

Islamic State (IS) Recruits Terrorists throughout North Africa and Middle East

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ISIL leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi.

CAIRO — Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, with control over large parts of Iraq and Syria, has set its sights on North Africa.

Islamist sources said ISIL has intensified recruiting in several countries in North Africa. They said the recruitment was now meant to help establish sleeper and operational cells in such countries as Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

“The cells are being organized by North Africans who have fought and are now returning to their home countries,” a source said. “It’s something that is very worrisome to the regimes in the area.”

In 2014, several North African states have reported the arrest of dozens of suspected ISIL recruiters. The sources said the recruiters at first focused on sending young Muslims to the ISIL wars in Iraq and Syria.

“Over the last two months or so, the direction has been changing, and ISIL also wants to establish an infrastructure in North Africa,” the source said.

ISIL has also sought alliances with other Al Qaida networks in North Africa. The sources said Al Qaida Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, deemed the leading franchise, rebuffed ISIL and its plans for a caliphate.

As a result, ISIL has been wooing Ansar Al Sharia, an Al Qaida branch active in Libya and Tunisia. On July 23, Islamist forums carried an appeal for Ansar to join ISIL and swear its allegiance to commander Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. On July 30, Ansar declared a caliphate around the Libyan city of Benghazi.

“The success or failure of the ISIS project hinges on the positions of three key jihadist organizations in the world: Al Qaida in Yemen, AQIM and Ansar Al Sharia in Libya,” Abdullah Rami, a leading analyst on Islamist groups, said. “Without the allegiance of those groups, the caliphate project will just be ink on paper and will be a local organization confined to Iraq’s borders.”

Rami told the U.S. Central Command-sponsored Magharebia.com news site that ISIL has attracted numerous smaller Al Qaida-aligned cells in North Africa. In addition, ISIL has recruited hundreds of so-called lone wolves for attacks.

“Therefore, Al Baghdadi can use those at any moment to carry out terrorist operations and destabilize regional countries,” Rami said.

The sources have already detected signs of ISIL-directed operations in North Africa. One group believed to have joined ISIL’s network was identified as the Uqba Ibn Nafaa Brigade, which claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 15 Tunisian Army soldiers along the border with Algeria in July 2014.

“These are prototypes for future operations in North Africa, which will undermine the region’s stability and security and wreak havoc if the international community doesn’t act quickly,” Mouhcine Abdul Wahed, a Moroccan researcher, said.

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