



Spotlight on Global Jihad

January 7-13, 2021



Main events of 2020

► Last week, ISIS published several infographics, summing up the activity of its provinces in Iraq and Syria in 2020. According to these infographics, and according to the ITIC's data and several publications, **five provinces stood out in 2020:**

◆ **The Iraqi Province remains the epicenter of ISIS's activity and reorganization.** In Iraq, **there was a sharp increase in the scope of ISIS's activity, with the largest number of attacks** (a total of 1,422, averaging close to 120 attacks per month). Most of the attacks (499) were carried out in the **Diyala Province**, a mixed Sunni-Shiite region north of Baghdad. **Most of the attacks were "simple" guerrilla operations** in the form of planting IEDs, shooting attacks, sniper fire and targeted killings. ISIS's most notable successes in 2020 were the **killings of several senior Iraqi army officers with the ranks of brigadier general and colonel.** However, ISIS still refrained from carrying out complex attacks such as the deployment of large-scale forces or deadly suicide bombing attacks.

◆ **The Syria Province** is in second place among the various provinces in the volume of attacks (593). Most of ISIS's activity focused on **the Euphrates Valley and the deserts in eastern Syria.** A smaller number of attacks were carried out in the **Daraa region** in southern Syria and north of Aleppo, **near the Syrian-Turkish border.** Most of the attacks were "simple" guerrilla operations in the form of planting IEDs, shooting attacks, and targeted killings. However, **ISIS carried out several deadly attacks in deserts in eastern Syria,** a region where the scope and quality of activity of the attacks **are on the rise.**

◆ **The West Africa Province (Nigeria and its neighbors):** This province ranks third among ISIS's provinces in the number of attacks (385) and **first in terms of the number of fatalities in these attacks.** From northeastern Nigeria, the epicenter of the West Africa Province, **ISIS's activity also spills over to Nigeria's neighbors** (Niger, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso). Terrorism researchers believe that **the countries of**

Africa, which are preoccupied with coping with the COVID-19 crisis and are characterized by domestic political instability, **are gradually becoming ISIS's most important area of activity at the global level.**

◆ **The Sinai Peninsula:** In the northern Sinai Peninsula, **ISIS operatives continued to carry out successful guerrilla attacks against the Egyptian security forces**, which repeatedly failed to provide an effective response to ISIS's activity. ISIS's peak achievement in 2020 was a large-scale attack against the Egyptian army near the village of Rabi'a, west of Bir al-Abd (about 30 km from the Suez Canal). Dozens of soldiers were killed in the attack, after which ISIS operatives took control of several villages in this region and held them for about three months, until the Egyptian security forces managed to drive them out.

◆ **Afghanistan (Khorasan Province):** In Afghanistan, **ISIS recovered from the blow that it had suffered at the hands of the Afghan army with US support in the Nangarhar Province** (southwest of Kabul). In February 2020, **the Khorasan Province resumed its activity after several months of inactivity.** Most of ISIS's activity **was carried out in the capital Kabul and it included deadly suicide bombing attacks.** From Kabul, ISIS's activity spilled over into additional provinces. The attacks represent an effort on ISIS's part to take advantage of the political uncertainty stemming from the US-Taliban agreement and the intention of the US to withdraw from Afghanistan. **An increase in ISIS's power in Afghanistan could lead to its activity spilling over to India and other countries in Southeast Asia.**

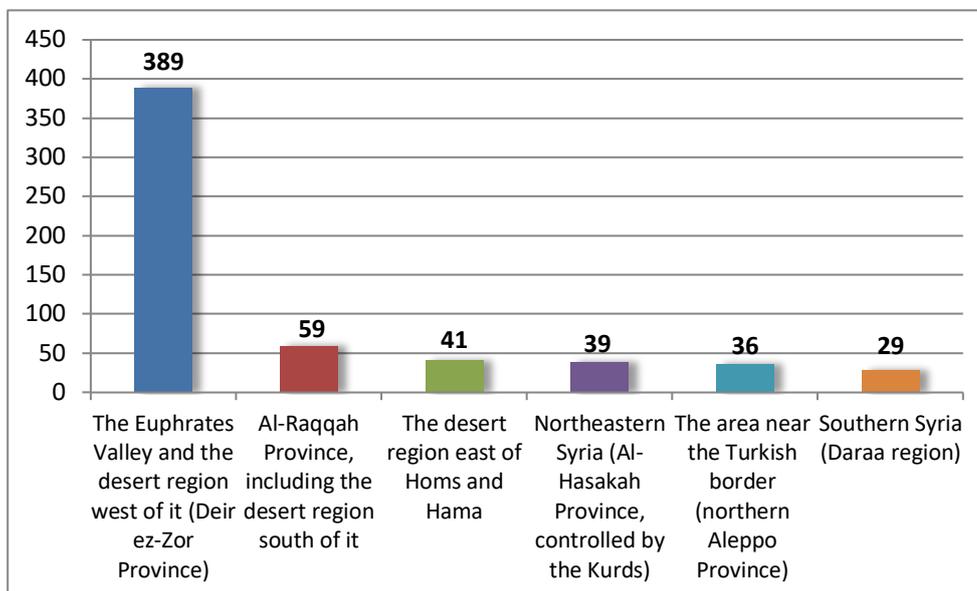
► ISIS is optimistic about the global developments which, in ISIS's assessment, may facilitate its activity in 2021. An article published in ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly claims that after the elections, **the US will be preoccupied with its internal affairs, at the expense of activity outside its borders, and this is expected to weaken the International Coalition against ISIS.** The article notes that the US has already significantly reduced its activity against ISIS around the world on the false grounds that ISIS has been defeated.

The Syrian arena

Summary of ISIS's activity in Syria in 2020

Recently, ISIS released an infographic summing up its activity in Syria in 2020. In the past year, **ISIS carried out 593 attacks**, i.e., close to 50 attacks per month. **Most of the attacks focused on the Euphrates Valley and the desert region west of it** (448 attacks, of which 389 were in the Deir ez-Zor Province and 59 in the Al-Raqqah Province)¹; they are followed by the **desert region in the eastern part of the provinces of Homs and Hama** (38 in the Homs Province and 3 in the Hama Province); then come **39 attacks in the Al-Hasakah Province**, in northeastern Syria (the region controlled by the Kurds); 36 attacks **in the northern part of the Aleppo Province, near the border between Syria and Turkey**²; and 29 attacks **in the Daraa region, in southern Syria**. The most common type of attacks was the activation of IEDs (256), followed by targeted killings (191), and exchanges of fire (123) (Amaq, January 6, 2021). **The Idlib Province**, which is controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), does not appear in the infographic in the list of provinces where ISIS is active.

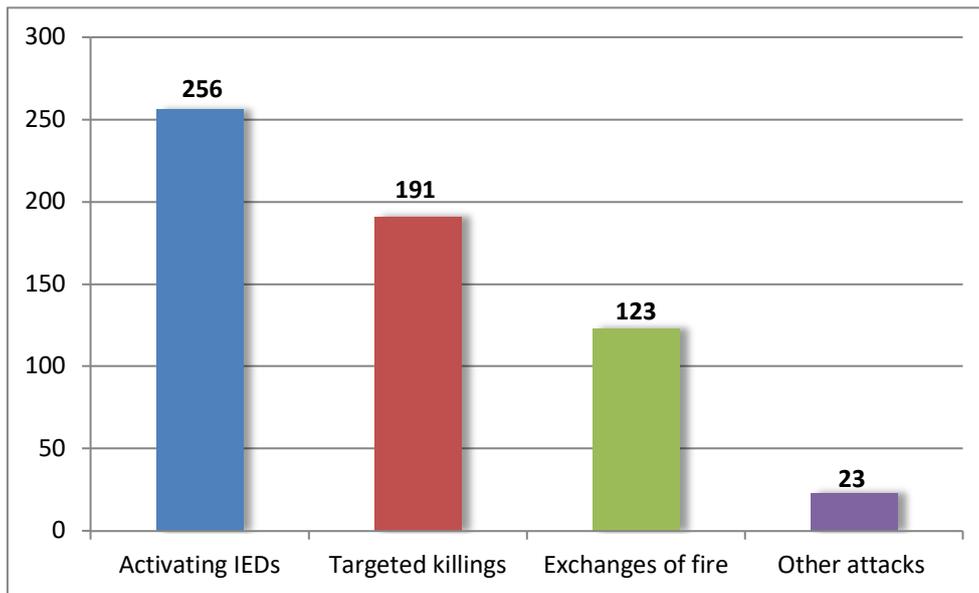
ISIS's attacks in Syria in 2020



¹ The desert region is not shown separately in ISIS's infographic, maybe because ISIS is not interested in giving prominence to its activity in this arena. The desert region west of the Euphrates Valley is included in the provinces of Deir ez-Zor and Al-Raqqah, while the desert region east of Homs and Hama is included in the provinces of Homs and Hama.

² This area appears in the infographic in the Aleppo Province. In the ITIC's assessment, this refers to the northern Aleppo Province, i.e., **the area near the border with Turkey, which is controlled by Turkey and Turkish-sponsored rebel organizations**, where ISIS intensified its activity in 2020.

Type of attacks by ISIS in Syria in 2020



► According to ISIS's data, 1,327 people were killed and wounded in attacks carried out in 2020. The highest number of casualties, higher by far than in the other provinces, was in the Euphrates Valley and the desert region west of it (908). It is followed by the desert region in the western part of the provinces of Homs and Hama (194); northern Aleppo Province, i.e., the area near the Syrian-Turkish border (97); Al-Hasakah Province in northeastern Syria (72); and the Daraa region in southern Syria (56).

► The highest number of casualties in ISIS's attacks was among the SDF fighters (901). In the ITIC's assessment, the Kurdish SDF forces were the main target of ISIS's attacks in the Euphrates Valley. They are followed by the Syrian army and the forces supporting it (407 soldiers and fighters, most of whom killed in the desert region in eastern Syria) and the Free Syrian Army (19 fighters who, in the ITIC's assessment, were killed near the Syrian-Turkish border).



Infographic summing up ISIS's activity in Syria in 2020 (Amaq, January 6, 2021)

The Syrian arena

The Idlib region

In the Idlib region, exchanges of artillery fire continued between the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, and the rebel organizations, mainly HTS. The incidents occurred mainly in the region several dozen kilometers south and southeast of Idlib. In addition, HTS snipers fired at Syrian soldiers. Russian aircraft reportedly carried out an airstrike about 40 km southwest of Idlib (Edlib Media Center, January 9, 2021).

ISIS's activity in Syria³

The region of Deir ez-Zor and Al-Mayadeen

- **On January 11, 2021**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire in the village of Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed.
- **On January 9, 2021, an IED was activated against a convoy.** One of the vehicles in the convoy carried a **senior IRGC commander**, an Iranian named Hajj Gholam Hossein Dehghan. He was killed along with two of his escorts (Khotwa, January 10, 2021; ISNA, January 11, 2021). Iranian sources reported that Hajj Gholam Hossein Dehghan had died of COVID-19 on January 9, 2021; they did not mention the said incident (Ayn Al-Furat, Eye of Euphrates, January 10, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was probably ISIS.

³ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram



Death notice for Hajj Gholam Hossein Dehghan (ISNA, January 10, 2021)

- ▶ **On January 9, 2021**, an SDF fighter was targeted by gunfire about 10 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. He was killed.
- ▶ **On January 8, 2021**, an SDF headquarters was targeted by machine gun fire and RPG rockets in the village of Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. One fighter was killed and another was wounded.
- ▶ **On January 8, 2021**, an SDF fighter was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed.
- ▶ **On January 7, 2021**, two SDF vehicles were targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Two fighters were killed and two others were wounded.
- ▶ **On January 5, 2021**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 5 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. The passengers were wounded.

The desert region (Al-Badia)

- ▶ **On January 11, 2021**, a vehicle carrying **two Republican Guard officers** was attacked on the Ithriya-Khanaser road (northeast of Hama). They were wounded. The Syrian army sent reinforcements to the scene of the incident (Khotwa, January 11, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was probably ISIS.
- ▶ **On January 10, 2021**, ISIS squads exchanged fire with fighters of the **Homeland Defense Forces** who were carrying out searches in the Deir ez-Zor Desert. Several fighters of the Homeland Defense Forces were killed (@ALBADIA24 Twitter account, January 10, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was probably ISIS.
- ▶ **On January 8, 2021**, a bus carrying three officers and nine soldiers of **the Homeland Defense Forces** was attacked about 70 km northeast of Hama. The charred remains of the bus were found. The fate of the officers and soldiers who were inside is unknown (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 10, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack but in the ITIC's assessment, it was probably ISIS.

Counterterrorism activities in the desert region

► On January 7, 2021, an IED was activated against a vehicle carrying a commander in the Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade, on the Deir ez-Zor-Palmyra highway (about 50 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor). The commander was killed (@ALBADIA24 Twitter account, January 7, 2021). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that the vehicle was destroyed and all the passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, January 9, 2021).



The wreckage of the Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade commander's vehicle
(Telegram, January 9, 2021)

► On January 7, 2021, an IED was activated against a Syrian army vehicle on the Ithriya road, about 100 km northeast of Hama. An officer serving in the Suheil al-Hassan forces was killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights; Al-Badia 24, January 7, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was probably ISIS.

► On January 8, 2021, the Syrian army along with the forces supporting it carried out a search operation in the Jabal al-Bishri region, west of Deir ez-Zor. The operation was launched after recent escalation in ISIS's attacks, killing dozens of Syrian soldiers and fighters of the forces supporting them (Deir ez-Zor 24, January 8, 2021).

Al-Raqqah region

► On January 10, 2021, an IED was activated in central Al-Raqqah against the vehicle of a judge in the SDF courts. He was wounded.

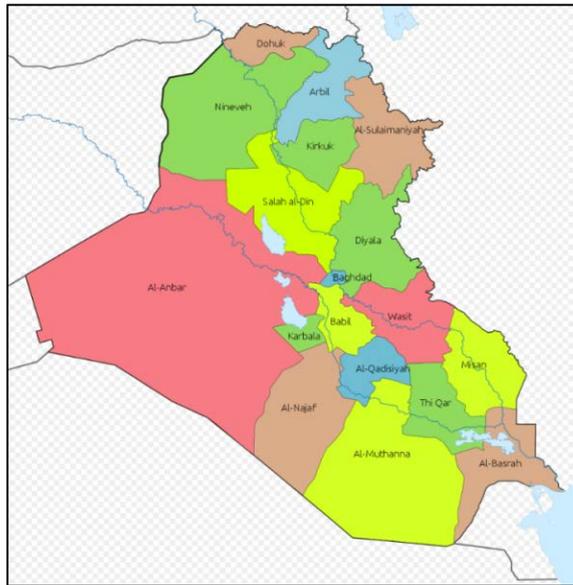
► On January 9, 2021, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle northwest of Al-Raqqah. The passengers were killed or wounded.

Al-Hasakah region

► On January 9, 2021, an intelligence operative of the International Coalition was targeted by machine gun fire about 80 km south of Al-Hasakah. He was killed.

► On January 7, 2021, an IED was activated against an Al-Qaterji tanker carrying oil for the Syrian regime, southwest of Al-Hasakah. It was damaged.

The Iraqi arena

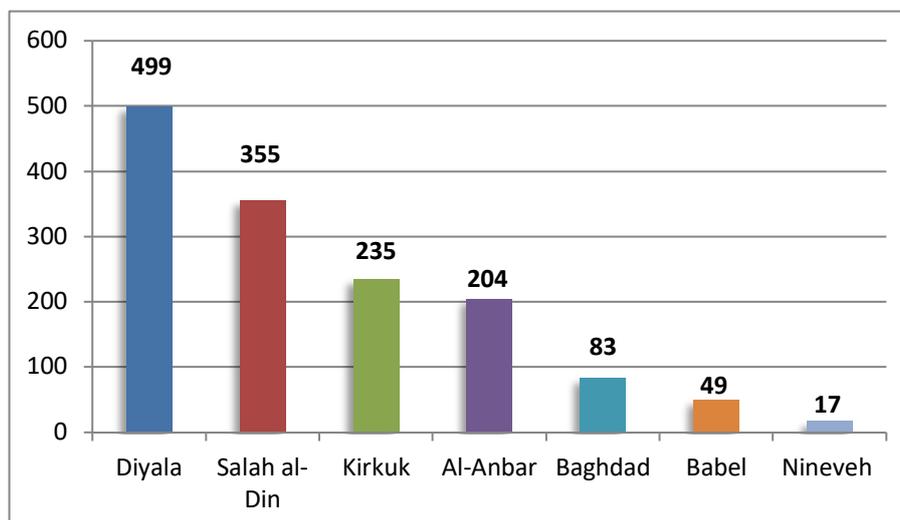


Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

Summary of ISIS's activity in Iraq in 2020

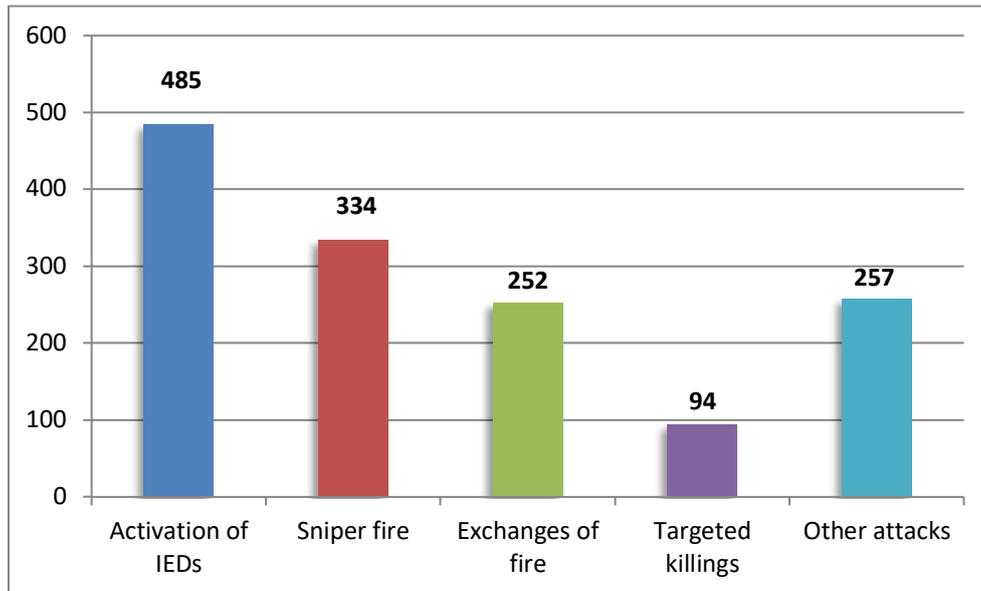
Recently, ISIS released an infographic **summing up its activity in Iraq in 2020** (Amaq, January 9, 2021). According to the infographic, **ISIS carried out 1,422 attacks in the various provinces in Iraq**, i.e., **about 120 attacks per month**. Most of the attacks, far more than in the other provinces, **were carried out in the Diyala Province (499), north of Baghdad** (a province with a mixed, Sunni and Shiite population, with terrain suitable for guerrilla warfare). The number of attacks carried out in the other provinces: Salah al-Din (335); Kirkuk (235); Al-Anbar (204); Baghdad (83); Babel (49); and Nineveh (17). **The leading modus operandi was the activation of IEDs (485 attacks)**, followed by **exchanges of fire (252); targeted killings (94); sniper fire (334)** and other attacks (257).

Breakdown of ISIS attacks in the various provinces



► **Types of attacks carried out by ISIS:** Activation of IEDs (485); sniper fire (334); exchanges of fire (252); targeted killings (94); and “other attacks”⁴. The targets were the Iraqi army; security, intelligence and police personnel; the Popular Mobilization forces (Shiite militias sponsored by the Iraqi regime) and the Tribal Mobilization forces (Sunni militias sponsored by the Iraqi regime); the Peshmerga (the Kurdish military force); “collaborators” and “agents”.

Types of attacks in Iraq in 2021



► **A total of 2,748 people were killed and wounded in the attacks. The highest number of casualties, by far greater than in other provinces, was in the Diyala Province (724),** where the largest number of attacks was carried out. The other casualties were in the following provinces: Salah al-Din (643); Al-Anbar (567); Kirkuk (474); Baghdad (210); Babel (104); and Nineveh (26). The **level of deadliness of the attacks in Iraq**, i.e., the ratio between the number of attacks and number of casualties, **was about two casualties per attack.** Most of the attacks carried out by ISIS were “simple” guerrilla actions with a relatively small number of casualties (even though 2020 also witnessed some showcase targeted killings, such as the killing of several senior Iraqi army officers with the ranks of brigadier general and colonel).

⁴ For example, burning fields and bombing high-voltage pylons as part of ISIS’s economic warfare against the Iraqi regime. This kind of activity does not appear in ISIS’s infographic.



Summary of ISIS attacks in Iraq in 2021 (Amaq, January 9, 2021)

ISIS attacks in the various provinces⁵

Diyala Province

Killing of a senior Popular Mobilization officer

► **On January 11, 2021**, ISIS operatives activated several IEDs inside a Popular Mobilization compound about 40 km northeast of Baqubah. An officer with the rank of brigadier general was killed along with his escort. Several other fighters were wounded (Telegram, January 12, 2021).

Other incidents

► **On January 11, 2021**, two Iraqi soldiers were targeted by machine gun fire about 5 km south of Baqubah. They were both killed.

► **On January 10, 2021**, a fighter of the Iraqi counterterrorism unit was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km northeast of Baqubah. He was killed.

► **On January 6, 2021**, a Popular Mobilization fighter was targeted by machine gun fire about 40 km northeast of Baqubah. He was wounded.

► **On January 5, 2021**, Iraqi soldiers were targeted by machine gun fire about 80 km northeast of Baqubah. Three soldiers were killed and another was wounded.

Salah al-Din Province

► **On January 8, 2021**, an Iraqi army compound was targeted by machine gun fire and hand grenades about 30 km north of Baghdad. One soldier was wounded.

⁵ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

► **On January 7, 2021**, an Iraqi army compound was targeted by machine gun fire in the Mashahada area, about 30 km north of Baghdad. Two soldiers were killed and another was wounded.

► **On January 6, 2021**, a rocket was fired at a refinery near the city of Baiji (**Note:** on November 29, 2020, ISIS fired two rockets at that refinery, causing a fire in one of the oil pipelines).

► **On January 5, 2021**, an Iraqi police compound was targeted by machine gun fire northeast of Samarra. One policeman was killed and four others were wounded. ISIS operatives ambushed a rescue force arriving at the scene and fired machine guns at a vehicle. The passengers were killed or wounded.

Al-Anbar Province

► **On January 10, 2021**, ISIS ambushed and fired at a vehicle carrying Iraqi soldiers near Al-Rutba, in western Al-Anbar Province. An officer and two soldiers were killed and others were wounded. When a rescue force arrived at the scene, it was targeted by heavy and medium weapons. One APC was put out of commission and additional soldiers were wounded.

► **On January 9, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 150 km northwest of Baghdad. The passengers were killed or wounded.

► **On January 5, 2021**, a Popular Mobilization compound was targeted by machine gun fire east of Al-Rutba. One fighter was killed and two others were wounded.

Babel Province

► **On January 5, 2021**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by machine gun fire about 15 km south of Baghdad. He was killed.

Counterterrorism activities by the Iraqi security forces

Salah al-Din Province

► **On January 9, 2021**, teams of the Salah al-Din Intelligence Directorate apprehended three wanted ISIS operatives who operated in the Samarra region. The three admitted in their preliminary interrogation that they had taken part in carrying out attacks against the security forces and Iraqi civilians (Al-Sumaria, January 9, 2021).

Al-Anbar Province

► **On January 12, 2021**, members of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Apparatus apprehended two “terrorist operatives” (implicitly, ISIS operatives) in the Fallujah region (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 9, 2021).

► **On January 9, 2021**, an Iraqi army force carrying out searches captured two wanted “terrorist operatives” (implicitly, ISIS operatives) about 10 km east of Al-Qaim, near the Iraqi-Syrian border (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 9, 2021).

► **On January 8, 2021**, a security force carrying out searches in the Al-Rutba Desert, in the western Al-Anbar Province, captured an ISIS squad numbering four operatives (Al-Sumaria, January 8, 2021).

Kirkuk Province

► **On January 12, 2021**, Coalition aircraft carried out airstrikes about 30 km south of Kirkuk. The remains of seven ISIS operatives were later found at the site. A tunnel and two hiding places were also located (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 12, 2021).

► **On January 12, 2021**, members of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Apparatus captured two “terrorist operatives” (implicitly, ISIS operatives) in the Kirkuk Province (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 12, 2021).

The city of Baghdad

► **On January 12, 2021**, members of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Apparatus captured a “terrorist operative” (implicitly, an ISIS operative) whom they described as a “quality target” in the city of Baghdad (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 12, 2021).

The Sinai Peninsula

ISIS’s activity in northern Sinai⁶

► **On January 11, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army tanker in Sheikh Zuweid. The tanker was damaged.

⁶ According to ISIS’s claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

► **On January 11, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army vehicle in the village of Tafaha in the Bir al-Abd region, west of Al-Arish. An officer with the rank of major and an Egyptian soldier were killed (Shahed Sinaa – Al-Rasmia Facebook page, January 11, 2021). ISIS has claimed responsibility for the incident. According to ISIS, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army vehicle in the village of Tafaha. The passengers were killed.

► **On January 10, 2021**, an IED was activated against a tanker belonging to a collaborator with the Egyptian army in west Rafah. The tanker was destroyed.

► **On January 8, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army bulldozer south of Rafah. The passengers were wounded.

► **On January 7, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army bulldozer near a checkpoint in south Rafah. The passengers were wounded.



Right: Egyptian army bulldozer before the IED was activated. Left: The IED being activated (Telegram, January 9, 2021)

► **On January 6, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army armored vehicle near a checkpoint in west Rafah. The passengers were killed or wounded.

► On January 8, 2021, ISIS's Sinai Province released a video entitled: "Bloodshed in [ISIS's] Operations in Sinai." The video claims that **the Egyptian army's operations against ISIS are ineffective since ISIS continues to operate at full speed and has even expanded its activity to new regions**. The video includes documentation of numerous attacks carried out by the Sinai Province in recent months against the Egyptian army, in the form of activating IEDs against vehicles, armored vehicles and bulldozers, and attacks on Egyptian soldiers using various types of weapons. It also includes documentation of the executions of Egyptian soldiers and collaborators. The video ends with the documentation of a suicide bomber traveling in a vehicle towards Egyptian soldiers in the area of the village of Aqtia, near Bir al-Abd (Telegram, January 8, 2021).



Right: ISIS operatives on their way to carry out an attack against the Egyptian army. Left: Suicide bombing attack in the Bir al-Abd region (Telegram, January 8, 2021).

ISIS's activity around the globe⁷

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► ISIS published an infographic summing up its activity between December 31, 2020 and January 6, 2021. During this time, ISIS operatives carried out 48 attacks in the various provinces in Asia and Africa, compared to 45 in the previous week. **Most of the attacks were carried out in Iraq (21)**. Attacks carried out in ISIS's other provinces: Sinai Peninsula (13); Syria (6); West Africa (3); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (3); Central Africa (1) and Pakistan (1) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, January 7, 2021).

► **A total of 164 people were killed and wounded in those attacks**, compared to 161 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in Syria (78). The other casualties were in the following provinces: Iraq (30); Sinai Peninsula (19); West Africa (17); Pakistan (11) and Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (9) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, January 7, 2021).

Africa

Nigeria

► **On January 10, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army compound about 100 km northeast of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Three soldiers were killed and others were wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized.

► **On January 10, 2021**, during a an attempt by the Nigerian army to attack ISIS positions about 100 km southwest of Maiduguri, a suicide bomber activated a car bomb among the forces. **About 20 soldiers were killed or wounded**. In addition, photography drone used by the Nigerian army was shot down, and two armored vehicles and three vehicles were destroyed (Telegram, Amaq, January 10, 2021).

⁷ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

► **On January 9, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked Nigerian army forces about 20 km south of Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State. Five soldiers were killed and others were wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized.

► **On January 9, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed a Nigerian army convoy about 80 km southwest of Maiduguri, firing at it and activating three IEDs against it. Two vehicles and an armored vehicle were destroyed and their passengers were killed.

► **On January 19, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired machine guns at Nigerian soldiers about 50 km east of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized.

► **On January 8, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army roadblock in Borno State. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On January 19, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired machine guns at Nigerian soldiers about 50 km east of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On January 7, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army roadblock about 70 km north of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On January 7, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army compound in Yobe State, 30 km southwest of the border between Nigeria and Niger. Several soldiers were killed or wounded. In addition, weapons, ammunition and several vehicles were seized.

► **On January 6, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked Nigerian army forces on a road connecting the town of Bosso on the border between Niger and Nigeria with Malem Patori, near the border between Chad and Niger. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

► **On January 12, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Congolese army compound in the Beni region in northeastern Congo. An officer and 14 soldiers were killed. In addition, weapons, ammunition were seized.

► **On January 9, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Congolese army compound in the Beni region in northeastern Congo. Three soldiers were killed and others were wounded.

Asia

Afghanistan

► **On January 11, 2021**, ISIS operatives raided a Taliban position in the Kunar region, about 200 km northeast of Kabul. Several Taliban operatives were killed or wounded.

- ▶ **On January 11, 2021**, an officer of the Afghan National Directorate of Security was targeted by gunfire in the area of Arbanu Kulai, in the city of Jalalabad. He was killed.
- ▶ **On January 10, 2021**, an IED was activated against a mukhtar who serves as an “agent” of the Afghan security forces north of Jalalabad. He was killed.
- ▶ **On January 6, 2021**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at a Taliban position in the Kunar region, about 200 km northeast of Kabul. The commander was wounded.

ISIS’s international weapons procurement network

The British institute for Conflict Armament Research (CAR), headquartered in London, recently published a study exposing details about **ISIS’s international weapons procurement network**. According to the study, ISIS has set up an international network of suppliers and technical personnel, **who have provided the organization with weapons on a large scale in Syria and Iraq**. Through this network, ISIS managed to steadily expand its control over Iraq and Syria, beginning in 2014.⁸ It is evident from the study that ISIS developed its weapons significantly over the years (at least until 2017), from the use of various types of explosives to the adoption of the use of drones.

- ▶ According to the study, **the border area between Turkey and Syria was a bustling center of activity of ISIS’s weapons procurement network, at least until 2015**. This was made possible for two reasons. First, until this year, Turkey did not perceive ISIS as an enemy; and second, ISIS was also fighting against Turkey’s enemy the Kurds. According to the study, **the Turks and ISIS parted company around 2015**, when ISIS gradually increased in strength, and became aggressive towards Turkey as well. However, the study does not rule out the possibility that the Syrian-Turkish border area **subsequently remained the center of ISIS’s arms smuggling activity**.
- ▶ The study, which covers 2014-2020, **examines the manufacturers and companies that took part in smuggling arms for ISIS**. According to the study, ISIS’s operating methods often included the use of false names, contacting family-owned private companies and individuals in the area of the border with Turkey, through which ISIS operatives ordered the necessary ingredients for manufacturing explosives and other weapons. It is evident from the study that **the companies received the orders from ISIS operatives without knowing**

⁸ Conflict Armament Research (CAR), **Red Flags and Choke Points: Procurement Networks behind Islamic State Improvised Weapon Programmes**. London, United Kingdom, December 2020. p. 1-46.

details about who they were doing business with. ISIS operatives took care to always conceal their identities and contact suppliers only through online accounts, using third-party websites and voice-changer software.

► Most of the payments for weapons were made in cash transferred through established international suppliers. Some of the transfers were made from one part of the world to the other part of it, where the order was placed. **After the components of the weapons came into their possession, ISIS operatives dispersed them to various facilities.**

► **The study found a number of red flags characteristic of ISIS's illegal procurement of weapons:**

- ◆ The appearance of an unknown customer whose company is located in a sensitive region (such as the Turkey-Syria border).
- ◆ Orders that had little, if any, connection with the company's core business.
- ◆ Payment of the invoice by a third party.
- ◆ Transfer methods concealing the identity of the person transferring the money.
- ◆ Use of unconventional routes for shipping the orders.

The impact of the US election results on the campaign against ISIS

This week, ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published a feature article analyzing the expected effects of the results of the US presidential elections on ISIS. According to the author, **after the elections, the US will be preoccupied with its internal affairs, and this will weaken the activity of the US-led International Coalition against ISIS** (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, January 7, 2021).

► According to the article, during Joe Biden's term in office, the sharp confrontation between the Republicans and the Democrats will focus on mobilizing support among the American public and **addressing the internal problems of the United States**. According to the author, **this will take place at the expense of activity outside the United States**. The author adds that the reduction in the presence of the United States around the globe can already be seen, as is evident from the withdrawals by American forces from various arenas over the past year (**note:** the author is referring to the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and Iraq).

► The article notes that in the next administration, US involvement in foreign affairs will be limited solely to issues directly related to the lives of the American people, issues related to

the security of their allies and issues related to the struggle for US hegemony around the globe (i.e., the struggle against Iran, China and Russia). The author surmises that the **United States will withdraw from its involvement outside its borders, but this will be done as a gradual process and not as a sudden move.** The author notes that the US will cooperate more with its allies with regard to its foreign policy and will be less involved in direct activity.

► According to the author, the US withdrawals in the international arena and the weakening of its fighting against ISIS gives rise to concerns not only among its allies but also among its adversaries, **which are much more afraid of ISIS than they are of the United States.** The article ends with **words of support for further jihad by ISIS**, until all the infidels disappear from the world.