



Spotlight on Global Jihad

February 2-8, 2023



Main events of the past week

- ▶ **This week, the relatively low level of ISIS activity around the world continued. Turkey arrested a squad of ISIS operatives who planned to carry out attacks against the Swedish and Dutch consulates and against Jewish and Christian targets in Istanbul, including churches and synagogues.**
- ▶ **Syria:** The US-led Global Coalition to fight ISIS, in collaboration with the Kurdish SDF forces, arrested 210 ISIS operatives during an operation to cleanse the cities of Al-Raqqah and Al-Tabqa of ISIS presence. Among the detainees is ISIS's official in charge of the administration of the Syria Province. In the Syrian Desert, ISIS carried out several attacks against the Syrian army and forces supporting it. In the northwest of the country, at least 20 ISIS operatives took advantage of the chaos following the earthquake and escaped from prison.
- ▶ **Africa:**
 - ◆ On February 1, 2023, a summit conference was held in **Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia**, with the participation of the leaders of Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia to coordinate activities against the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab. Following the conference, a border point was opened between Kenya and Somalia to coordinate and manage joint activities.
 - ◆ **Mozambique:** ISIS carried out five attacks against Christian citizens in the northeast of the country.
 - ◆ **The Democratic Republic of the Congo:** ISIS carried out two attacks against Christian villages in the east of the country.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly called on the organization's operatives and supporters to kill Jews around the world, especially in Europe and Israel. At the same time, ISIS continues its campaign calling for the killing of Christians around the world, especially in Europe.

The Syrian arena¹



Map of Syria's provinces (freeworldmaps.net)

Aleppo region

► On February 6, 2023, at least 20 ISIS operatives managed to escape from the Rajo prison, in northwestern Syria, near the border between Syria and Turkey, taking advantage of the chaotic situation that resulted from the earthquake in the region. The prison, run by the Syrian opposition factions loyal to the Turkish government, holds approximately 2,000 detainees, approximately 1,300 of whom are ISIS operatives (Al-Arabiya, February 7, 2023).

The desert region

► On February 5, 2023, taking advantage of the fog conditions, ISIS operatives fired at Syrian army positions in the Palmyra region. A Syrian soldier was killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 5, 2023).

► On February 5, 2023, several mines were activated (apparently by ISIS) against civilian trucks in the Al-Sukhnah region, about 120 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor. Ten civilians were wounded (Al-Badia24 Facebook page, February 5, 2023).

► On February 4, 2023, an IED was set off, apparently by ISIS, against a Syrian National Guard vehicle east of Al-Sukhnah. Two National Guard members were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 4, 2023).

¹ According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.

Al-Hasakah region

► On February 3, 2023, an SDF vehicle was targeted by gunfire on the Al-Kharafi road, between Deir ez-Zor and Al-Hasakah. Two SDF fighters were killed and another was wounded (Telegram, February 3, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Al-Raqqah region

► On February 4, 2023, the US-led Global Coalition to fight ISIS announced that during a large-scale military operation called “Revenge for the Martyrs of Al-Raqqah,” carried out together with the Kurdish SDF forces for several days and ended on February 1, 2023, the cities of Al-Raqqah and Al-Tabqa (about 40 km west of Al-Raqqah), as well as several towns in the rural area of Al-Raqqah (Khotwa, February 4, 2023), were cleansed of ISIS operatives (Khotwa, February 4, 2023). A total of 210 ISIS operatives were arrested, including Khalaf Abdullah, codenamed Abu Obeida al-Shami, ISIS’s official in charge of the administration of the Syria Province. He was found in the Al-Rumeila neighborhood in Al-Raqqah (SDF Press, February 6, 2023). Weapons and documents were also found in the operation (Al-Sharq, February 4, 2023).



**Abu Obeida al-Shami, who was in charge of the administration of ISIS’s Syria Province
(SDF Press, February 6, 2023)**

The Iraqi arena



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS attacks by province²

Salah al-Din Province

► On February 3, 2023, a sticky bomb attached to a Popular Mobilization commander's car was activated in the city of Tarmiyah, about 30 km north of Baghdad. He was wounded (February 5, 2023).

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

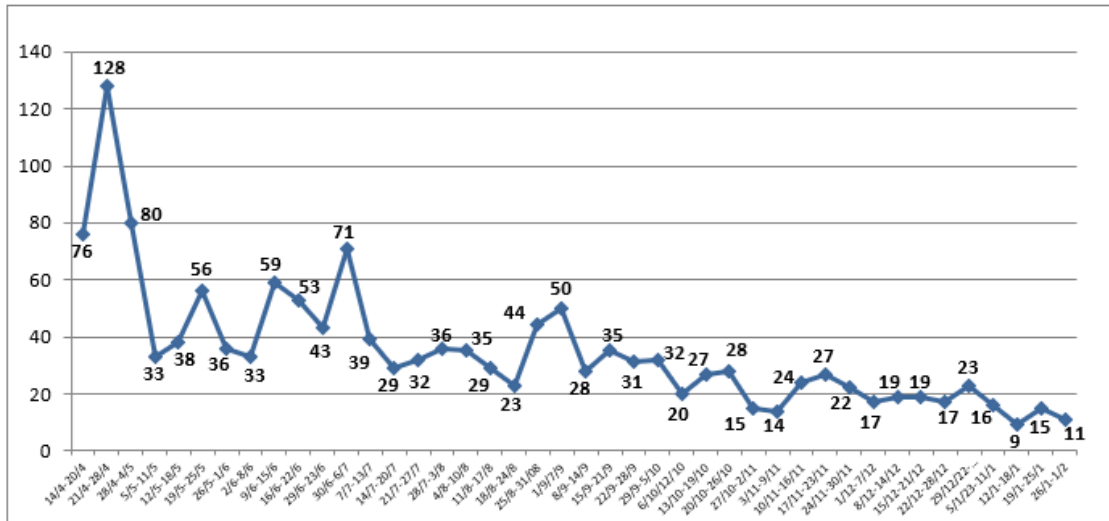
► An infographic published by ISIS, summing up its activity around the world between January 26 and February 1, 2023, indicates that the organization carried out 11 attacks in its various provinces around the globe (compared to 15 in the previous week). The largest number of attacks was carried out by ISIS's provinces of Mozambique and West Africa (three in each). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Central Africa (2); Iraq (2); and Syria (1). A total of 38 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared to 75 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Mozambique Province (18). The other casualties were in the following provinces: West Africa (11); Central Africa (4); Iraq (3); Syria (2) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, February 2, 2023).

² According to ISIS claims of responsibility and international media.



Summary of ISIS’s attacks (Al-Naba, Telegram, February 2, 2023)

ISIS attacks by week (according to ISIS data)



Africa

Number of deaths from Islamic violence in Africa increased

►The American research institute Africa Center for Strategic Studies noted in a comprehensive study published on February 6, 2023, that in 2022, the number of deaths as a result of violence by Islamic elements on the African continent increased by 22% compared to 2021. In addition, the institute noted that 40% of the death cases occurred in the Sahel region (where Al-Qaeda and ISIS-affiliated elements are active) and 37% of the incidents of violence occurred in Somalia, where the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab is active. In the Lake Chad area, where Boko Haram and ISIS are active, there was a decrease in the number of deaths in 2022, similar to 2021, and only 14% of all deaths in the region occurred as a result of

violence by Islamic elements in Africa (website of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, February 6, 2023).³

The Sahel region – a global epicenter of Islamic extremism

► On February 7, 2023, the UN's International Development Agency published a report stating that the new global epicenter of violent Islamic extremism is the Sahel region in Africa and the area south of it. According to the report, in this area, there is an increase in people joining this activity but for economic rather than religious reasons (a 92% increase in the number of people joining extremist organizations to improve their standard of living compared to the previous report, published in 2017). It was noted that the lives of many residents in Africa have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, high inflation, and climate change, and this motivates many to join extremist organizations. The report was based on interviews with about 2,200 individuals in eight countries in Africa: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan. Over 1,000 of the interviewees were former members of extremist and violent organizations who joined these organizations of their own free will or were forced to do so (AP, February 7, 2023).

Nigeria

Counterterrorism

► On February 7, 2023, it was reported that Tada Modu, a senior Boko Haram operative, died of his wounds after being wounded the previous week in an exchange of fire with a Nigerian army force in Gaizuwa, south of the Bama region, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri (Politics Nigeria, February 7, 2023).

► On January 31, 2023, a Nigerian army force and an accompanying civilian task force arrested 13 tradesmen, ISIS facilitators who provided logistical assistance to the organization. They were detained while purchasing supplies for the organization at a market in Benisheik, about 60 km west of Maiduguri, in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. They used to arrive at the market to buy food, fuel, SIM cards, clothing, and other equipment required by the terrorist operatives (Zagazola, January 31, 2023).

³ For the full version of the study, see <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/fatalities-from-militant-islamist-violence-in-africa-surge-by-nearly-50-percent/>

The Democratic Republic of the Congo⁴

- ▶ On February 3, 2023, citizens were targeted by gunfire in the Christian village of Mashongani, in the Ituri region, in northeastern Congo, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. Five citizens were murdered. Several houses were set on fire (Telegram, February 4, 2023).
- ▶ On February 1, 2023, Christian citizens were ambushed on the Komanda-Eringite road, in northeastern Congo, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. One citizen was killed and the motorcycle he was riding on was set on fire (Telegram, February 2, 2023).



A motorcycle on fire in the Ituri region, in northeastern Congo, after ISIS operatives had killed the citizen riding on it (Telegram, February 5, 2023)

Mozambique⁵

- ▶ ISIS operatives carried out five attacks against Christian residents in the province of Cabo Delgado, in northeastern Mozambique.
 - ◆ On February 6, 2023, an attack was carried out against the Christian village of Namakiol. There was an exchange of fire between ISIS operatives and local militia fighters loyal to the Mozambican government. The militia fighters fled the scene (Telegram, February 7, 2023).
 - ◆ On February 4, 2023, an attack was carried out against the Christian village of Moilo. The villagers fled and ISIS operatives set fire to about 20 homes (Telegram, February 7, 2023).
 - ◆ On February 4, 2023, Christian citizens' vehicles were ambushed on the Macomia-Bimba road. One citizen was killed and two others were wounded. Two vehicles were set on fire (Telegram, February 5, 2023).

⁴ According to claims of responsibility posted by ISIS.

⁵ According to claims of responsibility posted by ISIS.

- ◆ On February 4, 2023, citizens in the Christian village of Chaba were targeted by gunfire. Five citizens were abducted and executed (Telegram, February 4, 2023).
- ◆ On February 3, 2023, citizens were targeted by gunfire in the village of Namolo and fled. Several shops were set on fire (Telegram, February 4, 2023).

Mali

► Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), the Al-Qaeda branch in the Sahel region, met on January 26, 2023, in Mali with representatives of other armed organizations operating in the northeast of the country and signed a non-combat agreement with them as well as an agreement to fight against ISIS (World View, February 2, 2023).

Somalia

Regional summit conference to eliminate Al-Shabaab

► On February 1, 2023, a summit conference was held in Mogadishu that included the leaders of **Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia** to discuss coordinated military activity against Al-Shabaab. Following the conference, it was reported that a border point between Kenya and Somalia had been opened in northeastern Kenya, near the Kenya-Somalia-Ethiopia border triangle. It should be noted that the border between Kenya and Somalia was closed in 2012 due to the deterioration of the security situation, which resulted from the Al-Shabaab attacks. The reopening of the border point is intended to coordinate and conduct joint operations by the countries against Al-Shabaab (Garowe Online, February 4, 2023; Al Jazeera, February 1, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On February 3, 2023, an unmanned aircraft, apparently of the US military, carried out an airstrike against two Al-Shabaab vehicles loaded with explosives which were on their way to attack bases of the Somali army in the port city of Harardhere, about 400 km northeast of Mogadishu. The two car bombs were destroyed and the operatives on board were killed (All Africa, February 3, 2023).

► On January 30, 2023, a military court in Mogadishu sentenced Fartoun Abd al-Rashid Hussein to eight years in prison. She is the wife of Abd al-Qader Mumin, a senior operative in ISIS's Somalia Province. He was formerly an Al-Shabaab cleric but pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2015. Fartoun, who used false names, was arrested as early as

March 2022 by Somali security forces in a suburb of Mogadishu. She used to frequently transfer funds of \$100-200 to ISIS operatives in Somalia (AP, January 30, 2023).

Asia

Turkey

► On February 4, 2023, teams of Turkey’s counterterrorism unit, acting in coordination with the Turkish intelligence apparatus against ISIS in Istanbul, arrested 15 suspects of activity within ISIS who are accused of receiving instructions from ISIS’s Khorasan Province (i.e., Afghanistan) to carry out **attacks against the consulates of Sweden and the Netherlands and religious targets of Christians and Jews in Istanbul, including churches and synagogues**. Planning the attacks was probably in revenge for burning a copy of the Quran in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm on January 21, 2023 (Anatolia News Agency, February 4, 2023).⁶ It was also reported that following this, several Western countries temporarily closed their consulates in Turkey “for security reasons” (TRT network, February 4, 2023).

The Philippines

► On February 4, 2023, ISIS operatives ambushed and fired at a Philippine army patrol in the Lanao del Sur area, in the southern Philippines. A soldier was killed and three others were wounded. ISIS operatives, who managed to escape, seized three rifles and a motorcycle (Telegram, February 5, 2023).

Singapore

► On February 1, 2023, Singapore’s Ministry of Home Affairs announced that Muhammad Irfan Danyal bin Mohamad Nor, an 18-year-old student, was arrested by the security forces in December 2022 after the authorities determined that he was an immediate security threat. The detainee used a lot of ISIS propaganda content on the Internet and planned to carry out attacks of various types, including stabbing “infidels” to death in dark alleys and a multi-casualty attack against a military base. He also made a bomb to be used against a burial site which he described as un-Islamic. In addition, the detainee is suspected of planning to travel overseas and commit acts of violence there, after he manages to save enough money for that (Time, February 2, 2023

⁶ For further details, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletins from February 6, 2023, “ISIS calls for attacking Christians around the world, especially in Europe,” and from February 7, 2023, “ISIS calls for attacking Jews around the world.”

United States

Convictions of ISIS operatives

► On February 1, 2023, an Ohio court sentenced Naser Almadaoji, 23, born in Iraq and an American citizen, resident of Beavercreek, Ohio, to 10 years in prison after he pleaded guilty in November 2021 to attempting to provide material assistance to ISIS's Khorasan Province (i.e., Afghanistan). Almadaoji was arrested by an FBI task force after he bought a plane ticket on October 24, 2018, and tried to board a flight from the United States to Astana, Kazakhstan; from there he intended to enter Afghanistan through border smugglers, to join the ranks of ISIS's Khorasan Province and receive military training. Before that, on February 16-24, 2018, he traveled to Egypt and Jordan intending to join ISIS's Sinai Province, but this move failed. Almadaoji previously pledged allegiance to the leader of ISIS and even sent the video to the organization (US Department of Justice website, February 1, 2023).

► On February 2, 2023, a court in Manhattan, New York, sentenced James Bradley, 21, from the Bronx, to 11 years in prison, and the next day, on February 3, 2023, sentenced his wife, Arwa Muthana, 30, from Hoover, Alabama, to nine years in prison, after the two pleaded guilty in September 2022 to the charge of providing material aid to ISIS and that they tried to go to the Middle East to fight in the ranks of the organization. They were arrested on March 31, 2021, at the port in New Jersey, New York, after planning to board a cargo ship that was supposed to sail to Yemen. The two distributed radical content on the Internet. Bradley told an undercover agent who presented himself as a supporter of terrorism that he wanted to carry out an attack on US soil. Among the potential targets were the US Military Academy, West Point, a university in the state of New York, and cadets. Muthana told her interrogators after she was arrested that she was ready to fight and kill Americans if it is for the sake of Allah (FOX News, February 3, 2023).

Release of an Al-Qaeda operative after he finished serving his sentence

► On February 2, 2023, the United States released Majid Khan, a former Al-Qaeda courier who had been detained for about 20 years in the American detention facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, since he was arrested in Pakistan in 2003. He was released in Belize, in Central America (east of Guatemala). Khan, who was born on February 28, 1980, and lived in Maryland in the USA, moved to Pakistan and worked in Al-Qaeda. He was in contact with Khaled Sheikh

Muhammad, who was responsible for planning the 9/11 attacks. Khan was in charge of ISIS's logistics aspects and transferred \$50,000 to terrorist operatives who carried out an attack in 2003 on a hotel in Indonesia, in which 12 people were killed. He expressed regret for his actions. The White House announced that Khan's release was carried out as part of the US administration's decision to reduce the number of detainees at Guantánamo (The Washington Free Beacon, February 3, 2023)

The battle for hearts and minds

► On February 2, 2023, ISIS's weekly Al-Naba published an editorial entitled **"Kill the Jews,"** calling on Muslims around the globe to carry out terrorist attacks against Jews (Telegram, February 2, 2023).⁷

- ◆ The article, replete with virulent anti-Semitism, demonizes the Jews and claims that there is an eternal conflict between Muslims and Jews that will continue until the Day of Judgment, and therefore, Muslims should stay away from Jews, fight them, and carry out terrorist attacks against them.

- ◆ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is described as a religious rather than a national conflict, and the only way to resolve it is through violent jihad. In this context, the author praises Islam Farokh, the perpetrator of the combined attack in Jerusalem (November 23, 2022) whose action was inspired by ISIS.

- ◆ The article criticizes the regimes in the Arab and Islamic world that maintain relations with Israel.

► In the ITIC's assessment, the background for the encouragement of ISIS operatives to attack Jews and Christians is the unprecedented decrease in the scope of ISIS's activity around the globe in recent months.

⁷ For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 7, 2023, "ISIS calls for attacking Jews around the world"



The editorial entitled “Kill the Jews,” with the photo of Islam Farokh on the top corner (Telegram, February 2, 2023)

ISIS supporters continue to encourage attacking Christians

► ISIS’s campaign, which calls for murdering Christians around the world, especially in Europe, continued this week. The campaign began following the burning of a Quran by lawyer Rasmus Paludan, a Danish-Swedish politician and leader of the far-right Stram Kurs (Hard Line) party in Denmark, in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden, on January 21, 2023. ISIS seeks to take advantage of this campaign to resume its activity, especially in Europe.

► In this context, the ISIS-affiliated Sarh al-Khilafah foundation released on February 3, 2023, a video entitled “Avenge Your Religion, O Muslim in Europe.” The video, which is about four minutes long (in English and Arabic), calls on Muslims in Europe to carry out lone-wolf attacks. It includes video clips documenting previous ISIS attacks on the European continent, playing in the background a recording of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the organization’s first leader (2013-2019), in which he calls for violent jihad against the “infidels” and a recording of Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the organization’s spokesman (2014-2016), calling for the murder of Christians in Europe by any means possible (Telegram, February 3, 2023).



The title of the video, “Avenge Your Religion, O Muslim in Europe,” with flames, a gun, and the photo of Rasmus Paludan in the background (Telegram, February 3, 2023)



A call for carrying out lone-wolf attacks and violent jihad, with a photo of Rasmus Paludan in the background (Telegram, February 3, 2023)

Opening of editing course for propaganda materials

► On February 5, 2023, the ISIS-affiliated Tala'e al-Ansar (“Pioneer Supporters”) media foundation published an announcement that it is opening a digital editing course for ISIS propaganda materials (apparently including video, audio, and photo editing), adapted for cell phones. The announcement calls on the organization’s supporters to hurry up and join the course, noting that learning how to edit is an important tool for helping ISIS in its media efforts (Telegram, February 5, 2023). The course is to open apparently in an attempt to strengthen ISIS’s propaganda network.



The announcement on the digital editing course (Telegram, February 5, 2023)