



Spotlight on Global Jihad

January 10-16, 2019



Main events of the week

► Following is an overview of the situation in Syria, against the backdrop of the Trump declaration and the American political and media activity surrounding it:

◆ **The ISIS-controlled enclave on the east bank of the Euphrates River is gradually shrinking.** It is now reduced to a pocket around 10 km long and 6 km wide. A senior SDF official announced that ISIS operatives were “**living their final moments.**” A spokesman for the Coalition said that **the SDF was advancing** but the fighting was still ongoing. According to one report, ISIS operatives asked the SDF to open a safe passage for them, leading to the desert areas of Iraq. It is possible that the ISIS operatives are also considering the possibility of fleeing to the desert areas west of the Euphrates River.

◆ **The evacuation of the Kurdish and American forces from Manbij continued.** The city is controlled by a local council supervised by the Kurds, which is negotiating with the Syrian regime to regain control of the city. **The area surrounding the city has been supervised since January 8, 2019, by a Russian Military Police force.** According to Russian media reports, the Kurds are now under Russia’s protection.

◆ **In the Idlib area, the jihadi organization the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continues to take over areas controlled by other jihadi organizations and rebel organizations affiliated with Turkey.** According to the Turkish media, **the Headquarters now controls at least 75% of the Idlib region.** Neutralizing the Turkish-backed rebel organizations in the Idlib region **poses an immediate challenge to the Turks, whose political and military status in the Idlib region is weakening.**

◆ The United States officially announced that it had **begun withdrawing its troops from Syria.** In practice, air support for the SDF continued and even seemed to have increased during the attack by SDF forces against the ISIS enclave east of the Euphrates River. **At the political and media level, American officials continue to convey messages that address the concerns of their allies.** One of the most prominent such

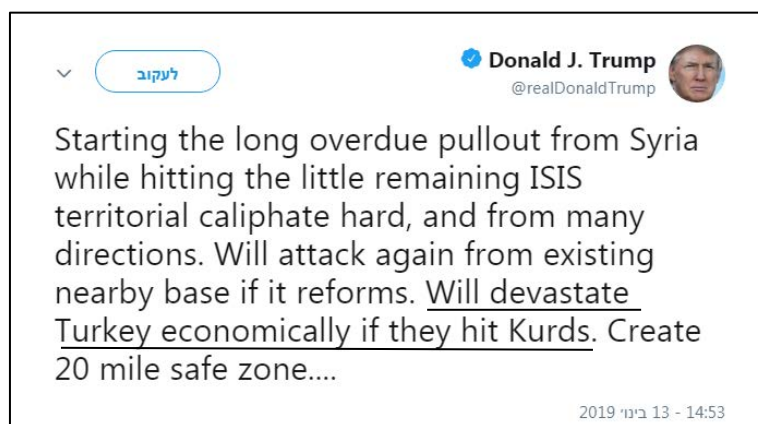
messages was President Trump's tweet threatening Turkey that he would destroy its economy if it were to harm the Kurds. Following this, and in order to calm the Turks, the US President held a telephone conversation with Erdoğan **to discuss the establishment of a Turkish-sponsored safe zone along a 32-kilometer border strip between Turkey and Syria.**

President Trump's announcement of the pullback of US forces from Syria (update)

Against the backdrop of the beginning of the pullback of American forces from Syria, American officials, mainly the President and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, continued to **convey reassuring messages to the allies of the US in the Middle East.** The messages focused on the US commitment to continue to act against ISIS, to help countries fighting against the "terrorist threat" and to remove the Iranian presence in Syria. **These messages, which stressed the US commitment to protect its Kurdish allies, created tension between the US and Turkey.** President Trump made an effort to calm Turkey and held a telephone conversation with Erdoğan **to discuss the establishment of a Turkish-sponsored safe zone along a 32-kilometer border strip between Turkey and Syria.**

- ▶ **Sean Ryan, the spokesman for the International Coalition against ISIS,** stated (January 11, 2019) that the pullback of the American forces from Syria had begun. Due to security considerations, the spokesman refrained from mentioning the timetables, the location of the forces and how they were moving. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the pullback began on Thursday night (January 10, 2019), and armored vehicles and trucks were observed traveling from northern Syria to Iraq (The New York Post, January 11, 2019).
- ▶ Following are a number of noteworthy statements made by senior US officials regarding the pullback from Syria and its implications:
 - ◆ **US President Donald Trump** tweeted that the United States had begun to pull back its forces from Syria while continuing to attack what remained of ISIS's territorial caliphate. **The US President threatened Turkey that he would destroy its economy if it were to harm the Kurds** (President's Twitter account, January 13, 2019). In the wake of the tweet, **President Trump held a telephone conversation with Turkish President Erdoğan.** According to the White House spokeswoman, the President

expressed his desire to address Turkey's security concerns in northeastern Syria, **stressing the importance that the US attaches to fair treatment of the Kurds and the SDF**, both of which fought alongside the US to defeat ISIS (Reuters, February 14, 2019).



**President Trump's tweet (emphasis added by the ITIC)
(President Trump's Twitter account, January 13, 2019)**

- ◆ In order to calm Turkey, **President Trump tweeted** (January 14, 2019) that he had talked with President Erdoğan about the developments in the fighting against what remained of ISIS. Other topics included the establishment of a **safe zone 20 miles wide (32 km) in northern Syria** and the development of the economic ties between the two countries, which have significant potential (President Trump's Twitter account, January 14, 2019). **Turkish President Erdoğan** referred to his conversation with Trump, stating that **the two men had reached an agreement on the establishment of a 30 km wide safe zone in northern Syria**. Erdoğan added that the Kurdish forces (YPG) must be evacuated from the safe zone and that Turkey and the United States must arrange the relevant logistical details (Daily Sabah; Hürriyet, January 15, 2019).
- ◆ In a speech delivered by **US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** at the American University in Cairo on January 10, 2019, he notes, inter alia, that **the United States remains committed to the destruction of ISIS**, but also expects its allies to do more in this regard ("We remain committed to the complete dismantling of ISIS – the ISIS threat – and the ongoing fighting against radical Islamism in all of its forms."). Secretary of State Pompeo adds, **"For our part, airstrikes in the region will continue as targets arise. We will keep working with our partners in the Coalition to Defeat ISIS"** (US Department of State, January 10, 2019).

The Idlib region

The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continues to establish its control in the Idlib region

► This week as well, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (affiliated with al-Qaeda) **continued to take over areas controlled by other rebel organizations in the Idlib region**, both Islamic jihadi and Turkish-sponsored rebel organizations. This week, its efforts were concentrated on taking control of the areas south and northeast of Idlib. According to the estimates, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham now controls at least 75% of the Idlib region (Khotwa, January 9, 2019; Orient News, January 12, 2019; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 9, 2019). According to a senior operative in the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, the organization's leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani was working to dismantle the armed organizations and control the Idlib region by himself in order to "defend the Syrian revolution" (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, January 10, 2019).

► In this context, it was reported that the **Jaysh al-Ahrar organization (a jihadi rebel organization)** transferred control of its positions and headquarters in the rural area of the city of Idlib to the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham. As part of the agreement, Jaysh al-Ahrar **transferred control of the Taftanaz military airfield**, about 13 km northeast of Idlib, to the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (Orient News, January 13, 2019). In addition, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reported that it had reached an agreement with **Ahrar al-Sham** (an Islamic rebel organization supported by Turkey) regarding the administration of the Al-Ghab Plain southwest of Idlib. According to the agreement, **the Ahrar al-Sham organization will hand over its medium and heavy weapons to the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the region** (Ibaa Magazine, January 11, 2019).

Turkish response to steps taken by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham

► The establishment of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the weakening of the Turkish-sponsored rebel organizations **posed an immediate challenge to the Turkish government**. On January 12, 2019, senior Turkish officials held a meeting in the Hatay Province (which borders on the Idlib Province). The meeting was attended by the Turkish Defense Minister, the Chief of Staff, the Commander of the Ground Forces and the Head of

Military Intelligence. According to a report by the Turkish Anadolu News Agency, the **meeting participants discussed the latest developments in the Idlib area and the efforts to maintain the ceasefire in the framework of the Sochi Agreement** (Anadolu, January 12, 2019).

► According to Syrian media reports, on January 13, 2019, **Turkish army reinforcements, including armored vehicles and Special Forces, arrived in the Hatay Province, near the Idlib Province**. It was reported that troops were reinforced in light of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham's takeover of the territories held by the National Liberation Front, the umbrella framework of the Turkish-supported organizations (Enab Baladi, January 13, 2019).



The Hatay Province in Turkey, which borders on the Idlib Province in Syria (Wikimapia)

► **In addition to the reinforcement of its troops, the Turkish government carried out a series of arrests among operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the provinces of Istanbul, Ankara, and Adana (in southern Turkey)**. The operatives are accused of helping the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham recruit new operatives and transfer money, in addition to their involvement in attacks in Syria. According to the Turkish police, the detainees include Hasan Süslü, chairman of the Fukara Der Charitable Society ¹ (Sabah, Turkey, January 13, 2019).

¹The Fukara Der Charitable Society is a humanitarian organization that has been assisting Syrian refugees since 2013, when Syrian refugees arrived in the city of Adana in southern Turkey. The headquarters of the charity is located in this city (Fukarader.org.tr website).

The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham’s takeover of the control areas of pro-Turkish organizations in the Idlib area **establishes its status as the dominant organization in the region, and perhaps even improves its ability to fight against the Russian-backed Syrian army. On the other hand, the Turkish-controlled rebel organizations** (which are organized in the framework of the National Liberation Front) are weakening and, as a result, **Turkey’s political and military status has weakened in the Idlib region. This creates the potential for military friction between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and Turkey, which until now had been opposed to a Syrian-Russian campaign to take over the Idlib region.**

The Syrian army reinforces its troops near the Idlib enclave

► According to a website affiliated with the Syrian regime, **Syrian army reinforcements keep arriving at the contact lines with the Idlib enclave**, the area north of Hama. According to a Syrian “senior military source,” **in recent days, the Syrian forces have raised their alertness on the fronts in the rural areas of Hama and Idlib.** This happens following the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham’s takeover of the Idlib area and the rural area of Hama, and the escalation in the attacks against Syrian army positions on these fronts² (Butulat Al-Jaysh Al-Suri, January 14, 2019). Reinforcements sent to the area reportedly included the “Tiger” forces and militias supporting the Syrian regime (Al-Modon, January 12, 2019).



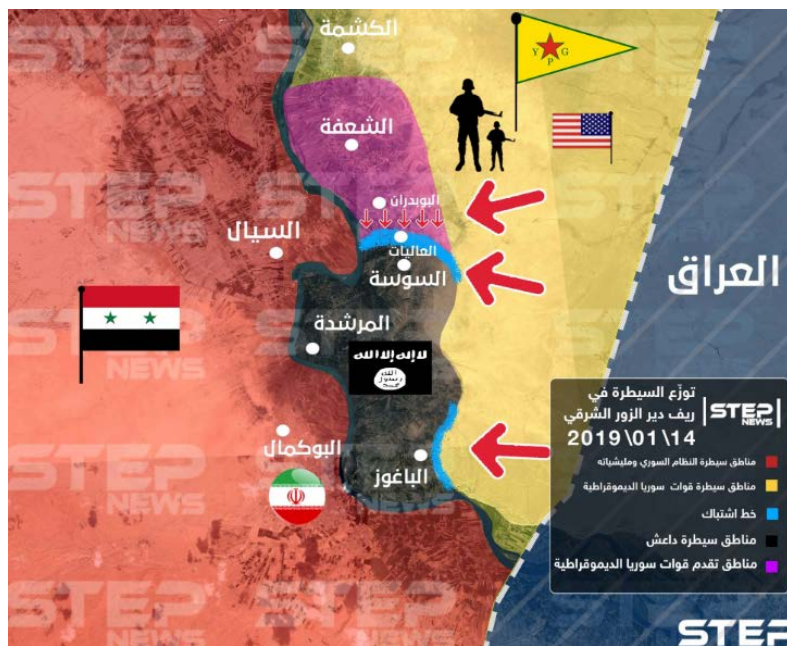
Syrian army tanks, apparently in the rural area north of Hama (SANA, January 15, 2019)

² As far as the ITIC knows, there has been escalation in the attacks between the Syrian army and the jihadi organizations, and clashes between them continue on a lesser scale.

Eastern Syria

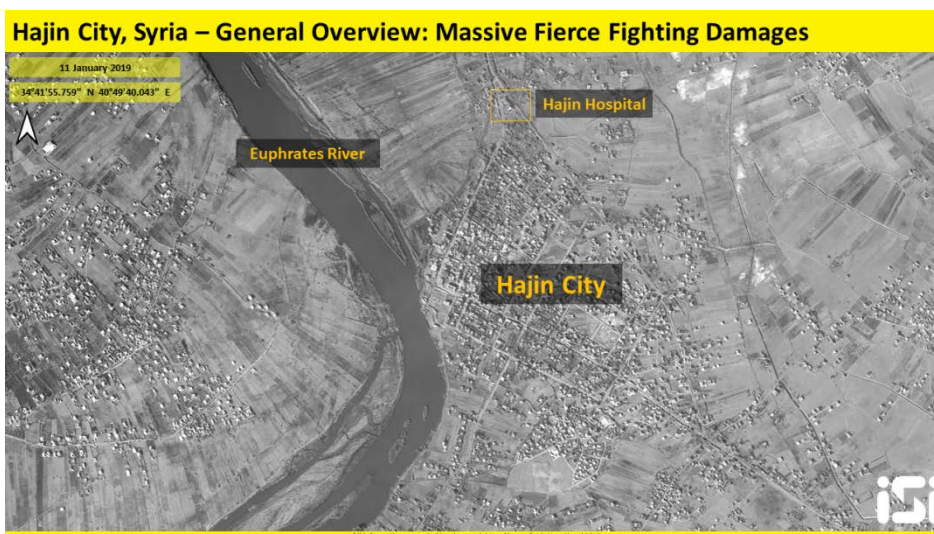
Shrinking of the ISIS enclave in the Euphrates Valley

► After the **SDF forces took over the city of Hajin and its environs, the focus of the fighting shifted to the village of Al-Sha'fah**, the largest village remaining in ISIS's control (about 11 km north of Albukamal). It seems that **this week, the SDF forces managed to take over the village of Al-Sha'fah and the area to its south**, even though apparently, they haven't completed mopping up the village yet. **This means that ISIS's enclave has shrunk into a "pocket" 12 km long and 5.8 km wide**, extending from Albukamal up to the village of Al-Susah (see map). According to a senior SDF official, **the ISIS operatives are "living their final moments."** According to a spokesman on behalf of the US-led International Coalition, the SDF have made "great progress... but the fight continues" (Reuters, January 13, 2019).



Map of the ISIS enclave (according to the Khotwa website): ISIS (gray); SDF forces (yellow); areas where the SDF recently advanced (maroon); areas controlled by the Syrian regime and the forces supporting it (red); the current friction lines (light blue); attacks by the Kurdish forces (red arrows) (Khotwa, January 14, 2019)

Satellite photos of Hajin after its takeover (courtesy of ISI)



ISI has detected massive fierce fighting damages within the city of Hajin. Facilities, structures and roads are destroyed as well as most of the main junctions. There is no evidence of significant civilian traffic within Hajin City. It is probable that most of its inhabitants have left the city.



ISI has detected new SDF military posts which have been built lately in Hajin City surroundings, probably for preventing additional ISIS forces from arriving from the Syrian-Iraqi deserts.

Fighting in Al-Sha'fah

► On January 10, 2019, it was reported that the ISIS operatives had regained control over the village of Al-Sha'fah several days after the SDF forces had taken most of it from ISIS (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 10, 2019). On January 12, 2019, the SDF forces attacked once again the ISIS operatives in the village and its environs, in order to retake it. The SDF announced that they had advanced for a distance of 1 km and that ISIS had sustained casualties. According to an SDF report, ISIS tried to carry out a counterattack, using

antitank missiles and drones, but it was halted (SDF press; Amaq, January 12, 2019). **On January 14, 2019, it was reported that the village of Al-Sha'fah was fully taken over by the SDF forces** (Deir ez-Zor 24 Twitter account, January 14, 2019).



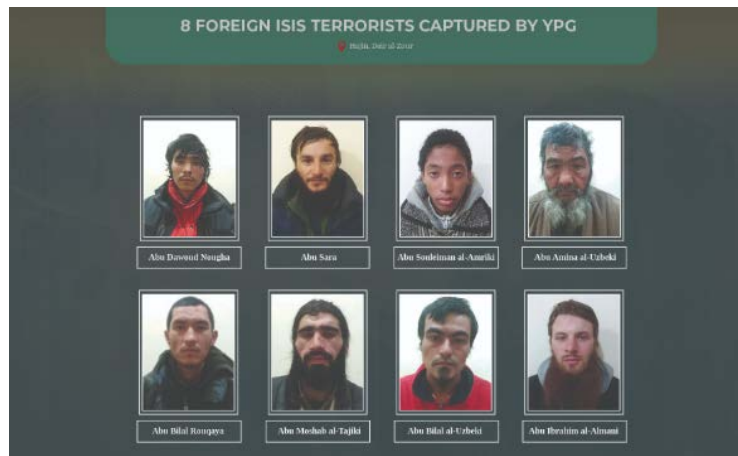
Right: ISIS operative getting ready to launch an antitank missile at SDF operatives in a building in the village of Al-Sha'fah. Left: The antitank missile hitting the target (Amaq, January 12, 2019)

ISIS operatives reportedly asked to allow the evacuation of their operatives to the “Iraqi Desert”

► According to a report of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (which still requires verification), ISIS asked the SDF and the Coalition countries **to open a “safe passage” for its operatives to the “Iraqi Desert”** (i.e., the desert area in the Al-Anbar Province in Iraq). Their request was denied and they were offered the choice between surrender and death. It was also reported that ISIS was on the verge of collapse; to halt the attacks, its defense is based on **planting a large quantity of mines, using car bombs, and handling suicide bombers**. In addition, it was noted that the ISIS operatives who remained in the enclave were divided between those who preferred to surrender and those who sought exit to areas on the west bank of the Euphrates River (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 10, 2019).

ISIS foreign fighters captured in the Hajin area

► The Kurdish forces reported that during the operations in the city of Hajin and its environs, **they captured eight ISIS foreign fighters** who had planned to carry out terrorist attacks against civilians (Enab Baladi, January 10, 2019). The Kurdish forces (YPG) published the operatives’ names and details. Two of them are from Uzbekistan, one from Tajikistan, one from Ukraine, one from Kazakhstan, one from Russia, one from the United States and one from Germany. The operative from the United States is an American boy aged 16, codenamed Abu Suleiman the American. The German operative is 31 years old, codenamed Abu Ibrahim the German (YPG website ypgrojava.org, January 9, 2019).



**Eight ISIS operatives captured by the YPG
(YPG website ypgrojava.org, January 9, 2019)**

ISIS operatives fleeing among the local population

► The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that **since early December 2018, over 14,800 people had fled from the ISIS enclave east of the Euphrates River.** Most of those who fled are local residents, **but there are also hundreds of ISIS operatives of various nationalities among them** (Syrians, Iraqis, Russians, Somalis, Filipinos and foreign fighters of other Asian nationalities). It was also reported that among the civilians who had fled there were also **850 ISIS operatives who had been arrested by the SDF forces.** Many of them reportedly carried millions of dollars in cash (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 10, 2019).

Northern Syria

Evacuation of the Kurdish forces from Manbij

► **Following is the situation in the Manbij area as is known to the ITIC:** The evacuation of the Kurdish and the American forces from the city of Manbij continues. **The city itself is controlled by a “local council”** operating under Kurdish supervision and maintaining contact with the Syrian regime to regulate the control over the city (Orient News, January 12, 2019; Kurdish website A50 Network, January 9, 2019). **The area in the vicinity of the city is supervised by a Russian Military Police force. The Syrian army** is still present on the outskirts of the city and is ready to enter it **under the Russian umbrella.** A question mark still remains concerning **the intentions of Turkey:** forces affiliated with it are also present in the area, as Turkey is also interested to have control or influence over Manbij and the Kurdish enclave west of the Euphrates.



**Syrian army armored vehicles and artillery in the Manbij rural area
(SANA, January 12, 2019)**

Russian Military Police force operates in the Manbij area

► The Russian media reported that the Manbij area, until recently controlled by the US military, **was transferred on January 8, 2019, to the supervision of the Russian Military Police**. This happened after a telephone conversation between US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford and Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. According to Russian official media outlets, **the Russian Military Police force is expected to stay in the Manbij area on a permanent basis, as Russia virtually extended its protection to the Kurdish YPG forces** (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 10, 2019). As of January 11, 2019, **Russian Military Police soldiers reportedly patrol the “security zone” near the city of Manbij** (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 14, 2019).



**Russian Military Police force patrols around the city of Manbij
(Russian Defense Ministry website, January 8, 2019)**

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activities

Detonating a car bomb in Al-Qaim

► On January 11, 2019, a car bomb exploded in a market in Al-Qaim, in western Al-Anbar Province (near the border with Syria). A council member of the Al-Anbar Province stated that the detonation of the car bomb was intended to hit a crowd celebrating a local holiday. He added that ISIS sleeper cells were still present in other sites (Al-Sumaria News, January 11, 12, 2019). So far, no claim of responsibility by ISIS was found, but it is reasonable to assume that ISIS was behind the attack.

► Following are additional activities carried out by ISIS this past week (based on ISIS's claims of responsibility):

- ◆ **The border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia:** ISIS reported that its operatives had attacked a position of the Iraqi Border Police near the border with Saudi Arabia. According to ISIS, about ten soldiers were killed, two vehicles were destroyed and the position was set on fire (Amaq, January 10, 2019).

- ◆ **Diyala Province:** ISIS operatives fired mortar shells at Ma'adan, a Shiite village about 70 km **northeast of Baqubah** (Shabakat Shumukh, January 12, 2019).

- ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** ISIS operatives fired mortar shells at an Iraqi police position **northwest of the city of Kirkuk** (Shabakat Shumukh, January 12, 2019). Iraqi sources reported the incident (Al-Sumaria, January 13, 2019).

Counterterrorist activities of the Iraqi security forces

► Following are the main counterterrorist activities carried out by the Iraqi security forces this past week (according to the Iraqi media):

- ◆ Detention of terrorist operatives **in west, north and east Baghdad** (Iraqi News Agency, January 13, 2019).

- ◆ Killing five ISIS commanders in an airstrike targeting a vehicle **about 80 km southeast of the Al-Rutba District**. Three explosive belts and military equipment were found in the wreckage of the vehicle (Iraqi News Agency, January 13, 2019).

- ◆ A depot of weapons, probably belonging to ISIS, was located by the Popular Mobilization **113 km west of Mosul**. It contained dozens of mortar shells, rockets and IEDs (Al-Hashed.net, January 13, 2019).

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

ISIS's activity in northern Sinai

► Following are reports on attacks in northern Sinai which, in the ITIC's assessment, were carried out by ISIS. The reports are based on the Twitter account **Shahed Sinaa**³. So far, no claim of responsibility by ISIS was found:

- ◆ **Detonation of an IED** near a military bulldozer south of Sheikh Zuweid (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, January 10, 2019).
- ◆ **Detonation of an IED** near an APC south of Sheikh Zuweid. Several Egyptian army soldiers were killed or wounded (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, January 10, 2019).
- ◆ **Several Egyptian army vehicles were blown up** south of Sheikh Zuweid. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, January 10, 2019).
- ◆ **Destroying a bullet-proof vehicle** used for clearing mines east of Al-Arish (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, January 11, 2019).
- ◆ **Detonation of an IED** near an Egyptian army vehicle south of Sheikh Zuweid. All the vehicle passengers were killed or wounded (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, January 11, 2019).
- ◆ **Attacking a fortified position** and destroying an Egyptian army vehicle. Several soldiers were killed and wounded (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, January 12, 2019).
- ◆ **Activating an IED** against a vehicle carrying a water tank in a camp in Rafah. The vehicle was destroyed (Shahed Sinaa, January 14, 2019).
- ◆ **Attacks in Rafah and Al-Arish**, killing two soldiers and an officer in the rank of captain in the Egyptian army (Shahed Sinaa, January 14, 2019).
- ◆ **Sniper shooting** at an Egyptian soldier at a checkpoint in the city of Rafah. The soldier was wounded (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, January 14, 2019).

Activity of the Egyptian security forces

► Egyptian Air Force aircraft carried out airstrikes against “terrorist operatives” (i.e., ISIS operatives) in northern Sinai. Eleven operatives were killed and weapons and military

³ The Twitter account **Shahed Sinaa** (i.e., “Sinai eyewitness”) is a functioning account since February 2018. It is possibly affiliated with the Egyptian army or connected with elements in the army. This account reports on ISIS terrorist activity against the Egyptian army and also about Egyptian army activity against terrorist elements in the Sinai Peninsula. Its up-to-date reports address incidents which the Egyptian press and even the Facebook page of the Egyptian Army Spokesman do not report about.

equipment were destroyed. The airstrike thwarted a terrorist attack near the village of Rawda, west of Al-Arish (Shahed Sinaa, January 11, 2019).

Jihadi activity in other countries

Attack on a hotel in Nairobi by Al-Shabaab, a Somali organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda

(Initial report based on Western and Kenyan media outlets)

- On the afternoon of January 15, 2019, at least five terrorist operatives belonging to the **Somali Al-Shabaab movement** attacked a hotel, an office complex and businesses in the heart of Nairobi (DusitD2). According to initial reports, the assailants arrived at their destination in at least two vehicles. The attack began with an explosion in the hotel parking lot. A suicide bomber then blew himself up in the lobby of the hotel, and the operatives, armed with light weapons, then entered the hotel. Security sources in Kenya said that the area was being **mopped up slowly and carefully for fear that the assailants were wearing explosive belts**. In the morning, the President of Kenya announced that all the terrorist operatives who carried out the attack had been killed.
- The final number of victims is still unclear. So far, **15 fatalities** have been reported, most of them hotel guests who were dining at the restaurant at the time of the explosion. It was reported that fatalities included 11 Kenyans, an American citizen, a British citizen and two others who have not yet been identified (Reuters; The Guardian, January 16, 2019).



Right: Cars going up in flames at the time of the explosion in the hotel parking lot. Journalists evacuating one of the victims (Twitter, January 15, 2019). Left: Two operatives of the Somali Al-Shabaab organization during the attack on the hotel. The photo is from the CCTV in the hotel complex (Twitter, January 15, 2019)



One of the Somali Al-Shabaab operatives during the attack on the hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. The photo is from the CCTV in the hotel complex (Twitter, January 15, 2019).

► **The Al-Shabaab movement claimed responsibility for the attack** through its Shahada News Agency. **Al-Shabaab is a Somali movement with Salafist-jihadi ideology, affiliated with Al-Qaeda.** The organization has been operating in Somalia since 2004 (or since 2006, according to another version) **and is designated by the United States (and other countries) as a terrorist organization.** Its center of activity is in Somalia, but in the past the organization has carried out attacks in Kenya and other African countries⁴. It should be noted that Kenya and Somalia have a **common land border** that makes it easy for terrorist operatives from the Al-Shabaab movement to reach Kenya.

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Deportation of two German citizens who came to Egypt to join ISIS's Sinai Province

► Last week, the Egyptian security forces reportedly deported two German citizens who had come to Egypt to join ISIS's Sinai Province:

◆ **On January 11, 2019**, Mahmud Amr Muhammad Ezzat Abdel Aziz, a German citizen of Egyptian descent, arrived from Saudi Arabia. He is a student at the Islamic University in Saudi Arabia who was arrested on the basis of information that he intended to join the ISIS operatives in Sinai. He was deported to Germany by the Egyptian authorities (Al-Masry Al-Youm, January 11, 2019).

◆ **On January 14, 2019**, it was reported that Issa Muhammad Abdel Ghani Ibrahim al-Sabbagh, a German citizen of Egyptian descent, had been arrested on arrival from Germany. Maps of northern Sinai and a compass were found in his possession. He was

⁴ On September 21, 2013, Al-Shabaab carried out an attack at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, in which some 70 people were killed.

deported from Egypt. The Egyptian authorities said that he had adopted ISIS's ideology, had contacted ISIS operatives via the Internet and had come to Egypt to join the ISIS operatives in Sinai (Al-Masry Al-Youm, January 14, 2019).



Issa Muhammad Abdel Ghani Ibrahim al-Sabbagh, a German citizen of Egyptian descent who attempted to join ISIS's Sinai Province, during an airport security check (Bawabat Al-Ahram, January 14, 2019)

The battle for hearts and minds

Article with ISIS's response to the Egyptian President's comments on security cooperation with Israel

Last week, an article appeared in the ISIS weekly Al-Naba, on the Israel Air Force airstrikes against ISIS in Sinai and Israel's assistance to Egyptian President El-Sisi in the fighting against ISIS. In the ITIC's assessment, the article is a response to the interview with President El-Sisi on CBS, in which he revealed the cooperation between Israel and Egypt on the issue of the struggle against ISIS in Sinai. The writer notes that this cooperation has long been known and stresses that **the Jews are an eternal enemy of ISIS and that the campaign against them will continue until the end of time** (Al-Naba, Issue 164, January 10, 2019).

► Following are the highlights of the article:

- ◆ **The cooperation between Israel and Egypt against ISIS's Islamic State in Sinai has been characterized by secrecy since its inception.** The Western media, according to the article, described this cooperation as a "secret alliance" for two reasons: it embarrasses the "infidel" Egyptian regime whose leaders describe Israel as an enemy and declare that they support the Palestinians. The second reason is that Israel feared that the exposure of this cooperation would play into the hands of the Islamic State by arousing solidarity with the Islamic State among Muslims worldwide, and could constitute an additional motive for taking revenge on Israel in Sinai and elsewhere.

◆ **“It appears that the struggle of the Islamic State against the Jews and their offshoots [i.e., the Egyptian regime] has entered a new phase in the wake of the exposure of the cooperation,”** since the Jews and their supporters have struggled over the years to conceal it so that the Islamic State would not take advantage of it [as a catalyst to carry out attacks]. They (the Jews) have long believed that the Islamic State is an entity that does not fight against the Jews, despite the fact that **over the years, the Islamic State** and its numerous media outlets **have never ceased to declare that the war against the Jews will undoubtedly take place through jihad, in accordance with Islamic religious law and in the way of the Prophet (Mohammad).**

◆ The article claims that the Israel Air Force carried out hundreds of airstrikes against the Islamic State in Sinai, using manned aircraft and drones. It also claims that the Israel Air Force carried out airstrikes against the Islamic State in southern Syria as part of the International Coalition airstrikes. Thus, the article states, “the Jews have left their fingerprints on the International Coalition against the Islamic State” and have joined forces with those who have gathered to fight it.

◆ The article ends by stating that “the Jews know very well that the Islamic State is the true enemy of their plan on Earth!”⁵ The Islamic State stressed, at the time of its inception in Iraq, that **the conflict with the Jews was not about borders, but an ideological and eternal struggle, to the end of days**, when “every tree and every stone will disclose the hiding place of the Jews, except for the Gharqad tree [a thorny bush growing in desert areas] that will protect the Jews and will not disclose their hiding place”⁶. The article ends with the statement that with the help of Allah, the alliances of the Jews will fail and their plots against the Muslim believers will boomerang.

⁵ There is an ambiguous context here: one – the plan refers to the establishment of the State of Israel and the second – the anti-Semitic context, according to which the Jews supposedly have a global plot in the spirit of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

⁶ This is a well-known anti-Semitic Islamic tradition (*Hadith*), according to which the Muslims will kill the Jews as a stage in advance of the Day of Judgment.