



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## September 10-16, 2020



### Main events of the week

► ISIS's provinces in Asia and Africa continued their routine activity. Noteworthy incidents this week:

◆ **Syria:** ISIS operatives ambushed an Al-Quds Brigade force carrying out searches in the desert region west of Deir ez-Zor. Many casualties were reported. The Al-Quds Brigade was established during the civil war to serve in support of the Syrian army. It comprises mainly Palestinians with a relatively high level of competence.

◆ **Iraq:** This is the second week that there has been a decrease in ISIS's activity and an increase in the Iraqi security forces' counterterrorist measures. This week, ISIS carried out another attempt on the life of a senior police officer with the rank of brigadier general. The officer survived. Over the past two months, it is evident that **ISIS has made an effort to target senior Iraqi officers**. So far, ISIS has managed to kill three Iraqi army colonels and a Popular Mobilization brigadier general.

◆ **Northern Sinai:** ISIS continues its intensive activity against the Egyptian security forces in northern Sinai. Even after the Egyptian army regained control of the Rabi'a area, **ISIS continues its activity against the Egyptian forces in the area** (mainly activating IEDs). To date, only some of the villagers have returned to their homes.

### ISIS's activity in the various provinces around the world

#### Summary of ISIS activity this week

► On September 10, 2020, ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published an infographic entitled "The Harvest of the Fighters," **summarizing ISIS's activity on September 3-9, 2020**. According to the infographic, during this period **ISIS carried out 33 attacks around the world**, compared to 82 in the previous week (i.e., a decrease of about 60% in the scope of the attacks). **A total of 14 attacks were carried out in Iraq, 6 of them in the Kirkuk Province**. Attacks were also

carried out in ISIS's other provinces in Africa and Asia: Syria (10); West Africa (4); Central Africa (1); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1); Pakistan (1); Somalia (1); and Tunisia (1) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, September 10, 2020).

► **Over 103 people were killed and wounded in these attacks**, compared to 204 last week (i.e., a decrease of about 50% in the number of casualties). **The largest number of casualties (47) was in Iraq**. The other casualties were in the following provinces: Central Africa, mainly Mozambique (20); West Africa (17); Syria (12); Somalia (3); Tunisia (2); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1); and Pakistan (1) (Telegram, September 10, 2020).

## The Syrian arena

### The Idlib region

In the Idlib region, artillery exchanges between the Syrian army and the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the other rebel organizations also continued this week. As in previous weeks, most of the incidents took place in Jabal al-Zawiya and in areas south and southwest of Idlib. Several Russian airstrikes were reported, mainly against targets of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham.

### The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham announces the completion of a course

► The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham announced the completion of an RPG and machine gun course (Ibaa, September 10, 2020). It appears that at least 20 operatives completed their training on firing machine guns and at least five on firing RPG rockets.



**Right: Operatives being trained to fire RPG rockets. Left: Operatives being trained to fire machine guns (Ibaa, September 10, 2020)**

## Targeted killing in Idlib

▶ **On September 14, 2020**, an International Coalition UAV attacked a vehicle in southern Idlib. A Tunisian commander in the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Guardians of Religion Organization in the vehicle was killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 14, 2020).



**The vehicle of the commander who was targeted and killed (QalaatM@QalaatM Twitter account, September 14, 2020)**

## ISIS activity in the Syria Province<sup>1</sup>

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

- ▶ **On September 13, 2020**, an SDF fighter was targeted by machine gun fire about 45 km south of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed.
- ▶ **On September 13, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 30 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. Two fighters were killed and another was wounded.

### The desert region (the Badia)<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ **On September 12, 2020**, ISIS operative ambushed and fired small arms and antitank missiles at a force of the **Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade** while it carried out searches **in the desert area of Al-Shoula, southwest of Deir ez-Zor**. This was reportedly the most serious attack since ISIS lost control of Deir ez-Zor. Many of the Al-Quds Brigade fighters were killed or wounded. In addition, 11 vehicles were destroyed (Khotwa, September 12, 2020). So far, no claim of responsibility by ISIS has been found, but sources in the Syrian opposition attributed the attack to ISIS.
- ▶ **The Al-Quds Brigade** is a force established by the Syrian regime during the civil war (2013). It mainly comprises Palestinian fighters with a relatively high level of competence. The

<sup>1</sup> According to claims of responsibility posted on Telegram.

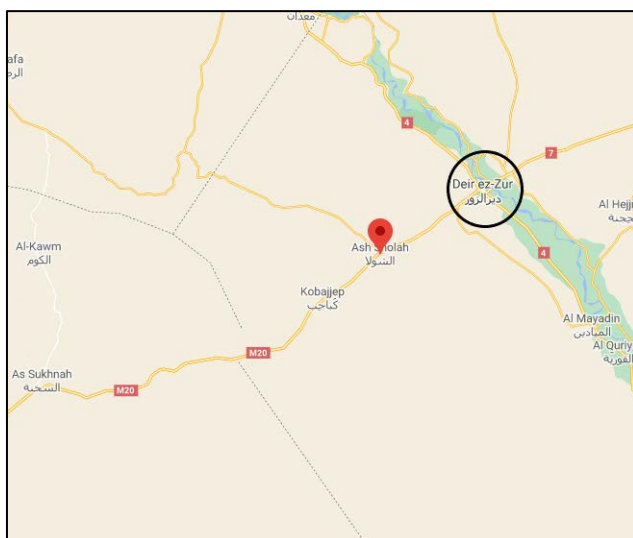
<sup>2</sup> For further information on the expansion of ISIS's activity in the desert region in central Syria (the Badia), see the ITIC's Spotlight on Global Jihad, September 3-9, 2020.

force was first deployed in the Palestinian refugee camps in northern Syria for defensive missions. Subsequently, it carried out offensive missions against the rebel organizations and ISIS operatives in northern and eastern Syria<sup>3</sup>.



**Insignia of the Al-Quds Brigade on uniforms of its fighters, with the Syrian flag in the background (Al-Kawthar, September 9, 2017)**

► The Syrian media reported that following ISIS’s attack, Syrian army forces with Russian air support deployed in the Al-Shoula area, about 30 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor (September 13, 2020). The forces set up checkpoints on the main road. The Al-Quds Brigade was reportedly ordered to remain in the Al-Shoula area and defend itself from ISIS attacks (Baladi, a Syrian news website affiliated with the rebel organizations, September 15, 2020).



**The Al-Shoula area where ISIS’s attack took place (Left: Google Maps; Right: Bing Satellite)**

## The Euphrates Valley

► **On September 11, 2020**, an SDF “agent” was targeted by gunfire and killed about 35 km northwest of Deir ez-Zor.

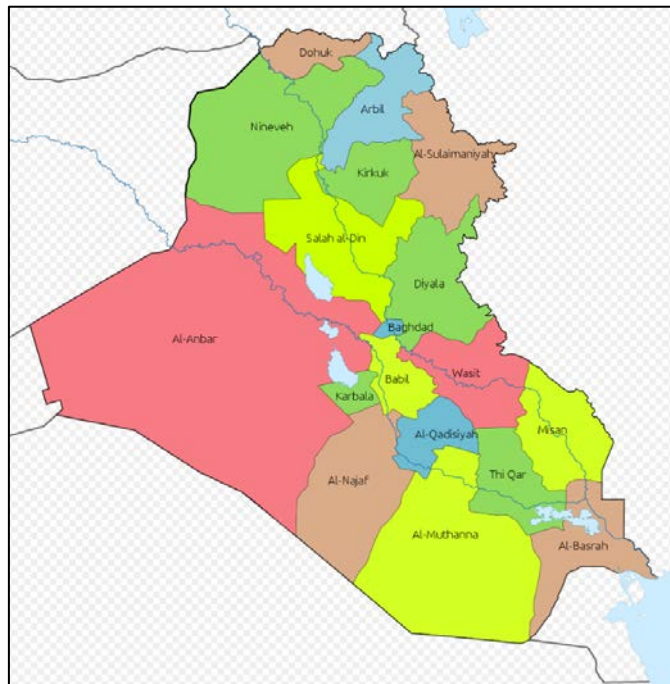
<sup>3</sup> See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 19, 2018, “Armed Palestinian forces, militias and organizations handled by the Syrian regime in the Syrian civil war”

- ▶ **On September 10, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 5 km east of Al-Mayadeen.
- ▶ **On September 10, 2020**, hand grenades were thrown at the house of an SDF mayor in the village of Diban, about 5 km east of Al-Mayadeen.

### The Al-Hasakah region

- ▶ **On September 13, 2020**, an SDF checkpoint was targeted by machine gun fire on the road leading to Al-Hol (about 35 km east of Al-Hasakah). Two fighters were killed.
- ▶ **On September 12, 2020**, an SDF vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire northeast of Deir ez-Zor. Two fighters were killed.
- ▶ **On September 10, 2020**, an SDF fighter was targeted by machine gun fire about 80 km south of Al-Hasakah (about 50 km west of the Syrian-Iraqi border). He was killed.

## The Iraqi arena



Map of the provinces in Iraq (Wikipedia)

## ISIS's attacks in the various provinces<sup>4</sup>

### Diyala Province

#### Attempt on the life of a senior Iraqi police officer

▶ On September 10, 2020, a sticky bomb was activated against **the vehicle of *Amid* (Brigadier General) Qahtan Ibrahim Ali**, a senior officer at the headquarters of the Diyala police in the central Baqubah district (about 35 km northeast of Baghdad). According to the Iraqi media, the officer survived. **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to ISIS, a sticky bomb was activated against the vehicle of *Amid* Qahtan Ibrahim Ali, in central Baqubah, and he was severely wounded (Telegram, September 10, 2020).

▶ During the last two months, **there has been an evident effort by ISIS to attack senior Iraqi officers.** So far, ISIS has managed to kill three Iraqi army colonels and a Popular Mobilization brigadier general.

#### Additional ISIS activity in the Diyala Province

▶ **On September 12, 2020**, Iraqi soldiers were targeted by machine gun fire about 70 km north of Baqubah. One soldier was killed and two others were wounded.

▶ **On September 8, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 5 km south of Baqubah. The passengers were killed or wounded.

### Nineveh Province

▶ **On September 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against a Tribal Mobilization vehicle about 60 km south of Mosul. One fighter was killed and two others were wounded.

▶ **On September 11, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of a mukhtar in a village about 35 km south of Mosul. He was wounded.

### Al-Anbar Province

#### Car bomb detonated against Iraqi army convoy

▶ On September 12, 2020, a **parked car bomb was detonated against an Iraqi army convoy** west of Al-Rutba, in western Al-Anbar Province. According to ISIS reports, **20 Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded.** According to the Amaq News Agency, two of the casualties were officers. In addition, five vehicles were destroyed (Telegram, September 12, 2020).

▶ On the other hand, Nasser al-Ghanam, commander of the Al-Anbar Operations, reported that **an Iraqi army force destroyed an ISIS car bomb which was about to be**

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<sup>4</sup> According to claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

**detonated among the Iraqi security forces** (NRT, a Kurdish-Iraqi news website, September 12, 2020).



**Detonation of an ISIS car bomb in western Al-Anbar Province (Telegram, September 12, 2020)**

### Additional ISIS attacks in the Al-Anbar Province

► **On September 12, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 70 km west of Al-Rutba, in western Al-Anbar Province. An officer and three soldiers were killed and other soldiers were wounded.

### Salah al-Din Province

► **On September 13, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army foot patrol about 30 km north of Baghdad. Several soldiers were wounded.

► **On September 8, 2020**, ISIS operatives broke into the house of an agent of the Iraqi National Security about 30 km north of Baghdad. He was killed by machine gun fire.

### Kirkuk Province

► **On September 8, 2020**, an IED was activated against Iraqi police about 35 km southwest of Kirkuk. Several policemen including an officer were killed or wounded.

### Erbil Province

► **On September 12, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 60 km southwest of Erbil. Three soldiers were killed.

## Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

### Nineveh Province

► **On September 12, 2020**, the Nineveh police announced that it had captured five ISIS operatives south of Mosul. One of them was a member of *Hisba* (ISIS's morality police).

Another operative was part of ISIS's security apparatus. The three others were fighters when Mosul was under ISIS's control (Al-Sumaria, September 12, 2020).

▶ **On September 12, 2020**, the Iraqi army located an ISIS arms depot containing IEDs and mortar shells about 95 km west of Mosul (Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, September 12, 2020).



**ISIS's IEDs and mortar shells located west of Mosul  
(Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, September 12, 2020).**

▶ **On September 11, 2020**, a Nineveh police force apprehended six ISIS operatives in eastern Mosul (Al-Sumaria, September 11, 2020).

## **Kirkuk Province**

### **Capture of a media operative of ISIS's Amaq News Agency**

▶ **On September 13, 2020**, the Iraqi police in the Kirkuk Province captured a wanted ISIS operative. He had been working in ISIS's media network in the Kirkuk Province. As part of his job, he had produced videos documenting ISIS's attacks for ISIS's Amaq News Agency. According to the detainee, his father and two of his brothers were executed by ISIS over financial disputes (Al-Sumaria, September 13, 2020).

### **Additional counterterrorist activity in the Kirkuk Province**

▶ **On September 13, 2020**, International Coalition aircraft carried out an airstrike about 30 km south of Kirkuk. Two ISIS operatives were killed. In addition, a hiding place and a motorcycle were destroyed (Al-Sumaria, September 13, 2020).

## Salah al-Din Province

- ▶ **On September 11, 2020**, the Iraqi security forces ambushed ISIS operatives about 20 km southeast of Samarra. Four ISIS commanders were killed, including two wearing explosive belts (Al-Sumaria, September 11, 2020).
- ▶ **On September 10, 2020**, the Iraqi counterterrorist unit captured an ISIS commander in Shirqat, about 20 km south of Mosul (Al-Sumaria, September 10, 2020).



ISIS commander captured in Shirqat (Al-Sumaria, September 10, 2020)

## The Sinai Peninsula

**ISIS still continues its guerrilla activity in the Rabi'a area**, even after the Egyptian army regained control of the region. This week, IEDs were reportedly activated near the village of Qatia and in Bir al-Abd. To date, only some of the villagers have returned to their homes.

### Activation of IEDs in the region of Bir al-Abd and Rabi'a

- ▶ **On September 13, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army vehicle south of the village of Rabi'a. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, September 14, 2020).
- ▶ **On September 12, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army force in **Bir al-Abd**. An officer with the rank of *naqib* (captain) was wounded (Shahed Sinaa – Al-Rasmia Facebook page, September 12, 2020). To date, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was apparently carried out by ISIS.
- ▶ **On September 9, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army vehicle **near the village of Qatia**, west of Bir al-Abd. An officer and three soldiers were killed and others were wounded (Shahed Sinaa – Al-Rasmia Facebook page, September 9, 2020).

## Destruction of buildings and infrastructure in the village of Al-Janain

▶ A resident of the village of Al-Janain, in the Rabi'a area, who entered the village, said that there was complete destruction there and that so far residents had returned to only a small part of the village. According to him, some of the buildings collapsed and others were partially damaged, the trees dried up due to lack of water and the electricity was disconnected. While he was in the village, echoes of explosions were heard due to airstrikes in the area around the village (Shahed Sinaa – Al-Rasmia Facebook page, September 11, 2020).

## The Rafah area

▶ **On September 14, 2020**, ISIS carried out intensive activity in the area of the village of Al-Wifaq, south of Rafah, which included sniper fire at an Egyptian soldier (who was killed); firing at a Egyptian army vehicle (both passengers were killed or injured); and activation of IEDs against a tank and a bulldozer (the tank crew and the soldiers in the bulldozer were killed or wounded) (Telegram, September 15, 2020).

## The fall of an Egyptian army drone in the city of Rafah

▶ **On September 11, 2020**, ISIS released a photo showing wreckage of an Egyptian army drone that had fallen in Rafah (Telegram, September 11, 2020).



The Egyptian army drone that fell in the city of Rafah (Telegram, September 11, 2020)

## The Sheikh Zuweid region

▶ **On September 14, 2020**, two Egyptian army vehicles west of Sheikh Zuweid were targeted by gunfire. The passengers of both vehicles were killed or wounded (Telegram, September 15, 2020).

- ▶ **On September 14, 2020**, snipers fired at an Egyptian soldier west of Sheikh Zuweid. He was killed (Telegram, September 15, 2020).

## ISIS's activity around the globe<sup>5</sup>

### Africa

#### Nigeria

- ▶ **On September 13, 2020**, ISIS ambushed and fired machine guns at a Nigerian army convoy near the Nigerian-Niger border. Several soldiers were killed and others wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized.
- ▶ **On September 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired machine guns at a Nigerian army force about 50 km west of the Nigeria-Chad-Cameroon tri-border area. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.
- ▶ **On September 11, 2020**, ISIS operatives set up a roadblock about 20 km south of the Nigeria-Chad-Cameroon tri-border area, setting fire to two International Red Cross vehicles.
- ▶ **On September 9, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army headquarters in the city of Baga, about 25 km southwest of the border between Nigeria and Chad. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.
- ▶ **On September 8, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Nigerian soldiers northwest of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State (in northeastern Nigeria). Several soldiers were killed and others were wounded.

### Asia

#### Pakistan

- ▶ **On September 12, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Pakistani army headquarters in the Bajaur Province, about 180 km northwest of Islamabad (near the border with Afghanistan). Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2020).
- ▶ **On September 11, 2020**, an ISIS operative fired a handgun at a Shiite in the city of Peshawar, about 40 km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The Shiite was killed (Telegram, September 12, 2020).

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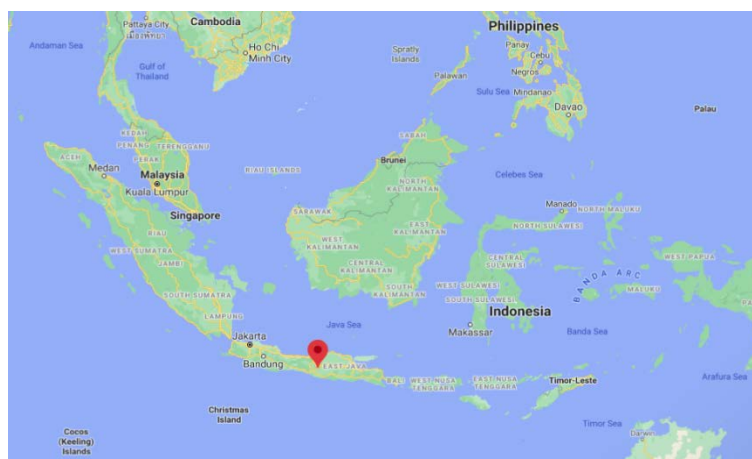
<sup>5</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

## Indonesia

### Overview

In their latest article, researchers of radical movements V. Arianti and Ahmad Saiful Rijal analyze the **educational activity carried out by ISIS supporters in Indonesia**, especially on **the island of Java**. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, with a population of about 270 million, about 90% of whom are Muslims. This educational activity, **which is gradually developing**, is designed **to create a militant young generation that supports ISIS**.<sup>6</sup>

► **Supporters of the Islamic State are working to train a new militant young generation of ISIS supporters in Indonesia**,<sup>7</sup> who receive their education at home-based schools (i.e., local schools or those based on tutoring at home). This phenomenon is **especially evident on the island of Java**. For the educational system in Indonesia, these schools constitute “[private] boarding schools” that are not subject to the laws of the state **and hence are not subject to supervision**.



The island of Java (Google Maps)

<sup>6</sup> V. Arianti and Ahmad Saiful Rijal, **Pro-Islamic State Home-Based Schooling in Indonesia – Analysis**. Eurasiareview, 30 August 2020: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/30082020-pro-islamic-state-home-based-schooling-in-indonesia-analysis>. V. Arianti and Ahmad Saiful Rijal are both Associate Research Fellows at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

<sup>7</sup> For details on the concept of educating a younger generation of militant fighters (Ashbal al-Khilafah; lion cubs) in general, and by ISIS in particular, see: Lion Cubs. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion\\_Cubs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion_Cubs). Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion\\_Cubs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion_Cubs)

### Adoption of rigid Salafi content at the schools

► These schools offer classes for religious studies with a Salafi curriculum that is faithful to the lifestyle and values of Islam in its early years. The curriculum includes **memorizing verses from the Quran. The curriculum includes the Arabic language**, in view of its importance in understanding the **Quran, hadith**<sup>8</sup> and **tawhid** (Islamic monotheism), which is taught uncompromisingly.

► ISIS supporters who run these schools have adopted principles of radical Salafism, **the most prominent of which is takfir, i.e., declaring another Muslim as an infidel/one who has abandoned Islam.** The principle of takfir is used **to legitimize ISIS’s killing of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.** The parents of the students are told that studying this principle is preferable to learning mathematics, English or civics. **In this way ISIS plants the seeds of antagonism against the “enemies of Islam.”** Pro-ISIS schools have adopted the book titled “Pembatalan Islam” as the core reference for the study of **Tawhid**, the fundamental principle of monotheism in Islam<sup>9</sup>. The book is a translated treatise known as “The Nullifiers of Islam” written by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Islamic doctrine known as Wahhabism.

### Characteristics of ISIS supporters’ schools

► At these private schools, which are a source of attraction for parents, a militant young generation of ISIS supporters is being educated in Indonesia. The parents include ISIS-supporters and those who do not support it but believe that **these schools offer the “true” teachings of Islam.** Moreover, children of the pro-ISIS followers who are detained and slain pro-ISIS militants are **sponsored by pro-ISIS charity groups when they go to such schools, where the students live and study in a cramped environment.** The education that students receive at these schools is designed to keep them away from the dangers inherent in education that runs counter to sharia (Islamic law), and first and foremost to keep them away

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<sup>8</sup> The Muslim tradition that includes details about the life of the Prophet Mohammad.

<sup>9</sup> According to ‘Abd al-Wahhab, as explained by the scholar Shaikh Abdullah an-Najmi, this set of ten nullifiers can invalidate one’s religion and good deeds. If a person commits any one of these nullifiers and his good deeds become void, he will be relegated to the rank of unbelievers. One of the nullifiers notes that “Whoever does not excommunicate the polytheists, or is doubtful about their unbelief, or affirms the validity of their doctrine – he is an unbeliever by consensus”.”

from the “dangers” of democracy. Since the principals of these schools are not involved in carrying out acts of terrorism, **the law enforcement agencies in Indonesia are unable to arrest them and their numbers are growing.**

### How to slow down the growth of the militant young generation of ISIS supporters

▶ The number of pro-ISIS home-based schools will likely grow **as the administrators aim to establish more such schools across the country. Thus, it is incumbent on the Indonesian government and civil society organizations to slow down the growth of these young militants.** They must make sure that the children of detained and slain ISIS operatives do not attend those schools. This would help to stop the cycle of radicalism within families of ISIS supporters. In addition, there should be **general education within the community about such schools, especially among unsuspecting parents who merely want a religious education for their children.**

### Afghanistan

▶ **On September 15, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Afghan National Directorate of Security in the city of Jalalabad. Four security operatives were killed and another was wounded (Telegram, September 15, 2020).

▶ **On September 13, 2020**, an operative of the Afghan National Directorate of Security was targeted by gunfire in the city of Jalalabad. He was killed (Telegram, September 15, 2020).

## The battle for hearts and minds

▶ The latest issue of ISIS’s Al-Naba’ weekly included **a feature article on the anniversary of the attacks on September 11, 2001.** According to the article, these were “blessed” events constituting the watershed in the war of the “Crusaders” [i.e., the United States and the West] against the Muslims. This event symbolized a victory on the part of the Muslims, which reached its climax with the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate of ISIS.

▶ According to the article, the “infidel” leaders took advantage of the West’s war against the jihad fighters to strengthen their power while oppressing the jihad fighters and their supporters. Some of Al-Qaeda’s leaders caused the deaths of Muslims in order to eventually bring to power local rulers who adhere to democracy, and therefore **Al-Qaeda ceased to operate within the framework of jihad.** In contrast, **the establishment of ISIS’s Islamic Caliphate was the true realization of the goal of jihad fighters since September**

**11, 2001.** The article notes that **jihad fighters (i.e., ISIS operatives) continue to fight for the existence of the Caliphate until Islam rules the world** (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, September 10, 2020).



**The article in Al-Naba' (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, September 10, 2020)**