



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## February 4-10, 2021



### Main events of the past week

- ▶ **Syria:** During the week, the Syrian army and the forces supporting it suffered heavy losses at the hands of ISIS operatives in the desert region (Al-Badia). The climax of the incidents was on the night of February 2-3, 2021, when ISIS attacked Syrian army positions in the area bordering on the Aleppo, Hama and Al-Raqqah provinces, killing 19 Syrian soldiers, including 12 fighters of the Imam al-Baqer Brigade, a local pro-Iranian militia supporting the Syrian regime. Two other attacks were carried out in the area of the Al-Taym oil field, south of Deir ez-Zor. **In the Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region**, ISIS operatives continued to attack Kurdish SDF forces.
- ▶ **Iraq:** The Popular Mobilization forces announced the **killing of ISIS's commander of North Baghdad and Karmah. This is the latest in a series of targeted killings of senior ISIS commanders in Iraq in the past two weeks.**
- ▶ **In the Sinai Peninsula, after a period of relative calm**, ISIS operatives ambushed and killed six fighters of the tribal militias that support the Egyptian regime and abducted another fighter.
- ▶ **Afghanistan:** ISIS's terrorist activity continued. Most of the attacks were carried out in the city of Jalalabad and were directed mainly at Afghan Intelligence and government officials.
- ▶ **Africa:** ISIS's attacks continued, mainly against Nigerian army forces in the northeast of the country. **This week, ISIS's West Africa Province began trial broadcasts of a new Internet radio channel** in the Kanuri language, a dialect spoken in the Lake Chad region (the Nigeria-Niger-Chad tri-border area). In the ITIC's assessment, ISIS is attempting to expand its influence in Africa to the Lake Chad region through the broadcasts and to recruit operatives to its ranks from among the locals.

## The Syrian arena

### The Idlib region

During the week, exchanges of artillery fire continued between the rebel forces, headed by HTS, and the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, in the region south and southeast of the rebel enclave in Idlib. The most noteworthy incident was when the rebel forces repelled a Syrian army infiltration attempt around the village of Al-Ankawi in the Al-Ghab Plain (the southeastern part of the rebel enclave in Idlib). Several soldiers were killed or wounded, and the Syrian force retreated (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 7, 2021).



**Artillery fire by the Syrian army at the southern part of the rebel enclave in Idlib  
(Syria TV opposition channel, February 8, 2021)**

### The desert region (Al-Badia)

► During the week, ISIS carried out several attacks against the Syrian army and the forces supporting it in the region. They sustained heavy casualties. Apparently, because of the incidents and the heavy casualties suffered by the Syrian army, starting on February 9, 2021, fighters of the Fatemiyoun Brigade and Iraqi Hezbollah (militias handled by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards) were deployed at 13 new roadblocks along the road between Deir ez-Zor and Palmyra, instead of the Syrian soldiers, who were evacuated (Khotwa, February 9, 2021). Following are details of the main incidents.

► On February 8, 2021, ISIS operatives ambushed and attacked a Syrian army force operating with the support of the Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade about 50 km southwest of Al-Mayadeen. A total of 26 soldiers and fighters of the Al-Quds Brigade were killed in the exchanges of fire. Eleven ISIS operatives were killed as well (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 8, 2021).

► **The Al-Taym oil field area:** On February 4, 2021, ISIS operatives attacked Syrian army positions near the Al-Taym oil field, about 10 km south of Deir ez-Zor. There were reports of casualties on both sides (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 4, 2021). On February 6, 2021, ISIS carried out another attack near the oil field. Three operatives belonging to the special units of the Syrian regime and the Syrian Air Force were killed and 16 others were wounded (deirezzor24.net, February 7, 2021).

► **The road between Hama and Al-Raqqah:** On the night of February 2-3, 2021, ISIS attacked Syrian army positions in the area bordering on the Aleppo, Hama and Al-Raqqah provinces (about 35 km east of Ithriya, on the road between Hama and Al-Raqqah). A total of 19 Syrian soldiers and fighters of the forces supporting them were reportedly killed in the incident, including 12 fighters of the Imam Al-Baqer Brigade, a local pro-Iranian militia supporting the Syrian regime (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 3, 2021; Enab Baladi, February 3, 2021). ISIS reported that its operatives had fired machine guns at a Syrian army position in the Ithriya area, east of Salamiyah. There were exchanges of fire. According to ISIS, 13 Syrian soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. In addition, the ISIS operatives set fire to a Syrian army vehicle equipped with a heavy machine gun. All operatives reportedly returned to their base unscathed.<sup>1</sup>



**The 12 fatalities of the Imam al-Baqer Brigade (Facebook page of the Al-Abbas Battalion of the Imam Al-Baqer Brigade, February 3, 2021)**

► The following day, a funeral procession for the fighters was held in Aleppo (YouTube, February 4, 2021). Later, ISIS released a video showing charred bodies in a desert region, noting that they were Syrian soldiers killed in an attack (Telegram, February 5, 2021).

<sup>1</sup> According to an ISIS statement posted on Telegram.



**Funeral procession for the fighters killed in the ISIS attack (YouTube, February 4, 2021)**

### **Russian Air Force attacks against ISIS targets in Al-Badia**

► According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on February 4-5, 2021, there were about 100 Russian airstrikes against ISIS targets in the desert region of the Hama Province (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 5, 2021).

### **The Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region**

► In the Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region, ISIS continued its attacks against Syrian soldiers and the SDF forces. A noteworthy incident occurred on February 3, 2021: a car bomb apparently exploded about 10 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor. Ten Syrian soldiers and fighters of the Al-Quds Brigade (a Palestinian militia supporting the Syrian army) were killed and several other soldiers were wounded (@DeirEzzor24 Twitter account, February 3, 2021). No one claimed responsibility for the explosion and it is unclear who was behind it. It cannot be ruled out that ISIS was responsible for it.



**Smoke rising from the site of the explosion south of Deir ez-Zor (@DeirEzzor24 Twitter account, February 3, 2021)**

► Following are other noteworthy incidents:<sup>2</sup>

- ◆ **On February 8, 2021**, an SDF fighter was targeted by gunfire in the Basira area, about 30 km southeast of Deir ez-Zor. He was killed. In addition, an SDF fighter was targeted

<sup>2</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram.

by machine gun fire in the village of Shahil, about 35 km southeast of Deir ez-Zor. A day earlier, an SDF fighter was targeted by gunfire in the village of Shahabat, in the eastern rural area of Deir ez-Zor. He was killed.

◆ **On February 6, 2021**, an SDF vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire in Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. One SDF fighter was killed and another was wounded.

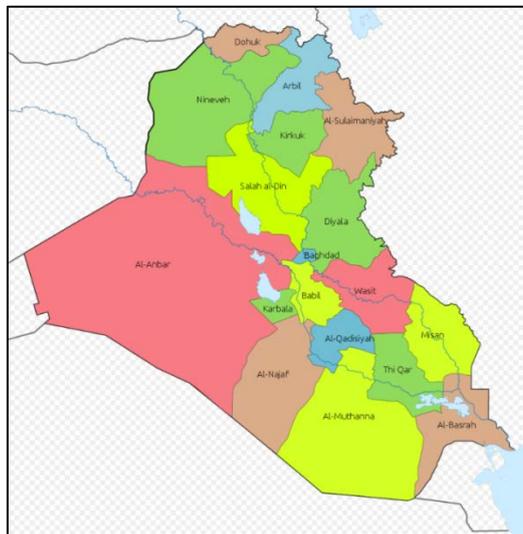
◆ **On February 6, 2021**, ISIS operatives captured an SDF intelligence operative in the Basira area, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was interrogated and then executed.

◆ **On February 3, 2021**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by gunfire in the Diban area, about 5 km east of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed.

### Al-Raqqah region

► On February 8, 2021, ISIS operatives attacked an SDF roadblock about 25 km northwest of Al-Raqqah. Four SDF fighters were killed and two others were severely wounded. The ISIS operatives seized five machine guns and a motorcycle and set fire to four other motorcycles.

## The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

### ISIS's commander of North Baghdad and Karmah killed

► The Popular Mobilization forces announced that two ISIS operatives had been killed in exchanges of fire in the Karmah region, about 15 km northeast of Fallujah (Al-Anbar Province). One of the operatives killed was Muhannad Ahmad Habib, ISIS's commander of North Baghdad and Karmah (the Popular Mobilization website, February 4, 2021).



**ISIS's commander of North Baghdad and Karmah, Muhannad Ahmad Habib  
(Popular Mobilization website, February 4, 2021)**

- ▶ Muhannad Ahmad Habib is the latest in a series of senior ISIS commanders killed recently by the Iraqi security forces. The most senior commander among those killed was Abu Yasser al-Issawi, ISIS's deputy leader and governor of the Iraq Province, killed on January 28, 2021.
- ▶ In addition to the killing of ISIS's senior commander, the Iraqi security forces continued their counterterrorism activities this week throughout Iraq. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie, commander of the United States Central Command, noted in a Middle East Institute (MEI) virtual event that in the war against ISIS last year, the Iraqi security forces had taken several significant steps, allowing the United States to reduce the scope of its forces in Iraq and pull out its troops and the International Coalition troops from many military bases, where Iraqi forces are currently deployed (US CENTCOM website, February 8, 2021). Following are details on the counterterrorism activities of the Iraqi security forces and the forces supporting them.

### **Nineveh Province**

- ▶ **On February 8, 2021**, the Iraqi Interior Ministry announced that the Nineveh Province Intelligence Directorate and Counterterrorism Unit had detained 15 people suspected of affiliation with ISIS in various regions throughout the province (Al-Sumaria, February 8, 2021).

### **Baghdad Province**

- ▶ **On February 7, 2021**, the Iraqi security forces detained 13 suspected ISIS operatives in the province (Al-Sumaria, February 7, 2021).

### **Al-Anbar Province**

- ▶ **On February 9, 2021**, the Iraqi security forces detained 24 wanted ISIS operatives in the Fallujah area and in various other areas around the province (Al-Sumaria, February 9, 2021).
- ▶ **On February 5, 2021**, the Iraqi army located an ISIS hiding place, with ISIS equipment, in the Al-Qaim region, in western Iraq (Al-Sumaria, February 5, 2021).

## Diyala Province

► **On February 3, 2021**, the Popular Mobilization forces announced that they had destroyed ISIS's guesthouses and tunnels in eastern Diyala. They also neutralized IEDs found there (Al-Sumaria, February 3, 2021).

## Erbil Province

► **On February 3, 2021**, a senior Peshmerga official said that International Coalition aircraft had attacked several ISIS targets in the rural area southwest of Erbil ([www.kurdistan24.net](http://www.kurdistan24.net), February 3, 2021).

## ISIS threatens Iraqi tribes through the Telegram app

► According to Iraqi security and tribal sources, in recent days, ISIS sent threats to tribespeople in western and northern Iraq through the Telegram app. Some of the tribespeople even received threatening phone calls and warning messages. ISIS threatens that it will take revenge on tribespeople who collaborate with the Iraqi regime. The threatened tribespeople turned to the Iraqi security forces for assistance (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 6, 2021).

## ISIS's attacks in the various provinces in Iraq<sup>3</sup>

### Diyala Province

► **On February 4, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army force west of Khanaqin. One soldier was killed and two others were wounded. An Iraqi military source confirmed the news item on the incident, noting that the Iraqi soldiers repelled an attack against their positions in the area; one soldier was killed in the fighting, and two others were wounded (Al-Sumaria, February 4, 2021).

► **On February 3, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Popular Mobilization vehicle northeast of Naft Khana, about 20 km south of Khanaqin. Four fighters were killed or wounded.

### Salah al-Din Province

► **On February 4, 2021**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at an Iraqi soldier in the Mashahada area, about 30 km north of Baghdad. The soldier was wounded.

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<sup>3</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram.

► **On February 2, 2021**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns and RPG rockets at an Iraqi army position west of Tuz Khormato, about 100 km northeast of Samarra. Two soldiers were killed and another was wounded.

## Al-Anbar Province

► **On February 6, 2021**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at an Iraqi army force that tried to ambush them about 20 km south of Fallujah. One soldier was killed and two others were wounded.

► **On February 2, 2021**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at a Popular Mobilization camp in the Karmah region, about 20 km northeast of Fallujah. A Popular Mobilization fighter was killed and another was wounded.

## Kirkuk Province

► **On February 5, 2021**, ISIS operatives fired at an Iraqi police camp about 30 km south of Kirkuk. One policeman was killed and three others were wounded.

## Sinai Peninsula

► During the past week, the relative slowdown in ISIS's activity in the Sinai Peninsula continued. On February 9, 2021, local sources reported that six fighters of the tribal militias supporting the Egyptian regime had been killed and another fighter had been abducted in central Sinai in an ISIS ambush (Shahed Sinaa Facebook account, February 9, 2021).

## ISIS's activity around the globe<sup>4</sup>

### Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► ISIS released an infographic summing up its activity around the world on January 28 – February 3, 2021. According to the infographic, during this period, ISIS operatives carried out 42 attacks in the various provinces in Asia and Africa, compared to 59 in the previous week. The largest number of attacks were carried out in West Africa (14). Attacks carried out in ISIS's other provinces: Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (10); Syria (8); Iraq (8); and Pakistan (2) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 4, 2021).

► According to the infographic, 132 people were killed and wounded in those attacks, compared to 264 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in West Africa

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<sup>4</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram.

(43). The other casualties were in the following provinces: Syria (38); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (27); Iraq (22); and Pakistan (2) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 4, 2021).

► This week's infographic reflects the continued increase in ISIS's activity in Afghanistan, the continuation of its high-intensity activity in West Africa, and a relative decline in ISIS's activity in Iraq and Syria. Another notable statistic in the infographic is the absence of information about ISIS's activity in the Sinai Peninsula.

## Asia

### Afghanistan

► **ISIS released an infographic summing up its activity in the Khorasan Province**, (i.e., Afghanistan) during the week of January 28 – February 3, 2021. According to the infographic, ISIS operatives carried out 10 attacks during this period, most of them in the form of planting IEDs (4 in Kabul and 2 in Jalalabad). Operatives also carried out three targeted killings and an ambush in the Kunar Province. A total of 27 people were killed or wounded in the attacks: 14 members of the Afghan security and government forces; seven Shiites (“polytheistic objectors” in the original); five Taliban operatives; and one leader of the Muslim Brotherhood (“The Brotherhood of the Deserters of Islam,” in the original) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 4, 2021).



**Infographic summing up ISIS's activity in Afghanistan  
(Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 4, 2021)**

► Following are several noteworthy incidents reported by ISIS during the week, mainly in the form of activating IEDs:

- ◆ **On February 8, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Afghan Intelligence operative in Jalalabad. He was killed.
- ◆ **On February 8, 2021**, an IED was activated against the car of a Shiite civilian (“polytheist objector” in the original) in Kabul. He was killed and his car was destroyed.

- ◆ **On February 6, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Afghan police vehicle in Jalalabad. Four policemen in the vehicle were killed and two others were wounded.
- ◆ **On February 6, 2021**, two IEDs were activated against a crowd of Hindus in Kabul. Six people were killed or wounded.<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ **On February 3, 2021**, an IED was activated against the vehicle of Afghan Intelligence personnel in Jalalabad. Five of the passengers were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **On February 3, 2021**, a judge at the Nangarhar court in Jalalabad was targeted by gunfire. He was killed.

## Turkey

### ISIS's so-called deputy minister of education arrested in Turkey

► According to the Turkish Interior Ministry, Turkish security forces in the Sakarya Province in northwestern Turkey arrested a Jordanian citizen who had served as ISIS's deputy ministry of education. In this capacity, he was in charge of all the educational institutions in the territories controlled by ISIS in Syria and Iraq in 2014-2017. The detainee is accused of brutally murdering detainees apprehended by ISIS, documenting the murder and distributing videos on social media as part of ISIS's media campaign. In addition, Turkish security forces detained five men on suspicion of involvement in ISIS activity in the south of the country (Anatolia News Agency, February 3, 2021).

## Lebanon

► **On February 6, 2021**, the Lebanese army detained two Syrian civilians in the Aarsal region on suspicion of involvement in ISIS activity (LBC channel, February 6, 2021). Last week, 18 Syrian and Lebanese citizens were detained in the same area on similar grounds.

## Africa<sup>6</sup>

### Nigeria

► **On February 8, 2021**, ISIS operatives exchanged fire and activated an IED against a Nigerian army vehicle in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. The vehicle was destroyed and seven soldiers were killed or wounded. The other soldiers fled.

► **On February 8, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army checkpoint in Monguno, about 70 km from the Nigeria-Chad-Cameroon tri-border area. There was an exchange of fire.

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<sup>5</sup> ISIS sees Hinduism as an infidel religion.

<sup>6</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram.

Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. ISIS operatives seized vehicles, weapons and ammunition.

► **On February 7, 2021**, ISIS operatives detonated an IED against a Nigerian army foot patrol in the Goniri region, near the Nigeria-Niger border. Several Nigerian soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On February 7, 2021**, ISIS operatives repelled a Nigerian army attack near Malary in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. There was an exchange of fire between the soldiers and ISIS operatives. A total of 20 soldiers were killed or wounded. In addition, four Nigerian army vehicles were destroyed.

► **On February 5, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed Nigerian soldiers in the Goniri region, near the Nigeria-Niger border. The two sides exchanged fire. Six soldiers were killed and a few others were wounded. The other soldiers fled. ISIS operatives seized vehicles, weapons and ammunition.



**Right: Weapons seized by ISIS operatives in the attack. Left: Nigerian army armored vehicle that fell into the hands of ISIS operatives (Telegram, February 6, 2021)**



**Right: Nigerian army armored vehicle that fell into the hands of ISIS operatives. ISIS set the vehicle on fire. Left: Nigerian army bulldozer going up in flames (Telegram, February 6, 2021).**

► **On February 4, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army position in Gamboru, on the Nigeria-Cameroon border south of Lake Chad. There were exchanges of fire and an unspecified number of soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On February 4, 2021**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army position in Gada Blu, on the Nigeria-Cameroon border south of Lake Chad. There were exchanges of fire and many soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On February 3, 2021**, ISIS operatives ambushed fighters of a militia that supports the Nigerian army in the Jakana region in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria, and exchanged fire with them. Several fighters were killed or wounded.

► **On February 3, 2021**, ISIS operatives activated three IEDs against a Nigerian army foot patrol in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. Several fighters were killed or wounded and an APC was destroyed.

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

► **On February 4, 2021**, ISIS operatives exchanged fire with Congolese soldiers in the Rwenzori region, on the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. The other soldiers fled. ISIS operatives seized vehicles, weapons and ammunition.

### **Al-Qaeda in Africa**

#### **The Aid Group for Islam and Muslims claimed responsibility for the attack on the Chadian army**

► The Aid Group for Islam and Muslims (an umbrella organization of Salafi jihadist organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda in North and West Africa) issued a statement claiming responsibility for several attacks in Mali (in late January 2021) against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and especially against Chad government forces (which are part of MINUSMA). According to the statement, the attacks against the Chadian government forces were carried out as part of the struggle against Chad's normalization with Israel and as part of a wider campaign initiated by Al-Shabaab in Somalia against the so-called Judaization of Jerusalem (Telegram, February 7, 2021).

► The incidents mentioned in the statement included the activation of a mine against a Mali government vehicle in central Mali, the activation of a mine against a vehicle of the MINUSMA, an incident in which 30 people were wounded (Telegram, February 7, 2021).

► The statement accuses the Chadian government of joining the “train of normalization with Israel” and notes that the attacks in Mali are part of the recent attacks mounted by members of the Al-Shabaab organization in Somalia entitled No to the Judaization of Jerusalem (“*Al-Quds lan Tuhawwad*,” in the original) in collaboration with jihadist fighters from Mali. The statement ends with a call on the “fair media outlets” to publish information about these attacks (Telegram, February 7, 2021).



The wording of the statement  
(Telegram, February 7, 2021)

## The battle for hearts and minds

### West Africa Province begins trial broadcasts of a new Internet radio channel

► As part of ISIS’s propaganda/media campaign, this week the organization’s West Africa Province began trial broadcasts of a new Internet radio channel. These are weekly broadcasts in the Kanuri language, a dialect spoken by several million people in the Lake Chad region (the Nigeria-Niger-Chad tri-border region), in Cameroon and, to a minor extent, in southern Libya. The first broadcast was about eight minutes long (Nigerian website humangle.ng, February 5, 2021). In the ITIC’s assessment, this reflects ISIS’s desire to expand its activity in the Lake Chad region and the need to turn to the local population in order to increase its influence and recruit operatives from among them.