



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Hearing Statement of Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement & Intelligence Subcommittee Ranking Member Seth Magaziner (D-RI)**

### ***The Future of Homeland Security: Addressing the Rise of Terrorism in Africa***

**September 27, 2023**

Terrorist attacks are increasing across the continent of Africa, making this a critical and timely oversight topic for this Committee.

Last month marked the 25th anniversary of the bombing of U.S. embassies in East Africa where 224 people were killed—including 12 Americans—and more than 4,500 people were wounded. The embassy bombings were orchestrated by Osama bin Laden, who would later direct the most heinous, most deadly terrorist attack on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001.

While the United States was reeling from the 9/11 attacks and focusing our counterterrorism efforts in the Middle East and Central Asia, Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda were looking toward Somalia and Yemen. Today, terrorist groups have established themselves in those countries and are focused on further expanding their reach through brutal violence in the Sahel and West Africa. The reality is that twenty-two years after the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda and ISIS affiliates are still active—especially in Africa—and newer terrorist organizations have emerged and spread to the African continent.

Al Qaeda's richest and most successful affiliate, Al Shabaab, today controls large territories in Somalia, despite more than 15 years of military operations and airstrikes, and has also killed U.S. citizens, U.S. soldiers, and U.S. contractors in Kenya. Ten years ago, last week, marked the anniversary of the Westgate Shopping mall attack where 64 people died at the hands of Al Shabaab terrorists. Al Shabaab has launched an incursion of as many as 2,000 terrorist fighters deep into Ethiopia. And it has killed thousands of people in attacks across Somalia.

Another Al Qaeda affiliate, JNIM, operates in West Africa, and particularly the nations of Mali and Burkina Faso. JNIM has attacked French, UN, and local security force personnel. It has brutally murdered civilians accused of collaborating with the state or foreign forces. And JNIM now has encircled the capital of Mali while spreading deeper into the Sahel and southward into coastal West Africa. And, al Qaeda and its affiliates are not the only terrorist organizations in Africa that aspire to attack Americans abroad.

Over the past seven years, ISIS has spread its influence throughout the Sahel region. ISIS-Sahel has predominantly focused on local targets in the border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, but the group has also claimed credit for killing four U.S. soldiers and kidnapping at least one U.S. citizen. And in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, Islamic State-West Africa has established itself as a leading extremist group in the region.

These threats may seem far away from the U.S. homeland, but we must be clear-eyed that what is happening in Africa affects our security here at home. Though the intelligence community assesses that Africa-based violent extremist groups are primarily threats to the regions in which they operate, these

terrorist organizations seek to target Americans and no doubt would take advantage of any opportunity to bring their reign of terror to our homeland as well.

In addition to working with friendly governments in Africa to crack down on terrorism, we must redouble our efforts to combat terrorist groups' ability to radicalize individuals here in the United States through the internet. As we know, Al Shabaab and ISIS have recruited American citizens and citizens of other Western countries to engage in terrorism, using social media to encourage sympathetic or troubled individuals to attack targets here in the United States.

Furthermore, we know these terrorist groups often rely on Americans and other Westerners to help fund terrorist operations.

I hope that we take the opportunity during today's hearing to discuss this - how we counter foreign terrorist groups' unprecedented, virtual access to people living in the United States in furtherance of inspiring and enabling attacks in the Homeland.

I am thankful that the Biden Administration is taking the threat from the rise in terrorism across Africa seriously. Today, we have around 450 military personnel on the ground advising Somali forces and African Union troops to beat back Al Shabaab and bring stability to the Horn of Africa. We also have approximately 1,100 military personnel in Niger conducting drone operations to combat terrorism.

The United States continues to launch airstrikes against Al Shabaab, when necessary. And, under President Biden, we are advising, assisting, accompanying, training, and equipping regional forces to carry out counterterrorism operations that protect the security of African nations and prevent the spread of terrorism to the United States and our allies. While military options are necessary to counter terrorism in Africa, the United States must also help African nations build their democratic institutions and improve the lives of their citizens—in order to foster stability and safety.

If we do not continue to engage with robust foreign aid, adversaries like Russia and China will fill that void, and terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS will continue to gain strength. It is in America's national security interest to be a good partner to those nations in Africa who are aligned with our values.

Today's hearing is an important opportunity for Members of this Subcommittee to demonstrate that we are united in a bipartisan effort to defend the American people, protect the homeland, and ensure the security of African nations from terrorist – and all security – threats.

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