



Spotlight on Global Jihad

April 24 – May 3, 2023



Main events of the past week

- ▶ **ISIS's activity around the world this week took place on a medium-low scale. The focus of its activity was on Africa. Al-Qaeda's activity in Mali continued to be high.**
- ▶ **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that ISIS leader Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi had been killed in northwestern Syria as part of an operation by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization.** The information has not been confirmed by other sources and has not been addressed by ISIS at this time.
- ▶ **Syria:** In the Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen region, several attacks were carried out against the Kurdish SDF forces. Militants, apparently ISIS operatives, killed three Syrian fighters operating as part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the eastern periphery of the Deir ez-Zor Province.
- ▶ **Africa:**
 - ◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued its intensive activity in northeastern Nigeria, mainly against Nigerian army targets.
 - ◆ **Burkina Faso:** Terrorist operatives, apparently affiliated with ISIS or Al-Qaeda, carried out an attack against a military base in eastern Burkina Faso. A total of 33 soldiers were killed and 12 were wounded. At least 40 terrorist operatives were killed. Several dozen people were killed in an attack carried out in western Burkina Faso, near the border with Mali.
 - ◆ **Mali:** Operatives of the Islam and Muslim Support Group (JNIM), Al-Qaeda's branch in the Maghreb region and West Africa, carried out a combined attack near a military base and an airport in central Mali. At least 10 people were killed and more than 60 were wounded.

◆ **Somalia:** Countries of the African Union Task Force (ATMIS)¹, which operates in Somalia against the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab, have decided to withdraw 2,000 of their fighters from that country by the end of June 2023.

► **Germany:** A Syrian citizen suspected of being an ISIS operative who planned to carry out attacks against civilian targets in Germany using IEDs was detained.

► **Morocco:** The security forces detained 13 ISIS operatives in 10 different cities across the country.

► Al-Qaeda's central leadership called on Muslims around the world to help its operatives ("jihad fighters") work to achieve "true independence from Jewish-Crusader control." Al-Qaeda's leader in Yemen called for jihad against "agents of Iran and the United States" and noted the contacts between Iran and Saudi Arabia on the issue of a settlement in Yemen, which, in his view, symbolizes Saudi Arabia's defeat.

Turkish President announces the death of ISIS's leader

► On April 30, 2022, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced in a live interview on Turkish TV that during an operation by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) forces in northwestern Syria on April 29, 2023, the forces killed ISIS's leader, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi², whose true identity has not been disclosed by ISIS. Erdoğan noted that Al-Qurashi had been under surveillance by Turkish intelligence for a long time. He stressed that Turkey would continue to fight terrorist organizations indiscriminately (Anatolia News Agency, April 30, 2023). ISIS has not addressed the report yet, and it has also not been confirmed by international sources.

► According to details revealed about the operation, Turkish Intelligence received intelligence according to which Al-Qurashi, who used to change hiding places, was in an isolated house in the town of Jindires, near Afrin (about 40 km northwest of Aleppo and about 7 km east of the Syrian-Turkish border). The forces raided the house and demanded that he surrender, but he did not respond. They surrounded the building and prepared for a break-in. However, Al-Qurashi detonated the explosive belt he was wearing and was killed (Hürriyet, April 30, 2023).

¹ African Union Peacekeeping Task Force in Somalia (ATMIS - The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia) is a force consisting of soldiers from East African countries Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, designed to assist Somali army in the fight against Al-Shabaab.

² Originally, Erdoğan referred to him as "Abu Hussein al-Qurayshi."

Syrian sources reported that he was killed in a joint operation by Turkish Intelligence and fighters of the National Army (Al-Jaysh al-Watani), a Turkish-backed rebel organization (Akhbar al-Aan, May 1, 2023).

► Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi was declared the leader of ISIS on November 30, 2022, following the death of the previous leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi, in mid-October 2022. He was ISIS's fourth leader after his three predecessors were killed.



Right: The location of Jindires, in northeastern Syria (Google Maps). Left: The building where Al-Qurashi was staying before he was killed (Akhbar al-Aan, May 1, 2023)

Decline in ISIS's activity in Syria and Iraq

► On April 24, 2023, **Major General Matthew McFarlane, commander of the Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve**, who is in charge of fighting ISIS on behalf of the US Department of Defense, announced that thanks to the activity of partners supported by the international coalition, **there has been a significant decline in ISIS's activity in Iraq and Syria since the beginning of 2023**. He noted that in the period from January 1, 2023, to the first week of April 2023, there was a 68 percent decrease in ISIS's activity in Iraq compared to the same period last year (in 2022). In Syria, there was a 55 percent decline in ISIS's activity during this period.

► According to MacFarlane, recently, ISIS's attacks have been carried out by one or a few operatives and the organization has not been able to organize or coordinate attacks involving a large number of operatives. MacFarlane also noted that this year's month of Ramadan was one of the quietest in recent years in terms of ISIS's activity, as in the past, the organization used to incite and carry out more complex attacks during that month (Homeland Security Today, April 25, 2023).

The Syrian Arena³



Syria's provinces (Free world maps)

ISIS's activity

Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen region

► **This week, ISIS operatives carried out several attacks against the Kurdish SDF forces and an Iranian-backed militia:**

- ◆ On April 27, 2023, militants, apparently ISIS operatives riding a motorcycle, shot at a commander in the Military Council of Deir ez-Zor, which belongs to the SDF, near his home in the town of Al-Basira, about 15 km north of Al-Mayadeen. He was killed, and one of his relatives was wounded (Syria TV, April 27, 2023).
- ◆ On April 24, 2023, an RPG rocket was fired at an SDF checkpoint in the town of Al-Shahil, about 9 km north of Al-Mayadeen. Several SDF fighters were wounded (Telegram, April 25, 2023).
- ◆ On April 24, 2023, armed operatives, apparently ISIS operatives, fired at fighters of an Iranian-backed militia in the desert area of the town of Mahkan, about 5 km southeast of Al-Mayadeen. Two fighters were killed (Deir ez-Zor 24, April 24, 2023).

Al-Raqqah region

► On April 28, 2023, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle about 30 km north of Al-Raqqah. Two SDF fighters were killed and three others were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, April 28, 2023).

³ According to ISIS's claims of responsibility and the global media.

► On April 27, 2023, an IED was activated against an SDF vehicle on the road between Al-Raqqah and the village of Hazimah, about 18 km north of Al-Raqqah. Two SDF fighters were killed and three others were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, April 28, 2023). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. According to its report, four SDF fighters were killed and wounded in the incident (Telegram, April 27, 2023).

The desert region

► Militants, apparently ISIS operatives, attacked three fighters with Syrian citizenship operating as part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards while they were riding a motorcycle in the eastern periphery of Deir ez-Zor Province. The three were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, April 24, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On May 2, 2023, special units of the SDF forces, with air support from the US-led international coalition forces, operated in the town of Al-Hawl, about 30 km southeast of Al-Hasakah, where a detention camp is located where family members of ISIS operatives are held. An ISIS operative who transferred weapons to ISIS terrorist cells inside the camp and smuggled ISIS operatives from the camp to other areas was detained. Another man who collaborated with him was also detained. Technical equipment was found in the apartment where the two lived (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 2, 2023).

Iraq



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS attacks by province⁴

Nineveh Province

► On April 28, 2023, an Iraqi soldier was abducted and shot to death near the town of Al-Kuwayr, about 35 km southeast of Mosul (Telegram, April 29, 2023). According to local sources, seven ISIS operatives attacked a Kurdish fisherman on the bank of the Great Zab River, in the area of Al-Kuwayr. The fisherman was accompanied by his friend, who was later found bound. The friend reported to the fisherman's family that ISIS operatives had shot him in the head after he admitted to them that he was an Iraqi army soldier. It was noted that the attack was carried out in an area where there is no security coordination between the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army (Kurdistan24, April 29, 2023).

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► According to an infographic published by ISIS's weekly Al-Naba, summarizing ISIS's activity in the period between April 20 and 26, 2023, ISIS operatives carried out 11 attacks in the various provinces during this period (compared with 27 in the previous week). The West Africa Province carried out the highest number of attacks (6). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Iraq (3); Central Africa (1); Syria (1). A total of 30 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared with 81 in the previous week. The West Africa Province had the largest

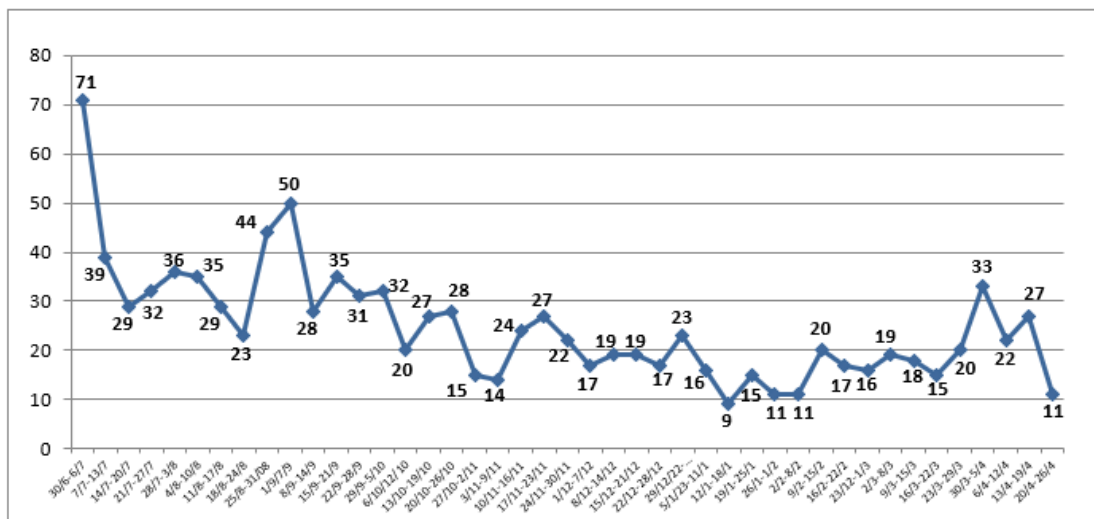
⁴ According to announcements by ISIS and the global media.

number of casualties (19). Other dead and wounded: Central Africa (8); Syria (3) (Al-Naba weekly; Telegram, April 27, 2023).



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly; Telegram, April 27, 2023)

Attacks by week (according to ISIS data)



Africa

Nigeria

ISIS's activity

► During the past week, ISIS continued its activity in the northeast of the country, mainly against Nigerian army targets. Following are the main incidents:

- ◆ On April 27, 2023, three IEDs were activated against two Nigerian army patrols in the town of Malam Fatori, about 200 km north of Maiduguri. A total of 15 soldiers were killed or wounded, and two vehicles were destroyed (Telegram, April 29, 2023).
- ◆ On April 25, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Nigerian army position in the town of Pulka, about 90 km southeast of Maiduguri. One soldier was killed, and the rest fled (Telegram, April 25, 2023).
- ◆ On April 24, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol in the town of San San, about 5 km southeast of the Nigeria-Niger border. Four soldiers were killed, and 10 others were wounded. One armored vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, April 25, 2023).
- ◆ On April 24, 2023, ISIS operatives abducted four residents, including a local leader, in the village of Laayi, about 5 km southeast of the Nigeria-Niger border. They planted IEDs as they retreated. The following day, when army forces patrolled the area, one of the IEDs was activated against a vehicle, and the five soldiers on board were killed (Barron's, April 26, 2023).
- ◆ On April 24, 2023, a mortar shell was fired at a Nigerian army camp in the town of Wajiroko, about 100 km southwest of Maiduguri (Telegram, April 25, 2023). No casualties were reported.
- ◆ On the night of April 24, 2023, ISIS operatives carried out an attack against a Nigerian army position on the outskirts of the town of Bama, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. The attackers were repulsed and retreated (Zagazola, April 24, 2023).
- ◆ On April 23, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol about 4 km southwest of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. The passengers on board a vehicle were killed or wounded (Telegram, April 25, 2023).
- ◆ On April 21, 2023, ISIS operatives killed eight bandits near the village of Gawni, in Borno State, and seized three assault rifles (Telegram, April 25, 2023).

Abduction of humanitarian aid workers

- ▶ On the night of April 25-26, 2023, terrorist operatives (apparently ISIS or Boko Haram operatives) abducted three men, aid workers of Family Health International (FHI) 360, and two security guards accompanying them, while they were staying at a guest house in the

town of Ngala, about 4 km southwest of the Nigeria-Cameroon border (Channels Television), April 27, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On April 30, 2023, Nigerian military forces, in collaboration with local militiamen, operated against Boko Haram hideouts in the village of Gargash, about 100 km southeast of Maiduguri. Several Boko Haram operatives were killed. During the operation, two humanitarian aid workers who were kidnapped in 2022 were rescued in Monguno, about 100 km northeast of Maiduguri. Three vehicles were seized, one of them carrying an anti-aircraft gun (Zagazola, April 30, 2023).

► On April 29, 2023, the Nigerian army fired artillery at a convoy of ISIS machine gun-carrying vehicles while they were in the village of Ambia, about 20 km south of Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State. One of the shells hit an ISIS vehicle. Several operatives were killed and several others were wounded (Daily Post, May 1, 2023).

► On April 17-20, 2023, Nigerian military forces operated in collaboration with local militia fighters (the Civilian Joint Task Force - CJTF) against Boko Haram hideouts on the edge of Sambisa Forest, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. A total of 35 Boko Haram operatives were killed in various incidents. In addition, 12 Boko Haram camps in this forest were destroyed (Zagazola, April 23, 2023). Following this operation, on April 30, 2023, a total of 135 Boko Haram operatives and their family members turned themselves in to the Nigerian army forces (Zagazola, April 30, 2023).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

ISIS's activity

► On April 28, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians in the village of Qabasioa, in the Beni region, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda. A civilian was killed (Telegram, April 29, 2023).

► On April 27, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians in several villages in the Mbau region, about 13 km north of Beni and about 50 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. A total of 18 civilians were killed (Telegram, May 1, 2023).

► On April 25, 2023, an ambush was set up and shots were fired at a joint Ugandan-Congolese army patrol near the town of Karoruma, in the Beni region, about 2 km west of the Congo-

Uganda border. Five soldiers were killed and three others were wounded (Telegram, April 26, 2023).

Burkina Faso

Terrorist activity

► On April 27, 2023, terrorist operatives (affiliated with ISIS or Al-Qaeda) carried out a large-scale attack against a Burkina Faso army base in the east of the country. A total of 33 soldiers were killed and 12 were wounded. At least 40 terrorist operatives were killed in the heavy exchange of fire (Barron's and Al-Jazeera, April 27, 2023).

► On April 20, 2023, about 100 gunmen on motorcycles attacked the village of Karma, in western Burkina Faso and near the border with Mali. A total of 60 people were killed. Local officials estimate the final death toll at around 80 people. ISIS or Al-Qaeda-affiliated elements who came from Mali are apparently behind the incident (AFP, April 24, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On April 25-26, 2023, a Burkina Faso army force operated against terrorist operatives (apparently affiliated with ISIS or Al-Qaeda) in Kantchari, in the east of the country, near the Burkina-Faso-Niger border. Dozens of terrorist operatives were killed, including some who tried to flee towards the Burkina Faso-Niger border. A large camp of the terrorist operatives was destroyed, as well as various kinds of vehicles and logistic equipment hidden there (Zagazola, April 27, 2023).

Mali

Al-Qaeda activity

► On April 22, 2023, a combined three-vehicle bomb attack was carried out near an airport and a military base in Sevare, central Mali. It was noted that the base hosts UN peacekeepers as well as fighters of the Wagner Force (Russian mercenaries operating on behalf of the Russian regime). At least ten people were killed and more than 60 were wounded. According to the Malian government, the three car bombs were destroyed by drones and about 20 buildings were destroyed as a result of the car bomb explosions (Al-Jazeera, April 22, 2023). The Support Group for Islam and Muslims, Al-Qaeda's branch in the Maghreb region and West Africa, claimed responsibility for the attack. According to ISIS, two car bombs were detonated against the airport, destroying part of it, and a third vehicle was attacked by the

Malian army. According to Al-Qaeda, dozens of Malian soldiers and Wagner Force fighters were killed. In addition, according to the organization, 15 of its operatives were killed (Barron's, April 25, 2023).

Mozambique

► On April 24, 2023, the European Union imposed sanctions on ISIS's branch in Mozambique and on two senior ISIS officials: Abu Yasir Hassan and **Bonomade Machude Omar** (European Interest, April 25, 2023).

► **Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi** said at a press conference that the security situation in the country allows the continuation of the international natural gas project in Cabo Delgado Province, in the northeast of the country. It should be noted that the gas project was stopped in April 2021 due to intensive activity by ISIS (Al-Jazeera, April 26, 2023).

Somalia

► On April 27, 2023, a summit of leaders and senior officials of the African Union Task Force (ATMIS), which operates in Somalia, was held in Entebbe, Uganda. At this meeting, it was decided that 2,000 fighters of this force would withdraw from Somali soil by the end of June 2023, and by December 31, 2024, the presence of the remaining fighters of this force would end in the country. This step will be carried out thanks to the soldiers of the Somali army, who were recently trained and operate on the front lines vis-à-vis the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab (Chimp Reporters, April 27, 2023)

Morocco

► On April 27, 2023, forces of Morocco's Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) detained 13 ISIS operatives aged 19-49 in ten different cities throughout the kingdom. Some of the detainees were involved in preparations for carrying out attacks against sensitive and vital facilities on a national level, as well as against members of the security forces and security institutions throughout the kingdom. As part of the preparations for the attacks, observations were carried out, targets for the attacks were set, and information was collected on making explosives (Asharq Al-Awsat, April 28, 2023).

Asia

Turkey

► Forces from Istanbul's public prosecutor's office detained eight people suspected of transferring money to ISIS. The funds were transferred to people whose assets were frozen due to their affiliation with ISIS. The detainees were indicted for violating the Prohibition on the Financing of Terrorism Law and belonging to an armed terrorist organization (Yeni Safak, April 29, 2023).

Afghanistan

► On April 25, 2023, a senior US administration official announced that a Taliban force had killed an ISIS operative who directed the organization's suicide bombing attack carried out at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul on August 26, 2021. A total of 11 Marines, a US Navy sailor and a US Army soldier were killed in this attack, as well as more than 150 Afghan civilians (FOX News, April 25, 2023).

Europe

Germany

► On April 25, 2023, a 28-year-old Syrian citizen suspected of being an ISIS operative was detained in Hamburg. It is suspected that the detainee planned to carry out attacks against civilian targets in Germany using IEDs, which he learned to prepare via the Internet (Jerusalem Post, April 25, 2023).

United Kingdom

► On April 27, 2023, the British government imposed sanctions, including a ban on entry into Britain and asset freezes, on two Afghan citizens, Maulawi Rajab, a senior ISIS leader, and Sultan 'Aziz 'Azam, ISIS spokesman (U.S. News, April 27, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

Al-Qaeda leadership calls for independence from “Jewish-Crusader Control”

► Al-Qaeda’s central leadership issued an announcement on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, calling on Muslims around the world to help the organization’s operatives (“jihad fighters”) work to achieve “true independence from Jewish-Crusader control [i.e., the West, led by the United States],” claiming that Islam will soon dominate the world. The organization called on non-Muslims to deepen their knowledge of Islam and free themselves from “deception by their pro-Zionist politicians” (MEMRI, April 29, 2023).

Al-Qaeda leader in Yemen calls for jihad

► **Khaled Batterfi, leader of Al-Qaeda’s branch in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)** operating from Yemen, referred to the contacts between Iran and Saudi Arabia regarding a settlement in Yemen, saying it symbolizes Saudi Arabia’s defeat. He called on the Sunni community in Yemen and Saudi Arabia to learn from the Taliban in Afghanistan and wage jihad against “agents of Iran and the United States” (MEMRI, May 1, 2023).