



Spotlight on Global Jihad

June 18-24, 2020



Overview

- ▶ The ceasefire is being maintained **in the Idlib region of northern Syria**, but there has been an increase in the intensity of local incidents. The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continues to prepare itself for an expected Syrian army attack.
- ▶ ISIS's activity around the globe **continues at low intensity**, a trend that has been going on for several weeks. At the same time, **disruptions of ISIS's media system continue**, sometimes preventing the dissemination of claims of responsibility by the various provinces.
- ▶ **The Iraq Province** continues to be ISIS's most active province. This week, ISIS operatives continued to carry out "routine" attacks (activating IEDs, attacking positions, machine gun fire, sniper fire); **In the Syria Province**, ISIS's activity has decreased; **In the Sinai Peninsula**, intensive activity took place, including an attack against an Egyptian force in Central Sinai (about six dead); and a combined attack in which three IEDs were activated against Sinai tribal forces (seven dead and wounded); **In West Africa**, a suicide bombing attack was carried out this week against Cameroonian army forces in the north of the country, near Lake Chad (34 dead soldiers).

The Idlib region

Overview

The ceasefire in the Idlib region was maintained this week. **However, there has been an increase in the intensity of local incidents between the rival sides** (ground activity, artillery fire, and probably also an airstrike). The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham continues its preparations in Jabal Zawiya, south of Idlib, in advance of an expected Syrian army attack. The joint patrols of the Russian and Turkish armies on the M-4 highway continue uninterrupted.

Syrian army ground activity

► **On the night of June 20-21, 2020**, the Syrian army and the forces supporting it attempted to advance towards rebel positions about 20 km south of Idlib. The sides exchanged artillery fire. Both sides sustained casualties (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 21, 2020).

Artillery fire and an airstrike

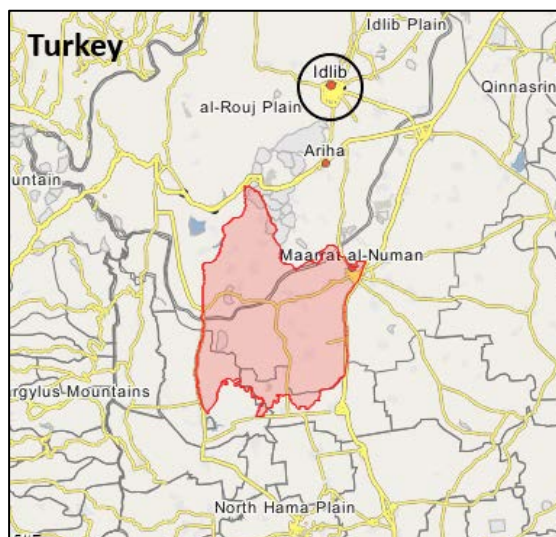
► **On June 20 and 23, 2020**, the Syrian forces **fired artillery** at the area of Jabal Zawiya, southwest of Idlib (Edlib Media Center – EMC, June 20, 23, 2020). It was also reported that **Russian fighter jets had carried out an airstrike** in that area (Idlib Plus, June 20, 2020).

Preparations made by the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in Jabal Zawiya

► **On June 19, 2020**, the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham released several photos showing its operatives digging trenches in Jabal Zawiya, about 25 km south of Idlib (Ibaa, June 19, 2020). The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham also reinforced its troops in the region (June 8, 2020) as part of the preparations to halt an expected Syrian army attack.



Operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham during fortification work (Ibaa, June 19, 2020)



**Jabal Zawiya area
(Wikimapia)**

Joint patrols on the M-4 highway continue

► **This week, the joint patrols of the Russian and Turkish armies on the M-4 highway (Aleppo-Latakia) continued uninterrupted.** On June 18, 2020, Turkey and Russia carried out their 18th joint patrol, reaching the Jisr al-Shughur area (about 30 km southwest of Idlib (Edlib Media Center – EMC, June 20, 2020).

Conflicts between the jihadi organizations

► **Conflicts continue between the rival jihadi organizations.** On June 23, 2020, there were exchanges of fire between the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the Guardians of Religion Organization, which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda (EMC, June 23, 2020). The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham has forbidden its operatives to break away from the organization without authorization or establish a separate organization, “whatever the reason” (Syrianfiles Twitter account, dealing with Syria and the Islamic world, June 23, 2020).

Northern and eastern Syria

The area of Deir ez-Zor, Al-Mayadeen, and Albukamal

- **On June 22, 2020**, an SDF vehicle was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. Three fighters were killed (Telegram, June 23, 2020).
- **On June 22, 2020**, ISIS operatives activated IEDs at an SDF headquarters in the village of Al-Basira, about 14 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The headquarters was damaged (Telegram, June 23, 2020).

► **On June 21, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked positions of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it on the outskirts of Al-Mayadeen. At least 18 Syrian soldiers were killed (according to another version, five were killed). Three Syrian soldiers were taken prisoner by ISIS (Khotwa; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 21, 2020).

► **On June 19, 2020**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire about 20 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed (archive.org, June 21, 2020).

Al-Hasakah area

► **On June 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF tanker carrying oil for the Syrian regime northeast of Deir ez-Zor. The tanker, which belonged to Al-Qaterji, a Syrian MP and commander in the Homeland Defense Forces, went up in flames (Telegram, June 21, 2020).

► **On June 18, 2020**, an IED was activated against an SDF oil tanker near the village of Al-Shadadi (about 50 km south of Al-Hasakah). It was destroyed (Isdarat, June 19, 2020). No casualties were reported.

Al-Raqqah area

► **On June 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives killed an SDF fighter north of Al-Raqqah (Telegram, June 21, 2020).

► **On June 17, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Syrian soldiers about 40 km southwest of Al-Raqqah. Five soldiers were killed and several others were wounded (Isdarat, June 18, 2020).

► **On June 17, 2020**, about 30 ISIS operatives moving in four vehicles with mounted machine guns raided fields about 35 km southeast of Al-Raqqah. Six farmers were killed. The ISIS operatives set fire to several fields. Over 200 head of cattle grazing in the fields died in the fire (Sputnik, June 17, 2020).

The area north of Aleppo (near the border with Turkey)

► **On June 23, 2020**, a commander apparently belonging to the National Liberation Front (a Turkish-backed umbrella framework fighting against the Syrian army in the Idlib region alongside the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham) was shot and killed about 10 km northeast of A'zaz (About 40 km north of Aleppo), near the border with Turkey (Telegram, June 23, 2020). ISIS's activity in this area is unusual.

Counterterrorist activity

SDF raid against ISIS operatives

► On June 21, 2020, as part of **Operation Deterrence of Terrorism** against ISIS which began ten days ago, SDF fighters operated against ISIS in the village of Al-Suwar, about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. One ISIS operative was caught and another blew himself up (apparently with his explosive belt) during an attempt to capture him. Several SDF fighters were wounded (Deir ez-Zor 24, June 23, 2020).

Former ISIS governor in Al-Raqqah killed

► On June 20, 2020, at noon, an International Coalition UAV attacked a motorcycle carrying two ISIS commanders **at the entrance to the city of Al-Bab**, about 30 km northeast of Aleppo. They were killed (Enab Baladi, a Syrian news website affiliated with the rebel organizations, June 20, 2020). The senior of the two was Fayez al-'Akkal, AKA Abu Saad al-Shimali, who had a Turkish ID card. He was ISIS's governor in Al-Raqqah for several months. The other operative who was killed (according to another version, he was wounded) was also a senior ISIS commander (Khotwa, June 20, 2020).



The motorcycle on which the two ISIS senior commanders were riding
(Khotwa, June 20, 2020)

The Iraqi arena

Iraq's leading position in ISIS's attacks

► On June 18, 2020, ISIS released an infographic entitled "The Harvest of the Fighters," summing up its activity in the various provinces between June 11 and June 17, 2020. According to the infographic, **a total of 53 attacks were carried out by ISIS around the world** (compared to 44 attacks in the preceding week), a figure significantly lower than the number of attacks in the period preceding the Raids of Attrition. **A total of 35 attacks (about**

67%, i.e., two-thirds of all the attacks carried out by ISIS around the globe) were carried out in Iraq. About half of the attacks in Iraq (17) were carried out in the Diyala Province. In addition, six attacks (about 11%) were carried out in West Africa (mainly in Nigeria), six in the Sinai Province, three in Syria, and two in Central Africa (Al-Naba' weekly, as published in Isdarat, June 18, 2020).

► **According to the infographic, over 208 people were killed and wounded in ISIS's attacks around the globe.** The largest number of casualties (138) was in ISIS's **West Africa Province, mainly in Nigeria.** The other casualties were in the provinces of Iraq (52), Sinai (10), Syria (7), and Central Africa (1).

Main activities carried out by ISIS in the past week

Diyala Province

- **On June 19, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization fighter was targeted by sniper fire about 35 km northeast of Baqubah. He was killed (Isdarat, June 20, 2020).
- **On June 17, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle near the Mansouriya gas station, about 45 km northeast of Baqubah. One soldier was killed and three others were wounded (Isdarat, June 18, 2020).
- **On June 16, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization compound was targeted by sniper fire about 55 km north of Baqubah. One fighter was killed and two others were wounded (Isdarat, June 17, 2020).

Al-Anbar Province

- **On June 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 3 km west of Hit. The passengers were killed or wounded (archive.org, June 22, 2020).
- **On June 17, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army headquarters east of Al-Rutba, in the western part of the Al-Anbar Province. Several soldiers were killed or wounded. The headquarters went up in flames (Isdarat, June 18, 2020).
- **On June 17, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 3 km west of Hit. The passengers were killed or wounded (Isdarat, June 17, 2020).

Salah al-Din Province

- **On June 20, 2020**, Tribal Mobilization fighters were targeted by machine gun fire south of Tikrit. Two fighters were killed and others were wounded (archive.org, June 22, 2020).

► **On June 19, 2020**, an Iraqi army compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 30 km north of Baghdad. One soldier was wounded (Isdarat, June 20, 2020).

► **On June 18, 2020**, an Iraqi army “agent” was targeted by machine gun fire in front of his home, about 30 km north of Baghdad. He was killed (Isdarat, June 19, 2020).

► **On June 15, 2020**, an Iraqi police compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 80 km north of Baghdad. One policeman was wounded (Isdarat, June 17, 2020).

Nineveh Province

► **On June 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 15 km south of Mosul. One soldier was killed (Telegram, June 23, 2020).

Counterterrorist activities by the Iraqi security forces

Diyala Province

► **On June 21, 2020**, a force of the Iraqi army commando brigade located 14 mortar shells converted into IEDs by ISIS, about 35 km northeast of Baqubah. The IEDs were neutralized in a controlled manner by combat engineering soldiers of the Iraqi army 5th Division (Iraqi Defense Ministry, June 21, 2020).



**Iraqi security forces locating ISIS's IEDs
(Iraqi Defense Ministry, June 21, 2020)**

Al-Anbar Province

► **On June 21, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization and Iraqi army joint force destroyed an equipment depot and three guesthouses of ISIS (al-hashed.net, June 21, 2020).



A joint force of the Popular Mobilization and the Iraqi army during security activity against ISIS (al-hashed.net, June 21, 2020)

► **On June 20, 2020**, an Intelligence Directorate force captured five ISIS operatives operating in the Al-Anbar Province. Under interrogation, they admitted having abducted and killed several residents in the Al-Anbar Desert. Subsequently, the bodies of the residents were located in the desert area of Al-Rutba (Al-Sumaria, June 20, 2020).



Five ISIS operatives captured by the Intelligence Directorate force (Al-Sumaria, June 20, 2020)

Nineveh Province

► **On June 15, 2020**, the Iraqi security forces captured six ISIS operatives. **On June 21, 2020**, an Intelligence Directorate force captured six additional operatives (Al-Sumaria, June 21, 2020).

Salah al-Din Province

► **On June 21, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization force repelled an ISIS attack about 10 km south of Tikrit (and about 135 km northwest of Baghdad) (al-hashed.net, June 21, 2020).

► **On June 21, 2020**, International Coalition aircraft carried out several airstrikes, destroying eight ISIS tunnels (Iraqi News Agency, June 20, 2020).

The Sinai Peninsula

► **On June 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province **attacked Egyptian army forces near Jabal al-Maghara**, in Central Sinai (about 60 km southwest of Al-Arish). A total of 15 soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 21, 2020). According to reports by local sources, **six soldiers were killed in the attack and three others were wounded**. According to the reports, the Egyptian Air Force was operating in the area (Shahed Sinaa al-Rasmiyah Facebook page, June 21, 2020).



Jabal al-Maghara
(Wikimapia)

► **On June 21, 2020**, an IED was activated in Al-Arish. Two Egyptian soldiers were wounded (Shahed Sinaa al-Rasmiyah Facebook page, June 21, 2020). To date, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was apparently carried out by ISIS.

► **On June 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province attacked an Egyptian army checkpoint near the Port of Rafah. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 23, 2020).

► **On June 21, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province attacked Egyptian army forces near a checkpoint in the area of Bir al-Abd (about 50 km west of Al-Arish). Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 23, 2020).

► **On June 19, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province killed an Egyptian army "agent" after abducting him south of Rafah. A foot patrol of five fighters from the Sinai tribes supporting the Egyptian army arrived at the scene. An IED was activated against them. The patrol was hit. A second IED was activated against another force that arrived at the scene. A third IED

was activated against another force that arrived at the scene. **As a result of the activation of the three IEDs, at least seven fighters were killed or wounded.** Fighters from the Sinai Tribal Union are concentrated in the area of the attack. The Sinai Tribal Union was established by Egypt's Military Intelligence to fight against operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province (Shahed Sinaa al-Rasmiyah Facebook page, June 19, 2020). ISIS's Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the attack (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, June 22, 2020).

ISIS's activity around the globe

Africa

Nigeria

- ▶ **On June 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives repelled a Nigerian army attack in the Lake Chad area. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 21, 2020).
- ▶ **On June 18, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked Nigerian soldiers on the road leading from Maiduguri (the capital of Borno State) to the city of Monguno (about 100 km northeast of Maiduguri). Several Nigerian soldiers were killed or wounded (Isdarat, June 20, 2020).
- ▶ **On June 17, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed Nigerian soldiers on the road between the cities of Maiduguri and Damboa (about 85 km southwest of Maiduguri). Three soldiers were killed and others were wounded. Weapons, ammunition and a vehicle were also seized (Isdarat, June 18, 2020).



Right: Nigerian army weapons and ammunition seized by ISIS in the ambush. Left: Nigerian army vehicle seized by ISIS operatives (Isdarat, June 20, 2020).

- ▶ **On June 17, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province activated an IED against a Nigerian army vehicle near Lake Chad. Eight soldiers were killed (Isdarat, June 17, 2020).

Is Nigeria losing the war against terrorists in Borno State?

► The attacks against the Nigerian army by ISIS’s West Africa Province **focus on Borno State, in the northeast of the country**. These attacks have recently increased in intensity. Researcher Michael Horton has published an article examining the question: **Is Nigeria Losing the War Against Terrorists in Borno State?**¹ Following are the main points of the article:

- ◆ **The situation in Borno State: extensive terrorist activity and so far the failure of the Nigerian army to deal with it:** Borno State, located in northeastern Nigeria, is an ideal place for the growth of terrorists and rebel groups. **It suffers from dire poverty, ethnic and religious tension, the existence of active illegal trading networks, easily crossed borders and a lack of government control over extensive areas.** Despite the permanent presence of large Nigerian army units (sometimes numbering as many as 70,000 soldiers), several terrorist organizations are active in Borno State and the surrounding areas: **Boko Haram**, described as “the deadliest terrorist organization in Africa”; **ISIS’s West Africa Province** and **Ansaru**, a faction that broke away from Boko Haram and is affiliated with Al-Qaeda². The operatives of these organizations carry out daily attacks in Borno State, including robberies and abductions. **Attempts by the Nigerian army to put an end to this activity have failed**, despite its statements about their alleged success.
- ◆ **The Nigerian army’s response to the terrorist activity in Borno State: a plan to establish “super camps” to improve the fight against terrorist operatives:** in the summer of 2019, Nigeria formulated a plan **to establish “super camps,” i.e., creating**

¹ Michael Horton, Is Nigeria Losing the War Against Terrorists In Borno State? Terrorists Monitor, vol. 18, Issue 12, 17 June 2020:

<https://jamestown.org/program/is-nigeria-losing-the-war-against-terrorists-in-borno-state/>

The author is a research fellow at the Jamestown Foundation. See: <https://jamestown.org/analyst/michael-horton/>

² **Ansaru (Jama’at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, “The Group of Muslim Supporters in Black Africa”):** A Nigerian Islamist group, formerly a faction in the Boko Haram organization, which started the revolt in Nigeria in 2009. The revolt failed, and some of the group’s senior officials fled to Algeria, where they found shelter with local Al-Qaeda supporters (AQIM), and some fled to Somalia, where they found shelter with local Al-Qaeda supporters (the Al-Shabaab organization). The group then returned to Nigeria, established its presence in the northeast and center of the country, and once again became a faction within Boko Haram. It split from Boko Haram in 2012, effectively becoming a local Al-Qaeda-affiliated branch whose operatives carried out terrorist attacks in Nigeria and Mali. Some senior officials returned to Boko Haram in 2015. The group was headed by Khaled al-Barnawi, who was arrested by the Nigerian army in 2016. His arrest led to a reduction in the group’s activity in Nigeria, but not to the termination of its activity (ANSARU, Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ansaru>).

a small number of highly fortified bases located in or on the outskirts of major towns in order to facilitate the fight against these terrorist groups. The plan was publicly criticized, mainly because it made the Nigerian army units more vulnerable to attacks. This is because Nigerian army patrols setting out from these sheltered bases to fight terrorist operatives were forced to operate at a distance from them. The speed of the activity carried out by operatives of Boko Haram and ISIS's West Africa Province, their low profile activity and their excellent human intelligence all run counter to the cumbersome movement of the Nigerian army forces. The activity of Boko Haram and ISIS's West Africa Province also includes the use of motorbikes to move around quickly and inconspicuously in both rural and urban areas in Nigeria and in the Lake Chad Basin.

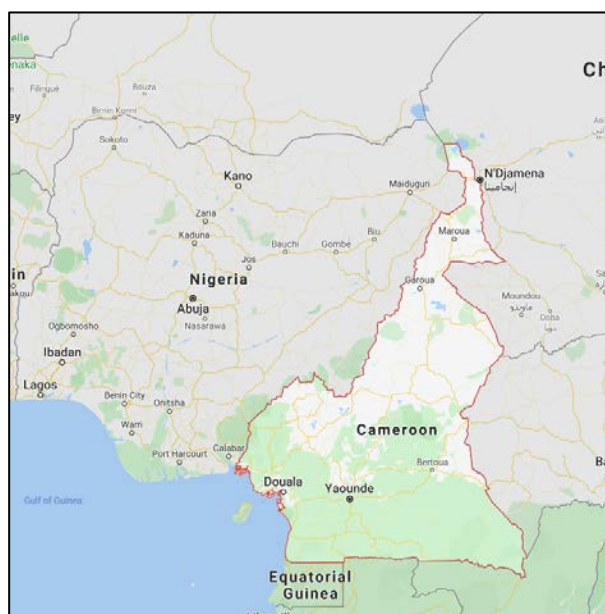
◆ **The failure of the Nigerian army's fight against terrorists is forcing residents to display tolerance towards the terrorist operatives:** due to the cumbersome activity of the Nigerian army units and their loose connection with the local population, **they are failing to protect civilians and do not prevent the deaths of many of them at the hands of terrorists. Thus, the Nigerian army is losing the battle for hearts and minds in most areas of Borno State.** The loss of extensive parts of Borno State to ISIS's West Africa Province and Boko Haram **forces many civilians to turn a blind eye to the activity of the terrorists and the rebels.** This despite the fact that these two organizations **do not provide basic assistance to residents**, unlike the Al-Shabaab organization in Somalia and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

◆ **The future of Borno State: further deterioration in the living conditions of residents versus the army's chances of regaining control:** Borno State and the surrounding states have the **highest levels of poverty and illiteracy in Nigeria, which increase from one year to the next.** The responses to COVID-19 have all but ensured that the state of Nigeria, which is dependent on oil exports, will face serious budget constraints, increased unemployment and decreased foreign direct investment. All of this will impact the Nigerian army's ability to combat insurgents while at the same time **a deteriorating national economy will make tens of thousands more vulnerable to recruitment by ISIS's West Africa Province and Boko Haram.** Internal fighting between the organizations and between different factions within each organization, as a result of Boko Haram's indiscriminate violence inspired by its leader, Abubakr

Shekau, is the Nigerian army's only chance to prevent the spread of these terrorist organizations and eventually regain control of the areas where they operate.

Cameroon

► **On June 20, 2020**, an ISIS suicide bomber activated a car bomb among a group of Cameroonian soldiers **near Lake Chad** (in northern Cameroon). A total of **34 soldiers were killed** (Telegram, June 21, 2020). As far as is known, this was the most serious attack by ISIS's West Africa Province against the Cameroonian army since the organization began its activity in this country.



Map of Cameroon. Lake Chad is located in the north of the country, near the border between Nigeria and Chad (Google Maps)

Democratic Republic of the Congo

► **On June 22, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's Central Africa Province fired machine guns **at UN soldiers** near the city of Beni in the northeastern part of the country. Five UN soldiers were killed (Telegram, June 23, 2020).

► **On June 21, 2020**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at Congolese soldiers near the city of Beni. One soldier was killed. Weapons and ammunition were also seized (Isdarat, June 22, 2020).

► **On June 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at a truck used by the Congolese army near the city of Beni. Two soldiers were killed. The truck went up in flames (Isdarat, June 20, 2020).



Truck used by the Congolese army going up in flames after being targeted by ISIS machine gun fire (Isdarat, June 21, 2020)

Somalia

► **On June 22, 2020**, a hand grenade was thrown at Somali policemen about 25 km west of Mogadishu. One policeman was killed and three others were wounded (Telegram, June 23, 2020).

Asia

The Philippines

► **On June 22, 2020**, operatives of ISIS's East Asia Province fired machine guns at Filipino soldiers in the northern part of Jolo Island, in the southern Philippines. An officer and nine soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 23, 2020).