



# Spotlight on Global Jihad

## May 18-24, 2023



### Main events of the past week

- ▶ **The moderate increase in ISIS's activity around the world continued this week. The hotspot of activity was in Africa.**
- ▶ **Syria:** ISIS carried out several attacks against the Syrian army and the forces supporting it in the desert region.
- ▶ **Iraq:** ISIS operatives carried out several attacks against Iraqi security forces, following the increase in ISIS's activity in Iraq.
- ▶ **Lebanon:** A senior Al-Qaeda operative who was responsible for establishing the organization's cells in Lebanon was detained northeast of Tripoli. A senior ISIS operative was detained in the Sidon area.
- ▶ **Africa:**
  - ◆ **Nigeria:** ISIS continued its high-intensity activity against the Nigerian army in the northeast of the country. The main incident was the detonation of a car bomb.
  - ◆ **Democratic Republic of the Congo:** ISIS's activity against Christian residents near the Ugandan border intensifies. At least 40 Christian residents were killed.
  - ◆ **Burkina Faso:** An Australian doctor abducted by an organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda was released after seven years.
  - ◆ **Mali:** ISIS operatives took over Al-Qaeda strongholds in a town in eastern Mali.
  - ◆ **Somalia:** Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda-affiliated organization, claims to have inflicted dozens of fatalities on the Somali army and the forces supporting it.
- ▶ **The battle for hearts and minds:** The editorial of ISIS's weekly Al-Naba stresses the importance of implementing Islamic law (Sharia) through violent jihad. The article categorically rejects the values of democracy and secular regimes in general.

### Sinai Peninsula

- ▶ On March 17, 2023, several women and girls were detained south of Sheikh Zuweid, in northern Sinai, on charges of having contact with ISIS operatives (Telegram, May 17, 2023).

## The Syrian Arena<sup>1</sup>



Provinces of Syria (Free World Maps)

### ISIS's activity

#### Deir ez-Zor-al-Mayadeen region

► On the night of May 20, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked an SDF patrol on the Abu Khashab Road, about 65 km north of Deir ez-Zor. Three SDF fighters were wounded. A senior SDF commander who has a major role in the fight against ISIS has reportedly survived (Rudaw, May 20, 2023).

#### The desert region

► On May 23, 2023, militants, apparently ISIS operatives, attacked vehicles of the Palestinian Al-Quds Brigade, which supports the Assad regime, in the Al-Amor Mountains, about 35 km north of Palmyra. One fighter was killed and two others were wounded (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 23, 2023).

► According to a report from May 22, 2023, contact was lost with a Syrian army vehicle while it was on its way to deliver supplies to army positions in the desert area of Sukhnah, about 60 km northeast of Palmyra (Al-Badia 24, May 22, 2023). The vehicle may have been attacked by ISIS operatives.

► On May 17, 2023, a rocket was fired at a bus traveling on the Deir ez-Zor-Palmyra Road, near Sukhnah. Three people were killed and two others were wounded (Al-Badia 24, May 17, 2023). It was not specified whether they were security personnel or civilians.

<sup>1</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility and the global media.

## Counterterrorism

### Idlib region

► On May 18, 2023, it was reported that the US military was investigating the details of an airstrike carried out by a US drone on May 3, 2023, in northwestern Syria, which, according to preliminary information provided by the US military, resulted in the death of Lutfi Hassan Misto, 56, who was identified as a senior Al-Qaeda operative. In the background of the investigation, there are claims by family members of the deceased that the deceased, a shepherd and former builder, had nothing to do with terror activity (The Washington Post, May 18, 2023; Al-Jazeera, May 19, 2023).

## Iraq



Provinces of Iraq (Wikipedia)

## ISIS attacks by province<sup>2</sup>

### Diyala Province

► On May 17, 2023, an Iraqi police vehicle was targeted by gunfire from an ambush about 80 km northeast of Baghdad. Two policemen were wounded (Telegram, May 18, 2023).

### Kirkuk Province

► On May 15, 2023, shots were fired and hand grenades were thrown at an Iraqi army compound about 30 km west of Kirkuk. Several soldiers were wounded. Subsequently, an IED was

<sup>2</sup> According to ISIS's claims of responsibility and the global media.

activated against a patrol arriving on the scene for assistance. Two bulletproof vehicles were damaged. No other casualties were reported (Telegram, May 17, 2023).

### Salah al-Din Province

► On May 20, 2023, several ISIS operatives broke into the home of a senior member of the Tribal Mobilization in the village of Albu Khalifa, near Al-Tarmiyah, about 30 km north of Baghdad. The senior official and his escort were shot dead, and two other escorts were wounded (Telegram, May 21, 2023).

### Counterterrorism

#### Salah al-Din Province

► On May 18, 2023, teams of the Federal Intelligence and Investigations Agency, which operates as part of the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, detained six wanted ISIS operatives in the Salah al-Din Province (exact locations were not specified). The detainees had taken part in planting IEDs, blowing up residential buildings, and attacking bases of the security forces when ISIS controlled some of the areas (Iraqi News Agency, May 18, 2023).



**The six detained ISIS operatives (Iraqi News Agency, May 18, 2023)**

### Al-Anbar Province

► A force of the Federal Intelligence and Investigations Agency located an ISIS cache of ammunition containing 250 boxes of ammunition in the Wadi Thumayl area, about 200 km southwest of Baghdad (Iraqi News Agency, May 23, 2023).



The ammunition found in the Al-Anbar Province (Iraqi News Agency, May 23, 2023)

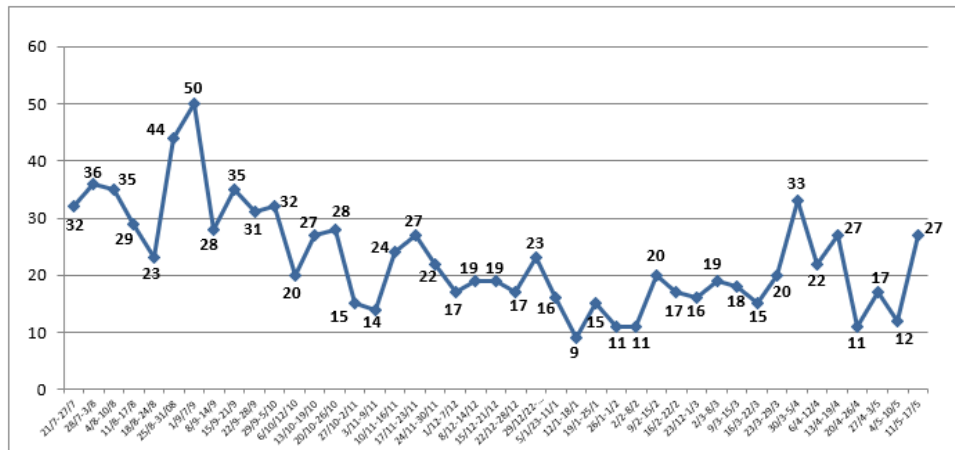
## Summary of ISIS's activity in the various provinces

► An infographic published by ISIS's Al-Naba weekly, summing up ISIS's activity in the period between May 11-17, 2023, indicates that during this period, ISIS operatives carried out 27 attacks in the various provinces (compared with 12 in the previous week). The West Africa Province carried out the highest number of attacks (15). Attacks carried out in the other provinces: Iraq (6); Central Africa (3); Mozambique (1); East Asia (1); and Syria (1). A total of 101 people were killed and wounded in the attacks, compared with 28 in the previous week. The largest number of casualties was in the West Africa Province (70). The rest of the dead and wounded: Iraq (20); Central Africa (10); and Mozambique (1) (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, May 18, 2023)



Summary of ISIS's attacks (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, May 18, 2023)

## Weekly attacks (based on ISIS's data)



## Africa

### Nigeria

#### ISIS's activity

► This week, ISIS continued its activity against the Nigerian army in Borno State, in the northeast of the country. On May 16, 2023, there was an exchange of fire between ISIS operatives and Nigerian army patrol forces attempting to advance towards ISIS positions near Garno Forest, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. During the exchange of fire, a car bomb driven by a suicide bomber codenamed Abu Othman al-Ansari was detonated. Several soldiers were killed or wounded, and vehicles were put out of commission (Telegram, May 17, 2023).



**ISIS operatives attacking a Nigerian army patrol southeast of Maiduguri (Telegram, May 17, 2023)**



**ISIS suicide bomber in a car bomb southeast of Maiduguri (Telegram, May 18, 2023)**

► **Additional incidents:**

- ◆ On May 18, 2023, grenades and mortar shells were fired at Nigerian army forces in the town of Arji in Borno State (Telegram, May 19, 2023). No casualties were reported.
- ◆ On May 16, 2023, an IED was activated against a patrol of forces supporting the Nigerian army near the town of Vargi, in Borno State. One fighter was killed and another was wounded (Telegram, May 20, 2023).
- ◆ On May 15, 2023, an IED was activated against a Nigerian army patrol near the town of Bursu, in Borno State. The passengers on board the vehicle were killed or wounded (Telegram, May 17, 2023).
- ◆ On May 15, 2023, grenades were fired at a Nigerian army patrol between the towns of Bosso, in Niger, and Malam Fatori, in Nigeria, near the border with Niger. Several soldiers were wounded. A vehicle caught fire (Telegram, May 18, 2023).
- ◆ On May 15, 2023, there were exchanges of fire between ISIS operatives and a Nigerian army patrol near Garo Forest, about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri. The soldiers reportedly fled (Telegram, May 17, 2023).

## Counterterrorism

- Based on intelligence, Nigerian army fighter jets carried out airstrikes against eight vehicles, machine gun carriers and ISIS operatives in the Gujba area, about 20 km south of Damaturu in Yobe State, in northeastern Nigeria. Many ISIS operatives were reportedly killed (Zagazola, May 23, 2023).

## Hundreds of Boko Haram operatives turned themselves in

► The Nigerian army announced that 511 Boko Haram operatives and their families had turned themselves in between May 4-18, 2023, during the army's activity in the northeast of the country (naijanews.com, May 19, 2023).

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

### ISIS's activity

► ISIS carried out several attacks against Christian civilians and the Congolese army near the Congo-Uganda border:

- ◆ On May 21, 2023, a truck convoy of Christian civilians was targeted in the Ituri region in northeastern Congo. At least two civilians were killed and others were wounded. Several trucks were set on fire (Telegram, May 22, 2023).
- ◆ On May 21, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians in the village of Quendia, in the Beni region, about 50 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. The civilians fled. Several homes were set on fire (Telegram, May 22, 2023).
- ◆ On May 19, 2023, an attack was carried out against the Christian village of Katula, in the Beni region. A total of 26 civilians were kidnapped and executed. Other civilians, including the village head, were wounded. Several homes were set on fire (Telegram, May 20, 2023).
- ◆ On May 18, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians in the village of Otambiri and several other villages on the Komanda Road, about 80 km west of the Congo-Uganda border. Thirteen civilians were killed. Several homes and property were set on fire (Telegram, May 20, 2023).
- ◆ On May 18, 2023, an attack was carried out against Christian civilians in the village of Kabasiwa, in the Beni region. A civilian was killed (Telegram, May 20, 2023).
- ◆ On May 16, 2023, an ambush was set up and shots were fired at a Congolese army patrol in the Ituri region. Two soldiers were killed. Two assault rifles were seized (Telegram, May 18, 2023).

## Burkina Faso

► On May 19, 2023, it was reported that Dr. Kenneth Elliott, an Australian doctor abducted by operatives of a terrorist organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda, returned to his home in



Australia. Elliott, now 88, and his wife Jocelyn lived in the country and since 1972 ran a clinic in the town of Djibo, in northern Burkina Faso. They were abducted by the organization on January 15, 2016. Jocelyn was released and arrived in Niger just three weeks after the abduction (7News, May 19, 2023; The Guardian, May 18, 2023).

## Mali

### Al-Qaeda activity

- ▶ On May 21, 2023, operatives of Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM, the Support Group for Islam and Muslims), Al-Qaeda's branch in the Sahel region, attacked a Malian army checkpoint near the border with Mauritania. A soldier was killed (Telegram, May 23, 2023).
- ▶ Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen claimed responsibility for a series of attacks carried out against Malian army positions in three communities in central and southwestern Mali: the city of Mopti in central Mali, the town of Koulikoro in southwestern Mali, and the town of Ségou in central Mali (SITE, May 20, 2023). The number of casualties in the incidents is unknown.

### ISIS's takeover of Al-Qaeda's strongholds in northern Mali

- ▶ On May 17, 2023, ISIS's Sahel Province published photos documenting ISIS operatives' takeover of Al-Qaeda's strongholds in and around the town of Tidermène in eastern Mali over the past month. ISIS operatives are seen carrying out Da'wa (preaching) activity among the residents of the town of Tidermène and its environs (Telegram, May 17, 2023).



**ISIS operatives in Al-Qaeda's strongholds in Tidermène (Telegram, May 17, 2023)**



ISIS operatives and residents during Da'wa activity (Telegram, May 17, 2023)



ISIS operatives and residents during Da'was activity (Telegram, May 17, 2023)

## Somalia

### Al-Shabaab activity

► The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab announced that on May 18, 2023, it had activated several IEDs against a convoy of Somali army forces, local forces operating alongside it, and Ugandan forces supporting it in the middle Shabelle area, north of Mogadishu. According to the organization, the Somali army sustained 22 fatalities, local forces sustained 22 fatalities, and Ugandan forces sustained five fatalities (Shahada News Agency, May 18, 2023).

### Counterterrorism

► Somali sources reported that on May 22, 2023, a US Army drone airstrike was carried out against Al-Shabaab's main headquarters in the city of Jilib, in the Middle Jubba area, an area under the organization's full control. It was noted that the organization sustained many losses, although the exact number of fatalities has not yet been disclosed. Equipment was also damaged (Opera News, May 22, 2023).

► On May 20, 2023, a Somali army force killed a senior Al-Shabaab operative in the town of Towfiq, about 350 km northeast of Mogadishu. The deceased was a senior financial official and served as head of Zakawat, the organization's tax collection system (Garowe Online, May 21, 2023).

## Conference of Al-Shabaab

► Al-Shabaab’s media arm, Al-Kataeb, released a video on May 21, 2023, including details about a conference that it convened on May 8-15, 2023, attended by 130 of the organization’s leaders, senior clerics affiliated with it, and local leaders close to the organization, to discuss the situation in Somalia in light of the activity of the Somali government and the United States against the organization. At the conference, elements affiliated with the organization were called upon to unite the ranks and show adherence to the religion of Islam and strengthen the spirit of jihad, in preparation for the continuation of the fighting. The organization’s leader, Sheikh Ahmad Omar Abu Obeida, appeared (with his face blurred), noting that the organization had struck its enemies severely and calling on the organization’s supporters to attack its enemies. According to Abu Obeida, Muslims in Somalia and East Africa are more responsive to joining jihad than in recent years (Shahada News Agency, May 21, 2023).



**Photographs from the conference alongside the interview with the organization’s leader  
(Telegram, May 21, 2023)**

## Counterterrorism

► On May 18, 2023, Somalia’s National Intelligence Agency (NISA) announced that its operatives had seized a sea shipment containing military equipment and explosives apparently destined for Al-Shabaab. The military equipment and explosives were hidden in containers presented as authorized imports for a business. In addition, a shipment containing military equipment was found at Mogadishu’s Aden Ade International Airport, which was also apparently destined for Al-Shabaab. An investigation by the intelligence agency led to the arrest of 10 people connected to smuggling (The East African, May 19, 2023).

## Cameroon

► Boko Haram operatives attacked a village in northern Cameroon, near the border with Nigeria. A Cameroonian army force and a local militia halted the attack. Two Boko Haram operatives were killed and many were wounded. A local militia fighter was killed (Big News Network, May 23, 2023).

## Asia

### Pakistan

#### ISIS activity

► On May 19, 2023, a policeman was shot and killed in the Kali Kariz Sur area of the city of Mastung, about 45 km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Telegram, May 19, 2023).

### Philippines

#### ISIS activity

► On May 13, 2023, ISIS operatives attacked forces supporting the Philippine army in the village of Tuyan in the Maguindanao area, in the south of the country. The fighters fled. An RPG launcher was seized. The area where the forces were staying was set on fire (Telegram, May 17, 2023).

### Tajikistan

► Tajikistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that 29 families of ISIS operatives, including 104 women, girls, and small children, held in the camps of Roj (about 130 km northeast of Al-Hasakah) and Al-Hol (about 35 km southeast of Al-Hasakah), had been flown to Tajikistan (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, May 22, 2023). Their return is part of an international effort to evacuate the detained families of foreign ISIS operatives from the Kurdish-controlled area in Syria.

## Lebanon

### Counterterrorism

► The Lebanese army announced that it had detained a senior Al-Qaeda operative in the town of Deir Ammar, northeast of Tripoli, on May 19, 2023. According to the statement, the man, identified by the letters T.M., was one of Al-Qaeda's senior operatives and was responsible for establishing the organization's cells in Lebanon (Al-Arabiya, May 20, 2023).

► On May 19, 2023, Lebanon’s state security apparatus detained an ISIS operative in the Al-Ghazia area, in the periphery of Sidon (Lebanon24, May 19, 2023). No further details were provided about the detainee.

## Turkey

► Turkish security forces operating in the Cankırı Province, northeast of Ankara, detained three Iraqi nationals suspected of being ISIS operatives. Another 12 people suspected of being ISIS operatives were detained in three additional provinces, including Istanbul (Anatolia News Agency, May 23, 2023).

## United States

► A US District Court sentenced Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov, 35, an immigrant from Uzbekistan, to eight consecutive life sentences plus 260 years in prison, to be served in a federal prison in Colorado (India Today, May 18, 2023). Saipov was found responsible for a ramming attack on October 31, 2017, in Manhattan, New York. Eight people were killed and 11 injured. Security personnel investigating the incident found a handwritten note in the vehicle used in the attack in which Saipov pledged allegiance to ISIS (lawandcrime.com, May 19, 2023).

## Google and Twitter acquitted of aiding terrorism charges

► On May 18, 2023, the US Supreme Court decided to accept the position of Google and Twitter in two lawsuits against them, which dealt with social media’s responsibility for terrorist acts outside the US. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas ruled in an opinion on a lawsuit against Twitter that family members of victims of the shooting attack on January 1, 2017, at the Reina Club in Istanbul, Turkey, did not provide enough evidence to show that the aforementioned online platforms directly facilitated the commission of a terrorist crime in violation of federal law (ABC NEWS, May 19, 2023).

## The battle for hearts and minds

► The editorial of ISIS’s weekly Al-Naba appeared this week under the title “Allah wants to make things easier for you.” It deals with the importance of implementing Islamic law (Sharia) and argues that Sharia is the fulfilment of divine justice and supreme values designed to guide men. It is also argued that contrary to secular laws established by man, Sharia promotes morality and rejects corruption. It rejects secular laws, first and foremost democracy, and claims they promote promiscuity, corruption, heresy, and inequality. The article concludes that violent

jihad is the only way to lead to the implementation of Sharia and the elimination of heresy in the world (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, May 18, 2023).



The article “Allah wants to make things easier for you” (Al-Naba weekly, Telegram, May 18, 2023)