



Spotlight on Global Jihad

June 1-7, 2023



Main events of the past week

- ▶ **The decline in ISIS's activity around the world continues. The organization's activity focused on Africa.**
- ▶ **Sinai Peninsula:** An Egyptian border guard infiltrated Israeli territory and killed three IDF soldiers.¹ There is a suspicion that he operated on a jihadist background.
- ▶ **Syria:** The United States and Turkey imposed sanctions on a senior operative of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS.
- ▶ **Africa:**
 - ◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued its high-intensity activity against the Nigerian army in the northeast of the country.
 - ◆ **Democratic Republic of the Congo:** ISIS continued its activity against Christian residents near the Ugandan border. At least 20 civilians were murdered.
 - ◆ **Somalia:** The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab attacked a Somali army base on the outskirts of Masagawa, about 300 km north of Mogadishu. At least 17 soldiers were killed.
 - ◆ **Kenya:** Al-Shabaab is recruiting Somali refugees in refugee camps in Kenya. ISIS operatives killed two policemen and wounded five near the border with Somalia.
- ▶ **Afghanistan:** A car bomb was detonated against a vehicle carrying a Taliban deputy governor of a province. The deputy governor and another man were killed and six people were wounded.
- ▶ **Germany:** Seven people were detained on suspicion of belonging to an international network that raised donations for ISIS's activity in Syria via the Internet.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly stressed the importance of jihad in the process of imposing Islam in the world and purging it of "infidels."

¹ For further details about the attack, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from June 7, 2023, "Spotlight on Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, May 31-June 6, 2023."

According to the author, ISIS is fighting the “infidels” out of a genuine religious commitment to impose Islam in the world.

Sinai Peninsula

Attack on the Egyptian border

► In the early morning hours of June 3, 2023, an Egyptian border guard entered Israeli territory through an emergency crossing in the security fence and killed three IDF soldiers. He was suspected of having a religious jihadi background. He was found in possession of a Quran (Arabi Post, June 4, 2023).

► His relatives rejected claims that he had undergone religious radicalization but claimed that he felt anger and hostility towards Israel after his colleague was killed by the IDF. It was also noted that he was “troubled about his military service,” implying that he may not have been at peace with his service in the Egyptian army (BBC in Arabic and Al-Jazeera, June 5, 2023). An examination of his Facebook page revealed that he had an affinity for Islam, though he did not express extremist thoughts. The Facebook page did not include at the time of examination any references to the Palestinian issue (@mohamedsalah Facebook page).

The Syrian Arena²



Provinces of Syria (Free World Maps)

ISIS's activity

Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen region

- ▶ On May 30, 2023, shots were fired at a vehicle of the Kurdish SDF forces in the village of Al-Hilweh, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. One fighter was wounded (Telegram, May 31, 2023).
- ▶ On May 30, 2023, shots were fired at an SDF checkpoint near the Al-Basira Bridge, about 10 km north of Al-Mayadeen. One fighter was killed and five others were wounded (Telegram, May 31, 2023).

Al-Hasakah area

- ▶ On June 6, 2023, shots were fired at an SDF vehicle in the village of Al-Saada al-Gharbia, about 80 km south of Al-Hasakah. Four fighters were killed or wounded. The vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, June 6, 2023).

The desert region

- ▶ On June 6, 2023, ISIS operatives shot and killed four workers, all family members, while they were harvesting grain in the Al-Sukhnah area, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 6, 2023).

² According to ISIS's claims of responsibility and the global media.

Counterterrorism

Northeastern Syria

► On June 4, 2023, the SDF forces announced that in May 2023, the forces had carried out 12 operations against ISIS. Eight of them were carried out in coordination with the counterterrorism forces of the Kurdistan Region (CTG) and four in cooperation with the US-led Global Coalition forces. A total of 21 ISIS operatives were detained and another operative was killed in these operations (SDF Press, June 4, 2023).

Sanctions imposed on a senior HTS operative

► On May 2, 2023, the United States and Turkey jointly imposed sanctions on Abu **Ahmed** Zakour, codenamed Omar al-Sheikh (or Jihad Issa al-Sheikh), who is in charge of the finances at the Al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS. He is considered the number two man in the organization and serves as the right-hand man of Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the organization's leader. He previously operated in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front (the Al-Qaeda-affiliated organization that preceded HTS) and served as deputy commander (emir) in Aleppo and later as the commander of the organization in the city. Zakour expressed regret at the step taken by Turkey, attacked the United States, and called the sanctions imposed on him "insignificant" because, according to him, he does not hold funds outside Syria and is not responsible for finances in the organization (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2, 2023; Aram, May 2, 2023).



Abu Ahmed Zakour, senior HTS figure (Orient News, May 3, 2023)

Salah al-Din Province

► On June 7, 2023, an Iraqi army and Popular Mobilization force set up an ambush in the Al-Tarmiyah district, about 25 km north of Baghdad. Four ISIS operatives, including the commander (wali) of ISIS's Northern Baghdad Province, were killed (Iraqi News Agency, June 7, 2023).

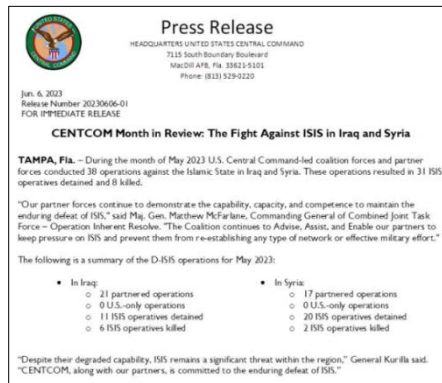
ISIS operatives returned from Syria to Iraq

► On June 3, 2023, the SDF forces returned 50 ISIS operatives to Iraq. The operatives had been imprisoned in the Al-Hasakah province in northeastern Syria. It was noted that they would be interrogated and prosecuted. On the same day, a total of 168 family members of Iraqi ISIS operatives who had been detained in the Al-Hol camp were returned to Iraq. The families will be transferred to the Al-Jad'ah refugee center, about 60 km south of Mosul, where they will receive mental health treatment. It was noted that they would return to their homes after the tribal leaders in their area of residence promised that no harm would be done to them and that no acts of revenge would be carried out against them (Al-Arabiya, June 4, 2023).

Summary of US activity against ISIS in Syria and Iraq

► According to a report by the US Central Command (CENTCOM), during May 2023, its forces, in cooperation with local elements (the Kurdish SDF forces, the Iraqi army, and the Kurdish forces in Iraq), carried out 38 operations in Syria and Iraq against ISIS. Eight ISIS operatives were killed and 31 were detained. According to General Michael Kurilla, commander of the Central Command, although ISIS's capabilities have decreased, the organization remains a significant threat to the region (CENTCOM, June 6, 2023).

► According to the report, 17 joint operations were carried out **in Syria**. Two ISIS operatives were killed and 20 others were detained. In **Iraq**, 21 operations were carried out in cooperation with local elements, killing six ISIS operatives and detaining 11 (CENTCOM, June 6, 2023).



CENTCOM announcement summarizing the activity against ISIS in May 2023 (CENTCOM, June 6, 2023)

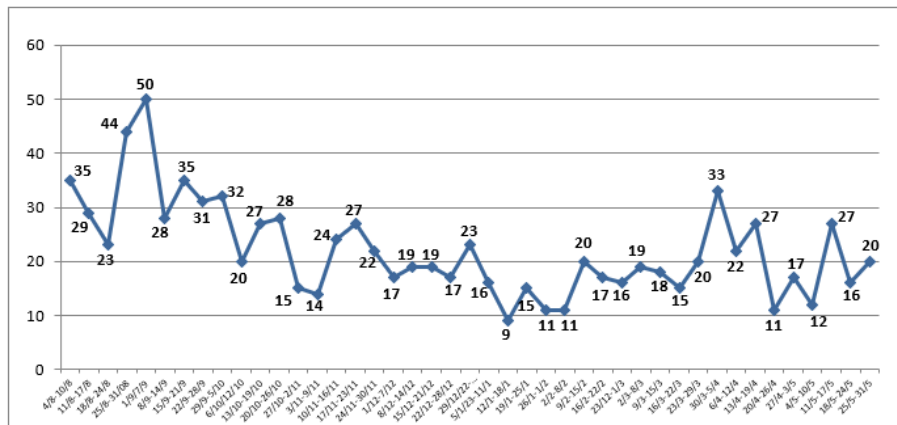
Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► According to an infographic published by Al-Naba, ISIS's weekly, summarizing ISIS's activity in the period between May 25 and 31, 2023, ISIS operatives carried out 20 attacks in the various provinces during this period (compared with 16 the previous week). The West Africa Province carried out the highest number of attacks (7). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Syria (4); Central Africa (3); Sahel (2); Iraq (2); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1); and Mozambique (1). A total of 105 people were killed and wounded, compared with 57 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the Sahel Province (52). The rest of the casualties: Central Africa (21); West Africa (16); Syria (11); Iraq (3); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1); and Mozambique (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 1, 2023).



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 1, 2023)

Weekly attacks (according to ISIS's figures)



Africa Nigeria

ISIS's activity

► On June 2, 2023, ISIS carried out several attacks against the Nigerian army in Borno State, in the northeast of the country:

- ◆ An attack was carried out against military forces in the town of Dikwa, about 80 km northeast of Maiduguri. One soldier was killed (Telegram, June 4, 2023).
- ◆ An attack was carried out against Nigerian army forces who were on their way to the town of Arege, about 40 km southwest of the Nigeria-Niger-Chad tri-border area, to support the African Coalition (MNJTF)⁴ forces. Two soldiers were killed and 11 others were wounded (Zagazola, June 3-4, 2023). According to ISIS's announcement, ISIS operatives attacked a convoy of Nigerian army forces in the area. During the exchange of fire, a car bomb driven by a suicide bomber codenamed Abu Ali al-Ansari was detonated. At least 20 soldiers were killed or wounded. Two armored vehicles were destroyed and four other vehicles were put out of commission. Weapons and ammunition were seized (Amaq, Telegram, June 4, 2023).
- ◆ An attack was carried out against a Nigerian army headquarters near the town of Gajiganna, about 40 km north of Maiduguri. The soldiers fled (Telegram, June 3, 2023).

► On June 3, 2023, militants attacked several villages in the Katsina-Ala area, about 70 km northwest of the Cameroon-Nigeria border. At least 25 people were killed and several others

⁴ The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) consists of troops from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Benin, and Niger.

were wounded. Houses and property were set on fire (The Sun, a news website operating in Lagos, Nigeria, June 3, 2023). So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the attack, but these apparently were ISIS or Boko Haram operatives.

► On June 1, 2023, a Red Cross worker was abducted near the town of Damasak, about 3 km south of the Nigeria-Niger border. He was executed (Telegram, June 1, 2023).

ISIS operatives turned themselves in

► On May 31, 2023, a total of 73 ISIS operatives and their families, including women and dozens of children, surrendered to the Nigerian army at several sites throughout Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria (Zagazola, June 2, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On June 2-3, 2023, the Nigerian army, with the support of additional forces, carried out an extensive operation against ISIS operatives in the Lake Chad area. Dozens of ISIS operatives and their families fled. At least 82 of them drowned in the Komadugu River, about 3 km south of the Nigeria-Niger border, while trying to cross it to reach Niger (Zagazola, June 3, 2023).

► On June 1, 2023, a Nigerian army force ambushed terrorist operatives in the Chikun area, Kaduna State, about 135 km north of the capital Abuja. During the exchange of fire, three terrorist operatives were killed (belonging to ISIS or Boko Haram). Two assault rifles, ammunition, equipment, and a motorcycle were found (Chronicle, June 2, 2023).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

ISIS's activity

► **ISIS carried out several attacks against Christian civilians and military targets near the Congo-Uganda border:**

◆ On June 4, 2023, there was an exchange of fire between ISIS operatives and Ugandan army foot patrol soldiers near the village of Mulkiya, about 50 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. Several soldiers were wounded (Telegram, June 5, 2023). Ugandan army forces operate in the Democratic Republic of Congo, near the border between the two countries, as part of the forces operating against ISIS in this area.

◆ On June 3, 2023, Christian civilians were ambushed on the road between the villages of Luna and Idoho, in the Ituri region of northeastern Congo. Two civilians were

abducted and murdered, and their two motorcycles were set on fire (Telegram, June 5, 2023).

- ◆ On June 2, 2023, an ambush was set up and shots were fired at Christian civilians along the road of the village of Nadalia, in the Ituri area. Five civilians were killed (Telegram, June 2, 2023).

- ◆ On June 1, 2023, an attack was carried out against the Christian village of Kanyamutsutsa, in the Beni area. Eleven civilians were murdered. Several houses were set on fire and some of their property was taken (Telegram, June 2, 2023).

- ◆ On May 31, 2023, Christian civilians were ambushed and shot at on the Komanda road, about 55 km northwest of the Congo-Uganda border. Two civilians were killed (Telegram, June 2, 2023).

- ◆ On May 29, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians near the village of Musia, in the Beni region. Several civilians were murdered or wounded. Some of their property was seized (Telegram, June 1, 2023).

Niger

ISIS's activity

- ▶ On May 31, 2023, there were exchanges of fire between ISIS operatives and patrol forces of the Nigerien army, which tried to advance towards ISIS positions in the village of Gortua, in the Diffa region, near the Niger-Nigeria border. Sixteen soldiers were killed and wounded. A vehicle was set on fire. Two heavy machine guns, two assault rifles, and ammunition were seized (Telegram, June 1, 2023).

Cameroon

Boko Haram activity

- ▶ On June 4, 2023, Boko Haram operatives attacked a Cameroonian army position in the Goldavi area, in northern Cameroon, about 12 km southeast of the Cameroon-Nigeria border. There were exchanges of fire between the sides. Four operatives were killed and many others were wounded. There were no casualties among Cameroonian army soldiers (China.org, June 5, 2023).

- ▶ On the night of June 4, 2023, Boko Haram operatives attacked a position manned by six elite soldiers of the Cameroonian army's Rapid Intervention Battalion in the Kerawa area in

northern Cameroon, near the border with Nigeria. One soldier was killed (Big News Network, June 6, 2023).

► On May 30, 2023, Boko Haram operatives carried out several airstrikes against Cameroonian government and military targets in the towns of Zigage and Mora, in the north of the country, about 25 km southeast of the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Three customs officials, three soldiers, and two civilians were killed (AP, May 30, 2023).

Somalia

Al-Shabaab activity

► On May 30, 2023, operatives of that Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab carried out an attack against a Somali army base on the outskirts of the town of Masagawa, about 300 km north of Mogadishu. At least 17 soldiers were killed. Twelve Al-Shabaab operatives were also killed in the attack (Middle East Online; Al-Jazeera, May 30, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► The US Africa Command (AFRICOM) announced that on June 1, 2023, an airstrike was carried out using a drone against Al-Shabaab operatives near Wayanta, about 60 km southwest of the port city of Kismayo, in southwestern Somalia. Three Al-Shabaab operatives were killed (AFRICOM, June 2, 2023).

Additional details about the attack on an African Union force base

► As mentioned in our last report, on the morning of May 26, 2023, Al-Shabaab operatives attacked a base of the African Union Transition Mission (ATMIS), where Ugandan army soldiers were staying, about 90 km southwest of Mogadishu (The East African, May 26, 2023).⁵ The number of the soldiers who have been killed was not clear at that time. On June 5, 2023, it was reported that the bodies of 54 Ugandan army soldiers killed in the attack will be flown from Somalia to Uganda during the week. **This is the largest number of casualties suffered by the Ugandan army in Somalia** since its troops were stationed in Mogadishu, with UN approval, in March 2007 (The East African, June 5, 2023).

⁵ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from June 1, "Spotlight on Global Jihad (May 25-31, 2023)."

Kenya

Al-Shabaab activity

► On June 2, 2023, Al-Shabaab operatives fired several rockets at a Kenyan police vehicle patrolling the Mandera area in northeastern Kenya, near the Somali border. Two policemen were killed and five others were wounded (Nation, June 3, 2023).

Al-Shabaab recruits Somali refugees

► On May 31, 2023, it was reported that Al-Shabaab is recruiting Somali refugees at the Dadaab Refugee Complex, about 70 km west of the Kenya-Somalia border, where more than 110,000 Somali refugees who moved to Kenya following the severe drought in their country are staying. Interviews conducted with residents of the compound indicate that an Al-Shabaab operative (acting as a recruiter on behalf of the organization) usually comes to the site and tells them that the food basket received by Muslim refugees is lower than that of Christian refugees. He offers them to join the ranks of the organization for a weekly salary ranging from \$500-\$700. According to testimonies, at least some of the refugees in the camp were offered an initial sum of \$2,000 in exchange for joining Al-Shabaab. It was noted that there are about 600,000 refugees from various African countries throughout Kenya (Yahoo News, May 31, 2023).

Asia

Afghanistan

► On June 6, 2023, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb against a vehicle carrying Nizar Ahmad Ahmadi, deputy governor of Badakhshan Province in northeastern Afghanistan. Ahmadi and another man were killed, and six others were wounded (Khaama Press, June 6, 2023). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, noting that it was carried out using a parked car bomb (Telegram, June 6, 2023).



Right: Deputy governor of Badakhshan Province, Nizar Ahmad (Khaama Press, June 6, 2023).

Left: The scene of the attack (Telegram, June 6, 2023)

Pakistan

► Two assassination attacks were carried out (on June 1 and 3, 2023) against clerics loyal to the Pakistani government in the Peshawar area, about 30 km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border:

- ◆ On June 3, 2023, a cleric was shot and killed in the city of Peshawar (Telegram, June 3, 2023).
- ◆ On June 1, 2023, shots were fired at a cleric and his security guard in the city of Peshawar. The two were killed (Telegram, June 1, 2023).

Europe

Germany

Counterterrorism

► In raids carried out by more than a thousand German police officers at several sites throughout Germany, seven men and women, most of them German citizens, were arrested on suspicion of belonging to an international network that raised funds for ISIS's activity in Syria through various Internet platforms, including Telegram. The funds were collected through online campaigns, which one of the detainees operated for several years, under the slogan "Your sister is in the camp." Interrogation of the detainees revealed that at least €65,000 had been transferred to ISIS or its intermediaries. These funds were allegedly used to support ISIS operatives imprisoned in northeastern Syria and, in some cases, even helped them escape from detention facilities (DW, May 31, 2023).

United Kingdom

► On June 2, 2023, a London court sentenced Matthew King, a 19-year-old British citizen, to life imprisonment after he admitted in January 2023 that he planned to murder British soldiers in east London. It was noted that as part of his preparations, he watched ISIS videos, the contents of which included tactical training for the use of a knife. He also purchased gloves and goggles. King was arrested on May 18, 2022, by members of the London Metropolitan Police’s counter-terrorism unit after his mother reported the radicalization process that he had undergone. It was noted that while King was a teenager, he used drugs and left the school system altogether at the age of 16. Around 2020, he became interested in Islam, began visiting mosques, and watched videos about Islam on YouTube (ITV, June 2, 2023).

United States

Terrorism Financing

► A Florida court has ruled that there are grounds for filing a lawsuit, in a US court, against Qatar National Bank (QNB) and Qatar Charity (QC) on suspicion of financing terrorism. According to the court, “the Qatar National Bank and a Qatari charity must face claims they funded terrorism in Syria.” The decision was made as part of a lawsuit filed by the family of Steven Sotloff, an American journalist who was executed by ISIS in 2014. As part of the lawsuit, it is claimed that an ISIS operative who ordered the execution of Sotloff and another American journalist, James Foley, received \$800,000 transferred to him through these institutions.

► Sotloff and Foley, two American journalists, were abducted by ISIS while covering the civil war in Syria. They were held hostage, tortured, and eventually executed. ISIS released videos documenting their executions, where they were forced, moments before their deaths, to read statements including repudiation of the United States (Bloomberg Law, May 31, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial of Al-Naba, ISIS’s weekly, was published this week under the title “Why do we carry out jihad?” The article stresses the importance of jihad in the process of imposing Islam in the world and purging it of the “infidels.” The author notes that the Quran commands Muslims to fight the “infidels” until the “infidels” accept Islam and even sacrifice their lives for this mission. The writer even clarifies that nowadays preaching to Islam (da’wa) is not enough because the “infidels” do not want to hear it. Therefore, a decisive war must be waged against

the “infidels” who do not accept Islam by choice. The writer adds that ISIS does not fight the “infidels” solely because of their hostility towards Islam and not only because of the theft of Muslim resources and lands but out of a genuine religious commitment to impose Islam in the world (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 1, 2023).



The article “Why do we carry out jihad?” (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, June 1, 2023)