



Spotlight on Global Jihad

June 7-13, 2018



Main events of the week

- ▶ This week, the Syrian army attacked an ISIS enclave some 68 km northeast of As-Suwayda. According to a Syrian military source, ISIS operatives who fled the southern neighborhoods of Damascus found shelter in this region. The Syrians are apparently concerned that ISIS operatives are establishing a presence which could pose a threat to the Daraa region, which the Syrian regime is currently preparing to take over.
- ▶ While pressure is being exerted on ISIS in southern and central Syria, in eastern Syria ISIS took the initiative and attacked the city of Albukamal in the Lower Euphrates Valley. The Syrian army and Shiite forces handled by Iran suffered heavy losses (several dozen fighters). Those killed included, among others, a Syrian division commander, an officer and a fighter from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, a senior Hezbollah operative, and fighters from the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, which is handled by Iran. Following these losses, Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani visited eastern Syria and met with the fighters of the Afghan Brigade.
- ▶ **ISIS continues its intensive terror and guerrilla activity in Afghanistan.** This week, 12 people were killed and dozens were wounded in a suicide bombing attack against the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Kabul. Of late, **senior Russian officials**, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have often spoken **about the security threat posed to Russia and the Central Asian countries** as a result of the establishment of ISIS in Afghanistan, and about the need for cooperation in dealing with this threat.

Russian statements about Syria and about ISIS in Afghanistan

Putin's statements about Syria

- ▶ **Russian President Vladimir Putin** recently made statements about **Syria**. The main points that he made (in response to a question):

- ◆ “As for the presence of our military [in Syria], the military contingent issue is not simple at all. There are two sites where it is deployed. One is **in the Port of Tartus and the other** [aviation one] **at Hmeymim.**” Putin added: **“We have no plans for pulling this unit out for now.** But let me draw your attention to the fact that I didn’t call these deployment sites ‘bases.’ **We are not building long-term facilities there.** If need be, we will be able to promptly withdraw out military personnel at no material costs.”
- ◆ Putin noted that **the Russian military installations are located in Syria in accordance with the treaty signed with the Syrian government** and their deployment is in accordance with international law. “Our military personnel are there **for ensuring the interests of Russia in this crucial region of the world.** And they will remain there as long as Russia finds it reasonable, in accordance with our international commitments” (TASS News Agency, June 7, 2018).

Russian President calls for cooperation against the terrorist threat in Afghanistan

- ▶ On June 9-10, 2018, a summit meeting of the heads of the member states in the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**¹ was held in Qingdao, China. During the summit meeting, the member states signed a plan for cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism in 2019-2021. Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, who took part in the summit, **called for fighting against the terrorist threat in Afghanistan** in a coordinated manner, curbing drug production and trafficking and providing aid to the country (Kremlin website, June 10, 2018).
- ▶ Of late, Russia has frequently warned about the widespread entrenchment of terrorist operatives, especially supporters of ISIS, in Afghanistan. This is especially evident in the north of the country, in the provinces bordering Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. According to Zamir Kabulov, director of the Second Asia Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, **ISIS has apparently marked the countries of Central Asia as its next target and is striving to expand its influence beyond Afghanistan** (RIA, December 23, 2017). **This poses a threat to the SCO countries in the region, including Russia.**

¹An international organization founded in 2001 by the leaders of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The SCO is designed to build trust and increase political, economic and security cooperation among its member states.



Summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Kremlin website, June 10, 2018)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warns against the entrenchment of ISIS in Afghanistan

► The situation in Afghanistan was discussed at the conference of foreign ministers of the member states in the **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)**². Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (who attended the conference) said that the ministers stressed the need to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan and expressed concern that **ISIS operatives, including operatives from Syria and Iraq (with combat experience), had infiltrated into Afghanistan**. Lavrov said that the fact that these operatives were trying to gain a foothold in the northern provinces of the country is of particular concern, since these **provinces are located near the area under the responsibility of CSTO**. According to Lavrov, the CSTO countries will continue to coordinate their activities on this issue, including providing assistance to Tajikistan in strengthening its borders (Russian Foreign Ministry website, June 11, 2018).

² A political-military alliance established in 1994 by the Commonwealth of Independent States. The current members of the organization are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

Syria

Syrian army attack against the ISIS enclave northeast of As-Suwayda

This week, the Syrian army launched an attack against the ISIS enclave in the Al-Safa area and the deserts around it, about 68 km northeast of As-Suwayda (Haqq, June 8, 2018; Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, June 10, 2018). According to a Syrian military source, **ISIS operatives who fled from the Yarmouk refugee camp and the south Damascus neighborhood of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad found refuge in that enclave** (Al-Alam, June 10, 2018).



Deployment of the forces northeast of As-Suwayda (updated to June 10, 2018): The Syrian army and the forces supporting it (red); ISIS (brown-black); Rebel forces (green); International Coalition forces (blue); Areas of clashes between ISIS and the Syrian army and supporting forces (orange stripe around the ISIS enclave) (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, June 10, 2018)

- ISIS's Amaq News Agency reported on Syrian army attacks and battles around the area of the enclave northeast of As-Suwayda. ISIS claimed that its operatives had killed at least 12 rank and file soldiers and officers and destroyed armored vehicles (Haqq, June 8, 9, 2018). On the other hand, it was reported that the Syrian army had managed to take over areas and dominating sites which it had previously lost to ISIS (Syrian Army Military Information Office; Khotwa; Al-Nashra, June 9, 2018).



Right: Column of armored vehicles of the Syrian army and forces supporting it moving to the ISIS enclave. Left: Syrian army launching rockets and firing artillery at ISIS targets in the enclave area (Syrian Army Military Information Office, June 9, 2018)

Southwestern Syria

► **This week, there was no change in the situation in southwestern Syria.** The Syrian army **continued to reinforce** its troops as part of the **preparations for the campaign to take over the region from the rebel organizations.** At the same time, **negotiations continued with representatives of the rebels, who (for the time being) refuse to reach an agreement on evacuation** (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, June 11, 2018). In the Yarmouk Basin, local clashes continued on a lesser scale between the ISIS-affiliated Khaled bin Al-Walid Army and the rebel organizations.



The Syrian army reinforcing its troops. Right: Syrian army tank en route to the Daraa area. Left: Rocket launcher (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, June 9, 2018)

Eastern Syria

Heavy losses for the Syrian army and its allies in Albukamal

During the first half of June 2018, **over a period of several days, ISIS attacked the Syrian army and the forces supporting it in the city of Albukamal.** The ISIS operatives arrived in the area from their bases in the Syrian Desert. In these attacks, **the Syrian army and its Shiite allies sustained heavy losses. About 20 ISIS operatives were killed,** including ten suicide bombers who blew themselves up with car bombs and explosive belts (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 9, 2018). It seems that **this was the setting for the visit of Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, who met with the fighters of the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade who take part in the battles.** Due to his visit in the area, he was unable to attend the Qods Day processions, which took place on Friday, June 8, 2018, in Iran.



The bodies of Syrian soldiers and operatives of the forces supporting them, killed in the ISIS attack in the area of Albukamal (Deir ez-Zor 24, June 10, 2018)

Battles on the northern and western outskirts of Albukamal

► During the first half of June 2018, battles took place in Albukamal between the Syrian army and Shiite forces supporting it, and ISIS, which attacked Syrian army positions on the outskirts of Albukamal. Mainly prominent were attacks carried out by ISIS on June 7-10, 2018, **on the western and northwestern parts of the city.** During these attacks, ISIS took over positions from the Syrian army. The Syrian army sent reinforcements, but they were unable to restore control over the positions lost (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 10, 2018). **The ISIS operatives who attacked in Albukamal arrived from their bases in the Syrian Desert, in southeastern Syria** (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies).

► **A total of 20-30 fighters from the Syrian army and the forces supporting it were killed in these attacks, most of them from the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade handled by Iran.** According to reports in the Syrian media, **Ali Mohammad al-Hussein, commander of the Syrian army 11th Armor Division, was killed in the attack carried out by ISIS in Albukamal** (apparently, on June 8, 2018). In addition, **an officer and a fighter of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were also killed** (see below). Another fatality was **Nasser Jamil Hadraj (Abu Hussein), a senior Hezbollah operative** who was described as **Hezbollah's rocket battalion commander in Syria** (Enab Baladi, June 9, 2018). Nasser Hadraj was from the village of **Al-Ghassaniyah**, about 15 km south of Sidon, **in southern Lebanon** (Zaman Al-Wasl, June 9, 2018). He was reportedly close to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (Khotwa, June 9, 2018).



Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani meeting with fighters of the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade which recently took part in the fighting against ISIS and sustained heavy losses. The meeting took place during Soleimani's visit in eastern Syria (Fatemiyoun Brigade's Telegram channel, June 10, 2018)

An officer and a fighter of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards killed



Right: Iranian officer Khalil Takhti Nezhad. Left: Mohammad Mehdi Fereidouni (Twitter, June 6, 2018). The two were killed in the fighting against ISIS, probably on June 6, 2018, on the outskirts of Albukamal.³ Nasser Hadraj, a senior Hezbollah commander, was also killed in Albukamal (Khotwa; Zaman Al-Wasl, June 9, 2018)

Syrian army division commander and a senior Hezbollah operative killed in the battles in Albukamal



Right: Nasser Jamil Hadraj, Hezbollah rocket battalion commander in Syria, who was killed in clashes with ISIS near the city of Albukamal. He is seen in an archive photo shaking hands with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (Twitter, June 10, 2018). Left: Ali Mohammad al-Hussein, Syrian army armor division commander who was killed in an ISIS attack on the outskirts of Albukamal (Khotwa, June 9, 2018)

³ According to another version, the two were killed in the Daraa area. In the ITIC's assessment, this version is doubtful.

ISIS attack on the Al-Tim oil field south of Deir ez-Zor

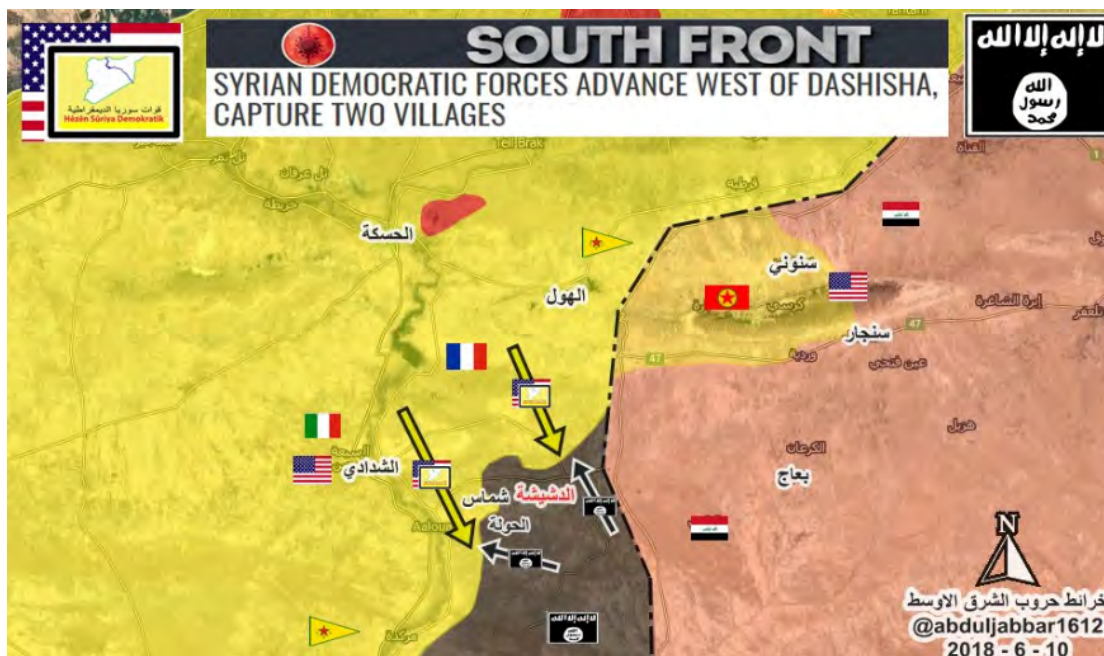
► On June 9, 2018, **ISIS attacked positions of the Syrian army and Iranian-handled militias near the Al-Tim oil field, about 12 km south of Deir ez-Zor.** ISIS operatives reportedly took over several important positions in the area (Qasiyoun, June 9, 2018). There were no reports on fatalities. The Al-Tim oil field consists of 24 oil wells (Wikimapia). In the past (September 2015), this field produced 800 barrels a day, but its production dropped to 200-300 barrels a day (Ayn al-Madinah, September 28, 2015; Sputnik, September 23, 2017). The fall of the Islamic State left behind devastation in the oil field facilities (Al-Mayadeen, September 14, 2017).



Al-Tim oil field (Google Maps)

Al-Hasakah area

► The SDF forces continue their campaign to take over the rural area **south of Al-Hasakah from ISIS.** This week, they took over two villages **west of Al-Dashisha,** ISIS's outstanding stronghold in the area.



Deployment of the forces south of Al-Hasakah (updated to June 10, 2018): Iraqi army and US and Kurdish forces in Iraqi territory (red); ISIS (grey); SDF forces and US, French and Italian forces supporting them (yellow); routes of SDF forces' attack (yellow arrows); ISIS's counter-attack routes (black arrows) (Twitter, June 10, 2018)



SDF fighters firing at ISIS targets in the Al-Shadadi desert area (YPG Press Office, June 9, 2018)

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS terror and guerrilla activity

► This week, ISIS continued its terror and guerrilla activity in various provinces of Iraq. Following are the main incidents:

- ◆ On June 8, 2018, ISIS announced that its operatives **had attacked a camp of the Iraqi security forces northeast of Samarra**. The ISIS operatives seized light weapons and uniforms of the Iraqi federal police (www.k1falh.ga, website affiliated with ISIS, June 8, 2018).



**Weapons seized by ISIS in an attack on a camp of the Iraqi security forces
(www.k1falh.ga, website affiliated with ISIS, June 8, 2018)**

- ◆ On June 8, 2018, **ISIS operatives burned wheat and barley crops in the Hawija District, about 55 km southwest of Kirkuk.** ISIS reportedly threatens the residents that they will burn their crops if they do not collaborate. Residents of the area refused to collaborate with ISIS and even reported ISIS's movements to the security officials (Al-Sumaria News, June 8, 2018).
- ◆ On June 9, 2018, **an ISIS IED was detonated in an open market about 13 km northwest of Baqubah, in the Diyala Province.** One man was killed and 23 were wounded (Al-Sumaria News, June 9, 2018; Haqq, June 10, 2018).



**The Scene of the explosion in an open market northwest
of Baqubah (Al-Sumaria News, June 9, 2018)**

Counterterrorist and preventive activity by the Iraqi security forces

- ▶ According to an Iraqi intelligence source, ISIS intends to send suicide bombers and car bombs to explode **in shopping centers and public places during the end of the Ramadan**

fast or Eid al-Fitr (Iraq News, June 9, 2018). The Iraqi security forces apparently increased their security measures in advance of such activity.

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

Interim balance of Operation Sinai 2018

► As four months have passed since the launch of Operation Sinai 2018, **Jamal Taha, a national security researcher, prepared an interim balance of the results of the operation, which he claimed calmed the situation in Sinai.** Following are the highlights:

- ◆ The operation was intended not only to eliminate terrorists but also **to destroy their infrastructure.** As part of these efforts, operations rooms, communications centers, about 5,000 depots, laboratories for making IEDs, shelters, tunnels, and underground escape routes were destroyed. In addition, **about 800 motorcycles and 400 off-road vehicles provided with weapons were also destroyed.**
- ◆ The operation exposed the **close connection between terrorist activity and criminal activities,** mainly **drug trafficking and smuggling people and goods.** During the operation, many criminals and wanted men recruited by the terrorist organizations were detained.
- ◆ The operation exposed **the organizational ties between the terrorist organizations in Sinai and Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam) in the Gaza Strip and some of the Hamas leaders.** Severing these ties was an essential condition to secure the success of the operation, cutting off the contact between the terrorists in Sinai and those in the Gaza Strip.
- ◆ The operation took place **as part of an overall mopping up plan which was implemented in the various areas of the Sinai Peninsula.** Roads and paths were searched, and temporary roadblocks were set up to prevent new infiltration of terrorists.
- ◆ **The Egyptian Air Force supported the campaign against the terrorists also on the western border (with Libya).** Airstrikes on the western border hit off-road vehicles carrying terrorist operatives and weapons arriving from Libya. In addition, **the Egyptian Navy also participated in the operation,** preventing the infiltration of terrorist operatives by sea. **Counterterrorist units and Special Forces also took part**

in the operation. They were sent to the desert hinterland of the Nile Delta and to the western Nile Valley.

◆ Following the success of the operation, it was discovered that **jihadists in Sinai are related to foreign elements** which finance them and provide them with weapons, ammunition and advanced equipment. The operation **required the Egyptian security forces to maintain large-scale cooperation with the local Sinai residents**, which proved that **the percentage of collaborators among them with the “terrorists” was small.**

Unconfirmed information on the death of ISIS leader in Sinai

► There were **unconfirmed reports** on the Telegram network and the official website of the Union of Sinai Tribes about the death of **Abu Osama al-Masri**, the emir (leader) of the ISIS Sinai Province (Egyptian_military@ Twitter account, an account featuring news on security topics in Egypt, June 11, 2018). **The ITIC has no confirmation for these reports.**

Jihadi activity in other countries

Afghanistan

Suicide bombing attack in Kabul

► **Twelve people were killed and 31 were wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up on June 11, 2018 at the entrance gate to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MoRRD) in Kabul.** Most of the casualties are ministry employees (Afghanistan Times, June 11, 2018). **ISIS’s Khorasan Province reported that an operative of the organization had detonated his explosive vest** near the entrance gate to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Kabul, where officials had gathered. According to ISIS, **over 90 people were killed and wounded** (Haqq, June 12, 2018).



The scene of the attack (Pakistan Today, June 11, 2018)

Additional attacks

► In addition, ISIS continued its routine of intensive terror and guerrilla activity in Afghanistan, which was directed mainly **against the Afghan government**. Following are a number of attacks carried out this week:

- ◆ The Amaq News Agency reported that on June 9, 2018, **an IED was detonated in the Nangarhar Province** in eastern Afghanistan. Four fighters of the militia forces loyal to the Afghan regime were killed and 27 were wounded (Haqq, June 10, 2018).
- ◆ The Amaq News Agency reported that an officer and four policemen had been shot to death by ISIS operatives **near a voting center in Jalalabad, in the Nangarhar Province** (Haqq, June 10, 2018).



Weapons seized by ISIS operatives in an attack that they carried out in the city of Jalalabad (Haqq, June 10, 2018)

- ◆ On June 7, 2018, ISIS operatives attacked a camp of the militias loyal to the Afghan regime in the **Jawzjan region of northern Afghanistan**. Five militia fighters were killed and three others were wounded (www.k1falh.ga, website affiliated with ISIS, June 9, 2018).

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Libya

US airstrike

► On June 6, 2018, the US Africa Command announced that **four ISIS operatives had been killed in an airstrike near the town of Bani Walid** (approximately 145 km southeast of Tripoli). Local sources in the town noted that **one of the dead was Abdel Ati al-Kiwi**, a Libyan who had returned from Syria and settled in Sirte, which was controlled by ISIS from 2015 until 2016 (Reuters, June 6, 2018).



The town of Bani Walid (Google Maps)

Arrest of ISIS operatives in Derna

► During the mopping up of the northeastern Libyan city of Derna, which is being carried out by the forces of General Haftar, 260 ISIS operatives were detained, including 19 Egyptians, 11 Tunisians, 7 Sudanese, 4 Syrians, 2 Palestinians, an Algerian, a Mauritanian and a Turk. One of them, an ISIS operative from Egypt, was detained in the western part of the city. The operative, **Yusuf Muhammad al-Tarabin**, AKA **Abu Haitham al-Sinawi**, is wanted by Egypt on suspicion of participating in an attack approximately 113 km west of Faiyum. In this attack, 16 Egyptian policemen were killed (October 20, 2017). He is also suspected of involvement in the attack on St. Mark's Church in Alexandria, in which 16 people were killed (Akhbar Libya, June 10, 2018).

The battle for hearts and minds

A speech by the leader of Al-Qaeda calling for jihad in Palestine and the struggle against the Arab and Islamic regimes

On June 6, 2018, Al-Qaeda's Al-Sahab media foundation released a video of a new speech by Al-Qaeda leader **Ayman al-Zawahiri**. The title of the speech: "From Nakba and Naksa to Rebirth and Glory." In his speech, he condemns the Arab and Muslim regimes, calls for the creation of a religious (Sharia) regime in the Islamic world and **promotes jihad against Israel**.



Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a video from June 6, 2018, entitled: “From Nakba and Naksas to Rebirth and Glory” (Al-Sahab, June 6, 2018)

- ▶ Following are key issues mentioned in Al-Zawahiri’s speech:
 - ◆ **The defeat by Israel can only be overcome through jihad:** Al-Zawahiri says that “Seventy years have passed since the establishment of the State of Israel, known as the Nakba [i.e., the Palestinian defeat in 1948] and nearly 50 years since the 1967 defeat known as the Naksas [literally: the disease that broke out again]. He adds that “these two wounds are etched in the [collective] memory of our Muslim nation.” **Al-Zawahiri asks a rhetorical question: “How can this agonizing defeat be overcome?” And he replies that the way to do so is jihad.**
 - ◆ **The Arab and Muslim governments are subordinate to the West and therefore they cannot bring about the liberation of Palestine.** Al-Zawahiri notes that **all Arab and Muslim governments failed in their conduct regarding the Palestinian issue and in organizing jihad to liberate every piece of land occupied by the infidels.** These governments are fighting Islam and their leaders are agents of “the greatest criminals in the world” [this is a reference to the Western countries, led by the United States]. Al-Zawahiri emphasizes once again that **the Arab and Muslim governments cannot liberate Palestine.**
 - ◆ **Jihad fighters are the ones who will liberate Palestine:** Al-Zawahiri states that “with the help of Allah, it [Palestine] will be liberated by the jihad fighters, who do not recognize the arrogant, criminal and despotic international legitimacy.” He adds that they do not recognize the legitimacy of “the traitors who sold Palestine, the secular criminals.” He notes that “the jihad fighters carry out jihad so that the word of Allah will rule over everything and so that the rule of Sharia, which negates nationalism and the secular state, will be applied in Palestine and in the rest of the territories of Islam.”

- ◆ **Those who will liberate Palestine must rely on the views of Salafist-jihadi clerics:** Al-Zawahiri **notes that Palestine will be liberated by an Islamic nation that has released itself from the false visions of clerics acting on behalf of the various regimes, such as the Saudi regime.** He calls on the jihad fighters to follow in the footsteps of **Omar Abd al-Rahman**, who called on the Islamic nation to shoot down American planes, sink their ships and harm their interests; and in the footsteps of **Abdullah Azzam**, who called on the Islamic nation to carry out jihad; and in the footsteps of **Osama bin Laden**, “who caused the greatest damage to Americans in their history.”
- ◆ **The campaign is a global campaign and not a local one:** according to Al-Zawahiri, **the campaign in Palestine**, similarly to the campaigns in **Cairo, Riyadh, Grozny, Kabul, and Syria, is not a local campaign.** It is the campaign of the Islamic nation against the “regime of the world’s greatest criminals,” headed by the President of the United States, who is supported by the biggest criminals in Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi. According to Al-Zawahiri, **“This is a long and difficult campaign.” Al-Zawahiri calls for Muslim unity against them, in order to harm them at a time and place of their choosing.** He concludes by saying that **“Palestine is an issue of all Muslims.”**
- ◆ **Al-Zawahiri calls on Muslims in the Gaza Strip to transfer the fighting to enemy territory [i.e., to Israel]:** According to him, The “traitors” [this is apparently a reference to the Palestinian Authority and Hamas] give information about the jihad fighters to Israeli military intelligence minute by minute, while the “despotic secular military Egyptian regime” strangles them [the jihad fighters of Gaza and Sinai]. He notes that **the jihad fighters in Palestine must not make do with the narrow strip that was imposed on them (i.e., the Gaza Strip), and must transfer the campaign to enemy territory [i.e., Israel] and expand it.**