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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Warfare; Africa; Israel; Middle East; Philippines

AL-QAEDA EXPLOITS BURKINA'S DISARRAY...

In October, al-Qaeda-linked rebels attacked the town of Djibo in Burkina Faso, leaving 40 civilians killed, 42 wounded, and setting ablaze three camps for internally displaced people. The attack, which was labeled a war crime by the United Nations, has been attributed to JNIM, an armed militia affiliated with al-Qaeda. It reflects a deepening state of disarray in Burkina Faso, which has experienced two coups in the past year and faces growing *jihadi* activity. Burkina Faso's government is at present unable to control roughly half its territory, a situation which has led to more than two million of its citizens being displaced. (Associated Press, November 29, 2023)

...WHILE MANILA'S WAR ON TERROR GETS BLOODIER

The Islamic State terrorist group has claimed credit for an early December bombing in the Philippines. The attack, which took place during a Sunday Catholic service at Mindanao State University in Marawi, left at least four dead and 45 injured. In the wake of the bombing, the government of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has stepped up security in Marawi, as well as the national capital, Manila.

According to Philippine officials, the bombing was extremist retaliation for the Marcos government's stepped up counterterrorism policies. The Philippine military chief, General Romeo Brawner, has suggested the bombing was a retaliatory strike in the wake of a recent crackdown by Manila on three ISIS factions, the Dawlah Islamiyah-Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf Group, and Maute. Those raids resulted in the deaths of 11 fighters and the capture of 13 others – setting the stage for the bloody December 3rd backlash. (*The Foreign Desk*, December 4, 2023)

HOW THE BIN LADEN NETWORK IS ADAPTING

After more than two decades of counterterrorism policies, the United States and its allies have charted some notable successes. However, the original target of the "Global War on Terror" – al-Qaeda – continues to pose a real threat, and is adapting its operational strategy to better take advantage of changing global conditions, a new analysis lays out. "Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus towards the concept of the 'near enemy' rather than the 'far enemy,' and the American withdrawal from Afghanistan allowed it to regain its primary safe haven, after the Taliban reopened its old bases, established training camps, rebuilt its organizational and operational capabilities, and granted its members Afghan national identities for legitimate residency," Adel Adalieh writes for *Diplomatic Insight*. "Therefore, Afghanistan has become a logistical hub for recruiting and training Al-Qaeda fighters, and its terrorist operations have started to surface in various regions across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia."

The Bin Laden network is also showing new signs of life in the Middle East, Adalieh notes: "Since 2022, Al-Qaeda in West Asia has continued its activities in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria to attract new recruits, taking advantage of the worsening sectarian tensions in these areas. In Yemen, Al-Qaeda activity rates increased during the year 2022, and it demonstrated its ability in recent months to enhance its operational and technical capabilities, trying to obstruct attempts to resolve the Yemeni crisis despite Saudi Arabia's cessation of the war. The organization's leaders have begun a dialogue with tribes, *jihadist* movements, and parties opposed to the Yemeni government, the Houthis, and Saudi Arabia, in order to form an alliance to thwart the Houthi project in Yemen and overthrow the Yemeni government." (*Diplomatic Insight*, December 13, 2023)

HAMAS LEADERSHIP GOES TO GROUND

On October 7th, Hamas carried out a massive, coordinated assault on communities in southern Israel, with horrific results. The attack, which resulted in 1,200 civilians dead and more than 200 others taken hostage, prompted a broad Israeli military incursion into the Gaza Strip, and a commitment from officials in Jerusalem to remove the Palestinian rejectionist group from power there. Additionally, Israel's government has pledged to bring the perpetrators of October 7th to justice, and to hunt down and eliminate the organization's top leaders wherever they are located.

Hamas political chiefs are taking the threat seriously. London's *The Sun* newspaper reports that senior leaders from the terror group have begun fleeing from Qatar in recent days, where the organization had maintained political offices for over a decade. According to the paper, a number of Hamas leaders are believed to be headed for Algeria, while others are believed to be destined for Turkey. The exodus follows warnings from the Qatari government that it could no longer ensure their safety. (*The Sun*, December 14, 2023)