



Spotlight on Global Jihad

August 24-30, 2023



Main events of the past week

► **This week, the scope of ISIS's activity around the world increased. The organization's activity focused on Africa.**

► **Israel:** An indictment was filed against a resident of Rahat for membership in ISIS and an attempt to enlist support for the organization.

► **Syria:** The Salafist-jihadi organization Ansar al-Tawhid claimed responsibility for detonating a booby-trapped tunnel under Syrian army positions on the outskirts of Idlib, killing at least 11 Syrian soldiers and wounding 20 others. Two Syrian soldiers were killed and six wounded while attempting to infiltrate the rebel enclave in Idlib. ISIS prisoners reportedly escaped from Ghuwayran Prison in Al-Hasakah.

► **Iraq:** According to initial reports of fighting between ISIS operatives and forces of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Unit and the US-led Global Coalition, a Spanish soldier and a French soldier were killed. Five Coalition fighters were wounded.

- **Africa:**
 - ◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS carried out several attacks against Nigerian security forces in the northeast of the country. Clashes between Boko Haram and ISIS continued. A total of 49 women kidnapped by Boko Haram were released for ransom paid by their families.
 - ◆ **Democratic Republic of the Congo:** ISIS operatives continued their attacks against Christian civilians in the Beni area, on the Congo-Uganda border.
 - ◆ **Mali:** ISIS is expanding its propaganda activity and the imposition of Sharia as part of expanding its influence in the country.
 - ◆ **Somalia:** Operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab attacked three bases of Somali army special units and militias supporting the army. According to the organization, following the attack, it managed to retake several cities and towns in the region.

► **India:** ISIS magazine Voice of Khorasan calls on ISIS operatives and supporters to carry out attacks against the Hindu population in the country.

► **The Philippines:** ISIS claimed responsibility for two attacks against policemen and soldiers in the south of the country. This appears to be an escalation, after a period in which the organization's activity in the country was reduced.

Israel

Indictment against a resident of Rahat for membership in ISIS

► As part of an Israeli security forces' operation, Hamza Abu Za'ila, a 19-year-old resident of Rahat, was detained for interrogation in July 2023. It emerged that he supported ISIS and its ideology, pledged allegiance to ISIS, distributed videos of the organization on TikTok, and tried to persuade his associates and family members to support the organization. About a year ago, he contacted the organization's operatives through social networks and was offered to carry out an attack on Israeli territory. He was indicted on August 25, 2023. The offenses attributed to him are contacting a foreign agent and conspiracy to commit an act of terrorism (Israeli media, August 25, 2023).

The Syrian Arena



Provinces of Syria (Free World Maps)

ISIS operatives escape from Al-Hasakah prison

► On August 2, 2023, it was reported that there was a prisoner rebellion in Ghuwayran Prison, in the Al-Sina'a neighborhood of Al-Hasakah, and that the Kurdish forces guarding the facility had begun to search for ISIS cells within the prison. On the same day, it was also reported that ISIS operatives had escaped from the prison and that a curfew had been imposed on the city

of Al-Hasakah (Al-Arabiya, August 27, 2023; Shafaq News, August 28, 2023; Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 27, 2023). No details were provided about the number of prisoners who escaped or their identities.

► This is not the first time ISIS prisoners have escaped from this prison. On January 20, 2022, around 200 ISIS operatives broke into the prison, where the Kurdish forces (SDF) held more than 4,000 ISIS operatives, and released hundreds of them.¹ In this context, it should be noted that ISIS attaches great importance to the release of its prisoners, and it has already carried out operations to release its prisoners from prisons in Syria, Iraq, and throughout Africa.

CENTCOM commander visits northern Syria

► CENTCOM Commander General Michael Kurilla arrived in Syria and visited several refugee camps in the north of the country, including the Al-Hol and Roj camps, where family members of ISIS operatives are detained. During his visit, Kurilla reviewed the humanitarian conditions in the camps as well as efforts to return the refugees to their countries of origin. He also met with senior Kurdish SDF officials. At the meeting, he noted that the United States, the SDF, and the international community are committed to defeating ISIS while dealing with the humanitarian and security crisis in the refugee camps (CENTCOM Twitter account, August 23, 2023).

Idlib region

► On August 29, 2023, a Syrian army force under the command of Hezbollah operatives tried to infiltrate the northern part of the rebel enclave in Idlib. A force of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS identified and attacked the force. Two Syrian soldiers were killed and at least six were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 29, 2023).

► According to a report from August 26, 2023, an explosive tunnel exploded under Syrian army positions in the village of Al-Milaja, about 40 km southwest of Idlib. At least 11 Syrian soldiers were killed and 20 others were wounded. According to reports, two organizations belonging to the coalition of Syrian opposition organizations in Idlib are responsible for this attack: Ansar al-Tawhid and Al-Hizb al-Islami al-Turkestani (Turkestan Islamic Party) (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 26, 2023; Arab News, August 27, 2023).

¹ For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 8, 2022, "ISIS's takeover of the prison in Al-Hasakah, which it presents as an achievement, may bring about additional such actions"

► Ansar al-Tawhid issued a claim of responsibility, noting that it had booby-trapped Syrian and Russian army positions in the village of Al-Milaja and killed everyone in them. The organization noted that the operation was carried out in response to Syrian and Russian army attacks against the residents of the rebel enclave in Idlib (Telegram, August 26, 2023).



Ansar al-Tawhid's claim of responsibility (Telegram, August 26, 2023)

► On August 25, 2023, Russian fighter jets attacked HTS targets in the rebel enclave of Idlib. Seven ISIS operatives were killed and at least 13 were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 25, 2023).

ISIS's activity

Al-Hasakah region

► On August 27, 2023, an attack was carried out against an SDF vehicle in the village of Al-Saada, south of the city of Al-Hasakah. An SDF fighter was killed and several others were wounded (Telegram, August 28, 2023).

Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region

► According to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, during August 2023 there has been an escalation in ISIS's activity against the Kurdish SDF forces and civilians in the Deir ez-Zor-Al-Mayadeen region, the SDF's control area. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, during the month, ISIS carried out 12 attacks, killing four civilians and eight SDF fighters (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 29, 2023).

Counterterrorism activity

The desert region

► On August 24, 2023, Russian fighter jets attacked ISIS hiding places in the Syrian Desert, in Jabal Bishri, about 80 km west of Deir ez-Zor (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 24, 2023). No casualties were reported.

Iraq



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS's activity

Salah al-Din Province

► On August 27, 2023, an attack was carried out against an Iraqi police post north of Samarra, about 100 km north of Baghdad. One policeman was wounded. An aid force arriving at the scene was also attacked. One vehicle of the aid force was destroyed, and two other vehicles were damaged (Telegram, August 28, 2023).

Kirkuk Province

► On August 17, 2023, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army vehicle south of Daquq, about 30 km south of Kirkuk. The vehicle was destroyed and the four passengers on board were wounded (Telegram, August 23, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Salah al-Din Province

► On August 28, 2023, a plane of the US-led Global Coalition against ISIS attacked an ISIS target in the Al-Aith area, east of Tikrit. Immediately after the airstrike, forces of the Iraqi government's counterterrorism unit and a French and Spanish force belonging to the Global Coalition landed there. Those forces were ambushed by ISIS, and according to an unverified initial report, a Spanish soldier was killed, and a French soldier was abducted. According to another unverified report, five fighters were wounded, three of them French and two from the Iraqi government's counterterrorism unit (Al-Sumaria, August 28, 2023; Hadha al-Youm, August

29, 2023). The French Defense Ministry later announced that a French commando had been killed in the incident (French Defense Ministry, August 29, 2023).

Kirkuk Province

► On August 26, 2023, Iraqi security forces detained two senior ISIS operatives in the Kirkuk Province (the exact location was not specified), one of them a foreign national carrying a fake Iraqi ID card and the other belonging to the organization's Lion Cubs (Ashbal al-Khilafah) Foundation, which is nurturing the organization's future generation (Iraqi News Agency, August 26, 2023).

Sulaymaniyah Province

► On August 26, 2023, the Internal Security (Asayish) forces of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government detained two suspected ISIS operatives in two separate operations in the city of Sulaymaniyah (Rudaw, August 26, 2023).

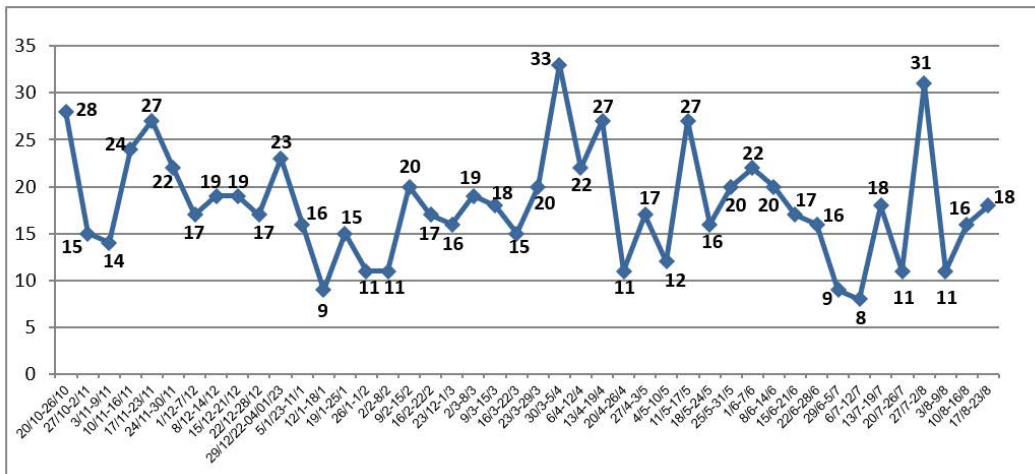
Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► According to an infographic published by Al-Naba, ISIS's weekly, summarizing ISIS's activity in the period between August 17 and 23, 2023, during this period, ISIS operatives carried out 18 attacks in the various provinces (compared with 16 in the previous week). The highest number of attacks were carried out by operatives of the Sahel and Iraq provinces (four each). Attacks carried out in other provinces: West Africa (3); Central Africa (2); Mozambique (2); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (2); and Syria (1). A total of 93 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared with 103 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in Central Africa (23). In the other provinces: the Sahel (20); West Africa (19); Mozambique (14); Iraq (8); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (6); and Syria (3) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023).



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023)

Attacks by week (according to ISIS’s figures)



Africa

Nigeria

ISIS’s activity

- ▶ On August 26, 2023, an attack was carried out against local militia fighters supporting the Nigerian army in the Sambisa Forest area, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria. One fighter was killed, and the rest fled (Telegram, August 27, 2023).
- ▶ On August 24, 2023, an IED was detonated, followed by an attack against a Nigerian army patrol in the Wajiroko area, about 100 km southwest of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, August 25, 2023).
- ▶ On August 23, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Nigerian police checkpoint near the town of Geidam, about 30 km south of the Nigeria-Niger border, in northeastern Nigeria. Two

policemen were killed, and the rest fled. ISIS operatives seized an off-road vehicle (Telegram, August 25, 2023).

Clashes between Boko Haram and ISIS

► On August 22, 2023, at least 41 people were killed in clashes between Boko Haram and ISIS in the Lake Chad area in northeastern Nigeria (guardian.ng, August 24, 2023).

Boko Haram

Release of abductees

► On August 25, 2023, it was reported that 49 rural women abducted by Boko Haram on August 22, 2023, in the periphery of Maiduguri, had been released after their families paid ransom to Boko Haram (VOA, August 25, 2023).

► The Nigerian army announced that on August 26, 2023, it liberated 14 local residents (six women and eight children) who had been abducted by Boko Haram in the Gwoza region, northeastern Nigeria, near the border with Cameroon. On August 27, 2023, 11 civilians were liberated in the area (www.chronicle.ng, August 28, 2023). It should be noted that Boko Haram frequently carries out kidnapping operations to obtain ransom money that finances its terrorist activity.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

ISIS's activity

► ISIS operatives continued their attacks against Christian civilians in the Beni area, on the border between Congo and Uganda:

- ◆ On August 24, 2023, three Christian citizens were abducted and murdered in the Ituri region, northeastern Congo, about 50 km west of the border with Uganda (Telegram, August 26, 2023).
- ◆ On August 23, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians in the village of Luna, in the Komanda region, about 100 km north of Beni. Five Christian civilians were abducted and murdered (Telegram, August 26, 2023).
- ◆ On August 21, 2023, an attack was carried out against a group of Christian civilians in the village of Kisanga and its environs, in the Beni area. Twenty Christian civilians were murdered (Telegram, August 23, 2023).

Mozambique

ISIS's activity

► On August 22, 2023, a Mozambican army patrol was targeted by gunfire and rockets on the road between the villages of Kobar and Kitrago in the Macomia region, Cabo Delgado Province, in the northeast of the country. Two officers and seven soldiers were killed. One armored vehicle was put out of commission and set on fire. Light and medium weapons were seized (Amaq, Telegram, August 23, 2023).



Right: ISIS operative firing at a Mozambican army patrol in the Macomia area, northeastern Mozambique. Left: Mozambican army weapons seized by ISIS (Amaq, Telegram, August 23, 2023)

► On August 16, 2023, an IED was activated against a vehicle belonging to the Mozambican army and the forces supporting it on the road between the villages of Mbau and Limare, in the Mocímboa da Praia area of Cabo Delgado Province. The passengers on board were wounded and the vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, August 23, 2023).

Summary of ISIS's activity in Mozambique

► ISIS's weekly Al-Naba published an infographic summarizing the activity of ISIS's Mozambique Province from June 30 to August 23, 2023 (55 days). The activity was carried out in the areas of Macomia and Mocímboa de Praia, in Cabo Delgado Province, in the northeast of the country. According to the infographic, the province's operatives carried out nine attacks during this period, killing and wounding 61 people, including three officers. In ISIS's activity, two vehicles were destroyed or put out of commission, and five compounds and positions were set on fire (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023).



Summary of ISIS's attacks in Mozambique (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023)

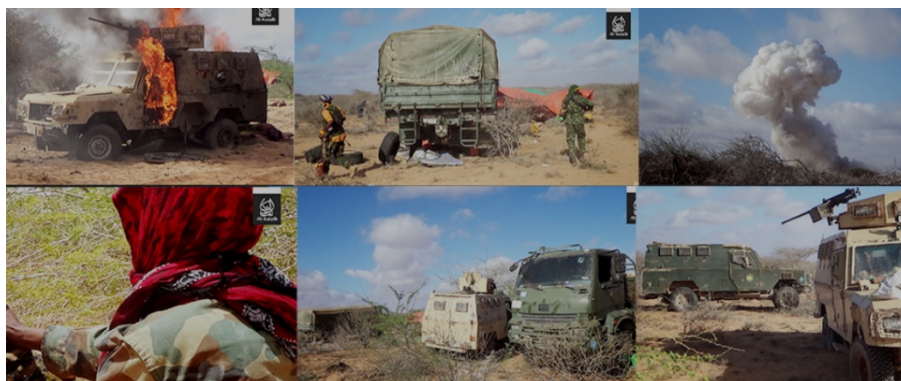
Counterterrorism

► On August 23, 2023, the Mozambican Ministry of Defense announced that three ISIS commanders had been killed in the activity of the counterterrorism unit in Cabo Delgado Province (website of the Mozambican Ministry of Defense, August 24, 2023).

Somalia

Al-Shabaab activity

► On August 26, 2023, operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab attacked three bases of Somali army special units and militias supporting the Somali army in the Masagaway region, in Galgaduud province, in central Somalia. According to Al-Shabaab, 178 Somali soldiers were killed in the operation. Additional soldiers (no exact number was given) were taken prisoner and hundreds of soldiers escaped (Shahada News Agency, August 26, 2023). Soldiers and medical sources reported that the number of fatalities was unknown and that there were dozens of wounded (Reuters, August 28, 2023). Al-Shahada News Agency, Al-Shabaab's media arm, announced that following the attack on the three bases, the organization's operatives managed to retake several cities and towns in the area (Shahada News Agency, August 29, 2023).



Documentation of the attacks against the bases of the Somali army and the militias supporting it in central Somalia (Shahada News Agency, August 26, 2023)

► On August 25, 2023, a Somali government intelligence operative was shot dead in the Al-Bakara market in Mogadishu (Telegram, August 25, 2023).

► On August 24, 2023, an Al-Shabaab car bomb was detonated, followed by an attack by the organization operatives against a base of militias supporting the Somali army in the Kahda area in southwestern Mogadishu. According to Al-Shabaab, 19 militia fighters were killed and 17 wounded, including ten members of a special police unit, two of them officers. There are also 20 missing people (Telegram, August 24, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On August 27, 2023, US planes attacked Al-Shabaab positions south of Mogadishu. Thirteen Al-Shabaab operatives were killed (VOA, August 27, 2023).

► On August 25, 2023, the Somali army announced that it had managed to take over a main Al-Shabaab base in the center of the country, in the Elbur area, about 400 km north of Mogadishu. This is a significant achievement for the Somali army in the fight against the organization (VOA, August 25, 2023).

► On August 25, 2023, the Somali army announced that it had managed to kill 27 Al-Shabaab operatives in an operation in the south of the country and destroy Al-Shabaab targets in the area (Somali News Agency, August 25, 2023).

Kenya

► On August 22, 2023, unknown persons, apparently Al-Shabaab operatives, set fire to a church and several homes in the village of Salama, in the Lamu region, southeastern Kenya, about 100 km southwest of the Kenya-Somalia border (theparadise.ng, August 25, 2023).

Libya

► Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, the prime minister of Libya under the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli, announced that Libya's security forces had detained on August 22, 2023, a senior ISIS commander who was responsible for planning and commanded several suicide bombings carried out in the capital Tripoli in 2018 (africanews.com, August 25, 2023).

Mali

UN report: ISIS doubled the area under its control in the past year

► According to UN experts, ISIS has doubled the area it controls in Mali in less than a year. In addition, Al-Qaeda's branch in the country, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), is also taking advantage of the chaos in the country to expand its influence. According to the experts, since 2015, the Islamic organizations have managed to penetrate the center of the

country and gradually expand their control. In the experts' assessment, Mali's military rulers are watching from a distance the confrontation between ISIS and Al-Qaeda's branch over control of territories and describe a deteriorating situation in the country (AP, August 27, 2023).

Signs of ISIS's governance in Mali

► In an article published in the latest edition of ISIS's Al-Naba weekly, it was noted that the organization had expanded its governance in Mali, and it seems that its influence in the country is increasing. The organization has expanded the activities of the Hisba Office (Diwan al-Hisba, i.e., the bureau in the organization responsible for applying Islamic law, Sharia, and operating as an Islamic police) in Mali. Attached to the article were photographs documenting the stoning of a person who committed an offense according to Islamic religious law, based on the strict interpretation advocated by the organization. In addition, ISIS operates on the propaganda level among the residents (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023).



Right: Documentation of stoning. Left: Propaganda activity among the residents
(Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023)

Al-Qaeda calls on Muslims to fight the Wagner Group and the Mali government

► On August 23, 2023, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), Al-Qaeda's branch in the Sahel region, issued an announcement calling on Muslims to fight a jihad war against the Malian government and the Wagner Group operating in the country (Telegram, August 23, 2023).

Kidnapping and murder activity

► ISIS's weekly Al-Naba reported that on August 17, 2023, the organization's operatives had executed a local who worked for "one of the offices of the German Crusader forces" whom they abducted (no exact date was specified) in the tri-border area of Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso. In addition, it was noted that on the same day, a fighter of the Tuareg militia, a tribal group

fighting ISIS, was abducted and executed in the same area (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023).

Niger

► On August 29, 2023, ISIS's Sahel Province published photos documenting the execution of a Nigerien army soldier who, according to them, was abducted in the city of Tira, in the west of the country (Telegram, August 29, 2023).



The execution of a Nigerien army soldier (Telegram, August 29, 2023)

Asia

Afghanistan

ISIS's activity

► On August 21, 2023, an explosive three-wheeled motorcycle (rickshaw) was detonated against several Taliban operatives near their headquarters in the Dar-ul-Aman area in southwestern Kabul. Five Taliban members were killed or wounded (Telegram, August 23, 2023).

Pakistan

ISIS's activity

► On August 26, 2023, a Pakistani government “spy” was shot dead in the Mamund region, northern Pakistan, on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Telegram, August 26, 2023).

► On August 25, 2023, a counterterrorism unit officer was shot and wounded in the city of Mastung, about 45 km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Telegram, August 25, 2023).

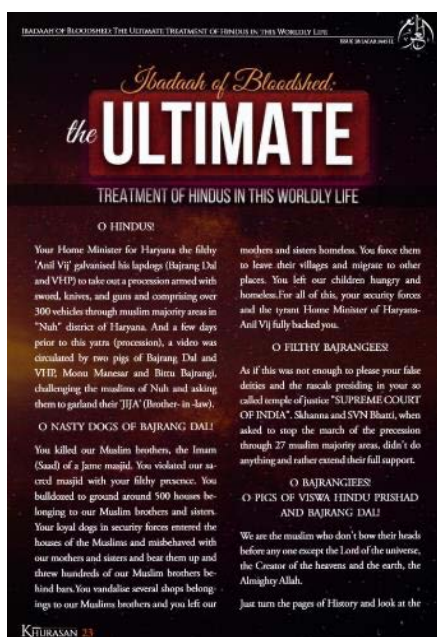
Counterterrorism

► The Pakistan Police reported that members of its counterterrorism unit had arrested eight suspected terrorist operatives in various locations in the Punjab region in eastern Pakistan. According to the Pakistani police, the suspects belong to various organizations: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other Salafist-jihadi organizations: Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Sipah-e-Sahaba, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. According to the report, their arrest prevented widespread terrorist activity

since they planned to plant IEDs throughout the Punjab region and attack important facilities and places of worship. Various kinds of weapons were found in their possession. It was later reported that the detainees included two senior Al-Qaeda operatives (hindustantimes.com, August 26, 2023; nation.com.pk, August 27, 2023).

India

► The main article published in the Voice of Khorasan, ISIS's magazine, calls on ISIS operatives and supporters to carry out attacks against the Hindu population in India. Among the proposed plans are arson attacks ("Burn Hindus alive") and IEDs, assassinations, vehicular attacks, and poisoning. It is also proposed to harm them economically by setting fire to their property. According to the organization, the attack on them is in order to take revenge on the Hindus for the crimes they are committing against Muslims in the country (Telegram, August 29, 2023). The magazine Voice of Khorasan is published by Al-Azaim, the organization's media arm, which apparently operates from Afghanistan.



The first page of the article calling for attacks on members of the Hindu faith in India (Telegram, August 29, 2023)

Philippines ISIS's activity

► On August 28, 2023, an attack was carried out against a Philippine police post in Maguindanao, in the southern Philippines. Four policemen were wounded (Telegram, August 29, 2023). On August 21, 2023, shots were fired at a Philippine army patrol there. Five soldiers were killed or wounded (Telegram, August 26, 2023).

Europe

Terrorist attack thwarted in Britain

► Mohamad al-Bared, 26, a British doctoral student engaged in mechanical engineering at the University of Birmingham, was accused on August 24, 2023, at a British court of building an explosive drone for ISIS. Al-Bared was arrested at his home in the city of Coventry in January 2023. At the time of the arrest, the drone and other devices, including a 3D printer used to create it, were seized (BBC, August 24, 2023).

Denmark

► On August 24, 2023, an extraordinary hearing began in a court in Copenhagen, Denmark, in the framework of a petition filed by Ahmed Samsam, 34, an ISIS operative and Danish citizen of Syrian origin, who was sentenced to eight years in prison after being convicted of fighting in the ranks of the organization. According to Samsam, he acted as an informant for Denmark's intelligence service and military intelligence between 2013 and 2014, spying on foreign fighters. Samsam's lawyer said his client wanted the court to recognize that he was an agent. He noted that the issue revolves around the question of whether it is possible to force the intelligence organizations to admit such cooperation (Al-Jazeera, August 24, 2023).



**Ahmed Samsam, Danish ISIS operative of Syrian origin
(YouTube channel 24.ae, February 6, 2023)**

United States

► On August 25, 2023, Muhammad Masood, a 31-year-old medical doctor, was sentenced to 18 years in prison and five years of supervision for attempting to join the ranks of ISIS. Masood, a physician by training, who worked in research at a clinic in Minnesota, was detained in 2020 after using an encrypted messaging app between January 2020 and March 2020 to join ISIS in Iraq. He pledged allegiance to the organization and its leader and expressed his desire to carry out terrorist attacks against senior figures in the United States. He tried several times to reach areas controlled by ISIS, and on March 19, 2020, he was arrested by the FBI after landing in Los

Angeles and confessed to his actions (The New York Times, United States Department of Justice, August 25, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial of ISIS’s weekly Al-Naba published this week under the title “Allah is within the jihad fighters” claims that Allah assists the organization’s operatives since they are loyal to Allah’s path and the path of jihad. The writer calls on the organization’s operatives to continue to adhere to this path and exercise patience so that their path will succeed sooner or later, and they will receive Allah’s help (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023). The article is intended to encourage the organization’s operatives to continue operating and strengthen the trend of recovery of the organization, which has been evident recently, after a period of decline in the scope of its activity.



The article “Allah is within the jihad fighters” (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023)