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Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Europe; North Africa; Russia; Southeast Asia

AFRICA AS AN ILLICIT FINANCE HUB

Affiliates of the Islamic State terrorist group are increasingly relying on wealth and funding generated in countries like South Africa to sustain themselves - an activity that is only now beginning to be scrutinized by the United States. According to a United Nations Security Council report published in mid-July, IS has established a thriving illicit finance network on the African continent. As part of that effort, nationals of Uganda and Kenya have been identified as generating funds in a number of nations, including South Africa, and funneling them to radical groups active on the continent. Earlier this year, the United States sanctioned four individuals residing in South Africa for exploiting the country's financial system "to facilitate funding for ISIS branches and networks across Africa." Reports also indicate that IS and its ideological rival, al-Qaeda, are using cryptocurrencies to facilitate donations and support operations. (*Bloomberg*, July 22, 2022)

ISLAMIC STATE PLANNED CHEMICAL ATTACKS IN EUROPE

When it was at the height of its power, the Islamic State planned to carry out chemical weapons attacks throughout Europe, Kurdish intelligence reports, a UN investigation and U.S intelligence officials have all outlined. According to them, in 2014 the Islamic State's self-declared *emir*, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, sought to enlist the services of a WMD expert named Salih al-Sabawi to spearhead a "crash effort" to develop a chemical weapons arsenal encompassing mustard gas, as well as "bombs and rockets filled with chlorine," and to explore acquisition of biological agents such as ricin and botulinum toxin. The ultimate goal of the effort, current and former U.S. officials have confirmed, was to amass a stockpile that could be used in terror attacks and military campaigns throughout Europe.

The effort was partially successful, with IS developing a rudimentary arsenal of chemical weapons that was used in some twenty attacks between 2015 and 2017. The effort, however, foundered as the Islamic State progressively lost territory to Coalition advances beginning in 2016. Sabawi himself was killed via drone strike in early 2015, following which Coalition forces targeted the network of laboratories and production centers that he had established as part of the group's effort to acquire WMD. (*Washington Post*, July 11, 2022)

BELATEDLY, BANGLADESH TRIES DE-RADICALIZATION

Six years after the deadly Holey Artisan Café attacks, which left 20 dead in Dhaka in 2016, Bangladeshi authorities have announced the beginning of a de-radicalization campaign for jailed Islamists in the South Asian state. A spokesman of the country's CTTC (Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime) unit explained that "the initiative is aimed to prevent the jailed militants' return to the path of militancy," through the counseling of militants in jail or out on bail. This would be facilitated through the hiring of a variety of psychologists, clerics and counterterrorism experts with the aim of rehabilitating an initial 20 militants in the first year of the program. That, however, represents just a drop in the bucket; over 7,000 suspected militants have been arrested over the past six years, with most hailing from the impoverished northwest region of the country. (*The Print*, July 1, 2022)

ISLAMISTS ON THE BACK FOOT IN TUNISIA

Amid a power grab by President Kais Saied, Islamist forces in Tunisia are increasingly under fire. In late July, a stage-managed constitutional referendum dramatically expanded Saied's authority and executive powers, weakening the authority of Tunisia's judiciary and allowing him to appoint a new cabinet without parliamentary approval. Saied, in turn, has wasted no time using his newfound powers to target his chief domestic opponents: Tunisia's Islamists. Ahead of the late July vote, the once-powerful leader of *Ennahda*, Rached Ghannouchi, was placed under investigation for money laundering. (Reuters, July 15, 2022; *The Guardian*, July 26, 2022)

RUSSIA'S MUSLIMS INCREASINGLY RESTIVE

Repression from the Kremlin, as well as Russia's war in Ukraine, is "politicizing" the country's Muslims, writes Russia expert Paul Goble in his *Window on Eurasia* blog. "Vladimir Putin has extended his repressive moves against Muslims from those he identifies as radicals to those even he has called moderate traditionalists," Goble writes. "Together with his war in Ukraine, this is radicalizing the faithful and leading more Muslims to conclude that only secession can save their community." He notes that this state of affairs "is recreating a situation like the one that existed in the early 1990s... one when many Muslims within Russia thought about escaping Moscow's rule but did not do so." At the time, "the Russian state was weak; but Muslims missed their chance, many of them deceived by the divide and conquer approach of the Kremlin. More recently, the Russian state has regained strength and become more imperialistic and repressive; but Muslims have changed as well: they recognize the threat they ignored earlier."

"Indeed," writes Goble, "it appears that Moscow has no intention of stopping until Muslim peoples are completely assimilated and Islam on the territory of what is now the Russian Federation is completely extirpated. But there is some good news: Muslim peoples are now recognizing this threat and doing something about it." He cites the *Altyn Myras* (Golden Inheritance) portal as saying that "among all Muslim peoples occupied by Russia a trend toward the rebirth of religious and political consciousness and the more the Russian colonizers try to extinguish this way, the stronger it is becoming." (*Window on Eurasia*, July 31, 2022)