



Spotlight on Global Jihad

September 14-20, 2023



Main events of the past week

► **This week, there was a decline in ISIS's activity around the world. The organization's activity focused on Syria and Africa.**

► **Syria:** In the Idlib area, fighting continued between the forces of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated HTS and the Syrian army. In the desert area, three pro-Iranian militia fighters were killed in an ISIS attack.

► **Iraq:** A commander of the Tribal Mobilization forces and his security guard were wounded in an assassination attempt carried out by ISIS in the Al-Tarmiyah area, north of Baghdad.

► **Africa:**

◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS attacked Nigerian army targets in the northeast of the country.

◆ **Somalia:** Operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab continued to attack targets of the Somali army and the forces supporting it. They particularly hit aid forces of the Ethiopian army operating in western Somalia. A senior Al-Shabaab operative threatened to take revenge on the United States, claiming that it was responsible for killing civilians in the country.

◆ **Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger** have formed a new defense alliance to jointly fight jihadi terrorist organizations headed by Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

◆ **Mali:** Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for attacking Wagner Group fighters, killing several of them, downing a helicopter belonging to the force, and putting out of commission another helicopter.

◆ **Mozambique:** ISIS operatives abducted eleven Christian civilians from villages in the northeast of the country and executed them. In the same area, ISIS operatives activated an IED against a Mozambican army patrol vehicle, killing or wounding the passengers on board.

► **The battle for hearts and minds:** Al-Qaeda's branch in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) renewed the publication of the magazine Sada al-Malahim, apparently to enlist support and

operatives. Unofficial media arms affiliated with Al-Qaeda published posters threatening the United States and its allies and Sweden and its “sisters.”

The Syrian Arena



Provinces of Syria (Free World Maps)

Idlib region

► The exchanges of artillery fire between HTS and the Syrian army in the rebel enclave in Idlib continued this week as well.

- ◆ On September 20, 2023, the Syrian army fired artillery at HTS positions in the northeastern area of the rebel enclave in Idlib. An HTS fighter was killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 20, 2023).
- ◆ On September 19, 2023, the rebel forces (apparently, HTS) fired artillery at a Syrian army force in the southeastern area of the rebel enclave. A Syrian soldier was killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 19, 2023).
- ◆ On September 15, 2023, HTS fired artillery at a Syrian army force in the western area of the rebel enclave. Two soldiers were killed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 15, 2023).

Al-Hasakah region

► On September 13, 2023, 600 family members of Iraqi ISIS operatives were transferred back to Iraq from the Al-Hol camp, where family members of ISIS operatives are being detained. The transfer was carried out in coordination between the Kurdish SDF forces, which manage the camp, and the autonomous government of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 13, 2023). This step is part of the process of evacuating the camp due to the SDF’s difficulties in operating it. It should be noted that many

of the detainees in the camp are foreign nationals whose home countries refuse to accept them, so the burden of guarding and protecting them rests with the SDF. In recent weeks, due to the complex challenges facing the SDF from Iran and its proxies and Turkey, the protection of the detainees has become more complex, and there is growing concern that ISIS will take advantage of the situation to try to break into the camp and liberate the inmates.

ISIS's activity

Al-Hasakah region

► On September 16, 2023, shots were fired at an SDF checkpoint near the Al-Jabsah oil fields, in southwestern Al-Shadadi, about 50 km south of Al-Hasakah. Four fighters were wounded (Telegram, September 16, 2023).

The desert region

► On September 18, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked a patrol force of the pro-Iranian militias in the Al-Sukhnah area, about 100 km southwest of Deir ez-Zor. Three militia fighters were killed, and several others were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 18, 2023).

Iraq



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

ISIS's activity

Diyala Province

► On September 18, 2023, an IED was activated against an Iraqi army convoy around the town of Qara Tapa, about 75 km north of Baqubah. One vehicle was hit, and the passengers on board were wounded. ISIS activated another IED against foot patrol forces in the same area. Two senior officers were wounded, one with the rank of colonel and the other with the rank of lieutenant colonel (Telegram, September 19, 2023).

Salah al-Din Province

► On September 15, 2023, Saeed al-Jassem, a senior commander in the Tribal Mobilization, was targeted by gunfire in the Al-Tarmiyah district, about 20 km north of Baghdad. Jassem, who serves as chairman of the Council of Tribal Chiefs of Al-Tarmiyah, and another man, apparently his security guard, were wounded (Al-Sumaria, September 16, 2023; Yawmiyat Iraqi, September 17, 2023). ISIS claimed responsibility for the incident (Telegram, September 17, 2023).



**Saeed al-Jassem being treated for the injury
(Yawmiyat Iraqi, September 17, 2023)**

Al-Anbar Province

► On September 16, 2023, IEDs were activated in two houses belonging to Iraqi national security personnel, east of Rutba. Both houses were destroyed. No casualties were reported (Telegram, September 16, 2023).

► On September 14, 2023, there were exchanges of fire between ISIS operatives and an Iraqi army patrol force near Al-Faydah, south of Rutba, in western Iraq. Two vehicles were damaged. No casualties were reported (Telegram, September 16, 2023).

Counterterrorism

Kirkuk Province

► On September 19, 2023, Iraqi army fighter jets attacked ISIS targets in Wadi Zaghitun, in the southwestern part of the province. The targets were reportedly destroyed (Khaliyat al-I'lam al-Amni, September 19, 2023).

Diyala Province

► On September 17, 2023, Iraqi army fighter jets attacked a group of ISIS operatives in the Hamrin Mountains, about 50 km northeast of Baqubah. The number of operatives in the group who were hit was not specified (Khaliyat al-I'lam al-Amni, September 17, 2023).

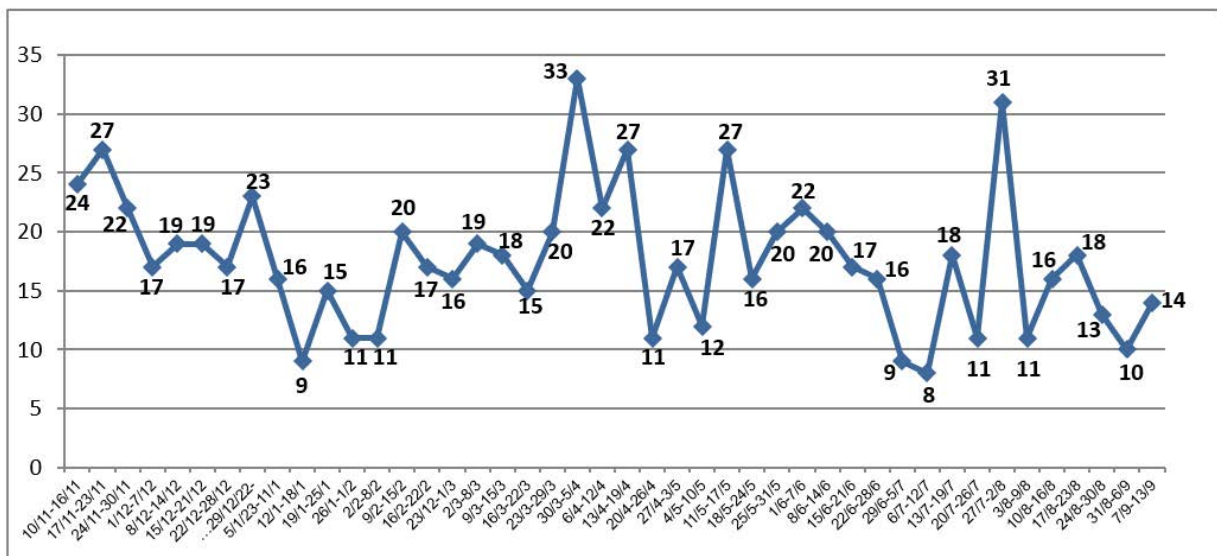
Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► According to an infographic published by Al-Naba, ISIS's weekly, summarizing ISIS's activity on September 7-13, 2023, ISIS operatives carried out 14 attacks in the various provinces during this period (compared with ten in the previous week). The highest number of attacks were carried out by operatives of the West Africa Province (5). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: East Asia (3); Iraq (3); Mozambique (1); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (1); and Pakistan (1). A total of 19 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared with 24 people the week before. The largest number of casualties was in the West Africa Province (10). In the other provinces: Mozambique (3); East Asia (2); Khorasan, i.e., Afghanistan (2); Iraq (1); and Pakistan (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, September 14, 2023).



Summary of ISIS attacks (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, September 14, 2023)

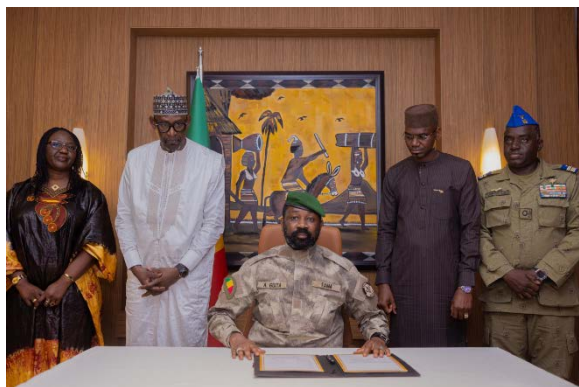
Attacks by week (according to ISIS's figures)



Africa

Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger defense alliance

► On September 16, 2023, Mali's military junta leader Colonel Assimi Goïta (chairman of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People) announced the signing of a tripartite defense alliance of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger against terrorist organizations operating in these countries (mainly organizations affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda). According to Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, the purpose of this alliance is to integrate the military and economic efforts of these three countries in the fight against terrorism, and the signatories are obligated to assist one another in any event in which one of them is attacked (France24, September 16, 2023).



Colonel Assimi Goïta (seated) and Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop (with a white robe) at the announcement of the tripartite defense alliance (Twitter account of Colonel Assimi Goïta, September 16, 2023)

Nigeria

Photos indicating the presence of terrorist elements in northern Nigeria

► On September 18, 2023, the Facebook account of a source close to the Nigerian government posted photos documenting the presence of militants described as “terrorist operatives” in the village of Fankama, in Katsina State, in northern Nigeria, not far from the Nigeria-Niger border. The photos, reportedly taken on September 16, 2023, indicate the presence of terrorist elements in this area. It should be noted that the border region between Nigeria and Niger is an area where global jihad operatives affiliated with ISIS and Al-Qaeda are operating (correctng.com, September 18, 2023; Jagaban Matasan Arewa Facebook account, September 18, 2023).



Presence of terrorist elements in Katsina State (Jagaban Matasan Arewa Facebook account, September 18, 2023)

ISIS's activity

- ▶ ISIS attacked Nigerian army targets in Borno State, in the northeast of the country.
 - ◆ On September 17, 2023, a Nigerian army convoy was ambushed on the Agiri–Dikwa Road, about 50 km west of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. The attack began with the detonation of IEDs and continued with the use of gunfire. Two soldiers were killed, and several others were wounded. Four vehicles were put out of commission, and ISIS operatives seized a medium machine gun (Telegram, September 18, 2023).
 - ◆ On September 16, 2023, a Nigerian army checkpoint was attacked near the town of Mairari, about 70 km west of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. The checkpoint soldiers fled. ISIS operatives put out of commission four motorcycles and seized ammunition and six other motorcycles (Telegram, September 18, 2023).
 - ◆ On September 13, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol on the road between the towns of Wajiroko and Damboa, southwest of Maiduguri. Several soldiers were wounded. One armored vehicle was put out of commission (Telegram, September 15, 2023).
- ▶ On September 14, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army vehicle. A soldier was killed, and five others were wounded. So far, ISIS has not claimed responsibility for the attack, but it can be estimated that the organization was behind it (dailypost.ng, September 14, 2023).

Continued clashes between ISIS and Boko Haram

- ▶ On September 14, 2023, Boko Haram operatives threatened about 50 fishermen in the Lake Chad area in northeastern Nigeria not to pay “taxes” to ISIS operatives, otherwise, they would pay with their lives. While the threats were being made, ISIS operatives arrived in motorboats and opened fire, chasing away Boko Haram operatives and the fishermen. Two fishermen were killed. ISIS operatives seized about 100 canoes (dailytrust.com, September 14, 2023).

Counterterrorism

► On September 4-8, 2023, Nigerian army forces carried out activity against Boko Haram in Yobe State, northeastern Nigeria. The Nigerian army reported the arrest of 12 suspects and confiscation of car fuel and money (channelstv.com, September 14, 2023).

Mozambique

ISIS's activity

► ISIS operatives operated against Christian civilians and the Mozambican army in the Mocímboa da Praia area, in Cabo Delgado Province, northeast of the country:

- ◆ On September 14, 2023, a total of 11 Christian villagers were abducted and executed. Several homes were set on fire (Telegram, September 15, 2023).
- ◆ On September 11, 2023, an IED was activated against a Mozambican army patrol vehicle in the area. The passengers on board were killed or wounded (Telegram, September 13, 2023).

Somalia

Al-Shabaab activity

► This week, operatives of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab continued to attack Somalia's security forces and government and forces supporting them:

- ◆ On September 17, 2023, two convoys of Ethiopian forces supporting the Somali army were attacked in the Bakool region in the southwest of the country. The Somali army reported that 50 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed in an exchange of fire there. No details were given about casualties among Somali and Ethiopian army forces. On the same day, a supply convoy of Ethiopian forces was attacked. According to Al-Shabaab, 167 convoy soldiers were killed, and many vehicles were destroyed (VOA, September 17, 2023).
- ◆ On September 15, 2023, a suicide bomber activated an IED he was carrying at the Laas Ga'mey military camp in Galmudug State, in central Somalia, while senior government officials were present to support soldiers on the front lines of the fighting against Al-Shabaab. Reportedly, there was one fatality, apparently a soldier, and several others were seriously wounded. None of the senior officials were reportedly killed, but two Senate members were wounded (garoweonline.com, September 16, 2023).

Senior Al-Shabaab official threatens to take revenge on the United States

► On September 15, 2023, a video was released showing Mahad Karate, one of Al-Shabaab's senior operatives, threatening that Al-Shabaab will take revenge on the United States following an incident on September 6, 2023, in which five civilians were killed. US Africa Command (AFRICOM) denied involvement in operational activity at the site (garoweonline.com, September 16, 2023).¹

Counterterrorism

► The Somali army reportedly regained control of several villages and towns in the Galgaduud area, in central Somalia, after Al-Shabaab took over them (Anatolia News Agency, September 17, 2023). On September 14, 2023, the Somali army attacked Al-Shabaab operatives in the town of El Garas, in central Somalia, after regaining control of it. According to military sources, 30 Al-Shabaab operatives were killed, and several others were wounded (garoweonline.com, September 14, 2023).

► On September 13, 2023, a senior member of Al-Shabaab's finance department was killed. According to military sources, he was killed, along with other operatives, during activity against the organization in central and southern Somalia (the exact location was not specified) (garoweonline.com, September 14, 2023).

Burkina Faso

► The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for an attack carried out against local militias on September 15, 2023, in the Titao area, about 40 km south of the border with Mali. According to JNIM, three militia fighters were killed (Telegram, September 2023).

Mali

► Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for several attacks it carried out against the Malian army and fighters of the Russian Wagner Group:

- ◆ On September 14, 2023, a joint force of the Malian army and the Wagner Group was ambushed in the Gao area, in the south of the country. According to JNIM, several soldiers and Wagner Group fighters were killed (Telegram, September 14, 2023).

¹ For further details regarding the incident, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from September 14, 2023, "Spotlight on Global Jihad (September 7-13, 2023)"

◆ On September 8 and 9, 2023, a helicopter of Wagner Group fighters was ambushed in Sikasso province, in the south of the country. The helicopter was shot down and its crew killed. After the downing of the helicopter, there were exchanges of fire between the sides. Other fighters were wounded, and another helicopter was put out of commission. According to JNIM, Wagner Group fighters detonated an IED and set fire to the helicopter that was put out of commission, but they succeeded only partially (Telegram, September 13, 2023).



Wreckage of the helicopter after it was set on fire by Wagner Group fighters (Telegram, September 13, 2023)

Asia

Pakistan

ISIS's activity

► On September 14, 2023, an IED was activated against a convoy of a senior member of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, a body of Muslim clerics affiliated with the Pakistani Democratic Movement, in the city of Mastung, in western Pakistan, not far from the border with Afghanistan. The senior official and several of his security guards were wounded (Telegram, September 14, 2023).

India

Counterterrorism

► Following information received about ISIS's intentions to carry out attacks, members of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) carried out an extensive operation against more than 50 different sites suspected of being centers of radicalization and recruitment of ISIS, in the Tamil Nadu region in the southeast of the country and Telangana in the south. During the operation, various digital devices, documents and books in local languages and Arabic were found (Mint; East Coast Daily; ABQ News, September 16, 2023).

► On September 13, 2023, the spokesman for India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) noted that they had managed to locate a house suspected of being used by an Al-Qaeda operative in

the town of Dubagga, in northern India. According to the spokesman, the operative was involved in preparations to carry out an attack in collaboration with operatives from Ansar Gazwat-ul-Hind, a local organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The operative used the house to manufacture IEDs (ptinews.com; Hindustan Times, September 13, 2023).

► India's National Court of Investigation has imposed death penalties and fines on two ISIS operatives who murdered a man after verifying that he was not a Muslim. Eight rifles and magazines were found in the home of one of the defendants (NDT, September 14, 2023).

Philippines ISIS's activity

► On September 19, 2023, four Christian civilians were shot and killed in Lanao del Norte, in the southern Philippines (Telegram, September 19, 2023). This is an exceptional incident since most of ISIS's activity in the country is carried out against the security forces and state infrastructure. It should be noted that in the past month, there has been an increase in ISIS's activity in the country.

Summary of ISIS's East Asia Province's activity

► ISIS's weekly Al-Naba published an infographic summarizing the activity of ISIS's East Asia Province in the period from June 14 to September 8, 2023 (about three months). According to the infographic, ISIS's East Asia Province carried out nine attacks during this period, killing and wounding 23 people, including a local senior government official. The attacks were carried out using the following methods: assault and exchange of fire (4); detonation of IEDs (2); and other methods (3) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, September 14, 2023).



Summary of about three months of activity of ISIS's East Asia Province (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, September 14, 2023)

Turkey

Counterterrorism

► On September 14, 2023, Turkish security forces detained 17 ISIS operatives throughout Bursa Province, northwest of the country (Anatolia News Agency, September 14, 2023).

Europe

Belgium

► On September 16, 2023, a Belgian court sentenced five defendants to 20 years to life imprisonment for their involvement in ISIS suicide bombings that took place in Brussels on March 22, 2016. It was noted that this was the longest trial ever held in Belgium (VOA, September 16, 2023).²

Spain

► According to a report from September 13, 2023, two 18-year-old men suspected of being ISIS operatives were arrested in August 2023 at two different sites in Spain, one from the city of Zamora and the other from Valencia. It was noted that the arrest was carried out as part of a collaboration between Spain and Morocco. The two are accused of collaborating in distributing ISIS propaganda materials among young people through social media (themedialine.org, September 13, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula renewed the publication of the Sada al-Malahim magazine

► On September 15, 2023, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) published Issue No. 17 of the Sada al-Malahim³ magazine, after 12 years in which no issues of this magazine were published. The current issue focuses on the organization's activities and its leaders' statements (Elisabeth Kendall@Dr_E_Kendall's Twitter account, September 15, 2023). In the ITIC's assessment, the resumption of publication may indicate the organization's desire to renew its propaganda activity to recruit support and operatives. It should be noted that issues 1-16 of this magazine were published between 2008 and 2011.

² They were suicide bombers who carried out three suicide bombing attacks on March 22, 2016: two suicide bombing attacks at Brussels Airport, and about an hour and a half later another suicide bombing attack at the Brussels metro station. A total of 32 people were killed in the attacks and more than 300 were wounded. Three people died later of their wounds and were also recognized as victims of the attack.

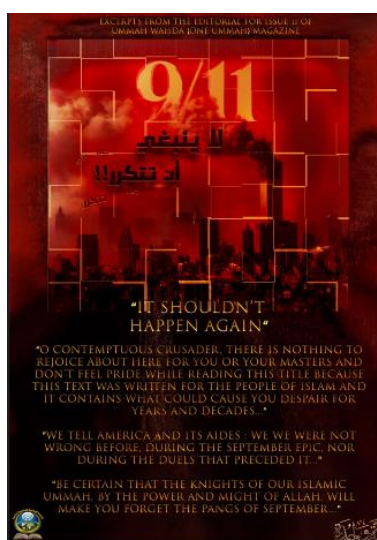
³ The magazine's name "Sada al-Malahim" means "the echo of epic battles."



Al-Qaeda's Sada al-Malahim magazine (Elisabeth Kendall@Dr_E_Kendall's Twitter account, September 15, 2023)

Unofficial media arm affiliated with Al-Qaeda threatens the US and its allies

► On September 18, 2023, an unofficial media arm affiliated with Al-Qaeda issued a poster threatening the United States and its allies that the 9/11 attacks would be forgotten compared to the next attack planned by the organization. This threat is in line with the one published last week in Umma Wahida, Al-Qaeda's magazine (Telegram, September 18, 2023).⁴



Poster of the threat (Telegram, September 18, 2023)

Unofficial media arm affiliated with Al-Qaeda threatens Sweden and its “sisters”

► On September 19, 2023, an unofficial media arm affiliated with Al-Qaeda issued a poster threatening Sweden and its “sisters,” i.e., European countries identified with it. The poster shows a masked armed operative with the inscription “Will Sweden and its sisters evade Allah’s

⁴ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from September 14, 2023, “Spotlight on Global Jihad (September 7-13, 2023)”

punishment?” It was issued against the backdrop of the Swedish authorities’ approval to set copies of the Quran on fire, claiming that the act was consistent with the values of freedom of expression (Telegram, September 19, 2023).



Poster threatening Sweden and its “sisters” (Telegram, September 19, 2023)