



## Summary of ISIS Activity around the Globe in 2023

### Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **In 2023, there was a sharp decline (about 50%) in the scope of ISIS's terrorist activity around the world compared with 2022.**<sup>2</sup> The downward trend in the volume of activity had continued since 2020. However, 2023 saw the sharpest decline.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ **ISIS's activity continued to be focused on Africa.** Activities were mainly conducted in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Sahel region, especially Mali. In Syria and Iraq, ISIS's core countries, the scope of activity was low.
- ▶ In Afghanistan's Khorasan Province, there was a 75% decrease in activity and a 50% decrease in casualties compared with the previous year, but the lethality of the attacks increased. In addition, the province continues to be a center for the spread of terrorism in Central and East Asia and around the world. In Iran, where the organization's activity is managed by the Khorasan Province, there was no notable activity in 2023, in contrast to 2022, which had been significantly deadly.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ One of the characteristics of the decline in the organization's activity is the number of ISIS provinces that were active in previous years, but no attacks were carried out in their territory in 2023. Prominent among these is the Sinai Province, after its activity was eliminated in a

<sup>1</sup> Due to the war, the 2023 summary was released significantly late and in a shortened format.

<sup>2</sup> The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC) has gathered information about ISIS's activity around the world over the past year based on claims of responsibility issued by ISIS in its media, especially the weekly al-Naba and publications of the organization's Amaq media wing. Some of the incidents were confirmed by reports by local officials. It should be remembered that the actual number of terrorist attacks may have been higher, since in some provinces the organization reported a lower number of terrorist acts than was attributed to it in practice. It is possible that some of the information did not reach the organization's central information system, which is responsible for reporting on behalf of ISIS, due to communication problems.

<sup>3</sup> According to Islamic movements researcher Mina al-Lami, there was a decline of about 50% in ISIS's activity in 2023 compared with 2022. See <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c204uvs9>.

<sup>4</sup> On August 13, 2022, a shooting attack was carried out against worshippers and security personnel at a Shiite temple in the city of Shiraz. Fifteen people were killed and 40 were wounded. See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 9, 2023, "[Summary of ISIS Activity around the Globe in 2022](#)"

series of successful counterterrorism operations by the Egyptian security forces in 2022. ISIS's provinces of Libya, Yemen, and India, which were active in 2022, also did not witness terrorist activity in 2023.

► There were no ISIS-inspired attacks in Israel in 2023, in contrast to 2022, which had witnessed three ISIS-inspired attacks. Attempts by ISIS to exploit the war in the Gaza Strip (which broke out on October 7, 2023) to harm Jews around the world were also unsuccessful, apparently due to effective counterterrorism activities by the security services in Israel and elsewhere in the world.

► Despite the dramatic decline in ISIS's activity around the world in 2023, there was an increase in activity in several of ISIS's provinces (an increase in the number of attacks, the number of casualties, and the lethality of attacks). For example, the Central Africa Province saw an increase in the number of casualties in the organization's activity in 2023, despite the decline in the number of attacks carried out by the province in 2023 (126 attacks, in which 781 people were killed or wounded, compared with 179 attacks, in which 626 people were killed or wounded, in 2022). In the Sahel Province, there was an increase in the number of attacks, but a decrease in the number of casualties, because the attacks were of a smaller magnitude (35 attacks were carried out in 2023, in which 526 people were killed and wounded, compared with 18 attacks, in which 674 people were killed and wounded, in 2022). The East Asia Province (mainly active in the southern Philippines) recorded a dramatic increase in activity (in total, the province's operatives carried out 24 attacks, in which 118 people were killed and wounded, compared with eight attacks, in which 64 people were killed and wounded, in 2022).

► **ISIS's activity in Western countries:** There was an increase in ISIS's activity in Europe. During the year, four attacks were carried out: one in Belgium, two in France, and one in Spain (in contrast to 2022, when no attacks were carried out in Western countries in the name of ISIS).<sup>5</sup> In the attacks carried out in 2023, five people were killed and about ten were wounded. These were lone-wolf ISIS-inspired attacks. The main causes of the increase in violence are mainly the burning of copies of the Quran in Sweden, the continued spread of radical Islam in Europe, and the rise in support for it in local right-wing circles. The war in the Gaza Strip also appears to have contributed to an increase in violence towards the end of the year.

---

<sup>5</sup>According to a Europol report for 2022, there were two Islamic-motivated terrorist attacks that year, but they were not attributed to ISIS. See <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2023-te-sat#downloads>.

► **The characteristics of ISIS's terrorist activity in 2023 were similar to those in 2022:** The vast majority of terrorist attacks were carried out by relatively small squads, usually equipped with light and medium weapons, and by detonating IEDs. The terrorist attacks carried out by the organization's operatives in Africa, especially in the Sahel region, were on a larger scale and caused many casualties, albeit less than in 2022.

► **The targets of the attacks:** The targets during 2023 included military targets, government institutions, Christian rural population, and elements affiliated with al-Qaeda (especially in the Sahel region).

► **Attacks on ISIS leadership:** The most significant incident was the killing of ISIS leader Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi on April 29, 2023. ISIS also lost several commanders in Syria and Iraq, especially in attacks by the US-led global coalition against the organization. In 2022, many senior ISIS operatives were killed, which apparently contributed to the weakening of the organization in 2023.

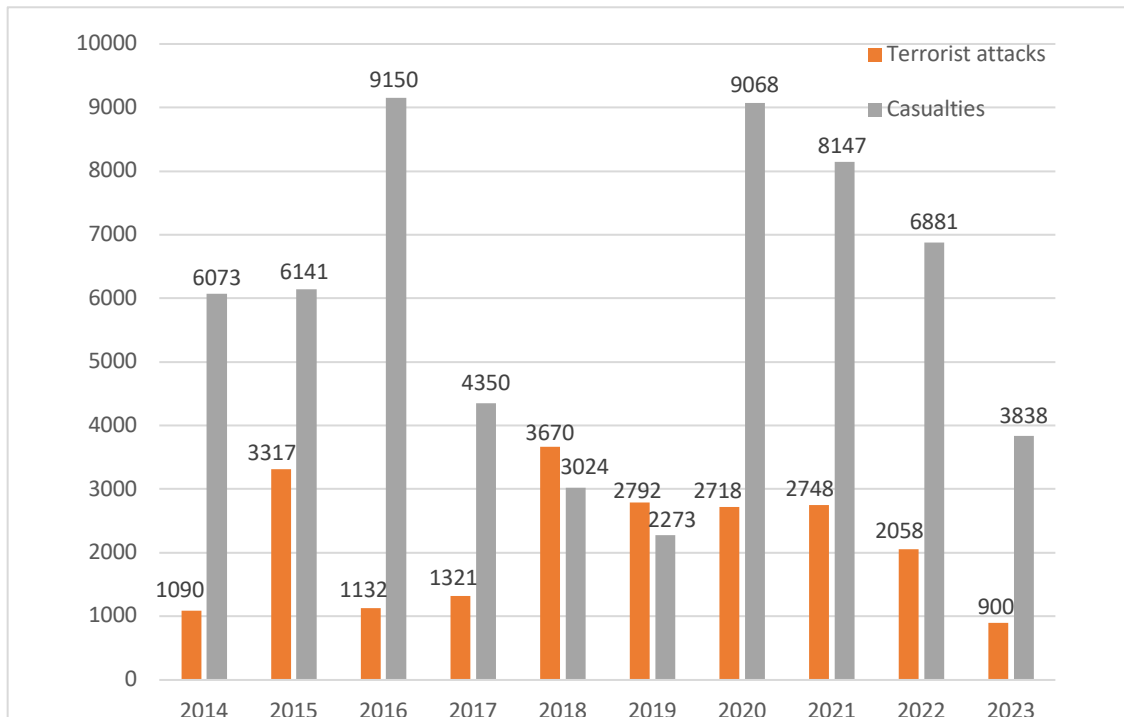
► **Changes in ISIS's propaganda apparatus:** ISIS's propaganda apparatus declined to a great extent compared with previous years. ISIS's weekly al-Naba continued to operate regularly, although the number of pages in each edition was sometimes reduced from 12 to only eight pages. During the year, supporters of the organization tried to establish a network of translations in various languages under the name Fursan al-Tarjuma, to attract different target audiences, but it seems that the effort did not yield significant results.

► The year 2023 marks the sharpest decline in the number of terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS in the past three years and is a continuation of the downward trend in ISIS's activity around the world in recent years. Concurrently with the decline in the number of terrorist attacks, there was a decrease in the number of geographic areas in which ISIS operated. However, although ISIS seems to have suffered defeats in most of its provinces of activity (except Africa), it seems that the idea itself persists and that the radical Sunni ideology is still trying and will try in the future to spread its message and gain supporters in countries around the world, including Western countries, by exploiting various events to attract the Muslim population to the idea of the Islamic State.

## ISIS activity in 2023 – analysis of data and trends

► **During 2023, there was a decline in the number of attacks carried out by ISIS operatives around the world. A total of 900 terrorist attacks were carried out, in which 3,838 people were killed and wounded.** This is in contrast to 2022, when 2,058 terrorist attacks were

carried out worldwide, in which 6,881 people were killed and wounded, and 2021, when 2,705 terrorist attacks were carried out, in which 8,147 people were killed and wounded. **This represents a decrease of about 56% in the number of attacks and about 44% in the number of casualties compared with the previous year.** This decline is a continuation of the downward trend in the organization’s activity around the world starting in 2020, but in 2023, the decline was the sharpest.



**Terrorist attacks and casualties by year: A sharp decline in ISIS’s activity since 2019 can be discerned following the collapse of the ISIS Caliphate in Syria and Iraq.<sup>6</sup>**

- ▶ Africa continued to be the organization’s main focus of activity after its center of activity moved to the continent from Syria and Iraq, which were the organization’s core countries.
- ▶ The highest number of attacks (about half) was carried out by the West Africa Province, which is mainly active in Nigeria. In total, the province’s operatives carried out 321 attacks in

<sup>6</sup> In this graph, we relied on data from the ITIC and other institutes. See:

<https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c204uvs9> ;

<https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-and-its-regional-affiliates-remain-persistent-and-pervasive-threat-worldwide/> ;

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/489611/terrorism-incidents-caused-by-major-terrorist-groups/> ;

[https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START\\_GTD\\_Overview2017\\_July2018.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_GTD_Overview2017_July2018.pdf) ;

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-47691006>;

<https://cdn.jns.org/uploads/2022/02/yOKFOxv.jpg> ;

[https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START\\_GTD\\_GlobalTerrorismOverview2019\\_July2020.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_GTD_GlobalTerrorismOverview2019_July2020.pdf) .

2023, killing and wounding 812 people (compared with 547 attacks, in which 1,589 people were killed and wounded, in 2022).

► After the African provinces, the Iraq Province operatives carried out 149 attacks, killing and wounding 239 people (compared with 484 attacks, in which 833 people were killed and wounded, in 2022).

► Operatives of the Central Africa Province, which is mainly active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, carried out 126 attacks, in which 781 people were killed and wounded (compared with 189 attacks, in which 626 people were killed and wounded, in 2022). The data shows that in 2023, attacks were, on average, more deadly.

► Operatives of the Syria Province carried out 114 attacks in 2023, in which 404 people were killed and wounded. This compares with 297 attacks, in which 887 people were killed and wounded, in 2022. It is likely (as in 2022) that the number of attacks was higher. During the year, attacks were carried out and attributed to ISIS squads, especially in the desert area, for which ISIS did not claim responsibility. The attacks were apparently carried out by ISIS-affiliated squads that were not necessarily in direct contact with the organization's central leadership, possibly due to communication problems.

► Operatives of the Mozambique Province carried out 63 attacks, killing and wounding 208 people (compared with 156 attacks, in which 331 people were killed and wounded, in 2022).

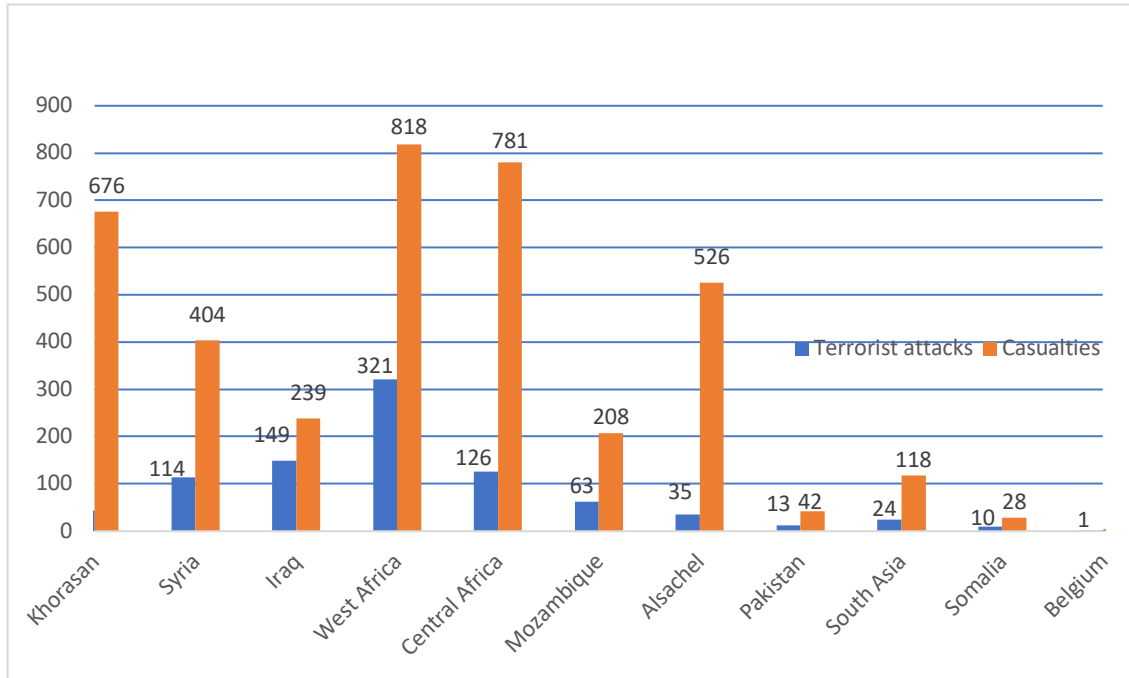
► Khorasan Province operatives carried out 44 attacks, killing and wounding 676 people (compared with 181 attacks in 2022, in which 1,188 people were killed and wounded). Apparently, the attacks carried out by the province operatives were the deadliest of any other ISIS province.

► The Sahel Province operatives carried out 35 attacks, killing and wounding 526 people, compared with 18 attacks in 2022, in which 674 people were killed and wounded.

► Operatives of the East Asia Province (mainly active in the southern Philippines) carried out 24 attacks, killing and wounding 118 people (compared with eight attacks, in which 64 people were killed and wounded, in 2022). This is a significant increase in the scope of the organization's activity in 2023. Operatives of the Pakistan Province carried out 13 attacks, in which 42 people were killed and wounded (compared with 19 attacks in 2022, in which 63 people were killed and wounded).

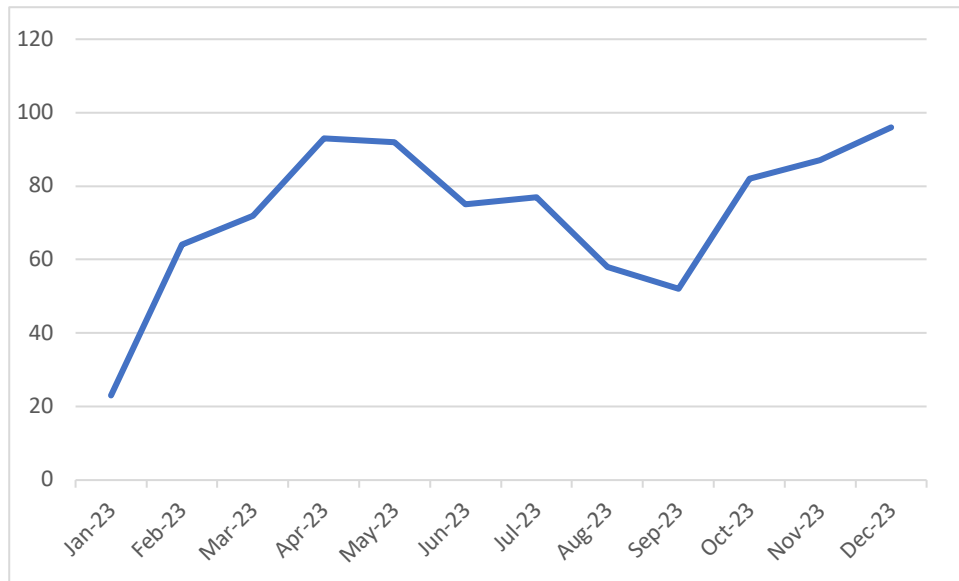
►Operatives of the Somalia Province carried out ten attacks, in which 28 people were killed and wounded (compared with 32 attacks in 2022, in which 61 people were killed and wounded, i.e., a decrease of more than 50% in ISIS’s activity).

### Attacks and casualties in ISIS activity in 2023 by province



#### West Africa Central Africa Khorasan Sahel Syria Iraq Mozambique East Asia Pakistan Somalia Belgium

►An analysis of ISIS’s attacks in 2023 on a monthly basis shows that from January 2023 to April 2023 there was an increase in ISIS’s activity, after which the trend reversed and there was a decline until September 2023. The decline in activity occurred close to the time of the killing of the organization’s leader (April 29, 2023) and apparently stemmed from the lack of a leader for the organization. Towards the end of the year, there was a renewed increase, apparently against the background of the reorganization of the leadership. Towards the end of the year, chaos also increased in Africa, especially in the Sahel region, which contributed to an increase in the organization’s activity.



**Approximate number of ISIS attacks in 2023 per month**

## Killing ISIS leader and senior members of the organization

► On April 30, 2023, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced in a live interview on Turkish TV that during the activity of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) forces on April 29, 2023, in northwestern Syria, they managed to kill ISIS leader Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi, whose true identity has not been disclosed by ISIS. Erdoğan noted that al-Qurashi had been under surveillance by Turkish intelligence for a long time, stressing that Turkey would continue to fight the terrorist organizations indiscriminately (Anadolu News, April 30, 2023). Turkish authorities have not disclosed the real name of the dead leader. Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi was declared the leader of ISIS on November 30, 2022, following the death of the previous leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi, in October 2022. He was the fourth leader of the organization after his three predecessors had been killed.



**Right: The house where ISIS's leader was killed (Akhbar al-Aan, May 1, 2023). Left: Location of the town of Jindires (Google Maps)**

► On August 3, 2023, ISIS's al-Furqan Media Foundation released an audiotape of the organization's spokesman, Abu Hudhaifa al-Ansari, announcing the death of the organization's previous leader, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi, and the appointment of his replacement, **Abu Hafs al-Hashemi al-Qurashi**<sup>7</sup>. In the recording, the spokesman blamed the HTS for the leader's death (Telegram, August 3, 2023). **The death of the current leader continued the trend of shortening the tenure of the organization's leaders**, which has damaged **the organization's power and image**. After the announcement of the new leader, operatives in the various provinces pledged allegiance to him, as is customary in the organization under such circumstances (Telegram, August 5, 2023).



**Right: Operatives of ISIS's Iraq Province pledge allegiance to the new leader (Telegram, August 5, 2023). Left: Operatives of ISIS's West Africa Province pledge allegiance to the new leader (Telegram, August 5, 2023)**

► During 2023, ISIS lost additional senior commanders, especially in Syria and Iraq. They were killed mainly in airstrikes by the US-led global coalition against ISIS. The organization's senior commander Abu Sara al-Iraqi, aka Abd al-Rauf al-Muhajir, was reportedly killed in a drone

<sup>7</sup> See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from August 8, 2023, "[ISIS has declared the death of its leader and the appointment of a new leader](#)"



attack in Syria in February 2023. Abu Sarah was responsible for managing ISIS's branches around the world. In April 2023, the US announced the killing of two senior ISIS operatives in northern Syria who were "responsible for planning attacks in Europe." In August 2023, the Mozambican army announced that it had killed the commander of the organization's Mozambique Province.<sup>8</sup>

## Africa

### Africa - ISIS's center of activity

►The African continent continued to be a center of ISIS activity in 2023 (similar to 2022). However, ISIS's activity in Africa decreased in 2023 compared with 2022 by about 60%. The activity focused on Nigeria, where the organization's West Africa Province operates. Then followed the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the organization's Central Africa Province) and then the Sahel Province. The activities of operatives in these provinces focused on attacking local and international security forces (especially African coalitions, attacking Christian civilians and ideological opponents).

►In general, it is evident that ISIS activity in Africa decreased in 2023 compared with the previous year. The West Africa Province (operating mainly in northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad), along with the Central Africa Province (operating mainly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda) and the Province of Mozambique, still pose a significant threat to the countries mentioned. The activities of the provinces focused on attacking local and international security forces (especially African coalitions, attacking Christian civilians and ideological opponents).

►Guillaume Soto-Mayor, researcher at the Middle East Institute, noted that ISIS's activity in Africa had been expanded towards the end of 2023, being characterized by attacks on government officials in villages and towns rather than targeting ordinary citizens. In addition, the activity was characterized by expanding the organization's indoctrination and recruitment mechanisms. According to Soto-Mayor, ISIS operatives present themselves as a ruling force, and recently he has begun to hear about entire communities joining ISIS, some because of their support for applying strict Sharia law in territories without a central government, and others because they lack resources to move and rebuild themselves elsewhere. He noted that the more ISIS had spread in Africa, the more its mechanisms had

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c204uvs9>.

increased, such as the training centers that train the next generation of terrorist operatives. He added that in the Sahel region, ISIS was pushing al-Qaeda away and that al-Qaeda's branch, the Support Group for Islam and Muslims – JNIM, had other priorities beyond the Sahel region, including aspirations for spreading in central Mali, the Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, and Ghana (The Washington Post, December 4, 2023).

## Nigeria

► **In 2023, ISIS tried to expand its activity in Nigeria to new territories.** In April 2023, it was first reported that ISIS operatives had their first IED detonation attack in Jigawa State, northern Nigeria. That same month, ISIS also carried out its first shooting attack in southwestern Nigeria, in Edo State (The Whistler, April 8, 2023).



**Right: Jigawa State in north-central Nigeria. Left: Edo State (Google Maps)**

## Sahel Region

► **In 2023, ISIS spread territorially in the Sahel region** (Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali). The spreading stemmed mainly from the weakness of the central governments in these countries and from the security vacuum created by the reduction in military aid provided by the West to the region, which was particularly reflected in the withdrawal of French forces and the closure of the UN peacekeeping task force operating in Mali. From April 2023, ISIS operatives in Mali took over villages surrounding the city of Ménaka, in the border area between Mali and Niger, turning the area into an ISIS stronghold, at the expense of al-Qaeda operatives who operated there.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, The offensive occurred amid a deteriorating security situation across the Sahel that will require creative U.S. responses, The Washington Institute, September 26, 2023: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/exploiting-vast-jihad-arena-islamic-state-takes-territory-mali>

►An article published in al-Naba, ISIS’s weekly, notes that ISIS has expanded its governance in Mali. Within this framework, the activity of the Hisba office (Diwan al-Hisba, the office responsible for applying Islamic religious law, sharia, and operating as an Islamic police) has been expanded. At the same time, the organization spreads its propaganda among the residents (al-Naba weekly; Telegram, August 24, 2023).



**Right: Stoning of a person who violated Islamic religious law. Left: Propaganda activity among the residents (al-Naba weekly, Telegram, August 24, 2023)**

►According to Caleb Weiss, a senior researcher at the Bridgeway Foundation who focuses on ISIS’s branches in Africa, ISIS’s branch in the Sahel region has become more active in the absence of an effective central government, and the only factor limiting its spread more widely is al-Qaeda’s branch in the Sahel, the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM - Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen) (The Washington Post, December 4, 2023). Researcher Héní Nsaibia noted that during the past year, ISIS’s activity in the Gao and Ménaka areas of Mali had been expanded at the expense of elements affiliated with al-Qaeda. According to him, the struggles between ISIS and al-Qaeda have decreased from July 2023 after both sides have realized that they face common challenges and that the fighting harms them. He added that while physical punishment was still enforced on outlaws (under sharia law), the organization placed greater emphasis on rebuilding and managing (local) infrastructure (The Washington Post, December 4, 2023).

►According to a report published by UN experts on August 27, 2023, ISIS doubled the area under its control in Mali in less than a year. It was also reported that Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (the Support Group of Islam and Muslims – JNIM), al-Qaeda’s branch in the country, also took advantage of the chaos in the country to expand its influence. According to the experts, since 2015, the Islamic organizations had managed to penetrate the center of the country and gradually expand their control. In the experts’ opinion, Mali’s military rulers watch from afar the confrontation between ISIS and al-Qaeda’s branch over control of

territories while the situation in the country keeps deteriorating (AP, August 27, 2023).

## Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda

► In 2023, operatives of ISIS's Central Africa Province, which operates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda<sup>10</sup>, carried out 126 attacks, in which 781 people were killed and wounded, compared with 189 attacks, in which 626 people were killed and wounded, in 2022. This represents a decrease of about 30% in the number of attacks, but an increase of about 20% in the number of casualties compared with the previous year. ISIS's main targets in 2023 remain the rural Christian population and local security forces in the border area between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

► The most serious attack in 2023 occurred on June 16, 2023, when five operatives attacked Lhubiriha secondary school in the city of Mpondwe, in southwestern Uganda. In the attack, which lasted about an hour and a half, 41 people were killed, 38 of them students (out of about 60 students at the school). No one claimed responsibility for the attack, but it is believed to be ISIS since the perpetrator was apparently the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) organization. It was the deadliest attack in Uganda since 2010, when two IEDs were detonated in the capital Kampala by al-Shabaab, an organization affiliated with al-Qaeda.<sup>11</sup>



**The entrance to the school and a partially burned residential building following the attack (al-Jazeera, June 17, 2023)**

<sup>10</sup> ISIS's Central Africa Province consists of operatives of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan-originating terrorist organization whose operatives pledged allegiance to ISIS's leader in 2019 and became part of the organization.

<sup>11</sup> On July 11, 2020, al-Shabaab carried out several suicide bombing attacks at the FIFA Cup finals. A total of 74 people were killed and 85 wounded.

## Mozambique

► ISIS's center of activity is the province of Cabo Delgado in the northeast of the country. This area has been the focus of ISIS's activity in recent years. The targets of ISIS's attacks are the Christian population and the local security forces. The attacks mostly consisted of shooting and detonating IEDs.

► On September 14, 2023, took place one of the most serious attacks, during which 11 Christian civilians from villages in the Mocímboa da Praia area were kidnapped and later executed. ISIS operatives gathered the Muslim residents of one of the villages and preached to them about the "importance of jihad." After that, they left the village (Telegram, September 15, 2023).



**Right: The bodies of the murdered and the houses set on fire by ISIS in one of the villages in the Mocímboa da Praia area (al-Naba; Telegram, September 21, 2023). Left: Mozambican army weapons seized by ISIS (Amaq; Telegram, August 23, 2023)**

► One of the targets of the attacks was **the international natural gas project in the Cabo Delgado area**, an international project for the production of natural gas, whose operation has been almost completely halted since April 2021 following ISIS's activity in the area. In November 2022, it was reported that activity was resumed, but on a relatively low scale. On April 24, 2023, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi announced that the security situation in the country allowed the project to continue (al-Jazeera, April 26, 2023).<sup>12</sup> However, at least until the end of the year, the project's activity was not renewed. ISIS's threat in the region persists.

## The Middle East

### Iraq

► During 2023, the Iraq Province operatives carried out 149 attacks, killing and wounding 239 people, compared with 2022, when 484 attacks were carried out, in which 833 people were killed and wounded. This is a sharp decline in the organization's activity, reflecting its

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/26/mozambique-okays-resumption-of-20bn-cabo-delgado-gas-project>

weakening in the country. ISIS's Iraq Province inflicted the lowest average number of casualties per attack compared with the rest of ISIS's provinces.<sup>13</sup> This attests to the limited scale of the attacks, which were carried out in the distant periphery, most of which did not receive headlines, even in the local media.

## Syria

- ▶ Operatives of ISIS's Syria Province carried out 114 attacks in 2023, in which 404 people were killed and wounded. This is a minimal number of attacks since additional attacks were carried out attributed to ISIS squads, especially in the desert area, for which ISIS's media network did not claim responsibility since the squads operating in these areas are not necessarily in direct contact with the organization's main leadership.
- ▶ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that in 2023, ISIS had carried out 336 attacks throughout Syria (about three times the number reported by ISIS), killing around 700 civilians and fighters – 411 of them Syrian army soldiers, fighters of Iranian-backed militias, and fighters of the Kurdish SDF forces. The SOHR did not report the number of wounded.
- ▶ Towards the end of the year, there was an increase in the number of attacks carried out by ISIS operatives in Syria, especially in the desert area, against Syrian army soldiers, fighters of pro-Iranian militias supporting the Syrian army, and Kurdish SDF fighters. According to the SOHR, seven attacks were carried out in September 2023, in which 20 fighters and three civilians were killed; In October 2023, 12 attacks were carried out, in which 18 fighters and three civilians were killed; In November 2023, 20 attacks were carried out, in which 77 fighters and one civilian were killed; In December 2023, 20 attacks were carried out, in which 47 fighters and two civilians were killed. According to the SOHR, 82 ISIS operatives and commanders were killed in Syria during the year (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 29, 2023).

## Khorasan Province

- ▶ During 2023, there was a significant decline in the volume of activity in the Khorasan Province. **Province operatives carried out 44 attacks, killing and wounding 676 people.** This is in contrast to 2022, during which the province's operatives carried out 181 attacks, in

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c204uvs9>,  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67819988>

which 1,188 people were killed and wounded. This represents a decrease of about 75% in the number of attacks and a decrease of about 50% in the number of casualties. At the same time, the attacks were more deadly, with more people being killed in each attack, an average of 15 casualties (compared with 6.6 in 2022).

► The dramatic decline in the number of attacks carried out by the Khorasan Province apparently stems from intensive preventive activity carried out by the Taliban government against ISIS, which is a political and ideological rival of the government. However, despite the Taliban's successes, ISIS has a presence in the country, and in 2023 managed to carry out several deadly attacks against government officials, security personnel, political and ideological opponents, and Shiite and Sikh civilians (considered by the organization to be infidels). Here are some examples:

► **Detonation of an explosive belt against the governor of Balkh Province:** On March 9, 2023, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive belt on the second floor of the headquarters of the governor of Balkh Province, in the city of Mazar-i Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Province governor Mohammad Dawood Muzammil and two civilians were killed (al-Jazeera, March 9, 2023). According to ISIS, the governor of the province was one of the Taliban commanders and held several senior military and administrative positions (Telegram, March 9, 2023).



**The terrorist who carried out the suicide bombing attack (Telegram, March 9, 2023)**

► **Detonation of an explosive bag in a Shiite center in the city of Mazar-i Sharif:** On March 11, 2023, an explosive bag was activated in a building where media personnel were present in the city of Mazar-i Sharif. One security guard was killed. Five journalists and three children were wounded (al-Jazeera, March 12, 2023). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, noting that an explosive bag had been placed in the Shiite center al-Tibyan, which belongs to Iran (Telegram, March 12, 2023).

► **Shooting attack against the chief engineer of the Herat Province:** On March 8, 2023, shots were fired at a vehicle in central Herat, about 120 km east of the Afghanistan-Iran border. Four people were killed in the attack, including the chief engineer of the province, and three others were wounded (Twitter account of Fayadullah Fayadan and Twitter account of Samiullah Menapal, March 8, 2023)



**ISIS operative shoots at the engineer  
(Telegram, March 10, 2023)**

► **Suicide bombing attack:** In 2023 as well, the activity of the Khorasan Province extended beyond the borders of Afghanistan to Pakistani territory. On July 30, 2023, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest near the stage during a political gathering ahead of the elections in the Pakistani city of Khar, the capital of Bajaur Province, on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. A total of 54 people were killed and nearly 200 wounded (al-Jazeera, July 31, 2023).

► **Shots fired at Sikh civilians:** On June 24, 2023, a Sikh civilian was shot and killed in the Yakatot area of the city of Peshawar, about 30 km east of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Telegram, June 24, 2023).

## Counterterrorism in Turkey

► According to Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, the Turkish authorities detained 29 people suspected of affiliation with ISIS in nine provinces in the country. It was also reported that the suspects planned to attack churches and synagogues in Istanbul (Turkish interior minister's X account, December 29, 2023). The planning may have been against the background of the war in the Gaza Strip.



## East Asia

### East Asia Province

- ▶ In ISIS's East Asia Province (which operates mainly in the southern Philippines), there was an increase in activity, with 24 attacks during the year, in which 118 people were killed and wounded, compared with 2022 (8 attacks, in which 64 people were killed and wounded).
- ▶ This year's activity also included attacks on Christian civilians and activity against infrastructure as part of an "economic war" waged by ISIS, whereas in previous years, the attacks were carried out mainly against members of the security forces.
- ▶ **Attack against Christians:** ISIS's worst attack of 2023 in the Philippines occurred on December 3, 2023, when ISIS operatives detonated an IED against a gathering of Christian citizens during a religious ceremony in a Catholic cathedral on the grounds of Marawi University, in the southern Philippines. Five people were killed, and nine others were wounded (Telegram, December 3, 2023, and CNN, December 3, 2023).
- ▶ **Attack against security forces:** On December 8, 2023, an attack was carried out against forces of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) – an organization that in 1996 recognized the government of the Philippines – in the Maguindanao area, on the island of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines. At least five fighters were killed, and several others were wounded. ISIS operatives set the place on fire (Telegram, December 11, 2023). Another deadly attack occurred on June 14, 2023, during which a Philippine police patrol was shot at in the town of Shariff Aguak, in the Maguindanao area. Six policemen were killed or wounded (Telegram, June 17, 2023).
- ▶ Against the background of ISIS's increased activity in the Philippines towards the end of 2023, ISIS tried to take advantage of the situation and called on its operatives and supporters to join the circle of jihad in that country. This came up in an editorial in ISIS's weekly al-Naba from December 7, 2023, entitled "The Philippines is an arena of jihad." The article encouraged ISIS operatives and supporters to carry out attacks against Christian Filipino citizens and against the country's political and security establishment (Telegram, December 7, 2023). The article was published amid ISIS's increased activity in the country.



The article “The Philippines is an arena of jihad” (Telegram, December 7, 2023)

## Western countries

- ▶ In 2023, there was an increase in ISIS’s activity in Europe compared with 2022. During the year, four attacks were carried out attributed to ISIS or inspired by ISIS. This is in contrast to 2022, during which no terrorist attacks were carried out in the West.<sup>14</sup> Among the four attacks, one was carried out in Belgium for which ISIS officially claimed responsibility, two in France, and one in Spain. Five people were murdered and about ten were wounded.
- ▶ The causes of the relative increase in activity are mainly the burning of copies of the Quran in Sweden, the continued spread of radical Islam in Europe, and the rise in support in local right-wing circles. In addition, it seems that towards the end of the year, the war in the Gaza Strip was also an influential factor, contributing to the increase in violence. Unfortunately, a significant number of the perpetrators of the attacks were known to law enforcement authorities to be affiliated with ISIS, which may indicate that the security forces failed to thwart these attacks.

## Belgium

- ▶ On October 16, 2023, a terrorist opened fire with an assault rifle about five kilometers from a stadium in Brussels about half an hour before the scheduled soccer match between Belgium and Sweden. He shouted “Allahu Akbar,” saying he was an ISIS operative. Two fans wearing

<sup>14</sup> According to the Europol 2022 report, there were two Islamic-motivated terrorist attacks that year, but they were not attributed to ISIS. See:

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2023-te-sat#downloads>.

Swedish football shirts were killed. The terrorist fled and was later shot and killed. The terrorist was Abdelsalam Gilani Moftah al-Aswad, 45, of Tunisian descent (Reuters and Le Monde, October 16-17, 2023). ISIS issued an official statement claiming responsibility for the attack (Telegram, October 17, 2023).



**Right: The terrorist during the attack (Telegram, October 16, 2023).  
Left: ISIS's claim of responsibility (Telegram, October 17, 2023)**

## France

- ▶ On October 12, 2023, a high school teacher in the northern French city of Arras was stabbed to death and several other people were killed and wounded on the spot. A few days after the attack, it was reported that the stabber was known to the police; he was affiliated with ISIS and even pledged allegiance to the organization's leader minutes before the attack (Fox News, October 18, 2023).
- ▶ On December 2, 2023, a stabbing attack was carried out near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. One person was killed, and two others were wounded. The perpetrator, Armand Rajabpour-Miandoab, a Frenchman of Iranian descent, was captured at the scene of the attack. According to French sources, the stabber is known as an ISIS member and was arrested in 2016 and imprisoned for five years for planning stabbing attacks. At the time of the attack, the terrorist shouted "Allahu Akbar" (AFP; Daily wire.com; kossyderrickent.com, December 2, 2023). ISIS did not claim responsibility for the attack.

## Spain

- ▶ On January 25, 2023, a man armed with a machete carried out a stabbing attack at two Catholic churches in the city of Algeciras in southern Spain and the Strait of Gibraltar. One person was killed, and four others were wounded. The perpetrator was apprehended. It

turned out that he was a 25-year-old Moroccan citizen named Yasin Ganza, who was staying illegally in Spain and was arrested for this reason and deported in 2019. The attack was investigated as a terrorist attack (unherd.com, February 1, 2023).



**The assailant documented on a security camera holding a machete (Telegram, January 25, 2023)**

## Counterterrorism

### United Kingdom

► On August 24, 2023, Mohamad al-Bared, 26, a doctoral student with British citizenship who works in mechanical engineering at the University of Birmingham, was accused in a British court of building an explosive UAV for ISIS (BBC, August 24, 2023).

### Germany

► On October 24, 2023, German special forces broke into a residential building in the city center of Duisburg, in northwestern Germany, and arrested a 29-year-old man, codenamed Osama al-Almani (i.e., the German), identified in Germany by his first name only, Tareq, on suspicion of attempting to carry out a terrorist attack during a rally in support of Israel in North Rhine-Westphalia, northern Germany. The suspect, an ISIS supporter, intended to rush into the rally by truck and murder as many people as possible. According to a report in the German newspaper Bild, the German authorities received information about the intention to carry out an attack at a pro-Israel rally from a “foreign intelligence organization” (Ynet, October 24, 2023).

## ISIS’s media network

► In 2023, ISIS’s propaganda network shrank significantly. This is evident in the volume of publications it distributed in 2023. Although ISIS’s weekly al-Naba continued its weekly publication, the scope of publication was reduced from 12 to eight pages. The organization’s Amaq agency also operated in 2023 in a limited format. At the same time, it is evident that the

organization's unofficial media network also operated on a limited scale. The most prominent arm remained al-Azaim, which apparently operates from Afghanistan.

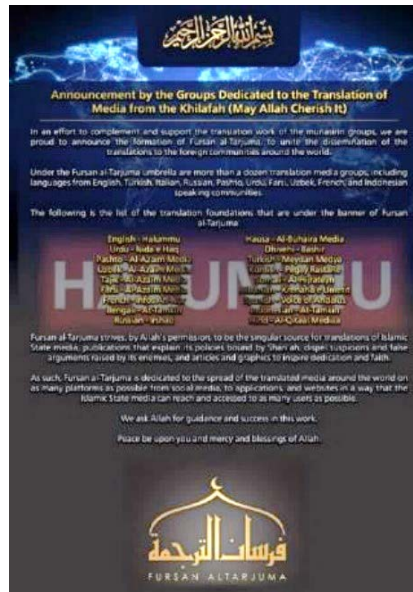
▶ Africa was a central place for producing ISIS propaganda material. Ian McCary, the US State Department's special representative in the US-led global coalition against ISIS, noted that about 60% of ISIS's propaganda originates (i.e., is produced) in Africa (The Washington Institute, March 21, 2024). In the ITIC's assessment, ISIS's main media network still remains in Syria and Iraq and is the most important to the organization. Afghanistan and Africa also serve as other important centers for producing the organization's propaganda materials.

▶ Due to the large part of the African continent in the organization's activities and as part of the organization's understanding that Africa has the greatest potential for expanding its activities, ISIS invested most of its media efforts in this continent. In this context, Mina al-Lami, a researcher of the Islamic movements, noted that 39 of the 49 front pages of ISIS's al-Naba weekly in 2023 had dealt with ISIS's activity in Africa.<sup>15</sup>

▶ On March 3, 2023, ISIS-affiliated sources announced that 14 different ISIS-affiliated media institutions had decided to join forces in an effort to translate ISIS's propaganda materials into different languages under one roof. The new foundation was called Fursan al-Tarjuma ("Knights of Translation"), and it was supposed to translate the publications into English, French, Russian, Tajik, Uzbek, Bengali, Hausa, Indonesian, Persian, Hindi, Turkish, Kurdish, Pashto, Somali and Albanian (Telegram, March 3, 2023). This was intended to attract additional target audiences to the organization. However, since the announcement, there has been no increase in the number of foreign-language publications distributed by the organization, so the establishment of the new body did not advance the organization's propaganda system.

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c204uvs9>.



### The announcement of the establishment of the Fursan al-Tarjuma Foundation (Telegram, March 3, 2023)

- One of the manifestations of the weakness of ISIS's propaganda network was reflected in the propaganda campaign conducted by the organization in August 2023, designed to show support around the world for the new leader of the organization. Unlike in the past, the campaign featured few photographs documenting support for the organization's leader, and no videos were published at all. The number of ISIS operatives who appeared in the photos was small compared with previous years, except for operatives from the West Africa Province and the Sahel Province. Operatives from the Sinai and Libya provinces were completely absent from the photos.
- In addition, it appears that in 2023, the organization's media department published very few photographs of the organization's operatives in the various provinces celebrating the month of Ramadan with joint meals, in contrast to previous years, when the organization's media department distributed many photographs documenting these meals.