



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (December 24-31, 2014)



### Main events of the week<sup>1</sup>

- The main event of the week was the crash of a Jordanian aircraft in Al-Raqqah and the capture of its pilot by ISIS. The crash is the first incident of its kind since the beginning of the air campaign against ISIS. It was used by ISIS for its propaganda purposes, claiming that it shot down the aircraft with an anti-aircraft missile. US Army and Jordanian Army sources announced that preliminary evidence indicates that the aircraft crashed and was not shot down by ISIS. Sources in the Salafist movement in Jordan quickly announced that they would be willing to mediate negotiations between Jordan and ISIS for the release of the pilot in exchange for jihadi supporters imprisoned in Jordan.
- Fighting in Iraq and Syria continued in the major battle zones, without significant changes on the ground. A senior Iranian officer in the Revolutionary Guards, who served as advisor to the Iraqi Army and Shiite militias, was killed by ISIS this week in the fighting in the Shiite city of Samarra, north of Baghdad. His funeral in Tehran was attended by senior figures in the Iranian military and security establishment. His death sheds some light on the indirect Iranian support of the Shiite militias fighting against ISIS, which were set up and operated by the Revolutionary Guards' Qods Force during the years of fighting against the US and its allies in Iraq.

### The international campaign against ISIS

#### Attacks by the US and the coalition in Syria and Iraq

- This week, US and coalition aircraft continued to carry out dozens of airstrikes in Syria and Iraq using fighter planes, bombers and unmanned aircraft. Following are the locations and characteristics of the airstrikes (CENTCOM website, Al-Hurra channel):

<sup>1</sup>The weekly publication Spotlight on Global Jihad monitors developments among ISIS and global jihad organizations in the Middle East and terrorist activities around the world, directed, supported or inspired by the global jihad organizations in the Middle East.

- **Syria** - the airstrikes were concentrated in Kobani (Ayn al-Arab), where fighting between ISIS and Kurdish forces continues. ISIS targets were also attacked in the provinces of Deir al-Zor, Al-Hasakah, Aleppo and Al-Raqqah, ISIS's "capital". The US Army reported that the airstrikes destroyed buildings, battle positions, deployment areas, oil facilities and vehicles belonging to ISIS. Airstrikes were carried out by the US and its Arab allies (Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE).

- **Iraq** - the airstrikes focused on ISIS targets in the areas of Mosul, Fallujah, Al-Qaim, Baiji, the Al-Assad military airfield (in the province of Anbar, south of Haditha) and Sinjar. The attacks included equipment, vehicles and checkpoints in Al-Qaim (northwestern Iraq, near the border with Syria); a military headquarters in Mosul; buildings near Baiji where ISIS operatives were staying; ISIS vehicles and forces near the Al-Assad military airfield, and vehicles and units near Sinjar. The airstrikes were carried out by the US and its Western allies (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Britain).

## **Crash of a Jordanian fighter plane, whose pilot was captured by ISIS**

■ On December 24, 2014, a Jordanian F-16 fighter plane crashed during a combat mission in northern Syria, near the city of Al-Raqqah. The pilot bailed out. ISIS announced that it had shot down the aircraft with an anti-aircraft missile and captured its pilot. **On the other hand, the head of the US Army Central Command announced that the aircraft had crashed and was not shot down by ISIS:** "Evidence clearly indicates that ISIL did not down the aircraft as the terrorist organization is claiming" (AFP, December 24, 2014). The Jordanian Army also announced that preliminary evidence indicates that the crash was not the result of firing by ISIS (Jordanian News Agency, December 24, 2014).



Photos of the captured pilot distributed by ISIS on social networks. The pilot is shown half-naked, being dragged from the lake where he landed.



Left: Cries of joy of ISIS operatives in Al-Raqqa, following the crash of the Jordanian aircraft (Twitter account affiliated with the Islamic State, December 24, 2014). Right: ISIS operatives near the wreckage of the aircraft, in a photo distributed by ISIS on social networks

This is the first time a coalition aircraft has crashed while carrying out airstrikes against ISIS. ISIS has shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, which it has used to intercept Iraqi Army helicopters on several occasions. **However, the ITIC is not aware that ISIS is capable of intercepting fighter planes.** Therefore, it is likely that the American and Jordanian version that the plane crashed (possibly due to a technical fault) is correct.

- According to the Jordanian and Arab media, the pilot, who was taken prisoner by ISIS, is a first lieutenant by the name of **Mu'ath Safi Yousef al-Kaseasbeh**, 27, who served in the province of Karak in southern Jordan. Senior Jordanian officials

stressed that they are working to secure the return of the captured pilot. Sources in the Jordanian Salafist movement announced that they are prepared to mediate between the government of Jordan and ISIS over the release of the captured pilot in return for operatives, supporters of ISIS, imprisoned in Jordan. It was also reported that Jordan has asked Turkey to help it in its efforts to secure the release of the captured pilot (Hürriyet, December 29, 2014).

**There are over 200 Salafist-jihadi operatives detained in Jordan (Al-Ghad, December 29, 2014). Some of them have been detained for involvement in terrorism and subversion against the regime.** Their possible release in exchange for the captive Jordanian pilot **is liable to strengthen the power of the supporters of ISIS and the global jihad in Jordan**, increase the risk that they pose to the Hashemite regime and, possibly, hamper Jordan's involvement in the US-led coalition.<sup>2</sup>

## Number of casualties in coalition airstrikes

■ According to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), since the international coalition's airstrikes began, **around 1,170 people** have been killed and over 800 have been injured. Among those killed, **1,046 were ISIS operatives and 72 were Al-Nusra Front operatives**. A total of 52 civilians were also killed in coalition airstrikes.

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<sup>2</sup>For information about the support for ISIS in Jordan, see the ITIC's study from November 26, 2014: "ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization," pp. 181-186.

## Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (GOOGLE EARTH)

### Kobani (Ayn al-Arab)

- The fighting between ISIS and the Kurdish forces (YPG) in the city of Kobani is still ongoing. According to media reports, ISIS operatives often fired mortars at targets in the city and carried out a suicide bombing attack (December 28, 2014) using a truck bomb. The ISIS media office published the will of the suicide bomber, whose codename was **Abu Noh the Algerian**, in which he called on ISIS operatives to carry out suicide bombings that would bring them close to heaven. However, Kurdish fighters have had a few isolated achievements in the south and east of the city. According to a senior Kurdish source, Kurdish forces now control approximately 70% of the area of the city (The Independent, December 28, 2014).

### Al-Raqqah

- A website affiliated with ISIS in the province of Al-Raqqah posted a video allegedly documenting the bombing of a mosque in the city of Al-Raqqah by coalition aircraft. The spokesman claimed that during prayers, one of the planes fired a missile that hit the mosque and another missile that hit a house opposite the mosque, killing the women and children inside (IsdaratTube, December 26, 2014). The ITIC cannot verify the reliability of the video.





The mosque in Al-Raqqah that was hit by a missile which ISIS claims was fired from the air (IsdaratTube, December 26, 2014).

## Deir al-Zor

- ISIS continued its efforts to take over the military airfield in the province of Deir al-Zor, a major stronghold of the Syrian Army in the east of the country. According to the Lebanese newspaper *As-Safir* (December 25, 2014), ISIS operatives tried to occupy an area controlling the airfield, but Syrian security forces managed to repel them.
- Sunni tribes in the province of Deir al-Zor disseminated a message on social networks about the establishment of an organization by the name of the **Popular Resistance Front** (*Jabhat al-Muqawama al-Sha'abiyya*). The purpose of the new organization is to help the Syrian Army “fight terrorist organizations,” with an emphasis on ISIS. The new body called on the residents of Deir al-Zor to cooperate with it and claimed responsibility for military operations against ISIS carried out in recent months in the province of Deir al-Zor (YouTube, December 27, 2014; Al-Watan, December 28, 2014).



**The Sunni tribes' announcement of the establishment of the Popular Resistance Front. The Syrian flag is visible in the background (YouTube, December 27, 2014)**

In the summer of 2014, it was reported that some members of the Sunni tribes in eastern Syria refuse to cooperate with ISIS. In August 2014, it was reported that ISIS carried out executions and massacres among members of the Shueitat tribe in the province of Deir al-Zor. In November 2014, it was reported that members of the Shueitat tribe who fled from ISIS have begun training under the Syrian regime in the area of Palmyra. Others chose to flee to Turkey (Zaman al-Wasl, November 8, 2014). In the ITIC's assessment, the recently reported new network of tribe members is supported by the Syrian regime, which is trying to drive a wedge between ISIS and the local population.

## The province of Hama

- A Syrian opposition website reported on fighting in the area around **the military airfield in Hama**. The website quotes various reports that "strategic weapons" of the Syrian Army are located at the airfield. It was reported that the Syrian Army began to remove planes and soldiers from the airfield for fear that operatives of the Al-Nusra Front and rebel organizations cooperating with it would take over the airfield, following their achievements in the province of Idlib (for information about the capture of two Syrian Army bases in the province of Idlib by the Al-Nusra Front and its allies, see last week's Spotlight on Global Jihad).

## Southern Syria

- In the central and southern Syrian Golan Heights, fighting continued between rebel groups and forces of the Syrian regime. The violent clashes that took place in recent weeks between the Al-Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria) and the Shuhada al-Yarmouk Brigade have apparently subsided. According to media reports, an

agreement was reached between the Al-Nusra Front and the Shuhada al-Yarmouk Brigade, stipulating a ceasefire, the return of the two sides to fight against the Syrian regime, and the establishment of a court to settle disputes between them (Zaman al-Wasl, December 25, 2014).

■ Media affiliated with the Syrian opposition reported that in the second half of December 2014, ISIS bombed **the tomb of Sidi Sulayman**, which the Druze consider a holy site, in the village of Al-Haqf, in the province of Al-Suwayda. It was reported that ISIS set up barriers at the site and collected protection money from the residents. It was also reported that ISIS's attempt to expand its influence in the area of Al-Suwayda encountered resistance from the Al-Nusra Front.



**The tomb of Sidi Sulayman in the village of Al-Haqf, which was blown up by ISIS (Al-Suwayda News Facebook page, December 26, 2014).**

Destroying tombs and smashing statues is a systematic pattern in Syria and Iraq by ISIS and other organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. This phenomenon has historical Islamic roots attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. The destruction of the tomb of the Druze saint in the province of Al-Suwayda, if it was indeed carried out by ISIS, is liable to exacerbate the organization's (problematic) relationship with the Druze community.

## **The province of Al-Hasakah**

■ **In the province of Al-Hasakah**, in northeastern Syria, the stronghold of the Kurdish minority, incidents took place this week between ISIS operatives and Kurdish YPG forces near the city of Qamishli. It was reported that Kurdish forces regained control of two villages south of Qamishli. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights



(SOHR) reported (December 25, 2014) that ISIS has brought in dozens of operatives from Iraq to reinforce its troops in the province of Al-Hasakah.

## Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (GOOGLE EARTH)

### The city of Samarra area (north of Baghdad)

- Fighting continued this week in the Shiite city of Samarra, north of Baghdad, which is defended by the Iraqi Army and Shiite militias. On December 28, 2014, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards announced the death of **Hamid Taqavi, a senior officer in the Revolutionary Guards with the rank of brigadier general**, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War. The officer, who served as an advisor to the Iraqi Army and Shiite militias in Samarra, was shot and killed by ISIS operatives on December 27, 2014. His funeral was held in Tehran on December 29, 2014, and was attended by senior figures in the Iranian military and security establishment (ABN.IR, December 29, 2014).



Left: Hamid Taqavi's body. Right: Hamid Taqavi (ABN.IR)



The officer's funeral in Iran (ABN.IR, December 29, 2014)

The death of the senior Iranian officer sheds some light on the indirect aid provided by Iran to the Iraqi Army and to the Shiite militias in Iraq fighting against ISIS. These militias were set up and operated by the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guards during the years of fighting against the US and its allies. In the ITIC's assessment, the Qods Force continues to support the Shiite militias in their war against ISIS. The most prominent of these militias are the League of the Righteous, the Hezbollah Brigades and the Promised Day Brigade. The extensive Iranian publicity surrounding the death of Hamid Taqavi in the fighting against ISIS is an exception and, in the ITIC's assessment, stems from the senior rank of the deceased officer.

## The province of Kirkuk

- ISIS posted a video showing a group of around 40 armed operatives listening to a speech designed to increase their motivation before attacking an Iraqi Army outpost. The video documents the takeover of the outpost through the use of machine-guns, RPGs, hand grenades and small-arms fire (IsdaratTube, December 24, 2014).

## The province of Diyala

- On December 28, 2014, ISIS posted a video showing an Iranian Shaheen unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). ISIS claims that it shot down the UAV in the province of Diyala (YouTube, December 28, 2014).



Islamic State operatives in Diyala alongside the Iranian UAV which they claim fell into their hands (YouTube, December 28, 2014)

## The city of Baghdad

- ISIS continues to initiate suicide bombing attacks in Baghdad against Shiite targets in order to interfere with daily life in the city and undermine the credibility of the Iraqi regime. This week, a 14-year-old Iraqi boy turned himself in to the Iraqi security forces. He had been sent on a suicide mission at a Shiite mosque. The Iraqi forces removed the explosive belt that he was wearing. During his interrogation, the boy claimed that he had volunteered for the suicide mission in order to escape from ISIS (The Daily Mail, December 27, 2014).



**Left: The explosive belt after it was taken off. Right: Removal of the explosive belt after the boy was handcuffed (YouTube, December 27, 2014)**

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### Setting up a government infrastructure in Al-Raqqah

- ISIS is continuing its efforts to build an effective governmental infrastructure in Al-Raqqah, the organization's "capital" in Syria. The Arab newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat reported (December 26, 2014) that ISIS is using the internet to recruit doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers and accountants to set up the institutions of the Islamic State. ISIS encourages families to join it, with salaries of up to USD 1,100 per month for each family plus electricity and food.
- According to the article in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, ISIS has opened a maternity hospital in the city of Al-Raqqah, run by female doctors trained in Britain. ISIS also runs schools for boys and girls: boys attend schools where they receive religious education until the age of 14 and then join the ranks of ISIS. Girls attend schools where they study religion and home economics until the age of 18. The newspaper quotes a professor of security studies at the University of Massachusetts, who noted that commentators believe that about 15,000 people have emigrated to date to areas controlled by ISIS. Most of them came from Arab countries (Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other countries) and several thousand came from the West.



## Execution of collaborators with the Syrian regime by the ISIS security apparatus

- On December 27, 2014, ISIS posted a video on YouTube, documenting the execution of 13 people presented as collaborators with the Syrian regime in the province of Al-Raqqah. The speaker in the video said that ISIS's security apparatus in the province of Al-Raqqah captured a squad that was behind the abduction and extradition of ISIS operatives to the Syrian regime and for bringing two car bombs into the city of Tabqa (one was seized and the other blew up).



The members of the squad before being executed by ISIS (YouTube, December 27, 2014)

- According to a report on the France 24 channel (December 20, 2014), ISIS executed around one hundred foreign fighters in the province of Al-Raqqah, after they attempted to leave the organization. It was reported that ISIS had set up a military police force whose job is to monitor foreign fighters who defected from the ranks of the organization.

The background of these reports, in the ITIC's assessment, is the stepping up of internal security measures in the territories of the Islamic State. This is due to ISIS's interest in imposing discipline among its operatives and punishing and deterring its enemies. It is also possible that ISIS's fear of infiltration into its ranks has recently increased, in view of the campaign being waged against it by the US and the coalition and by its many enemies from within.



## Executions of civilians

■ In the areas under its control, ISIS continues with its brutal imposition of Muslim religious law and Sharia, on the basis of its own Salafist-jihadi Islamic perception. A number of executions were reported this week:

- **In the province of Aleppo**, two men charged with embezzling public funds were executed.



Photo: justpaste.it

- **In Tell Abyad**, in northern Syria, a man charged with witchcraft was executed.



Photo: Twitter account affiliated with the Islamic State, December 26, 2014

- **In the province of Al-Hasakah** (called Al-Barakah by ISIS), a man was beheaded for cursing Allah.



Photo: Twitter account affiliated with the Islamic State, December 26, 2014

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

- This week, the Sinai Province of the Islamic State issued a communiqué claiming responsibility for terrorist attacks carried out against the Egyptian Army in December 2014. These terrorist attacks include, among others, setting off IEDs in the area of Al-Arish, killing a number of Egyptian soldiers and Egyptian police officers.



The front page of the communiqué issued by the Sinai Province of the Islamic State (justpaste.it, December 27, 2014)

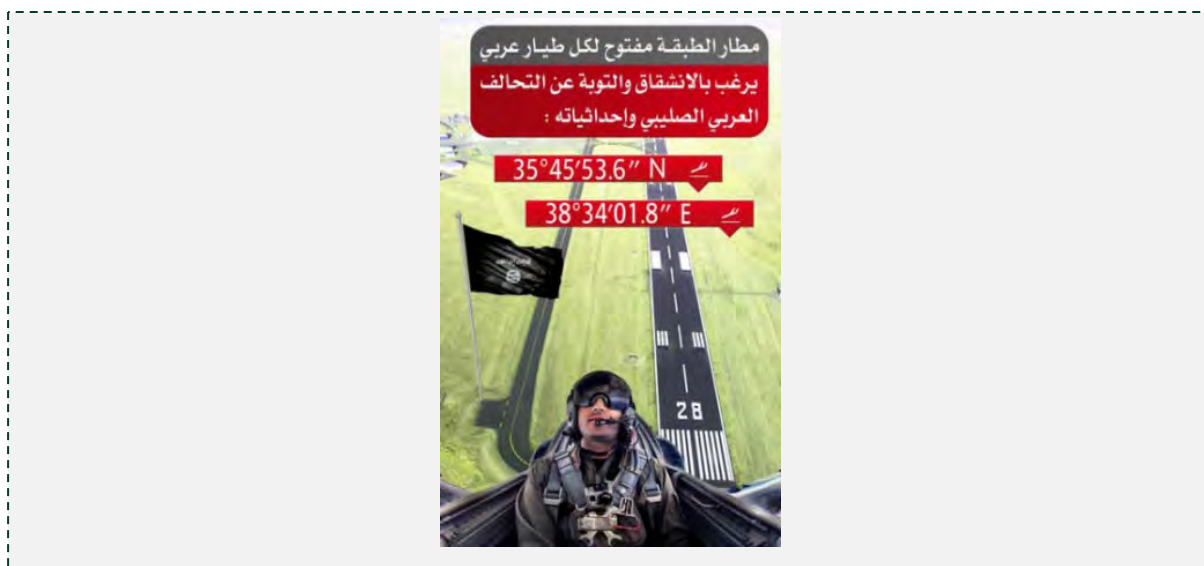
- On the ground, Egyptian security forces continued their intensive activity against Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in northern Sinai. Egyptian “security sources” in the Sinai Peninsula told Egyptian news websites that the **Egyptian Army had foiled a maritime terrorist attack by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis**, which had planned to use divers to attack Egyptian Navy ships off the coast of Rafah and Al-Sheikh Zuweid. Egyptian security forces have uncovered a jihadi network in possession of sniper

rifles and large quantities of diving equipment, oxygen tanks, fins, diving goggles and rubber tubes (Al-Watan, Al-Youm Al-Sabea, December 28, 2014).

## The battle for hearts and minds conducted by ISIS

### ISIS calls on Arab pilots to defect and join its ranks

■ In a message posted by ISIS jihadi forums and social networks, the organization called on pilots of Arab descent sent on missions on behalf of the coalition forces to **“repent” and join the ranks of the Islamic State**. The message stated that the Tabqa airfield in the Al-Raqqah province **is open for planes whose pilots have decided to defect**.



Appeal to Arab pilots to “repent,” below the inscription: “The Tabqa airfield is open to any Arab pilot who wants to defect from the Arab-Crusader coalition...” (From a Twitter account affiliated with the Islamic State, December 26, 2014)

### Exploitation of the Jordanian plane crash for propaganda purposes

■ ISIS was quick to disseminate news of the downing of the Jordanian plane in the media, shortly after the incident, in order to achieve the maximum propaganda effect. To enhance the achievement, it claimed that the plane was shot down by an anti-aircraft missile (actually, the plane apparently crashed). ISIS also published a **false report** on social networks and on one of its forums, claiming that ISIS had shot down another coalition plane in Iraq and captured its pilot.

■ **Dabiq**, ISIS’s internet organ, published an interview with the captured Jordanian pilot on December 29, 2014. The interview was utilized **to spread ISIS’s propaganda**



## Expressions of support and sympathy in the West

### The death of European foreign fighters in the ranks of ISIS

- This week there were reports of the deaths of two British citizens who joined ISIS, one in Syria and the other in Iraq:
  - A British citizen known as **the British Abu Abd al-Malik**, killed in Syria (Dot Misr news website, December 25, 2014).



The British Abu Abd al-Malik (Dot Misr news website, December 25, 2014)

- A British citizen known as **the British Abu Hajer**, killed in a suicide bombing attack in Baiji, Iraq (Twitter account affiliated with the Islamic State, December 28, 2014).





The British Abu Hajer (Twitter account affiliated with the Islamic State, December 28, 2014)

Britain is **one of the leading Western countries in terms of the number of citizens who join ISIS and other organizations affiliated with the global jihad**. The British Prime Minister reported some three months ago that about 500 operatives from Britain had arrived in Syria and Iraq (British Prime Minister's speech to the UN General Assembly, British Foreign Office website, September 24, 2014). ISIS often makes use of foreign fighters, both Arab/Muslim and Western, to carry out suicide bombing attacks in Syria and Iraq.