



Spotlight on Global Jihad

February 23 – March 1, 2023

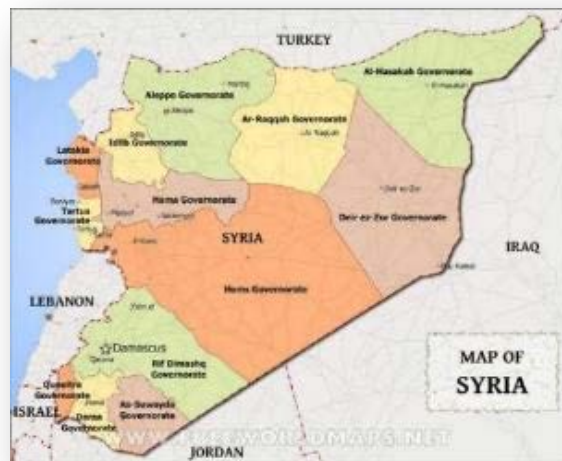


Main events of the past week

- ▶ **ISIS activity around the world moderately increased this week.**
- ▶ **Syria:** Ten civilians were killed and 12 others were wounded in the explosion of two mines in the Syrian Desert. A senior operative of the Hurras al-Din organization, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, was killed in an airstrike carried out by a drone of the US-led Global Coalition north of Idlib.
- ▶ **Iraq:** ISIS operatives attacked a Tribal Mobilization headquarters northwest of Al-Ramadi. A commander and three fighters were killed. A total of 17 ISIS operatives, including a senior ISIS operative, were killed in a counterterrorism operation carried out by Iraqi army forces in the desert region in western Iraq.
- ▶ **Afghanistan:** Two ISIS operatives, one of them a senior Khorasan Province operative, were killed and another was detained in a counterterrorism operation carried out by Taliban security forces against an ISIS squad in Kabul.
- ▶ **Pakistan:** An explosive device exploded in a market in the town of Barkhan in central Pakistan. Five people were killed and 16 were wounded. This was apparently an ISIS operation.
- ▶ **Africa:**
 - ◆ **Somalia:** Al-Shabaab operatives attacked a house in Mogadishu where a meeting of security personnel was held. Ten people were killed. In an operation carried out by Somali security forces, with the support of international forces, dozens of Al-Shabaab operatives were killed.
 - ◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS tried, without much success, to disrupt the general elections in the country, which were held on February 25, 2023.
 - ◆ **The Democratic Republic of the Congo:** ISIS operatives killed three Christian citizens in a shooting attack in the northeast of the country.

- ◆ **Mali:** Three UN soldiers were killed and five were seriously wounded from an IED that was set off against a convoy they were traveling in. Al-Qaeda or ISIS were likely behind the attack.
- ◆ **Burkina Faso:** ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack on the army of Burkina Faso that took place last week, saying that about 70 soldiers were killed.
- ▶ **Yemen:** Two Al-Qaeda operatives were killed in a US airstrike in the center of the country.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:** The ISIS-affiliated Al-Battar media foundation **calls for attacks against Christians in Western countries against the background of the burning of the Quran in Sweden.**

The Syrian arena¹



Map of Syria's provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

The desert region

- ▶ On February 27, 2023, ten civilians who were engaged in collecting truffle mushrooms were killed and 12 others were wounded in the explosion of two mines planted by ISIS east of Salamiyah, about 30 km southeast of the city of Hama. These were possibly old mines, planted by ISIS a long time ago (SANA, February 27, 2023). It should be noted that in the last month, civilians engaged in collecting truffle mushrooms in coordination with elements in the Syrian army became the target of ISIS attacks.
- ▶ On February 25, 2023, ISIS operatives laid an ambush against Syrian army forces in the Sukhnah Desert, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra. A Syrian officer with the rank of captain was wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 25, 2023).

¹ According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.

Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region

- ▶ On February 26, 2023, an SDF commander was targeted by gunfire while he was riding on a motorcycle with his escort about 25 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed and his escort was wounded (Telegram, February 27, 2023).
- ▶ On February 21, 2023, an SDF checkpoint was targeted by gunfire in the village of Al-Hariji, about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. An SDF fighter was killed and four others were wounded (Telegram, February 22, 2023).

Al-Raqqah region

- ▶ On February 27, 2023, residents in the Shueib area, in Al-Tabqa's periphery, found the body of a Syrian soldier who apparently was killed by ISIS (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 27, 2023).

Counterterrorism

The Idlib region

- ▶ On February 24, 2023, a Global Coalition drone attacked a senior operative of the Hurras al-Din organization, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, while he was riding on a motorcycle near the town of Mashhad Rohin, about 35 km north of Idlib. Local sources reported that the senior operative, Abu Obeida al-Iraqi (i.e., the Iraqi), and another person who was with him were killed (Atlas News, February 24, 2023; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 24, 2023).

Nineveh Province

► On February 23, 2023, two IEDs were activated against the Popular Mobilization Forces near the Al-Hadr area, about 90 km southwest of Mosul. One IED was activated against a foot patrol of the forces. One fighter was killed and several others were wounded. A second IED was activated against a vehicle. One fighter was killed and two others were wounded (Telegram, February 27, 2023).

Salah al-Din Province

► On February 23, 2023, an Iraqi army patrol was targeted by gunfire. The patrol was trying to ambush ISIS operatives in the Mutaybijah area, about 100 km north of Baghdad. Two soldiers were wounded (Telegram, February 27, 2023).

Kirkuk Province

► On February 22, 2023, three Tribal Mobilization fighters were targeted by gunfire in the Ras al-Jisr area, in northwest Kirkuk. One fighter was killed and the others fled. A short time later, an Iraqi police patrol was targeted by gunfire. One policeman was wounded (Telegram, February 27, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Al-Anbar Province

► On February 26, 2023, Iraqi army forces exchanged fire with ISIS operatives in the Akashat area, in western Iraq. The Iraqi army announced that 17 ISIS operatives were killed, including a senior commander of the organization and several lower-level commanders (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, February 26, 2023).

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

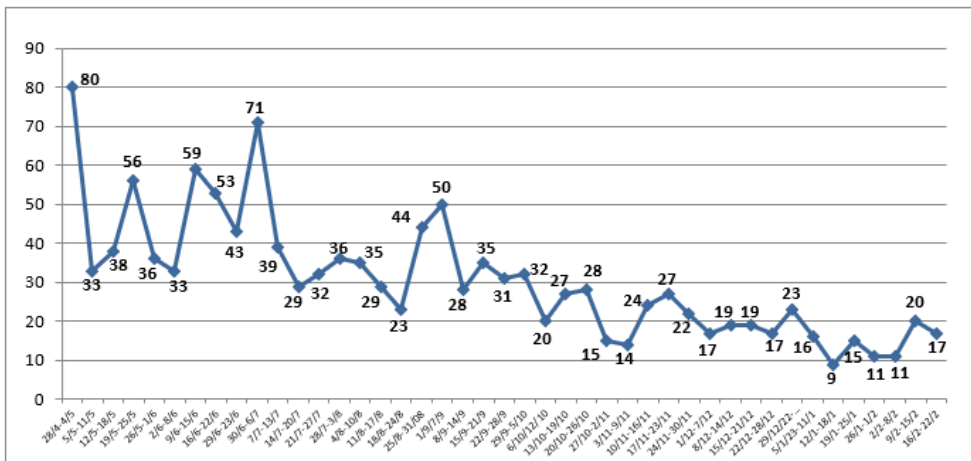
► An infographic published by ISIS, summing up its activity around the globe on February 16-22, 2023, indicates that the organization carried out 17 attacks in its various provinces (compared to 20 in the previous week). The largest number of attacks was carried out by ISIS's West Africa Province (7). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Syria (5); Iraq (2); Central Africa (1); Pakistan (1); Mozambique (1). A total of 30 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared to 91 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Syria Province (11). The other casualties were in the following provinces: Iraq (10); West Africa (4); Central Africa (3); and Pakistan (2) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, February 23, 2023). It

should be noted that the summary does not include the attack carried out by the Sahel Province against the Burkina Faso army on February 17, 2023, in which about 70 soldiers were killed (see below).



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba, Telegram, February 23, 2023)

ISIS attacks by week (according to ISIS data)



Africa

Nigeria

Terrorist activity to disrupt the general elections

► On February 25, 2023, the day of the general elections in Nigeria, gunmen, ISIS or Boko Haram operatives, attacked the government compound in the town of Goza, in Borno State, in the northeast of the country, while voters were gathering in the compound. Security forces returned fire at the attackers, who shot civilians indiscriminately. Five people were reportedly wounded (dailytrust.com, February 25, 2023).

► On February 20, 2023, a few days before the general elections, several explosive devices were set off by ISIS operatives in the offices of the local government in Okehi, in Kogi State, in southern Nigeria, about 150 km southwest of the capital Abuja (Within Nigeria, February 21, 2023). ISIS claimed responsibility, stating that four explosive devices planted by the organization were set off in a government headquarters where the elections in the town are supposed to be held. According to ISIS, parts of the headquarters collapsed (Telegram, February 22, 2023). No casualties were reported. The building was apparently empty.

Additional ISIS activity

► On February 25, 2023, four Grad rockets were fired at two Nigerian army camps in the town of Ngala, about 4 km southwest of the Nigeria-Cameroon border, and the town of Wulgo, about 7 km southwest of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. According to ISIS, definite hits were observed (Telegram, February 25, 2023). No casualties were reported.

Counterterrorism

► On February 22, 2023, Nigerian army forces fired at ISIS operatives who advanced towards the town of Gamboru, on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, south of Lake Chad. Several ISIS operatives were killed and the rest fled (Zagazola, February 22, 2023).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

ISIS activity

► On February 24, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Congolese army compound in the village of Karoruma, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. Two soldiers were killed and the rest fled. Three assault rifles and ammunition were seized (Telegram, February 25, 2023).

► On February 22, 2023, Christian civilians were targeted by gunfire in the Christian village of Mashongani, in the Ituri region, in northeastern Congo, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. Three civilians were killed (Telegram, February 22, 2023).

Mozambique

ISIS activity

► On February 21, 2023, an ISIS ambush was set up on a road near the village of Nicoi, in the Montepuez region, in northeastern Mozambique. A bus belonging to Christians was set on fire (Telegram, February 22, 2023).

Somalia

Al-Shabaab activity

► On February 21, 2023, a car bomb was detonated by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab in the capital city Mogadishu. There was also an exchange of fire that lasted eight hours between four Al-Shabaab operatives and the local security forces. The four attackers and 10 other people were killed. According to Al-Shabaab, immediately after the car bomb exploded, four operatives of the organization stormed a house where a meeting was held with the participation of senior officials of the Somali army and the militias supporting it. The identity of the dead people has not been disclosed (Reuters, February 22, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► Somali security forces with the support of US-led international forces attacked from the air Al-Shabaab operatives in the Hiran region, in western Somalia. Twenty al-Shabaab operatives were killed (Somalia's state television, February 23, 2023).

► On February 20-21, 2023, the Somali security forces along with US-led international forces carried out a joint operation against Al-Shabaab in the area of Middle Shabelle, northeast of Mogadishu. A total of 42 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed (Somalia's state television, February 21, 2023). US Africa Command (AFRICOM) confirmed that on February 21, 2023, at the request of the Somali government, it carried out an airstrike against Al-Shabaab near Galmudug, about 500 km northeast of Mogadishu, killing seven operatives (AFRICOM, February 22, 2023).

Mali

► On February 21, 2023, an IED was activated against a convoy of UN forces operating in Mali (UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali - MINUSMA) in the center of the country. Three UN soldiers were killed and five others were severely wounded. It should be noted that terrorist organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda or ISIS operate in this area (Reuters, February 21, 2023).

Burkina Faso

► On February 24, 2023, ISIS's Amaq News Agency announced that on February 17, 2023, the organization's operatives attacked a convoy of Burkina Faso army forces in the town of Diu,

in the Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger border triangle.³ According to ISIS, about 70 soldiers were killed and several dozens were wounded. Five were taken prisoner. In addition, ISIS operatives seized one Burkina Faso army vehicle, 27 motorcycles, and a wide range of weapons and ammunition. Photographs published by ISIS’s Amaq News Agency show about 50 bodies of Burkina Faso soldiers, the captives who were kidnapped, and what ISIS seized in the attack. Yet another announcement, by ISIS’s Sahel Province, stated that “the armies of the apostates in the Sahel region must know that the war against them will continue until Islamic law, Sharia, is implemented in the country” (Telegram, February 25, 2023).



Right: ISIS operatives setting out for the attack. Left: The five soldiers taken prisoner (Telegram, February 25, 2023)

Asia

Yemen

► On February 27, 2023, an American aircraft launched a missile at a house in the Hussein area of Marib Governorate, in the center of the country, where two Al-Qaeda operatives were staying, killing both of them. Another person was wounded, apparently also an Al-Qaeda operative (www.arabnews.com, February 27, 2023).

Afghanistan

Counterterrorism

► The Taliban government spokesman announced that on February 26, 2023, during the night, the Afghan security forces attacked squad operatives of ISIS’s Khorasan Province in the city of Kabul. According to the announcement, two ISIS members, one of them a senior operative of the organization, were killed and another was arrested. The senior operative who was killed is Qari Fateh, who was in charge of intelligence and operations in ISIS’s

³ For further details on the incident, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from February 23, 2023, “Spotlight on Global Jihad (February 16-22, 2023)”

Khorasan Province. He was the one who planned the organization's latest attacks in the city of Kabul. Before that, he served as the military chief of the province (Amir al-Harb) and the commander of the Kunar sector (Twitter account of Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, February 27, 2023; Washington Post, February 27, 2023).

Pakistan

► On February 26, 2023, an explosive device went off in a market in the town of Barkhan, in central Pakistan. Five people were reportedly killed and 16 wounded. No organization claimed responsibility but apparently, ISIS was behind it (Reuters and Al Jazeera, February 26, 2023).

Singapore

Counterterrorism

► On February 21, 2023, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) announced that a 15-year-old boy was arrested in November 2022, after planning to behead non-Muslims at popular tourist sites. In addition, he considered suggesting himself as a suicide bomber and expressed a willingness to support any organization that aspires to establish an Islamic caliphate in or outside of Singapore and also participate in jihad activity involving the use of weapons (The Telegraph Online, February 21, 2023).

Turkey

Counterterrorism

► On February 22, 2023, teams of Turkey's Counterterrorism Unit, working in cooperation with the Turkish intelligence apparatus, raided 14 targets in Istanbul as part of a counterterrorism operation against ISIS. Eight suspected ISIS operatives were arrested (Anatolia News Agency, February 22, 2023).

Jordan

Counterterrorism

► On February 22, 2023, the State Security Court in Jordan sentenced 11 Jordanian citizens, who were convicted of membership in an ISIS squad and were involved in two attacks in 2018 in which six members of the Jordanian security forces were killed. Three (one of them in absentia) were sentenced to death by hanging on the charge of terrorist activity by using weapons and explosives, which led to the death of a person, and the fourth was sentenced to

20 years in prison on the charge of possession of explosives with the purpose of using them in terrorist attacks. The rest of the convicts were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 15 years. Three other defendants, including two women, were released (The Independent, February 22, 2023).

Europe

Britain

► On February 22, 2023, a UK court ruled that Shamima Begum, 23, born in the UK, would not be able to regain her British citizenship after it was revoked in 2019 on national security grounds. Her citizenship was revoked shortly after she was found in a detention camp in Syria, where ISIS women and children are held. She left London for Syria in 2015, when she was 15 years old, together with two of her school friends, and they joined ISIS. She married an ISIS operative in Syria and they had three children, all of whom died when they were infants. Begum tried to challenge the decision and her attempt to regain her citizenship has sparked an extensive public debate in Britain regarding the civil rights of ISIS operatives and their families (NBC News, February 22, 2023).

United States

► On February 24, 2023, Muhammed Momtaz al-Azhari, 26, from Tampa, Florida, pleaded guilty to the charge of attempting to provide material assistance or resources to ISIS. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison, to be served in federal prison. Al-Azhari was convicted in 2015 in Saudi Arabia for supporting the Jaysh al-Islam organization in Syria, and therefore served three years in prison there, and was then transferred to the United States. In April 2020, he planned to carry out an attack in support of ISIS and for this purpose he began to acquire multiple arms. An undercover FBI agent exposed him, after being in contact with him as part of an investigation that was conducted against him. Al-Azhari was arrested by the FBI on May 24, 2020, after obtaining a gun and silencer from the same FBI agent (U.S. Department of Justice, February 24, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

► On February 24, 2023, the ISIS-affiliated Al-Battar Media Foundation released a video entitled “Global religious war - not individual conduct.” The video, which is about 12 minutes long, calls on Muslims in Western countries to carry out terrorist attacks (“jihad war for the sake of Allah”) against Christians (“the Crusaders”) in any possible way, including ramming,

stabbing, or beating. The speaker in the video says that the reward for the perpetrators of the attacks will be eternal life in heaven. He mentions the burning of the Quran in Sweden, which happened recently,⁴ and similar provocations against Islam carried out by Christians, such as the publication of cartoons mocking the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, in the French magazine “Charlie Hebdo” in 2015 (Telegram, February 24, 2023). The video is accompanied by the documentation of attacks carried out by the organization’s operatives or inspired by it in the West and includes calls for carrying out attacks. It shows, inter alia, the Eiffel Tower in Paris while a jihadist song in French is heard in the background. It also shows the Capitol building, the seat of the US Congress, while the Quran is burning in Sweden in the background, in such a way as if the Capitol is going up in flames (Telegram, February 24, 2023).

► The opening of the video in French could perhaps imply that it was produced in a French-speaking country. The choice of the title of the video, “Global religious war - not individual conduct,” was intended to encourage an extensive campaign and not sporadic actions, perhaps due to the fact that until now the call to carry out terrorist attacks against Christians has not led to any response by ISIS operatives and supporters.



The opening screen of the video (Telegram, February 24, 2023)

⁴ See the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from February 6, 2023, “ISIS calls for attacking Christians around the world, especially in Europe”



Right: The Eiffel Tower with a jihadist song in French in the background. Left: The US Capitol on fire with the flames of burning the Quran in the background (Telegram, February 24, 2023)