



Spotlight on Global Jihad

January 27-21, 2021



Main events of the past week

- ▶ The main event of the week was a **double suicide bombing attack carried out by ISIS operatives in Baghdad**. Two terrorists blew themselves up with their explosive belts in a square in northeast Baghdad. The blasts killed about 30 people, including civilians and members of the security forces. The most recent suicide bombing attack carried out by ISIS in Baghdad was about a year and a half ago at the Shiite Al-Mahdi Mosque (June 21, 2019). The present suicide bombing attack is **further evidence of ISIS's improved operational capabilities and an increase in its daring in the Iraqi arena**.
- ▶ Routine attacks continued in ISIS's various provinces in Syria, Iraq and throughout Africa and Asia. Noteworthy incidents this week:
 - ◆ **Syria:** ISIS's activity continued in the **desert region**. This week, ISIS ambushed and attacked buses carrying Syrian Republican Guard soldiers. ISIS reported about 20 dead and wounded soldiers.
 - ◆ **Iraq:** ISIS ambushed and attacked forces of the Popular Mobilization (Shiite militias) north of Baghdad. **ISIS reported that over 25 fighters had been killed or wounded. Two senior officers were among the dead.**
 - ◆ **The Sinai Peninsula:** ISIS continued its attacks in the northern Sinai Peninsula against Egyptian army targets (mainly the activation of IEDs and shooting attacks at targets such as a tank, an armored vehicle and a bulldozer).
 - ◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS's intensive activity continues in Borno State, in the northeast of the country. Noteworthy incidents this week included the activation of IEDs against Nigerian army patrols.
 - ◆ **Afghanistan:** Noteworthy incidents this week included targeted killings of intelligence personnel through the use of sticky bombs (Kabul) and shooting at point-blank range (Jalalabad).
- ▶ ISIS published an infographic summing up its activity in Nigeria in 2020. **Over the past year, ISIS carried out 343 attacks in Nigeria** (third place among the various provinces). A total of

2,990 people were killed or wounded in these attacks (the highest number of fatalities among the provinces). The main target of the attacks was the Nigerian army, followed by the militias supporting the Nigerian army, and the Christian population.

The Syrian arena

The Idlib region

In the Idlib region, exchanges of fire continued between the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, and the rebel organizations, south and southwest of Idlib. HTS snipers fired at the Syrian forces south of Idlib. In addition, Russian fighter jets reportedly carried out airstrikes in Kabanah, on the Kurd Mountain (about 40 km southwest of Idlib) (Khotwa, January 23, 2021).

ISIS's activity in Syria¹

The desert region (Al-Badia)

- ▶ **On January 26, 2021**, an antitank missile was fired at a Syrian army tank in the Al-Sukhnah Desert, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra. The tank was destroyed.
- ▶ **On January 26, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Syrian army vehicle in the Al-Sukhnah Desert, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra. The passengers were killed.
- ▶ **On January 26, 2021**, an RPG rocket and machine guns were fired at a Syrian army vehicle in the Al-Sukhnah Desert, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra. The passengers were killed.
- ▶ **On January 25, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked positions of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, about 40 km southwest of Albukamal (near the Syrian-Iraqi border). **A total of 15 fighters were killed and 20 others were wounded** (Ayn al-Furat, Eye of the Euphrates, January 26, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was probably ISIS.

¹ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram



The site of the ISIS attack near the border with Iraq (Google Maps)

- ▶ **On January 24, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired machine guns **at buses carrying soldiers of the Republican Guard (a Syrian elite force)** near the village of Al-Shula, about 30 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor. **About 20 soldiers were killed or wounded.**
- ▶ **On January 23, 2021**, contact was lost with a force of the Iranian-handled Fatemiyoun Brigade around the T3 oil pumping station (about 40 km east of Palmyra). The force was probably attacked by ISIS. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility.
- ▶ **On January 20, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Syrian army vehicle in the Al-Sukhnah region, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra. The passengers were killed or wounded.
- ▶ **On January 20, 2021**, an IED was activated against a motorcycle with two Syrian army soldiers in the Al-Sukhnah region, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra. The two soldiers were killed.
- ▶ **On January 18, 2021**, machine guns were fired at Syrian soldiers east of Hama (the exact location was not mentioned). Six soldiers were killed.
- ▶ **On January 18, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Syrian army vehicle in the Al-Salamiyah area, about 30 km southeast of Hama. The passengers were killed or wounded.

Counterterrorism activity in the desert region

- ▶ **On January 26, 2021**, Russian fighter jets carried out several airstrikes against ISIS positions in the desert area of the Al-Shula region, about 30 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor (@DeirEzzor24 Twitter account, January 26, 2021).

Al-Raqqah region

► **On January 20, 2021**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle near a roadblock about 20 km east of Al-Raqqah. The passengers were killed or wounded.

Deir ez-Zor and Al-Mayadeen region

► **On January 24, 2021**, ISIS operatives broke into the house of a fighter of a militia operating against ISIS, about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. He was shot dead.

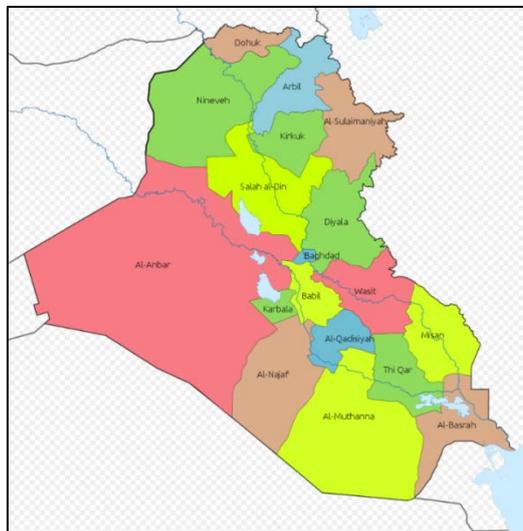
SDF counterterrorism activity

► **On January 24, 2021**, a force of the SDF and the International Coalition carried out an operation against ISIS in the village of Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Four ISIS squad members were captured. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized (SDF Press, January 25, 2021).

Al-Hasakah region

► **On January 22, 2021**, ISIS operatives broke into the homes of two female commanders in the SDF forces about 80 km south of Al-Hasakah (about 50 km west of the Syrian-Iraqi border). They were shot to death. ISIS attacks against women are rare.

The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS attacks in the various provinces²

Double suicide bombing attack in Baghdad

► **On the morning of January 21, 2021, two suicide bombers blew themselves up** while the Iraqi security forces were pursuing them **in northeastern Baghdad** (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 21, 2021). The first terrorist blew himself up in Tayaran Square, northeast of central Baghdad; the second terrorist blew himself up in the Al-Bab al-Sharqi open market, about half a kilometer southwest of the first suicide bombing attack. **A total of 28 people were killed in both attacks, and 88 were wounded** (Al-Sumaria, January 21, 2021). The two suicide bombers were reportedly Iraqis from Mosul (Al-Sumaria, January 24, 2021).

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to its statement, a suicide bomber detonated his explosive belt among Popular Mobilization fighters and Shiite civilians. Subsequently, another suicide bomber detonated his explosive belt among Popular Mobilization fighters, Shiite civilians, and members of the security forces who gathered in the area of the first suicide bombing. According to ISIS, **over 30 members of the security forces, Popular Mobilization fighters and Shiite civilians were killed and about 100 were wounded** (Telegram, January 21, 2021).



Right: Tayaran Square during one of the suicide bombing attacks. Left: The Tayaran Square area shortly after the arrival of an ambulance and vehicles of the security forces following one of the suicide bombing attacks (Telegram, January 21, 2021)

► **Iraqi President Barham Salih** noted that Iraq would firmly withstand the attempts to destabilize the country. **The Iraqi Parliament** called for an investigation into the security forces' incompetence in defending the site of the attack. Senior Shiite cleric **Ayatollah Ali**

² According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

Sistani condemned the attack, sent his condolences to the families of the victims and called on the security apparatuses to redouble their efforts (Al-Sumaria, January 21, 2021).

Salah al-Din Province

► **On January 25, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization convoy about 140 km north of Baghdad. The passengers were killed or wounded.

► **On January 23, 2021**, a “terrorist attack” (implicitly, by ISIS) was carried out against a Popular Mobilization force about 140 km north of Baghdad. **A total of 11 people were killed and 12 were wounded.** Among the dead were a **commander of a foj** (a force the size of a regiment) **in the Popular Mobilization 22nd Brigade** and an assistant commander of the 6th Foj in the brigade (al-hashed.net, January 24, 2021).

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to its statement, its operatives fired machine guns and threw hand grenades at a Popular Mobilization force near the Hamrin Mountain region (about 60 km northeast of Baqubah). ISIS claimed that **over 25 fighters had been killed or wounded.** Among the dead were the **3rd Foj commander and 6th Foj assistant commander.** Furthermore, according to ISIS’s statement, when the rescue force arrived at the scene, an IED was activated against their vehicles and the passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, January 24, 2021).

► **On January 19, 2021**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by machine gun fire about 30 km north of Baghdad. He was killed.

Al-Anbar Province

► **On January 19, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle near Al-Rutba, in western Al-Anbar Province. The passengers were killed or wounded.

Kirkuk Province

► **On January 22, 2021**, an Iraqi army compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 70 km south of Kirkuk. Two soldiers were killed.

Counterterrorist activity by the Iraqi security forces

Al-Anbar Province

► **On January 24, 2021**, a force of the Iraqi counterterrorism unit apprehended three ISIS operatives in the Hit region, about 140 km northwest of Baghdad. Important documents in their possession were seized (Facebook page of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Services, ICTS, January 24, 2021).



Three ISIS operatives apprehended in the Hit region
(Facebook page of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service, ICTS, January 24, 2021)

- ▶ **On January 24, 2021**, Iraqi security forces apprehended eight “terrorist operatives” (implicitly, ISIS operatives). In addition, three ISIS guesthouses in the middle of the Al-Anbar Desert were located and destroyed (Al-Sumaria, January 24, 2021).
- ▶ **On January 23, 2021**, a force of the Iraqi counterterrorism unit apprehended two ISIS operatives who were part of a network, a few dozen kilometers west and northwest of Baghdad (Facebook page of Iraqi Army Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 23, 2021).



ISIS operative apprehended by the Iraqi counter-terrorism unit
(Facebook page of Iraqi Army Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 23, 2021)

Nineveh Province

- ▶ **On January 23, 2021**, a force of the Nineveh Province police apprehended six ISIS operatives in Mosul (Facebook page of Iraqi Army Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, January 23, 2021).

Baghdad Province

- ▶ **On January 26, 2021**, Iraqi security forces in Baghdad apprehended a “terrorist operative” (implicitly, an ISIS operative) in the northern part of the city (Al-Sumaria, January 26, 2021).
- ▶ **On January 23, 2021**, Iraqi security forces apprehended three wanted terrorist operatives, implicitly, ISIS operatives (Iraqi Ministry of Defense website, January 23, 2021).

Salah al-Din Province

► **On January 23, 2021**, Iraqi security forces apprehended a wanted terrorist operative, implicitly, an ISIS operative, about 25 km north of Baghdad (Iraqi Ministry of Defense website, January 23, 2021).

Diyala Province

► **On January 24, 2021**, Iraqi airstrikes destroyed eight ISIS hiding places about 100 km northeast of Baqubah (Al-Sumaria, January 24, 2021).

The Sinai Peninsula

ISIS's activity in northern Sinai³

► **On January 26, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army armored vehicle in the village of Tafaha, south of Bir al-Abd (west of Al-Arish). The passengers were killed.

► **On January 26, 2021**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of the Egyptian water company (apparently a water tanker) in the village of Tafaha. One person was killed (Shahed Sinaa – Al-Rasmia Facebook page, January 26, 2021). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack.

► **On January 21, 2021**, an Egyptian army bulldozer in western Rafah was targeted by gunfire. The driver was wounded.

► **On January 21, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army tank on the beach in Sheikh Zuweid. The crew members were killed or wounded.

Difficulties in ISIS's activity in the area between Rafah and the village of Shabana (south of Rafah)

► Recently, senior ISIS operatives surrendered to the Egyptian security forces in the Rafah-Shabana region. Among others, a senior operative in Rafah by the name of Tawfiq Abu Malikh turned himself in (**Note:** It was reported at the time that an extremist and dangerous Islamic operative by the name of Tawfiq Abu Malikh had been arrested in early April 2014 by the Egyptian security forces (Al-Bashair, April 5, 2014)]. According to sources in Sinai, ISIS is unable to operate in the Rafah-Shabana region, in contrast to its intensive activity in the other regions.

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

ISIS's activity around the globe⁴

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

- ▶ ISIS released an infographic summing up its activity around the world on January 14-20, 2021. **During this period, ISIS operatives carried out 90 attacks in the various provinces in Asia and Africa**, compared to 64 in the previous week. The largest number of attacks were carried out in West Africa (31). Attacks carried out in ISIS's other provinces: Iraq (30); Syria (12); Sinai Peninsula (9); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (7) and Central Africa (1) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, January 21, 2021).
- ▶ According to the infographic, **226 people were killed and wounded in those attacks**, compared to 182 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in West Africa (120); The other casualties were in the following provinces: Iraq (40); Syria (28); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (18); Sinai Peninsula (15) and Central Africa (5) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, January 21, 2021).

Africa

Nigeria

Summary of ISIS's activity in Nigeria in 2020

- ▶ ISIS recently published an infographic summing up its activity in Nigeria in 2020. **In the past year, ISIS carried out 343 attacks**, i.e., about 28 attacks per month. Most of ISIS's attacks were carried out in **Borno State**, in northeastern Nigeria, followed by **Yobe State**, **with a small number of attacks in Adamawa State** (south of Borno State). The most common modus operandi was **exchanges of fire** (260 incidents). This was followed by **planting IEDs (48) and other types of attacks (35)**.

⁴ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram



The three states in northeastern Nigeria where ISIS carried out most of its activity: Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (Wikipedia)

► According to the infographic, **2,990 people were killed and wounded** in attacks carried out in 2020. **This is the highest level of lethality among ISIS’s provinces**, including provinces where the number of attacks was higher (Iraq and Syria). The largest number of casualties was among Nigerian soldiers (2,645 casualties), which was the main target of ISIS’s activity. They were followed by the militias supporting the Nigerian army (200 fighters) and the Christian civilian population (145) (Telegram, January 25, 2021).



Infographic summing up ISIS’s activity in Nigeria in 2020 (Telegram, January 25, 2021)

ISIS's activity over the past week

- ▶ **On January 24, 2021**, five IEDs were activated against a Nigerian army foot patrol in Borno State. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.
- ▶ **On January 23, 2021**, three IEDs were activated against a Nigerian army foot patrol in Borno State. Several soldiers were killed and a vehicle was destroyed.
- ▶ **On January 22, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired machine guns at a Nigerian army patrol in Borno State. Seven soldiers were killed and others were wounded. In addition, an ATV, weapons and ammunition were seized.
- ▶ **On January 21, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army foot patrol in Borno State. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.
- ▶ **On January 21, 2021**, ISIS operatives repelled an attack by the Nigerian army in Borno State. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

Asia

Afghanistan

- ▶ **On January 26, 2021**, a sticky bomb was activated against a vehicle in the capital, Kabul. One person was killed (Khaama Press, January 26, 2021). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. According to ISIS, a sticky bomb attached to the vehicle of an Afghan intelligence official was activated. He was killed (Telegram, January 26, 2021).



Vehicle apparently belonging to an Afghan intelligence official going up in flames in the city of Kabul after a sticky bomb was activated (Khaama Press, January 26, 2021)

- ▶ **On January 23, 2021**, an Afghan intelligence officer was targeted by gunfire in the city of Jalalabad. He was killed.

► **On January 21, 2021**, a sticky bomb was activated against a vehicle carrying three Shiites in Kabul. The passengers were killed or wounded.

► **On January 20, 2021**, a sticky bomb was activated against a vehicle carrying Shiites in Kabul. Four people were killed or wounded.

The battle for hearts and minds

ISIS calls for the release of its incarcerated operatives around the world

► **On January 21, 2021**, ISIS published an infographic in its Al-Naba' weekly entitled "Prisons whose walls the soldiers of the Islamic State have destroyed – we have not forgotten you." The infographic includes a list of prisons in ISIS's provinces: Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Central Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo), East Asia (Indonesia and the Philippines) and Khorasan (Afghanistan and Tajikistan). According to the infographic, ISIS's operatives attacked these prisons in 2012-2020, liberating ISIS operatives (ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, January 21, 2021). ISIS spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi asked ISIS's male and female prisoners **to be patient because ISIS's operatives have not forgotten and will not forget them**. He said they were working for their liberation, and were willing to die for this cause on the walls of the prisons.