



# **TERRORISM INDEX IN THE ARAB REGION**

**APRIL-JUNE 2023**

**PREPARED BY  
HATE SPEECH & VIOLENT EXTREMISM COUNTERING UNIT**

**JULY 2023**



## Report Summary

Arab countries were able to recuperate in the second quarter of 2023 after decades-long of terrorism that has debilitated the states. While Daesh is still gnawing at Syria and Iraq, the Houthis and al-Qaeda continue to undermine the Houthis sovereignty of Yemen, and al-Shabab are killing the Somali people. However, some countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Morocco could restrict terrorist activities and minimize them to the lowest degree possible. Perhaps the state of stability that these countries could reach is due to their participation and outstanding efforts in combating terrorism, especially at the international level. Egypt and the European Union co-chaired the 21st Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) Coordination Committee Meeting, succeeding the Kingdom of Morocco for a period of two years. Tunisia also facilitated the eighth annual review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, a decision that was adopted this June by consensus of the General Assembly, during which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also organized a ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition against Daesh, in which it affirmed its continued support thereto.

Terrorist groups, on the other hand, are still leveraging internal crises, fragile political systems, as well as states inability to exercise influence and sovereignty to sow discord and hatred and recruit many people. This is why organizations such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, and the Houthis are able to cross borders freely and to launch preemptive offensive strikes from different and multiple locations.

Accordingly, Maat documented, with a tool that tracks terrorist operations in the Arab region the implementation of (230) terrorist operations during the second quarter of the year. Although this percentage represents a decline in the number of operations compared to the first quarter of the year, which witnessed the implementation of (265) terrorist operations, the number of deaths and injuries from April to June has more than doubled due to internal crisis in Sudan and continued violations committed by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). According to Maat findings, Daesh attempted

to regain its activity after the severe blow it received by targeting its leader, "Abu Al-Hussein Al-Qurashi" last April, when it documented 12 terrorist operations during the aforementioned period, 7 of which were carried out in Syria and 4 in Iraq. However, the general scene confirms the relatively weak status of the organization's structure compared to its always refreshing activity on these fronts. It is worth noting that during the first quarter of the year, Daesh carried out approximately 39 terrorist operations. As usual, the Houthi terrorist group has always been at the forefront of the scene, the Houthi attacks continued and targeted both the armed forces and civilians, which have escalated recently, reaching the Saudi and Emirati borders. The Houthi topped the list of terrorist organizations that committed the majority of operations for the second time on a row, with 25 terrorist operations in Q2, compared to 48 terrorist operations in Q1.

### **Terrorist Operations Statistics**

The period from April 1 to June 30 witnessed a slight decline in the number of terrorist operations in the Arab region by 230 terrorist operations, compared to 265 operations in Q1 of the year. Maat used a tracking and analysis tool to verify such operations. Despite this decline, the death toll and the number of injured jumped from 845 deaths and 470 injuries in Q1 to 3,387 deaths and 5,343 injuries in Q2. In addition to the death toll caused by the Sudanese war as a result of the violations of the RSF, Maat tracked the victims of terrorist operations in other Arab countries and documented the killing of 325 military personnel, and the injury of 114, as well as the killing of 247 civilians, and the injury of 234.

For the first time since the beginning of the year, Sudan ranks first in the index of terrorist operations in the Arab region in Q2 2023, with 45 operations, most of which were carried out during the ongoing war since mid-April, after the rebellion and defection of the RSF. Sudan also ranked first in the number of casualties, with 2,800 deaths and more than 5,000 injuries.

Yemen and Syrian came second in the index of terrorist operations in the Arab region, with 53 terrorist operations in both countries, accounting for 23.04% of the total terrorist operations carried out in the Arab region in Q2. However, the number of victims varied, while the former ranked fourth with 49 deaths and 86 injures, the latter ranked third with 124 deaths and 110 injures.

For the second time in a row, since the beginning of the year, Somalia ranked third, with 33 terrorist operations, accounting for 14.3% of the total terrorist operations in the region. However, it ranked second in terms of the number of victims, with 350 deaths and 95 injuries. Iraq came in the fourth place, with 26 terrorist operations, or 11.3%, and fifth in terms of the number of victims, with 22 deaths and 22 injuries.

Libya ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the terrorist operation index with 7 terrorist operations recorded during this quarter and attributed to unknown persons. Such operations led to the death of 8 and the injury of 1 person; thus, it ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in terms of the number of victims, despite the continued efforts of Libya to eliminate terrorism through extensive arrest campaigns. On May 29, the Libyan Misrata Criminal Court issued sentences against (46) members affiliated with the terrorist organization Daesh. Such sentences varied between death, life imprisonment, and imprisonment between (3) and (12) years.

Algeria, Morocco and Saudi Arabia ranked 8<sup>th</sup> equally, with one operation in each of the three countries, which is no more than 1.5% of the total terrorist operations committed in the Arab region during Q2 2023.

For the second time in a row, since the beginning of the year, the Houthi terrorist group ranked as the most active group in Q2, with 25 terrorist operations, most of which were carried out in Ma'rib, Shabwah, Al-Bayda, and the northern regions of Dhale. Although this represents a weakness and a decline in the group's activity after carrying out 49 operations during the previous quarter, which explains the group's fading power



after Iran agreed in March to stop funding the Houthis with weapons as part of a deal to restore diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

Despite the continuous military efforts made by the Somali army, which has already eliminated nearly 2,000 militants from the Al-Shabaab movement, the organization remains capable of carrying out maneuvers and guerrilla tactics, which helps them launching attacks in various regions of central and southern Somalia and carry out several attacks in the capital, Mogadishu. Maat has monitored 21 terrorist operations carried out by Al-Shabaab movement, most of which targeted the military, including the Ethiopian army bases.

Daesh is still trying to compensate its losses with 12 new operations on the Syrian and Iraqi lands after security breaches that permeated its structure, making it lose two leaders in just about five months. This emphasizes the permeation in the ranks, especially the small circle of its leaders, who are the only ones capable of locating Daesh and securing it, in addition to Daesh's recently-adopted strategy of not disclosing the identity of the leader.

### **Terrorism in the Arab Region: Analytical View**

1. The Arab region is witnessing a real decline in the level of terrorist operations compared to the previous quarter, which witnessed the implementation of (265) terrorist operations, although the numbers do not strongly suggest so. At least (230) terrorist operations were carried out in Q2 of 2023, not to mention the huge increase in the number of victims. However, after analyzing and tracking terrorist operations in the region, Maat found that 82.6% of the total deaths and 93.5% of the total injures were linked to Sudan's war and conflict, meaning that the remaining few percentages were attributed to other armed terrorist groups, which used to be active in the past compared to the current situation.

## Sudan

2. Sudan ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the terrorist operation index in the Arab region in Q2, with 45 operations, mainly attributed to the war going on since mid-April between the Sudanese army forces and the dissident RSF, whose death toll jumped during the aforementioned period to 2,800 deaths and more than 5,000 injures.
3. Despite the international efforts seeking to stop the fighting, none of which has been carried out, the most recent of which was the signing of the Jeddah Declaration between the two parties on May 12<sup>th</sup> under US-Saudi sponsorship, but these efforts were suspended due to mutual accusations of violations. Although the White Flags campaign, launched by a Sudanese journalist, was a trending issue in Sudan this June, many opposed this campaign and considered it the surrender of one party to the other.
4. Maat attributed the RSF non-compliance with the ceasefire agreements to the lack of an international intervention that is binding for both parties. Likewise, the current mediations have faltered in finding peace, and the solutions they provide are only temporary to allow the arrival of humanitarian aid and relief.

## Syria

5. Syria ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the terrorist operations index in the Arab region during Q1, with 53 terrorist operations, accounting for 23.04% of the total terrorist operations, where 124 people were killed and 110 others were wounded. It is worth noting that more than half of this toll was directed to military targets.
6. 6 operations were attributed to Daesh, most of which were concentrated in Deir ez-Zor and northern Damascus, which represents 11.3% of the total terrorist operations in Syria, and represents a significant decline in Daesh operations in Syria, which used to be on the rise. Maat attributed this decline for the state of recovery that the organization experienced during the period to restore its organizational capacity and reunite its leaders.

7. Some other armed organizations also appeared in Syria. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham carried out no more than two terrorist operations in Idlib and the western countryside of Aleppo. Likewise, Kurdistan Workers' Party carried out two operations in northern Syria, whereas Al-Fateh Al-Mubin faction carried out 4 terrorist attacks, all of which focused on targeting the military.

## Yemen

8. Yemen also ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, with 53 terrorist operations carried out, killing 49 people and injuring 86 others. This may represent a decline in the number of terrorist operations compared to Q1 of the year, which recorded 82 terrorist operations. However, the ability of terrorist organizations to penetrate into Yemeni territory in a way that allows them to launch various attacks from multiple regions, as well as the unlimited concentration of operations in the capital, Sana'a, is not indicative at all on this retreat.
9. At least 25 terrorist operations were attributed to the Houthi terrorist group, which is 47% of the total operations in Yemen carried out in Q2. Its focus was not limited to a specific geographical location, but rather was distributed to various regions in central, western and southern Yemen, and limited operations in the east, in addition to its attempts to target the border front in Yafea. Another 11 operations were attributed to Al-Qaeda, which represents 20.7% of the total operations in Yemen, which is an increasing percentage compared to Q1 that witnessed only 6 terrorist operations. Daesh implemented one operation targeting the capital, Sana'a.
10. Maat agrees with the Yemeni Minister of Defense, who pointed out, during a meeting with the military attaché of the French Embassy in Yemen, in June, the international community's inaction in addressing the issue of Houthi terrorism, and also stressed the need for the international community to increase pressure on the Houthi militia so that it would achieve comprehensive and just peace.

## Somalia

11. Somalia ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for the second time in a row since the beginning of the year, with 33 terrorist operations, accounting for 14.3% of the total terrorist operations in the region, during which 350 people were killed and 95 others were injured. More than half of this death toll was attributed to military targets, with 18 operations.
12. Al-Shabaab movement continues to maintain its defensive capabilities to keep control of various areas in the center and south of the country, and to expand towards other border areas such as Kenya and Ethiopia, in addition to being able to confront the attacks of the Somali army and the American raids. Al-Shabaab movement targeted this quarter a hotel in the capital, Mogadishu, which led to the killing of 9 people, including 3 soldiers, a WHO employee, and 10 others were wounded. This came six days after the Somali authorities announced the killing of more than 60 of its members, and with the approaching date of the second phase of the operation launched by the Somali president against them, in a remarkable attempt not to be affected by such efforts and thwart them.
13. From another perspective, the continued activity of the movement and the expansion of its capabilities to target the military may be motivated by maintaining the reputation and prestige that it has always enjoyed at the international and regional levels, which contributes to receiving funding and support, especially after the recent rebellions of Somali citizens against paying the taxes imposed on them.

## **Iraq**

14. Iraq ranked 4<sup>th</sup> since the beginning of the year. However, this quarter witnessed a slight increase in the number of terrorist operations, with 26 terrorist operations, which is 11.3% of the total terrorist carried out in the region, compared to 24 terrorist operations in Q1. In Q2, 22 people were killed and 22 others were injured.
15. 4 operations were attributed to Daesh, while 17 operations were attributed to unknown persons. Maat tracked the other factors that contributed to the decline of Daesh power in Iraq in addition to the current internal tensions the organization is



witnessing, and attributed it to the effective employment of the capabilities of the military and intelligence forces, the strengthened coordination between them and its direction towards tracking their strongholds and targeting them through air strikes. Last May, the Iraqi National Intelligence Service announced the arrest of the most dangerous elements of the organization after an intelligence operation that lasted for several months. The Air Force also managed to eliminate groups affiliated with the organization in an air strike in Diyala, in addition to ground military operations, the latest of which was launched in Kirkuk, north Iraq.

16. Maat did not lose sight of the large-scale security operation launched by the Popular Mobilization Authority on Al-Ayth Island in Salah Al-Din governorate, north of Baghdad, last April, which has already led to killing many leaders and officials from Daesh and prevented their infiltration into many areas.

## **Libya**

17. Libya ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, with 7 terrorist operations attributed to unknown persons, killing 8 people in addition to injuring one. Libya maintained these rates since last year, which is a relative success for the state after it was hotbed for Daesh in its south extension towards the Sahara Desert. In addition to the above, no elements from Daesh were found among the perpetrators of these operations since the beginning of the year.

## **Lebanon**

18. Lebanon ranked 6<sup>th</sup> with 6 terrorist operations attributed to unknown persons, leading to the death of 7 and the injury of 4 others. Lebanon did not report an increase in operations, except for one additional operation compared to Q1.

19. Although Hezbollah did not perpetrate these operations, in addition to carrying out only one operation in Q1, it used another tactic during this period to openly challenge the government, after accepting the border demarcation agreement with Israel, where Hezbollah showed off, last May 25<sup>th</sup>, its power through a series of

maneuvers showing hundreds of fighters carrying live ammunition and advanced weapons such as those used by the national army.

## **Tunisia**

20. In Q2 2023, Tunisia witnessed an increase in the number of operations, deaths, and injuries, compared to Q1, in which it was included in the list of countries free of terrorism. Tunisia ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, which witnessed the implementation of 4 terrorist operations, killing 8 and injuring 23 others.

## **Morocco-Algeria-Saudi Arabia**

21. There is always a state of stability in these countries and they are devoid of terrorism, and there is only a rare and limited presence among them, which made them rank 8<sup>th</sup> (last rank in the index of terrorist operations in the Arab region) with one operation for each of them. In Morocco and Algeria, the two operations were attributed to extremists who used knives to attack military personnel, injuring a policeman in the first operation and killing an officer in the latter. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia witnessed an armed attack by terrorist elements targeting the US embassy in Jeddah, which resulted in the killing of a security guard.

22. Maat attributed this to the ability of these countries to employ their efforts in various fields and with comprehensive strategies, without relying on any external forces, as emphasized by the Algerian army commander last April. This, in addition to coordinating cooperation between them to combat the phenomenon, the most recent of which was the signing of a bilateral agreement between Morocco and Saudi Arabia, the main goal of which is to develop security and intelligence cooperation and to coordinate efforts to combat terrorism and extremism.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

According to Maat's monitoring and statistics, we confirm a decrease in the rates of terrorism in the Arab region during Q2, which recorded 230 operations, a decline of 35

operations from Q1. While analyzing and permeating the reality of terrorism within every Arab country, we find that the threat of terrorism and extremism remains on the rise, and terrorist organizations are still working on rehabilitating themselves, besides the emergence of new armed elements from their cells, and these elements began to carry out terrorist acts on the State borders, even if this is done slowly.

**Accordingly, Maat recommends the following:**

- Targeting the breaking-up of terrorist organizations cells requires launching a joint plan that focuses on encouraging sustainable cooperation among all Arab countries during a specific period under the auspices of the League of Arab States, so that the Arab states do not end up being caught in a vicious circle of terrorist strikes that would become active, paving the road for endless war and acts of violence that would undermine the stability of the region and stumble all efforts to development.
- Urging the international community to take decisive actions against the Houthi issue, and to dry up its sources of funding and support while trying to conclude mediation agreements with funding entities.
- The endeavors and efforts of the Global Coalition should not stop at this point given the state of dispersion and security penetration suffered by Daesh, after losing its leader for the second time in five months, but rather to be prepared to dry up the roots of this organization.
- Each country must follow a strategy of military cleansing of terrorism from its territory, and not to limit its military capabilities to mere defensive capabilities, but rather employ these capabilities in launching preemptive attacks after verifying the strongholds of terrorist cells.
- On the internal level, every Arab country stuck in protracted conflicts is working to reach a political settlement that will lead to stability. States also seek to eliminate inequalities and grievances in all their forms, which is the first step in reducing the number of terrorists.