

## **The Retreat of Islamic State Militants – A Distress Signal and Wake Up Call**

**Dr. Michael Barak**

Against the backdrop of the loss of the Islamic State's strongholds in Iraq and Syria, and the retreat of the organization's fighters from the territories that were under their control, Al-Wafa jihadist media institution (which is involved in media for the Islamic State) published an article on February 8, 2018 by a writer named Ahlam al-Nasr (aka Umm Usama al-Dimashqiyya), who is apparently active in the organization's territory in Syria.

In the beginning of the article, the author noted that the harsh events that befell the organization's fighters must be seen as a test of their resilience and determination to continue fighting against their enemies. She expressed dismay with the demoralization that has befallen a minority of the organization's fighters, and she accused them of being unwilling to fight against the enemy face-to-face. She warned that retreat from the battlefield will ultimately be to the detriment of the fighters and that they would be easy prey for the infidels. According to her, even in the Prophet Muhammad's army there were fighters with true faith in God and fighters who were motivated by self-interest as long as the reality was convenient for them.

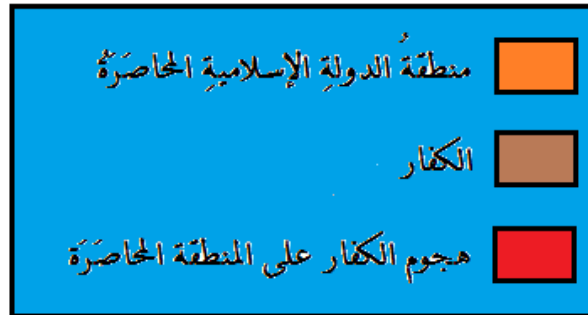
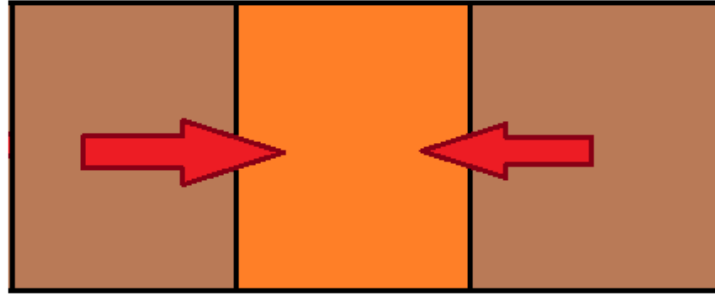
In the author's opinion, positive results in the field can be achieved even if the number of fighters is small compared to the large number of enemy armies. Thus, she recommended dividing the number

of IS fighters into several small groups, three for example, in order to attack enemy forces from several directions as the Prophet Muhammad did despite his numerical inferiority.

Later, the author referred negatively to the withdrawal of IS fighters from various territories. She rejected various justifications for the withdrawal, such as fear of the fighters' families being massacred by the enemy. According to her, the Prophet Muhammad made sure to provide shelter to women while he was in the city of Medina and even integrated some of them in the fight against the enemy. She emphasized that it is a mark of greatness to integrate women in the battle alongside male fighters.

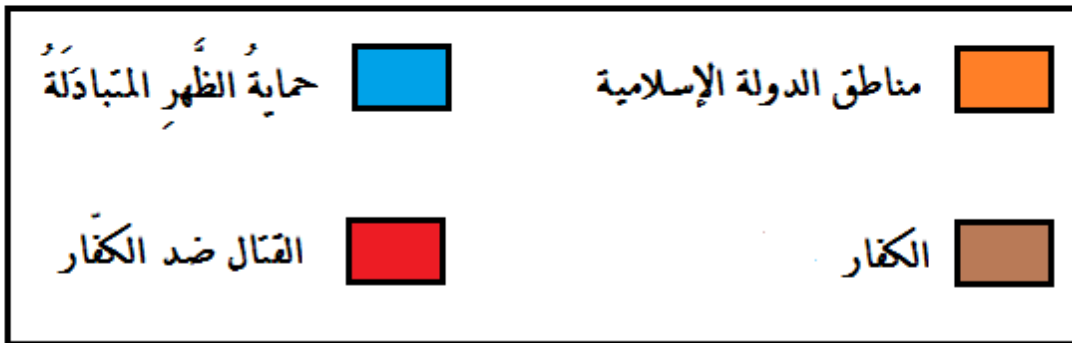
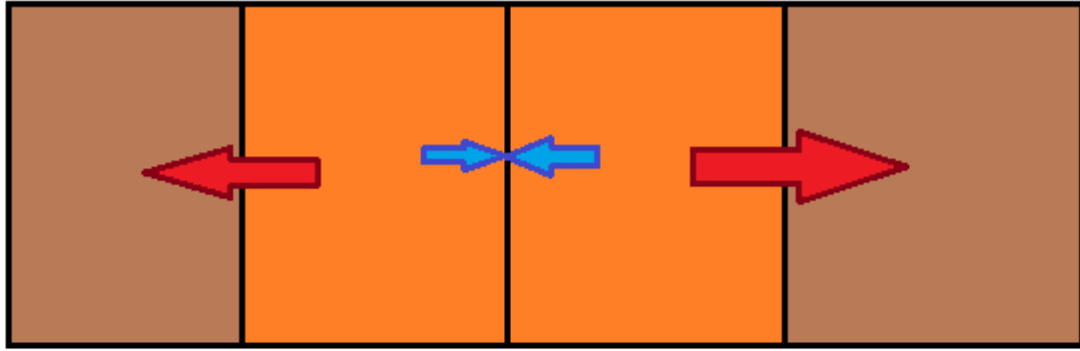
Later, she referred to the food and spoils left behind by the fighters during the withdrawal. According to her, enemy forces could have used them and benefitted from them during the course of their advancement. In light of this, the author emphasized that retreat is a humiliation and should be avoided. Instead, IS fighters must show a resolute fighting spirit and instill fear among enemy ranks in order to let them know that the organization's fighters are prepared to confront them until their last drop of blood. She promised that that God sows fear in the hearts of the infidels, and shows mercy to his fighters when they cling to faith and jihad. The author emphasized the gravity of the fighters' withdrawal from the territories. Indeed, they retreated from territories considered Dar al-Islam ("House of Islam") to other territories from Dar al-Islam, but in practice the infidels seize control over the territories following the withdrawal of the fighters and thus turn the areas into Dar al-Kufr ("House of Heresy"). In other words, as the territory of the Caliphate shrinks and declines, the enemy advances and expands the house of heresy. Moreover, the Prophet's armies did not retreat even when they suffered defeat. Hence, IS fighters fight the enemy and cause it to suffer losses. While the loss of life caused to the IS should not be taken lightly, it is still necessary to act and attack the enemy.

The writer further added that the series of withdrawals by IS fighters will eventually lead to a disastrous result: "The elimination of all areas of the Islamic State, and the imposition of a siege on its fighters in one area [...]". To clarify this, she posted a graph on the subject (see photo).



A graph posted by the author. Orange indicates the IS area under siege; Brown indicates the infidels; Red indicates attacks by infidels on the area under siege

In order to cope with the sensitive situation, the writer recommended that IS fighters focus on two areas where “Islamic State soldiers will defend each other”, namely, “If we are, for example, at point A, and behind us is Point B, and both of them are part of the [Islamic] State, then we at point A we will meet the infidels face-to-face while we are protected from behind” (see graph).



A graph posted by the author. Orange indicates IS areas; Brown indicates the infidels; Blue indicates mutual protection of one another; Red indicates battle against the infidels

The writer continued and emphasized that IS fighters must sow fear once again in the hearts of the infidels as it was uprooted from them following the former's retreat, and spread the belief in the Oneness of God. Toward the end of the article, the author called on fighters to eliminate the infidels, destroy their homes, and more. In addition, she repeated the call of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's by appealing to IS supporters to attack the media centers of the infidels as well as their centers of ideological warfare. In the conclusion, the author called on IS fighters to stop the series of withdrawals on the grounds, claiming that they raise the morale of the infidels and only serve to harm the image and strength of the organization. According to her, if they are vigilant and fight with determination against the enemy, Allah will be on their side and instill fear and defeat among the enemy.

The article expressed a deep sense of distress in light of the loss of IS territories and the withdrawal from them. In addition, it expressed dissatisfaction with the unwillingness of IS fighters to fight resolutely against enemy forces. The author relied on events from the Prophet Muhammad's past and promised divine intervention on behalf of the organization's fighters should this trend change; in other words, should there be an end to the ongoing

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