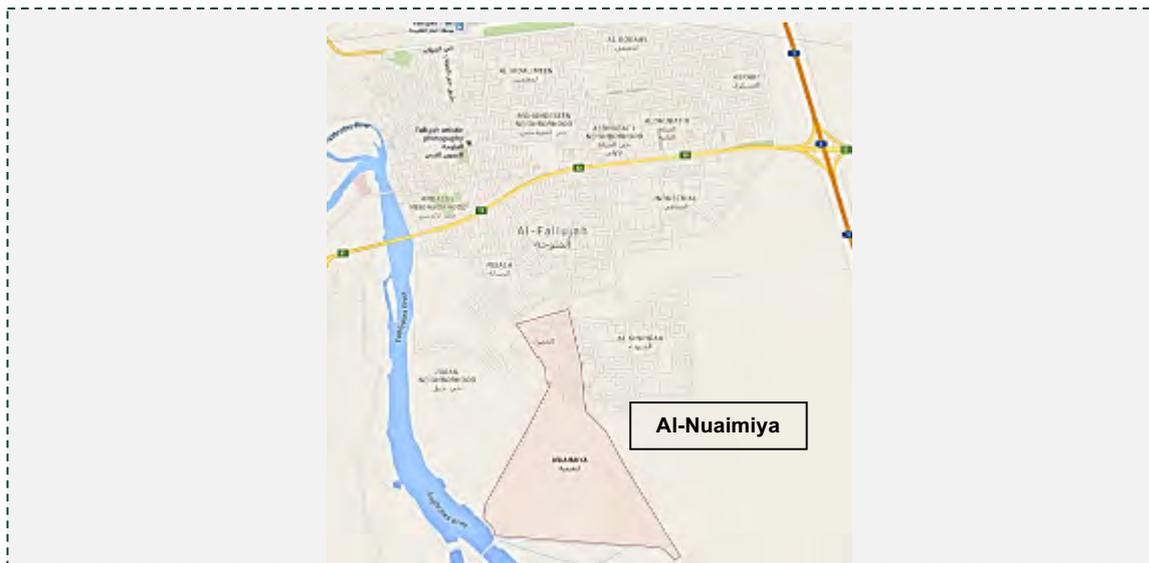
■ According to media reports, the Iraqi forces **entered the city from three directions**, mainly from the south and northeast, **with massive air support by the US and the Iraqi Air Force**. In order to defend Fallujah, **ISIS built a network of underground tunnels throughout the city, used for the purposes of hiding, command and control, and moving operatives and weapons from place to place** (Al-Aan Channel, May 14, 2016; Al-Sumaria, May 27, 2016). Some of these tunnels **lead out of the city** and may facilitate ISIS's guerrilla warfare against the Iraqi forces.

² The Shiite militias that support the Iraqi Army apparently play a secondary role in the takeover of the city, despite Iranian propaganda attempts to emphasize their central role. See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from May 30, 2016: "Iranian Participation in the Liberation of Fallujah." According to an Iraqi Army source, the coalition aircraft are dropping bombs to prevent the militias from entering Fallujah. They are doing so for fear that the militia operatives will go on a rampage of looting and massacres in the city, as was the case in the takeover of Tikrit (Al-Jazeera, May 31, 2016).



Right: The entrance to a long tunnel uncovered by the Iraqi Army northeast of Fallujah. Left: The entrance to a tunnel in a house south of the city of Fallujah, discovered by the Iraqi Army (Al-Aan Channel, May 14, 2016).

- According to a report by Iraqi military sources from **May 31, 2016**, the fighting is concentrated in the Nuaimiya neighborhood, on the southern outskirts of the city of Fallujah. The Iraqi Army suffered heavy losses there. The commander of the operation said the Iraqi Army had repelled an offense by over 100 ISIS operatives against the Iraqi Army in Al-Nuaimiya. According to the commander, 75 ISIS operatives were killed in southern Fallujah (Al-Sumaria, May 31, 2016).



The Nuaimiya neighborhood on the southern outskirts of Fallujah, where the battles are concentrated (Google Maps).

ISIS's response: increasing terrorism and guerrilla warfare

■ Typically, ISIS responded to the attack by increasing its terrorist and guerrilla activities in several arenas: in and around the city of Fallujah, the city of Baghdad, and the city of Hit, located on the Euphrates River (the latter was liberated by the Iraqi Army on April 14, 2016).

■ ISIS's main guerrilla and terrorist activities in these three arenas are as follows:

- **The area of Fallujah:** On May 28, 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for a **suicide bombing attack** carried out with a car bomb northwest of the city of Fallujah. The attack reportedly killed 15 Iraqi soldiers (Haqq, May 28, 2016). That same day, ISIS claimed responsibility for **additional suicide bombing attacks** in the area of Fallujah (Amaq, May 28, 2016).

- **The city of Hit:** On the morning of May 29, ISIS operatives carried out a **surprise attack on the city of Hit**. ISIS's operatives managed to take over a number of neighborhoods in the northwest of the city. According to Iraqi military sources, after several hours of fighting, the Iraqi Army regained control of the city. According to Iraqi military sources, about 40 Iraqi soldiers were killed in the surprise attack. Two senior Iraqi Army officers were wounded in the fighting in Hit, the commander of the Division 7 headquarters and the commander of Brigade 27 (Al-Jazeera, May 31, 2016).

- **The capital Baghdad:** ISIS continues to carry out terrorist attacks against the Shiite population and targets affiliated with the Iraqi regime. On May 30, 2016, two suicide bombing attacks were carried out in Shiite neighborhoods in the city: in the **Madinat al-Sadr neighborhood**, the largest Shiite neighborhood in Baghdad, an attack was carried out using a booby-trapped motorcycle. The attack killed three people and wounded 14 others. In the **Shiite Al-Shaab neighborhood**, a car bomb attack was carried out in the local open market. A total of 12 people were killed in the attack and 20 others were wounded (Al-Jazeera, May 30, 2016).

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

■ Last week, the Egyptian security forces continued their intensive activity against ISIS's Sinai Province, mainly in the areas of Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish, and Rafah. The activity included airstrikes and naval operations intended to prevent infiltration and

smuggling by sea. According to Egyptian reports, several dozen terrorist operatives were killed, buildings, houses, cars and motorcycles were destroyed, and operatives were arrested. In addition, communications devices, explosives and materials for manufacturing IEDs were seized.

- The US Treasury Department announced that an ISIS operative named **Salmi Salama Salim Sulayman**, aka '**Ammar**', has been added to the US sanctions list. This operative lives in Libya and has served as the representative of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis since early 2014. According to the US announcement, **since 2014 he has been involved in transferring hundreds of thousands of dollars, weapons and ammunition from Libya to the Sinai Peninsula** (US Department of the Treasury website, May 19, 2016).

- Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis is a Salafist-jihadi organization that pledged allegiance to ISIS and changed its name to the Sinai Province. The announcement indicates the importance of Libya as a logistical base for the transfer of weapons and money intended for operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province.

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

The campaign over Sirte

Overview

- This week, forces loyal to the Government of National Accord **advanced from the west and the east towards the city of Sirte**, ISIS's stronghold in Libya. The forces advancing from the west, led by the Libyan Dawn militias, announced that they had **reached the outskirts of the city**. In the east, a military force managed to take over the towns of **Bin Jawad** (152 km east of Sirte) and **Nawfaliyah** (southwest of Bin Jawad). **The forces advancing toward Sirte will apparently try to encircle it as a preliminary stage to taking it over.**



Towns taken over by the forces advancing towards Sirte, from the west and the east. The forces advancing from the west took control of the power plant and the road leading south to the city of Waddan (Google Maps).



Infographic illustrating the forces' advance towards Sirte from the west. Top left: Abu Qarin, which was taken over last week. Top right: the "security checkpoint" about 30 km west of Sirte. Right: ISIS's stronghold in the city of Sirte (circled) (Twitter account of the operation's information center, May 26, 2016)

Advance to Sirte by forces from the west

■ Forces loyal to the Government of National Accord, led by the Libyan Dawn militias, whose headquarters is in the city of Misrata, continued to advance toward Sirte this week³ (after taking over Abu Qarin last week). The operations room in Misrata, which is managing the campaign, announced that the forces had taken over the "security checkpoint" which is located about 30 km west of the city, and the Sirte power plant on

³ A previous attempt by a force from Misrata to take control of the city of Sirte was made in March 2015. The attempt proved unsuccessful. A brigade that was sent to Sirte from the city of Misrata to retake it never reached the city. At the time, the brigade commanders claimed that they had been surprised by ISIS's large force and that their soldiers had not received their salaries in months.

the outskirts of the city (ISIS took it over a year ago, on June 9, 2015). The **forces have reportedly cut off the road leading from Sirte southward to the city of Waddan** (about 230 km south of Sirte) and are now working to remove mines and IEDs planted there by ISIS.

■ While the forces were advancing, **airstrikes were carried out on ISIS targets in Sirte**. On May 29, 2016, the spokesman for the campaign's operations room announced that the Air Force had managed to **destroy parts of the magnificent Convention Center in Sirte used by ISIS as its main headquarters in Libya** (Al-Arabi al-Jadeed, May 29, 2016; aljazeera.net, May 30, 2016).

■ ISIS operatives responded (as usual) by carrying out **suicide bombing attacks against the attacking forces**. On May 26, 2016, ISIS's Tripoli Province announced that its operatives had carried out three suicide bombing attacks against the forces of Libyan Dawn. According to the announcement, more than 100 Libyan Dawn operatives were killed and injured in the attacks and the ensuing exchange of fire. On the other hand, the campaign's operations room claimed that the forces managed to detonate the car bombs before they reached their destination (justpaste.it, May 26 and 28, 2016; shortwiki.org, May 26, 2016; Al-Haqq Islamic News Agency, May 29, 2016; Al-Arabi al-Jadeed, May 29, 2016; aljazeera.net, May 30, 2016).



The Libyan security forces at the “security checkpoint” located 30 km west of Sirte (Twitter account of the campaign's media center, May 26, 2016)

■ The operations room in Misrata announced that one of the ISIS operatives killed in battle south of Abu Qarin was an Algerian named **Khalid al-Shayeb**, aka **Luqman Abu Sakhr**. Al-Shayeb reportedly served unofficially as the **coordinator of ISIS's military operations in North Africa**, having been ordered to do so by Abu Bakr al-

Baghdadi himself. He was one of the first founders of ISIS's branch in Libya and commanded the attack carried out by ISIS at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis⁴ (the Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, May 28, 2016; Aljarida Tunisie, May 29, 2016).



Left: The forces advancing from the west on the outskirts of Sirte (Akhbar Libya, May 30, 2016).
Right: The forces advancing from the west on the outskirts of Sirte (Al-Jazeera, May 30, 2016).



The forces advancing from the west toward the city of Sirte (Qanat Libya, May 31, 2016)

Takeover of ISIS's strongholds east of Sirte

■ Concurrently with the advance from the west, **another military force is operating east of Sirte** on behalf of the Government of National Accord. This force belongs to

⁴On March 18, 2015, several ISIS operatives carried out a mass terrorist attack in the Bardo National Museum, near the Tunisian Parliament building in the capital, Tunis. This attack killed 23 people, most of them tourists.

the **Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG)**, whose members number about 27,000 fighters. On May 30, 2016, a force took over the **town of Bin Jawad**, 152 km east of Sirte, and **the town of Nawfaliyah**, southwest of Bin Jawad (Al-Jazeera, May 31, 2016). These are two towns that were taken over by ISIS in February-March 2015, before the takeover of Sirte. The loss of these towns, and the loss of the territories west of Sirte, **means that the area under ISIS's control is shrinking and its forces are now being driven into the city of Sirte itself.**

Disputes among ISIS operatives in the city of Sirte

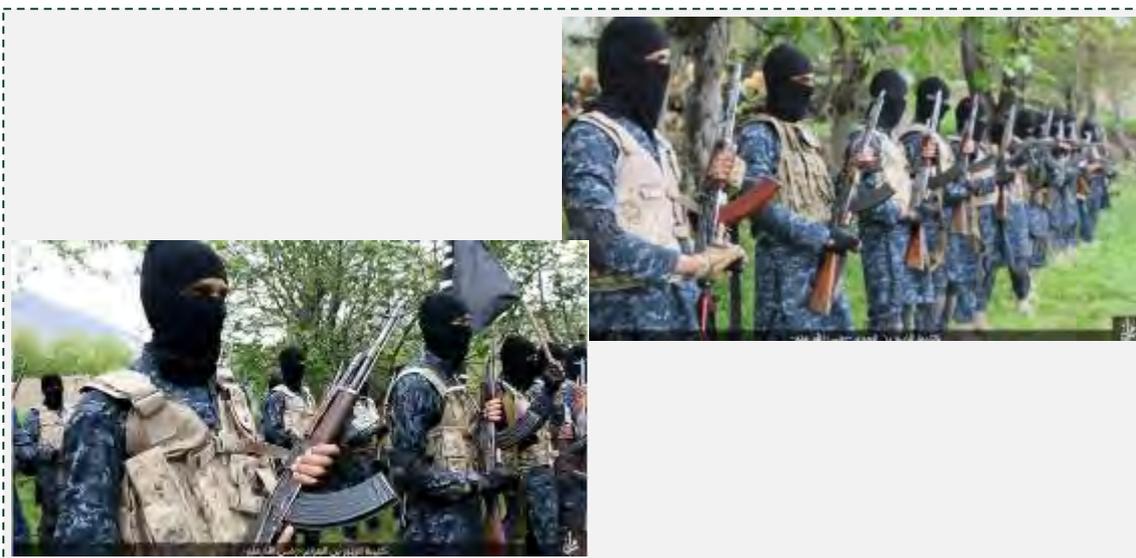
■ According to the Libyan media, **disputes have broken out among ISIS operatives in Sirte**, between the foreign fighters (Al-Muhajiroun) and the local Libyan operatives. The foreign fighters are reportedly complaining that the Libyan operatives give priority to their tribal affiliation or city of origin and do not adhere to the laws of the Islamic State. In an attempt to resolve the dispute, ISIS announced a conciliation meeting between the operatives. Previously, a ceremony was held in which two senior Libyan operatives were executed for treason (Al-Wasat Portal, May 24, 2016; Bawabat Ifriqiya al-Ikhbariya, May 26, 2016; Akhbar Libya 24, May 25, 2016; the Libyan forum Zanaqitna, May 25, 2016).



Invitation to a reconciliation meeting between the Libyan operatives and foreign fighters after the execution of two Libyan senior officials (Al-Wasat Portal, May 24, 2016)

Afghanistan

■ **ISIS's Khorasan Province** released photos documenting operatives of its **Al-Zubayr Ben al-Awwam Battalion** in Afghanistan. The photos show masked operatives with bulletproof vests and Kalashnikov rifles (Haqq, May 23, 2016).



Operatives of ISIS's Al-Zubayr Ben al-Awwam Battalion in Afghanistan (Haqq, May 23, 2016)

The conduct of the Islamic State

ISIS intensifies the tax burden on the population

- In response to economic pressures on ISIS, **it continues to raise the tax burden on the population living in the territories under its control. New fines and taxes have reportedly been imposed on residents.** In addition, the trucks that pass through checkpoints now have to pay \$600-700 dollars, compared to \$300 dollars paid last year. It is also reported that due to ISIS's withdrawal from territories that it had controlled and the drop in the population that it controls, its revenues from taxation have dropped by 23% (Market Watch, May 29, 2016).