



Spotlight on Global Jihad

April 24 – May 3, 2023



Main events of the past week

► **This week, ISIS carried out relatively low-scale activity around the world. The focus of the activity was on Africa.**

► **Syria:** A US-led Global Coalition force, supported by the Kurdish SDF forces, detained a senior ISIS commander north of Al-Raqqah. The US Army reported an airstrike against a senior Al-Qaeda operative in northwestern Syria.

► **Africa:**

◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued its activity against Nigerian army targets and against local residents in the northeast of the country. The Nigerian Army managed to free two of three humanitarian aid workers abducted by ISIS about a week ago.

◆ **The Democratic Republic of the Congo:** ISIS continued its activity against Christian residents in the northeast of the country. At least seven residents were killed.

◆ **Mozambique:** ISIS operatives attacked a Mozambican army position in northeastern Mozambique. At least five soldiers were killed and ten wounded.

◆ **Niger:** A mine was activated against a Niger Government National Guard vehicle about 2 km north of the Niger-Burkina Faso border. Seven fighters were killed. The mine was apparently planted by ISIS or Al-Qaeda operatives.

◆ **Somalia:** The Somali Army fired at a vehicle belonging to the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab. The vehicle was carrying weapons. Several dozen operatives were killed when IEDs exploded in the vehicle.

► **Tunisia:** Three people, two of them Jews and a Tunisian security guard, were killed in an attack carried out at the entrance to a synagogue on the island of Djerba. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it may have been an Islamic-motivated attack.

► **Belgium:** Police detained seven people suspected of aiding ISIS and preparing to carry out an attack.

► **Combating the Financing of Terrorism:** The State of Israel seized accounts in digital currencies on the Binance cryptocurrency exchange platform, linked to ISIS, as part of its activity against terrorism financing.

► **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly stressed ISIS's weakness in the Arab region alongside its expansion on the African continent, noting that Africans have replaced the Arabs as successors of the path of jihad.

The killing of ISIS's leader

► Following unverified reports about the killing of ISIS leader Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi in northwestern Syria (April 29, 2023), **Hussam Hammoud, a journalist and analyst based in Al-Raqqah**, noted that following the decision of ISIS's Shura Council, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi had been removed from his post about a month before his death. According to him, the decision was made after disagreements arose between him and senior ISIS leaders regarding the nature of ISIS's military activity. Most of the disagreements revolved around the issue of attacking the prisons controlled by the Kurdish forces where ISIS operatives are being held. While Al-Qurashi called for operations against the prisons, senior figures in the organization's leadership opposed the move, describing it as "reckless."

► Against this background, according to the journalist, ISIS had appointed a new leader even before Al-Qurashi was killed. In his assessment, the origin of the new ISIS leader is also Iraqi, and ISIS will refrain from announcing him soon. The new leader will be stationed in Syria's desert area (Al-Badia) or in Iraq's Al-Anbar Desert (Hussam Hammoud's Twitter account, May 4, 2023).¹

Summary of US activity against ISIS in Syria and Iraq

► According to a report by the US Central Command (CENTCOM), in April 2023, its forces, operating in cooperation with local elements (the Kurdish SDF forces, the Iraqi Army, and the Kurdish forces in Iraq), carried out 35 operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Thirteen ISIS operatives were killed in the operations and 28 were detained (CENTCOM, May 5, 2023):

¹ <https://twitter.com/HussamHamoud/status/1654197579503095810>

ISIS's activity

Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen region

- ▶ On May 5, 2023, two oil well workers were targeted by gunfire, apparently by ISIS, in the Al-Sabai desert, while they were around Al-Suwar, about 50 km northeast of Deir ez-Zor. One worker was killed and the other was wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 5, 2023).
- ▶ On May 4, 2023, two armed ISIS operatives, riding a motorcycle, broke into the home of a fuel merchant in the town of Al-Shahil, about 9 km north of Al-Mayadeen. The two demanded that he pay \$8,000 for “charity.” The merchant refused to pay, and this caused a confrontation between the parties. The militants fled and no casualties were reported (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 4, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Al-Raqqah region

- ▶ A US-led Global Coalition force operating with the support of the SDF forces in the village of Hazimah, about 20 km north of Al-Raqqah, detained a senior ISIS commander. Two residents of the area who apparently collaborated with the organization were also detained (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 6, 2023).

Idlib region

- ▶ On May 3, 2023, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported an airstrike carried out against a senior Al-Qaeda operative in northwestern Syria. No details were provided about the senior official (CENTCOM, May 3, 2023).

Iraq



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

Counterterrorism

Diyala Province

► On May 7, 2023, an Iraqi Air Force plane attacked ISIS infrastructure around the Hamrin basin, about 75 km northeast of Baqubah. Several operatives were killed in the attack and guest houses were destroyed (Iraqi News Agency, May 7, 2023). It was later reported that among the fatalities was ISIS's emir (i.e., the official in charge) in the area of Sandij and one of his aides (Baghdad Today, May 7, 2023).

Nineveh Province

► On May 5, 2023, a Popular Mobilization force acting on intelligence surrounded an ISIS tunnel near the Jinif military airbase, about 100 km southwest of Mosul. Three ISIS operatives who were hiding in the tunnel were killed (Iraqi News Agency, May 5, 2023).

Kirkuk Province

► On May 4, 2023, Iraqi Air Force planes attacked ISIS infrastructure around Wadi al-Shai, about 30 km south of Kirkuk. Several operatives were killed, and guest houses were destroyed (Iraqi News Agency, May 4, 2023).

Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

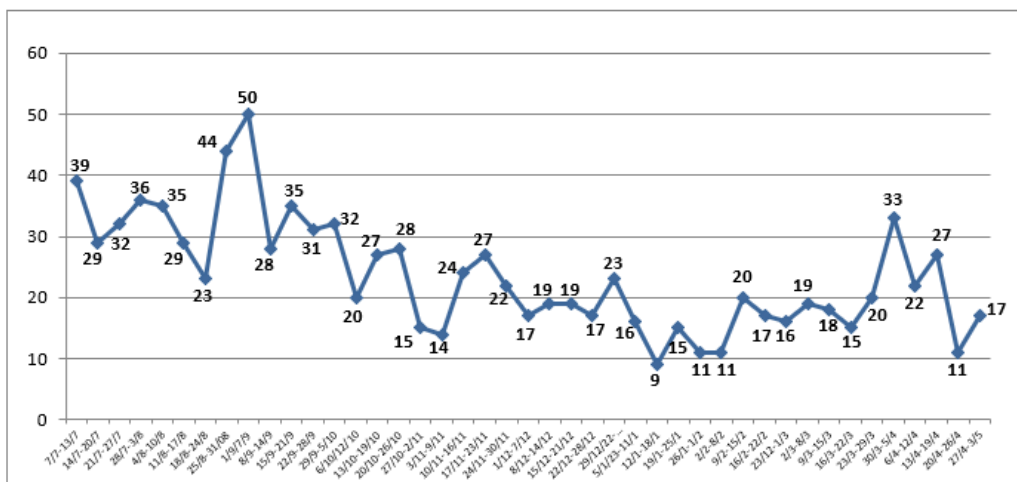
► According to an infographic published by ISIS's weekly Al-Naba, summing up ISIS's activity in the period between April 27 and May 3, 2023, ISIS operatives carried out 17 attacks in the various provinces during this period (compared with 11 in the previous week). The highest

number of attacks was carried out by the Central Africa Province (5). Attacks carried out in other provinces: West Africa (5); Syria (3), Iraq (3); and Mozambique (1). A total of 73 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared with 30 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Central Africa Province (25). Other dead and wounded: West Africa (19); Mozambique (17); Syria (11); and Iraq (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, May 4, 2023)



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly; Telegram, May 4, 2023)

Weekly attacks (according to ISIS's figures)



Africa Nigeria ISIS's activity

► In recent days, ISIS has continued its attacks against Nigerian army targets and local residents. Following are the main incidents:

- ◆ On May 6, 2023, there were exchanges of fire between ISIS operatives and Nigerian army patrol forces, which tried to advance towards their positions near the Sambisa Forest, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. According to ISIS, several soldiers were killed or wounded, and the rest fled (Telegram, May 8, 2023). According to a Nigerian army report, two ISIS commanders were killed (Vanguard, May 8, 2023).
- ◆ On May 5, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol on the Wajiroko–Damboa road, about 80 km southwest of Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria. The passengers were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 7, 2023).
- ◆ On May 4, 2023, grenades were fired using a grenade machine gun at a Nigerian army camp in the town of Malam Fatori, about 200 km north of Maiduguri. A fire broke out in the camp, but no casualties were reported (Telegram, May 7, 2023).
- ◆ On May 4, 2023, eight ISIS operatives, riding four motorcycles, abducted 14 farmers working in the fields about 10 km from the town of Banki, about 100 km southeast of Maiduguri. Subsequently, the bodies of three farmers who had been shot to death were found. Eleven farmers are still missing (Al-Arabiya, May 6, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Rescue of humanitarian aid workers

- ▶ On May 4, 2023, a Nigerian army force that exchanged fire with terrorist operatives on the Banki road, near the Nigeria-Cameroon border, released two of the three humanitarian aid workers abducted on the night of April 25-26, 2023, by Boko Haram or ISIS operatives (Zagazola, May 4, 2023; The Guardian, May 4, 2023).



Two aid workers rescued by a Nigerian army force (Zagazola, May 4, 2023)

Summary of terrorist and crime fatalities in Nigeria in Q1 2023

► According to a report published on May 7, 2023, by the Nigeria Mourns, which documents violent incidents in Nigeria, it appears that in the first quarter of 2023, at least 1,151 civilians and 79 members of the country's security forces were killed as a result of terrorist and criminal activity. The report shows that the vast majority of violent deaths were due to criminal causes, particularly robberies, in which 360 people were killed, constituting 29.27% of all fatalities. **A total of 272 people (22.11%) were killed in attacks carried out by Boko Haram and ISIS operatives.** A lower proportion were politically motivated murders and executions due to personal conflicts. The vast majority of violent incidents that ended in death occurred in the north of the country. In addition, during the period under consideration, more than 658 abductions of people were carried out across the country (Sahara Reporters, May 7, 2023).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

ISIS's activity

► **ISIS carried out several airstrikes against Christian civilians. Most of the airstrikes were carried out in the northeast of the country, near the Congo-Uganda border:**

- ◆ On May 4, 2023, an attack was carried out against the village of Katiri, about 40 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. Two civilians were killed and three were wounded. Several homes were set on fire (Telegram, May 6, 2023).
- ◆ On May 2, 2023, shots were fired at a vehicle carrying civilians in the Kasindi area, about 2 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. The vehicle caught fire and was put out of commission. No casualties were reported (Telegram, May 3, 2023).
- ◆ On May 1, 2023, an attack was carried out against several civilians in the village of Makumo, in the northeast of the country. At least five civilians were killed. Several Christian homes were set on fire (Telegram, May 3, 2023). According to reports from the local authorities, the attack was carried out at night, and at least six people were killed. It was noted that additional bodies may not yet have been found on the ground (VOA, May 3, 2023).

Niger

► On May 7, 2023, a vehicle of the National Guard, which is subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, hit a mine in the Tillabéri area, southwestern Niger, about 2 km north of the Niger-Burkina Faso border. Seven fighters were killed. According to assessments, elements

affiliated with Al-Qaeda or ISIS, operating in the area, are responsible for planting the mine (Africa News, May 8, 2023).

Mozambique

► On April 29, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Mozambican army position in the village of Mandaba, in Muidumbe, in the northeast of the country. At least five soldiers were killed and ten wounded in the heavy exchanges of fire between the sides (Telegram, May 3, 2023).



ISIS operatives attack a Mozambican army position (Telegram, May 6, 2023)

Somalia

Clashes between the Somali army and Al-Shabaab

► **This week there were two incidents between the Somali army and operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab around the city of Harardhere, northeast of Mogadishu:**

- ◆ On May 2, 2023, at 01:00 (local time), Somali army soldiers acting on intelligence fired rockets at a vehicle transporting more than 100 IEDs, which were unloaded from a vessel east of Harardhere. As a result of the explosion of IEDs in the vehicle, 67 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed. Two were detained (VOA, May 2, 2023).
- ◆ Two days later, Al-Shabaab operatives reported that they had halted two attacks by Somali army special forces and militias supporting it on the outskirts of the city of Harardhere. According to ISIS, the attacking forces suffered losses (TRACTerrorism, May 5, 2023).

Three senior Al-Shabaab officials captured in central Somalia

► During an operation carried out by the Somali army in the Galgaduud province in central Somalia, three senior Al-Shabaab commanders were detained. The three were responsible for extorting money from public vehicles traveling in the Galgaduud province (garoweonline.com, May 8, 2023).

Al-Shabaab published documentation of the construction of a dam in the south of the country

► On May 5, 2023, Al-Kataeb, Al-Shabaab's propaganda arm, published photos documenting the construction of a dam in the Bay province in southern Somalia by members of the organization (Al-Shabaab's Shahada News Agency, May 5, 2023). These photos could indicate that despite efforts by the Somali government and the United States to eliminate the group's presence, it still has control over areas in the south of the country.



Documentation of the construction of the dam (Shahada News Agency, May 5, 2023)

Significant decline in the number of Al-Shabaab attacks

► On May 4, 2023, Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre announced at a cabinet meeting that over the past six months, the number of Al-Shabaab attacks had decreased by 70%. He noted that the decline in the number of attacks is an indication that the country is slowly returning to security stability. Abdi Barre added that the Somali army, supported by local militias, managed to regain control and establish governance in more than 80 villages and towns that had previously been under Al-Shabaab's control. It should be noted that the African Union Transition Mission (ATMIS) and the Somali army control most of the country's urban centers, while Al-Shabaab operatives directly control or influence many areas of the country.

According to security experts, although Al-Shabaab operatives are being pushed out of large areas, they still pose a threat to national security and regional peace in East Africa (Garowe Online, May 5, 2023).

Tunisia

Attack on a synagogue in Djerba

► On the evening of May 9, 2023, an attack took place at a synagogue on the island of Djerba in Tunisia, killing three people. According to a report by the Ministry of Interior, a security guard at the National Guard Marine Center on Djerba Island shot and killed his colleague. He took the security guard's assault rifle and magazines and tried to reach the area of the Ghriba Synagogue, one of the oldest synagogues in the world, where the traditional event on the occasion of Lag B'Omer took place. He fired at the security forces in the area, who returned fire and killed him, preventing him from reaching the synagogue. Six security personnel were wounded and one of them died of his wounds. Also killed were two Jews who were in the parking lot at the time: Aviel Haddad, a 30-year-old Israeli living in Djerba, and his cousin, Ben Haddad, a 42-year-old French citizen. Four people were wounded (Al-Arabiya, May 9, 2023; Ynet, May 10, 2023). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it may have been an Islamic-motivated attack.



The rifle, magazines and handgun found at the scene of the attack (Al-Arabiya, May 9, 2023)

► On May 5, 2023, Libya returned four ISIS female operatives and five of their children aged 5-13 to Tunisia after they had been imprisoned in Libya. The women are expected to undergo a security interrogation. Ten other Tunisian women affiliated with ISIS are still imprisoned in Libya. They were tried in absentia and sentenced to up to 16 years in prison (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, May 5, 2023).

Asia

Pakistan

ISIS's activity

► On May 5, 2023, an IED was activated against a local militia fighter supporting the Pakistani government, in the village of Anait, in the Bajaur region, on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The fighter was killed (Telegram, May 7, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On May 6, 2023, members of the counterterrorism unit in Punjab Province carried out operations against several dozen suspected terrorists. Eleven of the suspects, belonging to various terrorist organizations including ISIS, were detained. Explosives, hand grenades, two IEDs, and propaganda materials were found (Daily News, May 7, 2023).

Iran

► On May 7, 2023, the IRGC announced that it had detained a senior ISIS commander while he was trying to enter Iranian territory. It was also reported that the members of this network were also detained by means of security and intelligence measures in Iranian territory (Al-Mayadeen, May 7, 2023).

India

► Intelligence agencies warned that ISIS had begun a campaign to recruit young people with technological backgrounds from India, mainly from Karnataka in the southwest and Rajasthan in northwestern India. According to intelligence sources, there has recently been an increase in the number of young people in India who have undergone a process of radicalization and joined the ranks of ISIS. According to a security source in India, in December 2022, intelligence information was received, according to which 21 young people who underwent a process of radicalization joined ISIS. In the following months, the number increased: In January 2023, a total of 28 young people with technological backgrounds joined, in February 2023, a total of 37 young people joined ISIS, and in March 2023, a total of 36 young people joined the organization.

► According to the report, ISIS recruits young people through the Internet. Upon their enlistment, they undergo a process of radicalization and training in carrying out terrorist activity through the Dark Web Academy, established by ISIS. According to intelligence sources, a group called The Transparent Tribe collects data from universities through hacking

and online theft and provides information to terrorist organizations, including ISIS (The Tribune, May 8, 2023).

Europe

Belgium

► On May 4, 2023, the Belgian Prosecutor General announced that police forces had arrested seven people suspected of assisting ISIS and preparing to carry out an attack. Three of the detainees have Belgian citizenship. According to the announcement, the target of the attack is still unknown (Al-Arabiya, May 4, 2023).

► On May 3, 2023, a Belgian police force in the town of Hasselt, in the northeast of the country, arrested an Iraqi immigrant (identified by his initials O.Y.T.), born in 1979, on suspicion of belonging to an Al-Qaeda terrorist cell. The suspect is accused of being involved in carrying out car bomb attacks against Baghdad's Green Zone between 2009 and 2010. A total of 376 people were killed in the attacks and more than 2,300 were wounded. The detainee, who has been staying in the country as a refugee since 2015, was brought to court on May 5, 2023 (Arab News, May 5, 2023).

Russia

► On May 5, 2023, theater director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriyuchuk were arrested in Russia on charges of "justifying terrorism." The two staged a play about Russian women being recruited online to marry ISIS fighters in Syria. According to Russian prosecutors, the play "romanticizes, justifies, and glorifies terrorists" (CNN, May 7, 2023).

Terrorism Financing

► According to documents from the Bureau for Counter Terror Financing (NBCTF) of Israel, since December 2021, the State of Israel has seized 189 accounts that were conducted in digital currencies on the Binance crypto exchange platform. It was found that two of the accounts, which were seized on January 12, 2023, were linked to ISIS. One of the ISIS-affiliated account holders is a 28-year-old Palestinian named Osama Abu Bayda (Tech12, May 5, 2023).

► On May 8, 2023, FBI agents in northeastern Virginia arrested Mohammed Azharuddin Chhipa. Chhipa, a 33-year-old native of India and resident of the United States, is suspected of providing material support to ISIS by transferring money. The investigation into his case began in August 2021. The FBI said that according to financial records, he purchased more than \$172,000 in digital currencies and sent part of the sum to ISIS women held in a refugee camp

in Syria. If Chippa is convicted, he could be sentenced to up to 20 years in prison (FOX 5, May 9, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

- ▶ The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly was published this week under the title "[Allah] has replaced you with another people [to continue jihad]." It deals with the organization's expansion in Africa and stresses that the Africans have replaced the Arabs at the forefront of jihad.
- ▶ The author notes that ISIS's Islamic State began in Iraq and spread to Syria, and now the Muslims in Africa continue its path. He stresses that this expansion, especially in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the divine reward for the faith of the organization's fighters in Al-Baghouz, ISIS's last stronghold in Syria (lost in March 2019). He emphasizes that, to the dismay of the "infidels," Allah has replaced the Arabs with the inhabitants of Africa to continue jihad.
- ▶ The author notes that the "infidels" and their armies repeatedly fail in fighting against the organization's fighters in Africa. The United States and the European Union take futile steps to put the organization's commanders on terror lists and impose economic sanctions on them as if those commanders have an interest in opening bank accounts, purchasing plane tickets, and spending a pleasant time in Western countries and their allies. According to him, those commanders are devoted to the path of jihad and committed to continue in this path.
- ▶ The author concludes by stating that this is a new era for Africa, calling it an era of jihad. An era that began when Muslims in Africa adopted Sharia and the principle of the Caliphate after their Islamic identity had weakened. As a result, Allah made their path successful in Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and elsewhere in the continent, in a way that is a source of pride for all Muslims, because without jihad, there is no life for Muslims (Al-Naba weekly; Telegram, May 4, 2023).



The article: “[Allah] has replaced you with another people [to continue jihad]” (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, May 4, 2023)