



Spotlight on Global Jihad

November 19-25, 2020



Main events of the past week

- ▶ **In the Idlib region**, exchanges of artillery fire continued between the Syrian army and the rebel organizations, mainly Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).
- ▶ ISIS's provinces in Africa and Asia continued their routine activity. Noteworthy examples:
 - ◆ **Syria:** This week, ISIS's intensive activity **in the desert regions of eastern Syria continued**. In the most prominent incident of the week, **a senior Syrian officer, a brigade commander with the rank of colonel was ambushed and killed** in the desert region west of the Euphrates Valley. In addition, ISIS continued **to carry out attacks against Turkish-backed organizations** near the Syrian-Turkish border (targeted killings and activating IEDs).
 - ◆ **Iraq:** **A police officer with the rank of colonel was ambushed and killed** along with nine other policemen in the Salah al-Din Province. Another noteworthy attack was **blowing up high-voltage pylons on the main power line between the Salah al-Din and Kirkuk provinces**, which is also used by the Iraqi army (so far, ISIS has not issued a claim of responsibility).
 - ◆ **The Sinai Peninsula:** ISIS operatives **blew up a pipeline carrying natural gas to the city of Al-Arish**. ISIS claimed that it was a pipeline carrying gas to Israel, **but Egyptian and Israeli sources denied this**. According to an Egyptian source, only minor damage was caused.
 - ◆ **In the various provinces in Africa**, deadly attacks against local military forces continued. **In northeastern Nigeria**, ISIS operatives ambushed a convoy (10 dead, according to ISIS); **In western Chad**, ISIS operatives sank a ship in Lake Chad (according to ISIS, 10 Chadian soldiers were killed).
 - ◆ **Afghanistan:** ISIS operatives fired rockets at the "green zone" in Kabul, where Western embassies and government buildings are located.
- ▶ Following the attack in Jeddah (November 11, 2020), **ISIS's media outlets called on its supporters to continue carrying out attacks in the Arabian Peninsula** against the Saudi

government and targets affiliated with the West (the “Crusaders”). According to an article in ISIS’s organ, **one attack in the Arabian Peninsula is equivalent to dozens of terrorist attacks anywhere else.**

The Syrian arena

The Idlib region

In the Idlib region, exchanges of artillery fire continued between the Syrian army and the rebel organizations, mainly HTS. These incidents occurred mainly in the region south of Idlib. In addition, an antitank missile was reportedly fired by a jihadi organization at a group of soldiers engaged in fortification work south of Idlib.

ISIS’s activity in Syria¹

The region of Deir ez-Zor and Al-Mayadeen

- ▶ **On November 22, 2020**, a man affiliated with the Syrian regime was targeted by machine gun fire in the village of Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed.
- ▶ **On November 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against a truck of the head of the local council in the village of Shahil, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The truck was damaged.
- ▶ **On November 20, 2020**, an SDF fighter was targeted by gunfire about 4 km northeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed. He had reportedly served in the internal security forces (Deir ez-Zor 24 Twitter account, November 20, 2020).
- ▶ **On November 19, 2020**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire about 15 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed.
- ▶ **On November 18, 2020**, two SDF fighters were targeted by machine gun fire about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. They were killed.

Senior Syrian officer killed in the desert region west of Al-Mayadeen

- ▶ On November 18, 2020, there were clashes between a Syrian force and ISIS operatives **in the desert region west of Deir ez-Zor. Bashir Salim Ismail, a senior Syrian officer with the rank of brigadier general was killed.** He had served as commander of the 137th Brigade in the 17th Division in the city of Deir ez-Zor. Three fighters of a force supporting the Syrian army were also killed (Deir ez-Zor 24 Twitter account, November 18, 2020).
- ▶ **ISIS claimed responsibility for killing the officer.** According to ISIS, on November 18, 2020, **ISIS ambushed and fired at Syrian soldiers in the Al-Mayadeen Desert. Brigadier**

¹ According to ISIS’s claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

General Bashir Ismail and six other soldiers were killed in the attack (Telegram, November 21, 2020).



Brigadier General Bashir [Salim] Ismail, commander of the 137th Brigade in the Syrian army, who was killed by ISIS (Deir ez-Zor 24 Twitter account, November 18, 2020; @musabalmjbel Twitter account, November 18, 2020)

Interview with a senior ISIS commander in the Deir ez-Zor region

► This week, ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published **an interview with a senior ISIS operative in the Deir ez-Zor region codenamed Abu Mansur al-Ansari** (he is described as commander of the security units in the area). The following are his main topics (Telegram, November 19, 2020):

- ◆ **ISIS is now waging guerrilla warfare against the Syrian army.** This is a manner of fighting which is currently better than direct confrontation. Guerrilla warfare enables ISIS to determine the appropriate time and place for carrying out the attacks.
- ◆ **The Syrian army is afraid of moving in the area** since ISIS operatives set up ambushes, activate IEDs and carry out hit and run attacks. In spite of that, **ISIS operatives are in a bad situation because the Syrian regime controls the area with massive forces.** In addition, Western (“Crusader”) planes and helicopters in the sky and spies on the ground hinder ISIS’s moves.
- ◆ **Local residents also don’t feel safe** in view of abductions, robberies and tribal acts of revenge in the area. **In addition, religious laxity prevails there,** as was the case in the period before ISIS’s takeover. Abu Mansur al-Ansari yearns for the period when ISIS ruled the region and, according to him, residents felt safe.
- ◆ **On the media level,** Al-Ansari points out that the Syrian regime’s statements about ISIS operatives being hit **are incorrect and intended for propaganda purposes.** According to him, local residents also don’t believe news items disseminated by the

regime. In addition, **economically speaking**, the Syrian regime has no interest in the region, **apart from the oil found there**.

Al-Hasakah region

► **On November 22, 2020**, an SDF intelligence operative was targeted by machine gun fire about 5 km west of the Syrian-Iraqi border (about 75 km southeast of Al-Hasakah). He was killed.

Counterterrorist measures

► **On November 18, 2020**, SDF Special Forces, with Coalition air support, operated in the Tel Hamis area, near Qamishli (about 60 km northeast of Al-Hasakah). They captured two ISIS operatives. They located weapons, mines, ammunition, and cellular phones (Twitter account of the SDF Coordination and Military Ops Center, November 18, 2020).



Weapons and equipment of the two ISIS operatives who were apprehended (Twitter account of the SDF Coordination and Military Ops Center, November 18, 2020)

The region near the Syrian-Turkish border

► **On November 18, 2020, Lieutenant Hossein al-Jibli was shot dead. He was an officer in the police and internal security forces** affiliated with the national army (sponsored by Turkey). **ISIS claimed responsibility for killing him with a handgun.** Hossein al-Jibli had formerly served as a fighter in the Tawhid Brigade, fighting against ISIS. He joined the local police after the Turkish army and the Turkish-backed organizations had taken over Al-Bab in February 2017 (Enab Baladi, November 19, 2020).

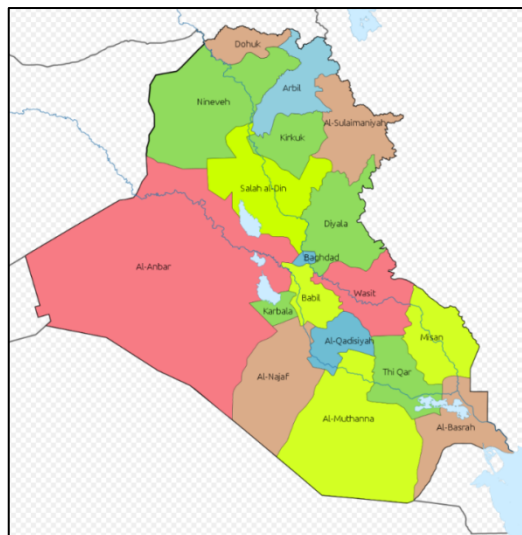


Funeral procession of Lieut. Hossein al-Jibli, shot by ISIS (Enab Baladi, November 19, 2020)

The desert area east of Aleppo

► On November 19, 2020, ISIS operatives fired machine guns at a Syrian army position in the Durayhim area, about 65 km southeast of Aleppo. Three soldiers were killed.

The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS hit a main power line used by the Iraqi army

► According to an Iraqi security source, on November 24, 2020, **ISIS operatives activated IEDs to blow up several high-voltage pylons** about 60 km south of Mosul. The security source added that it was **a power line connecting the provinces of Salah al-Din and Kirkuk** (passing through the Nineveh Province). **It supplies electricity to the Iraqi army and to oil and water facilities** (Iraqi News Agency, November 24, 2020). So far, ISIS has not claimed responsibility for the attack.



**High-voltage pylons of the main power line hit by the detonation of IEDs
(Iraqi News Agency, November 24, 2020)**

ISIS attacks in the various provinces²

Diyala Province

- ▶ **On November 18, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army bulldozer about 60 km north of Baqubah. One soldier was killed and two others were wounded.
- ▶ **On November 18, 2020**, an IED was activated against Iraqi soldiers about 70 km north of Baqubah. Several soldiers were wounded.

Al-Anbar Province

- ▶ **On November 23, 2020**, a Popular Mobilization compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 30 km northwest of Baghdad. An officer and a fighter were killed. When a force arrived at the scene to provide assistance, it was targeted by machine gun fire. One fighter was wounded.
- ▶ **On November 23, 2020**, the man in charge of collaborators with the Iraqi National Security Apparatus was targeted by machine gun fire west of Ramadi. He was killed.
- ▶ **On November 22, 2020**, ISIS operatives set up a roadblock near Al-Rutba and exchanged fire with Iraqi soldiers. An officer and two soldiers were killed. In addition, an Iraqi army vehicle and gasoline tanker were hit.

² According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram



Iraqi army truck set on fire by ISIS operatives (Telegram, November 23, 2020)

► **On November 18, 2020**, an ISIS squad broke into the home of a member of the Iraqi police about 30 km northwest of Baghdad. He was shot dead.

Salah al-Din Province

► **On November 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against a vehicle of a Tribal Mobilization fighter about 20 km north of Baiji. He was killed. ISIS set up an ambush at the scene and snipers fired at an Iraqi police patrol arriving at the scene. **A police officer with the rank of colonel and nine policemen were killed.** Additional policemen were wounded.

► **On November 18, 2020**, an Iraqi army foot patrol was targeted by machine gun fire and RPG rockets northwest of Samarra. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

► **On November 16, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army foot patrol northwest of Samarra. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.

Kirkuk Province

► **On November 23, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 70 km south of Kirkuk. The passengers were killed or wounded.

► **On November 23, 2020**, an Iraqi army camp was targeted by machine gun fire about 70 km south of Kirkuk. One soldier was killed and another was wounded.

► **On November 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi police vehicle about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. The passengers were killed or wounded.

► **On November 16, 2020**, an Iraqi police compound was targeted by machine gun fire about 30 km south of Kirkuk. One policeman was killed and another was wounded.

Nineveh Province

► **On November 21, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle about 40 km south of Mosul. An officer was killed and four soldiers were wounded.

Counterterrorism activities by the Iraqi security forces

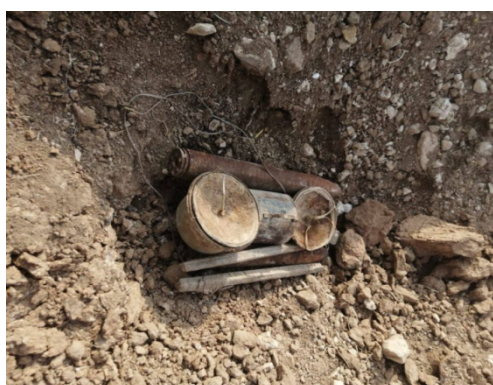
Kirkuk Province

► **On November 19-20, 2020**, the Iraqi counterterrorism unit carried out an operation against a group of ISIS operatives about 40 km southwest of Kirkuk. There were exchanges of fire and Coalition airstrikes, in which **16 ISIS operatives were killed**. Searches of the operatives' hiding places revealed documents, passports and local and foreign currency were found (Al-Sumaria, November 20, 2020).

► **On November 19, 2020**, teams of the Kirkuk Province Intelligence Directorate apprehended four ISIS operatives, members of a network which had operated in various places in the province. In their initial interrogation, the four operatives admitted carrying out attacks against the Iraqi security forces and civilians (Al-Sumaria, November 19, 2020).

Nineveh Province

► **On November 22, 2020**, an Iraqi army force located an ISIS weapons depot about 60 km west of Mosul. It contained IEDs and ammunition. Three more IEDs and two rockets were found during searches (Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, November 22, 2020).



**ISIS IEDs and weapons located by the Iraqi army
(Facebook page of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, November 22, 2020)**

► **On November 22, 2020**, teams of the Nineveh Province Intelligence Directorate apprehended five wanted ISIS operatives (Al-Sumaria, November 22, 2020).

Baghdad Province

► **On November 23, 2020**, the Iraqi Armed Forces Spokesman Major General Yahya Rasoul announced that **the Counterterrorism Unit had detained a senior ISIS operative codenamed Abu Naba' at Baghdad Airport**. The detainee, who is ISIS's General Administrative Coordinator³, tried to reach Iraq from another (unspecified) country to hold a

³ In Arabic, Al-Munassiq al-Idari al-Aam.

meeting with local field commanders in Baghdad. The spokesman said that the detainee had been active since 2003 and had been under surveillance from the moment he boarded the plane en route to Baghdad (Al-Sumaria, November 23, 2020).



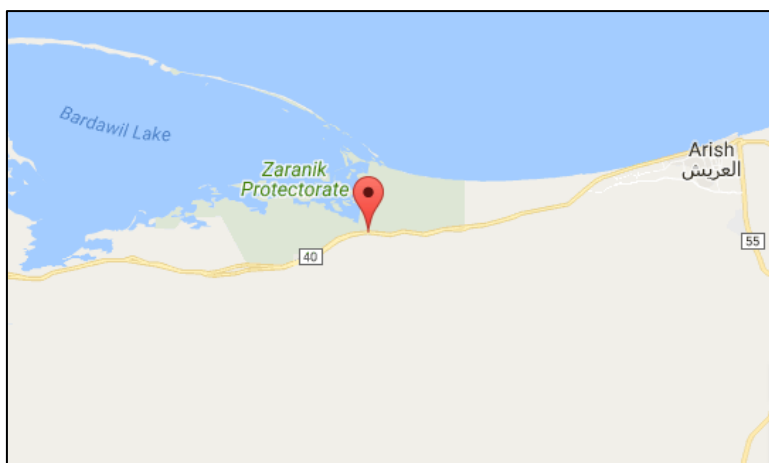
Fighters of the Counterterrorism Unit after detaining the senior ISIS official at Baghdad Airport (Twitter account of the spokesman of the Iraqi Armed Forces, November 23, 2020)

The Sinai Peninsula

Natural gas pipeline blown up west of Al-Arish

On November 19, 2020, there was an explosion in a natural gas pipeline west of Al-Arish. According to official Egyptian sources, **this is a pipeline supplying gas to Al-Arish.** According to an official Egyptian source, the Egyptian Natural Gas Company GASCO closed the main control system of the pipeline immediately after the explosion, thus making it possible to quickly extinguish the fire. The same source also added that **the pipeline had only sustained minor damage and that no one had been killed** (Masrawi, November 19, 2020). **According to the Israeli Ministry of Energy, it was not a pipeline carrying natural gas from Israel to Egypt** (Israel Hayom Israeli daily newspaper, November 19, 2020).

► **ISIS claimed responsibility for blowing up the pipeline.** According to ISIS, **several IEDs were activated against one of the pipelines which, according to ISIS, carries gas from Israel, about 30 km west of central Al-Arish** (Egyptian and Israeli sources denied that). ISIS claimed that the pipeline had sustained heavy damage.



Right: Gas catching fire as a result of the explosion in the pipeline (Shahed Sinaa – al-Rasmia Facebook page, November 19, 2020). Left: The location of the explosion in the Sabika area, west of Al-Arish (Google Maps)

ISIS's activity in the northern Sinai Peninsula

- ▶ **On November 21, 2020**, two Egyptian soldiers were targeted by machine gun fire in the western part of Sheikh Zuweid. They were both killed.
- ▶ **On November 17, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed fighters of tribal forces supporting the Egyptian army south of Rafah. Two fighters were wounded. In addition, weapons and ammunition were seized.
- ▶ **On November 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army bulldozer in the western part of Sheikh Zuweid. The bulldozer apparently sustained damage.



ISIS IED being detonated against an Egyptian army bulldozer in the western part of Sheikh Zuweid (Telegram, November 22, 2020)

- ▶ **On November 22, 2020**, an IED was activated against an Egyptian army armored vehicle in the western part of Sheikh Zuweid. The armored vehicle was apparently damaged (**Note:** This report may refer to the above incident of detonating an IED against the bulldozer).

ISIS's activity around the globe⁴

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces (November 12-18, 2020)

- ▶ ISIS released an infographic summarizing its activity **on November 12-18, 2020**. During this time, ISIS operatives carried out **59 attacks in the various provinces in Asia and Africa**, compared to 46 in the previous week (i.e., an increase of about 28% in the number of attacks). **Most of the attacks were carried out in Iraq (35)**. Attacks were also carried out in ISIS's other provinces: Syria (9); West Africa (7); Sinai Peninsula (4); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (3); and Hejaz, i.e., Saudi Arabia (1) (Al-Naba' weekly, Telegram, November 19, 2020).
- ▶ **Over 131 people were killed and wounded in those attacks**, compared to 135 in the previous week. **The largest number of casualties was in Iraq (51)**. The other casualties were in the following provinces: West Africa (41); Syria (28); Sinai Peninsula (4); Hejaz, i.e., Saudi Arabia (4); and Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (3) (Telegram, November 19, 2020).

Africa

Nigeria

- ▶ **On November 21, 2020**, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired machine guns at a Nigerian army convoy about north/northwest of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State (in northeastern Nigeria). **Ten soldiers were killed** and others were wounded. In addition, weapons, ammunition and military equipment were seized.
- ▶ **On November 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a Nigerian army compound about 40 km northwest of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded.
- ▶ **On November 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives attacked a headquarters of the forces supporting the Nigerian army about 15 km south of Maiduguri. One fighter was taken prisoner. The headquarters was set on fire.
- ▶ On November 16, 2020, ISIS operatives attacked a Christian village about 100 km southwest of Maiduguri. One Christian resident was killed. In addition, a church and several houses were set on fire.

⁴ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility posted on Telegram

Democratic Republic of the Congo

► On **November 20, 2020**, ISIS operatives **activated several IEDs against Congolese soldiers in the Beni region** in northeastern Congo (about 10 km west of the border with Uganda). Four soldiers were killed. Rescue forces that arrived at the scene of the incident encountered an ISIS ambush and fired machine guns at it. Four more soldiers were killed and three were wounded.

Chad

► **November 18, 2020**, ISIS operatives planted an IED **near the shores of Lake Chad, in western Chad**. The IED was activated when a ship carrying Chadian soldiers drew near. According to ISIS, **dozens of soldiers were killed**. The ship was destroyed and sank.

Asia

Afghanistan

Rockets being fired by ISIS at Kabul

► On the morning of **November 21, 2020**, a total of **23 rockets landed in various residential areas in Kabul**. According to the Afghan Interior Ministry, **eight people were killed and 31 were wounded** (Khaama Press, November 21, 2020). **ISIS claimed responsibility for firing the rockets**. According to the claim of responsibility, **ISIS operatives fired 28 rockets at the “green zone” in Kabul, where the Afghan presidential residence, Western embassies and headquarters of the Afghan forces are located**. According to ISIS, accurate hits of the targets were observed.



Right: The area hit by rocket fire in Kabul (Khaama Press, 21 November 2020). Left: The site hit by one of the rockets in the “green region” (Telegram, November 23, 2020).



ISIS rockets before being fired at the “green zone” (Telegram, November 23, 2020)

Additional attack by the Khorasan Province

► On November 20, 2020, an IED was activated against the mukhtar of one of the villages supporting the Afghan army, about 10 km southwest of Jalalabad. He was wounded.

North Caucasus

Fear of ISIS’s potential expansion in the North Caucasus

Researcher of Islamic movements in the Caucasus Mairbek Vatchagaev and journalist Nick Sturdee recently co-authored an article **on the potential for an increase in ISIS’s activity in the North Caucasus**. According to them, there is a great deal of sympathy for ISIS and its aims in the region, and there are signs of **an uptick in ISIS attacks**. They also noted that in the past, many fighters from the North Caucasus region joined the ranks of ISIS, **more than from anywhere else in the world**.⁵

ISIS operatives from the North Caucasus

► It is estimated that **a quarter of the 30,000 foreign fighters who left their homes to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq were from the former Soviet Union**. The largest percentage of those fighters came from the **North Caucasus region**. The largest groups were **Chechen or from Dagestan – according to some estimates, up to 5,000** men, women and children. Many of

⁵Nick Sturdee and Mairbek Vatchagaev, ISIS in the North Caucasus. Center for Global Policy, 26 October 2020: <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-the-north-caucasu/>.

Nick Sturdee is a Russian-speaking journalist and documentary maker, mostly for the BBC. Sturdee has closely followed events and travelled extensively in Chechnya and the North Caucasus since 1995, and has made films about North Caucasian fighters and their families in the Middle East. Most recently, he made a BBC radio documentary about attacks on Chechen refugees in Europe. **Mairbek Vatchagaev** is a Chechen historian and political analyst in the North Caucasus. Vatchagaev was a senior ranking official in the Chechen government of Aslan Maskhadov. He is the co-editor of the journal “Caucasus Survey” (Oxford, UK), and is an author of five books on the history and religion of the North Caucasus.

these people have died or remain in captivity in Syria and Iraq, especially the men. **The exodus of radical Muslims from Russia to Syria and Iraq from 2012 to 2017 helped stabilize a turbulent situation in the North Caucasus**, where an increasingly Islamist insurgency had been evolving for nearly 20 years.

Russia and the Caucasus Emirate

► The North Caucasus has been the scene of fighting between indigenous populations and an encroaching Russian presence for centuries. The most recent phase began in 1994, when the Russian military attempted to crush a bid for independence in Chechnya. Over the course of two wars and beyond, resistance to Moscow's rule evolved first into a regional campaign, drawing increasingly from a radical Islamist agenda and spreading across the North Caucasus. Fighters in the campaign gradually came to see themselves as part of a global Islamist struggle. **Most of the radical Islamist groups in the region declared allegiance to the Islamic State of ISIS and pledged allegiance to its leader in 2014 and 2015.**

► **Central to the spread of Islamist terrorism across the North Caucasus region was the Caucasus Emirate, formally proclaimed in 2007.** Local leaders emerged, and growing ties developed with leaders of similar Islamist groups around the world, including Al-Qaeda. Members of the group also claimed responsibility for a series of attacks on civilian targets in Russia, including a train bombing in 2009, metro bombings in Moscow in 2010, and the bombing of Moscow's Domodedovo Airport in 2011.

The rivalry between ISIS and the Caucasus Emirate

► **In 2012 it became clear that Chechen and other North Caucasian militants were active in Syria, initially under the banner of the Caucasus Emirate.** Subsequently, a growing and independent group called Jaysh al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar, the Army of Migrants and Supporters, received ever growing numbers of fighters from the Caucasus. This group split in 2013, with the larger part – led by the Georgian Chechen Tarkhan Batirashvili, aka Abu Umar al-Shishani – **joining and pledging allegiance to ISIS.**⁶

⁶ This group is also called **Liwa al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar** (i.e., the Brigade of Migrants [to Mecca] and Supporters [of the Prophet Muhammad], who were among the first to join Islam at the time of its inception). This Salafist-jihadi group, whose members were Arabic-speaking and fighters from the North Caucasus, was established in 2012 and was active in the civil war in Syria. Some who did not join ISIS pledged allegiance in September 2015 to the Al-Nusra Front (*Jabhat al-Nusra*, "the aid front"), which at the time was a Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, but subsequently split from the organization.

► Abu Umar al-Shishani became a **senior ISIS commander**, serving as ISIS's chief of Syrian military operations until his death in July 2016. The Islamic Caliphate, established in June 2014, became a challenge to the authority of the Caucasus Emirate. **The Caucasus Emirate was effectively replaced by a regional branch of ISIS called the Caucasus Province (Wilayat al-Qawqaz).** The Caucasus Province was headed by Rustam Aselderov, former head of the Caucasus Emirate's Dagestan Province (Wilayat Dagestan). **Caucasus Province operatives continued their activity in Syria, hoping for assistance from ISIS, but their hopes were not fulfilled.**

► Russian security forces operating in the North Caucasus were successful in their operations against local fighters, mainly due to the lack of **external** assistance. Many of the local fighters were killed. **The fall of ISIS in Syria meant less and less outside support.** However, ISIS's attacks against the Russian army continued in the North Caucasus and even spread to Russia itself.

The reason for the continued support for ISIS by young local fighters

► A large-scale local survey by the Dagestan government revealed that **8.1% of local militant youths declared their willingness to join ISIS.** Sympathy for the organization was at its greatest among students who responded to the survey, who listed the reasons for it: lack of opportunities, corruption, social injustice and the rise of Salafism, which they saw as an attractive alternative to the rule of the local, pro-Russian elite. A similar picture was revealed among young ISIS supporters in Chechnya. The reason is that President Ramzan Kadyrov, who has a rigid, albeit non-jihadist-Islamic orientation, supports the Putin regime and is hostile to them.

Forecast

► Fieldwork suggests that **sympathy for ISIS and its aims is high, and there are signs of an uptick in attacks in the North Caucasus.** Many of the underlying causes of radicalization and recruitment **remain unresolved**, and violence and instability may grow in the North Caucasus in the post-ISIS era if the local and federal authorities do not address them. According to the authors, it is not possible to defeat an ideology that advocates violence **without presenting a competing ideology that provides an answer to the social issues that cause recruitment into the ranks of ISIS.** Given the current difficult state of relations between the West and Russia, Western governments have been unable to influence and reduce sympathy for ISIS in the North Caucasus.

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Morocco

► **On November 23, 2020, security forces in Morocco uncovered an ISIS network numbering three operatives.** The network operated in the cities of Inezgane, about 480 km southwest of Rabat, and nearby Ait Melloul. According to security sources in Morocco, the network operatives pledged allegiance to ISIS's leader and **planned to carry out attacks** intended to shock Morocco's security and stability. The network operatives who intended to obtain weapons and materials for making IEDs (Al-Maghreb al-Youm, November 23, 2020).

Russia

► According to an initial report, Russia's federal security services **managed to thwart an ISIS attack in Moscow** and arrested a citizen of one of the East Asian countries. The suspects were reportedly engaged in extortion and raising money for terrorist purposes. It was also reported that **a self-made IED was found** where one of the suspects was arrested (mk.ru, November 25, 2020).

The battle for hearts and minds

ISIS continues to call on its supporters to carry out attacks in Saudi Arabia

► Following the attack on foreign consuls at a cemetery in Jeddah (November 11, 2020), ISIS's Al-Naba' weekly published an article **attacking the Saudi royal family and calling on ISIS operatives to carry out additional attacks in the Arabian Peninsula.**

► Highlights of the article (Telegram, November 19, 2020):

◆ **The article attacks Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his collaboration with the "Jews and the Crusaders"** (i.e., with the Jews and the West). It claims that Mohammed bin Salman is moving away from Islam and permitting the opening of nightclubs and discotheques. The article calls on Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula to "revive the religion of Islam," i.e., to adopt ISIS's version of Islam.

◆ **The attack at the cemetery was carried out in response to ISIS Spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi's call on residents of the Arabian Peninsula to attack Western civilians** ("Crusaders"). According to the article, the attack was carried out in order to

protect the good name of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, following the attack on it by France in recent weeks.

◆ The article ends with **a call on ISIS's supporters and operatives in the Arabian Peninsula to carry out attacks against the "infidels"** (i.e. Saudi government officials) **and the "Crusaders"** (i.e., Western citizens). The article also calls on its readers to assist ISIS operatives, giving them shelter, and assimilate the duty of jihad. The author notes that for many reasons, **carrying out one attack in the Arabian Peninsula is equivalent to carrying out dozens of attacks elsewhere** (implicitly, since it is where the holiest places for Muslims are located) (Telegram, November 19, 2020).