



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## June 15-21, 2023



### Main events of the past week

► **ISIS's activity around the world continued to focus on Africa. The main incident this week was an ISIS attack on a high school in the city of Mpondwe in southwestern Uganda,** in which 41 people were murdered, mostly children, and several others were abducted. There was an increase in ISIS's activity in Syria.

► **Syria:** A total of 37 ISIS operatives escaped from a prison in Ras al-'Ayn in northern Syria, 25 of whom have not been apprehended yet. Three Syrian soldiers were killed and six others were wounded in the explosion of an IED apparently planted by ISIS in the Homs region. Five soldiers or fighters of the forces supporting the Syrian army were killed and seven others were wounded in the explosion of an IED in a bus northwest of Deir ez-Zor. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility, but it was probably ISIS.

► **Africa:**

◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued its activity against the Nigerian army and Christian civilians in the northeast of the country.

◆ **Somalia:** Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab abducted at least 30 people, most of them elderly and children, in central Somalia. In addition, Al-Shabaab executed five people on charges of espionage. Over 40 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed in southwestern Somalia by an airstrike carried out by the US army, which supports the Somali army.

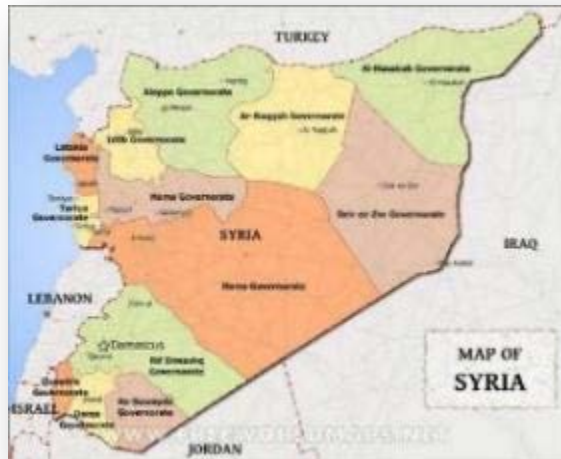
► **Afghanistan:** The findings of a UN report indicate the strengthening of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the country.

► **Austria:** Security forces detained three Austrian citizens of Bosnian and Chechen origin who were identified with ISIS and planned to carry out terrorist activity during the pride parade in Vienna.

► **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's weekly Al-Naba deals with the meeting of the Global Coalition against ISIS, held in Saudi Arabia. According to the editorial, the Global Coalition suffered a complete failure in its war against the organization, and the decision to hold the meeting in Saudi Arabia, "the land of revelation", at the beginning of the

pilgrimage season to Mecca and Medina constitutes clear defiance of Islam. In addition, it is noted that the coalition is hiding Israel's central role in the war against ISIS out of fear that this will provoke anti-Semitism.

## The Syrian Arena<sup>1</sup>



The provinces of Syria (Free World Maps)

### ISIS's activity

#### Al-Hasakah Province

► A total of 37 ISIS operatives escaped from a prison of the military police of the Turkish-backed Turkmen factions operating in the city of Ras al-'Ayn, adjacent to the Syrian-Turkish border. Some of the escapees served as senior ISIS commanders. Twelve of the escaped prisoners were apprehended. Turkish-backed factions reportedly detained six of the prison security guards on suspicion of assisting escapees (Al-Hadath, June 18, 2023). The 25 prisoners who are still at large have different nationalities: 13 Syrians, 10 Iraqis, one Saudi, and one Kuwaiti (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Al-Arabiya, June 18, 2023). To locate them, a list was published, including their details (first and last name, father's name, mother's name, date of birth, and place of birth), the date of their arrest, and organizational affiliation (Al-Marsad, June 18, 2023).

► ISIS attaches utmost importance to the release of its prisoners and has already carried out a series of break-ins into various prisons around the world to free them. It appears that the liberation of prisoners is also intended to strengthen ISIS's ranks in Syria by reintegrating the escaped prisoners into its activity, which has declined over the past year.

<sup>1</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility and the global media.

م	الاسم والتمسية	اسم الأب	اسم الام	مكان وتاريخ الولادة	الجرم	تاريخ التوقيف	الصورة الشخصية
1	بلال مهدي	كريم	حبيسة محمد تركي	العراق الأنبار ١٩٩٩	داعش	18\10\2021	
2	مصطفى عبد القادر	سني	نقاه حمدي محمد	العراق ٢٠٠٣	داعش	6\8\2021	
3	عبد الرحمن عطاالله	حازم	سهيلة	العراق الأنبار ٢٠٠١	داعش	8\10\2021	
4	علاوي الهزاع	حمدان	دلة	دير الزور الطباغة ١٩٩٠	داعش	18\12\2021	
5	نائل محمد	عبد العليم	سجودة محمد فرحان	العراق - الأنبار ٢٠٠٢	داعش	10\8\2021	
6	عثمان العبد	عواد	هلاله	الكويت ١٩٨٠	داعش	18\10\2021	
7	عسر خليفة	صالح	سعاد علي المصطفى	دير الزور - الجبيلة ٢٠٠٤	حزب	17\12\2021	
8	عثمان مشكور	فهد	صبرية	العراق - صلاح الدين ١٩٩٤	داعش	18\10\2021	
9	سلام حسون	عبادة	ناظي	العراق الموصل ٢٠٠٠	داعش	1\9\2021	

### Details of some of the escaped prisoners (Al-Marsad, June 18, 2023)

#### Homs region

► On June 18, 2023, an IED was activated against a military vehicle transporting soldiers near the Al-Jabiriyah junction, on the Al-Mushrefa road, about 10 km northeast of Homs. Three Syrian soldiers were killed and six others were wounded. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, ISIS was apparently behind it (Al-Modon, June 18, 2023; Al-Badia 24, June 18, 2023).



The vehicle hit by the IED, on the side of the road (Al-Modon, June 18, 2023)

#### Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen region

► On June 20, 2023, ISIS operatives shot and killed a “spy” for the SDF southeast of Deir ez-Zor (Telegram, June 20, 2023).

► On June 19, 2023, an IED was activated inside a bus in the Al-Baghiliya region, about 3 km northwest of Deir ez-Zor. Five Syrian soldiers or fighters of the forces supporting the Syrian army were killed and seven others were wounded. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility, but it was probably ISIS (Deir ez-Zor 24, June 19, 2023).

►On June 18, 2023, shots were fired at an SDF checkpoint in the village of Barsham, in the Al-Basira area, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Several fighters were wounded (Telegram, June 19, 2023).

►On the night of June 17-18, 2023, two militants, apparently ISIS operatives, shot at a fighter in the Deir ez-Zor Military Council (operating as part of the SDF forces) in the village of Al-Shahabat, about 4 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. The fighter died of his wounds the following day (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 19, 2023).

►On June 17, 2023, shots were fired at two SDF fighters in the village of Al-Hariji, in the Al-Suwar area, about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. An SDF fighter was killed (Telegram, June 18, 2023).

►On the night of June 15-16, 2023, militants, apparently ISIS operatives riding a motorcycle, shot at an SDF patrol in the village of Barsham, in the Al-Basira area, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. There were exchanges of fire between the sides. There were no casualties. The militants fled (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 16, 2023).

## **Hama Province**

►On June 19, 2023, an IED was activated against a Syrian army vehicle east of the town of Uqairabat, about 65 km east of Hama. The passengers were killed or wounded, and the vehicle was destroyed (Telegram, June 19, 2023).

## **Al-Raqqah region**

►On June 13, 2023, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle on Mazra'at al-Adnaniya road in the city of Al-Raqqah. Five fighters were killed or wounded, and the vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, June 14, 2023).

## **Counterterrorism**

### **Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen Province**

►On June 18, 2023, the SDF forces released 33 people they had held in custody on charges of belonging to ISIS. They were released on bail by members of their tribe in the Al-Ma'amil area, in the rural area north of Deir ez-Zor (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 18, 2023).

### **Al-Hasakah Province**

►On June 14, 2023, the SDF forces operated against an ISIS terrorist cell in the village of Sabkha, in the rural area of Al-Shadadi, about 50 km south of Al-Hasakah. Two ISIS operatives were detained. The two had reportedly smuggled ISIS operatives and supplied weapons and

ammunition to carry out terrorist attacks against the SDF forces and civilians. Weapons and military equipment were found in the possession of the detainees (SDF Press, June 16, 2023).



Two ISIS operatives and equipment found in their possession (SDF Press, June 16, 2023)

## Iraq



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

### ISIS's activity by province<sup>2</sup>

#### Kirkuk Province

► On June 17, 2023, an IED was activated against an Iraqi police patrol in the Al-Riyadh area, about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. The passengers on board the vehicle were wounded. The vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, June 17, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility and the global media.

## Salah al-Din Province

► On June 18, 2023, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle west of Jazirat al-Siniya, about 200 km north of Baghdad. One soldier was killed, three were wounded, and the vehicle was destroyed (Telegram, June 19, 2023).

## Nineveh Province

► On June 18, 2023, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army patrol near the Al-Khadr area, south of Mosul. An officer and a soldier were wounded (Telegram, June 20, 2023).

## Counterterrorism

► On June 14, 2023, the Iraqi security forces, acting on intelligence, detained six wanted ISIS operatives in the provinces of Al-Anbar, Kirkuk, and Nineveh (Iraqi News Agency, June 14, 2023).

## Kirkuk Province

► On June 16, 2023, teams of Kirkuk's General Directorate of Intelligence and Security, which operates within the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, detained two wanted men. One of them is an ISIS commander in charge of the organization's medical services in the province, and the other is a prominent commander who is the brother of ISIS's war minister (Iraqi News Agency, June 16, 2023).



Two ISIS commanders detained in the Kirkuk Province (Iraqi News Agency, June 16, 2023)

## Baghdad Province

► On June 18, 2023, the Iraqi security forces detained ISIS's commander (Wali) in Tal Afar, about 55 km west of Mosul. According to the documents, the detainee previously held several positions in ISIS's Nineveh Province and supervised sleeper terrorist cells in the area north of Baghdad (Iraqi News Agency, June 18, 2023).



**ISIS's commander (Wali) in charge of Tal Afar, detained by Iraqi intelligence  
(Iraqi News Agency, June 18, 2023)**

## Salah al-Din Province

► On June 19, 2023, members of the General Directorate for Intelligence and Security in the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, in coordination with the staff of the National Security Apparatus, detained a highly wanted ISIS operative in the Tikrit district, about 150 km north of Baghdad (Iraqi News Agency, June 19, 2023).



**ISIS operative detained by Iraqi intelligence (Iraqi News Agency, June 19, 2023)**

► On June 14, 2023, Iraqi security forces detained two wanted ISIS operatives, one of whom was ISIS's legal authority (mufti shar'i) in the Salah al-Din area. It was noted that this operative had issued fatwas encouraging people to kill members of the security services and Iraqi civilians, as well as to abduct and execute military personnel (Iraqi News Agency, June 14, 2023).



**ISIS's legal authority in the Salah al-Din area (Iraqi News Agency, June 14, 2023)**

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

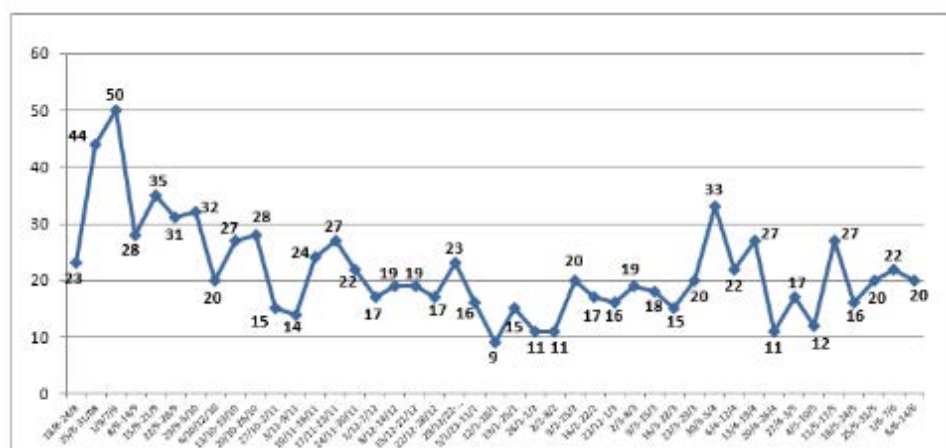
► According to an infographic published by ISIS's weekly Al-Naba, summarizing ISIS's activity on June 8-14, 2023, ISIS operatives carried out 20 attacks in the various provinces during this period (compared with 22 in the previous week). The Central Africa Province carried out the highest number of attacks (6). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: West Africa (5); Iraq (4); Mozambique (2); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1); Somalia (1); and Syria (1). A total of 150 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared with 85 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan, Province (70); Central Africa (56); Iraq (11); Syria (5); West Africa (4); and Somalia (4) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023).



**Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023)**



## Attacks by week (based on ISIS's data)



## Africa

### Uganda

#### ISIS's activity

► On the evening of June 16, 2023, five terrorist operatives attacked the Lhubiriha secondary school in the town of Mpondwe, in southwestern Uganda, near the Uganda-Congo border. The attackers infiltrated the students' residential area (for most of the students, the school served as a boarding school) and attacked the students and staff with machetes and set the quarters on fire. Eyewitnesses noted that the attackers had even detonated an IED. The attack lasted about an hour and a half. A total of 41 people were murdered, including 38 students (out of about 60 students at the school), one security guard, and two members of the local community. Six students were kidnapped, and apparently local residents as well. It was noted that the operatives fled to Virunga National Park, in northeastern Congo (DW and The Independent (Ugandan news website), June 17, 2023; the-star.co.ke and BBC, June 18, 2023). It was later reported that 20 people were detained on suspicion of assisting in the attack at the school (CNN, June 19, 2023). This was the deadliest terrorist attack in Uganda since 2010 when two IEDs were detonated in the capital Kampala by operatives of Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda-affiliated organization.<sup>3</sup>

► No one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far, but it is believed to be the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan-originating terrorist organization that operates mainly in

<sup>3</sup> On July 11, 2010, several suicide bombing attacks were carried out by Al-Shabaab at the FIFA World Cup finals. A total of 74 people were killed and 85 were wounded.

the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2019, many ISIS operatives pledged allegiance to the leader of ISIS and became part of the organization's Central Africa Province (DW and The Independent, June 17, 2023; the-star.co.ke, June 18, 2023). It should be noted that this is an organization that frequently attacks Christian citizens and military personnel, especially in the territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with Uganda serving as a place of refuge for the organization's operatives.



**The entrance to the school and a burnt residential building following the attack  
(Al-Jazeera, June 17, 2023)**

## Nigeria

### ISIS's activity

#### ► **ISIS's activity against the Nigerian army and Christian civilians in the northeast of the country:**

- ◆ On June 17, 2023, a "spy" operating for Nigerian and Chad military forces was kidnapped and shot dead in the town of Carinoa, Borno State (Telegram, June 17, 2023).
- ◆ On June 16, 2023, Boko Haram operatives attacked farmers in their fields near the villages of Molai Kura and Molai Gana, about 10 km south of Maiduguri. Residents were also attacked in their homes. Seven farmers were executed in the fields, and eight people were executed at their homes (Zagazola, June 16, 2023).
- ◆ On June 12, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol between the towns of Monguno and Gajiram, north of Maiduguri. The passengers were killed or wounded, and the vehicle was destroyed (Telegram, June 17, 2023).

### Counterterrorism

#### ► **Nigerian Army Air Force airstrikes against ISIS infrastructure and operatives:**

- ◆ On June 16, 2023, an airstrike was carried out against ISIS operatives in the Marte region, about 90 km northeast of Maiduguri. Many operatives were reportedly killed,

including two ISIS commanders: Amir Malam Bello and Amir Malam Musa Modu (Zagazola, June 18, 2023).

- ◆ On June 14, 2023, airstrikes were carried out against an ISIS workshop for making car bombs and other types of IEDs in the Lake Chad area. The background to the airstrikes was ISIS's intention to detonate car bombs against a Nigerian army compound in Arege, about 40 km southwest of the Nigeria-Niger-Chad tri-border area (Zagazola, June 15, 2023).

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

- ▶ On June 14, 2023, Christian civilians were ambushed on the road between the villages of Avisha and Kitigia in the Beni region, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. A civilian was murdered, and his motorcycle was set on fire (Telegram, June 14, 2023).

## Mali

### Counterterrorism

- ▶ In a speech to the UN Security Council, Mali's Foreign minister Abdoulaye Diop called for the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali). According to Diop, for an entire decade, these forces have not succeeded in stopping the spread of jihadi violence. MINUSMA's mandate is scheduled to end on June 29, 2023, but UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has recommended that the troops be redeployed to focus on a limited number of priorities. It was noted that mercenaries of the Russian Wagner Group are now assisting Mali's rulers (BBC, June 17, 2023).

## Niger

### ISIS's activity

- ▶ On June 15, 2023, an IED was activated against a Niger army patrol near the town of Shitimari Wangu, in southeastern Niger, near the border with Nigeria. Three soldiers were killed and three others were wounded. The vehicle was destroyed (Telegram, June 17, 2023).

## Somalia

### Al-Shabaab activity

- ▶ On June 19, 2023, Al-Shabaab operatives abducted at least 30 people, most of them elderly people and children, in the village of Daru Nicma, in central Somalia. In most cases, Al-Shabaab

operatives kidnap local residents for ransom. As of now, no ransom request has been received from the organization (Garowe Online, June 19, 2023).

► On June 15, 2023, Al-Shabaab executed five people aged 28-52 after an Al-Shabaab court convicted four of them of spying for U.S. intelligence and one of spying for Somali intelligence and providing information that led to attacks against the organization's operatives. The executions were carried out in front of a crowd of hundreds of people in the town of Kunyo-Barrow in southern Somalia, about 170 km southwest of Mogadishu (Calamada, June 16, 2023; All Africa, June 17, 2023).

## Counterterrorism

► On June 20, 2023, a Somali army force operated against Al-Shabaab operatives near Yaaqdabayl, southwest of Mogadishu. Thirteen Al-Shabaab operatives were killed. Seven assault rifles, a rocket launcher, and a machine gun were also found at the site (Somalia News Agency, June 20, 2023).



**Weapons and ammunition found in the possession of Al-Shabaab operatives  
(Somalia News Agency, June 20, 2023)**

► On June 16, 2023, an airstrike was carried out by a US aircraft, operating with the support of the Somali army, against Al-Shabaab operatives and senior leaders while they were gathering in the Jamame District of Lower Juba. The gathering took place as part of planning an attack against a Somali army base. A total of 43 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed, including two senior commanders: Aden Abdirahman Aden and Idiris Abdirahim Nur (Somalia's National News Agency, June 19, 2023).

## Kenya

### Al-Shabaab activity

► On June 18, 2023, an IED was activated against an armored vehicle of a special unit of the Kenyan Police in Lamu Province in southeastern Kenya, about 140 km southwest of the Kenya-

Somalia border. At least 10 fighters were wounded. A Kenyan army support force arriving at the scene was ambushed. Two soldiers were killed and several others were wounded (The Star, June 18, 2023). Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attacks, noting that at least two IEDs had been activated against vehicles belonging to the Kenyan security forces. According to Al-Shabaab, at least 25 soldiers were killed and three wounded (Calamada, June 19, 2023).

► In the early morning hours of June 15, 2023, Al-Shabaab operatives fired in the air near a bus on its way to Mandera, northeastern Kenya, near the border with Somalia, with 55 passengers on board. The passengers were forced off the bus and Al-Shabaab operatives searched among them for foreign nationals. After making sure they were all locals, they allowed them to continue on their way. It was noted that nothing was stolen from the passengers or the bus crew. A similar incident reportedly occurred in the same area two days earlier (The Star, June 16, 2023).

## Asia

### Afghanistan

#### UN report indicates the strengthening of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan

► The UN Sanctions Monitoring Team published a report reviewing the latest developments in Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan. The findings of the report indicate that there is an increase in the number of operatives and in the operational capabilities of these organizations in the country. It was also noted that these terrorist organizations have greater freedom of maneuver under Taliban rule, and that they take advantage of this.

► The report warns that there is a symbiotic relationship between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, with Al-Qaeda viewing Taliban Afghanistan as a safe haven. On the other hand, ISIS, which is persecuted by the Taliban, takes advantage of the Taliban's lack of governance in remote areas and relies on local residents' dissatisfaction with the functioning of the Taliban government. According to the report, airstrikes against senior Taliban officials raised the morale of ISIS operatives, prevented defections from the organization, and even increased the recruitment of operatives to it, including from the ranks of the Taliban.

► According to estimates, ISIS's Khorasan Province currently numbers 4,000-6,000 operatives and holds strongholds or camps in at least 13 provinces in Afghanistan. It also has a network of sleeper cells that can reach Kabul and other destinations. As for Al-Qaeda, the organization which a year ago included only a few dozen operatives in Afghanistan, now numbers 400

operatives/fighters and 1,600 family members of operatives. Also, the organization has a series of new training camps. Many senior US officials noted that they had not been exposed to findings that could corroborate these claims and that in several aspects, the data do not correspond to the results of studies conducted by the American intelligence community (VOA, June 14, 2023).

### **Summary of ISIS's assassinations of senior Taliban officials**

►Data from an infographic published by ISIS's weekly Al-Naba, entitled "The Beheading" (in Arabic: Qatf al-Ru'us, literally: picking heads), summarizing ISIS's assassinations of senior Taliban government officials in Afghanistan between November 1, 2021, and June 8, 2023, indicate that six senior officials were killed during this period (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023):

- ◆ Hamad Allah Mukhlis – commander of the Kabul unit, known as Faylaq (Corps) Badr 313. Killed on November 1, 2021, in an attack against a Taliban military hospital in Kabul.
- ◆ Rahim Haqqani – the Taliban's most prominent thinker, who called for the killing of ISIS's operatives. Killed on August 11, 2022, in a suicide bombing attack inside his office in Kabul.
- ◆ Abd al-Haqq Omar – Commander of the Badakhshan District Police. Killed on December 26, 2022, in a car bomb explosion in the city of Fayzabad, the capital of the province.
- ◆ Muhammad Daoud Mazmel – Governor of Balkh Province. Killed on March 9, 2023, in a suicide bombing at his headquarters in Balkh.
- ◆ Nizar Ahmad Ahmadi – Deputy Governor of Badakhshan Province. Killed on June 6, 2023, in a car bomb explosion in the city of Fayzabad, the capital of this province.
- ◆ Safi Allah Samim – Former commander of the Baghlan District Police, north of Kabul. Killed on June 8, 2023, in a suicide bombing attack against a Taliban gathering in the city of Fayzabad.



**Summary of ISIS's assassinations of senior Taliban officials  
(Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023)**

## Philippines

### ISIS's activity

► On June 14, 2023, an ambush was set up and shots were fired at a Philippine police patrol in the town of Shariff Aguak, on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Six policemen were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 17, 2023).

## Europe

### Greece

► On June 17, 2023, it was reported that eight Pakistani citizens were arrested in Greece on suspicion of planning terrorist acts in the country. The report has not yet been officially confirmed (greekcitytimes.com, June 17, 2023).

### Austria

► On June 17, 2023, Special Forces fighters arrested three Austrian citizens aged 14, 17, and 20 of Bosnian and Chechen origin who had undergone a process of online radicalization and showed support for ISIS. The three planned to carry out terrorist attacks that day at the Vienna pride parade, which was attended by about 300,000 people. Austria's internal security service was informed of their plans in advance and closely monitored them. In the raid on their homes, various pieces of evidence were found, including weapons (Global News, June 18, 2023).

## North America

### Canada

► On June 15, 2023, a combined Canadian National Security and police force arrested Zakarya Rida Hussein, 20, a Calgary resident, on suspicion of facilitating terrorist activity. He was charged with four counts, two of which due to a video he posted on TikTok on May 14, 2023, which directly or indirectly contributes to the activities of ISIS or Al-Qaeda. Two other counts relate to possessing and/or preparing explosive-making instructions which he would know facilitated a terrorist activity and having and preparing those instructions “for the purpose of enhancing the ability of a terrorist group to facilitate or to carry out a terrorist activity” (Calgary Herald, June 19, 2023).

### United States

#### Conviction of a US resident who belonged to ISIS’s media network

► On June 13, 2023, Hawazen Sameer Mothafar, a 33-year-old US citizen from Troutdale, Oregon, in the northeastern United States, pleaded guilty to providing material support to ISIS. Mothafar, who came to the United States from Iraq in 2014, oversaw the planning and production of a newspaper supporting ISIS and produced videos and graphic materials promoting the organization and inciting readers to attack and kill Westerners and conduct knife attacks against ISIS enemies. According to the prosecution, Mothafar was in direct contact with senior officials in ISIS’s media department and regularly received instructions from them regarding media productions. He also encouraged people to travel to Iraq and Syria to fight in the ranks of ISIS. He will be sentenced in January 2024 (OPB, June 14, 2023).

#### Conviction of an American soldier in an attempt to help ISIS

► On June 14, 2023, Cole Bridges, a 22-year-old US Army soldier from the city of Stow, Cleveland, pleaded guilty to attempting to provide material support to ISIS and attempting to murder US Army soldiers in the Middle East. Bridges, who enlisted in the US Army in September 2019, was assigned combat duty to the US Army’s 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia. At least beginning in 2019, he began searching the Internet and consuming propaganda content promoting jihadists and their violent ideology. He also expressed his support for ISIS and violent jihad on social media. In October 2020, he began online contact with an FBI online covert employee (OCE), who presented himself as an ISIS supporter with ties to ISIS operatives in the Middle East. During this communication, Bridges expressed his frustration with the US



Army and his strong desire to help ISIS. He gave instructions and advice to purported ISIS fighters about potential targets in New York City. In addition, he provided the OCE with portions of a US Army training manual and guidance about military combat tactics, for use by ISIS. Around December 2020, he began giving the OCE instructions for purported ISIS operatives on how to attack US military forces in the Middle East. Among other things, Bridges diagrammed specific military maneuvers intended to help ISIS fighters maximize the lethality of attacks on US troops (US Department of Justice, June 14, 2023).

## Conviction of an American citizen who fought in the ranks of ISIS in Syria

► On June 15, 2023, a Detroit court sentenced Ibraheem Musaibli, a 33-year-old US citizen from Dearborn, Michigan, to 14 years in federal prison after he had been convicted of providing material support to ISIS. After his release from prison, Musaibli will be under supervision for 10 years. It was noted that Musaibli was arrested in Syria in 2018 while fighting in the ranks of ISIS. He is one of at least 27 American citizens who were suspected of collaboration with ISIS and were apprehended in recent years in Syria and Iraq (The Detroit News, June 15, 2023).

## The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial published this week by ISIS's Al-Naba weekly, titled "Crusade in the Lands of Revelation,"<sup>4</sup> deals with the meeting of the US-led Global Coalition against ISIS held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on June 8, 2023 (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023).

► According to the article, the Global Coalition against ISIS has failed miserably in its mission to defeat ISIS. The writer of the editorial mocks the coalition, which has declared the organization's defeat many times while in fact ISIS has not ceased to exist and has even managed to wear down the Global Coalition, spread to other regions around the world, and make it impossible for the coalition to continue functioning materially and militarily against the organization. According to the writer, the meeting of the coalition in Riyadh is a proof of the coalition's defeat, as it was intended to raise funds for the coalition, in light of its material and military losses in the battle against ISIS.

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation (Arabic: *Wahi*) means the divine revelation to the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, who, according to Islam, received revelations from Allah, which after Muhammad's death were combined in the Quran, considered by Muslim believers to be the words of Allah. The term "lands of Revelation" refers to the Arabian Peninsula, and especially to the Hejaz area, where the holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, are located.

- The writer notes that the current meeting is clear defiance of Islam because of the choice to hold it in Saudi Arabia, which has two of the holiest places in Islam and is considered the land where the Quran was revealed to Muhammad, and because of its timing at the beginning of the pilgrimage season (al-Hajj) to Mecca, a measure described by the writer as “brazenness towards the holy places of Islam, which compares, or even overshadows, only the brazenness of the Jews, who harm the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.”
- The writer notes that despite the central role of Israel (“the Jews”) in the war against ISIS, the Global Coalition never mentions this role<sup>5</sup> “out of fear that it will arouse people’s hostility towards the Jews [i.e., anti-Semitism] beyond hostility towards the Christian West [the “Crusaders]!” According to the writer, the separation between Jews and Christians is the greatest deviation in faith that has occurred in the Islamic nation since the time of the Prophet Muhammad.
- The writer concludes by claiming that the meeting in Riyadh is a subversion of Islam in the “lands of revelation” (i.e., in the holy land of Islam in Saudi Arabia) and that every time the “infidels” fight Muslims, it ultimately works to the detriment of the “infidels” (Al-Naba Weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023).



The editorial “Crusade in the Lands of Revelation” (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 15, 2023)

<sup>5</sup> This may have been written against the background of Israeli former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot’s recent statement (June 13, 2023) on Israel’s great contribution in the fight against ISIS.

### **Al-Qaeda calls for support for Muslims in Ethiopia**

► On June 20, 2023, Al-Qaeda's central leadership issued a statement calling on Muslims to support Muslims in Ethiopia, according to them, because of the difficult situation of Muslims in the country, who suffer from the destruction of mosques and persecution by Christians. The leadership called for special assistance for the Al-Shabaab movement's "jihad fighters" in Somalia, claiming that they have the most experience in the region (Telegram, June 20, 2023).