



Spotlight on Global Jihad

September 5-11, 2019



Main events of the week

- ▶ With the exception of several local shooting incidents, as at September 10, 2019, **the unilateral ceasefire** announced by the Syrian army in the Idlib area **is being maintained**. The sides are apparently taking advantage of the lull in order to improve their positions and prepare for the next rounds of fighting.
- ▶ According to a report by the Turkish Ministry of Defense, **as part of the first phase of the plan to establish the safe zone along the Syrian-Turkish border, joint patrols by US and Turkish army forces along the Syria-Turkey border have begun**. The establishment of the safe zone was agreed upon by Turkey and the United States. Previously, Turkish President Erdoğan threatened that if a safe zone with the presence of Turkish soldiers was not established by the end of September 2019, Turkey would have no choice but to operate in the region alone. A Syrian Foreign Ministry official condemned the joint patrols and stressed that they constituted a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty, and also expressed Syria's opposition to the plan.
- ▶ **ISIS's terrorist and guerilla warfare activities continued in Syria and Iraq**. In Iraq, ISIS planned to carry out a number of attacks against Shiite pilgrims and worshipers celebrating the Ashura holiday. Some of the attacks were thwarted by the Iraqi security forces. **In Baghdad, several dozen Shiites were killed in IED attacks**.
- ▶ ISIS's provinces in Africa and Asia continued to carry out "routine" attacks. This week, attacks were reported in the Sinai Peninsula, Afghanistan, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Yemen.

Idlib region

► The unilateral ceasefire declared by the Syrian army in the Idlib region, which entered into effect on the morning of August 31, 2019, is being maintained as at September 10, 2019.¹ Tense quiet is maintained in the region, except for sporadic shooting incidents. Following are a number of violations:

- ◆ **On September 9, 2019**, the Syrian army fired artillery at positions of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and its allies in the rural area south and southeast of Idlib. According to the Syrian army, this was a response to artillery fire of the “terrorist organizations” (i.e., the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and its allies) at Syrian army positions in Khan Shaykhun (Al-Watan, affiliated with the Syrian regime, September 10, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 7, 2019**, Syrian army forces and the militias supporting them fired several rockets at targets in the rural area south of Idlib (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 7, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 6, 2019**, the Syrian army announced that its anti-aircraft units had shot down three UAVs of the “terrorist organizations” (i.e., rebel organizations) attempting to attack one of its positions in the Al-Ghab Plain, southwest of Idlib (SANA, September 7, 2019).



Right: One of the rebel organizations’ UAVs shot down by the Syrian army (SANA, September 7, 2019). Left: Four bombs attached to the wing of one of the aircraft (SANA, September 7, 2019)

¹ On the morning of August 31, 2019, a unilateral ceasefire entered into effect in the Idlib region. It was announced by the Syrian army, with Russian involvement. The rebel organizations are not party to the ceasefire. Bouthaina Shaaban, Syrian President Assad’s media advisor, made it clear that this was a temporary ceasefire and after it the campaign in Idlib would continue as part of the number one strategy of liberating the whole of Syria from “terrorism” and the occupying forces.

► It seems that the sides are taking advantage of the lull in the fighting to improve their positions and prepare for the next rounds of fighting. As part of these preparations, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham released photos showing its operatives deployed vis-à-vis the Syrian army and the militias supporting it on the Al-Qasabiya road, about 40 km northwest of Hama (Ibaa, September 8, 2019).



Right: Operative of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham at an observation post on the Al-Qasabiya road, overlooking the Syrian army and the militias supporting it. Left: Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham at a combat position (Ibaa, September 8, 2019).

Summary of the losses since the beginning of the Syrian army's ground attack

► Since the beginning of the Syrian army's ground attack in early May 2019, **a total of 4,128 people have been killed in the Idlib region**. Fatalities included **1,671 rebel organization operatives**, including **1,088 operatives of the jihadi organizations** [bearing the brunt of the fighting]. Fatalities also included **1,406 soldiers and operatives of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it**, and **1,051 civilians** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 7, 2019).

Northeastern Syria

Attacks against the SDF forces

► ISIS's guerrilla and terrorist activities against SDF fighters continued in the Kurdish control zone in northeastern Syria. Following are a number of incidents (according to ISIS's announcements):

- ◆ **On September 8, 2019**, an SDF fighter was shot and killed in the Ghawiran neighborhood, **in southern Al-Hasakah** (Telegram, September 9, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 4, 2019**, an SDF fighter was shot and killed in **Al-Hasakah** (Telegram, September 5, 2019).

SDF counterterrorism activity

► As part of the counterterrorism activities carried out by SDF forces against ISIS squads in the area, forces in Tel Ja'abi, in the area of Hajin (about 25 km north of Albukamal) captured an ISIS squad operative. Weapons and IEDs ready for use were found in his possession (SDF Press, September 9, 2019).



Right: ISIS operative captured by SDF forces. Left: The weapons found in his possession (SDF Press, September 9, 2019)

Al-Raqqah area

► **On September 4, 2019**, an ISIS force ambushed and fired at SDF forces on the **Al-Tabqa-al-Raqqah road** (west of Al-Raqqah). Twelve SDF fighters were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 5, 2019).

ISIS's activity in the Euphrates Valley

► ISIS's activity in the area of Deir ez-Zor, Al-Mayadeen and Albukamal continues. Following are highlights of this activity:

- ◆ **On September 10, 2019**, two SDF fighters were shot and killed in Diban, about 5 km **east of Al-Mayadeen** (Telegram, September 10, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 8, 2019**, two SDF fighters were shot and killed in Al-Dahlah, about 12 km **east of Deir ez-Zor** (Telegram, September 9, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 7, 2019**, machine gun fire hit and killed the head of the local council on behalf of the SDF in Al-Jaradi, about 20 km **southeast of Al-Mayadeen** (Telegram,

September 7, 2019). A local Syrian source reported that unknown assailants riding a motorcycle attempted to kill Ahmad Mussa al-Saleh, the head of the local council of western Al-Jaradi (Deir ez-Zor 24, September 7, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 7, 2019**, a motorcycle bomb was detonated, apparently against SDF fighters or another SDF target in Al-Basira, about 15 km **north of Al-Mayadeen** (Deir ez-Zor 24, September 7, 2019). No organization assumed responsibility so far, but it appears to be ISIS's activity.

- ◆ **On September 6, 2019**, machine guns were fired at Ramadan Zaki, an SDF commander, in Al-Jaradi, about 20 km **southeast of Al-Mayadeen**. The commander and one of his escorts were wounded, and another escort was killed (Telegram, September 7, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 4, 2019**, the SDF official in charge of the archive in the Al-Basira area, about 15 km **north of Al-Mayadeen**, was shot and wounded, and his escort was killed (Telegram, September 5, 2019).

Creating a safe zone on the border between Syria and Turkey

- ▶ The Turkish Ministry of Defense reported that joint patrols of forces of the US army and the Turkish army started operating in the safe zone in northeastern Syria. Six armored vehicles with Turkish flags joined a US army convoy patrolling the Tell al-Abyad area, 25 km east of the Euphrates River in northern Syria, close to the Turkish border. The force was also joined by UAVs and helicopters. Patrolling was carried out as the first phase of the plan to establish a safe zone along the border. The Turkish Defense Ministry reported that on the next few days, additional joint patrols would take place (Anatolia, September 8, 2019). An official source in the Syrian Foreign Ministry condemned the joint patrols and stressed that they constituted a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty. He said that Syria was opposed to the plan (SANA, September 8, 2019).

- ▶ Turkey and the United States agreed on the establishment of the safe zone on August 7, 2019. It was mainly intended to alleviate the tension between Turkey and the Kurdish forces operating in the area under American sponsorship. It was also intended to create a safe corridor that will allow Syrian refugees who wish to do so to return to their country. For the time being, details of the plan such as the size of the area and how it will be controlled are unclear. As part of the agreement, a joint operations center was recently set up.

► Before the patrols began, Turkish President Erdoğan threatened that if the safe zone with the presence of Turkish soldiers was not established by the end of September 2019, Turkey would have no choice but to operate in the region alone (Anatolia, September 7, 2019). He also threatened that if Turkey did not receive support from the European Union in the establishment of the safe zone, it would open its borders and allow the Syrian refugees to move into Europe. According to the Turkish president, Turkey intends to settle at least a million Syrian refugees in the safe zone, but it needs the aid that it was promised in the refugee agreement with Europe. It should be recalled that there are about 3.5 million Syrian refugees on Turkish soil, and as part of the agreement, Turkey prevents them from moving to Europe (Anatolia, September 6, 2019).

Involvement of foreign forces in Syria

Denmark

► US Department of Defense Chief Pentagon Spokesperson Jonathan R. Hoffman said that the United States welcomes Denmark's decision to send a military force to Syria in support of the US-led International Coalition's Operation Inherent Resolve. According to the announcement, the Danish forces will operate in cooperation with the US forces in northeastern Syria (US Department of Defense website, September 7, 2019).

Russia

► During a discussion with high-ranking Russian army officers, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu said that at present, the top priority of Russian military activity in Syria should be to protect weapons and additional technological means available to the forces and to maintain the operational fitness of these means. The minister also announced that he had ordered the development of various types of home front support for the force deployed in Syria (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 3, 2019). It should be noted that the base of the Russian force stationed at Hmeymim Airbase is often attacked by the rebel organizations.

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity

► ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity continued throughout Iraq. This week, ISIS's most noteworthy activity was carried out against Shiite worshipers in the Baghdad Province in the midst of Ashura. ISIS announced that its operatives had activated a series of IEDs against

gatherings and processions of Shiites on the holiday and against vehicles transporting the Shiite worshipers to ceremonies in various areas throughout Baghdad. According to ISIS, a total of 95 people were killed and wounded in this series of events (Telegram, September 7, 2019). Iraqi sources confirmed the report, but played down the number of casualties, noting that several people were wounded in the explosions and property was damaged (Al-Wikala al-Wataniyya lil-Anba', September 7, 2019).



**One of the explosions in Baghdad
(Al-Baghdadiya, September 7, 2019)**

► Following are ISIS's additional terrorist and guerrilla operations throughout Iraq (according to ISIS's claims of responsibility):

- ◆ **On September 9, 2019**, an IED was activated in the **Nineveh Province** against a Tribal Mobilization vehicle in the Hamam al-Alil area, about 16 km south of Mosul. A Tribal Mobilization operative was killed and six others were wounded. In addition, several mortar shells were fired at forces of the Iraqi army and the Tribal Mobilization in the area. Damage was caused to property (Telegram, September 9, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 8, 2019**, an IED was activated against a mine-sweeping vehicle of the Iraqi army in Al-Islah, in the **Diyala Province**, about 80 km northeast of Baqubah. Two soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 8, 2019). **In the Kirkuk Province**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of a Tribal Mobilization operative about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. The operative was wounded (Telegram, September 8, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 7, 2019**, ISIS operatives blew up a building which they had booby-trapped in the Baaj area, **in the Nineveh Province**, about 130 km southwest of Mosul. Two sappers were killed in the explosion and two soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 7, 2019). **In the North Baghdad Province**, ISIS operatives broke into the home of the mukhtar of Nahr al-Safi, in the Al-Taji area (about 20 km north of

Baghdad). The mukhtar, who they claimed was an agent of the National Security Service and the Popular Mobilization in the area of Al-Taji, was detained, interrogated and then executed (Telegram, September 8, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 6, 2019, in the Diyala Province**, an Iraqi army outpost was hit by sniper fire about 16 km northeast of Baqubah. Two soldiers were killed and another was wounded. A Popular Mobilization patrol arriving at the site was also shot at. The official in charge of the Popular Mobilization in the Abu Saida area, codenamed Abu Jandil, was killed and one of his aides was wounded (Telegram, September 6, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 5, 2019, in the Babel Province**, an IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle about 40 km south of Baghdad. Popular Mobilization operatives were killed or wounded (Telegram, September 6, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 4, 2019, in the Salah al-Din Province**, Iraqi army soldiers and Tribal Mobilization fighters northwest of Samarra were hit by machine gun fire. Five soldiers and Tribal Mobilization fighters were killed (Telegram, September 4, 2019). **In the Diyala Province**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle on the Jalula road about 30 km northeast of Baqubah. Three soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 4, 2019).

Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

► After the August 27, 2019 announcement about the end of Operation The Will to Win to liberate northern and western Iraq from ISIS operatives, counterterrorist activity of the Iraqi security forces and the militias supporting them continued throughout Iraq. On September 8, 2019, **Taleb al-Mussawi**, commander in the Popular Mobilization forces, announced **Operation Ashura**, intended to act against ISIS squads and secure the Shiite pilgrims. According to Al-Mussawi, 20 villages were mopped up during the operation and four ISIS guest houses were found, as well as an explosive belt and a vehicle.

► Following are additional counterterrorist operations of the Iraqi security forces:

- ◆ **On September 9, 2019, a Coalition airstrike was carried out**, based on intelligence, against an ISIS hideout in the Makhoul Mountains, **about 15 km north of Baiji. Khattab Khalaf Mohammed Saleh al-Jawari**, the ISIS operative in charge of coordination between the provinces of Tigris, Al-Jazeera, and Kirkuk, was killed in the airstrike, along with four other operatives (Al-Sumaria, September 9, 2019).

- ◆ The Iraqi Counterterrorism Service, operating in collaboration with the International Coalition, landed forces from helicopters in the Mutaibija area, on the border between the Diyala and Salah al-Din provinces (about 70 km north of Baqubah). **Fifteen ISIS operatives, including suicide bombers**, were killed and nine others were detained. Coalition airstrikes in the area destroyed ISIS's guest houses, caves, tunnels and a training camp (Al-Sumaria, September 9, 2019).
- ◆ A force of the Emergency Response Division (ERD) subordinate to the Iraqi Interior Ministry found **a stockpile of ISIS weapons** about 50 km southeast of Baghdad. The stockpile was reportedly moved there in order to carry out attacks against Shiite pilgrims arriving at Imam Hussein's Tomb on the Ashura Day (Al-Sumaria, September 9, 2019).



**Emergency Response Division commanders standing near the weapon stockpile
(Al-Sumaria, September 9, 2019)**

- ◆ Coalition aircraft, acting on intelligence provided by the Nineveh Operations command post, carried out an airstrike against ISIS in Jazirat Hawi Aslan on the Tigris River, about 15 km **south of Mosul. Eight ISIS operatives were killed** (Al-Sumaria, September 8, 2019).
- ◆ A Popular Mobilization force operating in the **Makhoul Mountains**, about 15 km north of Baiji, killed four ISIS operatives (al-hashed.net, September 8, 2019).
- ◆ A Popular Mobilization force operating with Iraqi army air support in the Al-Dour area, about 17 km **southeast of Tikrit, killed several ISIS operatives** and destroyed their hideout (al-hashed.net, September 5, 2019).



The Iraqi security forces during activity against ISIS
(al-hashed.net, September 5, 2019)

The Sinai Peninsula

► Operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province continued to carry out terrorist and guerrilla activities, mainly against the Egyptian security forces. Following are a number of incidents (according to ISIS's claims of responsibility):

- ◆ **On September 10, 2019**, ISIS operatives fired a rocket at an Egyptian army tank in the Al-Rasm area in western Rafah. Soldiers in the tank were wounded and the tank was damaged (Telegram, September 10, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 5, 2019**, ISIS operatives exchanged fire with Egyptian army troops, including light weapons and rockets, **south of Sheikh Zuweid**. Several Egyptian soldiers were wounded and the rest fled (Telegram, September 5, 2019). The incidents were documented by ISIS in a video disseminated two days later by ISIS's Amaq News Agency (Telegram, September 7, 2019). No casualties were reported.



ISIS operatives shooting south of Sheikh Zuweid
(Telegram, September 7, 2019)

- ◆ **On September 8, 2019**, ISIS's Sinai Province released a **video entitled "Commitment and Steadfastness 3."** The video features ISIS operatives, both foreign

and local, and documents attacks by ISIS operatives against Egyptian security forces in Al-Arish. The operatives documented in the video call on their audience to join ISIS and fight against its enemies, especially against the Egyptian regime. The speaker in the video points out that while “migrants” from different countries came to Sinai, religion has united them all in a way that has overshadowed the gaps. The video ends with two executions of so-called collaborators (Telegram, September 8, 2019). This is apparently in order to deter residents of the Sinai Peninsula from collaborating with the Egyptian regime.



ISIS operatives in the Sinai Peninsula appearing in the video. An operative from Caucasus appears on the left (Telegram, September 8, 2019).



Execution of collaborators with the Egyptian regime at a checkpoint set up by ISIS operatives in Sinai (Telegram, September 8, 2019)

ISIS's activity around the globe

Nigeria

- ISIS's West Africa Province operated against Nigerian soldiers. Following are a number of incidents according to claims of responsibility issued by ISIS's West Africa Province:

- ◆ **On September 9, 2019**, ISIS operatives ambushed a Nigerian army convoy near the town of Damasak, **in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria**, about 1.5 km east of the border between Nigeria and Niger. At the same time, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army position near the town of Garunda, about 53 km east of Damasak, in the vicinity of Lake Chad. Dozens of soldiers were killed or wounded. Three trucks and an armored vehicle were destroyed. In addition, ISIS operatives seized nine SUVs, an armored vehicle, weapons and ammunition (Telegram, September 10, 2019).
- ◆ ISIS operatives **ambushed** Nigerian soldiers near Purti in the Yobe region of **western Nigeria. Two soldiers were killed** in the exchange of fire and others were wounded. ISIS operatives seized weapons and a vehicle (Telegram, September 7, 2019).



Purti in western Nigeria (Google Maps)

- ◆ ISIS operatives carried out a sneak attack on the quarters of Nigerian soldiers in the **town of Gajiram** in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. The operatives exchanged fire with the soldiers. **Ten soldiers were reportedly killed** and several others wounded. An armored vehicle was set on fire. Six SUVs, weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, September 5, 2019)



Gajiram, Borno State (Google Maps)

Afghanistan

► According to reports by ISIS's Khorasan Province, its operatives carried out a number of attacks during the week, mainly against Taliban operatives. Following are the main attacks, according to ISIS's claims of responsibility:

- ◆ **Several IEDs** were activated in the capital Kabul against a gathering of members of the Al-Jam'iya al-Islamiya Party (the Islamic Association, moderate Sunni religious party in Afghanistan) and its supporters during a memorial service for Ahmed Shah Mas'ud². **Around 30 participants in the ceremony and members of the security forces were killed or wounded** (Telegram, July 10, 2019).
- ◆ ISIS operatives **attacked Taliban operatives** in the Wadi Hassar area of the Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan. In the attack, **ISIS operatives took control of a Taliban weapon stockpile** (Telegram, September 10, 2019).



**Taliban weapons seized by ISIS operatives
(Telegram, September 10, 2019)**

² A Sunni Afghan politician and military man who formerly fought against the Russian army in Afghanistan and was assassinated on September 9, 2001.

- ◆ On September 9, 2019, **ISIS operatives attacked a number of Taliban compounds** in the Mazar Dara area, **in the Kunar Province, near the border with Pakistan**, using light, medium and heavy weapons. Many Taliban operatives were killed or wounded and others fled. **ISIS operatives took over the three compounds and seized weapons and ammunition** (Telegram, September 10, 2019).
- ◆ **An IED was activated** against a government office in charge of running the elections in the city of Jalalabad in the Nangarhar Province in **eastern Afghanistan**. **Two officials at the office were killed** (Telegram, September 8, 2019).
- ◆ ISIS operatives attacked a gathering of Taliban forces in the Shirzad area, about 100 km **southeast of the capital Kabul**. **A total of 25 Taliban operatives were killed in the attack**. ISIS operatives seized weapons and ammunition (Telegram, September 8, 2019).
- ◆ ISIS operatives activated an IED, **killing a “spy” who belonged to the Afghan defense establishment** in Nangarhar, in the east of the country (Telegram, September 7, 2019).
- ◆ An IED was activated against Taliban operatives attempting to advance toward ISIS positions **in the western part of the Kunar Province**. **Three Taliban operatives were killed** and two others were wounded (Telegram, September 6, 2019)
- ◆ **An ambush was set up** in the Jabba Dara area, about 75 km **southeast of Kabul**. **Two Taliban operatives were killed** (Telegram, September 6, 2019).

The Philippines

► According to a report by **ISIS’s Philippines Province**, its operatives activated a **motorcycle bomb** against Christian residents in the Sultan Kudarat area on the island of Mindanao, in the **southern Philippines**. Seven people were wounded (Telegram, September 7, 2019). Reuters reported the incident, noting that the attack took place in the open market in the Christian city of Isulan (Reuters, September 7, 2019). An incident against Filipino Christians is relatively rare, as ISIS operatives usually concentrate on carrying out attacks against Filipino soldiers.



**The area of Sultan Kudarat in the southern Philippines
(Google Maps)**

► On September 8, 2019, a **female suicide bomber** wearing an explosive belt under her clothes attempted to enter a Philippine army compound in the area of Indanan, in the western part of Jolo Island, **in the southern Philippines**. She aroused the suspicion of the soldiers stationed there, who prevented her from entering. A few minutes later she blew herself up while calling “Allah Akbar.” There were no casualties. The commander of the West Mindanao Command noted that according to the body parts that were found, it is still unclear if it was a woman, and it may have been a man in women’s clothing. To date, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Philippine army announced that the ISIS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf organization might be responsible for the attack (Manila Times, September 8, 2019; Philippines Lifestyle News, a Filipino website, September 10, 2019).



Right: Indanan on Jolo Island in the Sulu Province, southern Philippines (Google Maps). Left: Investigators collecting parts of the IED (Twitter account of ABS-CBN News@ABSCBNNews, the leading news, media and entertainment corporation in the Philippines, August 9, 2019)

Yemen

► In Yemen, **clashes between ISIS and Al-Qaeda operatives continued this week**. Most of the clashes concentrated in the Qifah area **in the center of the country**. According to ISIS's Yemen Province – Al-Bayda region, the organization's operatives halted an attack by Al-Qaeda operatives along the roads leading from Hama to Awaja and from Hama to Abu al-Ghith, **about 100 km southeast of Sana'a**. The two sides exchanged fire. **Seven Al-Qaeda operatives were killed and several others were wounded**. ISIS operatives seized weapons and ammunition (Telegram, September 4, 2019).



**Weapons and ammunition seized by ISIS operatives
(Telegram, September 4, 2019)**

► On the same day, ISIS operatives activated an IED against an Al-Qaeda vehicle in the area of Sarar and Al-Zob, in the **northwestern part of the Al-Bayda Province**. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 5, 2019).

ISIS's battle for hearts and minds

► On the occasion of the new Hijri year, ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published a summary of the organization's terrorist activity over the past year. According to the infographic that was published, ISIS carried out 3,665 attacks worldwide during the year, killing and wounding 15,845 people.

