



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## January 9-15, 2020



### Highlights of the events

► On January 12, 2020, a **ceasefire agreed upon between Turkey and Russia entered into effect in the Idlib region**. Even after the ceasefire was declared (January 13 and 14, 2020), military friction continued between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the Syrian forces. In the ITIC's assessment, it is highly doubtful whether the ceasefire will survive for long because the fighting forces on the ground have no real interest in maintaining it over time. At a summit in Moscow, held by intelligence officials from Russia, Syria and Turkey, **Syrian representative Ali Mamlouk declared that Syria was determined to continue fighting against "terrorism" until the liberation of the entire Idlib region and the application of Syrian sovereignty there.**

► **In Iraq**, there was a meeting of senior commanders from the **Popular Mobilization** (the umbrella framework of Shiite militias), which examined the continuation of the campaign against ISIS following the killing of Qassem Soleimani and of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (deputy commander of the Popular Mobilization). **At the meeting, it was decided that the extensive security activity against ISIS would continue** in close coordination with the Iraqi security forces. In the ITIC's assessment, this decision may reflect an **Iranian decision to continue the campaign of the Iraqi Shiite militias against ISIS**, even after Soleimani's death. However, **on the ground, the Shiite militias operating as part of the Popular Mobilization continued their counterterrorism activity against ISIS and the Iraqi security forces.**

► **In Niger**, ISIS operatives attacked a Niger army base near the border with Mali. The Niger army sustained about 100 fatalities. **In Pakistan**, a terrorist blew himself up at the Taliban headquarters near Quetta (the capital of Balochistan). According to ISIS's announcement, 20 people were killed and more than 40 were wounded. **In the rest of ISIS's provinces abroad**, including Nigeria and the Sinai Peninsula, routine attacks continued.

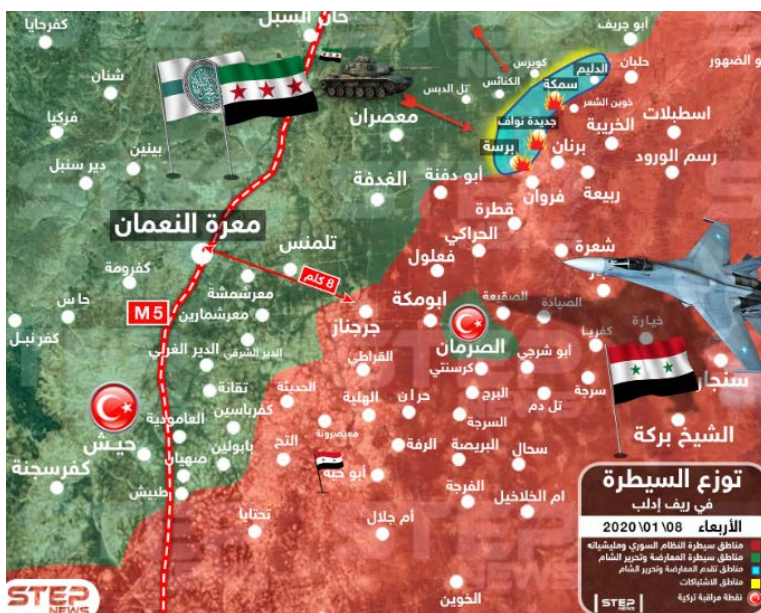
## Idlib region

### Overview

**On January 8, 2020**, operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham **mounted a local attack and took control of four villages** about 20 km northeast of Maarat Nu'man. In response, Syrian army forces fired artillery and Russian and Syrian fighter jets carried out a series of airstrikes. **On January 12, 2020, a ceasefire agreed upon between Russia and Turkey entered into effect.** At that time, the Russian and Syrian airstrikes stopped. However, the following day (January 13, 2020), the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continued its military activities against Syrian targets (artillery, antitank and sniper fire). **In the ITIC's assessment, it is highly doubtful whether the ceasefire will survive because both the Syrian army and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, the two main sides fighting on the ground, have no real interest to maintain it.**

### Offensive initiative by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in the Maarat Nu'man area

► **On January 8, 2020**, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the rebel organizations initiated an attack against the Tiger Forces under the command of Col. Suhail Hassan in the rural area northeast of Maarat Nu'man. It was reported that **the forces of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham with massive artillery support had taken over four villages in the area of Maarat Nu'man** (Khotwa, January 8, 2020).



Control zones in the Maarat Nu'man area (updated to January 8, 2020). Green: the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and other rebel organizations; Red: the Syrian army; Turquoise: area taken over by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham on January 8, 2020; Red dotted line: the Aleppo-Damascus highway (M5); circle with the Turkish flag: Turkish supervision post (Khotwa, January 8, 2020)



Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham during the attack against the Syrian army (Ibaa, January 8, 2020)



Rockets launched by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham against Syrian army positions east of Maarat Nu'man (Ibaa, January 8, 2020)

- The Syrian army dispatched reinforcements to the scene of the attack and fired massive artillery at the rural area of Maarat Nu'man (Ibaa, January 10, 2020; Syrian Observatory for

Human Rights, January 9, 2020). Syrian and Russian aircraft carried out a series of airstrikes (Edlib Media Center, January 8, 2020).

### Ceasefire agreement between Russia and Turkey in the Idlib region

**On January 12, 2020, a ceasefire entered into effect in the Idlib region.** The ceasefire was agreed upon **in the meeting** that took place on January 8, 2020, **between the Russian and Turkish presidents** (Anadolu News Agency; Sputnik News, January 12, 2020). As in previous agreements, **it is doubtful whether the current ceasefire agreement, in which Turkey has the greatest interest, will be maintained for a long time.** The **Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** (the dominant rebel organization) **is not party to the agreement** and it is highly doubtful whether it has any interest in a ceasefire in view of the achievements of the Syrian forces (which have reduced the area controlled by the rebel organizations). **In the ITIC's assessment, the Syrian army strives to complete the removal of the rebel organizations from the Idlib region, so it also does not have any real interest in maintaining the ceasefire.**

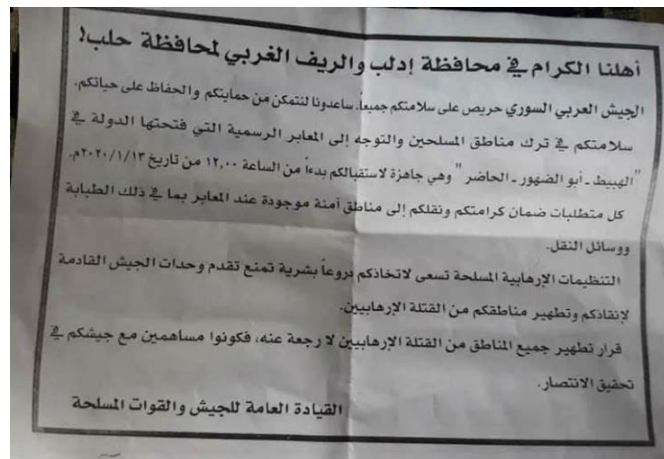
► **On the ground, on January 13 and 14, 2020, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continued its local military activity,** which included artillery fire north of Maarat Nu'man; firing antitank missiles at Syrian army forces west of Aleppo; nighttime sniper fire (by the thermal sniper shooting company) at Iranian-affiliated militiamen; and clashes with the Syrian army east of Maarat Nu'man. On the other hand, the Syrian army fired artillery at Maarat Nu'man, and Syrian and Russian fighter jets carried out airstrikes (January 14, 2020). All these activities indicate that **fighting on the ground continues, in spite of the Russian-Turkish ceasefire agreement.**



**Thermal sniper shooting company of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham shooting at “Iranian occupation militias” (i.e., militias handled by Iran). The shooting took place west of Aleppo, while militiamen were trying to evacuate the bodies of their operatives (Ibaa, January 13, 2020)**

## Appeal to residents of the Idlib region to evacuate the area controlled by the rebels

► On January 12, 2020, the Syrian Army General Headquarters distributed **leaflets asking residents of the Idlib region to evacuate the area. As of January 13, 2020, residents of the region were asked to arrive at three humanitarian crossings opened by the Syrian regime** (Al-Hobait, about 50 km south of Idlib; Abu ad-Duhur, about 40 km southeast of Idlib; and Al-Hader, about 20 km south of Aleppo). Medical teams and means of transportation will await them at the crossings, and from there they will be transported to safer areas. The Syrian Aid Center in Hmeymim will supervise the three crossings (Khotwa, January 12, 2020).



**The Syrian army calls on residents of the Idlib region to evacuate the area controlled by the rebels (Edlib Media Center, January 12, 2020)**

► **On January 13, 2020**, it was reported that dozens of civilians left the areas controlled by the rebels and moved through the Al-Hader humanitarian crossing (SANA, January 13, 2020). However, there are still no indications of a large-scale departure of civilians from the areas controlled by the rebel organizations. In the ITIC's assessment, the appeal to the residents to evacuate the Idlib region was intended **to prevent escalation of the refugee problem in the event of a Syrian attack to take over Idlib, the stronghold of the rebel organizations and the Syrian army's strategic target.**



Syrian regime's ambulance and mobile clinic awaiting civilians who wish to leave through one of the humanitarian crossings in the Idlib region (SANA, January 13, 2020)

## The Syrian representative at the Moscow summit: Syria is determined to liberate the entire Idlib region

► On January 13, 2020, a Syrian, Russian and Turkish meeting took place in Moscow with the participation of senior intelligence officials. The Syrian side was represented by **Maj. Gen. (Liwa) Ali Mamlouk**, the head of Syria's National Security Bureau, while the Turkish side was represented by **Hakan Fidan**, the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT). **The Russian side** was represented by several senior intelligence officials (SANA, January 13, 2020). The Syrian News Agency reported that **Syrian representative Ali Mamlouk demanded from Turkey "to fully and immediately withdraw"** from Syrian territory. As to the Idlib region, according to Mamlouk, **Syria is determined to continue fighting against "terrorism"** (i.e., the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the other rebel organizations) **until the liberation of the entire Idlib region and the application of Syrian sovereignty there** (SANA, January 13, 2020).

## The Euphrates Valley

### The area of Al-Mayadeen and Albukamal

► Prominent ISIS activity this week was an ambush for a Syrian army convoy southwest of Al-Raqqah. In addition, the activation of IEDs and targeted killings continued. Following are ISIS's main activities (mainly according to the organization's claims of responsibility):

- ◆ **On January 13, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked SDF fighters about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. One SDF fighter was wounded (Telegram, January 13, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 13, 2020**, an "agent" of the SDF Intelligence was targeted by gunfire in Al-Hawajj, 4 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed (Telegram, January 13, 2020).

- ◆ **On January 11, 2020**, an IED was activated **against a tanker carrying oil for the Syrian regime**, on the road leading to the Al-Omar oil field, about 20 km east of Al-Mayadeen. The tanker, belonging to Al-Qaterji, a Syrian MP and commander in the Homeland Defense Forces, went up in flames (Telegram, January 12, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 11, 2020**, a parked motorcycle was detonated in Hajin, 25 km north of Albukamal, against the deputy chairman of the local council of the SDF forces. The deputy chairman and one of his escorts were wounded (Telegram, January 11, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 11, 2020**, hand grenades were thrown at the house of a commune chief in the village of Harijiya, about 40 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. There were no casualties. A vehicle was damaged (Telegram, January 11, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 10, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle on the road leading to the Al-Tank oil field, about 50 km north of Albukamal. Five SDF fighters were killed (Telegram, January 10, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 8, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF armored vehicle in Al-Jaradi, about 20 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. An SDF commander and his security guards were killed (Telegram, January 8, 2020).

## Al-Raqqa area

- ▶ **On January 11, 2020, a Syrian army convoy was ambushed near the Al-Rasafah area, about 40 km southwest of Al-Raqqa.** Several Syrian soldiers were killed or wounded. ISIS operatives seized weapons and ammunition (Telegram, January 13, 2020).



The ambush area in Al-Rasafah (Google Maps)



**Right: ISIS operatives shooting at a Syrian army convoy. Left: A Syrian army vehicle in flames (Telegram, January 13, 2020)**

- **On January 14, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle west of Al-Raqqah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, January 14, 2020).

## The Iraqi arena

### ISIS activity

ISIS continued its activity in Iraq at **low intensity**. This was probably due to incidents related to the killing of Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and the stormy weather. The following are highlights of ISIS's activity in the various Iraqi provinces this week (according to ISIS's claims of responsibility).

#### Al-Anbar Province

- **On January 8, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army headquarters about 300 km west of Ramadi. The forces exchanged fire. Nine soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, January 9, 2020).
- **On January 8, 2020**, several mortar shells were fired at Popular Mobilization compounds on the road between Al-Qaim and Akashat, near the Iraqi-Syrian border (Telegram, January 9, 2020). No casualties were reported.
- **On January 13, 2020**, an Iraqi army headquarters was attacked near the Al-Walid border crossing, **at the border between Iraq and Syria** (near the tri-border area of Iraq, Syria and Jordan). According to ISIS report, five soldiers and an officer were killed. According to the Iraqi media, an officer with the rank of captain was killed and three Border Police fighters were wounded (Telegram; Al-Sumaria, January 14, 2020).



Al-Walid crossing, between Iraq and Syria (Google Maps)

### Diyala Province

► **On January 8, 2020**, a commando compound was targeted by sniper fire about 60 km north of Baqubah. Two commandos were killed (Telegram, January 9, 2020).

### Salah al-Din Province

► **On January 8, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army foot patrol about 70 km south of Kirkuk. Two soldiers were killed. An officer and two soldiers were wounded (Telegram, January 10, 2020).

► **On January 8, 2020**, hand grenades were thrown at an Iraqi army watchtower about 30 km southwest of Baqubah. One soldier was wounded (Telegram, January 10, 2020).

► **On January 11, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization force, in cooperation with Iraqi Federal Police, mopped up a number of areas including forests, fruit gardens, rivers and canals south of Samarra (about 100 km northwest of Baghdad) (al-hashed.net, January 11, 2020).



Force from Division 41 of the Popular Mobilization and the Iraqi Federal Police during a security operation (al-hashed.net, January 11, 2020).

## Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces and the Popular Mobilization

### The Popular Mobilization: The extensive security activity against ISIS will continue

On January 13, 2020, **commanders of the Popular Mobilization** (the umbrella framework of Shiite militias) **held a meeting at the headquarters of the deputy commander of the Popular Mobilization** (i.e., Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was killed along with Qassem Soleimani). At the meeting, **they examined the security and military priorities of the Popular Mobilization forces**. At the meeting, it was decided that **the extensive security activity would continue and that “quality” operations would be carried out against ISIS operatives**. It was also decided to continue to fortify the defense positions and to defend the borders against infiltration [by ISIS operatives] (al-hashed.net, January 13, 2020).

► The decision by the Popular Mobilization commanders emphasized the need **to intensify the coordination with the Iraqi security forces**. Support for the decisions of the Iraqi Parliament and Prime Minister on the removal of foreign forces from Iraq was also expressed (al-hashed.net, January 11, 2020). However, **on the ground, the militias operating in the framework of the Popular Mobilization continued their counterterrorism activity against ISIS**.



**Meeting on security and military priorities held by the Popular Mobilization commanders at the headquarters of the deputy commander of the Popular Mobilization. On the chair in the middle there is a photo of Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who were killed in the US attack on January 3, 2020 (al-hashed.net, January 13, 2020).**

### Nineveh Province

► The Iraqi army carried out a security operation called Promising Peace, during which they spent two days combing an area about 30 km north of Baghdad. They located a hiding place

of ISIS operatives containing IEDs, weapons and ammunition (@SecMedCell Facebook page of the Iraqi government, January 10, 2020).



**Security activity during Operation Promising Peace, and weapons seized in the operation (@SecMedCell Facebook page of the Iraqi government, January 10, 2020)**

► Other incidents are as follows:

◆ **On January 12, 2020**, Popular Mobilization forces exposed a hiding place containing an ISIS workshop for manufacturing weapons about 90 km southwest of Mosul. They found over 100 IEDs, explosive belts, weapons, and a large quantity of military equipment. This hiding place served as the main headquarters for carrying out attacks in sectors in the southern and western Nineveh Province (al-hashed.net, January 12, 2020).



**Right: Popular Mobilization fighters near an ISIS workshop which was discovered during their activity. Left: Dust cloud after controlled detonation of explosives and weapons found in the workshop (al-hashed.net, January 12, 2020)**

◆ **On January 11, 2020**, Iraqi Federal Police intelligence teams detained two ISIS operatives in Baghdad (Iraqi News Agency, January 11, 2020).



**The two ISIS operatives detained in Baghdad  
(Iraqi News Agency, January 11, 2020)**

- ◆ **On January 14, 2020**, a force of the Al-Anbar Operations Directorate combed the area of the Rutba District, about 280 km west of Ramadi (west of the Al-Anbar Province). Three ISIS operatives were detained. Another force apprehended an ISIS operative making his way from Ramadi to the Rutba Desert (Iraqi News Agency, January 14, 2020)

## The Sinai Peninsula

► ISIS's Sinai province operatives continued their "routine" attacks against the Egyptian security forces in northern Sinai. Following are the main attacks (according to ISIS's claims of responsibility):

- ◆ **On January 12, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army bulldozer near the Al-Ahrash camp in western Rafah. The bulldozer was put out of commission (Telegram, January 12, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 12, 2020**, an RPG rocket was launched at an Egyptian army tank near a checkpoint in western Rafah. The tank was put out of commission (Telegram, January 12, 2020).
- ◆ **On January 9, 2020**, an RPG rocket was launched at an Egyptian army tank near a checkpoint west of Rafah. The tank was put out of commission (Telegram, January 10, 2020).

## The activity of ISIS's provinces in Africa and Asia

## Nigeria

► This week, ISIS's activity continued in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria. Following are attacks for which ISIS's West Africa Province claimed responsibility:

◆ **On January 10, 2020**, a position of the forces supporting the Nigerian army was attacked about 70 km north of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. The forces exchanged fire. Five members of the forces supporting the Nigerian army were killed. In addition, weapons, ammunition and military equipment were seized (Telegram, January 11, 2020).

◆ **On January 10, 2020**, a Nigerian army compound was attacked about 70 km north of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed and wounded (Telegram, January 11, 2020).

◆ **On January 9, 2020**, a roadblock was set up about 40 km west of Maiduguri. A Nigerian soldier, a Nigerian policeman, a Christian civilian and a government official were taken prisoner (Telegram, January 10, 2020).

◆ **On January 9, 2020**, a Nigerian army compound was attacked in the city of Gom, in northeastern Nigeria. Several soldiers were killed and wounded (Telegram, January 11, 2020).

◆ **On January 7, 2020**, a car bomb driven by an ISIS suicide bomber exploded inside a Nigerian army compound in Manguno, in northeastern Nigeria. After the car bomb exploded, the forces exchanged fire. **Eight soldiers were killed and several others were wounded.** ISIS operatives seized weapons, ammunition, and vehicles (Telegram, January 8, 2020).

## Summary of four months of ISIS activity in Burkina Faso

► ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published an infographic summing up **about four months of activity of the West Africa Province in Burkina Faso** (from August 31, 2019, to December 26, 2019). According to the infographic, **the organization's operatives carried out more than 30 attacks during this period, in which 156 people were killed and wounded.** The main modus operandi was widespread attacks (7 attacks), followed by: targeted killings (6); raids (6); planting IEDs (5); ambushes (2); suicide bombing attacks (2); "other attacks" (2) (Telegram, January 9, 2020).

## Niger

### Attack on a Niger army base near the border with Mali

► ISIS's West Africa Province announced that on **January 9, 2020, the organization's operatives had attacked a Niger army base near the border with Mali**. According to the announcement, **100 soldiers were killed and dozens were wounded**. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized. According to ISIS's announcement, some of the soldiers fled toward the desert, but ISIS operatives caught them and killed them. French and US warplanes tried to help the Niger army curb the attack but failed, because the Niger army withdrew from its base (Telegram; Amaq, January 14, 2020). ISIS's West Africa Province released a claim of responsibility five days after the attack, probably because of communication problems in the organization's media system.

► **According to a report from January 13, 2020, Niger Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Ahmad Muhammad was ousted from office by Niger President Isoufou Mahamadou** after at least 89 Niger soldiers were killed in the attack. **This was the deadliest attack of its kind in Niger**. It was also reported that **at least 77 "militants" [i.e., ISIS operatives] were killed by the Niger army and its allies France and the United States**. The military response, which included airstrikes, led to the withdrawal of the "militants" from Niger (Voice of America, January 13, 2020).



**Right: ISIS operatives raiding the Nigerian army base. Left: ISIS operatives exchanging fire with Niger soldiers (Telegram, January 14, 2020)**



**Right: Smoke rising above the Niger army base. Left: ISIS operatives near two Niger army vehicles seized by them during the attack (Telegram, January 14, 2020).**

### ISIS ambush near the border between Niger and Mali

► **On January 9, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Niger Border Police forces in western Niger, about 250 km northeast of the capital Niamey (about 75 km southeast of the Niger-Mali border). **A total of 14 soldiers were killed.** In addition, vehicles, weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, January 14, 2020).



**The area of the ambush (Google Maps)**

### Somalia

► **On January 9, 2020**, a Somali policeman was shot and killed in the city of Bosaso on the shores of the Gulf of Aden (northeastern Somalia) (January 10, 2020).

### Pakistan

► **On January 11, 2020**, a terrorist blew himself up during Friday prayers at a mosque in a town located near the city of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan (in western Pakistan). **At least**

**16 people were killed, including a chief superintendent in the police force.** A total of 19 people were wounded (The Times of India, January 11, 2020).

► **ISIS's Pakistan Province claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to the claim of responsibility, an ISIS operative codenamed Abu Jarrah al-Baluchi broke into the Taliban headquarters and blew himself up with his explosive vest. According to the claim of responsibility, **19 Taliban operatives and a senior officer in the Pakistani police force were killed, and more than 40 others were wounded.** It also stated that in the city of Quetta and its suburbs there is a Taliban command center and many of the headquarters of the organization which operate under the protection of the Pakistani Intelligence and the Pakistani army (January 10, 2020). On the other hand, the Taliban spokesman denied that Afghan Taliban had been in this mosque at the time (The Times of India, January 11, 2020).



The city of Quetta, in western Pakistan (Google Maps)



**Right: Pakistani security operative stationed at the entrance to the mosque where the suicide bombing was carried out by ISIS (Samaa, a private satellite news channel in Pakistan, January 11, 2020). Left: ISIS operative Abu Jarrah al-Baluchi who carried out the suicide bombing attack (Telegram, January 10, 2020)**