Spotlight on Global Jihad
March 10-16, 2022

Main events of the past week

▶This week, ISIS officially confirmed the death of its leader and spokesman (who were killed on February 3, 2022) in an audio recording by its new spokesman, Abu Omar al-Muhajer. According to the recording, ISIS's new leader is Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. The spokesman notes that the new leader is a member of ISIS's founding generation but does not disclose further details. There are several estimates with regard to the identity of the new leader. According to one estimate, he is Juma Awad al-Badri, the brother of ISIS's founder and first leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It is still difficult to estimate what the nature and scope of ISIS's activity will be under the new leader, who apparently lacks any military experience. The fact that the successor is Iraqi may indicate that ISIS will continue to concentrate its activity in the core countries of Syria and Iraq. He may act to increase activity in those areas where there has been a recent decrease and may even adopt a different approach from his predecessor with regard to the nature and scope of ISIS's activity.

▶In Syria, low-scale activity continued, mainly against the SDF forces. Syrian army forces and forces of the militias supporting it reportedly sent reinforcements to the Palmyra Desert in preparation for an operation to locate ISIS operatives in the desert region. In Iraq as well, relatively low-scale activity continued.

▶The Sinai Peninsula: In several hotspots in the northern part of the peninsula, including Al-Arish, Egyptian army forces and Sinai Tribal Union forces exchanged fire with armed men, apparently ISIS operatives. Several soldiers and Sinai Tribal Union fighters were killed or wounded. For the time being, ISIS has not claimed responsibility for the incidents.

▶In Africa, ISIS activity continued mainly in Nigeria against security forces in the northeast of the country. There was also activity in Mozambique, Cameroon and Somalia.

ISIS's new leader announced[1]

▶On March 9, 2022, ISIS's media arm al-Furqan Foundation released an audiotape entitled "Among them is he who has fulfilled his vow [to the death – as shaheed]"[2]. The 12-minute audiotape consists of a statement by Abu Omar al-Muhajer, ISIS's new spokesman. He officially confirms the death of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, ISIS's (second) leader, and its spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi, and announces that Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi is ISIS's new leader (Telegram, March 9, 2022).

Picture accompanying the audiotape (Telegram, March 9, 2022)

▶In the audiotape, the spokesman notes that ISIS's leader and spokesman died " over the past few days," although the two men were killed over a month ago, on February 3, 2022, in a US military operation in Syria. Thus, it took ISIS over a month to officially publish their deaths and the names of their successors[3].

▶As for the new leader's identity, the spokesman does not reveal much, except for the fact that his codename is Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. The spokesman notes that he is one of ISIS's founders, but he deliberately does not reveal any other details. Most of ISIS's provinces accepted the call and pledged allegiance to the new leader.

▶As for the new leader's character and scope of activity, it is still difficult to assess. According to the little information known to us, it seems that he has virtually no military experience. The fact that he is Iraqi may indicate that ISIS will continue to concentrate on the core countries of Syria and Iraq. He may act to increase the activity in those regions,

[1] For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 15, 2022, "ISIS confirms the death of its leader and announces Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi as the new leader"

[2] Taken from Surat al-Ahzab, 23 (Sahih International translation), where it is stated that loyal believers who adhered to the path of Allah after meeting their obligations towards Allah end their lives as shaheeds.

[3] For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 9, 2022, "The killing of ISIS's leader in an operation by US forces in Syria and possible implications"

where there has been a recent decrease, and he may also resort to a different approach from that of his predecessor as to the type and scope of activity. In the audiotape, the spokesman stresses the need to continue liberating prisoners, which may indicate a possible course of activity. The spokesman's call for avenging the death of ISIS's leaders may instigate acts of revenge and arouse the operatives' motivation to carry out attacks, also in Western countries, mainly the United States.

▶This week's issue of ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly included the transcript of ISIS's new spokesman's audiotape and main messages, announcing the death of both the leader and the spokesman, and the appointment of the new leader (Al-Naba', Telegram, March 10, 2022).

The text of the audiotape and main messages of ISIS's new spokesman (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, March 10, 2022)

The Syrian arena

Syrian provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

The desert region (Al-Badia)

▶The Syrian army and the militias supporting it reportedly reinforced the Palmyra Desert in preparation for an operation to locate ISIS operatives in the desert region (Jisr, March 14, 2022).

Al-Hasakah region

▶The SDF forces transferred about 1,200 ISIS operatives held in the prison in al-Shadadi to a new prison which was recently built in the eastern Al-Hasakah Province. It seems that the prisoners were transferred due to the difficulty to secure the prisons and in view of ISIS's threats to break into prisons and liberate ISIS operatives (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 14, 2022).

▶The SDF forces detained a senior ISIS operative and three ISIS squad members in Manbij. They also closed down a workshop for the manufacture of IEDs (kurdistan24, March 11, 2022).

Al-Raqqah region

▶On March 13, 2022, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle in Tabqa. An SDF fighter who was on board the vehicle was wounded (Telegram, March 14, 2022).

Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen

▶On March 12, 2022, two SDF fighters were attacked near their base in Al-Zarr, in the Al-Basira region, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. They were both killed (Telegram, March 12, 2022).

▶On March 12, 2022, an SDF roadblock was targeted by gunfire in Sabha, in Al-Basira region. Two fighters were killed (Telegram, March 12, 2022).

The Iraqi arena

Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

Attacks by province

Al-Anbar Province

▶On March 10, 2022, three Iraqi army bulldozers were set on fire on the international highway in western Iraq, about 160 km east of Al-Rutba. A vehicle arriving in the area was targeted by gunfire. It was damaged and its passengers fled.

Erbil Province

▶On March 13, 2022, an Iraqi army post was targeted by gunfire in the Qara Chokh Mountains, about 30 km southwest of Erbil. Three soldiers were killed.

Salah al-Din Province

▶On March 10, 2022, in an operation carried out by the Iraqi army in the Mutaybijah region in the eastern Salah al-Din Province, an IED was activated against a vehicle carrying the Salah al-Din Operations commander. The passengers on board the vehicle were wounded.

▶On March 9, 2022, an Iraqi army vehicle was targeted by gunfire on the Baiji-Haditha highway. The vehicle was put out of commission and the passengers on board were killed or wounded. A rescue force arriving on the scene was also attacked. Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded.

[4] Mostly according to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

Babel Province

▶On March 10, 2022, an Iraqi army post was targeted by gunfire in the Faresiya area, in Jarf al-Khadr, about 40 km south of Baghdad. One soldier was wounded.

▶On March 10, 2022, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle in the Ruyiya area, in Jarf al-Khadr. It was put out of commission, and the passengers on board were killed or wounded. A rescue force arriving on the scene was targeted by gunfire. The soldiers fled.

Diyala Province

▶On March 10, 2022, an Iraqi soldier was targeted by gunfire in the Bahraz area, about 2 km southeast of Baqubah.

▶On March 8, 2022, two government officials were targeted by gunfire in the Al-Ebara region, northeast of Baqubah. One of them was killed and the other was wounded.

Sinai Peninsula

ISIS's activity

▶There were heavy exchanges of fire between a force consisting of Egyptian soldiers and Sinai Tribal Union fighters (supporting the Egyptian army), and armed men, apparently operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province, in the regions of Shibana and al-Barth, south of Rafah. A total of 14 soldiers were reportedly killed and wounded, and three Sinai Tribal Union fighters were killed. Egyptian military medical sources later reported that four soldiers had been killed and six had been wounded in several sites around the Sinai Peninsula, including Al-Arish. In addition, two Sinai Tribal Union fighters were killed, and five others were wounded (Shahed Sinaa - al-Rasmia Facebook page, March 14, 2022).

▶On March 11, 2022, two fighters, apparently belonging to the Sinai Tribal Union, were killed in an exchange of fire with armed men, apparently ISIS operatives, in the Shibana area, south of Rafah (Shahed Sinaa al-Rasmia, March 11, 2022).

▶On March 11, 2022, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army vehicle southwest of Bir al-Abd. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Shahed Sinaa al-Rasmia, March 11, 2022).

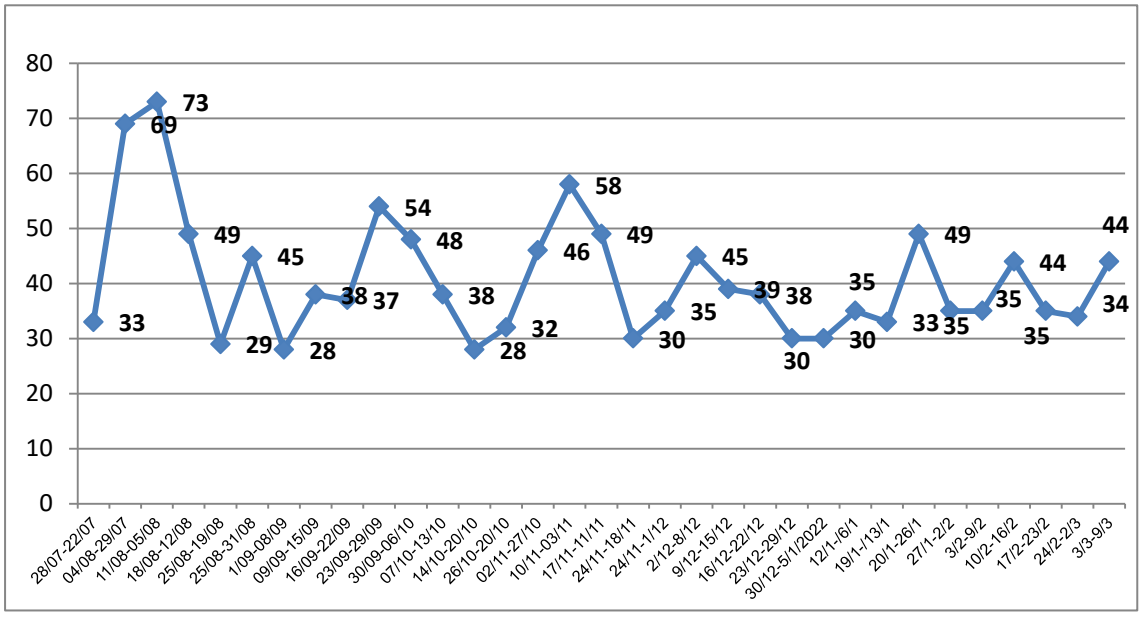
Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

▶ An infographic published by ISIS summing up its activity around the world between March 3 and March 9, 2022, indicates that in this period, ISIS carried out 44 attacks in its various provinces in Asia and Africa, compared to 34 last week. The largest number of attacks was carried out in the Iraq Province (14). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: West

Africa (13); Khorasan (i.e., Afghanistan) (5); Sinai (5); Syria (3); Central Africa (3); and Pakistan (1). A total of 387 people were killed or wounded in the attacks, compared to 78 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Khorasan Province (265). The other casualties were in the following provinces: West Africa (59); Pakistan (33); Sinai (14); Iraq (11); Central Africa (3); and Syria (2) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, March 10, 2022).

ISIS's attacks (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, March 10, 2022)

ISIS attacks in recent months (according to ISIS data)



ISIS activity in Africa[5]

▶ISIS's West Africa Province released a video documenting its operatives pledging allegiance to ISIS's new leader. The video shows a masked man (apparently an ISIS commander) speaking to dozens of armed ISIS operatives. He stresses the importance of continuing jihad and calls on all ISIS operatives to take revenge on the United States for the killing of the previous leader. At the end of the video, the operatives pledge allegiance to the new leader (Telegram, March 16, 2022).

Pledge of allegiance of the West Africa Province (Telegram, March 16, 2022)

Nigeria

▶ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published documentation of the activity of its morality police (*Al-Hisba*), apparently in eastern Nigeria, the stronghold of the ISIS's activity. Among other things, the morality police are documented burning drugs (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, March 10, 2022). This documentation is indication of the extent of ISIS's governance in these regions.

ISIS's morality police in eastern Nigeria burning drugs
(Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, March 10, 2022)

[5]Mainly according to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

Attacks

- On March 14, 2022, a Nigerian army foot patrol was ambushed and fired at on the Beta-Forlo highway, in northeastern Nigeria. The soldiers fled the scene and ISIS operatives seized ammunition.
- On March 13, 2022, a post of a militia loyal to the Nigerian army was targeted by gunfire in Damboa, about 80 km southwest of Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria. ISIS operatives set the post on fire after the soldiers had fled.
- On March 12, 2022, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army bulldozer in Malam Fatori, in the Nigeria-Niger border area in northeastern Nigeria. The bulldozer was destroyed.
- On March 10, 2022, IEDs were activated against two Nigerian army vehicles on the Goza-Polaka highway in the northeast of the country. Both vehicles were destroyed and their passengers were killed or wounded.
- On March 10, 2022, mortar shells were fired at a Nigerian army camp in Buratai, in northeastern Nigeria. According to ISIS, definite hits were identified.
- On March 9, 2022, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle on the Bama-Mairi highway in northeastern Nigeria. The vehicle was destroyed and eight soldiers were killed or wounded.
- On March 9, 2022, rockets were fired at a Nigerian army armored vehicle near Malam Fatori, putting it out of commission. An IED was also activated against a Nigerian army bulldozer, which was destroyed. Three soldiers were killed and about 10 others were wounded in an exchange of fire.
- On March 9, 2022, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle on the Katawila-Mararaba highway in northeastern Nigeria. The vehicle was destroyed and the soldiers on board were wounded.
- On March 8, 2022, mortar shells were fired at a Nigerian army base in Boni Gari, in northeastern Nigeria. According to ISIS, definite hits were identified.
- On March 8, 2022, a Nigerian army base was targeted by gunfire in Wulgo, on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, in northeastern Nigeria. Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded.

▶On March 6, 2022, a Nigerian army camp was attacked in Damasak, on the Nigeria-Niger border, in northeastern Nigeria. At least 10 soldiers were killed or wounded in the exchange of fire.

Cameroon

▶On March 8, 2022, mortar shells were fired at a Cameroonian army base in Sawiram, in the Maroua region of northern Cameroon, about 80 km from the Nigerian border. According to ISIS, definite hits were identified.

Somalia

▶On March 12, 2022, an IED was activated against a Somali army patrol in Mogadishu. At least one soldier was wounded.

Mozambique

▶On March 8, 2022, Mozambican soldiers were targeted by gunfire in the Christian village of Nova Zambézia, in the Macomia region, in northeastern Mozambique. One soldier was killed. Before leaving the area, ISIS operatives set fire to several homes of Christian residents.

Asia

Pakistan

▶ISIS's Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for firing machine guns at two Pakistani policemen in the Jermanak region, Bajaur, in western Pakistan, on the border with Afghanistan. One policeman was killed and the other was wounded (Telegram, March 15, 2022).

Pakistan Province operatives pledging allegiance to ISIS's leader (Telegram, March 15, 2022)

India

▶ Indian authorities have filed indictments against two Indian citizens, on charges of running a campaign to recruit operatives to carry out terrorist acts on behalf of ISIS and to raise money for ISIS. The two men are Afshan Parvaiz Jarabi, a senior ISIS ground operative who

also served as a senior official in ISIS's media network; The indictment states that he had connections with ISIS operatives in Afghanistan and Pakistan and was involved in recruiting adolescents; and Tawhead Latief Sofi, who worked in ISIS's media network, distributing its propaganda materials on social media, and in ISIS's Voice of Hind magazine (www.oneindia.com, March 14, 2022).

ISIS operatives in India pledging allegiance to the new leader (Telegram, March 15, 2022)

Saudi Arabia

- Saudi authorities have executed 81 people on charges of terrorist activity. At least some of them were reportedly operatives of ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the pro-Iranian Houthi movement operating in Yemen. Some of them were reportedly traveling to conflict zones in order to join terrorist organizations (Reuters, March 12, 2022).

Turkey

- As part of the war on terror, the Turkish Ministry of Finance froze the assets of 13 ISIS-affiliated entities and 7 Al-Qaeda-affiliated entities in Turkey (Turk Press, March 9, 2022).