



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



# TERRORISM INDEX IN THE ARAB REGION

## JULY-SEPTEMBER 2023

MAAT FOR PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS



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## Introduction

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During the third quarter of 2023, the Arab region continued to face the threat of terrorist operations. Terrorist groups made efforts to reorganize and revive their activities, particularly in areas of conflict, tension, and instability. These groups, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, pose a significant danger to both civilians and national armies, often receiving support from external parties. In order to sustain their operations, these groups sought additional financial resources and employed various methods to recruit new members. However, their activities have been hindered by limited funding.

Compared to the previous quarter, the number of terrorist operations in the Arab region decreased during the third quarter of 2023. From July 1 to September 30, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** utilized a tool to monitor terrorist operations in the Arab region and recorded 144 such operations across nine Arab countries. This represents a decrease compared to the 230 operations documented in the second quarter by the same association. These operations resulted in the deaths and injuries of 1,211 individuals, including both civilians and soldiers. Among the casualties, there were 293 civilian deaths, approximately 622 military deaths, 182 civilian injuries (with a significant number being women and children), and 114 military injuries. Civilians accounted for 32% of the total deaths resulting from terrorist operations and constituted 61.5% of the total injuries.

Yemen ranked highest in the terrorism index for the Arab region, with 54 terrorist operations. This can be attributed to the active presence of groups like Al-Qaeda and the Houthi group. While ISIS has experienced a decline, only 9 operations were claimed or attributed to the organization during the reporting period. However, the threat of its resurgence still persists. Maat believes that the decline of ISIS is a result of leadership losses due to the killing of several prominent leaders in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, the organization's resources have significantly diminished. Despite this, ISIS continues to rely on kidnapping for ransom as a primary means of generating financial resources.

Maat observed that Al-Shabaab continued to carry out terrorist operations across various regions of Somalia. These operations primarily targeted the Somali security forces, the national army, and the African forces deployed in Somalia. Despite being responsible for only 15 terrorist operations in the third quarter, the

group still poses a significant threat to the unity and stability of Somalia. Maat's analysis of Al-Shabaab's operational activities during this period revealed a new strategy employed by the group. They have focused on planning specific operations with a higher number of casualties, using these operations for propaganda purposes while reducing the number of less impactful attacks. Al-Shabaab's considerable influence in the southern regions of Somalia enables their survival and facilitates movement, maneuvering, and the execution of coordinated operations across different areas, including the capital, Mogadishu.

In the third quarter of 2023, thirteen Arab countries managed to prevent terrorist operations within their territories. This achievement can be attributed to their ability to counter rebel groups and enhance intelligence cooperation, resulting in the dismantling of terrorist cells. For instance, the Kingdom of Morocco serves as an example of a country that successfully curbs terrorism through effective measures. However, these countries still face the urgent task of combating terrorism through non-traditional means and addressing the root causes that contribute to its emergence, such as social and economic injustices. Defeating terrorism in the Arab region requires intensified intelligence and security cooperation, as well as concrete steps to prevent external interference in the affairs of Arab countries. Moreover, Arab nations should engage in the exchange of best practices, experiences, and lessons learned with United Nations member states.

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

The terrorism index in the Arab region has been developed by Maat as part of its annual Arab report. Starting from 2021, Maat recognized the need for a separate index focusing on terrorism in the Arab region. As part of this initiative, Maat began publishing quarterly reports on terrorism in the Arab region. Several factors influenced the selection of the Arab region for this index. **First**, although Arab countries constitute only 5% of the global population, they have experienced over 45% of terrorist attacks prior to 2020. **Second**, terrorism has spread in conflict zones within Arab countries, where armed groups fueled by external interventions have sought to undermine governance. The resulting chaos provides fertile ground for terrorist activities, hampering countries' efforts to effectively address or contain the phenomenon and mitigate its wide-ranging consequences. **Third**, the scarcity of previous indicators and literature focusing on terrorism in the Arab region further

motivated Maat to develop this index. Maat aims for these efforts to serve as a reliable database and reference for scholars, researchers, think tanks, and policymakers concerned with studying terrorism in the Arab region.

Based on this rationale, Maat has made the decision to release this indicator on a quarterly basis, in addition to an annual comprehensive report on terrorism in the Arab region. The aim is to monitor and thoroughly document terrorist operations in the Arab region, analyzing them in light of verified statistics and significant developments. The ultimate goal is to identify the factors that contribute to the escalation of terrorism in certain Arab countries while it recedes in others. Consequently, it is crucial to address the main challenges that hinder effective counterterrorism measures in the Arab region, ensuring stability and preventing further loss of civilian and military lives.

### **Methodology:**

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This report relies on a monitoring mechanism that tracks all terrorist incidents reported in local and international media and newspapers across Arab countries during the third quarter of 2023. It employs a methodology to monitor and analyze the impact of various variables on the terrorist phenomenon. Through this approach, the report seeks to dismantle these variables, enabling the formulation of new hypotheses and unbiased, logical conclusions about terrorism. Moreover, it aims to identify the challenges that impede counterterrorism efforts and achieve an accurate understanding of the phenomenon, providing a solid diagnosis. The report also adopts a systemized thinking approach to enhance comprehension of terrorism's dynamics and its effects on Arab societies. For scientific honesty, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of errors in the monitoring process. The accuracy of statistics published by local and international media and newspapers may vary, particularly concerning the number of victims, both injured and deceased. Therefore, caution must be exercised to ensure accuracy and objectivity.

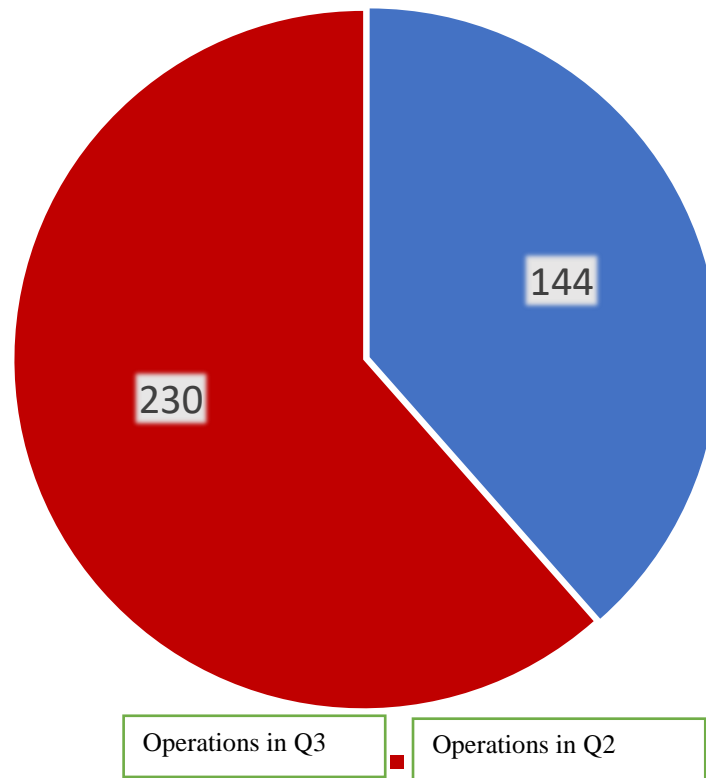
### **Key Findings of Terrorist Operations in the Arab Region:**

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In the third quarter of 2023, terrorist operations in the Arab region decreased compared to the second quarter of the same year. Terrorist organizations claimed

responsibility for or were attributed to 144 terrorist operations, a decline from around 230 operations in the previous quarter. Maat utilized a tracking tool to verify these operations, examining and analyzing the claims made by terrorist groups or attributed to them to ensure their authenticity. The following figure illustrates the comparison between the number of terrorist operations in the third quarter and the second quarter of 2023.

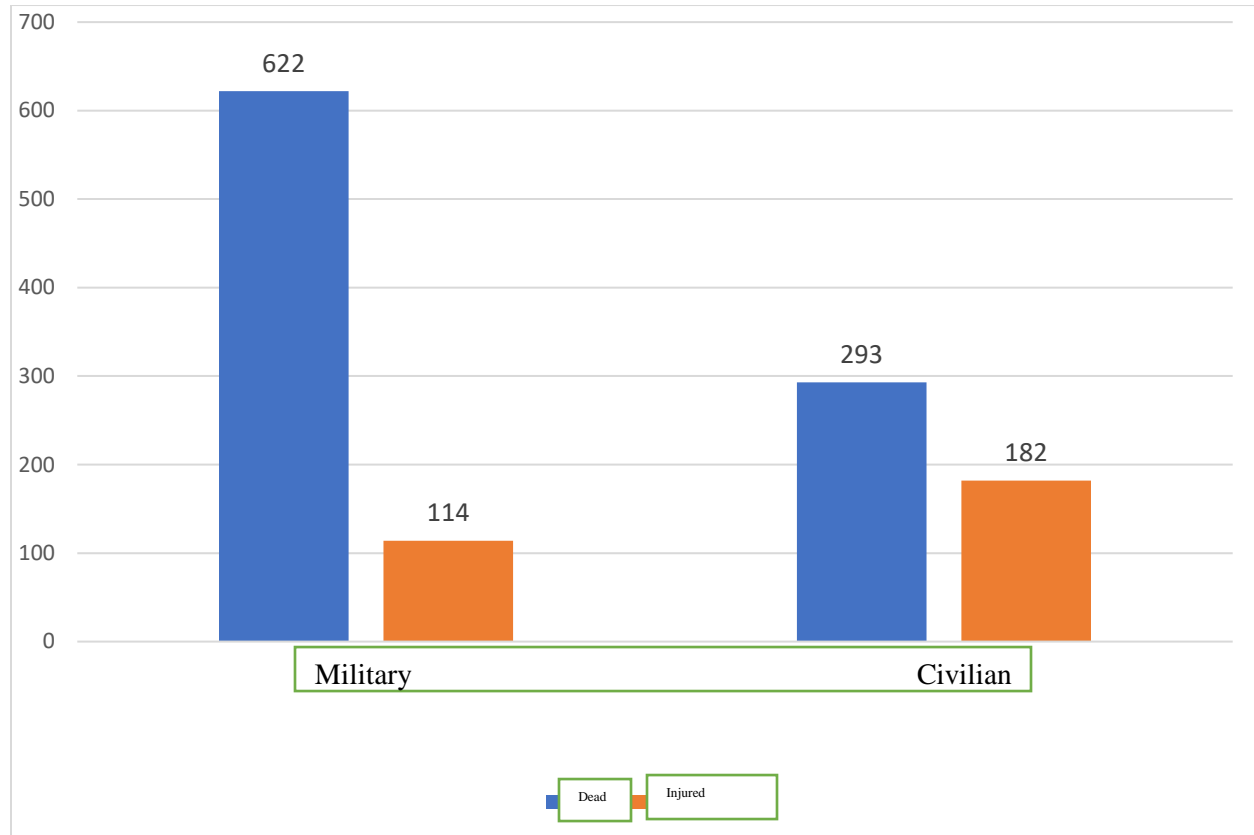
Figure (1): Terrorist operations in Q3 compared to Q2



During the reporting period, approximately 915 individuals lost their lives in terrorist operations, including 293 civilians and around 622 military personnel. The operations also left 296 individuals injured, consisting of 182 civilians and approximately 114 military personnel. Analysis of casualty statistics in the Arab region during the reporting period reveals that terrorist groups have adopted a strategy focused on causing the highest number of fatalities. This is evident from the weapons employed in these operations, such as drones, and the significant proportion of deaths, accounting for 75.5% of the total victims in the third quarter. The terrorist groups aimed to inflict substantial losses in the attacks they claimed

responsibility for during this period. The figure below depicts the victims of terrorist operations, both military and civilian, in the Arab region throughout the third quarter of 2023.

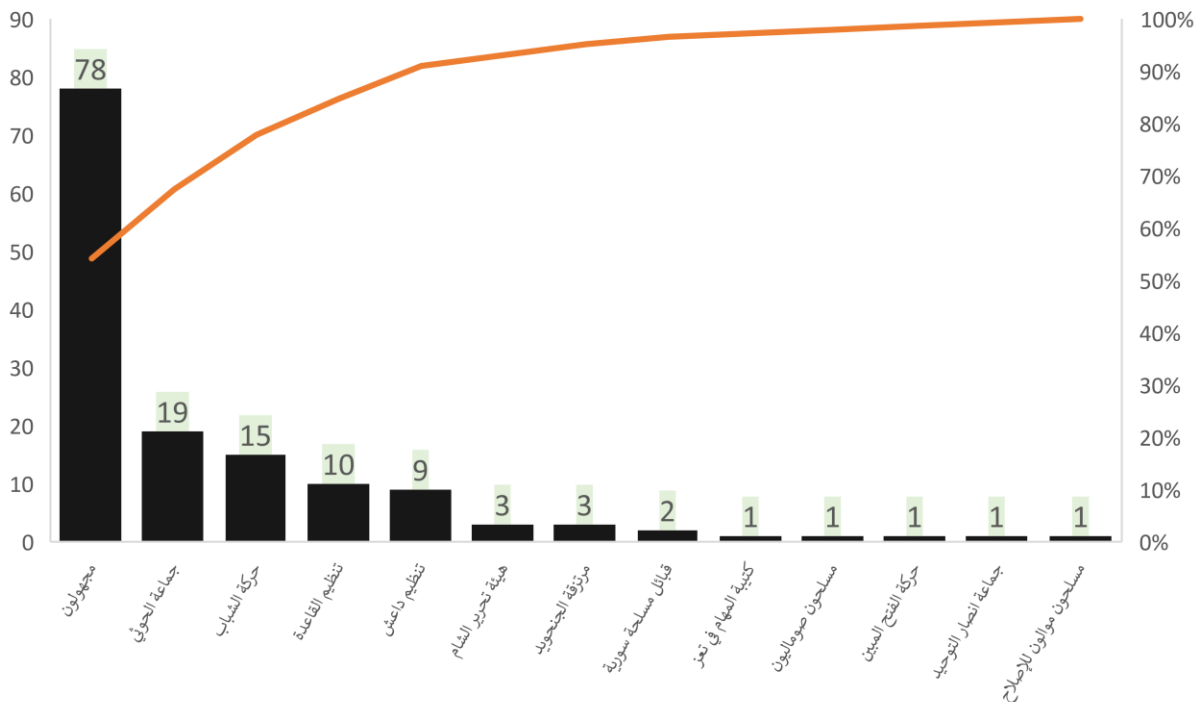
**Figure (2): Victims of terrorist operations, both military and civilian**



The Houthi group was active during the third quarter of 2022 and claimed responsibility for 19 terrorist operations during the period covered by the report, including 18 operations in Yemen and one operation on the southern border of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, while the Al-Shabaab movement in Somalia continued to carry out terrorist operations, exploiting the security gaps in the anti-terrorism strategy. Terrorism was practiced in Somalia and 15 terrorist operations were attributed to the movement, where Al-Qaeda continued to carry out more operations and 10 terrorist operations were attributed to it during the reporting period, including nine operations in Yemen and one operation in Syrian territory, originally targeting the security and military forces in southern Yemen. The activity of Da’esh has relatively calmed down, as only nine terrorist operations have been

attributed to it, despite the attempt to reach new areas of influence in Iraq and Syria, thanks to its ability to be present in rural and desert areas. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Janjaweed mercenaries in Sudan also carried out three terrorist operations during the reporting period. The rest of the operations were attributed to the Task Force Battalion in Taiz, to armed tribes in Syria, and the Al-Fath Al-Mubin group and Ansar Al-Tawhid, two groups active in Syrian territory. The number of operations carried out by terrorist groups in 2023 is shown in the figure below.

Figure (3): Classification of terrorist groups according to the number of operations



### Geographical Distribution of Terrorist Operations

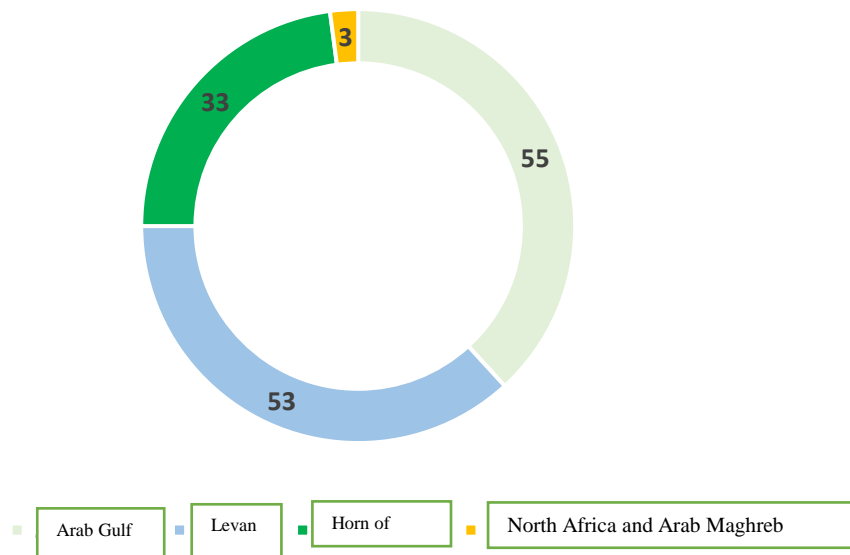
The analysis of terrorist operations in the Arab region during the period covered by the report shows the clear activity of terrorist groups in the Levant region, which includes five Arab countries, where 53 terrorist operations took place in this region, which represents 36.8% of the total terrorist operations in the third quarter, but it is noted that these operations took place in only three countries: 32



terrorist operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, about 17 terrorist operations in Iraq, and finally four terrorist operations in Lebanon, while Jordan and Palestine did not record any terrorist operations during the period covered by the report. The largest number of terrorist operations took place in Yemen, which is geographically classified within the Arab Gulf states, as 54 terrorist operations were carried out in Yemen alone, which represents 37.5% of the terrorist operations, excluding the operations that took place in Yemen and the operation carried out by the Houthis group on the southern border in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the Arab Gulf region did not record any other terrorist operations during the period covered by the report.

The Horn of Africa region also recorded 33 terrorist operations, which we estimate is 22.9% of the total terrorist operations, of which 21 terrorist operations occurred in Somalia, most of which were carried out by Al-Shabaab in Somalia, while 13 terrorist operations occurred in Sudan, which is witnessing a state of armed conflict. There is relative calm in the North Africa and Maghreb region, as this region recorded only three operations in the third quarter of 2023, two of which occurred in Libya and one in Tunisia, while Egypt, Algeria, the Kingdom of Morocco, and Mauritania did not witness any terrorist operations during the period covered by the report. The figure below shows the geographical distribution of terrorist operations in the Arab region.

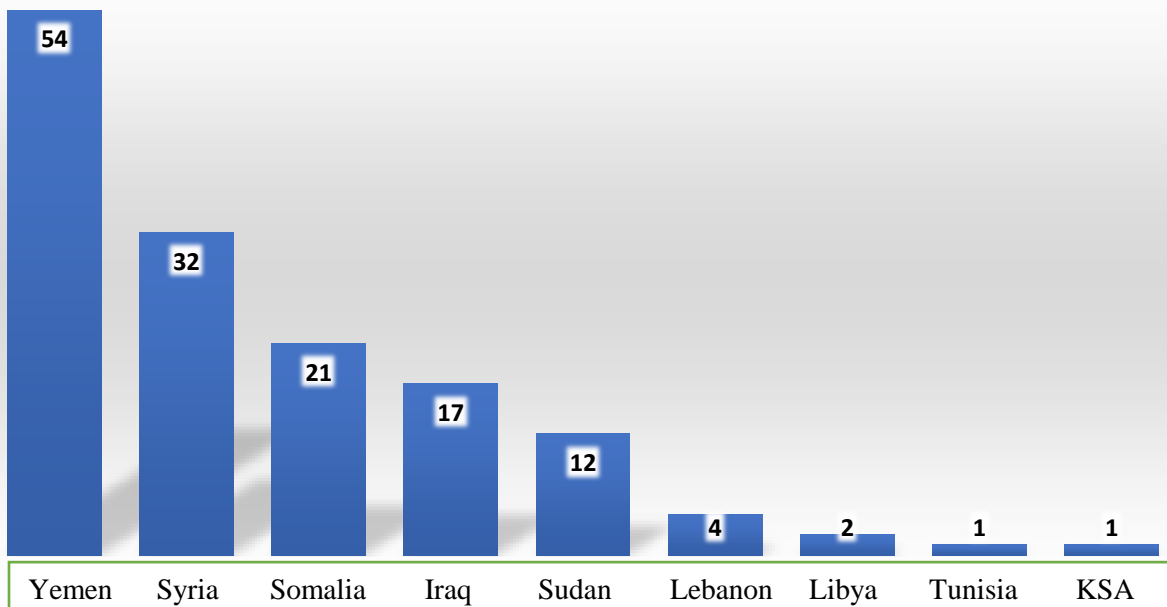
Figure (4): Geographical distribution of terrorist operations in the Arab region



## Terrorism in the Arab Region: An Analytical Perspective

Despite a decrease in the number of terrorist operations compared to the previous quarter, terrorism remains a significant threat to both military forces and civilians in the Arab region during the third quarter of 2023. Countries experiencing conflicts, such as Sudan, Somalia, and Syria, as well as those in temporary truce phases like Yemen, and regions with a widespread presence of terrorist groups like Iraq and Libya, face greater risks. These areas, along with other conflict zones and regions with prevalent armed groups, continue to bear the brunt of terrorist activities. Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, and Libya accounted for 138 out of the total 144 terrorist operations in the Arab region, representing 95.8% of the incidents. The remaining operations were reported in Lebanon, with four operations for which no perpetrator information was available, and one each in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

Figure (5): Terrorist operations in the Arab region according to each country



Maat's analysis of the terrorist operations that took place in the nine countries in the Arab region in the third quarter of 2023 shows that the desire to control more territory and weaken the national armies, as is the case in Yemen, represented an impetus for more operations, and most of the operations were carried out by the

Houthi group and Al-Qaeda, which began its activity is increasing in southern Yemen. The lack of a unified strategy to combat terrorism also led to security gaps in some other countries, such as Somalia, for example, which allowed Al-Shabaab to carry out more qualitative operations against the security and army forces in Somalia and African forces. In Iraq, despite anti-terrorism measures, the desire to prove its presence represented an incentive for Da'esh to not stop launching terrorist operations during the period covered by the report.

13 Arab countries maintained their record free of terrorist operations in the third quarter of 2023, which is an improvement on the horizon in terms of counter-terrorism measures and reducing sources of financing for terrorist groups, which is attributed to efforts to combat terrorism in the Arab region, in addition to the increase in the exchange of best experiences and good practices between Arab countries, UN agencies and member countries in the international coalition to defeat Da'esh, besides increasing measures to combat the financing of terrorism, which was reflected in a decline in the sources of funding for terrorist groups, at least during the period covered by the report. Rehabilitation programs and the prevention of violent extremism may play a role in reducing the number of operations and an incentive to discourage recruitment by terrorist groups in the Arab region. However, the role of these programs is still limited, and these programs suffer from the weak resources allocated to them in the Arab region, which makes their impact often unclear. In the following, we focus on terrorist operations in the Arab region in each of the nine countries separately.

## **1. Yemen**

Terrorist and armed groups in Yemen carried out 54 terrorist operations, the Houthi group claimed responsibility for 19 operations, while Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for 9 terrorist operations and attributed the rest of the operations to unknown persons. Maat believes that the expansion of launching terrorist operations in Yemen during the third quarter of 2023 remains driven by the desire to control more territory and weaken Yemeni government institutions, especially as the continuous negotiations, which may lead to gunfire between the Houthis, the Arab coalition, and government forces. The Houthis are trying to get many gains from the negotiations, especially paying the salaries of public employees in the Houthi lands, which perhaps, if agreed upon, will be through the revenues from oil

and gas reserves in Yemen, which are under the possession of the Yemeni government.

Al-Qaeda, which claimed nine terrorist operations in the third quarter of 2023 in Yemen, has renewed its activity and has become a clear threat to government forces, especially in southern Yemen. The forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council and senior military commanders were the first target of Al-Qaeda operations, where Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen its activity began to increase during the truce between the Houthis and the Yemeni government under the auspices of the UN, which lasted from April to the beginning of October 2022 and was implemented unofficially. Air strikes to combat the organization's activity did not reduce its danger, but led to the killing of some of its senior leaders, as in January and February 2023, drones killed two senior leaders of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in the Yemeni Ma'rib Governorate. The first, who was killed on January 30, 2023, is called Hussein Hadboul, whose nickname is Hassan al-Hadrami, and he is responsible for manufacturing explosives in the organization. The second, who was killed on February 26, 2023, is the group's media leader and leader of the group's Shura Council, the Saudi citizen Hamad al-Tamimi, whose nickname is Abu Abdul Aziz al-Adnani, these strikes may have temporarily affected the operational planning of attacks, but they did not stop the organization from launching large-scale attacks in southern Yemen.

## **2. Syria**

32 terrorist operations were carried out in the third quarter of 2023 in Syrian territory, these operations left 73 civilian victims, with 37 deaths and 36 injuries, while the military was the target of the terrorist attacks that took place in Syria during the third quarter, where 155 were killed and 20 military personnel were wounded. Maat noted that Da'esh in Syria is still using rural areas as a hiding place to plan and carry out more terrorist operations, which is evident in the large number of operations that took place in rural areas during the third quarter, where 16 terrorist operations took place in rural areas, which is 50% of the total operations that took place in Syria during the period covered by the report. Deir ez-Zor countryside and the Daraa countryside were more affected by these operations than other regions. Other smaller groups, such as Al-Fatah Al-Mubin and Jamaat Ansar Al-Tawhid, claimed responsibility for terrorist operations during the period

covered by the report, and Maat estimates that Syria in general will remain a fertile ground for terrorist operations, especially with the clear activity of armed groups in rural areas and the inability of the Syrian army to tighten control over coordination between militants in these areas.

### **3. Somalia**

Terrorist groups carried out 21 terrorist operations in Somalia in the third quarter of 2023, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for (15) of these operations, which represents (71.4%) of the total terrorist operations in Somalia. The remaining operations were attributed to unknown persons, which left more deaths and injuries in the Arab region during the third quarter of 2023, where 562 civilians and soldiers were killed and wounded, with 110 civilians and about 452 military personnel losing their lives and wounded. The distribution of terrorist operations carried out by Al-Shabaab shows that the movement has the ability and vitality to carry out coordinated attacks in different regions of Somalia, including access to the capital, Mogadishu. Security gaps and the lack of reconciliation continued to motivate Al-Shabaab to plan further operations. On August 26 and 27, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud held the seventh meeting of the National Advisory Council, which brings together leaders of the federal government and federal member states to advance Somali government priorities. In this meeting, it was decided to unify military operations against Al-Shabaab, through a joint command, and to accelerate preparations for the second phase of the attack against Al-Shabaab in Hirshabelle, Jubaland and the southwestern states, besides accelerating the pace of reconciliation. Maat believes that Al-Shabaab will remain able to carry out more operations against the security forces, the Somali army, and the African Union forces, as long as the movement remains able to recruit more militants and as long as succeeds in receiving smuggled weapons.

### **4. Iraq**

Terrorist and armed groups carried out 17 terrorist operations in the third quarter of 2023 in Iraq, and 21 deaths resulted from these operations, while eight others were injured. It is noted that the number of terrorist operations in Iraq has decreased, and this is considered an essential result of the efforts to combat terrorism and target Da'esh militants, especially in the Hamrin Mountains, and the joint coordination between Iraqi forces and foreign forces, especially intelligence.

These efforts led to a scarcity of Da'esh's resources and paralyzed its ability to maneuver and move in various regions, which prompted the organization to try to establish spatial bases in the Hamrin Mountains, but these attempts were incomplete until the period covered by the report. Maat believes that Da'esh is trying to exploit the stumbling block in the political process in Iraq to maintain its areas of influence and plan other operations in the future.

#### **5. Sudan:**

During the third quarter of 2023, Sudan experienced a total of 13 terrorist operations. Of these, three were attributed to mercenaries affiliated with the Janjaweed militia. Maat, however, classified the remaining operations as being carried out by unknown individuals. Throughout the reporting period, civilians bore the brunt of these terrorist acts, with 147 fatalities and approximately 36 injuries. In contrast, only two soldiers lost their lives. Maat suggests that terrorist groups in Sudan, including ISIS, may seek to exploit the ongoing conflict in the country to establish a presence. These efforts may involve recruiting additional militants, potentially doubling their estimated current number of around 200.

#### **6. Lebanon:**

In Lebanon, four terrorist operations occurred during the third quarter of 2023, carried out by individuals either affiliated with terrorist groups or acting independently. These attacks resulted in six civilian casualties, with three fatalities and three injuries. Maat observed that the perpetrators employed unlicensed weapons, highlighting the dangers associated with illicit arms trafficking. This situation raises concerns about the possibility of further operations in Lebanon during the final quarter of 2023. The country's economic and political challenges, coupled with frustration among its population, pose short-term risks to stability and security. The emergence of terrorist organizations within Lebanon cannot be ruled out, given the ambiguity surrounding the operations that occurred during the reporting period.

#### **7. Libya:**

Within Libya, two terrorist operations occurred during the third quarter of 2023, resulting in the deaths of three soldiers from the 177th Infantry Battalion of the Libyan Armed Forces. Although the individuals responsible for these operations remain unidentified, there are reports suggesting that ISIS-affiliated groups in Libya

may be behind them. ISIS, operating in southern Libya, appears to be attempting to establish a foothold by collaborating with criminal networks and other local groups. Reports indicate an increase in sympathizers, with the number of militants associated with the organization rising from 240 to 500 within a short span. This ongoing threat from ISIS in southern Libya is a cause for concern.

#### **8. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:**

A single terrorist operation took place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the third quarter of 2023. On September 25, 2023, drones launched an attack on a Bahraini force stationed near Yemen on the southern border of Saudi Arabia, resulting in the death of a Bahraini officer and a soldier. This operation followed a period of several months without any terrorist incidents targeting Saudi Arabia. It is believed that this attack was intended to exert pressure on the Kingdom to accept the terms of the current negotiations with the Houthi group. It is unlikely that similar terrorist operations will occur in Saudi Arabia in the near future.

#### **9. Tunisia:**

In Tunisia, a single terrorist operation took place during the third quarter of 2023. Unidentified gunmen targeted a member of the Naval National Guard in the La Goulette region of northern Tunisia on July 3, 2023, resulting in the injury of the guard member. During the reporting period, Tunisian security forces intensified their efforts to combat terrorism, particularly by tightening control over the financing of terrorist groups. The Jund al-Khilafah group, in particular, is believed to be facing financial constraints, which may limit its ability to plan further attacks or pay its militants' wages.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

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The threat of terrorism persists in the Arab region during the third quarter of 2023. Despite the decline of ISIS and its weakened capacity to acquire resources, efforts to revive its operations are evident, particularly in Iraq. Socioeconomic grievances remain exploitable vulnerabilities for the organization to recruit more militants. External support and guidance continue to motivate armed groups, like the Houthis in Yemen, to carry out further attacks. Effectively countering terrorist attacks relies on political stability, preventing the expansion of conflict zones, and curbing illicit arms trafficking to terrorist groups.

### Maat puts forth the following recommendations:

1. Increase financial resources allocated to rehabilitation programs and prevention of violent extremism in the Arab region.
2. Address all social injustices faced by citizens in the Arab region.
3. Encourage non-member Arab countries to join the international coalition against ISIS to benefit from best practices, lessons learned, and advice.
4. Advocate for unified Arab positions to expel foreign forces and mercenaries from conflict-affected Arab countries.
5. Promote religious tolerance, combat hate speech, invest in women's and religious minorities' rights, and provide social services to deserving groups as solutions to counter conditions that breed terrorism.
6. Expand scientific and academic research on the causes of extremism and terrorism, apply findings on the ground, revise educational curricula, and develop tools to monitor hate speech in Arab countries.
7. Participate in global counter-terrorism forums to exchange expertise, information, and experiences, enhancing countries' ability to combat terrorism.
8. Ensure that counter-terrorism measures are not misused to suppress opposition or impose restrictions on civil society and human rights defenders.
9. Seek support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for capacity building in financial investigations.



10. Provide funding for research, studies, and investigative journalism analyzing terrorism in the Arab region and examining the visions and recommendations proposed by these studies.