



Spotlight on Global Jihad

January 26 – February 1, 2023



Main events of the past week

► **This week, the relatively low level of ISIS activity around the world continued.** The Somali government's activity against the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab continues to bear fruit.

► **Africa:**

◆ **Somalia** - A US Army force killed a senior ISIS official in ISIS's Somalia Province and several other operatives. Somali army forces killed 136 Al-Shabaab operatives and wounded about 100, about 70 km southwest of Mogadishu.

◆ **The Democratic Republic of the Congo** - ISIS operatives attacked three villages in the northeast of the country. At least 15 people were killed. A suicide bomber detonated a bomb in a market in the town of Beni, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. At least 12 people were wounded.

◆ **Nigeria** - A total of 32 Boko Haram operatives, including a senior member of the organization, were killed in an operation carried out by the Nigerian army in the northeast of the country.

◆ **Burkina Faso** - France has announced that it will withdraw its forces from the country within a month. This refers to about 400 soldiers, about half of them Special Forces fighters.

► **Spain:** A man armed with a machete carried out a stabbing attack in two churches in Algeciras, in southern Spain. One person was killed and four others were wounded. The attack is being investigated as a terrorist attack.

► **Bangladesh:** Forces of the counterterrorism unit arrested six operatives of the Islamic Jihad organization (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami - HuJI)¹, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda, in different areas of the capital.

¹ This organization operates in Pakistan and Bangladesh. It was established in 1992 with the assistance of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

► **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS’s Al-Naba weekly emphasizes the commitment of ISIS’s operatives to continue jihad until the conquest of Mecca, Rome and Jerusalem. An infographic published in the weekly makes threats against the Jews and Christians. ISIS calls for attacking Christians following the provocative burning of a Quran by a Danish-Swedish politician.

The Sinai Peninsula

► An old IED planted by ISIS exploded on January 29, 2023, in the village of Al-Zuheir in southern Sheikh Zuweid. Three children who were playing with it were killed and another was seriously wounded (Sinaa Mubasher Facebook page, January 29, 2023).

► On January 26, 2023, the Egyptian security forces found a landmine, apparently belonging to ISIS, in the Al-Tuffaha area, in the Bir al-Abd region (Bir al-Abd al-Aan Facebook account, January 26, 2023).



The mine found in the Bir al-Abd region (Bir al-Abd al-Aan Facebook page, January 26, 2023)

► ISIS released a video entitled “The End and the Beginning - War Hasn’t Begun Yet – II.” In the video, ISIS reviews the history of the activity of the Salafist-jihadi movements in the Sinai Peninsula against the Egyptian regimes until now. It seems that the video, which is about an hour long, is intended to raise the morale of the organization’s operatives and mobilize support for ISIS’s Sinai Province in view of its weakening due to the extensive counterterrorism activity of the Egyptian security forces (Telegram, January 29, 2023).



The beginning of the video (Telegram, January 29, 2023)

The Syrian arena²



Map of Syria's provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region

- On January 28, 2023, an SDF checkpoint was targeted by gunfire and hand grenades in the Al-Basira region, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Two fighters were wounded (Telegram, January 30, 2023).
- On January 25, 2023, an SDF checkpoint was targeted by gunfire in the village of Al-Hawajj, about 4 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. Two SDF fighters were killed (Telegram, January 25, 2023).

² According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.

The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS attacks by province³

Kirkuk Province

► On January 20, 2023, a sticky bomb attached to a policeman's vehicle was activated in the Al-Faylaq neighborhood, in the northwest of Kirkuk. The vehicle was put out of commission but no casualties were reported (Telegram, January 27, 2023). It should be noted that ISIS's claim of responsibility was published about a week after the incident, which could indicate the difficulties experienced by the organization's media network.

Salah al-Din Province

► On January 27, 2023, an Iraqi army patrol was targeted by gunfire in the Al-Khan al-Qadim area, about 30 km north of Baghdad. Three soldiers were wounded (Telegram, January 27, 2023).

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► An infographic published by ISIS, summing up its activity around the world on January 19-25, 2023, indicates that the organization carried out 15 attacks in its various provinces around the globe (compared to 9 in the previous week). The largest number of attacks was carried out by ISIS's provinces of Iraq, West Africa, and Central Africa (four in each). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Syria (2); and Mozambique (1). A total of 75 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared to 67 in the previous week. The largest number of

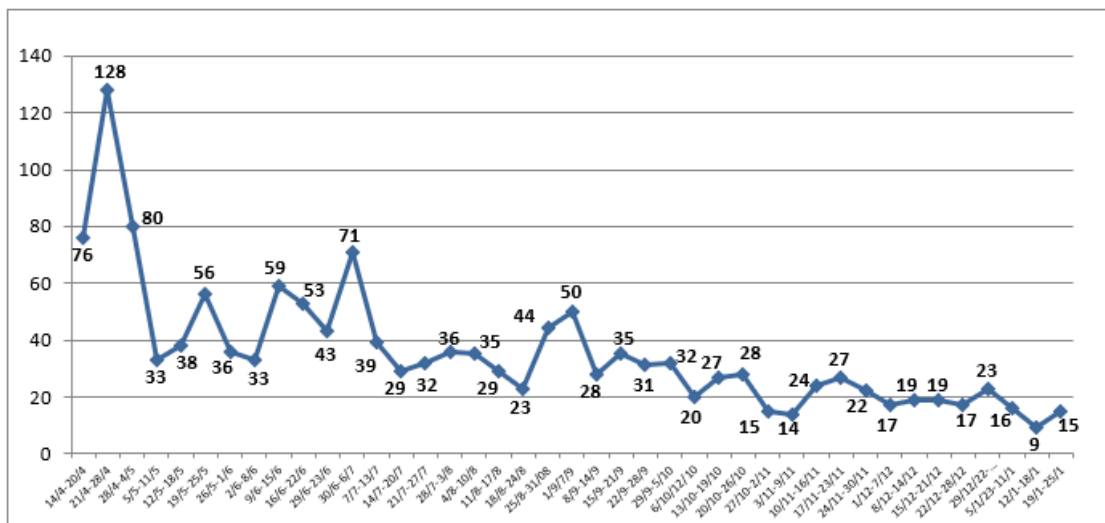
³ According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.

casualties was in the West Africa Province (54). The other casualties were in the following provinces: West Africa (7); Syria (6); Iraq (5); and Mozambique (3) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, January 25, 2023).



Summary of ISIS’s attacks (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 25, 2023)

ISIS attacks by week (according to ISIS data)



COVID-19 restrictions contributed to a decrease in ISIS activity

► According to a new study published by Yale University in the United States, the policy of restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, and especially the lockdowns, resulted in a significant decrease in the terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS in these countries. According to the study, during this period, ISIS had difficulty raising funds and recruiting operatives, operating in the logistics field, and penetrating the city centers.⁴

⁴ <https://news.yale.edu/2023/01/30>.

Africa

Nigeria

ISIS's activity

- ▶ On January 27, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol near the town of Sabon Gari, in northeastern Nigeria. Nine soldiers were killed and wounded (Telegram, January 31, 2023).
- ▶ On January 26, 2023, two mortar shells were fired at a Nigerian army base in Malam Fatori, in northeastern Nigeria, near the border with Niger. According to ISIS, definite hits were identified (Telegram, January 31, 2023).
- ▶ According to Nigerian military sources, ISIS's West Africa Province recently expelled operatives of the organization who had previously joined it from the faction of Abubakar Shekau (the Boko Haram leader who was killed in June 2021). The reason for the expulsion is the organization's suspicion that these operatives are responsible for its recent defeats by the Nigerian army due to the intelligence they provided to the Nigerian forces (Vanguard, January 28, 2023).
- ▶ On January 26, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army checkpoint in the town of Ngala, about 4 km southwest of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. One soldier was killed and the rest fled (Telegram, January 27, 2023).

Counterterrorism

- ▶ On January 24, 2023, the Nigerian army announced that over 100 Boko Haram operatives and their families had turned themselves in over the weekend (January 21-22, 2023) in the Banki area, near the Nigeria-Cameroon border, and in the Konduga area, about 30 km southeast of Maiduguri. Brig. Gen. Ishaq Abdullahi, the special adviser to the government of Borno State, noted that since 2021, over 82,000 Boko Haram operatives and their families had turned themselves in. According to him, over 3,500 former operatives have reintegrated into their communities. He also noted that about 85 percent of the Boko Haram operatives who turned themselves in had been forcibly recruited into the ranks of the organization (Sahara Reporters, January 24, 2023).

► On January 29, 2023, the Nigerian army killed 32 Boko Haram operatives, including a senior member codenamed Abu Illiya, in an operation conducted in the Konduga area, in northeastern Nigeria (saharareporters.com, January 29, 2023).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

► On January 29, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked three villages in the Ituri region, in the northeast of the Congo, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. At least 15 people were killed (VOA, January 29, 2023).

► On January 25, 2023, a suicide bomber activated an IED that was planted inside a bag in a market in the town of Beni, in eastern Congo, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. At least 12 people were wounded. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, it was apparently carried out by ISIS's Central Africa Province operatives, who are active in the region (AP, January 26, 2023).

Niger

► ISIS operatives attacked a vehicle in the town of Issari Boudoum, about 40 km southwest of Diffa, near the Nigeria-Niger border. One person was killed and another was wounded (Zagazola, January 28, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► The Nigerian army announced that its forces had operated against terrorist operatives affiliated with Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the western part of the Tillabéri region, near the Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso tri-border area. A total of 11 terrorist operatives were killed and six were arrested. In addition, weapons were seized and over 130 motorcycles were destroyed (All Africa, January 25, 2023).

Somalia

Counterterrorism

► US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that on January 25, 2023, a US military force operating against ISIS in northern Somalia killed Bilal al-Sudani, a senior operative in ISIS's Somalia Province, and several other operatives. It was reported that the force had intended to capture him alive, but this was not possible due to the exchange of fire between the sides. Al-Sudani was responsible for expanding ISIS's activity in Africa and funding the organization's terrorist activity around the world (CNN Politics, January 26, 2023).

► On January 29, 2023, Somali army forces operated with the support of foreign forces (probably American) in the Janale region, about 70 km southwest of Mogadishu, against forces of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab. A total of 136 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed and about 100 were wounded (Somalia National News Agency, January 29, 2023).

Mozambique

► On January 24, 2023, ISIS operatives exchanged fire with a militia loyal to the Mozambican government in the village of Nacala, in the Mueda region, in the Cabo Delgado province, in northwestern Mozambique. The militia fighters fled and ISIS operatives kidnapped and killed a local Christian resident (Telegram, January 28, 2023).

Burkina Faso

► On January 26, 2023, France announced that it would withdraw its forces from Burkina Faso within a month. Its forces consist of about 400 soldiers, including 200 from the Special Forces. In light of the repeated attacks by elements affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda throughout the country, there is concern that after the withdrawal of the forces, the security situation in the country will deteriorate further. At the same time, sources in the West are afraid that the Wagner Group, which consists of mercenaries close to the Russian regime, will expand its involvement in the country (Reuters, January 26, 2023; France 24, January 27, 2023; AFP, January 27, 2023). It should be noted that France recently withdrew its forces from Mali (on August 17, 2022) and the Central African Republic (on December 15, 2022) as part of the process of its disengagement from its former colonies in the African continent.

Asia

Bangladesh

► On January 28, 2023, forces of the Bangladesh Counterterrorism Unit arrested six operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic Jihad terrorist organization (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami – HuJI) in various parts of the capital. According to the unit commander, the terrorist organization planned to carry out a large-scale attack in Bangladesh, which was thwarted by the arrest of the operatives. According to him, one of the detainees, Fakhrul Islam, underwent training in shooting and instruction on how to make explosive devices at an Al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan. He returned to Bangladesh via India and tried to recruit operatives and regroup the organization in order to carry out a major attack in the country. The Bangladeshi police thwarted the plan and the operatives were arrested (All India Radio, January 28, 2023).

Lebanon

► On December 7-9, 2022, a squad of five Lebanese, residents of Tripoli, was arrested in northern Lebanon on suspicion that they had planned, inter alia, to detonate an explosive drone at Al-Rasoul Hospital in Beirut. The squad also planned to shoot at Christian worshipers on Christmas Eve in a church in Tripoli. It was reported that the detainees are members of families with a history of activity in terrorist organizations, some of them in Syria, and they lived in an area known as a site for recruiting young people for activity in Iraq (Al-Akhbar, January 30, 2023)

Yemen

► Three Al-Qaeda operatives were killed by a UAV while traveling in a car in Wadi Obeida, in northeastern Yemen. It is believed that the assassination was carried out by the United States (AFP, January 31, 2023).

Europe

Spain

► On January 25, 2023, a man armed with a machete carried out a stabbing attack in two Catholic churches in the city of Algeciras, in southern Spain. At least one person was killed and four others were wounded. The attack was investigated as a terrorist attack. The perpetrator, Yasin Ganza, was caught. His interrogation revealed that he is a 25-year-old Moroccan citizen who was staying illegally in Spain, for which he was arrested and deported in 2019. In a video circulated on social networks, the attacker is seen on a security camera holding a machete (murciatoday.com, January 27, 2023; eureporter.co, January 30, 2023).



The perpetrator with a machete seen on a security camera (Telegram, January 25, 2023)

United States

Molotov cocktail thrown at a synagogue

► On January 29, 2023, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a New Jersey synagogue. According to the report, around 03:00 local time, a person unknown wearing a ski mask threw a Molotov cocktail at the front door of the Ner Tamid Synagogue in the city of Bloomfield and fled the scene. The bottle was broken, no one was hurt and no damage was done. The authorities are investigating the incident (ABC, January 29, 2023). The background of the attack is unknown, but it seems that it was carried out on Islamic or anti-Semitic grounds.

Convictions of ISIS operatives

► Abdullah el-Faisal, a Muslim preacher from Jamaica, accused of mobilizing support for ISIS, was convicted on January 26, 2023, in the New York State Supreme Court of terrorist activity and is expected to serve 25-27 years in prison. The court decided that the sentence will be determined in February 2023 (AP, January 27, 2023). El-Faisal, who operated in the UK and Kenya, was arrested in Jamaica in 2017 and extradited to the US. He was arrested after making contact in 2016 via WhatsApp with a woman in New York who expressed a desire to become a jihad operative. He offered to help her join ISIS and introduced her to an ISIS operative. He did not know that the woman was actually an undercover police officer of the New York Police Department. Five indictments were filed against him, including conspiracy and support for terrorist activities of ISIS (The New York Times, November 28, 2022).

► On January 30, 2023, a court in Michigan convicted Ibraheem Izzy Musaibli, 32, born in the USA and an American citizen, from the state of Michigan, on charges of providing material aid to ISIS, conspiring to supply material aid, and being in an ISIS training camp. According to the evidence, Musaibli began to show interest in ISIS in 2015, while he was in Michigan. In April 2015, he went to Yemen. In the fall of 2015, he went to Syria where he underwent religious training at the organization's camp. After that, he underwent military training at an ISIS training camp. Upon completion of his military training, he pledged allegiance to ISIS's leader. He worked for two and a half years in the ranks of ISIS until he was captured in 2018 by the SDF forces. He was transferred to the custody of the FBI and flown to the US (US Department of Justice, January 30, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

- ▶ The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly was published this week under the title "Allah helps those who help Him [i.e., support His religion]." It deals with the commitment of ISIS's operatives to the organization's way, as reflected, according to the author, in the pledges of allegiance by the operatives in the various provinces to the organization's new leader. The author notes that the title of the article has become a common slogan in the pledges of allegiance that were recently published, and it reflects the spirit of jihad, the faith, and the commitment of the organization's operatives to continue jihad until the conquest of Mecca, Rome, and Jerusalem.
- ▶ According to the author, the various pledges of allegiance published by the various provinces give a boost to ISIS's operatives around the world. He adds that the path to the victory of Islam and the implementation of Islamic law (Sharia) is paved only by jihad. According to him, the Sinai Province operatives "insisted on documenting their pledge of allegiance despite the difficult security circumstances in which they operate." He adds that the province operatives are determined to continue on the path of the organization although their commanders were hit (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 25, 2023). It should be noted that the pledge of allegiance of the Sinai Province operatives was published in a considerable delay after the others.
- ▶ The editorial, which tries to raise the morale of the operatives, testifies to the organization's difficulties in recruiting supporters and operatives and expanding its activity, which has decreased in recent months; and to the weakness of the Sinai Province in view of the counterterrorism activity by the Egyptian security forces.



The editorial “Allah helps those who help Him [i.e., supports His religion]” (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 25, 2023)

ISIS infographic threatens the Jews and Christians

► ISIS’s Al-Naba weekly published an infographic that also appeared under the title “Allah helps those who help Him [i.e., support His religion].” It summarizes threats published in recent months by representatives of 10 ISIS provinces following the death of the organization leader, to attack Jews, Christians, and other “infidels.” The main messages of the infographic are as follows:

- ◆ The campaign against the Jews and Christians continues.
- ◆ Killing ISIS’s leader and its senior operatives will not defeat the organization, as the members of the organization are committed to violent jihad against the “infidels” until the last drop of their blood.
- ◆ Killing the leaders only strengthens the unity of the organization’s operatives.
- ◆ ISIS is expanding its influence in the world.
- ◆ There will be many more arenas and many days of battle, and the “infidels” (including the Jews and Christians) are in for bad times.
- ◆ The organization’s members are sure ISIS will continue on its path, as Islam did not die with the death of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.



The infographic entitled “Allah helps those who help Him [i.e., support His religion]” (Al-Naba, Telegram, January 25, 2023)

ISIS supporters on Telegram call for attacking Christians

► Following the burning of a Quran by the Danish-Swedish politician and leader of the far-right party Stram Kurs (Hard Line) in Denmark, the lawyer Rasmus Paludan, on January 21, 2023, in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden, a Telegram channel affiliated with ISIS published posts calling for attacking Christians around the world:

- ◆ Muslims around the world are called upon to see the act of burning the Quran as an insult to the religion of Islam and to shed the blood of the perpetrator. It was emphasized that every Muslim must protect his religion if he wants to go to heaven.
- ◆ A post was published stating that the killing of over 20 Christian civilians in a pub in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on January 23, 2023, and several attacks in which Mozambican army soldiers were killed recently were in fact reprisals for the burning of the Quran in Sweden, as “Christians everywhere are considered Paludan’s brothers” (MEMRI, January 26, 2023).⁵
- ◆ Another post called on Muslims around the world not to be content with condemnations, demonstrations, boycotts of products made in Sweden, and hashtags on social networks.

⁵ It seems that the claim that the attacks in Congo and Mozambique were carried out in revenge for the act of burning the Quran in Sweden is baseless since the organization has been carrying out attacks against Christians in these countries for a long period of time.

- ◆ Another post encouraged Muslims in Europe, and in Sweden in particular, to act according to the principle of “measure for measure” and set fire, in city centers, to the rainbow flag identified with the LGBT community.

Media foundation affiliated with ISIS calls for carrying out attacks in Europe

► On January 31, 2023, Sarh al-Khilafah Media Foundation, which is affiliated with ISIS, published a short video (about two minutes), entitled “A message from jihad fighters to polytheists in Europe.” It includes a recording of Osama bin Laden, the former leader of Al-Qaeda, who is a “role model” also for ISIS operatives, in which he threatened European countries with retaliatory actions in view of the publication of offensive cartoons against Muhammad (a threat bin Laden made in 2006, following the publication of 12 offensive cartoons against Muhammad in a Danish satirical newspaper). Bin Laden stated in the recording that the publication of the offensive cartoons constitutes an extremely serious offense and that the retribution would be even harsher. The video was published with subtitles in English and Arabic and photos from the scenes of attacks carried out by ISIS in Europe over the years (Telegram, January 31, 2023).



The beginning of the video (Telegram, January 31, 2023)