



AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Combating Illicit Trafficking and Terrorist Financing in Eastern Africa and the Great Lakes Region

EXPERTS ROUNDTABLE INFORMATION NOTE

WHAT: The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) will convene a four-day roundtable focused on combating the financing of terrorism and illicit activities by al-Shabaab, Islamic State-Somalia (IS-Somalia), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and Islamic State in Mozambique (ISIS-Mozambique). The roundtable will catalyze discussion on a regional solution framework through which practitioners can continue to support and further enhance inter-agency cooperation to combat illicit trafficking and organized criminal activities from which violent extremist organizations (VEOs), profit and the means through which they launder money and finance their activities.

WHERE: Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

WHEN: July 29 – August 1, 2025

WHO: The roundtable will include approximately 30–35 participants, comprising both uniformed and civilian national security officials, as well as representatives from public and private institutions involved in combating terrorist financing, illicit trafficking, and organized crime. Subject matter experts from the following countries will be invited: Democratic Republic of Congo DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Six regional organizations are invited to send representatives: AU-CAERT, EAPCCO/CTCoE, EAC, ESAAMLG, SADC, and SARPCCO. Four international organizations will also each nominate one representative: UNODC-ROEA, INTERPOL (Nairobi), FATF, and the Institute for Security Studies-Africa.

In addition, ACSS will invite six U.S. actors to attend as observers, with one representative each from: the U.S. Department of Treasury (TFFC), Department of State (INL/CT Bureau), SOCAFRICA, SETAF-AF, AFRICOM's relevant directorates, and the FBI.

WHY: Violent extremist groups like al-Shabaab and IS-Somalia remain serious threats in East Africa, despite military pressure and territorial losses. Al-Shabaab was responsible for over 7,600 deaths in 2023, a 22% increase from the previous year—showing its continued strength. IS-Somalia has emerged as a key revenue generator

for the Islamic State's global leadership, especially through its al-Karrar office, which, after recovering from leadership losses, resumed funding other IS branches, including in Central Africa. These groups fund operations through local taxation, extortion, racketeering, and criminal markets, including timber smuggling in Mozambique.

In response, East African countries like Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have adopted AML-CFT laws and partnered with international actors to build capacity and disrupt terrorist financing. While inter-agency and cross-border coordination has improved, challenges remain—such as limited information sharing, lack of enabling policies, insufficient training, and weak enforcement.

HOW: The program will be held in-person over three days and will feature plenary sessions with moderated Q&A segments, as well as discussion groups aimed at identifying key lessons learned, common themes, differences, and potential next steps. The program will be conducted in English and adhere to a strict non-attribution policy.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide a trusted platform for subject matter experts to assess how best to leverage their complementary roles and responsibilities to combat the financing of terrorism, including through illicit trafficking and organized criminal activities.
2. Catalyze solutions among East African national, regional, and international stakeholders about means to strengthen inter-agency and cross-border cooperation to combat the financing of terrorism, including through illicit trafficking and organized criminal activities.