



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## March 12-18, 2020



### Highlights of the events

- ▶ The ceasefire **in the Idlib region** entered into effect on March 15, 2020 following the agreement between Russia and Turkey. It is generally being maintained. Local incidents took place in some places, with each side accusing the other of breaking the agreement.
- ▶ **The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham**, and probably other rebel organizations as well, launched a campaign to disrupt the movement of the joint Russian and Turkish patrols on the M-4 highway (the Aleppo-Latakia highway). The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham initiated demonstrations by civilians near the highway. In addition, its operatives placed spikes and boulders on parts of the road and blew up a bridge about 20 km southwest of Idlib. So far, it is unclear how Russia and Turkey will respond to the attempts to disrupt the movement of the patrols decided upon in the Russian-Turkish agreement.
- ▶ **In the Euphrates Valley**, ISIS's attacks continued this week, focusing on the elimination of local SDF intelligence personnel in the Al-Mayadeen-Albukamal region. **In Iraq**, ISIS's activity was characterized by activating IEDs and firing light weapons at vehicles of the Iraqi security forces, attacks on Iraqi army camps, and sniper fire.
- ▶ **ISIS's provinces abroad** continued their routine activity: **In the Sinai Peninsula**, there was an attempt on the life of the commander of the Bir al-Abd police (the commander survived, a soldier who was with him was killed); **In Nigeria**, ISIS operatives continued their attacks on army camps in Borno, in the northeast of the country; **In Niger**, ISIS operatives attacked Niger army bases near the border with Mali. According to ISIS, dozens of Nigerian and French soldiers were killed in these attacks; **In Somalia**, ISIS operatives killed a policeman in the northeast of the country; **In Yemen**, attacks against positions of the Houthi rebels continued; **and in the Philippines**, ISIS operatives exchanged fire with the Philippine army on Jolo Island, in the southern Philippines.

## Idlib region

### Ceasefire between Russia and Turkey

#### Situation on the ground

The ceasefire agreed upon between Russia and Turkey entered into effect on March 5, 2020.

**On the whole, it is being maintained** and the rival sides refrain from resuming offensive moves. However, local violations of the ceasefire continue, with each side accusing the other of breaking the agreement. In the talks between the two countries, Russia and Turkey agreed to set up joint coordination centers in the Idlib region (Anadolu, March 13, 2020).

► **On March 12, 2020**, official Syrian sources announced that operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and rebel organizations affiliated with them had continued to violate the ceasefire. According to the statement, the rebel organizations fired mortar shells at Syrian army positions 3.5 km from the city of Maarat Nu'man (36 km southwest of Idlib). The Syrian army returned fire. According to the statement, three rebel organizations violated the ceasefire agreement 33 times since it entered into effect, by artillery fire at populated areas and Syrian army positions (SANA, March 12, 2020).

► On the other hand, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham reported that on March 12 and 15, 2020, the Syrian army had fired artillery at several towns and villages in the Idlib region and west of Aleppo. Apart from that, tense calm was retained in the first ten days since the Russian-Turkish agreement came into effect (Ibaa, March 12, 2020; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 5, 2020).

#### The joint patrols along the M-4 highway

► The Syrian transport minister announced that on March 12, 2020, the Syrians started to remove dirt embankments from the M-4 highway. The Syrian Transport Ministry announced its intention to recommission this traffic artery (Al-Watan, affiliated with the Syrian regime, March 12, 2020). On March 15, 2020, Russia and Turkey started to implement the joint patrols on the M-4 highway (from around the city of Saraqeb up to Ein al-Hour). A joint Russian-Turkish coordination center is supposed to oversee the joint patrols (TASS; Al-Jazeera, March 15, 2020).

**The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham**, which objects to the Turkish-Russian agreement, launched a campaign to disrupt the joint patrols on the M-4 highway. As part of this campaign, its operatives placed spikes on the road, increased their presence in various sections, and had civilians disrupt traffic.



**Right: Spikes laid by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham on the M-4 highway. Left: Armed operative of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham near the spikes (@VanessaBeeley Twitter account, March 16, 2020)**

► On March 11, 2020, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham organized a demonstration with the participation of social activists and local residents on the M-4 highway, close to the city of Jisr al-Shughur (about 20 km southwest of Idlib). The protesters expressed their objection to the opening of the M-4 highway and the patrols of the “Russian conqueror” (Ibaa, March 12, 2020). Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the so-called salvation government (the administrative entity controlled by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham) organized the transportation of demonstrators. They also distributed tents, food and drink (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 15, 2020).

► The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and other rebel organizations are running a campaign aimed at disrupting the movement of the Russian-Turkish patrols along the M-4 highway. Following are actions taken so far:

- ◆ The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and civilians blocked the M-4 highway on March 15, 2020 (the first day of the joint patrols). The first joint patrol, which set out from Saraqeb (15 km southeast of Idlib), reached Nayrab (8.5 km southeast of Idlib) and was forced to turn back (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 15, 2020). Official Syrian sources reported on **March 15, 2020** that the M-4

highway was blocked by “terrorist organizations backed by the Turkish regime” (SANA, March 15, 2020). The Russian Defense Ministry announced that the route of the Russian-Turkish patrols had been cut short due to the activity of “radical organizations which do not fall under Turkey’s control,” which make use of women and children as human shields (TASS, March 15, 2020).



**Protest on the M-4 highway against the Russian-Turkish patrols  
(Edlib Media Center – EMC, March 15, 2020)**



**Right: Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and their children blocking the M-4 highway. Left: Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham on the M-4 highway (Syria News, which opposes the rebel organizations, March 16, 2020)**

- ◆ **On March 16, 2020**, it was reported that the “terrorist” organizations had destroyed a bridge on the M-4 highway around the village of Mahambal, 21 km southwest of Idlib, in order to impede the movement of the Russian-Turkish patrols (SANA, March 16, 2020)



**The bridge southwest of Idlib, which was blown up by the rebel organizations (SANA, March 16, 2020)**

- ◆ **On March 17, 2020**, operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham laid dirt embankments and boulders on the M-4 highway near the town of Nayrab, about 8 km southeast of Idlib (SANA, March 17, 2020).

## Highlights of ISIS's activity

### The area of Al-Mayadeen and Albukamal

ISIS's intensive activity in the Euphrates Valley continues, with targeted killing of SDF intelligence members being the prominent form of activity. It appears that ISIS has recently intensified its activity against the SDF intelligence operatives southeast of Al-Mayadeen. To that end, ISIS apparently uses information extracted from prisoners before they are executed.

- **On March 15, 2020**, several IEDs were detonated at the home of an SDF commander in Darnaj, 14 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. Part of the house was destroyed (Telegram, March 16, 2020). ISIS released a video showing its operatives making the IEDs to blow up the house and an ISIS operative threatening to kill the Kurds (Telegram, March 17, 2020).



**ISIS operative making the IEDs (Telegram, March 17, 2020).**

- ▶ **On March 13, 2020**, an SDF fighter was targeted by machine gun fire in the village of Jaradi, about 20 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. The fighter was killed (Telegram, March 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 13, 2020**, a vehicle of an SDF intelligence operative was set on fire around the village of Al-Basira, 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen (Telegram, March 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 12, 2020**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire in the village of Darnaj, 14 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was wounded (Telegram, March 12, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 12, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an SDF “agent” prisoner around the village of Al-Basira, 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The “agent” was interrogated and then executed (Telegram, March 12, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives broke into the house of an SDF intelligence operative in the village of Darnaj, 14 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was interrogated and then executed (Telegram, March 11, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle 29 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Two SDF fighters were wounded (Telegram, March 11, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 10, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Syrian soldiers southeast of Aleppo. Seven soldiers were taken prisoner and executed (Telegram, March 11, 2020).

### Al-Raqqah area

- ▶ **On March 11, 2020**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire in the village of Al-Sabi’at, about 35 km southeast of Al-Raqqah. He was severely wounded (Telegram, March 11, 2020).

## The Iraqi arena

### Relatively reduced ISIS activity during the week

#### Diyala Province

- ▶ **On March 17, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Iraqi government counterterrorism forces in the village of Sheikhi, about 15 km northeast of Baqubah. Two fighters were killed (Telegram, March 17, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 17, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Shiite in the area of Al-Abara, northeast of Baqubah. He was wounded (Telegram, March 17, 2020).

- ▶ **On March 16, 2020**, two Tribal Mobilization fighters were targeted by sniper fire in the village of Had al-Akhdar, about 15 km northeast of Baqubah. Both were wounded (March 17, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 13, 2020**, a Tribal Mobilization commander was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km southeast of Baghdad. He was killed (Telegram, March 14, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 11, 2020**, an Iraqi army camp was targeted by sniper fire about 60 km north of Baqubah. One soldier was killed (Telegram, March 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed and shot at a vehicle carrying Tribal Mobilization operatives about 60 km north of Baqubah. One of the operatives was wounded (Telegram, March 13, 2020).

### Salah al-Din Province

- ▶ **On March 12, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an Iraqi soldier prisoner about 35 km north of Baghdad. He was executed (Telegram, March 13, 2020).

### Al-Anbar Province

- ▶ **On March 16, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army headquarters about 40 km east of Al-Rutba, in western Iraq. During the attack, the operatives and the Iraqi soldiers exchanged fire. One soldier was killed and others were wounded. Weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, March 17, 2020).



### Weapons, ammunition and equipment seized by ISIS in an attack against an Iraqi army headquarters 40 km west of Al-Rutba (Telegram, March 17, 2020)

- ▶ **On March 16, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an Iraqi intelligence operative prisoner east of Al-Rutba. He was shot to death by machine gun fire (Telegram, March 17, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 14, 2020**, an IED was activated against a mukhtar working for the Iraqi national security services in Al-Rutba. The mukhtar was wounded (Telegram, March 15, 2020).

► **On March 14, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army camp in the city of Hit, in western Iraq. During the attack, the operatives exchanged fire with the Iraqi soldiers. According to ISIS, five Iraqi soldiers were killed. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, March 15, 2020).

► **On March 14, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle near the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Four Iraqi soldiers were killed (Telegram, March 15, 2020).

## Counterterrorism activities by the Iraqi security forces

### Salah al-Din Province

► **On March 15, 2020**, the Iraqi security forces carried out an operation against ISIS about 6 km west of Samarra. They fired small arms and Katyusha rockets at the ISIS force. Several ISIS operatives were wounded and the others fled. An ISIS guesthouse was destroyed in the operation (al-hashed.net, March 15, 2020).



**Right: Popular Mobilization operative firing an anti-aircraft gun at ISIS operatives west of Samarra. Left: Katyusha rockets being fired at ISIS operatives west of Samarra (al-hashed.net, March 15, 2020).**



**Two Popular Mobilization operatives during the operation west of Samarra (al-hashed.net, March 15, 2020)**

► **On March 12, 2020**, an Iraqi army force searching the Makhmur area, about 50 km southwest of Erbil, located an ISIS hideout. Over 100 IEDs and close to 90 activation mechanisms for the detonation of IEDs were found at the site. In addition, two tunnels were destroyed (Facebook page of the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Office, March 12, 2020).



**Right: Iraqi soldiers near the explosives found in the searches. Left: Iraqi soldier near the opening of an ISIS tunnel (Facebook page of the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Office, March 12, 2020)**

### **Al-Anbar Province**

► **On March 14, 2020**, the Iraqi security forces carried out a large-scale operation in the western Al-Anbar desert. No details were disclosed, but it was said that the operation had achieved its goals (al-hashed.net, March 14, 2020).



**The Iraqi security forces during a large-scale operation against ISIS (al-hashed.net, March 14, 2020)**

► **On March 12, 2020**, an Iraqi army force operating in the Fallujah district, about 45 km west of Baghdad, located an ISIS hideout. Many dozens of IEDs and explosives were found on the site. The IEDs were neutralized in a controlled manner (Facebook account of the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Office, March 12, 2020)



**C4 IEDs found west of Baghdad**  
(Facebook page of the Iraqi Prime Minister's Office, March 12, 2020)

### Nineveh Province

► **On March 13, 2020**, an Iraqi army force located an ISIS weapons depot about 100 km west of Mosul. The depot contained 180 mortar shells and dozens of IEDs and artillery shells (Facebook account of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, March 13, 2020).



**IEDs and mortar shells located by an Iraqi army force west of Mosul**  
(Facebook account of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, March 13, 2020)

### Al-Sulaymaniyah Province

► **On March 13, 2020**, Iraqi security forces working with Kurdish internal security forces in this province apprehended six ISIS operatives who were wanted for carrying out attacks (Al-Sumaria, March 13, 2020).

## The Sinai Peninsula

► **On March 14, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army armored vehicle in Rafah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, March 16, 2020).

► **On March 14, 2020**, “jihad terrorist operatives” (i.e., ISIS operatives) fired at the vehicle of the Bir al-Abd police commander. An Egyptian soldier was killed. The commander survived the assassination attempt. The attack was carried out in response to the Egyptian army's intensive activity against ISIS (Anbaa Sinaa Facebook page, March 15, 2020).

► **On March 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army bulldozer near Kafr al-Ajra, southwest of Sheikh Zuweid. The bulldozer was put out of commission (Telegram, March 11, 2020).

### Counterterrorist activity

► **On March 13, 2020**, a joint force of the Egyptian army and the local tribes that support it in fighting against ISIS operated in the Rafah area. The force located the ISIS commander in Rafah, Fares al-Ansari, who had fled to a hiding place in the desert southeast of Rafah. Al-Ansari fired at the force and was killed during the exchange of fire. Al-Ansari pledged allegiance to ISIS several years ago and was responsible for many attacks (Sinaa News 24 Facebook page, March 13, 2020). ISIS's Amaq News Agency announced his death (Telegram, March 14, 2020).



ISIS's announcement of the death of Fares al-Ansari  
(Telegram, March 14, 2020)

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

### Africa

#### Nigeria

► During the past week, ISIS continued its attacks on the Nigerian army in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria:

- ◆ **On March 15, 2020**, ISIS operatives repelled an attack by the Nigerian army. Several Nigerian soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, March 15, 2020).
- ◆ **On March 13, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army camp. According to ISIS, several Nigerian soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, March 13, 2020).

- ◆ **On March 12, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army camp about 80 km northwest of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Several Nigerian soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, March 12, 2020).
- ◆ **On March 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Nigerian soldiers. Several soldiers were killed or wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, March 11, 2020).
- ◆ **On March 10, 2020**, ISIS operatives launched mortar shells at a Nigerian army camp. According to ISIS, target hits were observed (Telegram, March 11, 2020).

## Niger

- ▶ **On March 16, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerien army camp in the Diffa area, about 3 km from the border between Niger and Nigeria. According to ISIS, several Nigerien soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, March 17, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 16, 2020**, ISIS operatives launched mortar shells at a Nigerien army camp near the border between Niger and Nigeria. According to ISIS, target hits were observed (Telegram, March 16, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 14, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerien army base in Oyero, near the border between Niger and Nigeria. According to ISIS, 25 Nigerien soldiers were killed or wounded. In addition, weapons, ammunition and several vehicles were seized (Telegram, March 14, 2020).
- ▶ **On March 10, 2020**, ISIS operatives fired mortar shells at a Nigerien army camp in the town of Bouza, on the border between Niger and Nigeria. According to ISIS, target hits were observed (Telegram, March 11, 2020).

## Mali

- ▶ **On March 10, 2020**, an ISIS suicide bomber codenamed Abdullah al-Ansari detonated a car bomb against a French and Malian army convoy 64 km north of the border between Mali and Niger. According to ISIS, dozens of French and Nigerien soldiers were killed or wounded. The next day, **on March 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against the same convoy in the same area. One vehicle was destroyed and all its passengers were killed (Telegram, March 14, 2020).



**Abdullah al-Ansari, ISIS's suicide bomber who detonated a car bomb against French and Malian soldiers (Telegram, March 14, 2020)**

### Somalia

► **On March 12, 2020**, a Somali policeman was shot at near the municipality building in the city of Bosaso on the shores of the Gulf of Aden in northeastern Somalia. He was killed (Telegram, February 12, 2020).

### The Philippines

► **On March 14, 2020**, ISIS operatives exchanged fire with Filipino soldiers in the Patikul area, on the island of Jolo, in the south of the country. According to ISIS, 10 Filipino soldiers were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, March 14, 2020).

### Yemen

► **On March 15, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Houthi rebels in Qifah, in the northwestern Al-Bayda Province (about 100 km southeast of Sana'a). All the passengers were killed. Another IED was activated against a vehicle that arrived to offer assistance. The passengers were wounded (Telegram, March 16, 2020).

► **On March 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked positions of the Houthi rebels in Qifah. Two Houthi fighters were killed and two others were wounded. In addition, two vehicles were destroyed (Telegram, March 12, 2020).



**Vehicle of the Houthi rebels that was set on fire by ISIS operatives during the attack in Qifah (Telegram, March 14, 2020)**

## ISIS activity in the West

### Canada

► On March 16, 2020, police sources in Canada reported that an attack with a hammer that had been carried out on February 21, 2020 in Toronto was carried out due to the attacker's support for ISIS. A 64-year-old woman was murdered in the attack. The attacker, Saad Akhtar, 30, is an East Asian (probably Pakistani) resident of Toronto. The attacker used to attend a local mosque, and police are examining documents that apparently link him to ISIS (globalnews.ca, March 16, 2020).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Kazakhstan

► In March 2020, an ISIS supporter was detained in Kazakhstan. He had planned to carry out an attack during the upcoming spring celebrations (Nowruz). The attack was planned to be carried out in the city of Almaty, in southern Kazakhstan, near the border with Kyrgyzstan. A month ago, two other people suspected of planning this attack were arrested and their interrogation may have led to the current arrest (MBS, March 14, 2020).



**The ISIS supporter being led by Kazakh security personnel  
(Telegram, based on the Kazakhstan security forces, March 16, 2020)**

## The battle for hearts and minds

### Video released by the Iraq Province

- ▶ ISIS's Iraq Province – Kirkuk Region released a video entitled “Defeating their Enemy.” In the video, ISIS conveys a message to its enemies, and especially to the United States and the Iraqi regime, that the victory that they claim to have achieved is not real and that dropping bombs and killing operatives is not the way to win.
- ▶ The video includes documentation of ISIS attacks carried out recently, mainly in the nighttime. The attacks documented in the video are of various types: planting IEDs against vehicles of the Iraqi security forces; mortar shell fire; targeted killings of collaborators; activating IEDs in the homes of collaborators and setting fire to their fields. The video shows a group of ISIS operatives in the Kirkuk region. One of the operatives threatens residents of the region not to cooperate with the Iraqi authorities (Telegram, March 13, 2020).



**Activation of an IED against an Iraqi police vehicle (right) and an Iraqi army vehicle (left)  
(Telegram, March 13, 2020)**



**Right: Mortar shell fire. Left: Fields being set on fire  
(Telegram, March 13, 2020)**