



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## February 9-15, 2023



### Main events of the past week

- ▶ **This week, there was a moderate increase in ISIS's activity around the world. The centers of ISIS activity were Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mozambique.**
- ▶ At the UN Security Council meeting, **Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov** warned that the threat posed by ISIS remains high, especially in Africa.
- ▶ **Syria:** ISIS operatives abducted 75 people, the vast majority of them civilians, east of Palmyra and murdered 12 of them. The fate of the other abductees is unknown.
- ▶ **Iraq:** The Iraqi Air Force carried out airstrikes against ISIS northeast of Baqubah. Seven ISIS operatives were killed, including ISIS's Diyala Province commander.
- ▶ **Africa:**
  - ◆ **Somalia:** The government of Somalia, together with the international forces supporting it, continued to attack targets of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab.
  - ◆ **Nigeria:** The Nigerian army attacked from the air a large concentration of Boko Haram operatives in the Sambisa Forest. Dozens of Boko Haram operatives were killed and others were wounded. At the same time, clashes between ISIS and Boko Haram continued.
  - ◆ **The Democratic Republic of the Congo:** Ten Christian citizens were murdered by ISIS in the northeastern Congo.
  - ◆ **Mozambique:** ISIS operatives attacked a Mozambican army post in the northeast of the country. Five soldiers were killed.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:**
  - ◆ The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly dealt with the earthquake in southern Turkey and northern Syria, claiming that the earthquake is a message of warning and intimidation from Allah to the Muslims so that they strengthen their faith.

- ◆ Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQIM) calls on Muslims in the world and especially its supporters to help the victims of the earthquake.
- ◆ A video by Al-Zawahiri on the issue of “Palestine” was published. In the video, which was originally filmed about a year ago, he calls on Muslims around the world to help the Palestinians “liberate Palestine.”

## UN Under-Secretary-General: The threat posed by ISIS remains high

► **Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov** spoke on February 9, 2023, at the UN Security Council meeting and noted that **the threat posed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq remains high and has even intensified in conflict zones, especially in Africa**. According to him, the spread of ISIS is particularly worrisome in the regions of central and southern Africa, as well as in the Sahel region. In addition, Voronkov said that **ISIS continues to use the Internet, social media, computer games, and gaming platforms to expand its propaganda campaign** to radicalize and recruit new supporters for the organization. Voronkov also pointed out that ISIS operates “virtual assets”<sup>1</sup> intended to raise funds and continues to use drones in various arenas for surveillance and intelligence gathering (VOA, February 9, 2023).

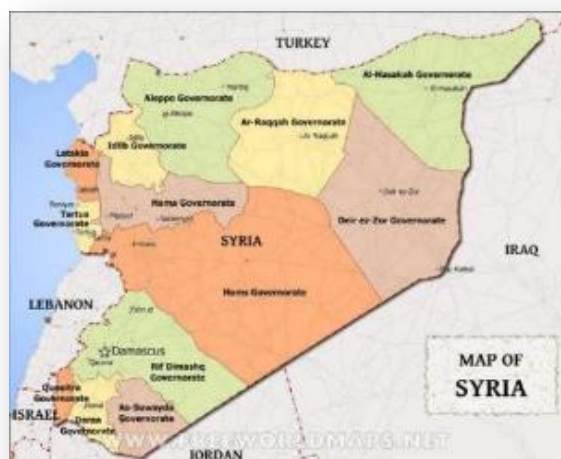
## The Sinai Peninsula

- A 12-year-old girl was wounded in the explosion of an IED apparently planted by ISIS at the entrance to Sheikh Zuweid (@Sinaifhr Twitter account, February 14, 2023).
- On February 9, 2023, tribal sources in Sinai informed that local civilians recently noticed the movements of ISIS operatives in the mountainous areas of the central Sinai Peninsula and reported this to the Egyptian army. Following this information, the Egyptian army began searching these areas to locate the ISIS operatives. In the searches, signs were found indicating the presence of the organization’s operatives in the area. However, it is not known how many they are and what military equipment they possess. It was reported that the task would take several months since the forces have to thoroughly search a large area estimated at about 10,000 sq. km. (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 9, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the operation of websites and activity within various platforms on the Internet that generate income. Voronkov did not specify which websites or platforms are involved.

## The Syrian arena<sup>2</sup>



Map of Syria's provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

### The desert region

► On the evening of February 11, 2023, ISIS operatives kidnapped 75 people, men and women who arrived by car to collect truffle mushrooms east of Palmyra. Twelve of them were executed, including a woman and a Syrian soldier who apparently secured them. The fate of the other abductees is unknown at this time (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 14, 2023).

### The Idlib region

► On February 12, 2023, six days after the earthquake in the area, UN and SDF aid delegations entered the rebel enclave in Idlib for the first time. A delegation of SDF forces also delivered donations collected by tribesmen and residents of the Manbij region (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 12, 2023). **HTS commander Abu Muhammad al-Julani** authorized their entry after severe criticism was leveled against him around the Muslim world for not allowing the entry of aid forces and not caring for the population affected by the disaster (Al-Shorook, February 13, 2023).

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

► On February 8, 2023, an SDF checkpoint was targeted by gunfire in the village of Hawi al-Hassan, about 4 km north of Deir ez-Zor. An SDF fighter was killed and another wounded (Telegram, February 9, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.



## Counterterrorism

### Diyala Province

► On February 12, 2023, Iraqi Air Force fighter jets acting on intelligence carried out two airstrikes against ISIS in the Hamrin Dam area, about 50 km northeast of Baqubah. Seven ISIS operatives were killed. Among the dead was ISIS's Diyala Province commander (wali) **Sami Mouhan, codenamed Ibn Abd al-Rahman** (Iraqi News Agency, February 12, 2023; Al-Sumaria, February 13, 2023).



**ISIS's Diyala Province commander Sami Mouhan (Al-Sumaria, February 13, 2023)**

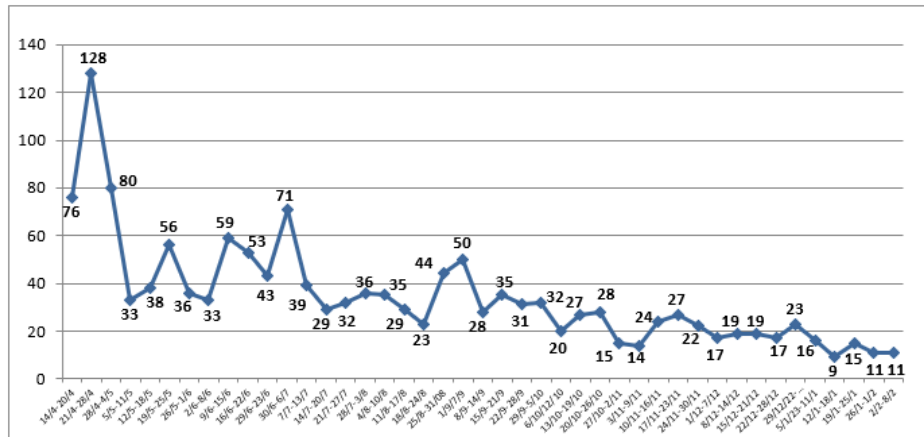
## Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► An infographic published by ISIS, summing up its activity around the world on February 2-8, 2023, indicates that the organization carried out 11 attacks in its various provinces around the globe (same as in the previous week). The largest number of attacks was carried out by ISIS's Mozambique Province (5). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Central Africa (3); Iraq (1); Syria (1); and East Asia (1). A total of 34 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared to 38 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Central Africa Province (18). The other casualties were in the following provinces: Mozambique (8); East Asia (4); Syria (3); and Iraq (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, February 9, 2023).



Summary of ISIS’s attacks (Al-Naba, Telegram, February 9, 2023)

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



**Africa**

**Nigeria**

**Clashes continue between ISIS and Boko Haram**

► On February 9, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked a Boko Haram convoy near the village of Gulmari, in the Konduga region, about 30 km southeast of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. A total of 15 Boko Haram operatives were killed (Zagazola, February 9, 2023).

**ISIS activity**

► On February 9, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol on the Damboa-Maiduguri road, in Borno State. One of the vehicles was damaged and the soldiers on board were killed or wounded (Telegram, February 9, 2023).

► On February 8, 2023, three mortar shells were fired at a Nigerian army camp in the town of Sabon Gari, about 130 km southwest of Maiduguri. According to ISIS, accurate hits were observed (Telegram, February 9, 2023).

## Counterterrorism

- On February 10, 2023, Nigerian army forces operated against Boko Haram in two locations:
- ◆ Two Air Force planes carried out airstrikes against a concentration of forces of over 100 Boko Haram operatives, dozens of whom riding on motorcycles, in the town of Gaizuwa, at the edge of the Sambisa Forest, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. Dozens of Boko Haram operatives were killed and others were wounded. Some Boko Haram operatives fled with their families and surrendered to the Nigerian army (Zagazola, February 11, 2023).
  - ◆ A Nigerian army force operated, with the support of local fighters<sup>4</sup>, against four Boko Haram terrorist hotspots northeast of Bama, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. Seven Boko Haram operatives were killed (Zagazola, February 11, 2023).

## The Democratic Republic of the Congo

► During the week, ISIS operatives attacked Christian residents in the Ituri region, in northeastern Congo and the Beni region, in eastern Congo, west of the border with Uganda. Ten Christian residents were killed:

- ◆ On February 10, 2023, an attack was carried out near the village of Nadalia. Four Christian residents were killed and their motorcycles were set on fire (Telegram, February 13, 2023).
- ◆ On February 10, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian residents who were driving on the Luna-Komanda road, near the village of Mahala. Three were killed (Telegram, February 13, 2023).
- ◆ On February 10, 2023, an attack was carried out against a convoy of Christian traders traveling on the Beni-Kassindi road. The traders managed to escape and one of their trucks was set on fire (Telegram, February 13, 2023).
- ◆ On February 8, 2023, residents in the village of Malibongo were targeted by gunfire. Three were killed (Telegram, February 10, 2023).

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<sup>4</sup> Civilian Joint Task Force – CJTF.

► On February 9, 2023, ISIS operatives activated two IEDs and fired at a Ugandan army patrol in the area of Beni, about 50 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, February 12, 2023).

## **Mozambique**

► On February 12, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked a Mozambican army post in the village of Nirotto, in the province of Cabo Delgado, in northeastern Mozambique. Five soldiers were killed and the rest fled. ISIS operatives set fire to the post as well as three vehicles and seized various weapons (Telegram, February 13, 2023).

## **Niger**

► Niger's Ministry of Defense announced that on February 10, 2023, an attack by terrorist operatives was carried out against a Niger army force near the Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso border triangle, an area where ISIS and Al-Qaeda squads are active. Ten soldiers were killed, 13 more were wounded, and 16 were missing. Several terrorist operatives were also killed in the attack (Within Nigeria, February 12, 2023).

## **Somalia**

### **ISIS activity**

► On February 11, 2023, an IED was activated against a vehicle of a senior Somali government official in Mogadishu. Three of his bodyguards were killed or wounded (Telegram, February 13, 2023).

► On February 8, 2023, an IED was activated against a convoy of government personnel accompanied by military forces southeast of Bosaso, in the north of the country. One vehicle was hit and five of the convoy passengers were wounded (Telegram, February 13, 2023).

### **Counterterrorism**

► The Somali army took control of an Al-Shabaab base in the southern Jubba region, in the south of the country (garoweonline.com, February 13, 2023).

► On February 10, 2023, Somali army forces, with the help of countries supporting it (led by the United States), conducted an operation against Al-Shabaab in the Mudug region, about 500 km north of Mogadishu. According to military sources in Somalia, 117 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed in the operation, which lasted about nine hours. A large part of the dead were hit by airstrikes (Somalia Official News Agency, February 11, 2023).

## Asia

### Pakistan

► Operatives of ISIS's Khorasan Province activated an IED against a Pakistani intelligence "spy" in the Mamund region, in Bajaur, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. He was killed (Telegram, February 14, 2023).

### India

► The Voice of Khorasan, an ISIS magazine, called in an issue published on February 11, 2023, for members of the PFI (Popular Front of India) organization to join ISIS and act under its name. PFI is an Islamic organization in India that has recently been outlawed for its links to terrorism (tribuneindia.com, February 13, 2023). It should be noted that in a previous issue, the magazine praised the Indian organization. This indicates that ISIS is trying in every way to expand its activity and recruit supporters in light of the sharp decrease in the scope of its activity in recent months.

► On February 10, 2023, a court in Delhi convicted four men of activity within Al-Qaeda. The four were part of a cell of the organization, which was established in India to recruit operatives and expand Al-Qaeda's presence in the Indian subcontinent (Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent - AQIS) (The Hindu, February 10, 2023).

## United States

### Conviction of an ISIS operative

► On February 8, 2023, a New York court convicted Ruslan Maratovich Asainov, 46, a US citizen, who was a former resident of Bay Ridge, New York, on five counts related to ISIS: Material assistance to ISIS, which includes training and counseling, receiving military training from ISIS, and obstruction of justice. In addition, the jury determined that the material assistance he provided caused the death of one or more people. It was noted that Asainov, who converted to Islam in 2009, adopted extremist views. On December 24, 2013, he traveled to Syria via Turkey, where he served as an ISIS sniper and even trained about 100 ISIS operatives as snipers. Asainov worked in the ranks of ISIS in Syria for five years, during which he participated in many battles within the organization. He was arrested in March 2019 after ISIS's defeat in Baghouz, near the Syria-Iraq border. When sentenced, Asainov faces up to life in prison (US Department of Justice website, February 8, 2023).

# The battle for hearts and minds

## ISIS trying to take advantage of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria to mobilize support

► ISIS’s recent issue of Al-Naba weekly, which was published on February 9, 2023, refers to the earthquake that occurred in Turkey and northern Syria. In our assessment, in its publications, ISIS is trying to take advantage of the earthquake to arouse religious sentiment and mobilize support among Muslims around the world (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, February 9, 2023):

- ◆ In the editorial entitled “And in no way do we send the verses, except for frightening,”<sup>5</sup> the earthquake is interpreted as a message of warning and intimidation from Allah to the Muslims so that they should strengthen their faith. At the end of the article, the writer expresses his hope that Allah will have mercy on the souls of the deprived Muslims who were killed in the earthquake and lead them to Paradise and also heal the wounded (Al-Naba’ Weekly, Telegram, February 9, 2023).
- ◆ In an infographic entitled “Earthquakes,” with a photo from the earthquake in the background, it is stated that an earthquake is a frightening and discouraging message that Allah conveys to mankind so that they believe in Him and follow His path. In addition, it is an opportunity for Muslims to offer kindness and give charity to other Muslims. Also, it is noted that an earthquake is one of the preliminary signs of the end of days when people will be judged for their actions.



Right: The article about the earthquake. Left: The infographic entitled “Earthquakes” (Telegram, February 9, 2023)

<sup>5</sup> Quote from the Quran, Surat al-Isra, Verse 59.

## Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula expresses solidarity with the victims of the earthquake

► On February 12, 2023, Al-Malahem, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)’s media wing, published a statement in which it expresses solidarity with the victims of the earthquake and calls for the provision of assistance to the victims in any possible way, such as providing material assistance, helping to remove the ruins, sending the wounded to the hospitals, caring for orphans and widows, and providing shelter for the homeless (Telegram, February 12, 2023). This indicates that Al-Qaeda is also trying to take advantage of the circumstances to gather support.



The announcement of Al-Qaeda’s Al-Malahem media wing (Telegram, February 12, 2023)

## A video by former Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri

► The Al-Sahab Foundation, Al-Qaeda’s central media arm, published on February 12, 2023, a video of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda’s former leader who was killed in Afghanistan on July 31, 2022. In the video, entitled “How should we help Palestine?” which is about eight minutes long, Al-Zawahiri conveys several messages and calls for spreading his messages in other languages as well. The messages are as follows:

- ◆ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of the “Zionist-Crusader campaign” led by the United States and Europe against Islam.
- ◆ The Palestinians in the West Bank are under the direct occupation of Israel or the indirect occupation of Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, whom Al-Zawahiri calls a “spy” who collaborates with Israel. In Gaza, on the other hand, the Israeli occupation works in collaboration with Egypt. When the Palestinians react, Israel strikes them and even damages their holy sites, mainly the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Therefore, since the Palestinians are weak, Muslims around the world must act alongside them, and not rely on their governments, which do not act on the issue.

- ◆ The “liberation of Palestine” will only take place through attacks against the interests of Israel and those who stand by it everywhere in the world by the Muslims, and especially the young people from among the jihad fighters.

- ◆ Al-Zawahiri calls on the Muslims in “Palestine” to protect “Palestine” and Jerusalem as a guarantee given to them until the “liberation of Palestine” and to attack the “traitors”, supporters of Oslo and the two-state solution. Also, to harm those who sell land to Jews.

► It seems that the background for the publication of the video at the current time is the Jerusalem Conference of the Arab League in Cairo (February 12, 2023), which dealt with the Palestinian issue. The video, which was apparently filmed about a year ago, has been edited and updated and is accompanied by video clips documenting Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s Minister of National Security, entering the Temple Mount along with other Jewish citizens. Also visible in the video is a photo of Alqam Khayri, the perpetrator of the attack in Neve Yaakov in Jerusalem (on January 27, 2023), in which seven Israelis were murdered and three others were wounded. The video also shows photos of Muslim and Arab leaders during meetings with senior officials in Israel, presenting them as traitors. It should be noted that the video does not mention Al-Zawahiri’s death, and its publication appears to be an attempt to present him as if he were alive (Telegram, February 12, 2023).



**The slide with Al-Zawahiri’s photo that accompanies the video (Telegram, February 12, 2023)**