



Spotlight on Global Jihad

September 12-18, 2019



Main events of the week

- ▶ **The unilateral ceasefire in the Idlib region** declared by the Syrian army (August 31, 2019) was **generally maintained** and occasionally interrupted by Syrian (and possibly also Russian) airstrikes and artillery fire. The rebel organizations fear the resumption of the Syrian army's ground moves in the Idlib region. **In the Euphrates Valley**, ISIS's guerrilla activity continued in the area between Al-Raqqah and Albukamal, targeting SDF forces. ISIS's main modus operandi was attacking checkpoints, activation of IEDs, and targeted killings.
- ▶ **In Iraq**, ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity continues. The main modus operandi was sniper fire and the activation of IEDs against vehicles of the Iraqi security forces. **In addition, IEDs were activated in areas populated by Shiites in four sites in Baghdad** (resulting in 24 killed and wounded). At the same time, the Iraqi security forces continued their counterterrorism activities, exposing IEDs in southern Baghdad, continued (as part of ISIS's effort to carry out showcase attacks among the Shiite population).
- ▶ **In the various provinces in the Middle East, Africa and Asia**, ISIS's "routine" attacks continued. This week, attacks were reported in the northern Sinai Peninsula, Nigeria, Congo, and the Philippines.
- ▶ ISIS's media arm released **an audiotape of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**. On the tape, Al-Baghdadi calls on the organization's operatives to **accelerate the attacks** and carry out "jihad operations." Special attention should be paid to **Al-Baghdadi's calls on the organization's operatives to attack judges, investigators and security personnel at prisons where ISIS operatives are incarcerated**. In the ITIC's assessment, this may be part of an **effort to release ISIS operatives incarcerated in prisons and detention facilities** (especially in areas controlled by the SDF forces). Al-Baghdadi also **calls on ISIS operatives to increase their propaganda activity**, evidence of the great importance that ISIS attaches to this area, **and a reflection of the organization's need to recruit new supporters and operatives** (Note: an analysis of the content of the tape will be published in a separate document).

Idlib region

The ceasefire: overview

The unilateral ceasefire declared by the Syrian army (August 31, 2019) **is generally maintained**. Since the declaration of the ceasefire, the Syrian army has refrained from the continuation of the ground attack. However, it has carried out airstrikes and fired artillery against rebel organizations' targets, mainly in the south and east of the Idlib region. According to several reports, Russian aircraft also carried out airstrikes in the Idlib region. The Syrian regime and Russia avoided admitting the airstrikes in order not to be shown as the party violating the ceasefire. On the other hand, Russia accused the rebel organizations of dozens of incidents of shooting at populated areas in the Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib and Hama. According to the rebel organizations, **the Syrian army is reinforcing its troops to resume the offensive in the Idlib region** (Reuters, September 11, 2019).

Exchanges of artillery fire and airstrikes

► **On September 12, 2019, the Syrian Air Force attacked rebel organizations' targets in the Jisr al-Shughur area.** This was the first airstrike since the declaration of a ceasefire by the Syrian army. The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reported that Syrian aircraft had carried out several airstrikes around the village of Safuhan, **about 40 km south of Idlib**. A video released by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham shows a number of buildings which were destroyed in the airstrike (Ibaa, September 12, 2019). According to media reports, Russian aircraft also took part in the airstrikes.



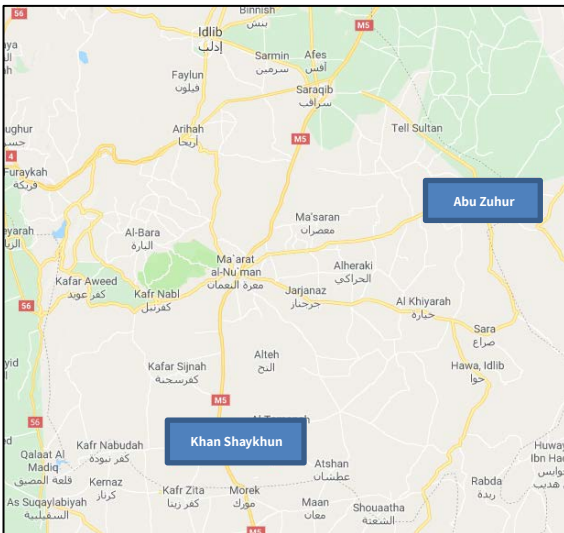
Right: Syrian Air Force attacks around the village of Safuhan, south of Idlib. Left: A building which was destroyed in the airstrikes (Ibaa, September 12, 2019)

► At the same time, there were exchanges of artillery fire, mainly in the south and east of the Idlib region. **On September 14, 2019**, the Syrian army and militias supporting it reportedly fired about 240 rockets at targets in the Idlib region. **On September 15 and 16, 2019**, artillery was still fired at rebel organizations' targets in the Idlib region (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 14 and 16, 2019). It was reported that **on September 17, 2019**, artillery was fired by the National Liberation Front (supported by Turkey) at Syrian army positions south of Idlib and in the western part of the Idlib region. In response, the Syrian army fired artillery at positions of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and other rebel organizations (Al-Watan, affiliated with the Syrian regime, September 18, 2019).

► Maj. Gen. Alexey Bakin, the chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of Conflicting Sides in Syria, accused the rebel operatives ("militants") of continuing to violate the ceasefire. According to Maj. Gen. Bakin, on September 13, 2019, there were 34 instances of firing at populated areas in Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib and Hama (TASS, September 14, 2019). On the other hand, Naji Mustafa, a rebel official of the National Liberation Front, said: "We are responding directly by targeting the positions from where the shells are fired" (Reuters, September 15, 2019).

Rebels prevent civilians from leaving the Idlib region

► The Syrian News Agency reported that **Syrian army forces had recently opened two "humanitarian passages" for civilians**: a passage in Abu Zuhur, about 40 km southeast of Idlib; and a passage near the city of Khan Shaykhun, which was recently taken over by the Syrian army. These passages were designed to allow the exit of civilians and rebel operatives who were ready to surrender. Official Syrian sources reported that **the rebel organizations were preventing the exit of civilians through the Abu Zuhur passage**. It was reported that operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham shot at many vehicles carrying civilians and threatened to kill anyone who wished to leave (SANA, September 14, 2019).



Right: The Abu Zuhur “humanitarian passage” (SANA, September 14, 2019). Left: The areas where the two “humanitarian passages” are located (Google Maps)

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 4,140 people have been killed in the Idlib region. Fatalities included 1,672 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 1,062 civilians (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 14, 2019).

Palmyra area

► On September 15, 2019, an IED was activated against a Syrian army vehicle on the road leading to the T3 oil pumping station, about 130 km east of Palmyra. The passengers were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 17, 2019). ISIS’s claim of responsibility for the attack was published only two days later, possibly due to communications problems.

The Euphrates Valley

Al-Raqqah area

► Following are ISIS’s prominent attacks in the Al-Raqqah area:

- ◆ **On September 16, 2019**, hand grenades were thrown at an SDF vehicle about 30 km east of Al-Raqqah, killing two SDF fighters (Telegram, September 16, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 13, 2019**, hand grenades were thrown at an SDF checkpoint about 5 km east of Al-Raqqah. Several SDF fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 12, 2019**, hand grenades were thrown at SDF soldiers in Al-Raqqah. Five soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 12, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 11, 2019**, an SDF checkpoint was shot at south of Tabqa (about 40 km west of Al-Raqqah). Eleven SDF fighters were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 12, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 10, 2019**, SDF fighters were ambushed and shot at by ISIS operatives south of Tabqa. Several SDF fighters were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 11, 2019).

The area of Deir ez-Zor, Al-Mayadeen, and Albukamal

- ▶ Following are highlights of ISIS's activity in the area between Deir ez-Zor and Albukamal:
 - ◆ **On September 17, 2019**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of an SDF commander parked in front of his house in the Al-Basira area, 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The vehicle was damaged (Telegram, September 17, 2019).
 - ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an SDF truck was targeted by machine gun fire 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Two SDF fighters were killed (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
 - ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle near the Omar oilfield, about 10 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. SDF fighters in the vehicle were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
 - ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an SDF vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km east of Deir ez-Zor. As SDF fighter was killed and two others were wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
 - ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an SDF checkpoint was targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km east of Deir ez-Zor. Two SDF fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
 - ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, a Syrian source reported that ISIS operatives had attacked positions of the Syrian army and the militias supporting it about 30 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor (Deir ez-Zor 24, September 14, 2019).

◆ **On September 11, 2019**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 20 km southeast of Deir ez-Zor. Two SDF fighters were killed. In addition, an SDF tanker was set on fire (Telegram, September 12, 2019).

◆ **On September 10, 2019**, an SDF fighter was shot and killed in the town of Hajin, about 25 km north of Albukamal (Telegram, September 11, 2019).

SDF counterterrorist activity

► As part of their counterterrorist activity against ISIS networks, the SDF forces captured four ISIS operatives about 30 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. They also found weapons in their possession (SDF Press, September 14, 2019).



Weapons found in the possession of four ISIS operatives southeast of Al-Mayadeen (SDF Press, September 14, 2019)

Main developments in Iraq

ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity

► ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity continued throughout Iraq. Most of the activity consisted of **IEDs and sniper fire against the Iraqi security forces**. Special attention should be paid this week to the detonation of IEDs among Shiite population centers in the capital Baghdad (resulting in 24 casualties). Following are the main incidents (according to ISIS's claims of responsibility):

◆ **On September 16, 2019**, IEDs were activated against Shiite residents in four sites in the southwestern part of Baghdad. A total of 24 Shiites were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 17, 2019).

◆ **On September 16, 2019**, an IED was activated against a Tribal Mobilization vehicle about 25 km southwest of Kirkuk. Two Tribal Mobilization fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 17, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 16, 2019**, several IEDs were activated against Iraqi army sappers who were lured into an apartment in the Sinjar area (about 100 km west of Mosul). One of them was killed and two others were wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Iraqi federal police about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. One policeman was killed and another was wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Iraqi federal police about 35 km southwest of Kirkuk. A rank-and-file policeman and an officer were killed and three others were wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, a Popular Mobilization vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 7 km southwest of Tuz Khurmatu (about 60 km southeast of Kirkuk). The passengers were either killed or wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, an Iraqi army vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 80 km east of Tikrit. Several soldiers were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 70 km southeast of Mosul. The passengers were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 15, 2019**, an IED was activated against Tribal Mobilization fighters about 40 km south of Mosul. One fighter was killed and another was wounded (Telegram, September 15, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, an Iraqi army checkpoint was attacked about 55 km southeast of Samarra. Three soldiers were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, an IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle 90 km northeast of Samarra. Several passengers were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, a camp of the Iraqi Interior Ministry's commando was targeted by sniper fire about 90 km northeast of Samarra. One commando fighter was killed and two others were wounded (Telegram, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 14, 2019**, an IED was activated against Tribal Mobilization fighters about 20 km south of Mosul. One fighter was killed (Telegram, September 14, 2019).

- ◆ **On September 13, 2019**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle approximately 40 km east of Baqubah. The passengers, including an officer with the rank of major, were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 13, 2019**, an Iraqi army camp about 40 km east of Baqubah was targeted by sniper fire. Two soldiers were killed (Telegram, September 13, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 13, 2019**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi vehicle in the area of Jalula, 70 km northeast of Baqubah. One soldier was wounded. When an Iraqi army patrol arrived on the scene, another IED was activated against it (Telegram, September 13, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 13, 2019**, an Iraqi army camp 45 km northeast of Baqubah was targeted by sniper fire. One soldier was wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2019).
- ◆ **On September 13, 2019**, four mortar shells were fired at a Popular Mobilization headquarters some 35 km northeast of Baqubah. A Popular Mobilization fighter was wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2019).

Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

► Following are counterterrorist activities carried out by the Iraqi security forces over the past week:

- ◆ **September 14, 2019:** The Diyala Province chief of police announced that the police were pursuing “terrorist operatives” (implicitly ISIS operatives) in five provinces. A total of 10 operatives were detained (Al-Sumaria, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **September 14, 2019:** Iraqi security forces exposed a “terrorist network” (implicitly ISIS’s) in the Samarra area. The six members of the network were caught. The network operatives had planned to carry out attacks during a Shiite holiday (Al-Sumaria, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **September 14, 2019:** Iraqi security forces located 20 IEDs and equipment to operate them in southern Baghdad (Al-Sumaria, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **September 13, 2019:** Iraqi police in the Kirkuk Province detained an ISIS operative engaged in observing the Iraqi security forces and conveying the intelligence collected to other operatives of the organization (Al-Sumaria, September 13, 2019).
- ◆ **September 13, 2019:** Iraqi security forces ambushed and captured two ISIS operatives at the southern entrance to Qayyarah, about 60 km south of Mosul (Al-Sumaria, September 13, 2019).

◆ **September 11, 2019:** A Popular Mobilization force downed an armed ISIS drone about 14 km southeast of Baqubah. The photos released after the incident show a drone with a shell attached to it (al-hashed.net, September 11, 2019).



**Armed ISIS drone downed by the Popular Mobilization southeast of Baqubah
(al-hashed.net, September 11, 2019)**

The Sinai Peninsula

Further attacks in northern Sinai

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

- ◆ **September 16, 2019:** An IED was activated against an Egyptian army vehicle east of Sheikh Zuweid. The soldiers in the vehicle were wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **September 16, 2019:** ISIS operatives fired six mortar shells at an Egyptian army checkpoint west of Sheikh Zuweid. Several Egyptian soldiers were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2019).
- ◆ **September 14, 2019:** A rocket was launched against an Egyptian army tank west of Sheikh Zuweid. The soldiers manning the tank were wounded. The tank was damaged (Telegram, September 14, 2019).
- ◆ **September 14, 2019:** ISIS operatives exchanged fire with Egyptian soldiers at a checkpoint in southern Al-Arish. Four Egyptian soldiers and an officer were killed and additional soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 14, 2019).

Annual summary of the activity of ISIS's Sinai Province

► On September 12, 2019, ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published an infographic summarizing the attacks by ISIS's Sinai Province in the period from September 11, 2018 to August 30, 2019. According to the infographic, **the Sinai Province carried out 228 attacks, in which 463 people were killed and wounded.** A total of 27 people were designated as “agents” and “local militia fighters” (of Bedouin tribes in the Sinai Peninsula who collaborate with the Egyptian government). According to the infographic, the types of attacks carried out are as follows: **IED explosions (157); sniper fire (30); exchanges of fire (21); ambushes (7); raids (6); self-sacrifice and suicide bombing attacks (4); and assassinations (3)** (Al-Naba', as published in Akhbar al-Muslimeen, September 12, 2019).



Infographic summarizing ISIS's activity in the Sinai Peninsula in the past year (Al-Naba', as published in Akhbar al-Muslimeen, September 12, 2019)

ISIS's activity around the globe

Nigeria

► ISIS's West Africa Province announced that its operatives were ambushing Nigerian army forces between the town of Gubio and the city of Maiduguri in the Borno State (northeastern Nigeria). The forces exchanged fire. Five soldiers were killed. ISIS operatives later attacked a Nigerian army camp in the area. Two Nigerian soldiers were killed and several were wounded (Telegram, September 15, 2019).



**The city of Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria
(Google Maps)**

Congo

► ISIS Central Africa Province reported that on September 14, 2019, its operatives ambushed a Congolese (Democratic Republic of Congo) army force and UN troops in the village of Kishanga, in eastern of Congo (some 120 km west of the tri-border area of Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Rwanda). A number of soldiers were killed and wounded in the exchange of fire between the sides. In addition, ISIS seized various weapons and ammunition (Telegram, September 15, 2019).

The Philippines

► ISIS's East Asia Province announced that on September 12, 2019, its operatives had exchanged fire with Philippine soldiers in the area of Patikul, on Sulu-Jolo Island, in the southern Philippines. Six soldiers were killed and 16 others were wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2019). "Security sources" in the Philippines announced that they had killed in the area of Patikul an operative of the ISIS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf organization who was about to carry out a suicide bombing attack (www.rappler.com, September 12, 2019).



**Sulu-Jolo Island in the southern Philippines
(Google Maps)**