

# U.S. Targets West African Hostage Takers

April 23, 2024

## *Sanctions Target the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin Terrorist Group*

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned two leaders of al-Qa'ida-aligned terrorist group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) for hostage-taking of U.S. persons in West Africa. OFAC is designating these individuals pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14078, "Bolstering Efforts To Bring Hostages and Wrongfully Detained United States Nationals Home," which targets those involved in, hostage-taking of a U.S. national or the wrongful detention of a U.S. national abroad. The Department of State concurrently designated five JNIM leaders pursuant to E.O. 14078, and designated two of these, as well as two additional leaders of JNIM, pursuant to E.O. 13224, as amended.

"JNIM relies on hostage-taking and wrongful detention of civilians in order to gain leverage and instill fear, creating anguish and misery for the victims and their families," said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. "Treasury will continue to use all tools at our disposal to hold accountable those who seek to hold our citizens hostage."

E.O. 14078 draws on the authority of the 2020 Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage Taking Accountability Act. This act represents the determination of the Levinson family and other families of those taken hostage or who are wrongfully detained overseas, who have worked to turn their family's extraordinary hardships into constructive and meaningful action.

The individuals designated today are members of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), an al-Qa'ida-aligned terrorist group operating in northwestern Africa. The Department of State designated JNIM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) on September 6, 2018. Treasury has previously targeted JNIM in 2019, designating Bah Ag Moussa, a close associate of JNIM leader Iyad ag Ghali, pursuant to E.O. 13224; Bah Ag Moussa has led terrorist attacks in Mali, including one that killed 21 Malian soldiers.

**Sidan ag Hitta (Hitta)** is a Mali-based senior JNIM leader who was the JNIM official coordinating all negotiations regarding the release of western hostages and issued instructions concerning the hostages held by JNIM. [On August 6, 2021](#), the Department of State designated Hitta pursuant to E.O. 13224, as amended, for being a leader of JNIM.

**Jafar Dicko (Dicko)** is a JNIM leader in Burkina Faso who was believed to have supervised the detention of a U.S. national. Dicko also served as a leader of Ansarul Islam, the JNIM-affiliated group responsible for kidnapping a U.S. national. [On February 20, 2018](#), the Department of State designated Ansarul Islam pursuant to E.O. 13224.

Sidan Ag Hitta and Jafar Dicko are being designated for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, an act of hostage-taking of a U.S. national or wrongful detention of a U.S. national abroad.

## **SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS**

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of the designated persons described above that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and must be reported to OFAC. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, individually or in the aggregate, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or exempt, OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC's ability to designate and add persons to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN List), but also from its willingness to remove persons from the SDN List consistent with the law. The ultimate goal of sanctions is not to punish, but to bring about a positive change in behavior. For information concerning the process for seeking removal from an OFAC list, including the SDN List, please refer to [OFAC's Frequently Asked Question 897 here](#). For detailed information on the process to submit a request for [removal from an OFAC sanctions list, please click here](#).

[Click here for more information on the individuals designated today.](#)

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