



Spotlight on Global Jihad

September 7-13, 2023



Main events of the past week

► **This week, there was an increase in ISIS's activities around the world. The organization's activities were concentrated in Syria and Africa.**

► **Syria:** In ISIS's activity in the desert area, nine members of the forces supporting Syria and three civilians were killed. In the rebel enclave in Idlib, exchanges of fire continued between the Syrian army and the Al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS. An operation by the Kurdish SDF forces against ISIS in the Deir ez-Zor area killed 29 militants and 25 SDF fighters. A member of the UAE delegation to the UN warned against the possibility that ISIS would use chemical weapons in Syria.

► **Iraq:** ISIS executed two Iraqi government "spies" in western Iraq. ISIS operatives attacked the building of a government company engaged in mining east of Rutba, in western Iraq. This is the most significant attack carried out by ISIS in Iraq in recent times.

► In August 2023, the US Army carried out 36 operations against ISIS **in Syria and Iraq**, during which seven operatives were killed and 25 were detained.

► **Africa:**

◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued to attack the Nigerian army in the northeast of the country.

◆ **Somalia:** Operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab continued to attack Somali army targets and reported taking over a city in the center of the country.

◆ **Mali:** The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) announced that it had attacked a Burkina Faso army force near the border with Mali. According to the organization, at least 50 soldiers were killed.

► **UK:** The Home Office has designated Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which is involved in war crimes in Ukraine and fighting in Africa, as a terrorist organization.

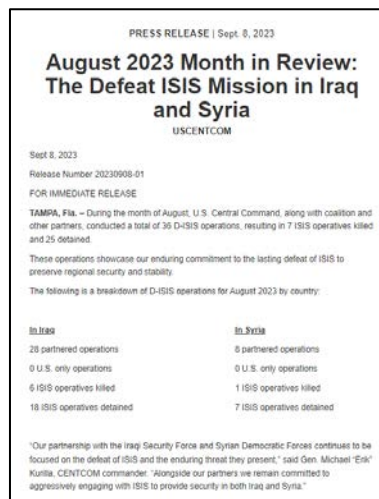
► **The battle for hearts and minds:** Al-Qaeda and ISIS marked the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks by glorifying the event and inciting violence against the "infidels."

US Army activity against ISIS in Syria and Iraq

►The US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that in August 2023, its forces, operating in collaboration with local forces (the Kurdish SDF forces, the Iraqi army, and the Kurdish forces in Iraq), carried out 36 operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, during which seven operatives were killed and 25 were detained, according to the following details (CENTCOM, September 8, 2023):

- ◆ **Syria:** Eight joint operations. An ISIS operative was killed, and seven were detained.
- ◆ **Iraq:** A total of 28 operations in which six ISIS operatives were killed and 18 were detained.

►According to CENTCOM Commander General Michael Kurilla, the partnership with the Iraqi security forces and the SDF forces continues, and the focus must be on defeating ISIS and removing the ongoing threat it poses.



**CENTCOM announcement summarizing the activity against ISIS
(CENTCOM, September 8, 2023)**

The Syrian Arena



Provinces of Syria (Free World Maps)

Idlib region

- ▶ On September 12, 2023, operatives of Ansar al-Tawhid, a Salafist-jihadi organization operating in the rebel enclave in Idlib, activated an IED against a Syrian army vehicle in the southern rebel enclave in Idlib. Two soldiers were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 12, 2023).
- ▶ On September 12, 2023, a Syrian soldier was killed by HTS sniper fire (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 12, 2023).
- ▶ On September 12, 2023, there were exchanges of fire between the Syrian army and HTS in the western rebel enclave in Idlib (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 12, 2023).
- ▶ On September 11, 2023, HTS detained a senior member of the organization, codenamed Abu Yunis, and three fighters in the western periphery of Idlib on suspicion of collaborating with the US-led Global Coalition forces (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 11, 2023).

ISIS's activity

The desert region

- ▶ ISIS renewed its activity in the desert region against the forces supporting the Assad regime and against local shepherds. Two incidents took place this week in the Al-Shula area, about 35 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor:
 - ◆ On September 10, 2023, an attack was carried out against a joint force of Syria's Civil Defense service (of the Syrian regime) and the Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade, which supports the Syrian army, resulting in killing six fighters and three local shepherds, and wounding ten. The joint force reportedly arrived at the scene to locate five missing

shepherds who had apparently been abducted by ISIS operatives (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 10, 2023).

◆ On September 10, 2023, members of Syria's Civil Defense service were targeted by gunfire. Three Syria's Civil Defense service members were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 10, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region

► On September 8, 2023, the Information Office of the Kurdish SDF forces announced that they had completed an operation against ISIS in the Deir ez-Zor area, which began on August 27, 2023. According to the announcement, 29 armed operatives were killed in the operation and ISIS operatives were detained. In the operation, 25 SDF fighters were killed, and nine civilians were wounded. Members of Syria's Civil Defense were also detained (their number was not specified) (SDF Press, September 8, 2023).

Al-Raqqah region

► On September 8, 2023, the SDF Information Office announced that on September 7, 2023, the SDF forces had completed an operation against ISIS operatives in the Al-Raqqah region. The operation was carried out in collaboration with the forces of the US-led Global Coalition against ISIS and the forces of the autonomous Kurdish government in northern Iraq. During the operation, an ISIS commander (emir) in charge of the organization's finances (in charge of ISIS's Islamic Bank) was detained. He was also in charge of ISIS's relations with the tribes (Diwan al-Ashaer) in the Al-Raqqah area. The detainee is accused of transferring money and equipment to ISIS operatives to carry out attacks. During the operation, Kalashnikov rifle magazines, memory cards, and cell phones were found (SDF PRESS, September 8, 2023).



Weapons and documents found and documentation of the operation of the Kurdish SDF forces in collaboration with the Global Coalition (SDF Press, September 8, 2023)

ISIS in Iraq recently. It is part of the economic war waged by ISIS against the Iraqi government.

► On September 11, 2023, ISIS announced that it had executed two “spies” operating for the Iraqi government in the Al-Kubaisa area, western Iraq. ISIS released photos documenting the execution (Telegram, September 11, 2023).



One of the “spies” just before his execution (Telegram, September 11, 2023)

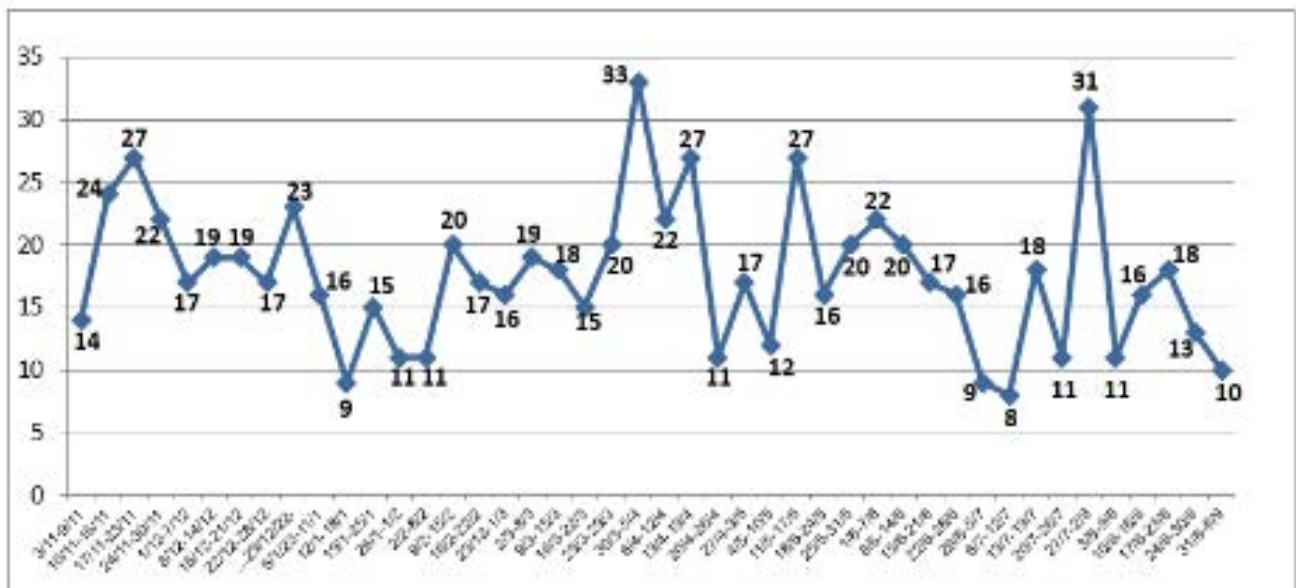
Summary of ISIS’s activity in the various provinces

► According to an infographic published by Al-Naba, ISIS’s weekly, summarizing ISIS’s activity in the period between August 31 and September 6, 2023, during this period, ISIS operatives carried out ten attacks in the various provinces (compared with 13 in the previous week). The highest number of attacks were carried out by operatives of the West Africa Province (6). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Iraq (3); and Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1). A total of 24 people were killed and wounded, compared with 38 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the West Africa Province (20). In the other provinces: Iraq (2); and Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (2) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, September 7, 2023). This is a further decline in the scope of ISIS’s activity worldwide (in terms of the number of attacks and the number of casualties). It should be noted that the activity took place in only three provinces of the organization.



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, September 7, 2023)

Attacks by week (according to ISIS's figures)



Africa

Nigeria

ISIS's activity

► ISIS continued to attack targets of the Nigerian army and forces supporting it in Borno State, in the northeast of the country.

- ◆ On September 10, 2023, a fighter of a militia supporting the Nigerian army was shot and killed in the town of Beni Sheik, about 60 km west of Maiduguri (Telegram, September 12, 2023).

- ◆ On September 8, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Nigerian army checkpoint in the town of Kawari, near the border with Niger. The soldiers fled, and ISIS operatives seized equipment (Telegram, September 10, 2023).
- ◆ On September 7, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol on the road between the towns of Kukawa and Cross (known as Cross Kauwa), west of the Nigeria-Chad-Cameroon tri-border area. A vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, September 9, 2023).
- ◆ On September 7, 2023, an attack was carried out against a force of local militia fighters supporting the Nigerian army, in the town of Gauza. Several militia fighters were killed and wounded (Telegram, September 7, 2023).

Counterterrorism

- ▶ On September 7, 2023, Nigerian army soldiers attacked Boko Haram operatives in the Sambisa Forest, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri, in the northeast of the country. Six Boko Haram operatives were killed (September 9, 2023).

Mali

Al-Qaeda activity

- ▶ On September 7, 2023, gunmen attacked a boat on the Niger River in central Mali, killing at least 49 civilians. The gunmen also attacked a military base in the area, killing 15 soldiers. According to the Malian government, 50 of the militants were killed during the attack on the base. The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for attacking the base, but not for attacking the boat (BBC, August 8, 2023; Telegram, August 8, 2023).
- ▶ On September 5, 2023, JNIM operatives activated an IED against a military vehicle of the Malian army and the Wagner mercenary group in the Douentza area, near the border with Burkina Faso. The vehicle was destroyed, and the passengers on board were apparently killed or wounded (Telegram, September 8, 2023).

Burkina Faso

Al-Qaeda activity

- ▶ JNIM claimed responsibility for two attacks:
 - ◆ On September 6, 2023, Wagner Group fighters were attacked in the Beko area in the east of the country. According to the organization, the Wagner Group had fatalities (Telegram, September 6, 2023).

◆ On September 6, 2023, JNIM claimed responsibility for an attack on a Burkina Faso army force on September 4, 2023, near the border with Mali. According to the organization, at least 50 soldiers were killed (Telegram, September 6, 2023). **This announcement refers to the incident reported in the ITIC’s previous document,** dealing with an attack carried out on September 4, 2023, by armed men who attacked a Burkina Faso army force and local fighters in the Yatenga province in the north of the country (the Mali border). A total of 17 soldiers and 36 civilian volunteers were killed in the incident (France 24, September 5, 2023). **At the time of writing, the ITIC assessed that they were operatives of Al-Qaeda or ISIS. This claim of responsibility confirms that these are elements affiliated with Al-Qaeda.**¹

Somalia

Al-Shabaab activity

► This week, operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab continued to carry out attacks against Somalia’s security forces and government and the forces supporting them.

◆ On September 11, 2023, an IED was activated against a vehicle in the town of El Garas, in the center of the country. Three people were killed, including Mohamed Mohamud, aka Mohamed Yare, a regional parliamentarian of the province of Galmudug, in central Somalia (VOA, September 11, 2023).

◆ On September 10, 2023, an IED was activated and then an attack was carried out against a Somali army base about 80 km west of Mogadishu, in the south of the country. The soldiers responded quickly and, according to official sources, 20 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed in the incident. So far, the number of casualties among the base soldiers is unknown, but it has been reported to be small (Xinhua, September 10, 2023; garoweonline.com, September 11, 2023).

◆ On September 7, 2023, a car bomb was detonated, and an attack was carried out against a Somali army base in the town of Nur Dugle, in the Middle Shabelle area in the south of the country. The soldiers of the base responded with gunfire and the exchange of fire lasted about an hour. Both sides sustained losses (exact numbers were not published) and the Al-Shabaab operatives withdrew (allafrica.com, September 7, 2023).

¹ See the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from September 7, 2023, “Spotlight on Global Jihad (August 31 – September 6, 2023)”

- ◆ On September 5, 2023, a suicide bombing attack was carried out against an Ethiopian army base and local militias in the city of Mahas, in Hiran Province, in central Somalia. According to Al-Shabaab, several officers and soldiers were killed and wounded (Shahada News Agency, September 5, 2023).
- ▶ On September 11, 2023, Al-Shabaab operated in two other sites:
 - ◆ The organization announced that it had taken over the town of El Garas in the Galgaduud province, in the center of the country, after Somali Army Special Forces abandoned the area (Shahada News Agency, September 11, 2023).
 - ◆ Al-Shabaab operatives set fire to seven villages in the Lower Shabelle area in the south of the country. The villagers suffered extensive economic damage (hornobserver.com, September 11, 2023). The use of arson by Al-Shabaab is intended to weaken the local government and arouse resentment against it.

Counterterrorism

▶ Official sources in Somalia announced that Somali army forces and Civil Defense Forces operated on September 6, 2023, in the village of Ceel La Helay in the Galgaduud area in central Somalia against Al-Shabaab and that three senior Al-Shabaab members, a commander and two other senior officials, were killed (there was no reference to civilian casualties). Subsequently, local sources said a drone had attacked a building in the village, killing three Al-Shabaab operatives and five civilians, including a woman and two children. According to this version, Al-Shabaab operatives took shelter in a house belonging to civilians before it was attacked, and therefore there were also victims among non-involved civilians in the incident (Reuters, September 8, 2023; Somalia News Agency, September 7, 2023). In view of Al-Shabaab's accusations that the United States was responsible for the killing of civilians in Somalia, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) referred to this incident and noted that civilians who were near the scene of the operation were indeed killed or wounded, but it was emphasized that US Army forces did not take part in the operation. Thus, Al-Shabaab's claim that US Army forces caused civilian casualties is false (AFRICOM, September 8, 2023; Shahada News Agency, September 8, 2023).

A total of 107 Al-Shabaab operatives turned themselves in

▶ A total of 107 Al-Shabaab operatives reportedly turned themselves in to the Somali security forces during the months of July-August 2023 (theeastafrican.co.ke, September 8, 2023).

Additional US aid to the Somali army

► On September 6, 2023, the US Embassy in Mogadishu announced that the United States had transferred US\$2 million in aid to the Somali army to assist it in the fight against Al-Shabaab (garoweonline.com, September 6, 2023).

United States offers a reward for information about the leader of Al-Shabaab

► On September 7, 2023, the US Department of State announced that it is offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information about Al-Shabaab leader Abu Ubaidah, known as Ahmed Diriye. According to the announcement, Abu Ubaidah is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people in Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Djibouti (Rewards for Justice Twitter account, September 6, 2023).



US State Department announcement
 (Rewards for Justice Twitter account, September 7, 2023)

Kenya

Al-Shabaab activity

► On September 10, 2023, an IED was activated against a military vehicle in the Lamu area, near the border with Somalia. Fourteen soldiers were wounded. It is believed that Al-Shabaab, which operates in the area, is responsible for activating the IED (Somali News Agency, September 12, 2023).

Asia

Afghanistan

ISIS's activity

► On September 7, 2023, an IED was activated against a motorcycle ridden by two Taliban men from the Mamund district, on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The two were killed (Telegram, September 8, 2023).

Pakistan

ISIS's activity

► On September 4, 2023, a policeman was shot dead in the city of Mastung, in western Pakistan, not far from the border with Afghanistan (Telegram, September 4, 2023).

Philippines

ISIS's activity

► On September 8, 2023, an IED was activated against a high-voltage electricity transmission pylon in Lanao del Sur, in the southern Philippines. The pylon collapsed (Telegram, September 8, 2023). It should be noted that ISIS occasionally blows up high-voltage pylons as part of its economic war against the country.

► On September 6, 2023, a Philippine government “spy” was shot dead in the Shariff Saydona area of Maguindanao, in the southern Philippines, and ISIS operatives seized his weapon (Telegram, September 10, 2023).

Turkey

Counterterrorism

► On September 5, 2023, Istanbul police detained five members of an ISIS cell consisting of six members in various parts of the city on suspicion of providing funding for the distribution of incitement materials. The five were seized with incitement material belonging to the organization and \$73,000 in cash. No details were provided about the sixth member of the cell, but it can be assumed that he managed to escape (Anatolia News Agency, September 5, 2023).

Europe

United Kingdom

► On September 6, 2023, the UK declared the Russian Wagner mercenary group, which operates as a military wing of the Kremlin around the world, as a terrorist organization. According to an order issued by the British Home Office, the Wagner mercenary group has been involved in looting, torture and barbaric murders, and its actions in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Africa pose a threat to global security. Therefore, the order states, it is absolutely forbidden to support this group in any form. The order includes a provision according to which the penalty for violators of this order may reach 14 years in prison. The order will take effect from September 13, 2023 (www.gov.uk, September 6, 2023).

Europe

Germany

Counterterrorism

►On September 6, 2023, two Syrian citizens, Amer A. and Basel O., were detained in Cologne and Munich, Germany. They were suspected of being operatives in a foreign terrorist organization, Liwa Jund al-Rahman, a Sunni rebel organization established in February 2013 by Amer A., who commanded it. According to the prosecution, Amer A. is accused of committing war crimes and membership in ISIS. The war crimes relate to an attack carried out by the organization operatives in June 2013 against residents of the village of Hatlah, about 2 km east of Deir ez-Zor. The attack, commanded by Amer A. and other jihadi organizations, killed 60 residents of the village, members of the Shiite community persecuted by ISIS. Amer A. joined ISIS in July 2014 and placed his organization under ISIS's command. According to the prosecution, Basel O. held a senior position in the organization and commanded units of the organization during the fighting against the Syrian army and forces supporting it in December 2013 and April 2014, particularly at the military airfield in Deir ez-Zor (ABC News; Al-Araby al-Jadeed, September 7, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

Al-Qaeda and ISIS marked the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks

►On September 11, 2023, Al-Qaeda published another edition of the magazine Umma Wahida ("One Nation"), dedicated to the 9/11 attacks. The magazine notes that the attacks had an enormous strategic impact, but at the same time argues that there is no need to repeat this attack, since the "next Islamic strike" must be much more sophisticated and unpredictable, and its impact should reverberate strongly. It notes that the "next Islamic strike" will not necessarily be in the United States, but its effects should be above and beyond the 9/11 attacks (Telegram, September 11, 2023).



Umma Wahida magazine (Telegram, September 11, 2023)

► On September 11, 2023, ISIS’s Al-Battar Foundation released a video including incitement against the “infidels” on the background of a clip documenting the 9/11 attacks. The video praises the perpetrators of the attacks and calls on Muslims around the world to act for their religion (implicitly, to carry out more attacks). It includes footage showing Muslim children in different parts of the world being humiliated by non-Muslims, calling for revenge. It should be noted that there is also a call for the liberation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and its “cleansing” from the Jews (Telegram, September 11, 2023).



The opening slide of the video: Former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden against the background of the World Trade Center on fire (Telegram, September 11, 2023)

Publication of a book about the attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania

► Al-Sahab, Al-Qaeda’s media foundation, published a book called “The Road to Nairobi and Dar al-Salam,” written by Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Masri, one of Al-Qaeda’s senior figures. In the book, the author documents his memoirs regarding planning and carrying out the terrorist attacks at the US Embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) on August 7, 1998, which resulted in the killing of 223 people and wounding of about 4,000. The 150-page book was published a few days before the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, probably to attract more

attention. An examination of the book reveals many details about the planning and execution of the attack (Matbaat Noor, September 7, 2023).



The book “The Road to Nairobi and Dar al-Salam” (Matbaat Noor, September 7, 2023)