



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## September 19-25, 2019



### Main events of the week<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The unilateral ceasefire **in the Idlib region** declared by the Syrian army was also maintained this week. At the same time, artillery exchanges continued, and the Syrian army apparently thwarted local attempted assault by the rebel organizations. All these **illustrate that the ceasefire is weak and that the situation in the Idlib region is fragile**. The situation in the Idlib region was discussed at a summit meeting in Ankara between the Iranian, Turkish and Russian presidents. **The disagreements between Turkey and Russia apparently remained unchanged**. While the Turkish media accused the Syrian regime of violating the terms of the ceasefire, the Russian media warned that “... **the ceasefire does not protect the terrorist organizations. The campaign against them will continue.**”
- ▶ ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity continued this week in various sectors in eastern Syria. In addition, **two attacks took place in southern Syria** (the area of As-Suwayda and Daraa). In one of the attacks, an IED was detonated against a bus carrying Syrian soldiers. These operations, which were preceded by several attacks in the Daraa area in June-July 2019, **may indicate that ISIS is rehabilitating itself in southern Syria**. As in other areas where it has resumed its activity, in southern Syria ISIS has switched to guerrilla warfare, while giving up its control over territories and population.
- ▶ **In the various provinces in Iraq**, ISIS's terror and guerrilla activity continued. Most of the activity took the form of detonating IEDs. Mortar shells and light weapons were also fired. **A prominent ISIS attack was the detonation of an IED against a minibus carrying Shiites** in the city of Karbala in southern Iraq, which is a holy city for the Shiites (12 killed and five wounded).
- ▶ ISIS's “routine” attacks continued in its various provinces in Africa and Asia. This week, among others, attacks were carried out in Nigeria, Egypt, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup>Due to the High Holidays, there will be changes in the dates of publication of the forthcoming bulletins. The ITIC wishes all our readers a Happy Jewish New Year.

## Idlib region

### The ceasefire: overview

**The unilateral ceasefire** declared by the Syrian army on August 31, 2019, **has generally been maintained in the past week.** Since the declaration of the ceasefire, the Syrian army has refrained from initiating ground attacks to take over territories. However, at the same time, exchanges of artillery fire continue mainly in the southern Idlib region and, a local assault attempt by the rebel organizations was apparently thwarted. This **demonstrates that the ceasefire which was achieved is fragile and the situation in this region remains volatile.** While the Guardians of Religion Organization (affiliated with Al-Qaeda) claimed responsibility for a number of attacks, a source affiliated with the Syrian regime claims that Syrian army fire comes as a response to the violations of the ceasefire by the rebel organizations. However, the rebel organizations, on their part, are still concerned about the resumption of the campaign by the Syrian army.

### Syrian army artillery fire

► **The Syrian army continued to fire artillery at rebel organizations' targets.** Thus, for example, it was reported that on September 20, 2019, artillery was fired at Maarat Harma, about 40 km south of Idlib (Edlib Media Center, which opposes the Syrian regime, September 20, 2019). In addition, it was reported that on the night of September 21-22, 2019, and the morning of September 22, 2019, the Syrian army fired dozens of rockets at targets in the rural area south of Idlib (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 22, 2019).



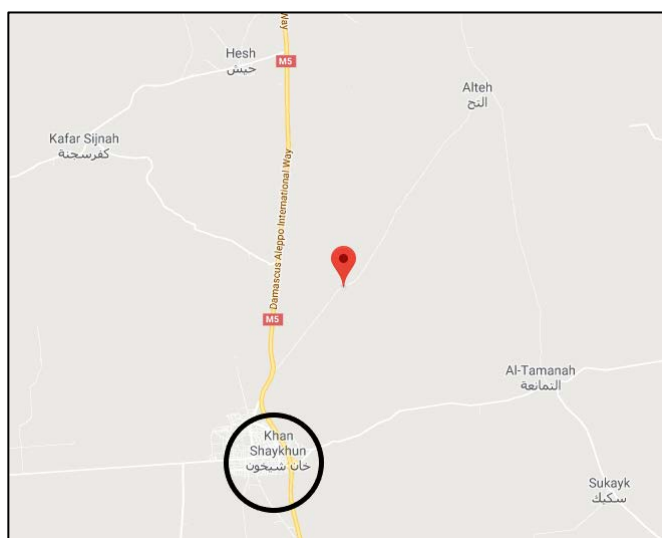
**A cloud of dust rising in the wake of artillery fire at Maarat Harma, south of Idlib (Edlib Media Center, September 20, 2019)**

► On September 23, 2019, the Syrian army reportedly fired artillery at targets in the rural area south of Idlib and the Kabanah area, about 13 km southwest of Jisr al-Shughur. In addition, **about seven Syrian Air Force helicopters reportedly attacked targets in the Kabanah area and dropped barrel bombs** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 23, 24, 2019). The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reported that the militias supporting the Syrian army had fired artillery at villages in the rural area south of Idlib and in the northern part of the Al-Ghab Plain, southwest of Idlib (Ibaa, September 23, 2019).

### Offensive activity by the jihadi organizations

► The Guardians of Religion Organization (affiliated with Al-Qaeda) officially announced a series of operations carried out against the Syrian army: firing mortar shells at the Syrian army in the Al-Ghab Plain; killing a Syrian soldier by sniper fire in the northern Al-Ghab Plain; and killing a Syrian soldier in northwest Aleppo (Telegram, September 19, 2019).

► It was reported that on September 24, 2019, **the Syrian army had thwarted a local assault attempt by operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, who were supported by the National Liberation Front** (sponsored by Turkey). The attempted attack was carried out on the Tal Jaafar road, **about 4 km north of Khan Shaykhun**. After the Syrian army took over several positions near Tal Jaafar and the attacking force sustained casualties, the rebels were forced to retreat (Al-Watan, affiliated with the Syrian regime, September 25, 2019).



**Tal Jaafar, north of Khan Shaykhun (in black), where a local assault attempt by the rebel organizations was thwarted (Google Maps)**

## Syrian army's attitude towards the ceasefire

► According to a media outlet affiliated with the Syrian regime, **the Syrian army adheres to the ceasefire but retains the right to respond to violations of the rebel organizations** (“the terrorist organizations”). According to the report, the rebel organizations sent additional reinforcements to the front lines south and southeast of Idlib, and are now fortifying their positions. It was also reported that the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham had called on young men to volunteer as part of its preparations in advance of attacking Syrian army positions (Al-Watan, August 22, 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 **4,149 people have been killed in the Idlib region**. Fatalities included **1,673 rebel organization operatives**, including 1,088 operatives of the jihadi organizations [bearing the brunt of the fighting]. Fatalities also included **1,410 soldiers and operatives of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, and 1,066 civilians** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 24, 2019).

## Demonstrations against the Syrian regime

► On September 20, 2019, Russia and China vetoed the UN Security Council Resolution calling for a ceasefire under which all the hostilities in the Idlib region should be stopped (Al-Jazeera; Anatolia, September 19, 2019). On the same day, operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham prevented demonstrators from arriving at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing between Syria and Turkey, about 30 km north of Idlib (Edlib Media Center, September 20, 2019). However, on September 20, 2019, **a demonstration was held in Idlib**, probably initiated by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and other rebel organizations. The demonstrators called for the toppling of the Syrian regime and condemned the Russian and Chinese veto (Edlib Media Center, September 20, 2019).



**Right: Demonstration in Idlib calling for the toppling of the Syrian regime and condemning the Russian and Chinese veto in the UN Security Council (Edlib Media Center, which opposes the Syrian regime, September 20, 2019). Left: Demonstrators in Idlib holding signs condemning the Russian veto (Edlib Media Center, September 20, 2019).**

## Preventing civilians from leaving the Idlib region

► The Syrian News Agency reported that for the eighth day in a row, rebel organizations are preventing civilians from leaving the Idlib region through the Abu al-Zuhur crossing (about 40 km southeast of Idlib). It was reported that operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (referred to in the original as “the Al-Nusra Front”) set up observation posts in areas bordering villages and towns retaken by the Syrian army, to prevent the arrival of civilians at the crossing (SANA, September 20, 2019).

## Ankara summit meeting

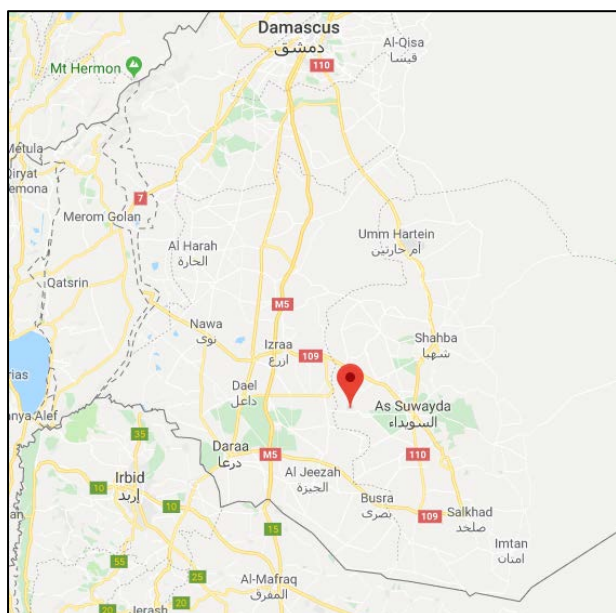
► On September 16 and 17, 2019, a summit meeting was held in Ankara between the presidents of Iran, Turkey and Russia. **The talks centered on the situation in the Idlib region** (TASS News Agency, September 16, 2019). The closing statement of the meeting does not include an operative clause pertaining to Idlib, **and the disagreements on this issue appear to be unchanged.** Turkish media accused the Syrian regime and its allies of violating the terms of the ceasefire and expressed concern over the influx of refugees [implicitly in the event of the resumption of fighting] (Anatolia News Agency, September 16, 2019). On the other hand, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov made it clear that “a significant part of Idlib is under the control of terrorist groups [...] **The ceasefire does not protect the terrorist organizations. The campaign against them will continue**” (TASS News Agency, September 17, 2019).



The presidents of Russia, Iran and Turkey at the summit meeting in Ankara  
(Anatolia News Agency, September 16, 2019)

## Southern Syria

► On September 21, 2019, an IED was activated against a bus carrying Syrian army officers and soldiers on the Al-Dara Road, about 14 km west of As-Suwayda (in the rural area northeast of Daraa). The passengers on the bus were reportedly killed and wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019). ISIS released a video showing the detonation of the IED (Telegram, September 22, 2019). Officially, the Syrian regime did not refer to the attack (which is its policy in other areas under its control). However, local Syrian sources reported it and noted that there were fatalities and several wounded (Facebook pages of the Suwayda-SNN news agency and Daraa Al-Youm, September 21, 2019). The Syrian military airbase Al-Tha'la is situated about one kilometer south of Al-Dara. It is possible that the passengers of the bus were Syrian military personnel serving in this base.



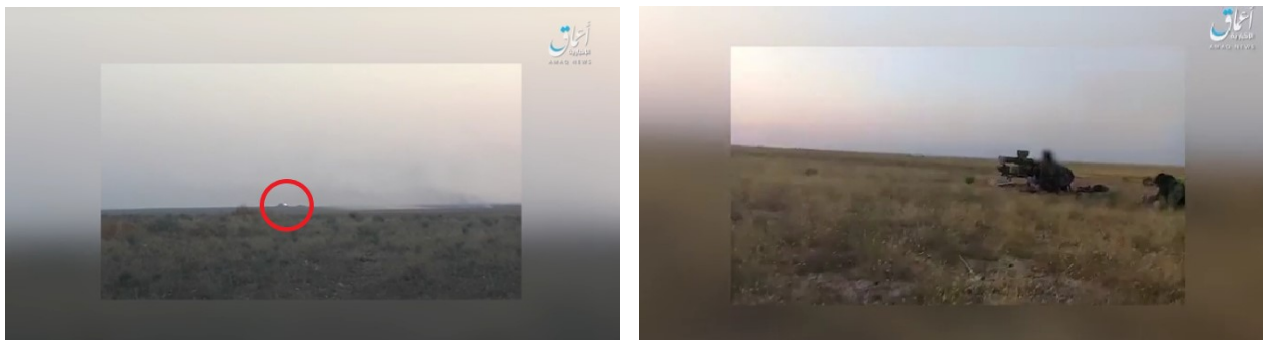
**Right: Detonation of the IED shown in a video released by ISIS (Telegram, September 22, 2019).  
Left: Site of the detonation, west of As-Suwayda (Google Maps)**

► **On September 21, 2019**, an IED was activated against a vehicle carrying a Syrian army brigadier general (*amid*) on the road between the village of Azra and As-Suwayda (about 25 km northeast of Daraa). The high-ranking officer was wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019).

In November 2018, the Syrian army took over the ISIS stronghold in As-Suwayda, thereby completing its takeover of southern Syria. However, in the summer of 2019, **ISIS resumed its guerrilla activities in the region of As-Suwayda-Daraa** against Syrian army soldiers. These sporadic activities included the detonation of IEDs against vehicles (June 4, 2019); a suicide bombing attack (July 27, 2019); and the detonation of an IED against a minibus (July 17, 2019). Two additional terrorist attacks were carried out last week. **All these activities may indicate that ISIS is rehabilitating itself in southern Syria, and like in other areas, it switched to guerrilla attacks, giving up its control over territories and populations.**

## Eastern Syria

► **ISIS reported that on September 21, 2019**, its operatives had ambushed a convoy of Russian and Syrian army forces **in the rural area north of Al-Sukhnah** (about 60 km northeast of Palmyra). Several IEDs were activated against vehicles in the convoy. Then there were exchanges of fire between the sides. About 15 Russian and Syrian soldiers were killed and wounded. Five military vehicles were destroyed and one tank was damaged by an antitank missile (Telegram, September 22, 2019).



**Right: ISIS operative preparing to fire an antitank missile at a Syrian army tank north of Al-Sukhnah. Left: The antitank missile hitting the Syrian army tank (Telegram, September 23, 2019).**

## The Euphrates Valley

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

- ▶ During the past week, ISIS's prominent modus operandi in the Euphrates Valley was the use of machine gun fire in its attacks, along with the detonation of IEDs. It is possible that ISIS suffers from a lack of explosives in the Euphrates Valley, maybe as a result of SDF counterterrorist activities.
- ▶ Following are highlights of ISIS's activity in the area between Deir ez-Zor and Albukamal:
  - ◆ **On September 18, 2019**, an IED was activated against the house of a local mukhtar (head of a commune) in the village of Shahil, about 9 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The building was damaged (Telegram, September 18, 2019).
  - ◆ **On September 18, 2019**, two SDF fighters in the Al-Basira area, about 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen, were shot and seriously wounded (Telegram, September 19, 2019).
  - ◆ **On September 20, 2019**, three SDF fighters in a village 14 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen were targeted by machine gun fire. Two fighters were killed and the third was wounded (Telegram, September 21, 2019).
  - ◆ **On September 20, 2019**, an SDF "agent" was targeted and killed by machine gun fire 20 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen (Telegram, September 21, 2019).
  - ◆ **On September 20, 2019**, an SDF position in the village of Diban, 5 km east of Al-Mayadeen, was targeted by machine gun fire. Two SDF fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 21, 2019).
  - ◆ **On September 21, 2019**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle in the village of Al-Dahla, 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The passengers were wounded (Telegram, September 21, 2019).

◆ **On September 23, 2019**, an SDF intelligence operative was shot and killed in the village of Shahil, 9 km north of Al-Mayadeen (Telegram, September 23, 2019).

## Main developments in Iraq

### ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activity

► During the past week, ISIS's terrorist and guerrilla activities in the various provinces in Iraq continued. Most of the activity took the form of detonating IEDs. Mortar shells and light weapons were also fired. Worthy of mention is the detonation of an IED against a minibus carrying Shiite visitors in the city of Karbala, a Shiite holy site. The main activities were as follows:

◆ **Nineveh Province:** An IED was detonated against the vehicle of a Tribal Mobilization intelligence commander some 90 km southwest of Mosul. The commander was seriously wounded. Two of his security guards were also wounded (Telegram, September 18, 2019).

◆ **Diyala Province:** Two IEDs were detonated against two Tribal Mobilization vehicles some 70 km northeast of Baqubah. Seven Tribal Mobilization fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 20, 2019).

◆ **Kirkuk Province:** ISIS operatives ambushed Iraqi police some 70 km west of Kirkuk and exchanged fire with them. A police vehicle caught fire and all the passengers were killed or wounded. When a police rescue force arrived at the scene, ISIS operatives detonated an IED against one of their vehicles. Three policemen were killed and a senior police officer was wounded (Telegram, September 20, 2019).

◆ **Karbala Province:** An IED was detonated against a minibus carrying Shiite visitors at the northern entrance to the city of Karbala. Twelve Shiites were killed (including women and children) and five others were wounded. According to Iraqi security sources, three people have been arrested as suspects in the attack (Telegram; Al-Hurra; Al-Rassed, September 21, 2019).



**The minibus attacked by ISIS  
(Al-Rassed, September 21, 2019)**

- ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** ISIS operatives fired mortar shells at local headquarters of the Tribal Mobilization and the Iraqi police some 40 km southwest of Kirkuk (Telegram, September 21, 2019).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** Five houses were set on fire in a Shiite village west of Khanaqin (Telegram, September 21, 2019).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** An IED was detonated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle 15 km west of Khanaqin. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** Snipers fired at the living quarters of Popular Mobilization soldiers 5 km south of Baqubah. A Popular Mobilization fighter was seriously wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** Iraqi soldiers were targeted some 30 km north of Baghdad. Two soldiers were killed and additional soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** An IED was detonated against a Tribal Mobilization vehicle some 150 km north of Baghdad. The passengers were wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** Machine guns were fired at a Tribal Mobilization vehicle some 30 km north of Baghdad. Three Tribal Mobilization operatives were killed (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ **Erbil Province:** An IED was detonated against an Iraqi army vehicle some 70 km southeast of Mosul. An officer and two soldiers were killed. Other soldiers were wounded (Telegram, September 22, 2019).

- ◆ **Diyala Province:** An IED was detonated against an Iraqi army sapper 6 km north of Baqubah. The sapper was killed (Telegram, September 23, 2019).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** An IED was detonated against Tribal Mobilization fighters about 40 km northeast of Baqubah. The Tribal Mobilization operative was killed (Telegram, September 23, 2019).
- ◆ **Kirkuk Province:** Machine guns were fired at Iraqi Federal Police personnel some 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. An Iraqi policeman was killed. In addition, three mortar shells were fired at the living quarters of police personnel in the area (Telegram, September 23, 2019).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** Snipers fired at Popular Mobilization fighters 6 km north of Baqubah. A Popular Mobilization fighter was killed and another was wounded (Telegram, September 24, 2019).
- ◆ **Diyala Province:** Snipers fired at a Popular Mobilization camp some 15 km west of Khanaqin. A Popular Mobilization fighter was killed and three others were wounded (Telegram, September 24, 2019).
- ◆ **Erbil Province:** An IED was detonated against a Tribal Mobilization vehicle some 70 km southeast of Mosul. Three Tribal Mobilization fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 24, 2019).
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** An IED was detonated against an Iraqi police vehicle in the Samarra area. All the passengers were killed. Another IED was detonated against police rescue forces arriving on the scene. A number of policemen were wounded (Telegram, September 24, 2019).
- ◆ **Salah al-Din Province:** Police were ambushed and machine guns were fired at them in the Samarra area. Three policemen were killed and two others were wounded (Telegram, September 24, 2019).



**Iraqi police weapons seized by ISIS operatives in the Samarra area  
(Telegram, September 24, 2019)**

◆ **Nineveh Province:** According to Iraqi army sources, ISIS operatives broke into the home of an Iraqi army officer some 30 km north of Mosul and killed his family. The operatives fled the scene (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, September 23, 2019). So far, ISIS has not claimed responsibility.

### Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

► **The Iraqi army continued Operation The Will to Win, with the goal of mopping up western and northern Iraq from the presence of ISIS operatives.** During the past week, the operation centered on the Al-Anbar Province, up to the border with Saudi Arabia. The operation took place with the support of International Coalition aircraft. According to an announcement by the Iraqi army, dozens of ISIS targets in the Al-Anbar Province were destroyed and ISIS's attempts to regroup were foiled. At the same time, the Iraqi army continued to mop up the Diyala Province from the presence of ISIS operatives (Al-Ghad Channel, September 16-22, 2019).



**Right: Iraqi army forces during the operation in the Al-Anbar Province (Iraqi Ministry of Defense, September 21, 2019). Left: Popular Mobilization force in the southern Al-Anbar Province (Popular Mobilization Military Information Office, September 21, 2019).**

► Iraqi police caught two ISIS operatives from the Kirkuk Province. The operatives had participated a week earlier in an attack against an Iraqi police headquarters, in which two

policemen were killed. The interrogation of the two operatives led to the discovery of an ISIS tunnel (Al-Sumaria, September 24, 2019).

## The Sinai Peninsula

### ISIS activity

- ▶ ISIS continued its terrorist and guerrilla activity in northern Sinai:
  - ◆ **On September 22, 2019**, an IED was detonated against an Egyptian army armored vehicle south of Sheikh Zuweid. Six soldiers were wounded (Anbaa Sinaa Facebook Page, September 23, 2019). ISIS’s Sinai Province is apparently responsible for the attack, although ISIS has not yet claimed responsibility.
  - ◆ **On September 23, 2019**, militants abducted two civilians from a house in the village of Al-Jura, some 10 km south of Sheikh Zuweid (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, September 23, 2019).

### Counterterrorist activities by the Egyptian security forces

- ▶ **On September 23, 2019**, Egyptian security forces raided a hiding place of “terrorist operatives” (i.e., ISIS operatives) west of Al-Arish. The two sides exchanged fire. A total of 15 “terrorist operatives” were reportedly wounded (Anbaa Sinaa Facebook Page, September 23, 2019).
- ▶ **On September 20, 2019**, the Egyptian Army fired artillery at villages south of Sheikh Zuweid (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, September 23, 2019). They were apparently firing at ISIS targets.
- ▶ For several days this week, stripping operations (i.e., removing trees and vegetation) were carried out in the Al-Ahrash neighborhood west of Rafah (Shahed Sinaa Facebook page, September 23, 22, 2019).

## ISIS’s activity around the globe

### Nigeria

- ▶ ISIS’s Amaq News Agency released a video documenting the execution of two Nigerian soldiers captured on September 5, 2019. The speaker voices a series of threats of revenge against “crimes committed against Muslims” (Telegram, September 22, 2019). On September 5, 2019, ISIS operatives carried out a sneak attack on the living quarters of Nigerian soldiers in

the town of Gajiram in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. Ten soldiers were killed and several others wounded. Apparently, soldiers from this incident are those who were captured by ISIS.



**The two Nigerian soldiers before being executed  
(Telegram, September 22, 2019)**

## Libya

► The US Africa Command (AFRICOM) announced that, in coordination with the Libyan Government of National Accord, AFRICOM aircraft carried out an airstrike against operatives of ISIS's Libya Province near Murzuq, in the southwest of the country. AFRICOM estimates that eight ISIS operatives were killed (AFRICOM, September 20, 2019).



**The city of Murzuq, where AFRICOM carried out its airstrike against ISIS operatives  
(Google Maps)**

## Somalia

► ISIS's Somalia Province released photos of the organization's training camp, showing the organization's operatives engaging in physical training, climbing cliffs, and small arms fire (Telegram, September 21, 2019).



**Right: ISIS operative during cliff climbing training at the organization's training camp in Somalia (Telegram, September 21, 2019). Left: ISIS operatives moving in a mountainous region (Telegram, September 21, 2019)**



**Right: Machine gun fire (Telegram, September 21, 2019). Left: Target practice accuracy check (Telegram, September 21, 2019)**

## Afghanistan

► ISIS's activity continues in the **Nangarhar Province**, mainly against government officials.

Main activity:

- ◆ Detonation of a sticky bomb against a so-called agent in Jalalabad, in the Nangarhar Province. He was killed (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ Detonation of an IED against a member of the Afghani Intelligence in Jalalabad. He was killed (Telegram, September 22, 2019).
- ◆ Shooting at a commander in a militia supporting the Afghani army in the Muhmand Dara area, in the southeastern part of the Nangarhar Province. The commander was killed (Telegram, September 20, 2019).

► ISIS's Khorasan Province announced the detonation of an IED against a Taliban commander **in the Kunar Province**, in eastern Afghanistan. The commander was killed and one of his escorts was wounded (Telegram, September 23, 2019).

## **Pakistan**

► ISIS's Pakistan Province announced that its operatives had fired at a Pakistani police commander in the Balochistan region, some 30 km southwest of Quetta. The police commander was killed (Telegram, September 19, 2019).