



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## May 21-26, 2020



### Overview

- ▶ The synchronized wave of attacks known as the Raids of Attrition, which began on May 14, **ended on May 24, 2020. Over a period of 10 days, more than 100 attacks were carried out, the vast majority in Iraq (about 40) and Syria (about 30).** After them, by a wide margin, are **Nigeria (8 attacks)** and other provinces in Africa and Asia (a few attacks in each province).
- ▶ A comparison of the current wave of attacks and the four waves of attacks carried out in 2019, leads to the following conclusions:
  - ◆ **Duration:** The current wave of attacks **lasted longer than its predecessors**, although not significantly (8 days in December 2019; 8 days in August; 4 days in May-June and 4 days in April).
  - ◆ **Location of the attacks:** In all of the waves of attacks, **most of the attacks were carried out in Iraq and Syria.** A small number of attacks were carried out in ISIS's provinces in Africa and Asia, mainly in West Africa.
  - ◆ **Nature of the attacks:** Most of the attacks were **unsophisticated; no unusually complex or deadly showcase attacks were carried out. No attacks were carried out in the West.**
- ▶ Hence, an analysis of the current wave of attacks indicates **an improvement in ISIS's operational capability, mainly in the Iraqi arena** and to some extent in the Syrian arena as well, **in contrast with ISIS's other provinces around the world. In the current wave of attacks, ISIS has again demonstrated the ability to focus its efforts on a defined and scheduled mission and to time its attacks and media activity in its various provinces.** The image of power that ISIS is attempting to convey **is only partially borne out on the ground** and, in the ITIC's assessment, has failed to rehabilitate its image after the severe blows that it suffered with the fall of its territorial strongholds in Iraq and Syria, and the killing of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

► A noteworthy attack carried out by ISIS during the past week was **an attack against an Egyptian border patrol force** east of Sheikh Zuweid. Four members of the force were killed. Photos published by ISIS **show some of the operatives who participated in the attack wearing Egyptian army uniforms**. In the ITIC's assessment, this was in order to mislead the Egyptian forces at the scene. In another operation carried out in the area of Sheikh Zuweid, eight ISIS operatives killed four so-called Egyptian spies. According to ISIS, the eight operatives **also wore Egyptian army uniforms**.

## The Idlib region

### Overview

**The ceasefire in the Idlib region was maintained this week.** It was violated by local clashes between the Syrian army and the rebel forces around the town of Kafrunubl (about 30 km south of Idlib). The joint patrols of the Syrian and Turkish armies continued uninterrupted. A protest prayer was held by local residents on the M-4 highway near Idlib, without any unusual events. In the ITIC's assessment, it took place on the initiative of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham.

### Joint patrols of the Russian and Turkish armies continue

► **The joint patrols of the Russian and Turkish armies continued this week. On May 20, 2020,** Turkey and Russia carried out their 12th joint patrol on the M-4 highway (Aleppo-Latakia). For the first time, the patrol went beyond the town of Ariha (about 10 km south of Idlib) and reached a village about 17 km southwest of Idlib (Enab Baladi; Anatolia, May 20, 2020).



**Armored vehicles of the Turkish army and the Russian Military Police during the joint patrol on the M-4 highway (Anatolia, May 20, 2020)**

► **On May 22, 2020**, civilian activists called on residents of the Idlib region to take part in the Eid al-Fitr prayer and listen to a sermon **on the M-4 highway, near the bridge of the town of Ariha**. The prayer and sermon were intended to express the residents' objection to the joint patrols. In the ITIC's assessment, the call to attend the prayer and sermon came from the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, which is trying to instigate the local population to disrupt the joint patrols. In practice, **on May 24, 2020**, a holiday prayer was led by Abd al-Razzaq al-Mahdi, an operative affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (Enab Baladi, May 24, 2020). **The protest prayer and sermon took place without any unusual events.**



**Eid al-Fitr prayer on the M-4 highway, led by Abd al-Razzaq al-Mahdi (right), who is affiliated with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (Enab Baladi, May 24, 2020)**

### Turkish army reinforcements arriving at the Idlib region

► **On May 23, 2020**, a Turkish army convoy comprising 30 military vehicles entered Syrian territory. The convoy was escorted by **operatives of the Faylaq al-Sham rebel organization**<sup>1</sup>. It reached the rural area southeast of Idlib (Khotwa, May 23, 2020).



**Turkish army armored vehicles en route to the Idlib region (Khotwa, May 23, 2020)**

<sup>1</sup> **Faylaq al-Sham** is a Turkish-affiliated Islamic rebel organization. It was established in March 2014 by officers who deserted from the Syrian army. The organization, comprising several thousands of operatives, is part of the National Liberation Front, a Turkish-backed umbrella framework fighting against the Syrian army in the Idlib region, alongside the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham.

## Prisoner exchange between an organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Syrian army

► On May 22, 2020, a **prisoner exchange deal was carried out between the Syrian army and the “Awaken the Believers” operations room** (an Al-Qaeda-affiliated umbrella network of jihadi organizations led by the Guardians of Religion Organization). The Syrian army released two women and three boys. One of the women is the wife of a commander in the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham. In return, the jihadi operatives released three members of a militia supporting the Syrian army, who were captured during the clashes in the Turkmen Mountain (southwest of Idlib) (Twitter account affiliated with the “Awaken the Believers” operations room; Khotwa, May 22, 2020).



**Right: Operatives of the “Awaken the Believers” operations room and a member of the Syrian Red Crescent welcoming two women and one of the three boys who were released. Left: Three members of a militia supporting the Syrian army, a short while before being released (Twitter account affiliated with the “Awaken the Believers” operations room, May 23, 2020)**

► **This is the third prisoner exchange deal** carried out recently between the rebel organizations and the Syrian army. The first deal was carried out with the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham<sup>2</sup>, the second with the National Liberation Front (a Turkish-backed umbrella network), and the third with the Guardians of the Religion Organization (an Al-Qaeda-affiliated organization operating as part of the “Awaken the Believers” operations room) (Enab Baladi, May 24, 2020).

## Northeastern Syria

ISIS’s intensive activity in the Euphrates Valley continued this week, mainly in the form of IEDs against SDF vehicles and targeted killings.

<sup>2</sup> See Spotlight on Global Jihad, May 14-20, 2020.

## The area of Al-Mayadeen and Albukamal

- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an SDF fighter prisoner about 70 km north of Deir ez-Zor. He was shot to death (Telegram, May 24, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 20 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Two fighters were wounded (Telegram, May 23, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle on the road leading to the Al-Omar oil field, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an SDF “agent” prisoner about 5 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was interrogated and then executed (Telegram, May 21, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an SDF vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. Two fighters were killed (Telegram, May 21, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 25 km north of Albukamal. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an SDF intelligence operative prisoner about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was interrogated and then executed (Telegram, May 20, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, an SDF fighter was targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed (Telegram, May 20, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives took an SDF fighter prisoner about 5 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was interrogated and then executed (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

## The Al-Raqqah area

- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an SDF vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km southwest of Al-Raqqah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 70 km northwest of Al-Raqqah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

## The Al-Hasakah area

► On May 20, 2020, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).

## Eastern Syria (Al-Sukhnah-Palmyra region)

► On May 21, 2020, a Syrian soldier riding a motorcycle was targeted by machine gun fire northwest of Al-Sukhnah. He was wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).



The Syrian soldier's motorcycle seized by ISIS  
(Telegram, May 22, 2020)

## The Iraqi arena

### ISIS's Iraq Province taking the lead in ISIS's activity

► On May 21, 2020, ISIS released an infographic entitled "The Harvest of the Fighters," summing up its activity in the various provinces **between May 14 and May 20, 2020**. A total of **158 attacks were carried out around the world: 84 of them (about 53%) in Iraq**, 39 in Syria, 13 in the West Africa Province, 9 in the Sinai Province, 4 in the Central Africa Province, and the rest in other provinces (Telegram, May 21, 2020).

In addition, ISIS released an infographic summing up **the military activity in its various provinces in Iraq** between April 24, 2020 and May 20, 2020. During this time, ISIS operatives carried out **226 attacks throughout Iraq, killing or wounding 426 people**. A total of 97 attacks **were carried out in the Diyala Province**. Following them are the provinces of **Kirkuk (41), North Baghdad (19), Al-Anbar (16), Salah al-Din (15), and Al-Janub (Babel Province) (15)**. Sporadic attacks were also carried out in other provinces. Most of the attacks were carried out in the form of **detonating IEDs and sniper fire** (Telegram, May 21, 2020).

## Highlights of ISIS's activity during the past week

### Diyala Province

- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an Iraqi police patrol was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km northeast of Baqubah. Two policemen were wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 20 km northeast of Baqubah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by sniper fire about 20 km southwest of Khanaqin. He was wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, an IED was activated against two members of the oil facility security police about 10 km northwest of Baqubah. One policeman was killed and the other was wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

### Salah al-Din Province

- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 30 km north of Baghdad. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 24, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 22, 2020**, two Iraqi policemen were targeted by sniper fire in the Samarra area. About five policemen were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 24, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 22, 2020**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by machine gun fire about 30 km north of Baghdad. He was wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

### Kirkuk Province

- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi police vehicle about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. The passengers were wounded (Telegram, May 25, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, a compound of the oil facility security police was targeted by machine gun fire about 40 km northwest of Kirkuk. Three policemen were killed and another was wounded (Telegram, May 23, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Tribal Mobilization vehicle about 45 km west of Kirkuk. Two fighters were killed. When another force arrived at the scene to provide assistance, an IED was activated against it. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 23, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, a sticky bomb was activated against a Kurdish Peshmerga vehicle in central Kirkuk. An officer and three fighters were wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

► **On May 20, 2020**, a vehicle of the oil field security police was targeted by machine gun fire on the Baiji-Kirkuk highway. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).

### Al-Anbar Province

► **On May 24, 2020**, ISIS operatives fired **at an Iraqi army helicopter** near Al-Rutba. The helicopter was hit. The crew and passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 25, 2020). However, Iraqi “security sources” reported that an Iraqi Air Force aircraft providing support to anti-ISIS ground activity was targeted by gunfire. The aircraft was slightly damaged but returned safely to its base (Al-Sumaria, May 25, 2020).

► **On May 22, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army headquarters about 25 km west of Al-Rutba. Four soldiers were killed or wounded. In addition, a vehicle was destroyed and the headquarters sustained damage (Telegram, May 23, 2020).

► **On May 21, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Popular Mobilization headquarters northeast of Fallujah. One commander and two fighters were killed (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

► **On May 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle northeast of Fallujah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

► **On May 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives **attacked an Iraqi army headquarters near the Arar border crossing between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. An officer and about eight soldiers were killed or wounded.** The headquarters was damaged. **An Iraqi army force sent to the scene was tricked by the ISIS operatives into entering a minefield.** Six additional soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2020).

### Babel Province

► **On May 22, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 40 km south of Baghdad. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

## Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

### Senior ISIS official captured

► **On May 20, 2020**, the Iraqi National Intelligence service announced that it had captured **Abd al-Nasser Qardash, a senior ISIS official who was one of the candidates to succeed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.**<sup>3</sup> According to the statement, Abd al-Nasser Qardash was caught based on accurate intelligence (Al-Sumaria, May 20, 2020). Qardash, who was born in Mosul,

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the similarity in the names of the detainee and ISIS’s leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurashi, it was initially reported that ISIS’s leader had been captured.

**held a series of military positions in ISIS.** He was in charge of a number of operations in Syria and Iraq and was known for his close relationship with ISIS's Arab command. He started his activity in Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which later became ISIS. He was very close to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In an interview after he was apprehended, Qardash noted that the current ISIS leader, Abdallah Qardash, is not as resolute in his decisions as Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. According to Iraqi "intelligence sources," in his interrogation, Qardash revealed that there were severe differences of opinion between ISIS's Arab and foreign operatives (Al-Hadath Channel, May 20, 2020).



**Abd al-Nasser Qardash, captured by the Iraqi National Intelligence, during an interview (Al-Hadath Channel, May 20, 2020)**

### **Additional activity by the Iraqi security forces**

- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, an Iraqi Interior Ministry Intelligence force captured five ISIS operatives in various parts of the Salah al-Din Province (Al-Sumaria, May 23, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, Iraqi police captured two ISIS operatives in the Kirkuk Province (Al-Sumaria, May 23, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 22, 2020**, force of the Intelligence and Counterterrorism Directorate of the Al-Anbar Province captured six terrorist operatives (i.e., ISIS operatives) in various parts of the Al-Anbar Province. In addition, a stockpile of explosives used by ISIS was found in the area of Fallujah (Al-Sumaria, May 22, 2020).



**IEDs made of barrels and gas canisters filled with explosives found in the area of Fallujah (al-hashed, May 23, 2020)**

► **On May 23, 2020**, an Iraqi military intelligence force captured two “terrorist operatives” (i.e., ISIS operatives) in the area of Al-Qaim, near the border between Iraq and Syria. The two underwent training at one of ISIS’s camps in Albukamal and took part in the fighting in Deir ez-Zor (Al-Sumaria, May 23, 2020).

## The Sinai Peninsula

### ISIS activity

► ISIS reported that on May 19, 2020, its operatives had ambushed an Egyptian border patrol force east of Sheikh Zuweid. During the attack, they fired machine guns and activated an IED. **Four members of the Egyptian border police force were killed. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized** (Telegram, May 20, 2020). The day after the incident, ISIS published photos documenting ISIS operatives preparing for the attack and withdrawing after the attack. **Some of the ISIS operatives were shown wearing Egyptian army uniforms**. In the ITIC’s assessment, this was in order to mislead the Egyptian forces at the scene of the attack (Telegram, May 20, 2020).



**Right: ISIS operatives withdrawing from the scene of the attack. Left: ISIS operatives at the scene of the attack. Some of the operatives are wearing Egyptian army uniforms (Telegram, May 20, 2020).**

## Additional attacks

► **On May 19, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army tank near the Abu Rashid checkpoint west of Sheikh Zuweid. The crew members were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2020). The tank was destroyed in the explosion (Shahed Sinaa, May 21, 2020).

► **On May 17, 2020**, eight operatives wearing Egyptian army uniforms killed four Egyptian “spies” in the area of Sheikh Zuweid. ISIS operatives managed to infiltrate a village southwest of Sheikh Zuweid, despite the large number of Egyptian army checkpoints in the area. The eight fled the scene unscathed (Al-Naba' weekly, Issue 235, as published on Telegram, May 21, 2020).

## Counterterrorist activity by the Egyptian security forces

► The Egyptian Interior Ministry obtained intelligence about a farm in northern Sinai used by ISIS operatives for hiding, training and planning terror attacks. It also obtained intelligence about a house in Bir al-Abd used by ISIS operatives. On the basis of this intelligence, Egyptian security forces attacked both of these targets simultaneously. **A total of 14 ISIS operatives were killed at the farm, and seven were killed in Bir al-Abd.** Weapons and IEDs were found in both locations (Facebook page of the Egyptian Interior Ministry, May 23, 2020).

## Activity of ISIS's other provinces

### Africa

#### Nigeria

► **On May 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province attacked a Nigerian army camp about 80 km east of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Three soldiers were killed and others were wounded. Weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

► **On May 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province ambushed a Nigerian army convoy about east of Maiduguri. Five soldiers were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

► **On May 20, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province fired mortar shells at a Nigerian army camp near the border with Chad. According to ISIS, accurate hits of the targets were observed (Telegram, May 21, 2020).

► **On May 20, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province attacked a Nigerian army camp about 90 km northeast of Maiduguri. Two soldiers were killed and others were wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at Christian civilians in northeastern Congo. A total of 13 Christians were killed (Telegram, May 25, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Central Africa Province exchanged fire with a Congolese army force in the area of Beni in the northeastern part of the country (about 50 km from the border with Uganda). Five soldiers were killed (Telegram, May 20, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 19, 2020**, ISIS operatives took two Congolese army "agents" prisoner (apparently in the Beni region). The two were interrogated and then executed (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

## Chad

- ▶ **On May 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives broke into the home of two Chadian army "agents" in the Lake Chad region, in the southwest of the country. The two were interrogated and then executed (Telegram, May 22, 2020).
- ▶ **On May 18, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province attacked a Nigerian army camp in Lake Chad area. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

## Somalia

- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Somalia Province threw an IED at a Somali police headquarters in a suburb of Mogadishu. One policeman was killed and another was wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

## Libya

- ▶ **On May 23, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Libya Province in the area of Fezzan (southern Libya) activated an IED against a convoy of the Libyan National Army under the command of Haftar (referred to in the original as the Haftar Militia) in southwestern Libya. The passengers were wounded (Telegram, May 25, 2020).

## Asia

### The Philippines

- ▶ **On May 18, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's East Asia Province attacked a Philippine army camp on the island of Mindanao in the south of the country. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2020).

### India

- ▶ **On May 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's India Province threw incendiary bombs at an Indian police checkpoint in the Kashmir region. The checkpoint was damaged (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

## Pakistan

► **On May 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Pakistan Province fired at two Pakistani intelligence personnel near the border with Afghanistan. They were killed (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

## Yemen

► **On May 22, 2020**, ISIS operatives activated two IEDs against two vehicles of the Houthi rebels in Qifah, in the northwestern Al-Bayda Province. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 22, 2020).

## Afghanistan

### Attack on Bagram Airbase

► **On May 24, 2020**, ISIS operatives fired five rockets at Bagram Airbase, where US army troops are stationed. The military airbase is located about 40 km north of Kabul (Telegram, May 24, 2020).

### Article examining the chances of survival of the Khorasan Province

► An article by Andrew Mines, a research fellow at the George Washington University Program on Extremism, along with Amira Jadoon, a professor at the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy in West Point, examines the chances of survival of ISIS's Khorasan Province following the blows that it has sustained. Following are the highlights of the article<sup>4</sup>:

- ◆ **Achievements of ISIS's Khorasan Province:** the Khorasan Province, which is considered one of ISIS's most important provinces, was established in January 2015. Since its establishment, it has carried out deadly attacks, both in Afghanistan (mainly in Nangarhar and Kunar) and Pakistan (mainly in Balochistan). This activity was carried out **through the creation of alliances with local jihadi groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)<sup>5</sup> and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA)<sup>6</sup>**, which provided it with logistical and operational support. The fierce rivalry between ISIS and the Taliban helped ISIS recruit deserters from the Taliban.

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Mines and Amira Jadoon, Can The Islamic State's Afghan Province Survive Its Leadership Losses?, LAWFARE, 17 MAY 2020: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/can-islamic-states-afghan-province-survive-its-leadership-losses#>

<sup>5</sup> **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (the Jhangvi army):** An Sunni-Islamic terrorist organization based in Afghanistan and operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The organization is a branch of a Pakistani anti-Shiite jihadi organization by the name of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) (Guardian of the Friends of the Prophet Muhammad in Pakistan), which changed its name to Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'ah.

<sup>6</sup> **Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (The Gang of Free People):** A Sunni terrorist organization which split off from the Pakistani Taliban in 2014 (Tehrik-i-Taliban, Pakistan, TTP) and is based in Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

◆ ISIS's Khorasan Province **sent some of its fighters to fight alongside ISIS operatives in Syria**. The province recruited fighters from over a dozen countries. One of these countries is **Pakistan**, where it has a wide operational presence. It also recruited fighters from other countries, including France, India and Bangladesh.

◆ **ISIS's Khorasan Province recently suffered some painful failures**: Province leader Abdullah Orokzai was arrested in Kandahar. His replacement, Mawlawi Zia ul-Haq, was arrested a month later in Kabul. **These two arrests appear to have weakened the province significantly.**

◆ Since the province was established, it has suffered territorial losses, and many commanders and operatives have met their deaths. **However, despite the blows that it has suffered, the Khorasan Province has proved resilient.** There seem to have been **three key reasons** for this: first, it regularly leveraged **deadly cross-border operational alliances** with regional terrorist groups. Second, it managed to recruit a **never-ending stream of fighters**, particularly from Pakistan. Third, its leadership includes **commanders with experience and knowledge** acquired from their previous activity in regional terrorist groups.

◆ **In March-May 2020, the province recovered and carried out several deadly attacks**: a suicide bombing attack in a Sikh house of worship in Kabul, causing the deaths of 25 worshipers (March 25); suicide bombing attack at the funeral of a local police commander in Nangarhar, causing the deaths of 25 people (May 12); and a terrorist attack carried out by three terrorists disguised as doctors in the maternity ward of a Kabul hospital belonging to the French humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (Doctors Without Borders) in which 24 civilians were killed (May 12).

◆ **The fragile situation in Afghanistan**, aggravated by the appearance of COVID-19 and in view of the prolonged government crisis created by the results of the presidential election, **presented ISIS's Khorasan Province with an opportunity to renew its terrorist activity on a wider scale.** Moreover, the negotiations between the US and Afghan governments and the Taliban, which culminated in an agreement signed on May 17, 2020, **enabled the Khorasan Province to present itself as a prominent jihadi alternative to the Taliban, presented by ISIS as a compromiser and as a collaborator with the United States.**

◆ The deadly attacks carried out recently by ISIS's Khorasan Province are the **result of a strategy aimed at disrupting the negotiations and obtaining media publicity**. As it strives to restore its ranks and its military infrastructure, **the province also strives to increase the political tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan**. Targeted killings carried out by the Afghan political leadership in coordination with the US and NATO have led to significant victories over ISIS's Khorasan Province. On the other hand, the effect of COVID-19, which is liable to limit the number of US military troops around the world, **could help the province recover**. Although ISIS's Khorasan Province is in dire straits, **its collapse can only be achieved through regional political coordination and focused continuous pressure on the province's leadership and operatives**. If this collapse is not achieved, ISIS's Khorasan Province **is liable to recover and increase its activity in the future**.

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

► On May 24, 2020, the German interior minister announced that **more than 100 ISIS operatives who had been involved in the fighting in Syria and Iraq had returned to Germany after the collapse of the organization's infrastructure in these countries**. The German authorities estimate that **1,060 ISIS operatives left Germany for Syria or Iraq. A third of them have returned to Germany**. According to the German Interior Ministry, in addition to legal proceedings, ISIS operatives returning to Germany also undergo a process of **deradicalization** and reintegration (DW, May 24, 2020).