



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## January 5-11, 2023



### Main events of the past week

- ▶ **This week has witnessed a relatively low level of ISIS activity around the world.**
- ▶ **At the center of events:** Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab set off several car bombs in central Somalia. A total of 41 people were killed and dozens were wounded. Al-Shabaab had 61 dead.
- ▶ **Syria:** ISIS carried out several attacks against the Syrian army and the forces supporting it in the desert area and the Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region. The US-led Global Coalition against ISIS and the Kurdish SDF forces completed Operation Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt (Saiqat Al-Jazeera) against ISIS presence in the Al-Hawl camp area and the Tel Hamis area.
- ▶ **Afghanistan:** Taliban security forces killed eight ISIS operatives and arrested seven in Kabul.
- ▶ **Mozambique:** ISIS carried out several attacks against the Mozambican army in the province of Cabo Delgado, in the northeast of the country.
- ▶ **Terrorism financing:** The US Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on a network of ISIS operatives that operated in Turkey to finance the organization.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly deals with the organization's adherence to continuing violent jihad against the "infidels" until the end of time.

## The Syrian arena



Map of Syria's provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

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

► On January 9, 2023, ISIS carried out two attacks against positions of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it:

- ◆ An attack in the Al-Masrab desert, about 30 km northwest of Deir ez-Zor. Several soldiers and fighters were killed and wounded. Following the attack, the Homeland Defense Forces, which support the Syrian regime, sent reinforcements to the area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 9, 2023).
- ◆ An attack on a position near the town of Al-Jalaa, about 15 km northwest of Albukamal. Several soldiers and fighters were killed and wounded, and one ISIS operative was killed. The other ISIS operatives fled the scene (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 9, 2023).

### The Desert region

► On January 7, 2023, ISIS carried out two attacks in the region:

- ◆ An attack against the headquarters of a local pro-Iranian militia supporting the Syrian regime, in the Palmyra desert region. A militia fighter was killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 9, 2023).
- ◆ An attack against the Syrian army and the forces supporting it about 5 km northwest of Al-Rasafah. One fighter was killed and four others were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 7, 2023).

## Counterterrorism

### Al-Hasakah region

► The US-led Global Coalition against ISIS and the Kurdish SDF forces completed Operation Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt (Saiqat Al-Jazeera) against the presence of ISIS in the Al-Hawl camp area, and the Tel Hamis area east of Al-Hasakah. During the operation, which lasted nine days (December 29, 2022 - January 6, 2023), 102 wanted ISIS operatives who had a part in planning and carrying out terrorist attacks were arrested. Also, 27 people were arrested who provided ISIS operatives with logistical support or distributed ISIS propaganda. An additional 25 people were arrested for criminal activity (SDF Press, January 8, 2023).

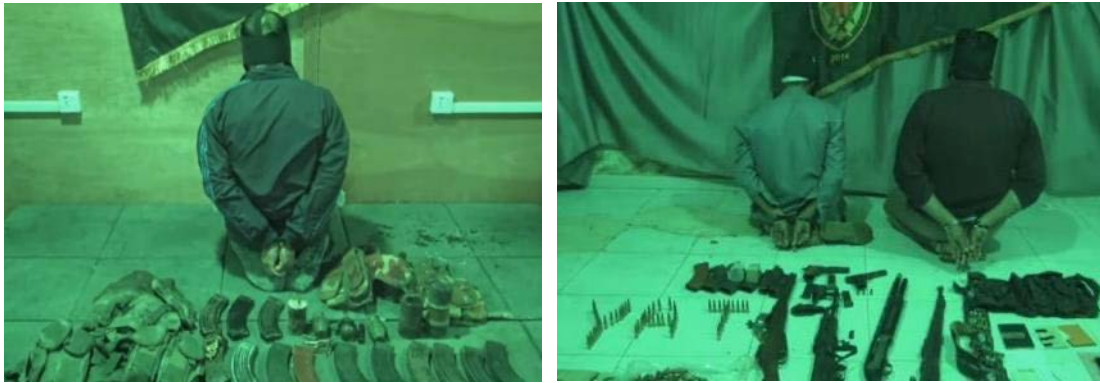


**Convoy of SDF armored vehicles during Operation Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt  
(SDF Press, January 4, 2023)**

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

► Armed men on a motorcycle, apparently ISIS operatives, shot at the car of the spokesman of the Al-Baqir tribe, north of Deir ez-Zor. He was not hurt (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 10, 2023).

► On January 1-2, 2023, fighters of the Kurdish counterterrorism units operating in the Deir ez-Zor rural area arrested three ISIS operatives who were planning to carry out attacks in the area and to act against the forces participating in Operation Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt. Weapons and ammunition in their possession were seized (SDF Press, January 4, 2023).



**Three ISIS operatives who were arrested (SDF Press, January 4, 2023)**

## **Al-Raqqah region**

► Special units of the SDF forces operating on January 4, 2023, with Global Coalition air support arrested a former ISIS commander in Mazraat Hittin, about 3 km northwest of Al-Raqqah. The detainee, suspected of being connected to active and dormant ISIS terrorist cells, was previously ISIS's official in charge of finances (Emir Bayt al-Mal) in Deir ez-Zor and fled in 2019 when SDF forces and the Global Coalition operated in the area. Documents in his possession were seized (SDF Press, January 4, 2023).

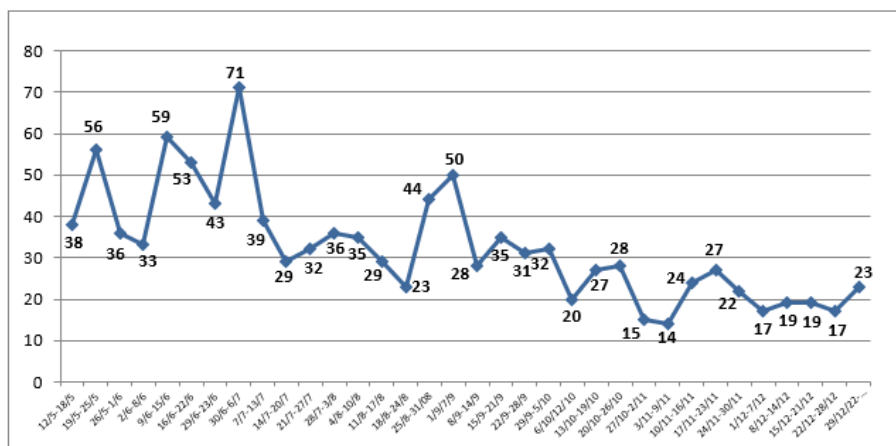


**ISIS's former official in charge of finances in the Deir ez-Zor Province, who was detained (SDF Press, January 4, 2023)**





## ISIS attacks by week (according to ISIS data)



## Africa

### Nigeria

#### ISIS activity

- On January 9, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Nigerian army compound in the town of Ajiri, about 10 km south of Maiduguri, in the northeast of the country. The soldiers fled and the compound was set on fire (Telegram, January 10, 2023).
- On January 8, 2023, an IED was set off against a Nigerian army patrol on the road between the towns of Wajiroko and Damboa, about 80 km southwest of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, January 10, 2023). A day earlier, an IED was set off on the same road against a Nigerian army armored vehicle. The soldiers on board were killed or wounded (Telegram, January 10, 2023).

#### Clashes continue between ISIS and Boko Haram

- On January 8, 2023, a force of Boko Haram operatives attacked six camps of ISIS's West Africa Province in the northeast of Lake Chad. A total of 35 ISIS operatives were killed in the exchange of fire between the sides, and many more were wounded (Zagazola, January 8, 2023).

### Mozambique

- **ISIS operatives carried out several attacks against the Mozambican army in the eastern part of Cabo Delgado province, in the northeast of the country.**
  - ◆ On January 9, 2023, a Mozambican army patrol was targeted by gunfire in the village of Mandaba. One soldier was killed. ISIS seized weapons and ammunition (Telegram, January 9, 2023).

- ◆ On January 8, 2023, Mozambican army forces were targeted by gunfire near the village of Naguida. The soldiers fled. ISIS operatives seized weapons and ammunition (Telegram, January 9, 2023).
- ◆ On January 8, 2023, a Mozambican army convoy was targeted by gunfire in the village of Litandaqua. Several soldiers were wounded and fled. ISIS seized a surveillance drone and ammunition (Telegram, January 9, 2023).

## Somalia

### Al-Shabaab activity

- ▶ On January 6, 2023, operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab set off three car bombs and opened fire at forces of the Somali army in the village of Hilowle Gab, in the Hirshabelle region, in central Somalia. Six Somali army members, including four commanders, were killed. According to Al-Shabaab, 31 Somali soldiers were killed, and the operatives seized vehicles and weapons (Somaliland Standard, January 7, 2023; Al-Jazeera, January 6, 2023).
- ▶ On January 4, 2023, two car bombs were set off in the town of Mahas, in the Hiran district, in central Somalia. The first car bomb was set off near the home of the district police commissioner and the home of a member of parliament. The second car bomb was set off in the market in the town. A total of 35 people, including nine members of one family, were killed and 72 were wounded. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attacks (Garowe Online, January 4, 2023; BBC, January 5, 2023; The Muslim News, January 7, 2023).



**The scene of the explosion of one of the two car bombs in the town of Mahas  
(Somali Guardian, January 4, 2023)**

### For the first time, Al-Shabaab wants to hold talks with the Somali government

- ▶ The government of Somalia announced on January 7, 2023, that Al-Shabaab had requested for the first time to open negotiations with it (ABC17News, January 7, 2023). Al-Shabaab denied any contact with the Somali government (AfricaNews, January 10, 2023).



## US reward offer for information about senior Al-Shabaab leader

► On January 8, 2023, the US State Department offered a reward of up to \$10 million to anyone who would provide information about **Maalim Ayman, leader of Jaysh Ayman** (Ayman's Army), an Al-Shabaab unit that carried out terrorist attacks in Kenya and Somalia. Among other things, Ayman was the one who planned an attack on Kenyan and American personnel at the Manda Bay Airfield, in southeastern Kenya, on January 5, 2020. Two US contractor pilots and a US Army specialist acting as an air traffic controller were killed. In November 2020, the Department of State designated Ayman as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) (US Department of State, January 8, 2023).



**Maalim Ayman, senior Al-Shabaab leader wanted by the United States**  
(US Department of State, January 8, 2023)

## Counterterrorism

► On January 9, 2023, the Somali Information Ministry announced that Somali security forces, operating with US army support, attacked Al-Shabaab targets in the Middle Shabelle region. According to the statement, at least 61 Al-Shabaab operatives had been killed (garoweonline.com, January 9, 2023).

## ISIS activity

► On January 6, 2023, an IED was set off against a Somali police member on the Mogadishu-Afgooye road, about 20 km northwest of Mogadishu. He was wounded (Telegram, January 7, 2023).

## Algeria

### Counterterrorism

► On January 8, 2023, the Algerian security forces announced the discovery of a terrorist cell affiliated with ISIS. One of the cell members who were arrested, Maraghni al-Hajj, admitted

his affiliation with ISIS and noted that he had contact channels with ISIS's West Africa Province. He also confessed to planning to carry out assassinations of senior Algerian officials and carrying out terrorist attacks against economic targets and oil facilities in the south of the country (Al-Ghad TV YouTube channel, January 8, 2023).



**Maraghni al-Hajj, ISIS operative who was arrested in Algeria  
(Al-Ghad TV YouTube channel, January 8, 2023)**

## Asia

### Yemen

► On January 6, 2023, the US Department of State offered a reward of up to \$5 million to anyone who would provide information about Ibrahim al-Banna, AKA Abu Ayman al-Masri, born in 1965. Al-Banna, who has Egyptian citizenship, serves as a senior leader in Al-Qaeda's branch in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), operating from Yemen. In 2010, in an article published in the organization's English-language magazine, Al-Banna praised the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York and threatened to harm American citizens around the world in response to US activity outside its borders. Between the years 1996-1998, before joining Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Banna served as the leader of the branch of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad in Yemen (US Department of State, January 6, 2023).



**Ibrahim al-Banna, senior AQAP leader (US Department of State, January 6, 2023)**

## Afghanistan

### Counterterrorism

► On January 4, 2023, the Taliban security forces, acting on intelligence, operated against ISIS hideouts in the city of Kabul, killed eight ISIS operatives, and arrested seven others (Bakhtar News Agency, January 6, 2023). Taliban spokesman Dhabih Allah Mujahid announced that the operatives had played a major role in the attack on the hotel where Chinese citizens were staying in Kabul on December 12, 2022<sup>1</sup> (Al-Arabiya, January 5, 2023).



**Activity against ISIS in Kabul  
(Twitter account of the Afghan Intelligence General Directorate, January 5, 2023)**

## India

► On January 6, 2023, the Indian police arrested two suspects of being connected to ISIS in the Howrah district, in eastern India. Weapons, several laptops, mobile phones, hard drives, portable storage devices, a computer processor, credit cards, and documents containing jihadist content were found in the possession of the two (India Today, January 7, 2023).

<sup>1</sup> For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from December 15, 2023, "Spotlight on Global Jihad (December 8-14, 2022)"

## Europe

### Spain

► Two women and 13 children, members of the families of ISIS operatives with Spanish citizenship, who were held in detention camps by the Kurdish forces, were transferred on January 9, 2023, to a delegation of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the process of extraditing them to their country of origin (ANHA, January 10, 2023).

### The United States

► Senior officials at the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced on January 7, 2023, that according to an intelligence alert from December 31, 2022, Al-Qaeda intends to carry out imminent attacks against the US which will use new techniques and tactics that include aircraft (WCBC Radio, January 7, 2023).<sup>2</sup>

## Terrorism financing

► The US Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on an ISIS financial network in Turkey that includes four individuals and two legal entities. According to them, the network played an important role in recruiting operatives and managing, transferring, and distributing funds for ISIS in Syria and Iraq. At the same time, the Turkish Ministry of Treasury and Finance as well as the Ministry of Interior have implemented an asset freeze against members of this network (US Department of the Treasury, January 5, 2023).<sup>3</sup>

## The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly, published this week under the title "All their years are similar," refers to the end of the year and ISIS's adherence to violent jihad until the end of time (Telegram, January 5, 2023). According to the article, a year begins and a year ends, and the West remains in a state of worry, fear, and apprehension about ISIS. The author points out that the West presents itself in the world media as having defeated ISIS, while in practice it continues to suffer heavy blows from it. According to his approach, Islam's concept of victory is different from that of the West since according to Islam, the believing Muslim must adhere to violent jihad against the infidels until the end of time.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wcbradio.com/?archiv=al-qaeda-plans-plane-attacks-as-air-marshals-are-sent-to-mexican-border>

<sup>3</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1181>

►The author concludes by claiming that despite the material and military superiority of the West, it does not succeed in defeating ISIS and has no solutions that will lead to its elimination. He calls on ISIS’s operatives and supporters to continue to adhere to jihad until the end of time and emphasizes that Allah foils the plots of the enemies - the Jews, the Christians, and the infidel Muslims - and makes all their years similar.



Al-Naba editorial entitled “All their years are similar” (Telegram, January 5, 2023)