

## **Prepared Statement to Joint Special Meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the 1267 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee**

Thank you, Chair; esteemed delegates and colleagues, I am delighted to participate in this long postponed but still timely Joint Special Meeting. I will focus my remarks on providing an overview of the ISIL and AL-Qaeda threat, with a focus on the terrorism financing trends that the Monitoring Team has observed. Alongside these developments, I will also address the rapidly evolving terrorism picture in Africa, as well as the current status of the ISIL and AQ global leaderships.

For years, the Monitoring Team has noted that ISIL is one of the world's wealthiest terror groups. There is now an emerging consensus that the group's financial resources are significantly depleted, although far from gone. Recent assessments put the financial reserves available to ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq at between \$25 million and \$50 million.

Continued counter-terrorism pressure in the region on ISIL finances and, more importantly, on ISIL financial facilitators, is expected to further erode the group's access to these resources.

An enduring concern are the thousands of ISIL fighters and their family members who remain in detention or in displaced persons camps in the region. Financial flows in and out of these facilities suggest that the risk of terrorism financing remains high. The Monitoring Team has consistently recommended that Member States seek to monitor these flows, which may involve their nationals at one end of the transaction, with the aim of identifying facilitators and networks on the outside who are key to understanding how the group continues to finance itself.

Outside of the conflict zone, we are working to highlight the risks posed by social media in providing a platform for the recruitment,

dissemination of propaganda and financing of ISIL, Al-Qaida and affiliated groups.

More recently we have noted that the rapid adoption of cryptocurrencies or virtual assets is posing new challenges to law enforcement and regulators as they seek to keep pace with the adoption of these currencies, some of which have anonymizing features.

Perhaps the technological antithesis of cryptocurrency is the artisanal mining of gold and other natural resources which have been abused by terrorists and terrorist financiers for decades. This is a persistent concern especially in parts of Africa.

This brings us to the broader threat picture which I want to touch on briefly as a way of setting the stage for the rest of this discussion.

In **West Africa**, and specifically the Lake Chad Basin, ISIL's local province ISWAP appears to be benefitting from having killed Abubakar Shekau and absorbed many of his Boko Haram fighters. The group continues to project a threat across international borders into Cameroon, Niger and Chad. It is numerically ISIL's largest affiliate, even without counting its branch in the **Sahel**, known as ISGS.

JNIM has continued to expand in the region, building on its long-running radicalization efforts. Political instability in Sahel adds to MS concerns about the region, with coups in Mali and Guinea weakening legitimate authorities and inviting exploitation by terrorists and radical elements. In this context, it is worth mentioning the inspiration and example that the Taliban's success in Afghanistan may supply to other groups around the world. JNIM, in particular, has shown sustained interest in attacking state authority in the Sahel. Mali and Burkina Faso are obviously at risk.

In **East Africa**, Al-Shabaab continued to launch successful suicide car bombings and improvised roadside IED attacks against high profile Government targets throughout Mogadishu, as well as landmine and IED

assaults in Kenya's North-Eastern Province and Lamu County. The group is another that may be inspired by the Taliban example in Afghanistan to step up its efforts to take control of more territory in Somalia, and to believe that it might ultimately be able to take control of the country.

ISIL Somalia is a relatively small but well-established ISIL presence in Puntland, strategically significant as the hub of the Central Africa Province (ISCAP). ISCAP has branches in DRC and Mozambique, where it is a rising threat. The key local group that has pledged allegiance to ISIL is Ahlu Sunna Wal Jammah (ASWJ), led mainly by Tanzanians. Following its assault on Palma in Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique in March and April 2021, ASWJ has suffered some setbacks and made a tactical retreat south towards Pemba, the provincial capital.

The Monitoring Team remains concerned about the trajectory of terrorist violence in Africa, as well as the impact of events in Afghanistan on the local, regional and global threat.

**Returning to the issue of leadership,** Counter-terrorism pressure from various MS continues on ISIL and Al-Qaida in most theatres where they are active, and both groups continue to lose both leaders and fighters from the rank and file.

**ISIL leader** Amer Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla (aka Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi aka Haji Abdullah) still chooses not to follow his predecessor's risky practice of recording audio or video messages for his supporters. This leaves the group over-reliant on spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi and on its general propaganda output. Operational communication, command and control continues but is complicated and dangerous for the group.

Illustrating this point, the Iraqi authorities this month detained both al-Mawla's deputy, Sami Jasim al-Jabouri, aka Hajji Hamid, who was also

in charge of ISIL finances, and another key leader. Al-Mawla has lost so many deputies that his effectiveness must be in question.

Like ISIL, Al-Qaida has continued to suffer losses. The imminent **AQ leadership succession** is expected to be challenging, given the lack of any obviously suitable safe haven for a new leader. At the same time, AQ has received a major boost from the success of its Taliban allies in taking over Afghanistan this summer.

Ayman al-Zawahiri was still alive as late as January 2021 but is assessed to be in poor health and unable to lead or communicate effectively. Sayf-al Adl is still seen by MS as the most likely successor to Zawahiri when the time comes, although we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of a shift to a lesser-known leader. Uncertainty as to where the new amir would go to assume the leadership is reduced now **Afghanistan** looks an increasingly safe haven for AQ.

With respect to the Taliban's relationship with AQ, we can say that ties remain close. On 31 August, AQ issued a statement congratulating the Taliban on their victory, and calling on co-religionists to extend total support to the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

**THANK YOU Again for the opportunity to participate in this discussion.**