



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان  
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

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**A Quarterly Report**

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# **Terrorism** Index in the **Arab Region**

**A Quarterly Report (April-June 2021)**

## An Executive Summary

The phenomenon of terrorism has exacerbated in the Arab region during the second quarter of 2021. The early signs of this escalation began to loom since the end of last year and intensified during the first quarter of 2021. Terrorist groups, topped by ISIS, have claimed responsibility for 169 terrorist operations. Moreover, this phenomenon has exacerbated in the period from April until the end of June 2021, during which terrorist groups claimed responsibility for 212 terrorist operations in 9 Arab states. Some of these states suffer from countless armed conflicts and interventions, such as Somalia, Syria and Yemen, in addition to other states that are being torn apart by political polarization and sectarianism, such as in Iraq.

Despite the constant counter-terrorism efforts by the Arab governments and the coordination at the level of intelligence services to early predict such terrorist operations, gather the necessary information, target dangerous members in extremist organizations, curb the phenomenon of terrorism and reduce its security, economic and social impacts, terrorist groups are still capable of maneuvering security forces, recruiting combatants and getting financial assistance that helps them in the planning and implementation of different operations. At the same time, however, and with the defeats these organizations suffered from, most recently ISIS's defeat in the battle of Baghuz Fawqani in Syria on March 23 2019 by forces of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Currently being the most significant organization at the level of international terrorism, ISIS was forced to change its strategies for managing the terrorist operations. This new strategy is basically consistent with the principle of "Disempowerment Periods" announced by ISIS following their consecutive defeats in Iraq and Syria from 2007 until the end of 2019.

The new strategy adopted by ISIS, which is also known as "Appearing & Fading" is based on mobile groups of 10 to 15 individuals that carry out terrorist operations with limited impact, through which they do not seek to control the ground, but to drain the security forces. Such

strategy avoids direct confrontation with the security forces so that ISIS does not lose any of its members, particularly since the organization is trying to put back together its pieces in order to be able to face the new variables aimed at dismembering ISIS at the international, regional and Arab level.

Iraq was one of the first countries in which terrorist operations were carried out during the second quarter of 2021, amounting to 72 terrorist operations that ISIS claimed responsibility for and were attributed to the pro-Iranian factions or what are also known as state militias. These state militias adopted a two-pronged terrorist operations; the first one is the attacks on the American bases and bases of the Global Coalition in Iraq and the second is the assassination of political activists and human rights defenders opposing the Iranian influence in Iraq. The pro-Iranian factions' intensifying their terrorist operations is apparently due to internal factors, including challenging Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, particularly after the arrest of Nasser Musleh, a commander in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), on May, 26, 2021, who was soon released owing to the pressures. Thus, this indicates the desire of these pro-Iranian factions to militarily consolidate the pillars of their ground forces and to increase their financial capacity, according to Raed Al-Hamid, a researcher on terrorism affairs, in addition to establishing themselves and their forces as an equivalent state against Iraq and implementing the Iranian agendas of forcing the American forces to leave Iraq.

The Houthis continued to intensify their terrorist attacks inside and outside Yemen. In Yemen, the Houthi Movement carried out about 13 terrorist operations and has also exacerbated their attacks on oil installations and civilian objects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They also claimed responsibility for about 44 terrorist operations, in which the Houthis launched more than 100 drones and ballistic missiles. In all cases, however, such attacks have proved the ability of the Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces (RSADF) to intercept such missiles, as there were no injuries or mortalities in Saudi Arabia caused by these attacks except for the installations that were targeted by such attacks. Apparently, the Houthis want to pressure Saudi Arabia to accept their terms to

engage in negotiations related to the war in Yemen, which has been in place for seven years without any looming solutions to end this war in the short term.

In Somalia, the security forces are still unable to contain the movements of Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (HSM), despite the slight decrease of the terrorist operations in Somalia during the second quarter of 2021, as Maat has monitored 41 terrorist operations during the aforementioned period compared to 45 terrorist operations during the first quarter of the current year. The HSM has claimed responsibility for about 32 terrorist operations, i.e. one terrorist operation every three days over the last three months. Moreover, units of the HSM in the security services of the Somalia government have assisted the HSM to continue their attacks, which are the units that help them gather information and target the prominent figures of the security services. Such security breach include the affiliation of some security members of the Somali General Intelligence Service to the HSM, which have resulted in the failure of the Intelligence Service to protect some figures that the HSM claimed responsibility for their assassinations during the second quarter of 2021, foremost among them is an officer of Jubbaland province who was assassinated on April, 11, 2021. In addition to the intelligence and security failure, the HSM still has a unique ability to mobilize financial resources by imposing taxes on checkpoints and extorting the residents in exchange for protection along with collecting alms from the residents of areas under the HSM's control.

In Syria, ISIS maintained its presence in the Syrian Desert as a base for launching its operations against the Syrian and Russian security forces, which prompted the Syrian forces in Syria to advance the military reinforcements to the Syrian Desert occupied by ISIS, particularly in Deir ez-Zor and Hama. This is in addition to the subsequent sorties by the Russian Air Force on the locations of the armed members of ISIS, resulting in significant casualties among them to the point where Russia has implemented 180 airstrikes on ISIS locations in just two days in May. As a result, the terrorist operations carried out in Syria decreased during the second quarter of 2021, with 26 terrorist operations compared to 39 terrorist operations during the first quarter of 2021.

In Yemen, in addition to the traditional terrorist operations by the Houthis, Al-Qaeda has resurfaced again after it was contained during the last year and it claimed responsibility for about 5 terrorist operations only in Yemen during the second quarter of 2021. This prompted the USA on June, 24, 2021 to place a 5-million-dollar cash reward in exchange for any information about Al-Qaeda in Yemen and Khalid Batarfi, owing to incitement to members of Al-Qaeda in Yemen to spill the blood of civilians.

In Libya, and after five months since the Government of National Unity, led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, has assumed power, the danger of the rising terrorism, especially in southern Libya, is still a real threat to Libya and its neighboring countries. The terrorist attack on the city of Sabha on June 2021 had been only a formal declaration about the return of ISIS in Libya. Moreover, the terrorist groups in Libya are taking advantage of the security loop holes, resulting from the obstruction of military and security institutions' unification under the 2019 Berlin Conference and the outcomes of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, to rehabilitate themselves to carry out consecutive terrorist operations, using the escalated terrorist situation in the African Sahel and the local units cooperating with such terrorist groups in southern Libya. The most significant example of such are members of the Front for Change and Concord in Chad who fled from Libya to Chad on last April to carry out the assassination of Chadian President Idriss Déby on April, 19 of the current year. Claiming its responsibility for the terrorist operation in Sabha on June 2021, and its prior attempts to carry out similar operations in the Fertile Crescent Region, ISIS is likely to consider Libya one of the pathways on which the organization will set its sights in 2021.

Egypt is still able to confront terrorism in north Sinai through the qualitative operations carried out by the Egyptian Armed Forces, occasionally supported by the Police forces, after fully containing terrorism in all areas of Cairo and Nile Delta as well as at the level of the governorates of Upper Egypt. Moreover, the relative calm in Darfur has helped with reducing rates of violence and terrorism, contributing to the return of about 44 thousand displaced persons to their areas of

origin. In Tunisia, the counter-terrorism efforts and the sting operations by the security forces have contributed in containing terrorism. Nonetheless, some terrorist organizations in Tunisia, particularly Jund al-Khilafah of ISIS, were relatively able to carry out some terrorist operations.

Finally, one can say that despite all the counter-terrorism efforts by the governments in Arab states, such efforts have not completely limited the ability of terrorist organizations to carry out more operations. These organizations have proved their adjustment to new variables, as they no longer aim to control cities and lands, but they temporarily aim to drain the security forces and recruit individuals to replace their principal commands killed during the latest operations, with the possibility of changing such strategy in accordance with new variables. Moreover, these terrorist organizations have taken advantage of the attacks and political polarization in certain Arab states as well as the poor security, resulting from the persistent armed conflicts in Yemen and Syria to reassume their activities and adjustments. In addition to the counter-terrorism efforts, the delayed return of such organizations to the peak of their powers is also attributed to them losing the community-based support they had at the beginning of their control over the lands in Syria and Iraq, owing to their abuses towards residents in areas under their control, even for a short period of time.