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France and Europe are facing the scenario between al-Qaeda's weakness and the reproduction of the group.

Al-Zawahiri's killing and the repercussions against al-Qaeda- affiliated groups in the African Sahel region..

- Al-Qaeda in the African Sahel -



Paris, August 2, 2022 - The United States announced a U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan killed top al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri, in a precision intelligence and military operation in the Afghan capital, Kabul. The US President Joe Biden announced that he authorized and gave his final approval for the high Precision Strike that targeted Al-Zawahiri over the weekend and led to be killed.

A US official considered Al-Zawahiri's presence in the Afghan capital, Kabul, a "clear violation" of the Doha agreement between the Taliban and the United States in 2020, which paved the way for the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The US strike on al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, in addition to the critics of violating the Doha agreement, will lead to a major controversy in the coming period, regarding the Taliban's strategy, if Taliban will actually abide by the agreements not to turn Afghanistan never again into a haven for the extremist groups.

Under the 2020 Doha agreement(US-Taliban agreement), Taliban pledged not to allow Afghanistan to be used again as a staging ground for jihadists, but experts believe that Taliban has never broken ties with al-Qaeda.

"What we know is that the senior Taliban leader Haqqani was aware of al-Zawahiri's presence in Kabul," a US official said.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban's deputy leader and the interior minister, heads the "Haqqani Network," Haqqani heads a powerful subset of the Taliban blamed for some of the deadliest and bloodiest violence of the past 20 years. US officials describe the network as the "real arm" of the Pakistani intelligence.

The killing of Al-Zawahiri is considered the biggest blow to the al-Qaeda since its founder Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan in 2011, which gives a great opportunity for countries fighting the al-Qaeda around the world to plan for bigger strikes targeting the leaders of the al-Qaeda group and its widespread affiliates around the world. Despite the strategy followed by the al-Qaeda group after Al-Zawahiri's killing, by decentralizing its leaders and giving them the option to operate individually according to specific resources, separately from the central leadership of the al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, this blow is directed to the al-Qaeda and its leaders, and they will need a long time to rearrange their tactics.



France and Al-Qaeda in the African Sahel

The news of the killing of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, is very important for France, which is leading efforts to counter the extremist groups and organizations in the Africa's Sahel region, where extremist groups are increasingly active in recent years, the most important of which is al-Qaeda, which spreads in Africa under several names and groups, but it follows the ideology of al-Qaeda and is closely linked to the al-Qaeda organization.

The Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin Group loyal to al-Qaeda in the African Sahel, is considered a major party to the regional conflict, in the difficulty of eradicating and eliminating the group, because it has local support and its field capabilities accumulation. In January 2020, the summit between France and the G5-Sahel group -Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger- in the French city of Pau, designated the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara as the Enemy No. 1.

A year later, the number of attacks claimed by this IS in the Greater Sahara had been decreased under the pressure exerted by the French forces and the local armies.

This terrorist group faced a greater threat Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin Group, which recently claimed two attacks happened in less than a week and resulted in the killing of five soldiers from the French forces anti-terror operation Barkhane.

The commander of the French forces Barkhane, General Marc Conroyt, told the National Assembly in November that this group "presently represents the most dangerous enemy of the Barkhane force, the international forces and Mali."

This group arose in 2017, of the unification of several jihadist groups under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali, who belongs to the Tuareg and has been in Mali since the 1990s.

The group, whose fighters are estimated at more than a thousand, is showing resilience, especially after the assassination of its "military official" Bah Ag Moussa in November 2020 with a French strike.

Despite the advance of the Islamic State in some stages over al-Qaeda organizationally and geographically, as happened in Iraq and Syria, the strength of al-Qaeda is still very large in Africa, especially the African Sahel countries, which pushes towards greater international strategies to confront the group and track its leaders.



Decentralization in Al-Qaeda

France will have a chance for a good time in its war against the extremist groups in the African Sahel, the most important of which is Al-Qaeda, after the killing of its leader Al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan. However it is also not possible to build on the impact of targeting the leaders of the al-Qaeda group in Kabul, because the group followed the strategy of decentralization with the groups affiliated to al-Qaeda around the world and gave them the freedom to move and operate, whether in the terrorist operations or through recruitment and financing.

The relationship that links the al-Qaeda with most of the groups affiliated with it around the world, has become related to the pledge of allegiance - or "bay'ah" only in some cases, receive funding and the main lines of the group's work in other cases, which means that al-Qaeda in the Africa's Sahel will not be greatly affected by the killing of al-Zawahiri.

France and the European countries must prepare well for a retaliatory reaction by the members of the al-Qaeda group, whether inside the European countries or the Sahel countries and areas where the French, American and European interests are spread, given that the al-Qaeda group will try to prove its strength again and that the killing of Al-Zawahiri will not affect its strength, especially if who takes over the leadership after al-Zawahiri, is one of the names that tends to show the power and mobilize the affiliated groups around the world and the most powerful in the African Sahel.

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