

***Joint Open Briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee on ISIL in Africa: Nature of Threat and Responses***

**7 April 2022**

**Session I: Overview of the evolution of the threat posed by ISIL in Africa**

**Full Statement by Mr. Martin Ewi, Institute for Security Studies (South Africa) on Sources of Radicalisation and Factors Accounting for ISIS Expansion in Africa**

Thank you for giving me the floor Chairperson

- Excellencies,
- Distinguished Participants,
- Ladies & Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), I wish to express our deep appreciation to CTED and the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee for inviting the ISS to take part in this important open briefing on ISIS' expansion in Africa.

The Islamic State continues its expansionist operations into Africa for the third year running since the demise of the Caliphate in the Levant. The group is now considered the biggest threat to the continent, surpassing Al Qaeda as the most dangerous terrorist group in Africa. Deaths and humanitarian catastrophe including forced displacements (IDPs) and refugees from ISIS-related violence are now more than those resulting from traditional armed conflict including coups and rebellions.

ISIS now has active operational cells in the five geopolitical regions in Africa, putting more than 500 million people at risk of terrorism. In addition to military operations, ISIS maintain logistics cells in more than 30 countries on the continent. The key function of these logistics cells is to mobilize funds and equipment to facilitate movements and operations.

The spread of Islamic State in Africa is due largely to a very dynamic and effective recruitment and radicalization machinery that is highly adaptive to local realities. The Islamic State is not just a terrorist group, it is also an organized crime network that functions like a criminal enterprise.

**Sources of radicalization and recruitment**

The internet and social media are the fastest growing radicalization and recruitment sources. On these platforms ISIS' spy webs spot vulnerable youth frequenting certain internet site or social media platforms or searching certain terms. Research indicate that radicalization on the internet does not happen overnight. People, especially youth who are addicted to the internet are more likely to be radicalized. The time it takes to radicalize someone on the internet ranges from several days to months depending on the individual. This means that with good intelligence, or even more attentive parents, it is easy to intercept and disrupt

radicalization. The purpose of radicalization is often to recruit and/or deepen the individual's commitment to the goals of the group to ensure loyalty.

Radicalization on the internet is often assumed to occur on special websites. Yes indeed, special website especially in the darknet do exist, but radicalization also occurs on public platforms such as the Youtube, Facebook, twitter, and internet blogs. There are many radicalization materials including videos and audios of radical clerics and ideologues on Youtube, Facebook and personal blogs or websites, which are accessible to everyone. For example, you can find audios and videos on the preaching and key statements of Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al Zawahiri, Al Baghdadi and many other Al Qaeda and ISIS' kingpins. You can find videos and audios of Utaz Mohammed Yussuf and Sheik Ja'afar—the founders of Boko Haram, and even those of Abu Bakr Shekau, the notorious Boko Haram leader who died in May last year. You can still find videos and audios of Aboud Rogo, the radical Kenyan cleric who radicalized many people in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique and who is believed to be the ideological brain behind the insurgency in Mozambique.

So, those who wish to be radicalized do not need special websites or the darknet. All they need is internet and they can watch videos of or listen to or read the sermons of radical clerics. Extremist materials for radicalization include music and other entertainment tools on Youtube. It is the existence of these radicalization materials on these public and private internet platforms that makes online radicalization to be growing at a record speed in Africa. It is estimated that an average of 30 youth are radicalized online each day in Africa.

Radicalization does not only occur in countries experiencing attacks. Even countries that have not experienced extremist attacks, such Mauritius, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau have experienced varying levels of radicalization of their youth, many of whom have joined the ranks of the Islamic State.

While the internet remains the most powerful and rapidly growing recruitment tool, it is not the only source for radicalization. The Islamic State continues to use traditional face-to-face recruitment tactics. In Africa, this is increasingly being conducted by local recruiters who most often are popular figures. In South Africa, for example, Farhad Hooper, who along with three others, was blacklisted by the US government, is a well known figure in his community in Durban. It was therefore a shock to many people, when South African police, as part of an investigation, found ISIS' flag, training manuals, guns and other materials linking him to the incidents of explosive devices that were placed in shopping malls in 2018. It is therefore important that any effort to combat radicalization should prioritize the use of intelligence to detect and intercept agents of radicalization.

A study conducted by the Institute for Security Studies on the insurgency in Cabo Delgado, has shown how the ISIS weaponized a local group called *Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jama'ah*, known locally as *al Shabaab* or *mashabab*. The study, which is forthcoming confirms how ISIS' involvement was instrumental in the escalation of violence in October 2017, and how the group utilized its broader continental network to bring in foreign fighters from Uganda, Somalia, Kenya, DR Congo, Sudan and Tanzania. It shows how ISIS took advantage of local grievances about marginalization, poor service delivery, corruption, unemployment and poor

management of natural resources, to orchestrate violent riots and resistance against the state.

Tactically, ISIS' expansion in Africa relies on local groups that pledge allegiance to ISIS' leadership. In Libya, ISIS utilized local groups and also sent fighters from Syria and Iraq. With the exception of Northern Burkina Faso and Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, where ISIS engineered the insurgency, the presence of the group in Africa is where there has been conflict or violence being perpetrated by local groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, ISIS Somalia, ADF in Uganda and DRC and various groups in Egypt and Libya

The Mozambique research also shows that ISIS is instrumentalizing poverty. The recruitment in Cabo Delgado was largely done by luring youth with promises of jobs and giving some loans to do business, which later on became ISIS. Some people were given funds ranging from MT100 000 (US\$1 500) to MT500 000 (US\$7 500 2 000 to 5 000 USD, money that the government could not offer to people. So they took advantage of state weakness and inability to care for ordinary people. In Nigeria, Boko Haram paid suicide bombers various amounts ranging from N100 000 (US\$350) to N4 000 000 (US\$13 500), and it claimed the remuneration attracted over 2 000 potential suicide bombers. The group was also paying N4000 for people to blow up mosques or churches. Many of the Kenyans who joined Al Shabaab Somalia did so because of job promises or offers of cash.

Where money could not ensure recruitment, they coerced people and used brutal tactics including kidnappings and beheadings to intimidate communities.

### **The question to ask is why is ISIS spreading like wildfire in Africa?**

The first reason for the spread of ISIS in Africa is the links with transnational organised crime. The group is present mostly in borderland areas with natural resources, where it joins forces with various criminal groups including organised crime groups such as drug traffickers, wildlife traffickers, illegal artisanal mining, arms trafficking, money laundering and kidnapping rings. These borderlands are often lacking any form of security, presence of the state, and extremely porous borders, which provide escape routes for refuge in different countries. ISIS is not the first or the only terrorist group to seek and benefit from Africa's unprotected natural resources. Many terrorist groups including Al Qaeda are known to be or have been involved in the exploitation of various minerals, fauna and flora resources in DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Libya, etc.

The intricate and sometimes symbiotic or mutually reinforcing links between ISIS and organised crime activities foster the view that ISIS is a business, a criminal enterprise and an opportunist. It is impossible today to combat ISIS effectively or successfully without having to deal with its transnational organised crime roots. Organised crime should not be seen as a separate entity from ISIS, but rather as an inseparable element of the organization. Terrorism and organised crime for ISIS are two sides of the same coin, mutually reinforcing each other.

The second reason for the spread of ISIS is the existence of conflict or residues of conflict and widespread criminal and violent extremist groups which look up to ISIS as a model and are

need the world's richest terrorist group to secure key resources for their existence including arms, funds, recruits, and training. The presence of these local groups such as Boko Haram, JNIM, Al Shabaab, Ansar al Sharia, Ansar-al Dine, AQIM and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have been instrumental for the spread of ISIS in Africa. Without the ADF, there won't be ISCAP; without Boko Haram, there won't be ISWAP, and without Ansar-al Dine, they won't be ISGS.

The third reason relates to the ambivalence of Africa's responses. There are still a number of countries on the continent who see terrorism as a foreign agenda imposed by American and Western powers. As a result, there is limited political will, which has seen some of these countries to invest very little on counter-terrorism and countering and preventing violent extremism. Counter-terrorism is not seen as a priority.

The fourth is the lack of counter-terrorism coordination by the African Union and most regional organisations. The use of poorly equipped peacekeeping operations with limited militaristic mandates and resources in places like Somalia, Mali, Lake Chad Basin and Mozambique has been highly costly and delivered little dividend. Counter-terrorism has become long and never-ending war that sustains terrorism and violent extremism. Beyond peacekeeping, international cooperation on the prevention of

The fifth reason relates to global injustices—the existence of perceived global injustices—the racial and intra and inter religious wars, and the struggle for self-rule are radicalising millions each day. No single factor has radicalised more people in Africa than the Palestinian issue. No matter how captivating the idea of the Caliphate has been, many of the African foreign terrorist fighters were radicalized by what they perceived as injustices against Palestinians and the ambivalence of the international community. Colonialism or any form of oppression has also been a rallying cry for many people on the continent. The contemporary African youth is extremely sensitive and intolerant to hypocrisy.

Increasingly, host communities of natural resources in Africa are demanding a greater share and involvement in the governance of natural resources. Most often these are the most marginalized and underdeveloped communities in Africa, which at the same time have to pay the environmental cost of the exploitation of their natural resources. The ISS' research in Cabo Delgado confirms that the discovery of natural resources often becomes a key factor in the escalation of terrorism and violent extremism, confirming what some have described as resource curse bedevilling countries with natural resources. This is often discussed in the context of governance and failure to effectively manage natural resources. An issue which often reveals the elephant in most countries in Africa—the endemic problem of corruption.

Sixth, the expansion of ISIS in the past two years has been enabled to some extent by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The urgency to eradicate the pandemic diverted state resources that could have been used to combat ISIS. The latter also took advantage of the pandemic to change its messaging and propaganda and to provide services that the state could not provide, thus winning hearts and minds.

## **Solution**

ISIS is a global organisation and its success in Africa is due in part to its rich global resources and network. It cannot be defeated in Africa by Africa alone. There is need for a global strategy to defeat ISIS globally and in Africa in particular.

On its part, Africa should develop a solid criminal justice strategy that offers a more rigorous approach to countering terrorism and ISIS organised crime links. Such a comprehensive criminal justice strategy must address the political, economic, social and security aspects of the spread of ISIS. It requires African countries acting in concert to address the deep-rooted human security issues and drivers of terrorism and help rebuild and strengthen the social contract between the people and their government.

Intelligence should be strengthened to detect, intercept and stem radicalisation by identifying potential recruitment agents and vulnerable people to radicalisation.

The ISS study also demonstrates the important role that communities can play in preventing and combating violent extremism. In Cabo Delgado, for example, in the southern districts of Balama, Namuno and Chiure, Al Shabaab was driven out by hostile population before it found a hospitable population in Mocimboa da Praia. Communities and people must therefore be the centre of any effective strategy to deal with ISIS in Africa.

I thank you for your attention