



Global Islamism Monitor No. 93

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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Europe; Israel; Middle East; West Africa

BOKO HARAM ON THE BACK FOOT

The death of a prominent militant is altering the face of *jihadiism* in Africa. Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Nigeria's feared Boko Haram movement, was killed back in May during a confrontation with rival insurgents. In the wake of his death, the longstanding ideological rift within the group - a faction of which broke off to become the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) in 2015 - is deepening. In late June, several hundred Boko Haram fighters defected from the group, pledging allegiance to ISWAP in a video that was subsequently circulated by the Islamic State.

Boko Haram is experiencing losses in other ways as well. More than a thousand members of the group surrendered to Nigeria's government in mid-August, fanning hopes of a "new chapter" in the country's long-running insurgency. Notably, the surrender included the turnover of at least two hostages previously taken by Boko Haram from the town of Chibok some seven years ago. (*Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2021; Reuters, June 28, 2021; *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2021)

HAMAS TURNS TO DIGITAL FUNDRAISING

The Islamist Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip is increasingly relying on cryptocurrency to sustain itself - and that activity is now being targeted by the Israeli government. In early July, Israel's National Bureau for Counter Terror Financing moved to confiscate 84 separate cryptocurrency "wallets" associated with the terror group. The "wallets," a sort of online account, are said to have contained Bitcoin, Tether and other digital currencies cumulatively worth over \$7 million. Hamas' cryptocurrency fundraising has ramped up in recent months, and the group saw a surge in digital donations following its May clash with Israel. (*UoToday*, July 7, 2021)

THE SHAPE OF TODAY'S TERROR

Twenty years after the attacks of September 11th, the threat posed by Islamic extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda is expanding, a new report from a UN expert panel has warned. "The first half of 2021 saw broad continuity in terms of the nature and source of the threats posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaida and their affiliates, along with heightened threats emerging in some regions," the report, which was submitted to the UN Security Council in late July, warns. "This is especially true in parts of West and East Africa, where affiliates of both groups can boast gains in supporters and territory under threat, as well as growing capabilities in fundraising and weapons, for example, in the use of drones."

The report also makes note of the Islamic State's ongoing financial solvency. Estimates of the group's material wealth have been "revised downward" in the past year by UN member states, and are now believed to be "between \$25 million and \$50 million," the study outlines. Among the group's continuing funding sources are *hawalas* (informal value exchange networks), "neobanks" (financial institutions that exclusively operate online) and funds flowing "through financial institutions, money service businesses and cash couriers in neighbouring states" to ISIS fighters as well as their families, many of which are now in refugee camps and detention facilities in Syria. (United Nations Security Council, July 21, 2021)

GERMAN FEARS OVER AN ISIS RESURGENCE

The conclusions of the July UN report have been echoed by European intelligence officials, who have warned that the Islamic State poses a growing threat to the continent. In a recent interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Bruno Kahl, the head of Germany's foreign intelligence agency, the BfV, issued a gloomy assessment of the terror threat facing the European Union. Today, "ISIS is very active," Kahl told the newspaper. "The number of terrorist actors and the danger they pose has increased." And while the West has scored some major successes against ISIS in recent years, Kahl notes, the organization has adapted as a result, transforming into a decentralized organization whose franchises and cells are "spreading out."

Germany's domestic security service, the BfV, has a similar view. In its most recent assessment, published in June, the BfV warned that the threat of terrorism in the Federal Republic was as high as ever, despite a comparative lull in attacks over the past year. According to the BfV, "complex and multiple attacks, controlled by terrorist groups abroad, have not taken place in Germany yet, but could happen any time." (*Deutsche Welle*, July 13, 2021)

