



Spotlight on Global Jihad (May 19-25, 2016)



Main events of the week

- **ISIS continues to face military pressure in Iraq and Syria:** In Iraq, a **campaign for the liberation of Fallujah has begun**. The city of Fallujah is the most important stronghold still held by ISIS in the Sunni Al-Anbar Province. The Iraqi Army has reportedly reached the outskirts of the city and is now tightening the siege. In Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab military framework supported by the US, has declared a **campaign to take over Al-Raqqah**, ISIS's stronghold in Syria. The SDF has reportedly taken over the **area of Al-Issa, some 50 km north of Al-Raqqah**. ISIS, on its part, is taking measures to defend Al-Raqqah.
- **ISIS's response** to the pressure it is facing is **to increase its terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare in Syria and Iraq**. This week, the main event was a **series of coordinated and precisely timed suicide bombing attacks, the first of their kind, in crowded places in Jableh and Tartous**, in the Latakia Province (the stronghold of the Alawite community). These attacks and ISIS's terrorist attacks in Baghdad were **intended to strengthen ISIS's deterrence and demonstrate its ability to harm the "soft underbelly" of the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, even when faced with severe pressure**.
- With the approach of the month of Ramadan, ISIS mounted an extensive propaganda campaign that **focused on threats of carrying out attacks against Western countries (the US and Europe) and against Israel and the Jews**. ISIS's spokesman called on its supporters in the West to make Ramadan a month of disasters for the enemies of ISIS, **and not to shirk from killing civilians** (according to the spokesman, harming them is more beneficial for ISIS). The spokesman stressed that **even if ISIS loses its core areas in Iraq, Syria and Libya, it will continue fighting**, as it did during the US Army's occupation of Iraq.

The ceasefire

- 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 (Sputnik, May 18, 2016). According to the Russian report, the number of communities that have joined the agreement has reached 113. The number of "armed groups" that have accepted the agreement remains unchanged and stands at 59 (TASS News Agency, May 21, 2016). While Russian officials boast about the increase in the number of organizations that have accepted the ceasefire, **it is becoming eroded on**

the ground, and the fighting in the various provinces in Syria **has increased in intensity in recent weeks**.

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. **Iraq** - the airstrikes were concentrated in the areas of Rutba, Fallujah, Kisik, Mosul, Sinjar, Sultan Abdullah, Tal Afar, Baghdadi and Haditha. **Syria** - the airstrikes were concentrated in the areas of Al-Raqqah, Ain Issa, Marea, and Palmyra.

Russia's involvement in the fighting in Syria

■ Russian planes continued to attack targets in Syria. Among other places, they attacked targets **in the area of Khan Touman, south of Aleppo**, where the rebel organizations had recorded a victory over the Syrian Army and the forces that support it (Khatwa News Agency, May 21, 2016). They also attacked targets **north and west of Aleppo** and targets **in the areas of Deir al-Zor, the Al-Sha'ir oil field, and Palmyra**, where there were clashes between ISIS and the Syrian Army.

■ **Russia's defense minister made a proposal to the US to carry out joint airstrikes in Syria**. According to him, the joint airstrikes would be directed against the Al-Nusra Front and against the transfer of weapons and terrorists to Syria via Turkey (Sputnik, May 20, 2016). **The US rejected the proposal**. According to **Pentagon Spokesman Jeff Davis**, Russia never made a formal request to the United States on the issue. He also made it clear that the United States does not cooperate with Russia and does not coordinate in its operations in Syria with Russia, stressing that the US and Russia have different military objectives (Al-Jazeera, May 20, 2016).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (www.nationsonline.org)

ISIS's terrorist attacks in Jableh and Tartous

On May 23, 2016, ISIS carried out a series of **coordinated and precisely timed** suicide bombing attacks in several crowded places (central bus stations, hospitals) in the cities of **Jableh** and **Tartous**. These cities are located in the Latakia Province in western Syria, **the stronghold of the Alawite community in Syria**. **The attacks were carried out simultaneously by suicide bombers and by using car bombs**. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks, which **killed over 150 people and injured over 200 others**.

■ Following is a description of the attacks (based on initial reports):

- **In the city of Jableh** (around 80,000 inhabitants), south of the city of Latakia, **there were four suicide bombing attacks and another attack was thwarted**. A car bomb exploded **in the city's central bus station**. Three other attacks were carried out **near Jableh Hospital** (Syrian TV, May 23, 2016). An ISIS operative who intended to carry out another attack was caught.

- In the city of Tartous (around 120,000 inhabitants), **four suicide bombings were carried out simultaneously**: three attacks were carried out at the **central bus station** in the south of the city. Another attack was carried out in a **residential area adjacent to the central bus station** (Syrian TV, May 23, 2016).



The scenes of the suicide bombing attacks in Jableh (right) and Tartous (left) (Syrian TV, May 23, 2016)

ISIS's claim of responsibility

■ In a statement issued by ISIS's news agency, **the Coastal Province of the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks in Jableh and Tartous**. The statement says that ISIS managed to infiltrate the strongholds of the Alawites ("the infidels") in Tartous and Jableh and deploy car bombs and operatives who blew themselves up using explosive belts. The attacks **killed over 150 people and injured around 300 others**. According to the statement, the objective was to **give the Alawites a "taste of the death"** that the Muslims taste as a result of the Russian and Syrian airstrikes in Muslim cities. **ISIS promised to carry out more attacks against the Syrian regime: "The next attacks will be more terrible and more bitter"** (Khilafah Mubasher, May 23, 2016).

Initial assessment of the implications of the attacks

■ **This wave of terrorist attacks is the first of its kind carried out in the Latakia Province in western Syria**. This province is largely populated by the **Alawite community, the foundation of Bashar Assad's regime**. **Russian military infrastructure facilities, primarily the air base in Hmeymim (about 4 km northeast of Jableh) and the port of Tartous** are located in this province. During the five years

of civil war in Syria, **the residents of the Latakia Province enjoyed relative calm** that enabled them to proceed with their daily lives, in stark contrast to the grave situation prevailing in the other provinces.

For the Syrian regime and its allies Russia and Iran, **the terrorist attacks in Tartous and Jableh represent a blow in terms of security, politics and morale.** The attacks were carried out against the background of **ISIS's failures in Syria and Iraq, and the emerging threat against ISIS's core areas** (Al-Raqqah in Syria and Mosul in Iraq). The terrorist attacks in the Latakia Province, like the wave of terror in Baghdad, **are designed to strengthen ISIS's deterrent image and demonstrate to the Syrian and Iraqi regimes its ability to strike vital targets and their soft underbelly.** In the ITIC's assessment, **as ISIS weakens, its motivation and that of its supporters to carry out terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare will increase, and the targets may be ISIS's enemies in Syria and Iraq, as well the West, Russia, and Israel.**

Increasing pressure on Al-Raqqah, ISIS's stronghold in Syria

■ On May 24, 2016, the **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**, a Kurdish-Arab military umbrella framework supported by the US, announced **the start of a campaign to take over the city of Al-Raqqah.** To this end, thousands of soldiers were reportedly recruited in areas north of Al-Raqqah. The fighting is now concentrated **in and around the town of Al-Issa,** south of Tal Abyad (about 50 km north of Al-Raqqah).



The area of Al-Issa, north of Al-Raqqah, the scene of fighting between the Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS (Google Maps)

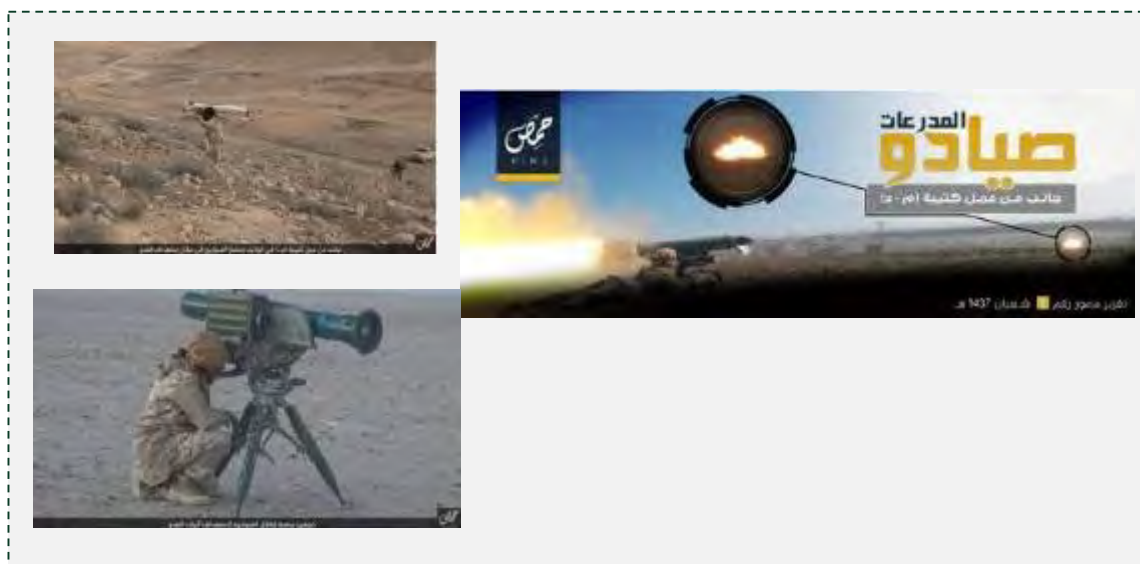


The Syrian Democratic Forces (all4syria.info, May 24, 2016)

■ **ISIS, on its part, is preparing to defend Al-Raqqah.** ISIS has reportedly brought in reinforcements in the city, canceled vacations and made preparations to face a ground incursion into the city (reinforcing of embankments, laying mines). Coalition aircraft dropped leaflets calling on residents to leave the city (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 20, 2016). In response, ISIS used loudspeakers in mosques to forbid civilians from leaving the city (Dimashq al-Aan, May 21, 2016).

Fighting in other areas

- In other areas in Syria, **fighting continued** without significant changes on the ground.
 - **The area of Palmyra:** ISIS continues to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Syrian Army in Palmyra. Fighting continues in the Al-Sha'ir oil and gas field to the west of the city. ISIS reportedly attacked a Russian Air Force base, hitting four attack helicopters (Conflict News, May 24, 2016).



Photos released by ISIS's Homs Province. The photos show antitank weapons operators on the outskirts of Palmyra (Khilafah Mubasher, May 21, 2016). Right: A poster with the inscription "The armored vehicle hunters." ISIS operatives firing antitank weapons (Khilafah Mubasher, May 21, 2016)

- **The area of Aleppo:** Fighting continued between ISIS and the rebel organizations, especially in the villages north of Aleppo.
- **Deir al-Zor:** Clashes continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army in the city and in the area of the military airbase.
- **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:** In western Daraa there were clashes between the ISIS-affiliated Al-Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade and the Muthanna Movement (which fights alongside it), and the Al-Nusra Front and other Islamic organizations. According to media reports, **ISIS recently sent operatives to the area of Daraa** to support the Al-Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, which is suffering from a shortage of fighters (Al-Hal, May 15, 2016).

Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (www.nationsonline.org)

Al-Anbar Province

Operation to take over the city of Fallujah

■ Fallujah, located about 54 km west of Baghdad, is **the most important stronghold still held by ISIS in the Sunni Al-Anbar Province**. It is a city of great symbolic value, which was a stronghold of jihadists in Iraq during the US military occupation of Iraq. Some of its residents fled, but around 60,000 remained. On May 22, 2016, **Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announced the beginning of an operation to liberate the city of Fallujah from the hands of ISIS**. The operation is being conducted by the Iraqi security forces, supported by Shiite militias and Sunni tribes.

■ **The first phase** of the military effort was focused on taking over the **towns and villages surrounding Fallujah, along with artillery fire at the city**¹ (Al-Mayadeen, May 23, 2016). **The Iraqi Army forces have apparently reached the outskirts of the city of Fallujah.** On May 23, 2016, the commander of the Operations Division of the Iraqi Army announced that the Iraqi Army had **taken over the town of Al-Karmah**, about 16 km northwest of Fallujah. The takeover of Al-Karmah was an important achievement, giving the Iraqi Army a good starting point in its campaign to take over Fallujah.

■ **In the second phase, which began on May 24, 2016, the Iraqi Army advanced towards the city of Fallujah, with the support of the Shiite militias.** The advance was carried out from the northwest and the east. ISIS is trying to stop the Iraqi force by carrying out suicide bombing attacks (Al-Jazeera; the Iraqi News Agency, May 24, 2016). According to an announcement by **Iraqi Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi, the Iraqi Army is stepping up the siege on the city, after having taken over several villages on its outskirts.**



The Iraqi Army on the outskirts of Fallujah (Al-Jazeera, May 24, 2016)

■ According to sources among the Shiite militias supporting the Iraqi Army, Qassem Soleimani, **commander of the Qods Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards**, is in the area and taking part in conducting the campaign over Fallujah (Al-Jazeera, May 24, 2016).

¹ Before the start of the operation, residents were asked to leave the city (Al-Sumaria, May 23, 2016).



Qassem Soleimani alongside senior officers of the Shiite militias that support the Iraqi Army (Al-Jazeera, May 24, 2016) Note: According to Iraqi sources, the photo was taken in the operations room of the Shiite militias supporting the Iraqi Army in the operation over Fallujah.

Takeover of the city of Rutba and the border crossings to Syria and Jordan

■ On May 17, 2016, the city of Rutba was liberated from the hands of ISIS. The Iraqi Army continues to dismantle IEDs left by ISIS in the city. On May 20, 2016, the Iraqi Army announced that it had taken over the road between Rutba and Tarbil (Al-Sumaria, May 20, 2016). Tarbil is a village on the Iraqi-Jordanian border where a **border crossing to Jordan** is located. It was also reported that the Iraqi Army had advanced toward the **Al-Walid border crossing** between Iraq and Syria (the Syrian side of the crossing was recently taken over by a rebel organization called the New Syrian Army).



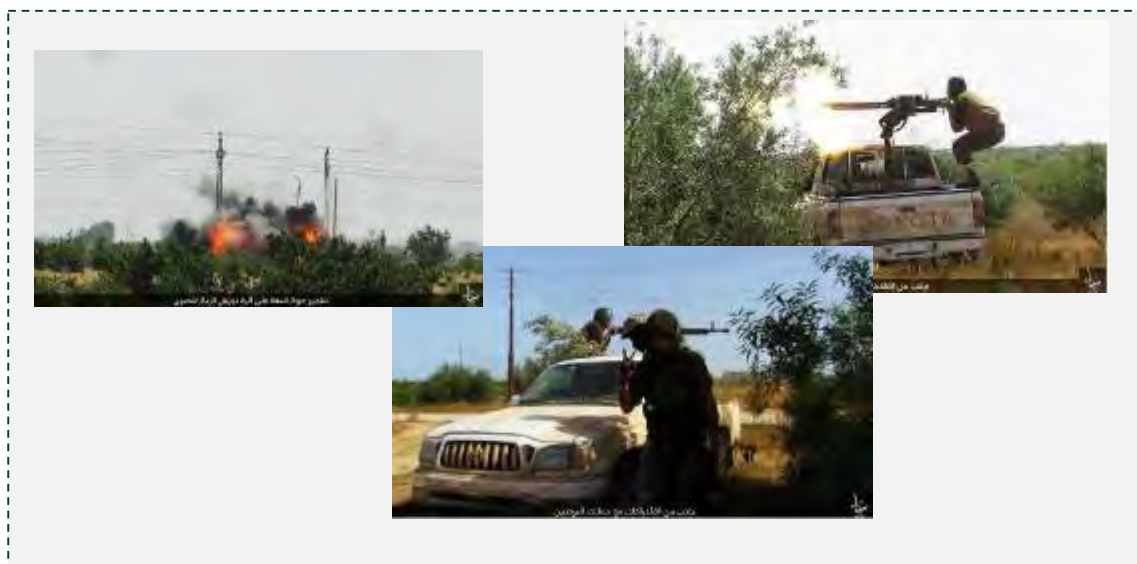
Right: Residents alongside Iraqi Army soldiers in Rutba after its liberation (Tasnim News Agency, May 21, 2016). Left: The Iraqi Army in Rutba (Al-Sumaria, May 20, 2016)



The Al-Walid border crossing (between Iraq and Syria) and the Tarbil border crossing (between Iraq and Jordan) (Google Maps)

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

■ During the week, the Egyptian security forces continued their activity against ISIS's Sinai Province in the areas of Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish, and Rafah. Dozens of airstrikes were carried out. During the operation, ISIS operatives were killed, and large quantities of weapons and IEDs were destroyed. In addition, several dozen suspects were detained and vehicles were seized. The Egyptian security forces reportedly destroyed eight tunnels on the border with the Gaza Strip and in the area of Rafah.



Photos released by ISIS's Sinai Province entitled "The graveyard of the unfortunate," documenting attacks carried out by ISIS's operatives against the Egyptian security forces (Haqq, May 22, 2016)

- ISIS's Sinai Province released an animated video entitled **“Publication of the Sinai Province... the war against the Jewish state.”** The video shows ISIS operatives training and **preparing themselves to fight against the Jews.** At the beginning of the video there is an inscription that reads: “Dedicated to dear ones in the Sinai Province” and **“May Allah soon unite us in Al-Aqsa”** (YouTube, May 22, 2016). **ISIS's threats against Israel and the Jews recently increased.**

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

International involvement in the fighting against ISIS

- According to **Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff**, there is a debate in the Libyan Government of National Accord, which could lead “any day” to an agreement under which **American military advisers would be stationed in Libya to help fight ISIS.** He added that there were member states in NATO that were also interested in taking part in the fighting against ISIS in Libya, which will be prolonged and will probably **focus on equipping and training the militias that are loyal to the Libyan Government of National Accord.** According to a Pentagon spokesman, a precondition for sending US troops to Libya is **the existence of political unity and a single central government** (Washington Post, May 19, 2016; military.com, May 20, 2016).

Fighting in the Abu Qarin area

- **In the town of Abu Qarin, west of Sirte, fighting continued between ISIS and the Islamic militia Libyan Dawn.** Libyan Dawn announced the **liberation of the towns of Abu Qarin, Zamzam, Al-Qadahiya, Abu Najim and Al-Washaka,** which had been taken over by ISIS on May 5, 2016 (Al-Wasat Portal, May 19, 2016). According to Libyan Dawn's announcement, 32 of their operatives were killed in the battles against ISIS and around 50 others were injured.



The area of Abu Qarin, west of Sirte, where fighting continued between ISIS and the Islamic militia Libyan Dawn (Google Maps)

■ After the takeover of the town of Abu Qarin, Libyan Dawn's forces tried to open the **road leading from the Abu Qarin area to Al-Jafra**, the desert area in central Libya. ISIS's Tripoli Province claims to have activated a number of IEDs against a Libyan Dawn convoy that tried to advance from Al-Jafra to Abu Qarin, inflicting casualties on the convoy and causing it to retreat. **Mohamed Sualim, former labor minister in the Tripoli government and one of the commanders of Libyan Dawn's forces**, was reportedly killed in the fighting (alarabiya.net, May 22, 2016; shortwiki.org, May 20, 2016; Twitter account affiliated with Libyan Dawn, May 18, 2016).

Control of the Abu Qarin area is of great importance since it gives Libyan Dawn's militias and their supporters a good launching ground to reach **the city of Sirte**, ISIS's stronghold in Libya. On the other hand, control of the region will give ISIS a good launching ground to advance towards **the important port city of Misrata**, halfway between Sirte and Tripoli.

Yemen

■ **ISIS carried out two suicide bombing attacks in Aden.** The first attack was carried out at the local recruitment office. Some 45 people were killed, most of them members of the security forces, and dozens more were wounded (Sky News, May 23, 2016). ISIS's Aden Province published a claim of responsibility for the killing of more than 30 "infidels" **at a recruiting office in Aden** (Khilafah Mubasher, May 23, 2016). Shortly after the bombing at the recruitment office, **another suicide bombing was carried out** nearby, **near the Yemeni Army's Bader Camp.** ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. (BBC, May 23, 2016).

The Philippines

- ISIS claimed responsibility for the **detonation of an IED that was activated against seven Philippines Army soldiers** in the Al-Barka area, in the southeastern part of the island of Basilan, about 908 km south of the capital Manila (Haqq Islamic News Agency, May 20, 2016).

The conduct of the Islamic State

Restrictions on leaving the territory of the Islamic State in Syria

- A travel agency affiliated with the Al-Khayr (Deir al-Zor) Province of the Islamic State listed the conditions that must be met by civilians who want to leave the country in order to fulfill the religious obligation of the Hajj. In order to leave the territory, they must obtain a special travel document. To this end, they must submit, among other things, a photocopy of their identity card, two passport photos, and references from two ISIS operatives. They must also submit a certified document attesting to the ownership of a home, and a photocopy of a diploma from a course in Islamic law (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 22, 2016). **It can be assumed that such restrictions almost completely prevent residents from leaving the territory of the Islamic State, even in order to fulfill the religious obligation of the Hajj.**

Is Al-Qaeda planning to establish an alternative headquarters in Syria?

- According to counterterrorism experts in the US and Europe, **Al-Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan**, which has been severely weakened by years of US attacks, **has decided that Al-Qaeda's future lies in Syria**. To this end, **Al-Qaeda's leadership has secretly sent several senior experienced and skilled operatives to Syria**. The operatives were sent there to establish an **alternative headquarters and lay the groundwork for the possible establishment of a caliphate through the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria**. The move reflects the growing importance of Syria for the Al-Nusra Front. If this information is true, it indicates a change in policy for Al-Qaeda, which has so far opposed the establishment of a caliphate before the conditions are ripe (The New York Times, May 15, 2016).

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Western fear of attacks by ISIS

- According to intelligence agencies in Germany and Italy, **ISIS is planning to carry out terrorist attacks during the summer against crowded beaches in the south of France, Spain, Italy, Turkey and Morocco.** To this end, **ISIS is training Indian combatants in the area of Lake Qattinah**, southwest of the city of Homs (see below, in the section entitled The battle for hearts and minds) (The Sun, May 20, 2016).
- **Patrick Calvar, head of the French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), warned about possible attacks by ISIS during the Euro 2016 Games** scheduled for next month. He noted that **“we know that [ISIS] is planning more attacks [...] and that France is clearly a target.”** According to Calvar, such attacks could be carried out by planting explosive devices where large crowds are gathered. The French security services are reportedly on high alert and are making hundreds of arrests throughout France (nbcnews.com, May 21, 2016).

The battle for hearts and minds

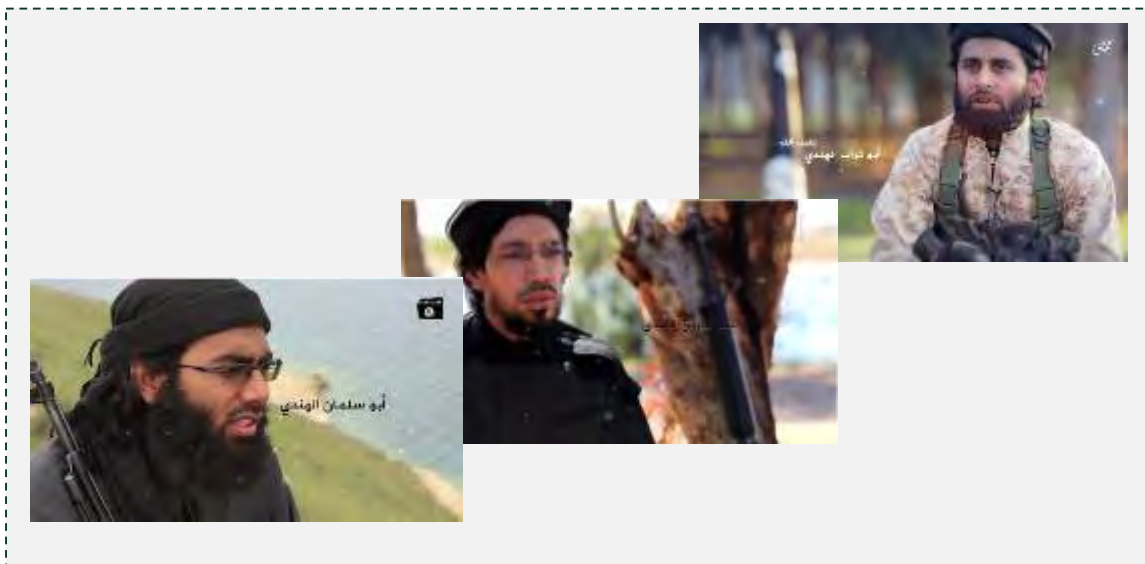
Threats of attacks against the West and against the Jews

- On May 21, 2016, a few days before the attacks in Jableh and Tartous, ISIS released an audio recording of a speech by its spokesman, **Abu Mohammad al-Adnani**. The recording was preceded by **an extensive campaign in several languages** (Arabic, English, Kurdish, German and French) that raised expectations about the contents of the recording. In his speech, Al-Adnani threatens the West and the Jews, saying that **ISIS will continue to fight, even if it loses the territories under its control in Syria, Iraq and Libya** (YouTube, Khilafah Mubasher, May 21, 2016). Following are some of the topics mentioned in his speech:
 - Abu Mohammad al-Adnani calls on ISIS’s operatives **to prepare for Ramadan** (which he calls “the month of raids and jihad” and “the month of victories”) **and to make it a month of disasters** for ISIS’s enemies: **“We especially appeal to the soldiers of the Caliphate and its supporters in Europe and America [...] Open up the gates of jihad for them and make them regret their actions.”**

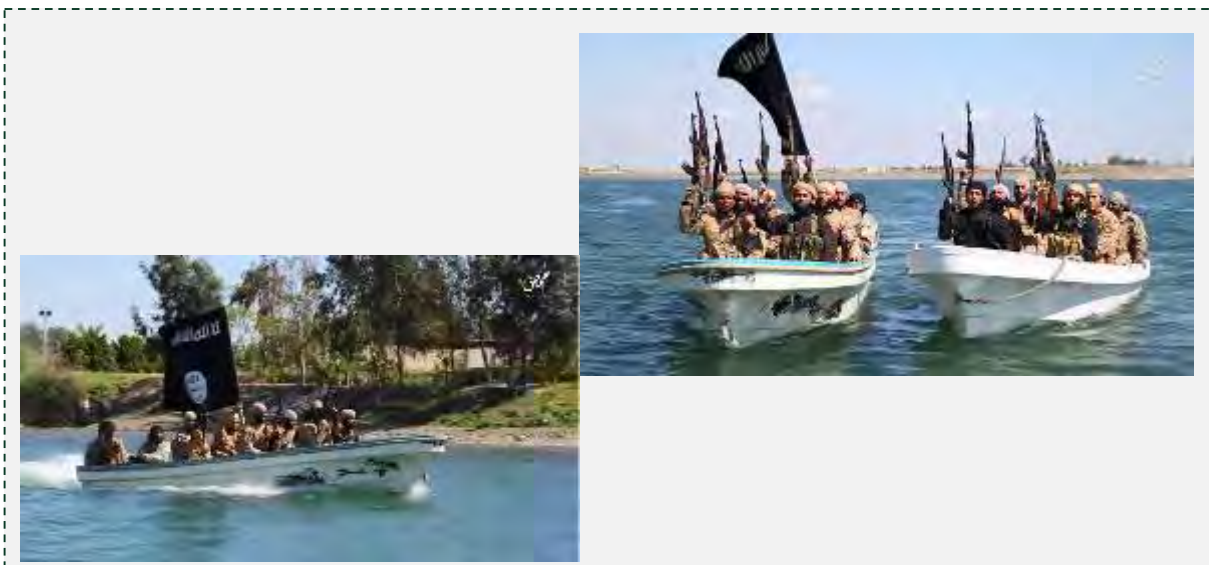
- **He warns the Christians (“Crusaders”) and the Jews** that they will be punished by the Muslims, quoting a tradition (*hadith*) stating that the time of resurrection will come **only after the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them.**
- Al-Adnani calls on the United States not to delude itself **that killing one leader or another of ISIS will lead to victory. He says that the Islamic State is committed to continue fighting and even if it loses areas such as Mosul or Al-Raqqah or Sirte, the Islamic State will continue to fight**, just as it did in Iraq during the fighting against the United States.
- **Justifying attacks on civilians:** Al-Adnani stresses **that there is no reason to shirk from harming civilians** since there are no innocent civilians in the countries of the Crusaders: “Know that in the land of the Crusaders [...] there is no immunity to blood, and there is no such thing as innocent [...] **Know that your harming so-called civilians is more desirable and beneficial to us because it hurts them more.**”

Threats against India

- **A video released by ISIS’s Homs Province shows Indian operatives fighting in Syria, in the area of Homs.** The operatives in the video denounce the Indian government’s attitude towards Muslims **and threaten to carry out attacks in India.** The video describes ISIS’s version of the history of the Muslims in India. One of the Indian speakers calls on doctors, engineers and other professionals in India to migrate to the Islamic State and support it (Khilafah Mubasher, May 20, 2016). According to the British newspaper The Sun (May 20, 2016), Indian operatives are expected to carry out attacks on crowded beaches in Western Europe and Muslim countries (see above, in the section entitled Counterterrorism and preventive activity).



The Indian operatives in the video. Right: Abu Turab the Indian. Center: Omar Farouq the Indian. Left: Abu Salman the Indian (Khilafah Mubasher, May 20, 2016)



Indian ISIS operatives in the area of Homs (Khilafah Mubasher, May 20, 2016). The photos were apparently taken on Lake Qattinah, southwest of the city of Homs, where Indian operatives are reportedly trained (according to the British newspaper The Sun, May 20, 2016).