



Spotlight on Global Jihad

March 16-22, 2023



Main events of the week

► **This week there was a decrease in the scope of ISIS activity around the world.**

► **Afghanistan:** An IED was activated, apparently by ISIS, against a vehicle carrying the governor of the Sherzad region, a Taliban commander, and two security guards, in the Nangarhar province, east of Kabul. All the passengers on board were wounded.

► **Syria:** Two Syrian soldiers were killed by gunfire, apparently by ISIS operatives, in the Palmyra Desert.

► **Africa:**

◆ **The Democratic Republic of the Congo:** An ISIS attack was carried out for the first time in the area of the town of Lubero, about 70 km south of Beni. Ten Christian civilians were killed and several others were wounded. According to ISIS, it is an expansion of the organization's activity outside the areas of Beni and Ituri, in the northeast of Congo.

◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued to carry out attacks against the Nigerian army in the northeast of the country. The Nigerian army continued its counterterrorism activity, killing dozens of ISIS operatives.

◆ **Somalia:** An agreement was signed between the US and the Somali government, according to which the US will continue to train the Somali Army Special Forces as part of the fight against the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab.

► According to the findings of the Global Terrorism Index summing up 2022, which was published in Australia, ISIS is the deadliest terrorist organization.

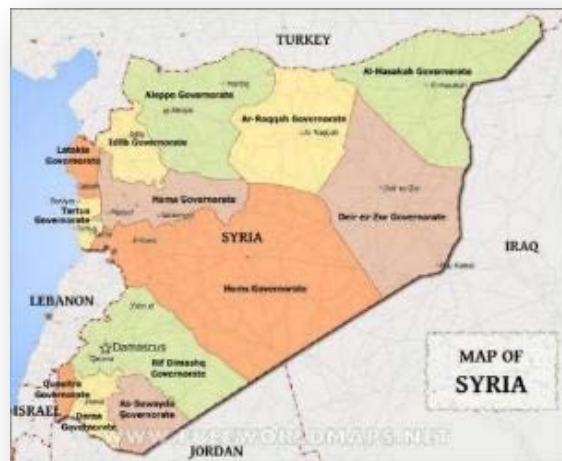
► **The battle for hearts and minds:**

◆ The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly claims that in contrast to the claims of the US Department of Defense, according to which the United States is scoring significant achievements against ISIS, in practice, the United States is failing in the campaign

against the organization. The article calls on ISIS's operatives and supporters to intensify their efforts in the media field against the hostile Western media.

◆ ISIS's Sahel Province released a video in which the organization attacks the West (the "Crusaders") and Al-Qaeda, which are fighting against ISIS in the Sahel region. The video ends with the claim that ISIS is determined to continue in its global vision, including in Europe, stressing that the operatives in the Sahel region are acting "with their eyes set on Seville and Cordoba (in southern Spain), Rome and its neighboring regions" (Telegram, March 20, 2023).

The Syrian arena¹



Map of Syria's provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

ISIS activity

The desert region

► On March 20, 2023, a group of Syrian soldiers in the Palmyra Desert were targeted by gunfire, apparently by ISIS. Two soldiers were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 20, 2023).

Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region

► On March 18, 2023, two RPG rockets were fired by militants, apparently ISIS operatives riding on a motorcycle, at the house of one of the investors in oil wells in the town of Dhiban, about 5 km east of Al-Mayadeen. An exchange of fire began between ISIS operatives and armed men, apparently SDF fighters, in the town. It should be noted that the investor was

¹ According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.

already threatened by ISIS operatives that he would be harmed if he did not pay “charity” money to ISIS, and they even threw a hand grenade at his house on February 25, 2023 (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 18, 2023).

The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

Counterterrorism

Salah al-Din Province

- ▶ On March 20, 2023, the Iraqi National Security Apparatus announced that it had exposed an ISIS terrorist cell consisting of six operatives in Al-Tarmiyah, about 25 km north of Baghdad. The cell was responsible for killing two Iraqi policemen and activating IEDs against others. The interrogation revealed that the cell members smuggled explosives, IEDs, and silencers to northern Baghdad inside a generator. Mortar shells, night vision binoculars, military equipment and uniforms, helmets, computers, cameras, and wireless communications devices were found in their possession (Al-Sumaria, March 20, 2023).
- ▶ On March 19, 2023, Popular Mobilization forces operated against ISIS in Jazirat al-Aith, in the eastern part of the Salah al-Din Province. Eight ISIS hiding places were destroyed. In addition, an IED was found and destroyed (Al-Sumaria, March 19, 2023).

Al-Anbar Province

- ▶ On March 17, 2023, a Tribal Mobilization force operated against ISIS in the Al-Anbar Desert, about 60 km north of Al-Rutba. Four ISIS operatives were killed and their vehicle caught fire (Iraqi News Agency, March 17, 2023).

► On March 17, 2023, a Popular Mobilization force detained two wanted ISIS operatives in eastern Al-Anbar Province (Iraqi News Agency, March 17, 2023).

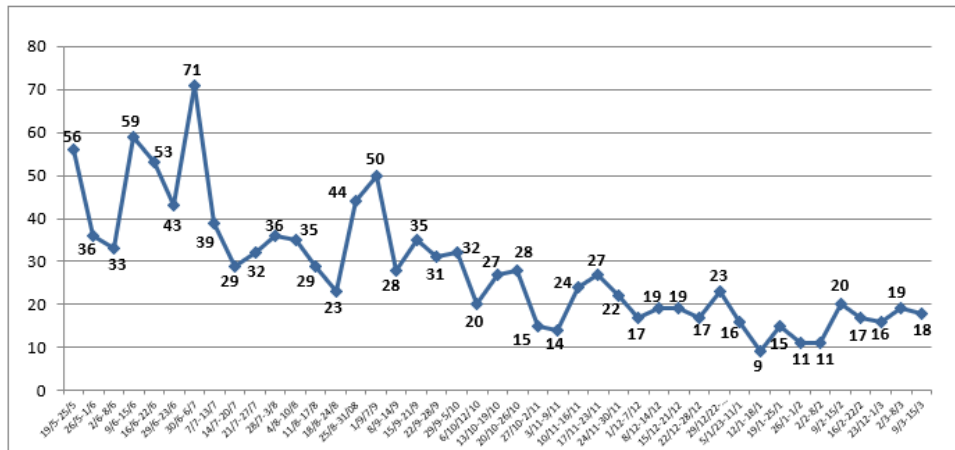
Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► An infographic published by ISIS's Al-Naba weekly, summing up ISIS's activity around the globe on March 9-15, 2023, indicates that the organization carried out 18 attacks in its various provinces (compared to 19 in the previous week). The largest number of attacks was carried out by the West Africa Province (9). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Central Africa (5); Khorasan, i.e. Afghanistan (2); Iraq (1); and Mozambique (1). A total of 191 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared to 76 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Central Africa Province (109). The other casualties were in the following provinces: West Africa (45); Khorasan (Afghanistan) (34); Mozambique (2); and Iraq (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, March 16, 2023). It should be noted that over half of the fatalities were Christian civilians murdered in villages in the Beni region, in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba, Telegram, March 16, 2023)

ISIS attacks by week (according to ISIS data)



Africa

Nigeria

ISIS activity

- On March 19, 2023, three mortar shells were fired at a Nigerian army camp in the town of Lumani, on the Nigeria-Cameroon border. No casualties or material damage were reported (Telegram, March 20, 2023).
- On March 18, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol near the town of Buni Yadi, about 50 km south of Damaturu, in northeastern Nigeria. The passengers on board the vehicle were wounded. The next day, on March 19, 2023, another IED was activated against another Nigerian army patrol at the same scene. The vehicle was put out of commission but no casualties were reported (Telegram, March 21, 2023).
- On March 18, 2023, a Nigerian army checkpoint was targeted by gunfire in the town of Dikwa, about 80 km northeast of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria. The soldiers manning the checkpoint fled. ISIS operatives seized an assault rifle and ammunition (Telegram, March 18, 2023).
- On March 18, 2023, three mortar shells were fired at a Nigerian army camp in the town of Damboa, about 80 km southwest of Maiduguri. No casualties or material damage were reported (Telegram, March 19, 2023).
- On March 17, 2023, a Nigerian army checkpoint was targeted by gunfire in the town of Ngala, about 4 km southwest of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. One soldier was killed (Telegram, March 18, 2023).

► On March 16, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle in the Banki area, about 120 km southeast of Maiduguri, near the Nigeria-Cameroon border. Three soldiers were killed and several others were wounded (Sahara Reporters, March 17, 2023). ISIS claimed responsibility for the incident (Telegram, March 18, 2023).

Boko Haram activity

► On March 21, 2023, Boko Haram operatives carried out an attack, using heavy weapons, against the town of Banki. A Nigerian army force repelled the attackers and pursued them, shooting at them (Zagazola, March 21, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On March 19, 2023, in the early morning hours, dozens of ISIS operatives, some of them riding on motorcycles and others in vehicles carrying machine guns, carried out an attack against a Nigerian army compound in the town of Mafa, about 45 km east of Maiduguri. The attack was carried out against government officials and party representatives who were counting the votes for the election of the governor of Borno State, which was held the day before. The attack took place a few hours after the governor of Borno State, Babagana Zulum, arrived to vote in his town. Nigerian army soldiers, with the support of fighter jets, repelled the attack. According to various sources, 40-60 ISIS operatives were killed (Zagazola; HumAngle, March 19, 2023; PM News, March 19, 2023).

► On March 15, 2023, Nigerian Air Force aircraft carried out several airstrikes against ISIS in three areas northeast of the town of Marte, about 90 km northeast of Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria. Over 70 ISIS operatives, including commanders and members of the organization's morality police (Al-Hisba) were killed (Zagazola, March 17, 2023).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

ISIS activity

► On March 18, 2023, an ISIS attack was carried out for the first time in the area of the town of Lubero, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda and about 70 km south of Beni. In the attack, 10 Christian citizens were murdered and several others were wounded. According to ISIS, this is an expansion of the organization's activity outside of the areas of Beni and Ituri, in the northeast of Congo (Amaq, Telegram, March 19, 2023).

► On March 17, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian citizens in the village of Kabasiwa, in the Beni region, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. One Christian

citizen was killed (Telegram, March 19, 2023). Ten days earlier, on March 7, 2023, an ambush was set up for several Christian citizens near this village. Three citizens were kidnapped and executed (Telegram, March 8, 2023).

► ISIS's Al-Naba weekly published an infographic summarizing the details of the attacks of ISIS's West Africa Province on March 8-14, 2023, against seven Christian villages in the Beni region. According to the infographic, 108 people were killed in the attacks, and the province operatives set fire to dozens of houses, a church, and much property. According to the infographic, as a result of the attacks, many Christian residents were displaced from their homes (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, March 16, 2023).

Cameroon

ISIS activity

► On March 14, 2023, a Congolese army compound was targeted by gunfire in the town of Gassama, in northern Cameroon, about 80 km east of the Cameroon-Nigeria border. The soldiers manning the compound fled (Telegram, March 16, 2023). It should be noted that recently there has been a moderate increase in the number of ISIS attacks in northern Cameroon.

Boko Haram activity

► On March 21, 2023, an IED was activated against a Cameroon army force in the town of Limani, in northern Cameroon, near the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Dead and wounded soldiers were reported, but no exact numbers were given (Zagazola, March 21, 2023).

Somalia

Counterterrorism

► On March 16, 2023, an agreement was signed between the United States and the government of Somalia, according to which the United States will continue to train the Somali Army Special Forces "Danab Brigade / Lightning Force" as part of the fight against the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab. According to the new agreement, the US will equip the forces and supply them with food and fuel. The ceremony of the signing of the agreement was attended by Somali Minister of Defense Abd al-Qader Muhammad Nur and US Ambassador to Somalia Larry André (Garowe Online, March 16, 2023).

Mozambique

► On March 14, 2023, an attack was carried out against local militia fighters in the village of Mitup, in the Mocímboa da Praia region, in northeastern Mozambique. One fighter was killed (Telegram, March 21, 2023). A claim of responsibility for the attack was published about a week after the event, possibly due to communication difficulties between the operatives in Mozambique and the members of the organization's central information system in Syria and Iraq.

Mali

► On March 20, 2023, kidnapped French journalist Olivier Dubois arrived in Niamey, the capital of Niger. Minister of the Interior of Niger Hamadou Adamou Souley announced that his release was achieved after several months of efforts by the Niger government. Dubois, 48, had lived in Mali since 2015 and worked as a journalist for the French daily Libération, the French weekly Le Point, and other media outlets. In April 2021, he was kidnapped in northern Mali by Al-Qaeda operatives and had been held by the organization's operatives ever since. On March 21, 2023, Dubois landed at a military airport near Paris where he was welcomed by French President Emmanuel Macron (Africa News, March 21, 2023). As will be recalled, Abu Obeida Yussef Al-Annabi, the head of Al-Qaeda's branch in northwestern Africa (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb – AQIM), stated in an exclusive interview with the France24 channel that the organization has a journalist kidnapped in April 2021. He also stated that in Mali there is an eternal war between Al-Qaeda and ISIS and that it is not possible to bridge them since ISIS is considered infidels by Al-Qaeda (France24, March 6, 2023).

Morocco

► On March 15, 2023, the Moroccan security forces arrested two members of an ISIS terrorist cell in two operations carried out simultaneously in Casablanca and the area of Sidi Harazem, on the outskirts of the city of Fez. The detainees are suspected of murdering a policeman in early March 2023 in Arrahma district, in southwestern Casablanca. The arrest led to another operation in Casablanca, in which a third member of the terrorist cell was arrested. The interrogation of the detainees revealed that they had recently pledged allegiance to ISIS's leader. Two of them are suspected of stabbing the policeman to death while he was on nighttime activity, stealing his car and weapon, and setting his body on fire in a rural area (Hes Press, March 15, 2023).

Asia

Afghanistan

ISIS activity

► On March 15, 2023, an IED was activated against a vehicle carrying the governor of the Sherzad region, a Taliban commander, and two security guards while they were in Nangarhar province, east of Kabul. All the passengers on board were wounded (Telegram, March 16, 2023). It seems that ISIS has recently begun to focus its attacks on high-ranking figures in the local Taliban government (the killing of the governor of Balkh province in northern Afghanistan in a suicide bombing attack on March 9, 2023; the killing of the chief engineer of Herat province, in western Afghanistan on March 8, 2023).

► On March 15, 2023, a Taliban member was shot dead in the southwest of the city of Kabul (Telegram, March 16, 2023).

United States

ISIS can attack US assets or interests outside its borders

► On March 16, 2023, **US Central Command Commander General Michael Kurilla** testified before a Senate committee. General Kurilla emphasized that ISIS has 10,000 prisoners, held in 26 prisons throughout Syria. He noted that a week earlier, he had visited the Al-Hasakah prison as well as the Al-Hol and Al-Roj detention camps, in northeastern Syria. He also noted that ISIS is capable of carrying out within six months an attack against US assets or interests outside its borders (website of the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, March 16, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On March 17, 2023, Ridon Kola, 32, of Albanian origin, a resident of Yonkers, New York, was arrested on the grounds of his support for ISIS and the use of social media to make threats on March 6 and 9, 2023, to kill Yonkers police officers during the St. Patrick's Day Parade, which took place on March 17, 2023. About a year and three months earlier, on December 5, 2021, Kola threatened to kill police officers as well as the mayor, Mike Spano (FOX News, March 18, 2023).

Global Terrorism Index: ISIS is the deadliest terrorist organization

► On March 14, 2023, the Institute for Economics & Peace, a research institute operating from Sydney, Australia, published the Global Terrorism Index summing up 2022 (Reliefweb, March 14, 2023).²

► **The main findings of this comprehensive study are as follows:**

- ◆ The number of worldwide terrorist acts in 2022 dropped by 28% from 5,463 in 2021 to 3,955 in 2022. At the same time, the number of people killed as a result of terrorist activity in 2022 dropped by 9% (compared to 2021) to 6,701 people. This is a decrease of 38% compared to 2015, which was a record year.
- ◆ ISIS is the deadliest global terrorist organization for the eighth consecutive year in terms of the number of attacks and deaths. However, the number of deaths due to ISIS activity worldwide decreased by 16% in 2022 compared to the previous year.
- ◆ The Sahel region in Africa is the focus of global terrorist activity, with the number of deaths there in 2022 being greater than that of the same year in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa combined. It was noted that 43% of the number of people killed in the world in 2022 were in the Sahel region, compared to only 1% in 2007. Moreover, during the last 15 years, terrorist activity in the Sahel region increased by 2000%.
- ◆ Afghanistan remained the country most affected by terrorism for the fourth year in a row, even though the number of acts of terrorism there dropped by 75% and the number of deaths dropped by 58 percent.
- ◆ In 2022, there were 42 countries around the world where people were killed as a result of terrorist activity, while in 2015, a record year in global terrorism, 56 countries suffered from terrorist activity which claimed human lives.
- ◆ Terrorist acts have become deadlier. In 2022, the average number of deaths per terrorist act was 1.7 compared to 1.3 in 2021.

The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly was published this week under the title "The Pentagon Harvest" (i.e., the Pentagon's achievements). It claims that despite the claims of

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2023>

the US Department of Defense, according to which the United States scores significant achievements against ISIS, in practice the United States is failing in the campaign against the organization. The article calls on ISIS operatives and supporters to intensify their efforts in the media field to fight against the hostile Western media.

►According to the author, the global media relies on the organization's weekly report (published every week in the Al-Naba weekly under the title "Harvest of the Fighters") in claiming that ISIS is getting weaker or stronger. According to the author, this is a partial index since there are constraints regarding the documentation of the organization's activity around the world, and therefore some of ISIS activity is not mentioned in this report. The world media attributes the increase or decrease in the scope of the organization's activity to material reasons such as COVID-19, the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, etc., while in practice, according to the writer, the organization operates on a permanent and continuous level of faith according to which it maintains a militant jihad against the "infidels" that will last until Judgment Day.

►The writer points out that jihad is a global phenomenon, taking place in different arenas and at different times, and stresses that the West does not acknowledge that in its attempt to stop jihad in Iraq, it was exposed to it in the Congo, Mozambique, the Sahel, and other regions.

►According to the author, the US Department of Defense, in its monthly reports on its achievements in the fight against ISIS, proves exactly the opposite - the failure of the United States in dealing with the organization, since it continues to report achievements while the organization continues to operate.

►In conclusion, the author points out that the organization's operatives and supporters must intensify their efforts in the battle for hearts and minds against hostile media (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, March 16, 2023).



The article entitled “The Pentagon Harvest” (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, March 16, 2023)

► On March 20, 2023, ISIS’s Sahel Province released a video entitled “The Sons of Abomination,” in which the organization attacks the West (“the Crusaders”) for its activity against the organization as part of various international coalitions in the Sahel region and Al-Qaeda, which is fighting against ISIS in this area. The video, which is approximately 16 minutes long, includes documentation of ISIS attacks against Al-Qaeda and against local government forces as well as against local militia forces, which operate, at least in part, with international assistance. The video ends with the narrator saying that ISIS operatives in the Sahel region are determined to continue on their path and that they are acting “with their eyes set on Seville and Cordoba (in southern Spain), Rome, and its neighboring regions.” This is said against the background of photographs from the cities of Seville and Rome (Telegram, March 20, 2023).



Operatives of ISIS’s Sahel Province setting out to attack Al-Qaeda in Mali (Telegram, March 20, 2023)



The narrator notes that ISIS operatives are operating “with their eyes set on Seville and Cordoba (in southern Spain), Rome, and its neighboring regions” (Telegram, March 20, 2023)