



Spotlight on Global Jihad

July 9-15, 2020



Overview

- ▶ The ceasefire is being maintained **in the Idlib region of northern Syria**, but there has been an increase in the number and severity of local incidents between the warring sides. This week, a **car bomb (according to another version, an IED) was activated against one of the vehicles of the Russian forces** during a joint Russian-Turkish patrol on the M-4 highway (Aleppo-Latakia). Three Russian soldiers were slightly wounded (and apparently some Turkish soldiers as well) and the joint patrol was stopped. Local media reported Russian airstrikes and Syrian army artillery fire at areas controlled by the rebel organizations, apparently in response to the attack.
- ▶ **In the Iraq Province**, ISIS's main area of activity, ISIS's attacks continued, mainly the activation of IEDs against the Iraqi security forces and Shiite militias (the Popular Mobilization). At the same time, the Iraqi security forces continued to carry out counterterrorist activity. All this, **against the backdrop of the increase in the COVID-19 morbidity rate in Iraq** (nearly 30,000 active cases, including 420 patients in serious condition, and 3,150 deaths). According to a report based on Iraqi and American security sources, **ISIS is now reorganizing its forces in order to increase the scope of its activity and also carry out showcase attacks, in anticipation of a new state of chaos in Iraq or the departure of US and International Coalition forces** (Al-Hurra, July 8, 2020).
- ▶ **This week, Nigeria was the most active of ISIS's provinces in Africa and Asia.** According to ISIS, more than 50 Nigerian soldiers were killed in an ISIS ambush in the northeast of the country. According to reports published this week (requiring verification), **the leader of Abu Sayyaf**, the central organization comprising ISIS's East Asia Province, **was wounded in battle against the Philippine army and died of his wounds.** If the report is correct, this is a severe blow to the East Asia Province.

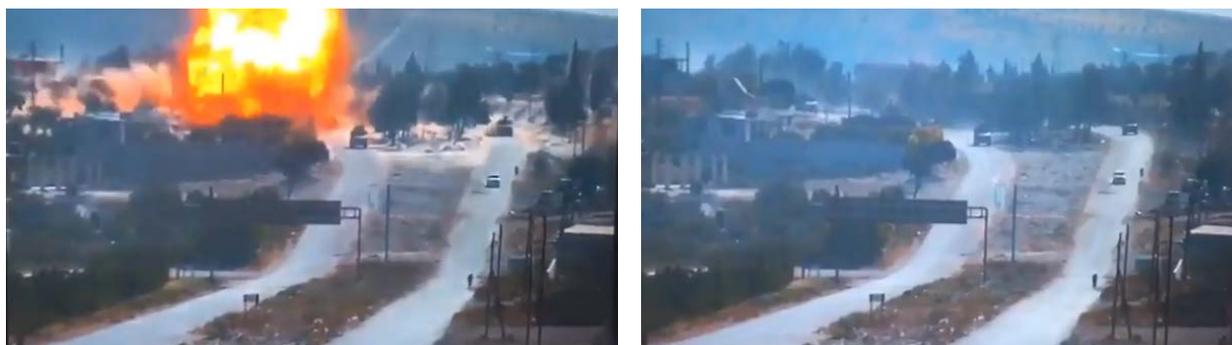
The Idlib region

Incidents in the Idlib region between the Syrian army and the jihadi organizations

- ▶ **On July 14, 2020**, the Syrian forces fired artillery at the outskirts of the city of Ariha, about 10 km south of Idlib (Idlib Plus, July 14, 2020). This may have been a response to the detonation of the car bomb/IED.
- ▶ **On July 10, 2020**, there were clashes between the rebel organizations and the Syrian forces about 35 km south of Idlib (Edlib Media Center - EMC, July 10, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 9, 2020**, the Syrian forces fired artillery at two villages about 40 km south of Idlib (Edlib Media Center - EMC, July 9, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 9, 2020**, the Syrian forces fired artillery at two villages north of Maarat Nu'man (Idlib Plus, July 9, 2020).

Detonation of a car bomb (or an IED) against the joint patrol on M-4

- ▶ **On July 14, 2020**, a car bomb (or an IED) was detonated **against one of the vehicles of the Russian forces during a joint patrol with the Turks**. The explosion occurred when the vehicle passed through the **Ariha area**, about 12 km south of Idlib. Several Russian soldiers were wounded. A video documenting the explosion was posted on a number of Telegram channels, including one affiliated with Islamic rebels who operate under Turkish sponsorship (Enab Baladi, a Syrian news website affiliated with the rebel organizations, July 14, 2020).
- ▶ **According to Russian media**, the explosion was caused by an IED planted at the spot and activated against the patrol at dawn. As a result of the explosion, three Russian soldiers were slightly wounded and several Turkish soldiers were wounded as well. The patrol was immediately stopped. The Russian forces in Syria are investigating the incident with Turkish and Syrian security officials (RT news agency; TASS, July 14, 2020). **The Turkish Defense Ministry** announced that “terrorist operatives” (i.e., jihadi rebel organizations) activated a car bomb to disrupt the efforts to secure peace in Idlib (Enab Baladi, July 14, 2020).



Right: A moment before the car bomb exploded. Left: The explosion of the car bomb (Ebu El Furkan @slaam46 Twitter account, affiliated with the Damascus Center for Political Studies in Istanbul, July 14, 2020)

UAV attack against the Russian airbase in Hmeymim

► On July 12, 2020, the Russian Defense Ministry reported that **two UAVs that had taken off from the Idlib area had attempted to attack the Russian airbase in Hmeymim on July 11, 2020**. Head of the Russian Reconciliation Center Rear Admiral Alexander Shcherbitsky said that the two aircraft had come from the northeast and had been intercepted by the airbase aerial defense system at a distance of about 5 km from the Hmeymim airbase (Sputnik, July 12, 2020).

ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► On July 9, 2020, ISIS released an infographic entitled “The Harvest of the Fighters,” **summing** up its activity in the various provinces on July 2-8, 2020. According to the infographic, **a total of 56 attacks were carried out by ISIS around the world, compared to 60 in the preceding week**. A total of 18 attacks (about 32%) **were carried out in Iraq, which continues to be the main arena of ISIS's activity**. In addition, 11 attacks (about 19%) were carried out in **Syria**, eight (about 16%) in **the Sinai Province**, seven (about 12%) in **West Africa** (mainly in Nigeria), four in **East Asia** (the Philippines), three in **Yemen**, one in **India**, one in **Somalia**, one in **Central Africa**, and one in **Pakistan** (Al-Naba' weekly, July 9, 2020).

► **According to the infographic, over 185 people were killed and wounded in the attacks**. The largest number of casualties (66) **was in West Africa** (Nigeria often represents the deadliest battle zone although most of the attacks take place in Iraq). The other casualties were in the provinces of Syria (28), Iraq (26), the Sinai Peninsula (24), Yemen (16), East Asia (the Philippines), Central Africa (6), India (3), Somalia (3), and Pakistan (1) (Al-Naba' weekly, July 9, 2020).

The Syrian arena

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

- ▶ **On July 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF fighter riding a motorcycle about 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was wounded (Telegram, July 12, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 8, 2020**, an SDF fighter was targeted by machine gun fire about 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed (Telegram, July 10, 2020).

Al-Raqqah region

- ▶ **On July 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against a bus carrying fighters of the Syrian forces about 25 km northwest of Al-Raqqah. About 10 soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 12, 2020).

Al-Sukhnah region

- ▶ **On July 11, 2020**, ISIS squads reportedly attacked outposts of militias handled by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the Al-Sukhnah Desert. Ten militiamen were killed. Afterwards, Russian fighter jets reportedly attacked the ISIS operatives and (mistakenly) hit a group of militia operatives. Two operatives were killed and seven wounded (Zaman Al-Wasl, July 12, 2020).

The Iraqi arena

This week, ISIS carried out intensive activity in western and northern Iraq. The common form of attack was the detonation of IEDs against the Shiite militias (Popular Mobilization Forces) and the Iraqi security forces. At the same time, the Iraqi security forces' counterterrorist activity continues, **in spite of the upsurge in COVID-19 morbidity** (the number of confirmed cases doubled within two weeks and the number of deaths increased¹).

Attacks last week in Iraq according to ISIS's claims of responsibility

Baghdad Province

- ▶ **On July 7, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Shiite gathering site near a mosque in the southwestern part of Baghdad. Several Shiites were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 9, 2020).

¹ The number of active cases in Iraq on July 12, 2020, was 29,632, of whom 420 were in intensive care and some of whom were on ventilators. The number of dead is 3,150 (Facebook page of the Iraqi Health Ministry, July 14, 2020).

Diyala Province

- ▶ **On July 13, 2020**, an IED was activated against the Popular Mobilization forces about 15 km northeast of Baqubah. Three sappers were killed (Telegram, July 14, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 13, 2020**, two IEDs were activated against Popular Mobilization fighters about 40 km northeast of Baqubah. Four fighters were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, July 14, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 12, 2020**, two IEDs were activated against a foot patrol and forces of the Popular Mobilization northeast of Baqubah. Two commanders and a fighter were killed and five others were wounded. Another IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle west of Khanaqin. Three fighters were killed and three others were wounded (Telegram, July 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi police vehicle about 20 km southwest of Khanaqin. Two policemen were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, July 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle about 100 km northeast of Baqubah. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 12, 2020).



Wreckage of the Popular Mobilization vehicle destroyed by an ISIS IED (Telegram, July 14, 2020). The Popular Mobilization emblem is visible on it”.

Salah al-Din Province

- ▶ **On July 12, 2020**, an Iraqi police vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 70 km north of Baghdad. One policeman was killed (Telegram, July 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 12, 2020**, an Iraqi police compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 80 km north of Baghdad. One policeman was wounded (Telegram, July 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle about 20 km southeast of Tikrit. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 12, 2020).

► **On July 10, 2020**, two Grad rockets were fired at Shiite gathering sites in the area of Amirli, about 80 km east of Tikrit. According to ISIS, accurate hits were observed (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

► **On July 7, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Iraqi government counterterrorist unit west of Tikrit. The passengers, including two officers, were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 9, 2020).

Nineveh Province

► **On July 12, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle about 15 km south of Mosul. Three soldiers were killed (Telegram, July 14, 2020).

► **On July 7, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army “agent” about 45 km southwest of Mosul. He was wounded (Telegram, July 8, 2020).

Al-Anbar Province

► **On July 9, 2020**, two Popular Mobilization intelligence operatives were targeted by machine gun fire west of Hit, 135 km northwest of Baghdad. Both of them were killed (Telegram, July 10, 2020).

► **On July 7, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army headquarters east of Al-Rutba. Several soldiers were killed or wounded. The headquarters was destroyed and a communications tower there was set on fire (Telegram, July 8, 2020).

Kirkuk Province

► **On July 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi police vehicle about 50 km west of Kirkuk. Five federal policemen were killed (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

► **On July 11, 2020**, a Tribal Mobilization compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 60 km west of Kirkuk. Two fighters were killed (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

Diyala Province

► **On July 12, 2020**, an Iraqi army force operating against ISIS as part of Operation Heroes of Iraq located six canisters of explosives about 50 km northeast of Baqubah. In addition, the force found IEDs, a generator, two oil tanks, and mortar shells (Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, July 12, 2020).

► **On July 12, 2020**, an Iraqi army force operating as part of Operation Heroes of Iraq about 60 km north of Baqubah located two ISIS guesthouses. They also found a tunnel used by ISIS and six IEDs (Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, July 12, 2020).



**Iraqi army forces during Operation Heroes of Iraq
(Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, July 12, 2020)**

Nineveh Province

► **On July 11, 2020**, teams of the Iraqi Interior Ministry Intelligence Directorate captured 11 wanted ISIS operatives in various areas in the Nineveh Province (Al-Sumaria, July 11, 2020).

Report on ISIS's new organizational structure

► **On July 8, 2020**, the Al-Hurra TV (an American Arabic-language channel) aired a presentation detailing **ISIS's new organizational structure in Iraq**, created after Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's death (October 27, 2019). The presentation is based on Iraqi intelligence sources and on a report by the Center for Global Policy operating in Washington. It was prepared by **Hisham al-Hashemi** (a senior Iraqi researcher on security and Islamic movements, who was shot dead on July 6, 2020 in Baghdad; the assassin was probably affiliated with Kataeb Hezbollah, a Shiite militia handled by the Iranian Qods Force).

► According to the Al-Hurra report, **ISIS is now composed of 14 provinces and five ministries** (in Arabic: *dawawin*, singular: *diwan*). In addition, there is **a directorate (in Arabic: *idarah*) which is in charge of running ISIS's provinces outside Syria and Iraq.** Following the loss of its territorial control zones, **ISIS canceled the directorates** which were responsible for the morality police (*Al-Hisba*) and the provision of services to the population. **Local commanders** were reportedly given more extensive powers in everything that pertains to the executive matters. According to the presentation, **ISIS currently includes 3,500-4,000 fighting operatives as well as 8,000 members who are not currently active (Note: In the ITIC's assessment, these numbers seem low, possibly related only to the Iraq Province).**

► According to the report, American and Iraqi security sources agree that **Al-Baghdadi's successor is codenamed Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurashi, and his real name is Amir Mohammad Sa'id al-Salbi al-Mawla** (Note: He usually goes by the codename of **Haji Abdallah**). Al-Baghdadi's successor heads the new organizational structure. There are **two supreme committees** subordinate to him:

- ◆ **The Shura Committee / the Consulting Committee (*Lajnat al-Shura*):** It is headed by **Haji Jum'ah Awad al-Badri**, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's brother. **The role of the committee is to outline policy and select the heads of the provinces.** The Shura Committee includes **five office holders**: Abu Mohammad al-Masri, Abu Hashem al-Jazrawi, Naif Hamad Shayya', Abu Sa'ad al-Libi, and Abu Abdallah al-Ghulami.
- ◆ **The Appointed Committee (*Al-Lajna al-Mufawwadah*):** This is **ISIS's supreme executive body. It is headed by Sami Jassem al-Jabouri.** Under Al-Jabouri's command there are five office holders in charge of matters such as security, finance, religious matters, and media. **The Appointed Committee supervises the heads of ISIS's provinces**, including the head of the Iraq Province, Jabbar Salman al-Issawi.

According to the Al-Hurra report, ISIS operatives detained in Iraq confirmed that **the airstrikes carried out by the International Coalition were the main reason for the organization's defeat.** They noted that after the withdrawal of the Coalition forces from Iraq, **ISIS would once again carry out showcase attacks. ISIS currently focuses its efforts on reorganizing its ranks in an anticipation of a new state of chaos in Iraq or the withdrawal of the International Coalition forces led by the US from Iraq, to increase the scope of its activity once again.**

ISIS's activity around the globe

Africa

The Sahel (the sub-Saharan region)

► Following are the key points of an article by **Katherine Zimmerman, a researcher on Islamic organizations at the American Enterprise Institute**, which deals with the Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups operating in the Sahel region². Her article casts light on the

² Katherine Zimmerman, Salafi-Jihadi Ecosystem in the Sahel. American Enterprise Institute, April 2020. PDF File:

<https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Salafi-Jihadi-Ecosystem-in-the-Sahel.pdf>

complexity and fragmentation of the jihadi groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and ISIS operating in the sub-Saharan region.

Formation of an integrated network of Salafi-jihadi terrorist groups in the Sahel

► Over the past decade, **a unique integrated network of Salafi-jihadi terrorist groups** has emerged in the Sahel, which includes **Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger**. **This network is expanding in view of the ongoing deterioration in living conditions in these countries.** Porous borders, the fragile internal situation, weak and resource-strapped governments, and rising insecurity driven by both poorly equipped militaries and intra-communal conflict over access to water and land for cultivation, are all being exploited by terrorist groups **affiliated with Al-Qaeda or ISIS in order to establish their Islamic ideology in these countries through terrorist activity.** These terrorist groups multiply and cooperate with each other, **especially in outlying areas where government control is weak**, based on common objectives, a shared history and exploitation of ethnic-local tension.

The growth and spread of Islamic terrorist groups in the Sahel

► The Salafi-jihadi network in the Sahel began **outside the region and can be traced back to the Algerian civil war**. One of the two main Islamist factions fighting the Algerian government was the **Armed Islamic Group (GIA)**³. The GIA was established in 1992 under the leadership of Algerians who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan with Al-Qaeda and returned to their country at the end of the war there. Another group calling itself the **Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)** splintered from the GIA in 1998, due to the brutality characterizing its activity. **It was recognized in September 2006 by Osama bin Laden as affiliated with Al-Qaeda.** In January 2007, its name was changed to **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**. This branch took root in Sahelian society immediately after its establishment, especially **in northern Mali**, by providing assistance to local communities of the Tuareg tribe and marriage with their families.

Katherine Zimmerman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). Her research is focused on Islamic terrorist groups, with an emphasis on Al-Qaeda's global network. Her research has been featured in prominent US media outlets. Ms. Zimmerman has testified before Congress about the threats to US national security interests emanating from Al-Qaeda and its network. She has also briefed members of Congress, their staff, and US military, diplomatic, and intelligence community personnel.

³ The initials of the groups mentioned reflect their names in French. However, in this article their full names are given in their English translation.

► **The first major splinter from AQIM occurred in October 2011:** a group of jihadist operatives broke away to establish the **Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)**. These operatives were predominantly **Malian and Mauritanian** and were critical of the Algerian-dominated AQIM leadership. One of the senior figures was **Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi**. **They established their hold mainly in the GAO area, the smuggling center in northern Mali**, during the Tuareg tribal revolt there. In 2012, another group by the name of **Ansar al-Din**, established by **Iyad ag Ghali**, split from AQIM. Ansar al-Din, along with MUJAO and AQIM, **took control of northern Mali (including the capital, Timbuktu), by providing public services and security to local residents.**

► **The second major splinter from AQIM occurred at the end of 2012, when Mokhtar Belmokhtar**, a senior Algerian AQIM commander, quarreled with its leader, Abdel Malek Droukdel. In consequence, he was suspended from command in October 2012. Belmokhtar married a girl from one of the Tuareg tribes in Timbuktu, and his men began carrying out local terrorist acts in Niger. In August 2013, the two groups that had split from AQIM merged to form **Al-Murabitoun**, which focused on carrying out terrorist acts against French and American targets in the Sahel. A French military intervention that began in January 2013 (Operation Barkhan) had (temporarily) weakened the activity of the terrorist groups, including Ansar al-Din and AQIM.

► **In January 2015, another Islamic terrorist group called the Macina Liberation Front was established in northern Mali.** Like Ansar al-Din, it used violent tactics to weaken the local authorities. Its leader, **Amadou Diallo Koufa**, a charismatic ethnically Fulani (a shepherd tribe fighting a local group of farmers) preacher from the region, **expanded the Salafi-jihadi uprising to central Mali.** A small group headed by **Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahrawi** split from Al-Murabitoun. **Adnan al-Sahrawi pledged allegiance to ISIS with his men in May 2015, forming the nucleus of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).** Since September 2016, this branch has been carrying out terrorist activity in the **tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.** The ISIS branch is based on cooperation with various regional elements, taking advantage of local ethnic tension for its own purposes.

► A new group calling itself **Ansar al-Islam** launched a low-level insurgency among disenfranchised Fulani **in northern Burkina Faso in December 2016**, founded by a radical Burkinabe preacher, **Malam Ibrahim Dicko**. He fought in Mali in 2013, died in 2017, and was replaced by his brother, Jafar. His group remains independent from Al-Qaeda and Islamic

State affiliations, but in addition to the support from the Al-Qaeda-linked groups, its members have received support from ISGS. **In early 2017, the Al-Qaeda followers in the Sahel united to form Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM)** (literally, “the group for the support of Islam and Muslims”). The group numbers about 700-800 fighters and represents the bulk of the Salafi-jihadi network **operating in Mali**. In March 2017, this was announced publicly by the leaders of Ansar al-Din, AQIM, the Macina Liberation Front and Al-Murabitoun, and a senior AQIM official. **These groups worked together to conduct a series of attacks against hotels in Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, and Mali in 2015-16.**

Suspected expansion of the activity of Salafi-jihadi groups to other areas

► JNIM, ISGS and Ansar al-Islam **now work together within an integrated and flexible alliance**. They carry out terrorist acts in the Sahel, in order to institute sharia-based governance, according to their interpretation, and establish a local government infrastructure, while stoking intercommunal conflict, on the one hand, and gaining support among various ethnic communities, on the other. Local soldiers, and French soldiers sent to help them, operate against these terrorist groups, **but fail to prevent or reduce the scope of their attacks**. As for the future, both ISGS and JNIM **have ambitions to destabilize the littoral states to the Sahel, including Benin, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Togo**. They intend to accomplish this using the same modus operandi that they used in the Sahel.

Nigeria

► On July 9, 2020, ISIS published an infographic entitled “Monthly Harvest in West Africa,” summarizing the organization’s activity in the West Africa Province between June 6 and July 7, 2020. According to the infographic, **during this period, ISIS operatives carried out 25 attacks in which over 290 people were killed or wounded**. Most of the attacks were carried out in **Nigeria**, mainly against the Nigerian army and the forces supporting it. Other attacks were carried out against the **Cameroonian and Chadian armies** (Al-Naba’ weekly, as posted on Telegram, July 9, 2020).

Attacks in Nigeria for which ISIS claimed responsibility

► **On July 7, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed a Nigerian army convoy about 50 km southwest of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. According to ISIS, **at least 40 Nigerian soldiers were killed in the attack** and others were wounded. In addition, weapons, ammunition, and five vehicles were seized (Telegram, July 8, 2020).



**The site of the ambush, southwest of Maiduguri
(Google Maps)**



**Right: Nigerian army weapons and ammunition seized in the ambush (Telegram, July 8, 2020).
Left: Bodies of Nigerian soldiers killed in the ambush (Telegram, July 8, 2020)**



**Right: One of the Nigerian army vehicles seized in the ambush (Telegram, July 8, 2020). Left:
Nigerian army vehicle going up in flames (Telegram, July 8, 2020)**

- **On July 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Nigerian soldiers about 40 km north of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 12, 2020).
- **On July 10, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army compound in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. Several soldiers were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

► **On July 10, 2020**, ISIS operatives repelled an attack by the Nigerian army about 20 km southwest of the border between Nigeria and Chad, in Borno State. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

► **On July 8, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army compound in Borno State. A few soldiers were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, July 8, 2020).

► **On July 7, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army compound about 80 km northwest of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Several soldiers were killed and others were wounded (Telegram, July 8, 2020).

Chad

► **On July 10, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province ambushed Chadian soldiers in the Lake Chad area in the southwest of the country. A total of 11 soldiers were killed and others were wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized, and two vehicles were set on fire (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

► **On July 8, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Chadian army vehicle in the Lake Chad area in the southwest of the country. Eight soldiers were killed (Telegram, July 10, 2020).

Asia

Pakistan

► **On July 11, 2020**, two Pakistani police vehicles were targeted by machine gun fire in the Baluchistan district. Two policemen were wounded (Telegram, July 11, 2020).

The Philippines

► **On July 7, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's East Asia Province exchanged fire with the Philippine army in the northern part of Jolo Island, in the southern Philippines. Four soldiers were killed and two others were wounded (Telegram, July 8, 2020).

► This week, it was reported that **Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, the leader of Abu Sayyaf**, the main organization comprising ISIS's East Asia Province, **had died of wounds sustained in clashes with the Philippine army** (researcher Rita Katz's Twitter account, July 10, 2020). If the report is correct, this is a severe blow to ISIS's East Asia Province.



Abu Sayyaf leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan
(borneotoday.net, November 23, 2016)

Yemen

- ▶ **On July 8, 2020**, ISIS operatives activated IEDs at positions of the Houthi rebels in the area of Qifah, in the northwestern Al-Bayda Province (about 100 km southeast of Sana'a). Several Houthi rebels were wounded (Telegram, July 8, 2020).
- ▶ **On July 7, 2020**, ISIS operatives raided three positions of the Houthi rebels in the area of Qifah. An IED was activated against the Houthi rebel forces. Seven Houthi fighters were killed and six others were wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized (Telegram, July 8, 2020).

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Italy

- ▶ According to a report from last week, Italian police seized 14 tons of amphetamines at the Port of Salerno, about 50 km south of Naples, in southern Italy. The Italian authorities estimated that the drugs were shipped from Syria by ISIS (AP, July 1, 2020)⁴. Since the report was published, **many experts have questioned the Italian authorities' version**. The experts believe that **the pills were manufactured in Syria and exported by the Syrian regime and Hezbollah**. In their opinion, ISIS in Syria and Iraq is scattered in a limited number of places **and does not have the capability to manufacture and export such a quantity of pills**. On the other hand, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah are known to export amphetamines. The fact that the shipment departed from the Port of Latakia, which is controlled by the Syrian regime, also reinforces this claim (Fox News, July 9, 2020).

⁴ For details, see "Spotlight on Global Jihad (July 2-8, 2020)"

► In response, ISIS published an article denying any connection with the smuggled amphetamines. According to ISIS, the Italian authorities were attempting to cover up for the Syrian regime, in order to conceal Italy's political and economic ties with the Syrian regime. In ISIS's assessment, the attribution of the shipment to ISIS may be due to pressure by the Italian mafia on the Italian government to whitewash the drug ties between it and the Syrian regime. According to the article, the Syrian regime and the militias collaborating with it (implicitly Hezbollah, which is involved in drug trafficking at the international level) export the drugs that they manufacture through seaports and airports under their control. According to ISIS, European governments are afraid of exposing their ties with the Assad regime, and this motivates them to publish such false reports (Al-Naba', as posted on Telegram, July 9, 2020).



Right: Amphetamines that were seized (Al-Aan Channel, July 2, 2020) Left: ISIS's article denying any connection with the incident (Al-Naba', as posted on Telegram, July 9, 2020)