



Wave of orchestrated ISIS terrorist retaliation attacks around the globe: overview and assessment

April 14, 2019

The current situation (as of April 14, 2019)

During four days, between April 8 and 11, 2019, the various ISIS provinces in Syria, Iraq and around the globe carried out **a wave attacks in retaliation for the blow ISIS suffered in Syria**. ISIS reported that **eight of its provinces carried out more than 92 attacks in more than 80 areas**. The attacks were accompanied by a media campaign and claims of responsibility entitled "Battle of vengeance for blessed [Province of] Sham" [Syria].

- ▶ The following is the distribution of the attacks according to an ISIS announcement: the largest number of attacks was carried out by the **Iraq Province** (37 attacks, more than one third of the total number). Following them were the provinces in **Syria** (30 attacks), **West Africa** (five attacks), **Sinai** (five attacks), **Somalia** (five attacks), **Khorasan** (three attacks), **Libya** (two attacks) and **the North Caucasus** (one attack). Most of the attacks were directed against **security targets and were relatively uncomplicated**. They included shooting attacks, detonating IEDs, ambushes, attacks on military camps and compounds and the execution of "collaborators." Very few were suicide bombings or complex attacks.
- ▶ ISIS claimed the retaliation attacks carried out during the four days damaged or destroyed 62 vehicles, destroyed seven military bases and headquarters, and destroyed houses of six "infidels." According to ISIS, **362 people were killed or injured**. (**Note:** ISIS announcements tend to exaggerate for propaganda purposes. In addition, ISIS does not indicate its losses. However, ISIS did in fact carry out extensive and exceptional attacks in its various provinces.)

ISIS provinces in addition to its core provinces in Iraq and Syria



In ITIC assessment, **the attacks and accompanying media campaign were orchestrated by the ISIS leadership**. Their objective was **to raise the morale of ISIS operatives and supporters** around the globe. They also aimed to send a message to the American-led coalition countries that despite the severe blow inflicted on ISIS in Syria, **ISIS is growing stronger and its operatives are still active in Iraq, Syria and around the globe**. In effect, the ISIS leadership did in fact prove that even after the loss of its province in the lower Euphrates Valley, **it continues to function and is capable of carrying out a concentrated, extensive, coordinated effort in all its provinces worldwide**. The retaliation attack illustrated that **ISIS has changed into a global terrorist organization** which focuses on guerrilla attacks on its many enemies, especially the security forces in the countries where it operates (while continuing its activities against Shi'ites and other groups of populations it considers "infidels").

► In addition, its recent attacks raise two additional inputs:

- ◆ **The intensity of the attacks in its various provinces reflects the operational capabilities of each province**. Judging by the number of attacks, **the Iraq Province has become the center of its guerrilla-terrorist activities**. In **Syria**, on the other hand, ISIS continues to operate mainly in the northeastern and northern parts of the country but its capabilities are less than those in Iraq. Beyond its core provinces, the

most prominent is **the West Africa Province**, where the organization operates in Nigeria and neighboring countries. Also prominent is the **Sinai Province**, where despite the continued pressure of the Egyptian security forces, it has managed to carry out a series of attacks, some of them showcase attacks. The ISIS province in **East Asia** retains its ability to withstand the intensive activities of the Filipino army in the southern part of the country.

◆ In the recent wave of retaliation attacks **there was a conspicuous lack of ISIS-inspired attacks in Western and other countries** (beyond ISIS's provinces). The campaign against the ISIS enclave in the lower Euphrates Valley was also not accompanied by ISIS-inspired attacks in the West. During the four days of retaliation attacks ISIS called for attacks by its supporters abroad, especially in the West, but none was carried out. **That may indicate the weakening of the ISIS brand among the Muslim communities in Western countries around the world, at least temporarily.** However, it is still too early to reach any definite conclusions about the matter.

Media Campaign

- ▶ The wave of retaliation attacks was accompanied by a media campaign called "The battle of vengeance for blessed Sham Wilayah ["province"]," i.e., attacks carried out to avenge the blow inflicted on ISIS in the lower Euphrates Valley. Most of the claims of responsibility were issued via **Telegram**. Some of them were also posted to ISIS's **Shabakat Shumukh** website, and to a lesser degree on the **Akhbar al-Muslimin** website. That may indicate that those are **ISIS's main information platforms**.
- ▶ On April 11, 2019, ISIS's weekly magazine *al-Nabā'* (issue 177) published an infographic summing up the retaliation attacks carried out between April 8 and 11, 2019. It was accompanied by a statement from **ISIS spokesman Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir**. The main objective of the attacks, he said, was retaliation for what happened in Syria. **He called on ISIS operatives to avenge the blood of their brothers and sisters and to carry out retaliation attacks** that will uproot the "infidels" and "atheists." He called for suicide bombing attacks, IED attacks, sniper fire and the detonation of car bombs (*al-Nabā'*, April 11, 2019, based on Shabakat Shumukh in Arabic, April 12, 2019).



ISIS infographic (al-Nabā', April 11, 2019).



The notice reads, "The retaliation invasion of the blessed al-Sham Province is on the way – the Islamic State following the path of the Prophet [Muhammad] – military actions of the jihadi fighters for the sake of Allah [with a reminder of the suicide bombing attacks in the Sinai Peninsula and the takeover of the town of al-Fuqaha in central Libya carried out as a retaliation attack] – Allahu akbar and glory to Islam (Telegram, April 10, 2019).

- During the retaliation attacks **ISIS supporters issued notices calling for attacks in Western countries.** No attacks were carried out.



Right: Notice posted by an ISIS-affiliated source to Telegram. The Arabic reads, "One body#retaliation_campaign" (Telegram, April 10, 2019). Left: Poster from an ISIS-affiliated source calling itself "Nur al-Tawhid" ("the light of the oneness of Allah"). It shows the World Trade Center subway stop in New York City with an ISIS operative next to a sign that reads, "Soon [we will operate] in the middle of your countries" with the hashtag of the retaliation attacks on the social networks (Telegram, April 10, 2019).

Retaliation attacks carried out in the various provinces¹

Syria

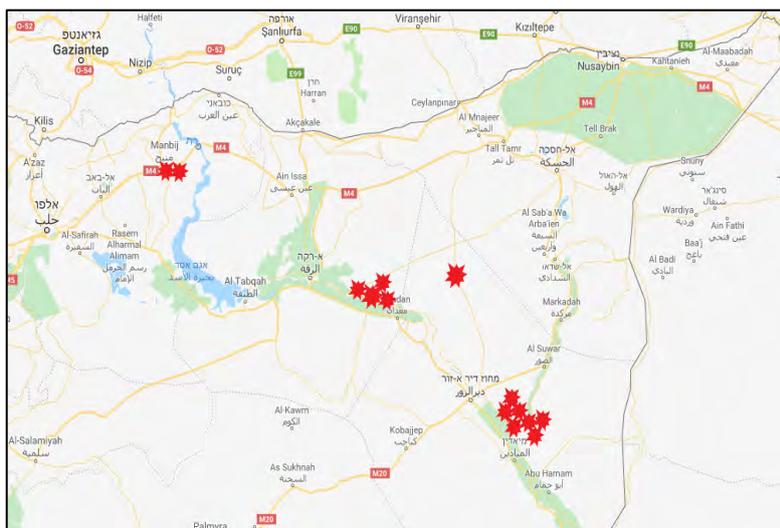
In Syria ISIS attacks focused **on the Kurdish forces in the al-Mayadeen and al-Raqqa areas in the Euphrates Valley**, where there are routinely intensive guerrilla activities. Attacks were also carried out in **Manbij and al-Hasakeh** in northern and eastern Syria (areas controlled by the Kurds). Most of the attacks involved detonating IEDs to attack the vehicles of SDF forces, and some were shooting attacks and executions of SDF commanders and fighters.

► **The following are the attacks on the SDF forces in the region of al-Mayadeen** (the al-Sham al-Kheir and al-Sham al-Raqqa Provinces, via Telegram):

- ◆ **Assassination attempt on the life of a senior figure** in the security forces, 25 kilometers northeast of al-Mayadeen.
- ◆ **Killing of a fighter in an elite SDF unit and taking another fighter hostage** in the village of al-Busayra, about 14 kilometers north of al-Mayadeen.
- ◆ **Shooting attack and detonation of two IEDs** to attack two SDF vehicles, about nine kilometers north of al-Mayadeen.

¹ This section includes only the attacks ISIS announced were carried out as retaliation attacks (between April 8 and 11, 2019). It does not include "routine" terrorist attacks carried out in the various provinces. The ITIC's information is not complete and the **number of ISIS attacks in the provinces may be higher**.

- ◆ **Detonating an IED to attack an SDF vehicle** in the region of the village of al-Busayra.
 - ◆ **Attack on an SDF roadblock**, about 11 kilometers north of al-Mayadeen.
 - ◆ **Break-in into the homes of two military intelligence agents**, 11 kilometers north of al-Mayadeen. The two were shot to death.
 - ◆ **Shooting a Syrian soldier to death** while he was on leave in his village, about nine kilometers north of al-Mayadeen.
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED to attack an SDF vehicle**, five kilometers east of al-Mayadeen. Two SDF fighters were killed.
- ▶ The following attacks were carried out against SDF forces in the **al-Raqqa region** (al-Sham al-Raqqa Province, via Telegram):
- ◆ **Shooting at a roadblock**, 36 kilometers east of al-Raqqa. Three SDF fighters killed and five wounded.
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a vehicle, about 33 kilometers east of al-Raqqa. Six SDF fighters wounded.
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a vehicle, about 43 kilometers east of al-Raqqa. Three SDF fighters killed or wounded.
 - ◆ **Shooting at a vehicle** near a roadblock, about 43 kilometers east of al-Raqqa.
 - ◆ **Shooting and killing two SDF fighters**, about 70 kilometers north of al-Raqqa, near the border with Turkey.
 - ◆ **Blowing up a motorcycle** and killing two SDF fighters east of al-Raqqa.
 - ◆ **Blowing up the home of an SDF commander.**
- ▶ The following were attacks carried out in the **city of Manbij** (Telegram, April 11, 2019):
- ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack an SDF forces' vehicle. Three SDF fighters killed.
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack an SDF forces' vehicle on a Manbij street. Four SDF fighters killed.



Regions where ISIS carried out retaliation attacks in the Euphrates Valley, the area of al-Mayadeen, al-Raqqah and Manbij (Google Maps)

- ▶ The following attacks were carried out in the **al-Hasakeh region**:
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack an SDF forces' vehicle in a rural area near al-Shaddadi. Two SDF fighters wounded (RisboLensky Twitter account, April 10, 2019).
 - ◆ **Shooting attack at four SDF vehicles** transporting fighters in the al-Hasakeh region. About ten SDF fighters killed or wounded, among them two commanders (RisboLensky Twitter account, April 10, 2019).

Iraq

In western and northern Iraq a wave of attacks was carried out in the various provinces.

Most of the attacks targeted the Iraq security forces (although some targeted Shi'ite civilians). There were various types of attacks: detonating IEDs (the most common type), detonating a leech demolition charge (a magnetically-attached explosive device) to a vehicle, attacking military bases and headquarters, shooting attacks, executions of "agents" and detonating a car bomb.

- ▶ The following are attacks carried out throughout the Iraqi provinces (according to Telegram and Shabakat Shumukh):
 - ◆ **Detonating IEDs** to attack two Iraqi army vehicles in the center of the city of al-Qa'im, near the Syrian border. Eight Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded.
 - ◆ **Detonating a leech demolition charge (a magnetically-attached explosive device) to the vehicle** of an Iraqi army intelligence commander in al-Qa'im. The commander was killed and his vehicle was destroyed.

- ◆ **Attacking an Iraqi army headquarters** near the Jordanian border. ISIS claimed 11 Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **Killing a Shi'ite [civilian]** with an IED about 60 kilometers northeast of Baghdad.
- ◆ **Detaining a tribal recruiting activist** and "**agent**" of **Iraqi national security** in the northern suburb of Baghdad.
- ◆ **Detonating an IED and throwing hand grenades** at the home of a policeman in Tarmiyah, about 30 kilometers north of Baghdad.
- ◆ **Firing light arms** at an officer in the national security forces in al-Taji, 16 kilometers north of Baghdad.
- ◆ **Killing a Shi'ite [civilian]** in a village about 70 kilometers northwest of Baghdad.
- ◆ **Attacking a tribal recruitment headquarters** east of Fallujah with light arms and hand grenades. According to an ISIS report, ten tribal recruitment activists were killed, including a local commander.
- ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a vehicle of the Iraqi police force east of Fallujah. Three policemen in the vehicle were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a vehicle of the Iraqi police force in the center of the city of Ramadi.
- ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a vehicle of the tribal recruitment in the region of al-Shirqat, about 100 kilometers west of Kirkuk. According to an ISIS report, a colonel in the police force and two of his companions were wounded.
- ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a popular recruitment vehicle about 30 kilometers west of Khanaqin. Six popular recruitment fighters were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **Detonating two IEDs** to attack an Iraqi army vehicle and a concentration of Shi'ite forces ("infidels") about 30 kilometers west of Mosul. One soldier was killed and another wounded.
- ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack a foot patrol of Iraqi policemen about ten kilometers north of Baqubah. Three policemen were injured.
- ◆ **Detonating four IEDs** to attack two vehicles of the emergency police force and the tribal recruitment about 20 kilometers south of Fallujah. Six people in the vehicle were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **Detonating a car bomb** to attack a convoy of the Shi'ite Badr Militia north of Baiji. Fighters in the convoy were killed or wounded, including a commander.

- ◆ **Throwing a hand grenade** at an Iraqi army post in the Old City in the western part of Mosul. An Iraq soldier was killed and another was wounded.

Sinai Province

ISIS retaliation attacks in the Sinai Province included ambushes, detonating IEDs and shooting sniper fire at Egyptian security forces in the northern Sinai Peninsula. The one exceptional attack was a suicide bombing attack at the entrance to the market in Sheikh Zuweid, killing civilians and members of the Egyptian security forces.

- In **Sheikh Zuweid** a suicide bomber wearing an explosive belt blew himself up at the entrance to the market in the center of the town (Shabakat Shumukh, April 9, 2019). Four operatives of the security forces and two civilians were killed. About 26 people were injured (France 24, April 9, 2019).



Abu Hajar the Egyptian, the ISIS operative who carried out a suicide bombing attack in the market in Sheikh Zuweid (Shabakat Shumukh, April 9, 2019).

- Other attacks carried out in the Sinai Province as part of the retaliation campaign were the following:
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED** to attack an Egyptian army tank south of el-Arish. According to an ISIS announcement the crew of the tank was killed (Shabakat Shumukh, April 9, 2019).
 - ◆ **Sniper fire** to attack an Egyptian army roadblock on the international road in Rafah. An Egyptian army soldier was killed (Shabakat Shumukh, April 9, 2019).
 - ◆ **Detonating an IED** from an ambush to attack an Egyptian army vehicle on the international road west of el-Arish. According to an ISIS announcement four Egyptian army soldiers were killed, one of them an officer, and three were injured. The officer killed was Captain Muhammad Isma'il (Shabakat Shumukh, April 10, 2019).



Right: Egyptian army Captain Muhammad Isma'il, killed when an ISIS IED exploded, west of el-Arish (Mu'ta News Agency, reposted by Shabakat Shumukh, April 10, 2019). Left: Weapons and military equipment seized by the operatives of the ambush (Shabakat Shumukh, April 11, 2019).

Libya Province

► As part of the retaliation campaign in the Libya-Barqa Province there was a raid in the town of al-Fuqaha in central Libya (633 kilometers southeast of Tripoli). **ISIS operatives broke into houses** and searched for men affiliated with the army of General Khalifa Haftar. **They killed the mayor and the town police chief.** They also killed and captured others affiliated with Haftar's army and set fire to their houses (ISIS's A'maq News Agency and Shabakat Shumukh, April 9, 2019).



The city of al-Fuqaha in central Libya
(Google Maps)

► **The Libya Province-Fezzan region** announced its operatives had executed six operatives of General Haftar's militia. The six were captured in a raid carried out by ISIS operatives in the village of Ghudwa, about 65 kilometers south of the city of Sabha in central Libya (Telegram, April 11, 2019).

West Africa Province

Nigeria

► As part of the retaliation campaign, ISIS announced the following attacks:

- ◆ **An attack on Nigerian army soldiers' barracks** in the city of Damaturu in the Yobe State in the northeastern part of the country (April 9, 2019). According to an ISIS announcement its operatives in the province killed and wounded a number of soldiers and seized an ATV, a weapon and ammunition.
- ◆ A "support company" of the West Africa Province **launched mortar shells** at soldiers' barracks in the village of Goniri in the Yobe State in the northeastern part of the country (April 9, 2019). No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **The head of the local council** in the town of Gajiram (Borno State) **was assassinated**. ISIS claimed he collaborated with the "African Coalition" (the Multinational Joint Task Force).



**The locations of the ISIS attacks northeast Nigeria:
Damaturu (1), Goniri (2) and Gajiram (3).**

Niger

► **Attacking the headquarters building of the Niger border guard** in the city of Diffa in the southeastern part of the country (near the border with Nigeria). Both sides suffered losses. Operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province **killed the mukhtar of one of the villages in the region and burned his house** (Shabakat Shumukh, April 10, 2019).



**The city of Diffa in Niger
(Google Maps).**



Four terrorists who carried out the attack on the border guard headquarters in Diffa on the Niger border (Shabakat Shumukh, April 10, 2019).

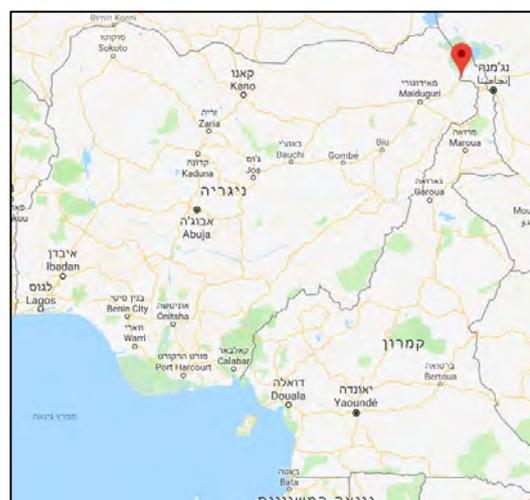
► **Firing rockets at the Diffa airport and at a Niger army base nearby.** According to an ISIS announcement, Niger army soldiers were killed and wounded (West Africa Province via Telegram, April 9, 2019).



One of the Grad rockets launched at the Diffa airport and a Niger army base (Telegram, April 13, 2019).

Cameroon

► ISIS's West Africa Province announced its operatives had **ambushed a Cameroon army force near the city of Fotokol** in the northern part of the country, near the Nigerian border. In the clashes that followed ISIS operatives used light, medium-weight and heavy arms. According to the ISIS report, more than 20 soldiers of the Cameroon army were killed and wounded, and a large quantity of military equipment was seized.



Right: The city of Fotokol in the Far North Region of Cameroon (Google Maps). Left: A Cameroon army vehicle with a double-barrel anti-aircraft gun, seized by ISIS in Fotokol (Shabakat Shumukh, April 9, 2019).

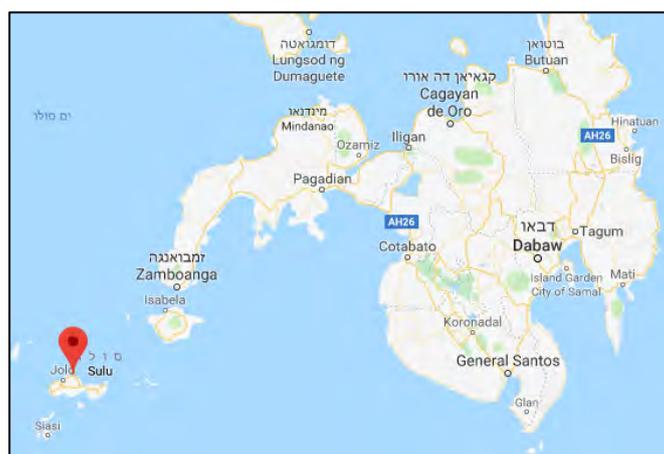
Khorasan Province

► ISIS's Khorasan Province announced that its operatives had **detonated an IED to attack an Afghan army mine-detection vehicle** in Jalalabad. Two soldiers were killed and the vehicle

was destroyed. The Khorasan Province also claimed responsibility for **killing two Taliban operatives** (Telegram, April 10, 2019)

East Asia Province

► ISIS's East Asia Province announced that its operatives had invaded a concentration of Filipino army forces in the city of Patikul, the seat of government in Sulu, South Philippines. According to the announcement 25 Filipino soldiers were killed or wounded (Shabakat Shumukh, April 13, 2019). The Western media reported that nine ISIS operatives were killed in two clashes in Patikul. Five Filipino soldiers and 19 ISIS operatives were wounded (ABS – CBN News, April 14, 2018).



**The city of Patikul, the seat of government in Sulu
(Google Maps)**

Somalia Province

► ISIS's Somalia Province announced that **its operatives had shot and killed a Somali policeman** near the city hall of Bosaso, on the coast of the Gulf of Aden, in the northeastern part of the country (Somalia Province via Telegram, April 9, 2019).

► ISIS Somalia Province announced that **its operatives has detonated an IED** to attack a vehicle of the Somali government police force in Bosaso. The seven policemen in the vehicle were wounded (Telegram, April 10, 2019). According to a Somali news website, the explosion damaged a police vehicle in Bosaso. Hussein Ali Muhammad, the local police commander, was not hurt in the explosion but six of his bodyguards were wounded (Mareeq Media, April 11, 2019).



The city of Bosaso in northeastern Somalia
(Google Maps)

Caucasus Province

► ISIS's Caucasus Province announced its operatives had **blown up a apartment** in the ancient city of Kolomna, Russia (Kolomna is located in the Muscovy Oblast, about 90 kilometers southeast of Moscow.) Two Christians were killed in the explosion and several others were wounded (Shabakat Shumukh, April 10, 2019).