



## **Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, February 1, 2023**

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**Data Cutoff:** February 1, 2023, at 10 a.m.

### Key Takeaways:

**Iraq.** The Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham likely made a strategic choice to decrease its attacks in some areas of Iraq to enable their use as transit zones. ISIS continues to use Ninewa province in northwestern Iraq to move supplies and personnel to support its attack cells in eastern Iraq. Iraq's government is attempting to limit ISIS movements, though Ninewa's geographic and demographic features challenge this effort. ISIS likely retains some access to rural Arab communities due to Yazidi-Arab tensions stemming from the aftermath of ISIS atrocities and subsequent retribution attacks in the 2014–17 period.

**Somalia.** The Islamic State is leveraging networks across multiple continents to sustain both new and established affiliates. A US military raid in northern Somalia killed a key ISIS facilitator in northern Somalia. This facilitator oversaw a sprawling financial and logistical support network from Somalia that coordinated trainers and funding to Islamic State affiliates in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mozambique. His death may temporarily disrupt these activities.

**Afghanistan-Pakistan.** The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) significantly escalated its attack campaign against the Pakistani state with a major suicide bombing targeting police in northwestern Pakistan on January 30. Conflicting TTP responses to the attack could demonstrate internal TTP divisions over strategy and ideology. These divisions, as well as tensions between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP faction that conducted the attack, could lead this faction to ally itself with the Islamic State's branch in the region. Afghan Taliban support for the TTP will continue to strain the Taliban's relationship with Pakistan and increases the likelihood of Pakistani military action against TTP havens in Afghanistan.

### Assessments:

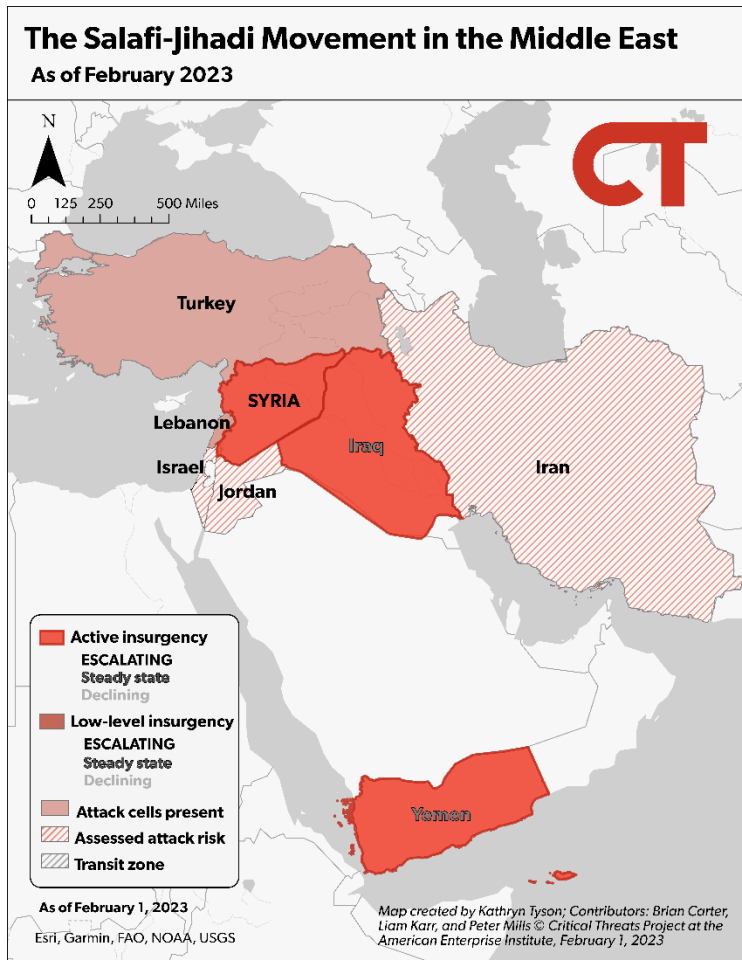
**Iraq.** ISIS has likely made a strategic choice to decrease its attacks in some areas of Iraq, including in Ninewa province, to sustain attack cells in Diyala and Kirkuk provinces and the northern Baghdad belts. ISIS rarely attacks in Ninewa but uses the province to move supplies and personnel to eastern Iraq, capitalizing on Ninewa's human and geographic terrain that allows militants to move relatively undetected by security forces.<sup>1</sup> The Iraqi Interior Ministry disrupted a three-person suicide attack

near the Yazidi-majority town of Sinjar on January 25, illustrating ISIS’s continued ability to plan attacks targeting minorities in Ninewa province.<sup>2</sup> Iraqi Border Guards regularly arrest likely ISIS fighters transiting the Ninewa-Syria border. This access indicates that ISIS likely has more attack capability inside Ninewa than it chooses to use in the province. Iraq is building a border wall to mitigate the movement of ISIS fighters, but it will likely have only limited effects.<sup>3</sup>

ISIS is likely able to use Ninewa province as a transit zone despite a significant Iraqi military presence, due to the province’s large size and cross-border populations and the Iraqi army’s competing priorities. There are four professional division-sized Iraqi units in Ninewa, but the province’s long border with Syria is difficult to patrol.<sup>4</sup> The Iraqi army also intermittently diverts resources to counter the influence of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)–affiliated Yazidi Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS).<sup>5</sup> The YBS and PKK in Sinjar also sometimes cooperate with Iran-backed militias, causing both primary counter-ISIS forces—the Iraqi army and Iran-backed militias—to jockey for influence instead of focusing on ISIS.<sup>6</sup>

ISIS is also able to take advantage of communal tensions caused by its atrocities in 2014.<sup>7</sup> ISIS massacred 5,000 local Yazidis and other minorities. Local Yazidi militias responded in 2017 after ISIS’s defeat in Sinjar, abducting and killing local Arab tribesmen.<sup>8</sup> Some local Yazidi militiamen accuse “90 percent’ of local Arab tribes” of involvement in ISIS.<sup>9</sup> Arab communities’ memory of Yazidi militia attacks could contribute to ISIS’s ability to move through Ninewa province. ISIS moved “hundreds” of fighters across the Iraqi-Syrian border to Iraq in fall 2022.<sup>10</sup> ISIS also coerces local tribesmen in northwestern Iraq.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1. The Salafi-Jihadi Movement in the Middle East**

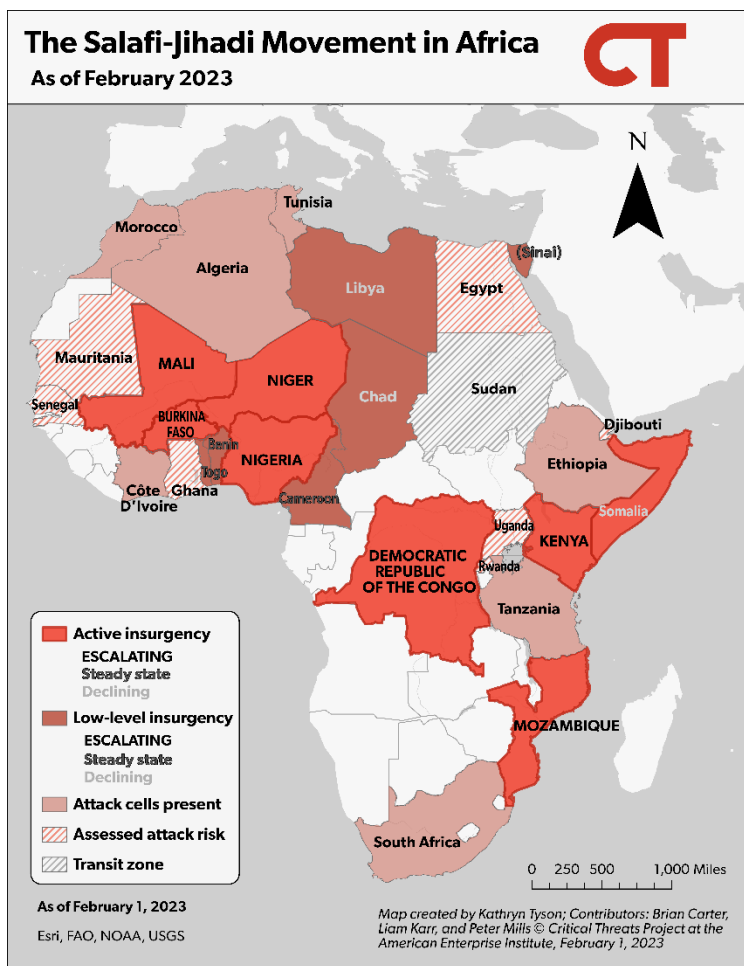


Source: Kathryn Tyson.

**Somalia.** The US killing of Islamic State financier Bilal al Sudani underscores the global connections and support structure that link Islamic State affiliates. US Special Forces killed Sudani and 10 other Islamic State fighters in a ground raid in a cave complex in northern Somalia on January 26.<sup>12</sup> The operation was the first US ground raid in Somalia since 2020.<sup>13</sup>

Sudani oversaw a sprawling financial and logistical support network. The US sanctioned Sudani in 2012 under the name Suhayl Salim Abd el Rahman for facilitating foreign fighters' travel to al Shabaab training camps.<sup>14</sup> Sudani had since defected to the Islamic State's Somalia province (IS-S) and likely led the Islamic State's administrative office in Somalia, which supported Islamic State affiliates in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Mozambique. The office has allowed IS-S to play an outsized role in the Islamic State's administrative network despite the Somalia faction's small military footprint.<sup>15</sup> Assistance included sending trainers to the Islamic State groups in the DRC and Mozambique, which has likely contributed to the growing capabilities of the DRC-based group in recent years.<sup>16</sup> Sudani also used operatives in South Africa to transfer money to these affiliates and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan, which has significantly increased its activity since the Taliban takeover in 2021.<sup>17</sup> Sudani's death may temporarily disrupt this administrative network and the support reaching these affiliates but is unlikely to dampen this support permanently.

**Figure 2. The Salafi-Jihadi Movement in Africa**



Source: Kathryn Tyson.

## Afghanistan-Pakistan

**The TTP significantly escalated its attacks in northwestern Pakistan on January 30.** A TTP suicide bomber detonated an improvised explosive device inside a high-security police compound in Peshawar in northwestern Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> The attack occurred in a mosque frequented by Pakistani police officers living in the compound. The bombing killed over 90 officers and wounded at least 170 others, marking the highest casualty TTP attack in Peshawar since 2014, when TTP militants opened fire in a public school and killed over 130 schoolchildren.<sup>19</sup> The TTP frequently targets Pakistani security forces in small-scale attacks but rarely inflicts more than a dozen casualties. The attack follows a trend of TTP attacks increasing in scope and scale in Pakistan since the group called off a cease-fire with the Pakistani government in November 2022.

**Conflicting TTP responses to the attack could demonstrate internal TTP divisions between hard-line and more moderate factions.** The leader of TTP sub-faction Jamaat ul Ahrar (JuA) and his aide claimed responsibility for the Peshawar attack on January 30.<sup>20</sup> JuA claimed the attack was in revenge for the killing of JuA's former leader in Afghanistan in August 2022. The TTP spokesperson later denied responsibility for the attack and reiterated that TTP attacks against mosques are prohibited.<sup>21</sup> Pro-TTP social media accounts circulated a fake ISKP statement claiming responsibility for the attack, suggesting some TTP members seek to deflect blame for the attack away from the TTP.<sup>22</sup> A pro-Islamic State Telegram account denied ISKP's involvement in the attack.<sup>23</sup> The bombing could also represent a lack of coordination between TTP leadership and its array of sub-factions rather than overt hostility between factions.

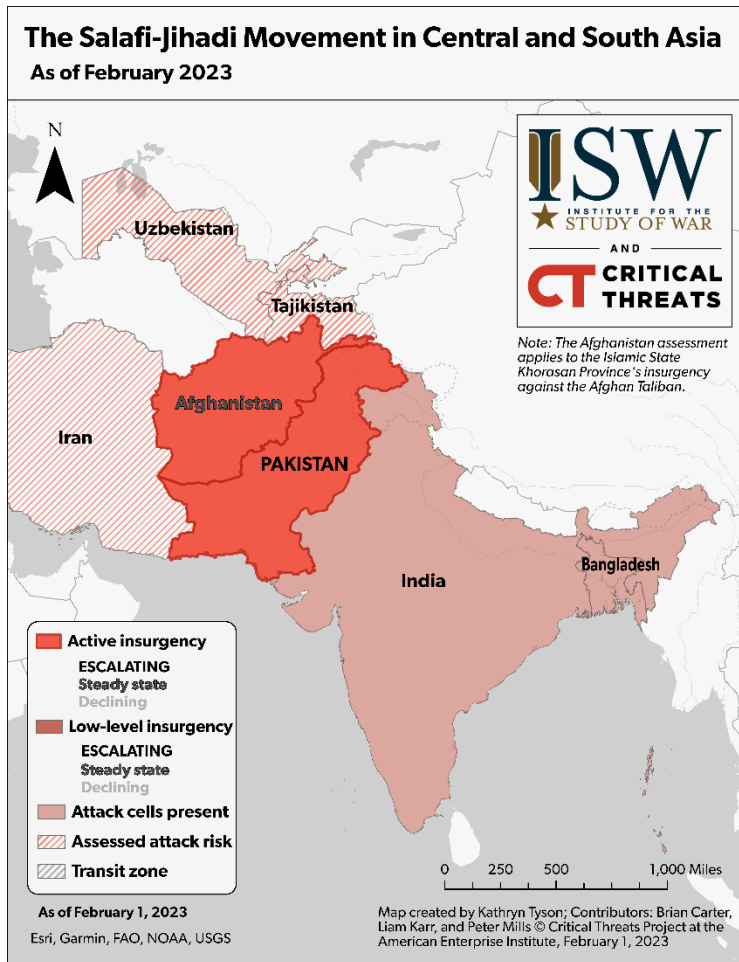
The JuA faction could split from the TTP if it views the TTP as taking too moderate of an approach to its insurgency against Pakistan. The JuA split from the TTP in 2014 but rejoined the group in 2020.<sup>24</sup> JuA reportedly opposed peace talks between the TTP and Pakistani government in 2022 and criticized the TTP for not taking more aggressive and violent action to avenge the death of the JuA leader after August 2022.<sup>25</sup> Hard-line JuA members could alternatively defect to ISKP. JuA and ISKP have previously cooperated in attacks and may maintain ties.<sup>26</sup>

**The Taliban government's rhetorical response to the Peshawar bombing was fragmented and indecisive but ultimately reinforced its ties to the TTP.** The Taliban Foreign Ministry condemned targeting worshippers at mosques as un-Islamic but did not attribute responsibility or label the attack as terrorism.<sup>27</sup> The Taliban embassy in Pakistan went further by calling the bombing a heinous terrorist attack.<sup>28</sup> The Taliban embassy in Pakistan issued its condemnation first, and it may have thought ISKP carried out the attack, which is why it issued a stronger condemnation. The Taliban Foreign Minister later blamed the attack on Pakistan's internal problems and reiterated Taliban denials that foreign terrorist groups are allowed to operate in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> The Taliban government is likely condemning attacks on mosques as un-Islamic to differentiate itself from ISKP, which routinely attacks mosques. This condemnation risks elevating tensions between JuA, the rest of the TTP, and the Taliban, and it could contribute to JuA defecting to ISKP.

**Afghan Taliban rhetorical support for the TTP, as the TTP escalates against Pakistan, will further strain the Taliban's relationship with Pakistan and increase pressure on Pakistan to take military action against TTP safe havens in Afghanistan.** Afghan Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada indirectly expressed support for a TTP rhetorical campaign legitimizing TTP attacks against the Pakistani state a few days before the Peshawar bombing. Akhundzada's statements indicate he does not view Pakistan as a legitimate state and is unlikely to approve measures to restrain the TTP's campaign against it. He and other Afghan Taliban linked religious figures argued that Pakistan is not a legitimate Islamic state, therefore fighting against the Pakistani state is religiously permissible.<sup>30</sup> TTP-affiliated religious leaders are conducting an

information campaign intended to rebut a recent Pakistani state-backed fatwa, which argued Pakistan is a legitimate Islamic state.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 3. The Salafi-Jihadi Movement in Central and South Asia**



Source: Kathryn Tyson.

## Other Updates:

### Africa

**Mali:** Worsening relations between the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali and the Malian junta will likely lead to the mission's drawdown and eventual disintegration. The Malian junta has alienated stakeholders in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by pushing for the peacekeeping force to take a more aggressive role in combating Salafi-jihadi groups. The junta has simultaneously asserted its authority by imprisoning MINUSMA personnel and sporadically denying MINUSMA overflight permission.<sup>32</sup>

The rupture in France-Mali relations and French forces' withdrawal from Mali in 2022 has also complicated the MINUSMA mission; major troop-contributing countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Sweden, and the United Kingdom plan to withdraw their MINUSMA forces in 2023.<sup>33</sup> The UN secretary-general released an internal review of MINUSMA on January 16 that outlined three options for MINUSMA's future following the withdrawals: increasing the number of troops to compensate for current gaps, shrinking MINUSMA's footprint to match its capacity, or ending MINUSMA's peacekeeping component and making it a political mission.<sup>34</sup> The junta rejected all three options and reiterated its calls for a more aggressive posture. This response indicates that the junta's expectations

will continue to diverge from MINUSMA's current posture and capability, increasing the likelihood that MINUSMA will reduce operations and ultimately withdraw entirely.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/07/iraqs-northwest-wary-executions-cross-border-movement-continue>

<sup>2</sup> <https://shafaq dot com/en/Iraq-News/Iraq-s-federal-intelligence-agency-thwarts-an-ISIS-plot-targeting-a-court-in-Nineveh>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.facebook.com/haras.hodod6/posts/pfbid02AG5VKHKAIQyjaov8Evz4bhLsTrVT2n67WsBRHGfGhMotLyMAwSfZ4j4RXz7Nydmdl?\\_cft\\_\[0\]=AZWCbZbdIucvutlg-RuSUBM1iG0OuCLws4uP4wT0\\_D\\_m6GNSBDjU1bZmx5rLrOP72Z3RR8mDYEvu74HyeR9A3j11PKUB0pypUusSXRa2wzcQJg985RyxbzmbBmUmOhAoLy9xXcQyZ7pu0YkG58VOIP&\\_tn\\_=%2CO%2CP-R;](https://www.facebook.com/haras.hodod6/posts/pfbid02AG5VKHKAIQyjaov8Evz4bhLsTrVT2n67WsBRHGfGhMotLyMAwSfZ4j4RXz7Nydmdl?_cft_[0]=AZWCbZbdIucvutlg-RuSUBM1iG0OuCLws4uP4wT0_D_m6GNSBDjU1bZmx5rLrOP72Z3RR8mDYEvu74HyeR9A3j11PKUB0pypUusSXRa2wzcQJg985RyxbzmbBmUmOhAoLy9xXcQyZ7pu0YkG58VOIP&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R;)  
<https://www.facebook.com/haras.hodod6/posts/pfbid0KCpw7BCouJrxz8UCwYgiDwtY9BeeH1PMFUjcgSQQw8XD5BtwpiQkq8N7QKGTsG3I;>

[https://www.facebook.com/haras.hodod6/posts/pfbid02nsfjxA8ns5GFaTeA9LaMT1zp94P7XpTTnflTtEecitaZbaq37LFUBAzWYXj2SeiEI?\\_cft\\_\[0\]=AZVukHQy6V3YkqKS7s5dViYoMvlcyp-ggZ\\_ula95RsFOcEoAelCCpWnWp3e8y76nrKU709S9FrLSUTPKR0fJW79E\\_rJXrQxCY3hluDd9PwnsjqrZYk-xbpY1p2LaqvGvt8P\\_n14DEj\\_DWo2ml32OJt5&\\_tn\\_=%2CO%2CP-R;](https://www.facebook.com/haras.hodod6/posts/pfbid02nsfjxA8ns5GFaTeA9LaMT1zp94P7XpTTnflTtEecitaZbaq37LFUBAzWYXj2SeiEI?_cft_[0]=AZVukHQy6V3YkqKS7s5dViYoMvlcyp-ggZ_ula95RsFOcEoAelCCpWnWp3e8y76nrKU709S9FrLSUTPKR0fJW79E_rJXrQxCY3hluDd9PwnsjqrZYk-xbpY1p2LaqvGvt8P_n14DEj_DWo2ml32OJt5&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R;)  
[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0cFWM5ATcGhmkRtWjK45PwHVPoNr6HQWvKmd2eM7GXbptuqCLMrNeE4qMpirFYeVkl&id=100088118756478&\\_cft\\_\[0\]=AZUetpalMY26qjdHbTTceCHBM5EqCrMBF4WaoLtxmY3mGGereLWOWUqkkZ3J-EJ0CmcPxtomMmhoEXTCSqSGsbuKkF4GWQBp8CLQC4-vla7Xs0hgup-H4nT0AKjKUGdYqZfAfxZeIT5INvbKtGpshK\\_kJK8N3aNeySxh5YVh-Zkw&\\_tn\\_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0cFWM5ATcGhmkRtWjK45PwHVPoNr6HQWvKmd2eM7GXbptuqCLMrNeE4qMpirFYeVkl&id=100088118756478&_cft_[0]=AZUetpalMY26qjdHbTTceCHBM5EqCrMBF4WaoLtxmY3mGGereLWOWUqkkZ3J-EJ0CmcPxtomMmhoEXTCSqSGsbuKkF4GWQBp8CLQC4-vla7Xs0hgup-H4nT0AKjKUGdYqZfAfxZeIT5INvbKtGpshK_kJK8N3aNeySxh5YVh-Zkw&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/back-basics-us-iraq-security-cooperation-post-combat-era>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.turkiyegazetesi dot com.tr/gundem/768531.aspx>; <https://arabi21 dot com/story/1336776/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.turkiyegazetesi dot com.tr/gundem/768531.aspx>; <https://carnegie-mec.org/2021/03/30/making-of-kurdish-frontier-power-conflict-and-governance-in-iraqi-syrian-borderlands-pub-84205>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/germany-iraq-worlds-first-judgment-on-crime-of-genocide-against-the-yazidis>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ecfr.eu/publication/when-the-weapons-fall-silent-reconciliation-in-sinjar-after-isis>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ecfr.eu/publication/when-the-weapons-fall-silent-reconciliation-in-sinjar-after-isis>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/12/syrian-rebels-kill-caliph-attacks-continue-iraq-syria>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/07/iraqs-northwest-wary-executions-cross-border-movement-continue>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3279923/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-somalia-operation>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/26/us/politics/isis-leader-us-somalia-raid.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/the-war-in-somalia>

<sup>14</sup> <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=13367>; <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1630.aspx>; <https://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-usa-eritrea-idAFL2E8I5C4020120705>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2023/01/analysis-u-s-military-kills-key-islamic-state-leader-in-africa.php>

<sup>16</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/013/48/PDF/N2101348.pdf?OpenElement>;

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<sup>17</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0616>;

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www dot dawn dot com/news/1734573/death-toll-from-suicide-attack-on-mosque-in-peshawars-police-lines-rises-to-100>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/death-toll-pakistan-mosque-blast-rises-83-hospital-spokesperson-2023-01-31>;

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30491435>

<sup>20</sup> <https://twitter.com/WajSKhan/status/1620110716949905408>; <https://twitter.com/abdsayed/status/1620006009870888960>

<sup>21</sup> <https://twitter.com/basitresearcher/status/1620138341244239873>

<sup>22</sup> <https://twitter.com/Natsecjeff/status/1620424092821368833>

<sup>23</sup> <https://t.me/egrhsk/386>

<sup>24</sup> <https://twitter.com/khorasandiary/status/1620681132932214786>

<sup>25</sup> <https://twitter.com/Natsecjeff/status/1620424100236898304>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/05/evolution-and-potential-resurgence-tehr-i-taliban-pakistan>

<sup>27</sup> [https://twitter.com/MoFA\\_Afg/status/1620088603765526529](https://twitter.com/MoFA_Afg/status/1620088603765526529)

<sup>28</sup> <https://twitter.com/afghanembassy1/status/1620032254373429251>

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<https://twitter.com/AfghanAnalyst2/status/1620791130194579456>
- <sup>30</sup> <https://twitter.com/bsarwary/status/1618971835680591873>; <https://twitter.com/abdsayed/status/1618325031611961345>
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- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230108-pardoned-ivorian-soldiers-arrive-home-after-months-in-malian-detention>;  
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- <sup>35</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/politics-soviet-union-mali-government-united-states-russia-2962c28cfb2e03f21ff68559cf29b439>