



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## February 11-17, 2021



### Main events of the past week

- ▶ **In the Idlib region, exchanges of artillery fire continued** between the Syrian army and the forces supporting it, and the rebel forces, south and southeast of Idlib. **In the desert region (Al-Badia)**, the epicenter of ISIS's activity, the presence of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it has been increased, with the forces receiving Russian air support. **In the Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region, another high-ranking ISIS operative** was killed this week in an airstrike by an International Coalition UAV. He had been in charge of both ISIS's oil activity and the region east of the Euphrates River. At the same time, ISIS operatives continued to attack Kurdish SDF forces.
- ▶ **Iraq:** ISIS continued its activity against the Iraqi security forces, mainly in the form of sniper and machine gun fire and activating IEDs.
- ▶ **Africa:** ISIS carried out intensive activity this week, mainly in Nigeria. The height of ISIS's activity was the takeover of **the town of Askira in the northeast of the country** for several hours. This is the southernmost point that ISIS operatives have so far taken control of in Borno State, which could indicate ISIS's intention to spread beyond the Lake Chad region.
- ▶ This week, there was also an increase in ISIS's attacks against the Afghan security forces, mainly in Jalalabad in the Nangarhar Province. At least seven ISIS operatives were killed in the Nangarhar Province in an operation by the Afghan security forces on February 15, 2021.

### Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office: The threat posed by ISIS is growing

- ▶ At a briefing before the UN Security Council, **Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov** noted that ISIS's threat to world security has recently increased once again and that ISIS **was now working to reorganize** its ranks. According to him, since mid-2020, ISIS has gained momentum in some places around the globe and has even **managed to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to**

**accelerate its activity.** Following are a number of topics that he addressed in the briefing (UN website, February 10, 2021)<sup>1</sup>:

- ◆ **Presence of ISIS operatives:** In Iraq and Syria, there are operatives working in small groups, moving between the two sides of the border and finding refuge in the deserts and rural areas. These operatives could pose a threat to the whole world in the long range. Voronkov also mentioned the expansion of ISIS's activity in West Africa and warned that local residents in Europe are liable to carry out terrorist attacks.

- ◆ **At the propaganda level:** ISIS continues to expand its activity. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, young people around the globe are spending more time in cyberspace, and ISIS took advantage of this situation to send messages to them and recruit them to the organization.

- ▶ **The humanitarian situation in the detention camps in Syria:** Voronkov mentioned the deteriorating situation in the camps, and especially in the Al-Houl camp, which houses families of ISIS operatives. According to Voronkov, the international community has done too little to address the situation, noting that there is evidence of radicalization, fundraising, training and incitement in these camps. According to him, this phenomenon could have serious consequences in the future at the global level, with children at the camps becoming the next generation of ISIS operatives within a few years. He called on countries to accept the residents of these detention camps.

## 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 of the rebel enclave in Idlib. A noteworthy incident occurred on February 13, 2021, when **ground forces of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it attempted to penetrate the rebel enclave** in Idlib from the southeast, but were repelled by the rebel forces (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 13, 2021). Russian planes fired missiles at the main prison in Idlib. No casualties were reported (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 13, 2021).

<sup>1</sup><http://webtv.un.org/watch/vladimir-voronkov-unoct-on-threats-to-international-peace-and-security-caused-by-terrorist-acts-security-council-open-vtc/6230848756001>

### The desert region (Al-Badia)

► **In view of ISIS attacks in the desert region in the recent weeks, the Syrian army and the forces supporting it began to reinforce their presence in the area, availing themselves of Syrian and Russian air support** mainly to locate ISIS operatives in the area (Sputnik News, February 11, 2021).

► **In view of the large number of attacks carried out by ISIS against oil tankers**, Syrian army helicopters reportedly escorted an Al-Qaterji oil tanker which was en route from the Kurdish region in northeastern Syria to the Deir ez-Zor Governorate. This might be a new tactic of securing the oil tankers sent to the Syrian regime (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 12, 2021).

► At the same time, a military source in the Syrian opposition reported that in view of the increase in ISIS's attacks, about 400 Syrian soldiers deployed on the Deir ez-Zor-Palmyra road. According to the above source, the soldiers are equipped with antitank missiles and vehicles with medium and heavy machine guns (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 12, 2021).

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

► In the Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region, ISIS continued its attacks mainly against the Kurdish SDF forces, the Syrian army, and local militias.

#### ► **Following are the main incidents:**

- ◆ **On February 15, 2021**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by gunfire in the Basira area, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen.
- ◆ **On February 13, 2021**, a militiaman was taken prisoner by ISIS in the Shahil area, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was interrogated and then executed.
- ◆ **On February 13, 2021**, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle in the Basira area, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. An SDF commander and a fighter were killed. Six other fighters were wounded. The vehicle was destroyed.
- ◆ **On February 12, 2021**, an IED was activated against a vehicle about 10 km north of Deir ez-Zor. The vehicle was destroyed and its passengers were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **On February 12, 2021**, an SDF fighter was targeted by gunfire in Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was wounded.
- ◆ **On February 11, 2021**, an SDF fighter was taken prisoner in the Jadid Akidat area, about 20 km southeast of Deir ez-Zor. He was interrogated and then executed.

- ◆ **On February 11, 2021**, an SDF fighter was shot at about 10 km southeast of Deir ez-Zor.

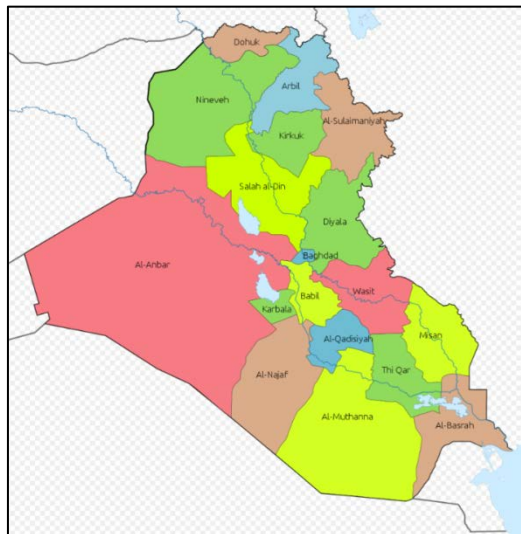
### High-ranking ISIS operative killed northeast of Deir ez-Zor

- ▶ **On February 14, 2021**, an International Coalition UAV killed a senior ISIS operative in the Rawda region, about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. The dead operative was **Abu Yassin al-Iraqi**, 33, from Ramadi, Iraq. Al-Iraqi was ISIS's official in charge of the region east of the Euphrates River and of oil in the area (AFP, February 14, 2021; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 14, 2021; Syria TV, February 14, 2021; Naher Media, February 14, 2021).

### Al-Raqqah region

- ▶ **On February 11, 2021**, according to Kurdish sources, four fighters of Asayish (the internal security forces in the Kurdish region) were killed in an ISIS attack northeast of Al-Raqqah ([www.kurdistan24.net](http://www.kurdistan24.net), February 11, 2021).

## The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

### Iraq accepted more than a hundred ISIS operatives from Syria

- ▶ According to Iraqi sources, Iraq has recently accepted more than a hundred ISIS operatives, Iraqi citizens, who were transferred to Iraq by the Kurdish SDF forces in northeastern Syria. The operatives, some of them senior ISIS figures, had been held by the SDF. They were sent to a special prison in the Nineveh Province, in northwestern Iraq (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 11, 2021).

## ISIS operatives killed in an IED explosion

► **A total of 21 ISIS operatives were killed** in what seemed to be a “work accident”: a car bomb exploded among ISIS operatives while they were assembling it about 20 km northeast of Samarra (Al-Sumaria, February 13, 2021).

## ISIS’s attacks in the various provinces in Iraq<sup>2</sup>

### Diyala Province

- **On February 15, 2021**, an Iraqi policeman was targeted by gunfire in the Al-Waqf area, northwest of Baqubah. He was wounded.
- **On February 13, 2021**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by machine gun fire north of Jalula, about 75 km northeast of Baqubah. The soldier was killed. A thermal camera was destroyed.
- **On February 11, 2021**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by sniper fire in the Qulay area, west of Khanaqin. He was wounded.
- **On February 9, 2021**, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by machine gun fire in the Jalula area, about 75 km northeast of Baqubah.

### Nineveh Province

► **On February 14, 2021**, an IED was activated in the house of Sa’ad Nahed al-Hamidi, a candidate for the Parliament elections in the Nimrud region, about 30 km south of Mosul. The house was damaged. It is not the first time that Iraqi political candidates are targeted by ISIS operatives.

### Kirkuk Province

- **On February 15, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army force in the southern Daquq area, about 70 km south of Kirkuk. One soldier was killed and several others were wounded.
- **On February 11, 2021**, an Iraqi police compound was targeted by machine guns south of Daquq, in southern Kirkuk. Four policemen were killed and three others were wounded.
- **On February 8, 2021**, an IED was activated against a group of Iraqi policemen operating in the Riyadh area, about 50 km southwest of Kirkuk. Two policemen were wounded.

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

## Salah al-Din Province

► **On February 12, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle in the Tarmiyah area, about 25 km north of Baghdad. The vehicle was destroyed and the passengers on board were killed or wounded. Immediately afterwards, another IED was activated against a rescue force arriving at the scene. Several other soldiers were killed or wounded.

## Counterterrorism measures in Iraq

### Salah al-Din Province

► **On February 12, 2021**, the Iraqi government counterterrorism unit apprehended four ISIS squad members in the Salah al-Din Province (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, February 12, 2021).



**One of the four apprehended squad members**  
(Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, February 12, 2021)

► **On February 11, 2021**, the Iraqi Air Force carried out several airstrikes in the Hamrin Mountains, about 20 km east of Baiji, destroying several ISIS hiding places and tunnels in the area (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, February 11, 2021).

### Kirkuk Province

► **On February 12, 2021**, acting on intelligence, the Iraqi government counterterrorism unit detained two ISIS operatives in the southern Kirkuk Province (Facebook page of Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Yahya Rasoul, February 12, 2021).

### Diyala Province

► **On February 15, 2021**, the Iraqi Air Force attacked ISIS targets in the province. At least five ISIS operatives were reportedly killed (Military Information Office, February 16, 2021).

## Sinai Peninsula

### Security allegedly improved in the Sinai Peninsula

► In early February 2021, a committee of the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt visited North Sinai and met with senior officials in the governorate and with residents who had suffered from the terrorist attacks. A report published after the visit of the committee indicates a considerable improvement in the security situation in the governorate and the beginning of stability. The report also cites official data of the North Sinai Governorate: the number of civilians killed in terrorist attacks since 2014 has reached 1,836 and the number of wounded reached over 9,000. The North Sinai governor promised that in view of the relative stability, security procedures in the governorate would soon be significantly eased. The report also notes that the compensation received by civilians who suffered from the security confrontations and terrorist activity in the Sinai Peninsula has amounted to more than EGP 942,000 (about USD 60,000) (Al-Masry Al-Youm, February 11, 2021).

### ISIS attacks

► In spite of the relative quiet, during the week, ISIS carried out several attacks against the Egyptian security forces: **On February 12, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army foot patrol at a roadblock west of Sheikh Zuweid. Several soldiers were killed or wounded. A couple of days before, **on February 10, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army bulldozer in Shabana, south of Rafah, destroying it completely.

### Documenting an ISIS attack

► ISIS's Sinai Province released (a week after the fact) photos documenting an attack carried out by ISIS on February 9, 2021, **killing six fighters of the tribal militias supporting the Egyptian army**. The photos expose **the vulnerability of the Egyptian forces and the ability of ISIS's Sinai Province to carry out attacks on a relatively large scale**. According to ISIS's announcement, issued by the Amaq News Agency, ISIS operatives attacked a roadblock of a militia supporting the Egyptian army in central Sinai. Six militiamen were killed. After the attack, while Egyptian soldiers and fighters of the militia were pursuing the ISIS operatives, ISIS activated an IED, causing more casualties among the Egyptian security forces (Telegram, February 15, 2021).



**Right: ISIS operatives before setting out to the attack. Left: ISIS operatives attacking the fighters of the tribal militia, who are running for their lives (Telegram, February 15, 2021)**

## ISIS's activity around the globe<sup>3</sup>

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

- ▶ ISIS released an infographic summing up its activity around the world on February 4 – 10, 2021. According to the infographic, during this period, ISIS operatives carried out 46 attacks in the various provinces in Asia and Africa, compared to 42 in the previous week. The largest number of attacks were carried out in West Africa (16). Attacks carried out in ISIS's other provinces: Iraq (13); Syria (7); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (7); Sinai (2); and Central Africa (1) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 11, 2021).
- ▶ According to the infographic, 136 people were killed and wounded in those attacks, compared to 132 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in West Africa (70). The other casualties were in the following provinces: Iraq (24); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (21); Syria (12); Central Africa (5); and the Sinai Province (4) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 11, 2021).

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

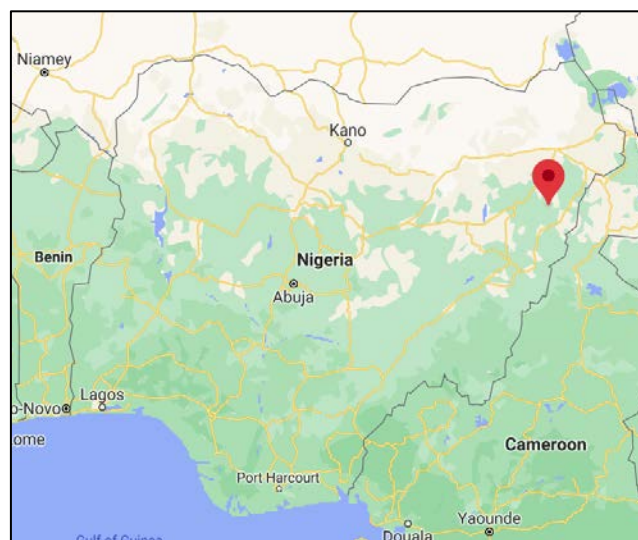


The infographic  
 (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, February 11, 2021)

## Africa<sup>4</sup>

### Nigeria

► Clashes continued between ISIS operatives and the Nigerian army forces and militias supporting it. A notable incident occurred on February 10, 2021, when **ISIS operatives attacked the Christian town of Askira** in southern Borno State (in northeastern Nigeria). There was an exchange of fire with Nigerian soldiers in the town. Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. The rest fled. **ISIS operatives took over the town for several hours, setting fire to a church and a Nigerian army camp. They also seized weapons and large quantities of ammunition.**



Askira, in the southern part of Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria (Google Maps)

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



**ISIS operatives taking control of the town of Askira (Telegram, February 12, 2021)**



**Right: ISIS operatives collecting ammunition that they seized (Telegram, February 12, 2021).  
Left: ISIS operatives setting fire to Nigerian army barracks in the town of Askira (Telegram, February 12, 2021).**

► **Other incidents are as follows:**

- ◆ **On February 16, 2021**, a group of Nigerian soldiers was attacked in a village in Borno State, in the northeast of the country. There was an exchange of fire. Four soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. The other soldiers fled. ISIS operatives seized weapons and ammunition.
- ◆ **On February 15, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle in the Malam Fatori region, near the Nigeria-Chad-Niger tri-border area in northeastern Nigeria. The vehicle was destroyed and the passengers were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **On February 15, 2021**, a Nigerian army compound was attacked in Marte, about 40 km east of the Nigeria-Cameroon border, in northeastern Nigeria. Ten soldiers were killed in the exchange of fire and several others were wounded. The other soldiers fled. ISIS operatives set fire to the compound, two tanks and a Nigerian army vehicle. They also seized three vehicles, weapons and ammunition.
- ◆ **On February 15, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle about 90 km southwest of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. The armored vehicle was destroyed and the soldiers on board were killed or wounded.

- ◆ **On February 14, 2021**, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle in the Goniri region, near the border between Yobe State and Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. The vehicle was destroyed and the soldiers on board were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **On February 12, 2021**, a force of a militia supporting the Nigerian army was attacked in the village of Gur, about 150 km south of Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria. There was an exchange of fire. Four militia fighters were killed. The ISIS operatives set fire to four vehicles and houses belonging to the fighters.
- ◆ On February 12, 2021, a Nigerian army patrol was ambushed in Gorgi, in northeastern Nigeria. There was an exchange of fire. Five soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. The other soldiers fled. ISIS operatives set fire to a tanker and seized two vehicles, weapons and ammunition.
- ◆ **On February 12, 2021**, two IEDs were activated against Nigerian army APCs about 100 km southwest of Maiduguri. Both APCs were destroyed. The soldiers in the APCs were killed or wounded.
- ◆ **On February 11, 2021**, Nigerian soldiers were ambushed in the suburbs of Monguno, in the northeast of the country. An IED was activated against the soldiers, followed by an exchange of fire. Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded. The rest fled. ISIS operatives seized an ATV and weapons.
- ◆ **On February 9, 2021**, a group of Nigerian soldiers was attacked between Jakana and Mainok, about 30 km west of Maiduguri. There was an exchange of fire. Seven soldiers were killed. In addition, two Nigerian army vehicles were destroyed. ISIS operatives seized weapons left at the site.



**Right: Drone, weapons and ammunition that fell into the hands of ISIS operatives in the attack.  
Left: Vehicle seized by ISIS operatives in the attack (Telegram, February 11, 2021)**

- **On February 9, 2021**, a Nigerian army checkpoint was attacked in Geidam, in Yobe State, in northeastern Nigeria, about 30 km out of the Nigeria-Niger border. The sides exchanged fire.

Four soldiers were killed, three were taken prisoner and the rest fled. ISIS operatives seized weapons left at the site and set fire to a Nigerian army vehicle.

► **On February 9, 2021**, a Nigerian army compound was attacked in Rann, in Borno State, about 10 km west of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. There was an exchange of fire. Several soldiers were killed or wounded and the rest fled. ISIS operatives set fire to the compound, two tanks and two vehicles, and seized weapons.

## Mali

► **On February 13, 2021**, at least 20 UN security personnel were wounded in an attack in central Mali. No organization has claimed responsibility for the attack. Sources estimate that it was carried out by Al-Qaeda or ISIS operatives (The Tribune, February 13, 2021).

## Niger

► **On February 14, 2021**, ISIS operatives infiltrated into a Nigerien army camp in the Diffa region, about 3 km from the Niger-Nigeria border, and seized vehicles.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

► **On February 14, 2021**, ISIS carried out two attacks against the Congolese army in the Congo-Uganda border region. In one incident, ISIS operatives attacked a Congolese army camp in the Beni region, about 60 km from the Congo-Uganda border. There was an exchange of fire. Several soldiers were wounded and the rest fled. ISIS operatives seized weapons and ammunition. In another incident on the same day, ISIS operatives attacked a Christian town in the Ituri Province. There was an exchange of fire with Congolese soldiers manning positions in the region. ISIS operatives managed to take over the town for several hours. They set fire to a church and seized weapons and ammunition. Three soldiers and around 13 Christian residents were killed in the incidents.

## Asia

### Afghanistan

► During the week, ISIS continued its activity against the Afghan security forces, mainly in and around the city of Jalalabad. Most of the attacks took the form of activating IEDs. A notable incident occurred on February 11, 2021, in Jalalabad. At first, an IED was activated against an Afghan army convoy. Then five more IEDs were activated in the area of the first explosion, causing additional casualties. About 30 Afghan soldiers were killed or wounded. At least seven ISIS operatives were reportedly killed in an operation by the Afghan security forces on

February 15, 2021 in the Nangarhar Province. The operation was carried out in response to the increasing activity of ISIS operatives in recent weeks (Khaama News, February 15, 2021).

► Following are the main incidents:

- ◆ **On February 16, 2021**, an Afghan police vehicle was targeted by gunfire in Jalalabad. The vehicle was put out of commission, three policemen were killed and another was wounded (Telegram, February 16, 2021).
- ◆ **On February 13, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Afghan police vehicle in the city of Jalalabad. One soldier was killed and two others were wounded. The vehicle was put out of commission.
- ◆ **On February 12, 2021**, two prominent commanders of the militias supporting the Afghan government were targeted by gunfire in Jalalabad. Both of them were killed.
- ◆ **On February 11, 2021**, an IED was activated against a checkpoint of the Afghan Intelligence forces in Jalalabad. Two Intelligence personnel were killed and two others were wounded.
- ◆ **On February 10, 2021**, an IED was activated against an Afghan army vehicle in Jalalabad. Three soldiers were killed and another was wounded. The vehicle was put out of commission.
- ◆ **On February 10, 2021**, a sticky bomb was activated against the vehicle of a Shiite Afghan Intelligence investigator in Kabul. He was killed.

## Pakistan

► **On February 11, 2021**, ISIS operatives activated an IED against two Pakistani Intelligence personnel in the Bajur region, about 25 km east of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Both of them were wounded.

## Turkey

► According to a report on ISIS's financial activity in Iraq and Syria published in early January 2021 by the US Department of the Treasury, ISIS's financial situation remains largely unchanged in comparison with the previous quarter. ISIS continues to amass funds by extorting oil smuggling networks, abducting civilians, demanding ransom for hostages, robbery, running straw companies, taking over civilian businesses and more. According to the report, ISIS has financial reserves in the hundreds of millions of dollars in Turkey, which it smuggles to its branches in Syria and Iraq. The report states that the money is transferred to Syria through companies based in Turkey and through smugglers in Iraq. Some of the money

transfers are carried out through companies located in the Al-Houl camp, which provide financial services. Some of the money is sent by mail via the Syrian-Iraqi border (US Department of the Treasury website, January 4, 2021; Sky News in Arabic, February 7, 2021).

## **Europe**

### **Danish and German security forces arrest ISIS operatives who planned an attack in Europe**

► Security forces in Denmark and Germany have announced the arrest of 14 people, including three brothers of Syrian descent, on suspicion of plotting to carry out terrorist attacks in Denmark and Germany. Weapons and materials used to assemble bombs were found in their possession. ISIS insignia were also found in their possession (NBC, February 12, 2021; Reuters, February 12, 2021).

## **Germany**

► An indictment has been filed in Germany against five Tajiki citizens arrested last year on suspicion of plotting to carry out attacks in Germany. According to the indictment, the five are members of an ISIS squad in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in western Germany. One of them was in contact with a high-ranking ISIS operative in Afghanistan. The squad operatives received instructions and material to make bombs. To improve their shooting and attack skills, the squad operatives trained with paintball guns (Reuters, February 15, 2021).