



Funding terrorism: ISIS-affiliated website raises funds using the virtual currency Bitcoin

November 17, 2019

Overview

In recent days, **Akhbar al-Muslimin**, the ISIS-affiliated news website, resumed operation under a new address.¹ The website went online after several months of inactivity. Concurrently with the resumption of the website’s activity, **the fundraising campaign was reinstated on the website. The website carries out the fundraising campaign through Local Bitcoins, a company trading in virtual currencies, based in Helsinki. The Akhbar al-Muslimin website used this company in the past for its fundraising campaign²** (for additional details, see Appendix). It is stated on the website, as in the past, that the funds raised are intended to finance the website’s activity. However, in the ITIC’s assessment, the funds may end up in ISIS’s possession and be used **to finance additional ISIS activities.**



“You can buy bitcoins on the Local Bitcoins website, and the way [to do so] is presented in the following”

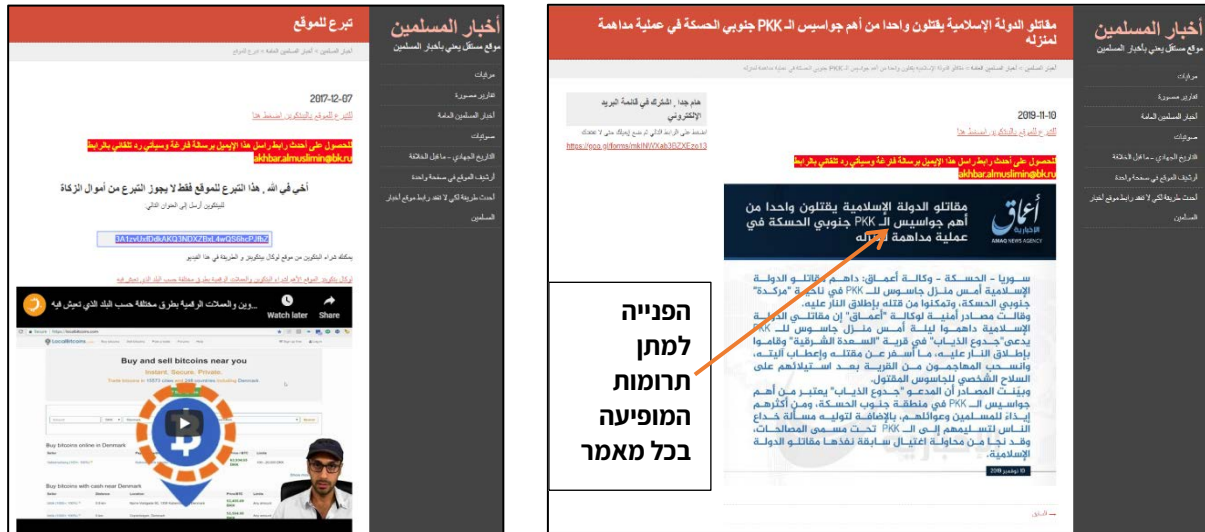
“You can buy bitcoins on the Local Bitcoins website, and the way [to do so] is presented in the following video” (Akhbar al-Muslimin, November 12, 2019).

¹ The website’s new address: <https://ou7zytv3h2yaosqq.f101.ml/>

² See the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from March 10, 2019, “Funding terrorism: ISIS raises funds through an affiliated website, using bitcoins.”

► The current fundraising campaign on the website does not make do with one ad published on the website’s homepage. **Every news item published on the website is accompanied by the following sentence highlighted in red: “In order to donate to the website using Bitcoin, click here.”** The following text (yellow letters on a red background) appears underneath the above sentence: “In order to receive the most up-to-date link, send a blank message to the following email address: akhbar.almuslimin@bk.ru and you will receive an immediate [automatic] response.”

► Clicking on “Click here” takes the user to another page, **showing the address of a digital wallet** to which funds may be sent. The address changes upon every entry. Underneath the address of the digital wallet, there are instructions for the potential donor where and how to purchase the bitcoins. They include explanations and a link to a YouTube video intended for the general public, explaining how to send or deposit funds in virtual currencies. **It is recommended for the donors to purchase the currencies on the Local Bitcoins website.** In addition, the page includes the following message: “My fellow Muslims, this is a donation for the website only. You cannot donate funds for charity” (Akhbar al-Muslimin, November 12, 2019).



Right: One of the news items on the website. Every item includes a link for making a donation using Bitcoin. Left: The page linked from the news item: it includes the address of a digital wallet to which funds should be sent, and underneath it there is a YouTube video explaining how to send or deposit funds in virtual currencies (Akhbar al-Muslimin, November 12, 2019).

This appeal to the public is another indication that **ISIS (similarly to other terrorist organizations) continues to raise funds from its supporters using the digital method.**

This mode of operation **is intended to protect the anonymity of the donors and ensure that funds are received without the involvement of banks or other financial institutions.**

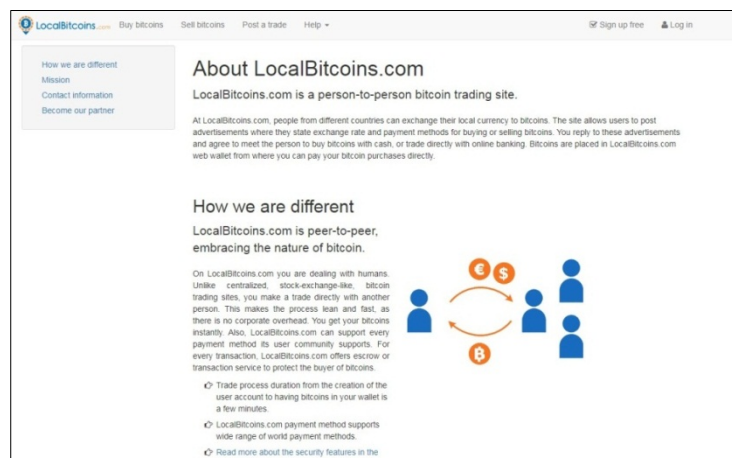
In the ITIC's assessment, although the website explicitly states that donations are intended solely for the operation of the website, **the funds may serve to finance a variety of other ISIS activities.**

Appendix

Local Bitcoins

► **Local Bitcoins** was founded in June 2012 **and is based in Helsinki, Finland**. It sells and buys virtual currencies. It is managed by Jeremias Kangas and his younger brother Nikolaus Kangas, who is the company's CEO. The company has 15 employees. According to the company's website, its uniqueness lies in the fact that the company's activity is carried out vis-à-vis human beings rather than a virtual trade website. The company supports any means of payment (LocalBitcoin.com).

► The company operates an Internet platform for buying and selling virtual currencies, inter alia, Bitcoin. Its website address is <https://localbitcoins.com>. According to the company's directors, as at September 2017, the company had about 350,000 active clients throughout the world. Many of them are unknown to the directors, as the company does not require its clients to identify themselves (Reuters, September 29, 2017). It is not the first time that the Akhbar al-Muslimin website refers to using the services of Local Bitcoins. **In March 2019 as well, Akhbar al-Muslimin advised the donors to buy Bitcoin through the same company.**



Local Bitcoins website
(www.localbitcoins.com, November 14, 2019)