



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## January 19-25, 2023



### Main events of the past week

- ▶ **ISIS's activity around the world continued to be moderate this week.**
- ▶ **The main event this week was in Somalia:** Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab attacked a Somali army base about 350 km northeast of Mogadishu. According to the Somali government, over 100 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed as well as six Somali soldiers. On the other hand, according to Al-Shabaab, over 150 Somali army soldiers and officers were killed.
- ▶ **Sinai Peninsula:** Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced that “we succeeded to a great extent to eliminate terrorism in Sinai,” saying that events will soon be held in Rafah and Al-Arish to mark the elimination of terrorism.
- ▶ **Syria:** Syrian security forces killed a senior ISIS operative and two of his escorts about 10 km northwest of Daraa. A joint US army and SDF force captured a senior ISIS official in eastern Syria.
- ▶ **Iraq:** This week, there was a moderate increase in ISIS's activity.
- ▶ **Africa: The Democratic Republic of the Congo** – ISIS operatives carried out a shooting attack in a pub in the Beni area, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. A total of 24 people were killed.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly dealt with the subordination of regimes in Islamic states to the Christian West and the Jews. According to the author, the solution for returning control to the Muslims lies in returning to pure Islam by implementing Islamic religious law (Sharia) and establishing an Islamic Caliphate.

### The Sinai Peninsula

- ▶ On January 23, 2023, **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi** announced that “we **succeeded** to a great extent to eliminate terrorism in Sinai,” and noted events would soon (no specific date was mentioned) be held in Rafah and Al-Arish to mark the elimination of terrorism (TeNTV, January 23, 2023). This is in line with the recent atmosphere of optimism of the Egyptian regime following its achievements against ISIS's Sinai Province. As will be

recalled, Egypt's Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Army visited North Sinai on January 14-15, 2023, in view of the stabilization of the security situation, and expressed their satisfaction with the security situation in the region. However, it should be noted that ISIS recently carried out several attacks in the Suez Canal area, and in response, the Egyptian army reinforced its troops in the area and especially in the city of Ismailia, where ISIS carried out its last attack, on December 30, 2022.<sup>1</sup>

► On January 18, 2023, ISIS's Sinai Province released a video under the title "Allah helps those who support His path," in which a spokesman for the province states that the province will continue on the path of jihad, implicitly exposing ISIS's weaknesses at this time (Telegram, January 18, 2023). The main points in the video:

◆ **The struggle must be continued without commitment to victory:** At the beginning of the video, a subtitle appears, stating that "Allah, may He be exalted, ordered us to carry out jihad, but did not order us to win. He promised us this on the condition that we support His path. Supporting Allah is through fighting His enemies, supporting those loyal to Him, and upholding His laws [i.e., Sharia, Islamic law]. We continue on this path." In the ITIC's assessment, the caption reveals the weakness of the province, which is content with fighting even though it does not guarantee victory.

◆ **ISIS's command was damaged:** An armed masked speaker wearing the traditional Galabeya points out that although its commanders were hit, the province will continue its activity, and that "if the Crusaders and their tails [i.e., the West and its proxies] think that killing our commanders will divert us from our path, [then they should know that] Allah has [still] left people who adhere to their religion [to continue on this path]."

◆ **An attempt to encourage the operatives' spirit:** The video also contains an excerpt from the words of ISIS's spokesman Abu Umar al-Muhajir, from September 2022, in which he praises the province's operatives ("Lions of Sinai") for their firm stand against "the Jews and the descendants of Pharaoh" (Israel and Egypt). A photo from a meeting of former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett with ISIS appears in the background. The speaker concludes with the words: "You remained as a thorn in the throat of the

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<sup>1</sup> For details about the attack, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from January 3, 2023, "Third ISIS attack in 2022 in the vicinity of the Suez Canal"

Jews” (that is, the only achievement is that they did not surrender). This quote is intended to encourage the spirit of the few who still remain to operate within ISIS.<sup>2</sup>

◆ **A pledge of allegiance:** At the end of the video, four operatives pledge allegiance to ISIS’s new leader Abu Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi. It should be noted that this pledge of allegiance was published long after the operatives of the organization’s other provinces around the globe published their pledges of allegiance. This may indicate communication difficulties and perhaps even functional difficulties in the province’s media system.



The speaker in the video concludes and then the four pledge allegiance to ISIS’s new leader (Telegram, January 18, 2023)

## The Syrian arena<sup>3</sup>



Map of Syria’s provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

<sup>2</sup> For further details, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from September 18, 2022, “ISIS spokesman Abu Umar al-Muhajir calls on Muslims around the world to join the organization’s ranks and criticizes other Islamist organizations”

<sup>3</sup> According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.

## Al-Hasakah region

► On January 19, 2023, an IED was set off against an SDF vehicle east of Al-Hasakah. Four fighters were wounded (Telegram, January 20, 2023).

## The desert region

► On January 23, 2023, a Syrian army patrol located nine bodies of fighters of the Fatemiyoun militia, which operates in Syria under the direction of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. The bodies were found in the Al-Masrab Desert, about 30 km northwest of Deir ez-Zor. They are apparently fighters captured by ISIS in an attack carried out by the organization in the area on January 18, 2023 (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 23, 2023).

## Al-Raqqah region

► On January 23, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked a Syrian army position in the area of the Al-Tabqa military airbase, about 40 km west of Al-Raqqah. It seems that in their attack, the operatives took advantage of the poor visibility conditions that prevailed in the area due to fog. Three soldiers were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 23, 2023).

## Counterterrorism

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

► As part of the activity against ISIS, on January 18, 2023, a joint force of the US Army and the SDF forces conducted a helicopter assault in eastern Syria (the exact location was not specified). The force captured an ISIS Syrian provincial media and security operative. He was involved in the planning and facilitation of ISIS operations in and outside of the region as well as global recruiting efforts (CENTCOM, January 19, 2023).



### CENTCOM's statement on the capture of a senior ISIS official in eastern Syria (CENTCOM, January 19, 2023)

## Southern Syria

► On January 20, 2023, a Syrian security force broke into ISIS headquarters in the town of Muzayrib, about 10 km northwest of Daraa and about 25 km east of the Syria-Jordan-Israel border triangle. In the headquarters area, near an elementary school in the town's northern neighborhood, there was an exchange of fire with the ISIS operatives. **A senior ISIS operative, Mohammad Ali al-Shaghouri**, and two of his escorts, Ahmed Khaled al-Masri and Mohsen Zitawi, were killed. Al-Shaghouri, codenamed Abu Umar al-Shaghouri, was one of the ISIS commanders who remained in the rural area west of Daraa and was responsible for assassinations and attacks carried out in the area (SANA, January 20, 2023). It was reported that he had previously been in the ranks of the Free Syrian Army and was one of six people whom the Syrian regime asked to deport to the north of the country (hammam Twitter account, January 20, 2023).



**Mohammad Ali al-Shaghouri (hammam Twitter account, January 20, 2023)**



specified). One of the abductees managed to escape (Al-Sumaria, January 20, 2023). It should be noted that this is not the first time that ISIS operatives kidnap shepherds and sheep. They do that to provide themselves with food and money.

## Counterterrorism

### Kirkuk Province

► On January 21, 2023, an Iraqi police force acting on intelligence set up checkpoints in the village of Al-Sharifiya, in the Al-Riyad area, about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. An ISIS operative, who was wearing an explosive belt and tried to enter the village, was shot dead by the force (Iraqi News Agency, January 21, 2023).

### Al-Anbar Province

► On January 18, 2023, a force of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Apparatus killed two ISIS operatives from an ambush they set about 170 km northwest of Baghdad (Al-Sumaria, January 18, 2023).

### Salah al-Din Province

► Iraqi Air Force F-16 fighter jets carried out airstrikes against four ISIS terrorist hotspots in the northern part of Al-Tuz district, about 165 km north of Baghdad. The terrorist hotspots were destroyed and ISIS operatives who were inside were killed (SecMedCell Facebook page, January 20, 2023).

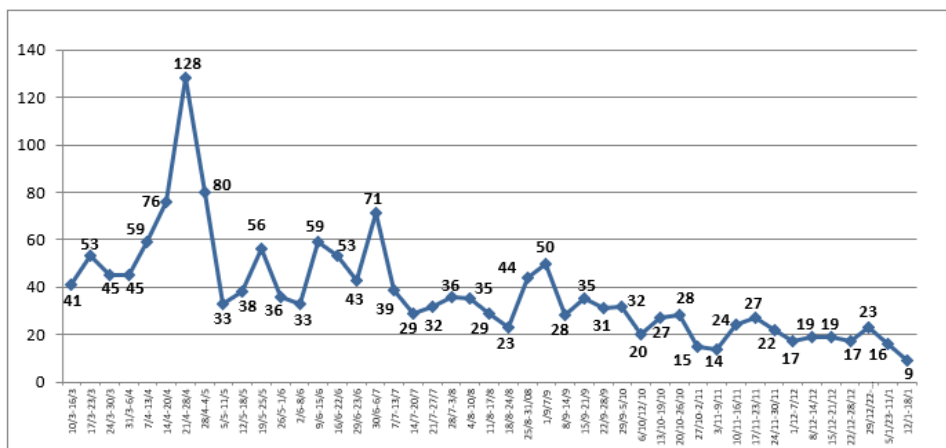
## Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► An infographic published by ISIS, summing up its activity around the world on January 12-18, 2023, indicates that the organization carried out 9 attacks in its various provinces around the globe (compared to 16 in the previous week). **This is the lowest number of ISIS attacks in the current year and apparently since ISIS was established.** The largest number of attacks was carried out by ISIS's provinces Mozambique, West Africa, and Iraq (two in each). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Central Africa (1); Somalia (1); Syria (1). A total of 67 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared to 93 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Central Africa Province (50). The other casualties were in the following provinces: West Africa (7); Iraq (4); Mozambique (3); Somalia (2); and Syria (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, January 19, 2023).



Summary of ISIS’s attacks (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 19, 2023)

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



## Africa

### Nigeria

► On January 23, 2023, a Nigerian army patrol was ambushed near the town of Gashua, about 50 km south of the Nigeria-Niger border. The soldiers reportedly fled (Telegram, January 24, 2023).



**ISIS operatives shooting at a Nigeria army patrol (Telegram, January 24, 2023)**

## Boko Haram

► On January 17, 2023, Boko Haram operatives riding on motorcycles infiltrated cultivated fields in the village of Makilwe, in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. One farmer was killed and eight others were kidnapped. The organization’s operatives contacted the families of the abductees for ransom (Sahara Reporters, January 18, 2023).

► According to Nigerian military sources, during the year 2022, over 300 Boko Haram operatives were killed by the organization itself because they intended to surrender to the Nigerian security forces. Brig. Gen. Ishaq Abdullahi, the special adviser to the government of Borno State said that the commanders of Boko Haram ordered to kill any operative who tries to escape from the Sambisa Forest, about 100 km southeast of Maiduguri, to surrender to the Nigerian forces. According to Abdullahi, over 95 percent of Boko Haram commanders have been eliminated in recent years, which makes it easier to hold a dialogue between the Nigerian government and the organization’s operatives to persuade them to lay down their weapons and adopt peaceful ways. Abdullahi added that the deadly conflict between ISIS’s West Africa Province and Boko Haram played a central role in achieving important goals in the fight against terrorism in the country (PUNCH, January 20, 2023).<sup>5</sup>

## Counterterrorism

► **On January 19, 2023, African Coalition forces operated against Boko Haram and ISIS hotspots in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria:**

<sup>5</sup> For further details, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from January 15, 2023, “Boko Haram: The Relations between the two factions of the organization”

◆ On the Kara-Diffa road in the Nigeria-Niger border area. About 36 terrorist operatives were killed and the rest fled, leaving heavy weapons, vehicles, and food at the scene (The East African, January 20, 2023).

◆ In terrorist hotspots near Baga, about 25 km southwest of the Nigeria-Chad border. Over 20 terrorist operatives were killed and the rest fled (The East African, January 20, 2023).

## The Democratic Republic of the Congo

► On January 23, 2023, operatives of ISIS's Central Africa Province attacked a pub in the village of Makungwi, in the Beni region, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. A total of 24 people were killed in the pub (france24, January 23, 2023).

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.** According to its statement, on the night of January 22, 2023, its operatives attacked a Christian pub by shooting and using knives, and also houses, in the village of Makungwi. According to ISIS, at least 26 Christians were killed. ISIS operatives set fire to several houses and took some of their property. In its statement, ISIS adds that the attack emphasizes the message that the military activity of the Congolese and African forces is doomed to failure (Amaq, Telegram, January 23, 2023).

## Somalia

### Al-Shabaab activity

► Somalia's Ministry of Public Information announced that on January 22, 2023, six suicide terrorists of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabab attacked the office of the mayor of Mogadishu. The operatives wore military uniforms for camouflage and thus managed to pass the checkpoints on their way to their destination. The attack began when one of the terrorists set off an explosive charge which he carried on his body, near the entrance gate behind the building. The rest of the attackers entered the building. The Somali security forces managed to kill three of them and the rest activated their explosive belts and were killed. At least five civilians were killed in the attack and 16 others were wounded (Al-Arabiya, January 22, 2023; AllAfrica, January 23, 2023). **Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack** (EuroNews, January 23, 2023).

► The Somali government announced that on January 20, 2023, Al-Shabaab operatives attacked a Somali army base in the village of Galcad, about 350 km northeast of Mogadishu. According to the Somali government's announcement, the attack was repelled and over 100

al-Shabaab operatives were killed. Six Somali soldiers and an officer of a Somali elite unit were also killed. On the other hand, **Sheikh Abu Musab, Al-Shabaab spokesman**, claimed that over 150 soldiers and officers of the Somali army were killed in the attack (AP, January 20, 2023).

## ISIS activity

► On January 21, 2023, ISIS's Somalia Province released a video under the title "God is the Protector of the Faithful," in which it documents operations carried out by the province against the security forces of Somalia and joint forces of the government of Somalia and the United States Army in the northeast of the country. In the video, an operative of the province appears with his face visible. He calls on the prisoners of the organization to be patient and know that the organization has not forgotten them and is working for their release. He calls on the organization's operatives to fight their enemies. In addition, he calls on the United States to stop its activity against Muslims which has been going on for more than two decades, since it has achieved nothing except the destruction of its economy. He threatens the Somali government and its supporters, stating that a new phase of harming them has begun, one that they have not known until now (Telegram, January 21, 2023). The video was published in view of the intensification of the conflicts between the Somali government and the jihadist elements in the country, led by Al-Shabaab.



ISIS operative in the video (Telegram, January 21, 2023)

## Counterterrorism

► On January 19, 2023, forces of the Somali army attacked an Al-Shabaab camp in the village of Goof-Gaduud, about 250 km northwest of Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab operatives reportedly intended to attack Somali army forces. At least 20 Al-Shabaab operatives, including senior commanders, were killed and others were wounded. Five Somali soldiers were also killed (VOA, January 19, 2023).

► On January 18, 2023, Forces of the Somali army, local tribes, and US forces carried out a surprise attack against Al-Shabaab on a farm in the Hawadley village area, about 60 km north of Mogadishu. At least 49 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed (VOA, January 19, 2023).

## Kenya

### Counterterrorism

► On January 19, 2023, a Kenyan security force attacked Al-Shabaab operatives in the village of Galmagalla, in eastern Kenya, about 45 km southwest of the Kenya-Somalia border. Ten operatives of the organization were killed. RPG rockets and IEDs which were in their possession were seized (Voice of Nigeria, January 19, 2023).

### Burkina Faso

► On January 19, 2023, terrorist operatives (probably Al-Qaeda or ISIS-affiliated elements) carried out two attacks against local militias supporting the Burkina Faso army:

- ◆ An attack against a local force in the north of Bam province, in northern Burkina Faso, about 70 km south of the Burkina Faso-Mali border. Six fighters and one woman were killed and about 10 were wounded (Al-Jazeera, January 20, 2023).

- ◆ An attack against a joint force of volunteers and the army, who were securing a convoy moving on the Siena-Saran road, in the west of the country. Ten volunteers and another person were killed (Al-Jazeera, January 20, 2023).

► On January 20, 2023, a force of the Burkina Faso army operating in the north-central part of the country located and rescued 66 people, including 23 women, 39 children, and four babies, who were kidnapped on January 12-13, 2023, by Islamist militants affiliated with ISIS or Al-Qaeda in the province of Soum, in northern Burkina Faso, about 65 km south of the Burkina Faso-Mali border (US News, January 21, 2023).

### Mozambique

► On January 22, 2023, a Mozambican army patrol was targeted by gunfire in the village of Litandaqua, in the Macomia region, in the northeast of the country. Several soldiers were wounded and fled (Telegram, January 23, 2023).

## Mali

### Tribe leaders pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda

► Al-Zallaqa, the propaganda arm of Jabhat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), Al-Qaeda's branch in the Sahel and West Africa, released photos documenting tribe leaders in northern

Mali pledging allegiance to the organization leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, codenamed Abu al-Fadl (The Long War Journal, January 23, 2023).



Tribe leaders pledging allegiance (Telegram, January 23, 2023)

## Asia

### Iran

► On January 19, 2023, Iranian security forces arrested operatives of two ISIS-affiliated squads in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan in southeastern Iran. According to the reports, the operatives, who included Afghan and Tajik nationals, intended to undermine security in the southeast of the country and take foreign citizens and businessmen in the city of Jabbar as hostages (Press TV, January 19, 2023).

## Europe

### Germany

► On January 19, 2023, members of the Bundestag approved **a resolution recognizing the crimes of ISIS against the Yazidi minority in Iraq as genocide**. It should be recalled that ISIS killed thousands of Yazidis in Iraq, enslaved about 7,000 Yazidi women and girls, and displaced 550,000 members of the minority (almost all) from their place of residence in northern Iraq. The resolution is expected to facilitate the prosecution of ISIS operatives in Germany (EuroNews, January 20, 2023).

## The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial of ISIS Al-Naba weekly was published this week under the title “Blind Subordination.” It argues that the existence of a pure Islamic regime is the only solution for the Muslims’ subordination to the Christians and the Jews.

► The author points out that modern intellectuals analyze the subordination of the regimes in Islamic countries to Christians and Jews through a material perspective, i.e., focusing on the hegemony of the West in the world economy whereas, in fact, the subordination stems from the distance from Islam and the spirit of jihad. Therefore, the solution to this subordination is found in the values of pure Islam.

► According to the writer, Muslims should learn from their past. In the past, before the advent of Islam, the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula were subordinate to the Persian Empire or the Byzantine Empire, but with the advent of Islam (in the 7th century AD), Islam spread through jihad beyond the Arabian Peninsula, conquering these empires while its inhabitants converted to Islam. Thus, instead of being subordinate, Muslims became sovereign. According to the author, the situation today is similar to the pre-Islamic period when the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula were subordinate to non-Muslim rulers, and therefore the solution is to return to pure Islam by implementing Islamic law (Sharia) and establishing an Islamic caliphate (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 19, 2023).

► It should be noted that the photo that appears at the top of the article is from the opening ceremony of the World Cup held on November 20, 2022, in Qatar, where American actor Morgan Freeman appears next to a local disabled person with amputated legs, in a way that expresses tolerance and acceptance of the other. In the current context, however, the photo comes to symbolize the inferiority of the Muslims and their subordination to the West.



The editorial “Blind Subordination” (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 19, 2023)