

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 9

p.1

*Alexander Sehmer***BRIEFS**

p.3

*Sunguta West*

**Jahba East Africa:  
Islamic State Alters  
the Dynamic of Soma-  
lia's Conflict**

p.5

*Zana K. Gulmohamad*

**Iraq's Shia Militias:  
Helping or Hindering  
the Fight Against  
Islamic State?**

p.7

*Animesh Roul*

**How Islamic State  
Gained Ground in India  
Using Indigenous  
Militant Networks**

## **GERMANY: DO TERRORISTS WANT TO TARGET EUROPE'S NUCLEAR FACILITIES?**

*Alexander Sehmer*

German newspapers reported this month that documents about a German nuclear facility were found at the Brussels apartment of alleged Paris attacker Salah Abdeslam. However, German authorities quickly denied the existence of such material.

According to news service RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland (RND), documents relating to the Jülich Research Center, which sits about 20 miles from the Belgian border in North Rhine-Westphalia, were found in Abdeslam's apartment in Molenbeek (*RND*, April 13). Among this supposed trove of documents was a photograph of the nuclear facility's CEO, Wolfgang Marquardt. Hans-Georg Maassen, the president of Germany's domestic intelligence agency—the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)—briefed politicians in the strictest confidence following the discovery, RND reported. The BfV denied there had been any such meeting or that the documents even existed (*The Jerusalem Post*, April 14).

RND, which supplies 30 German newspapers with content, based its report on unnamed sources in a parliamentary committee. However reliable those sources, there is a real fear that Europe's nuclear facilities could be vulnerable. In the police raids that followed the Brussels attacks, Belgian authorities discovered dozens of hours of secret video footage of the director of Belgium's nuclear research program supposedly filmed by Khalid and Ibrahim El Bakraoui, two brothers involved in the attacks (*La Dernière Heure*, March 25). Meanwhile, a report from the UK's Office for Nuclear Regulation distributed in March acknowledged for the first time that Britain's 15 operational nuclear facilities are potentially at risk from a terrorist threat (*Independent*, March 26).

Speculation continues regarding exactly what that threat would be, whether it be terrorists hoping to infiltrate a nuclear site, obtain nuclear material, or simply aiming to attack the facility. The report by RND reflects concerns that Islamic State (IS) is trying to obtain nuclear material (*Deutsche Welle*, April 14), presumably for a dirty bomb. There were similar concerns voiced in the media earlier in the year when it was revealed a laptop-sized case of such material had gone missing from an oil services company's storage facility in Iraq (*The New Arab*, February 18). In theory, however, Europe's facilities should

be well-protected and—given the myriad uses for which radioactive material is utilized—there are easier ways to obtain such material than from a nuclear plant.

## **LIBYA: ISLAMIC STATE FORCED OUT OF DERNA**

*Alexander Sehmer*

Islamic State (IS) appears to have suffered a setback in Libya after they were pushed out from the city of Derna this month (*al-Arabiya*, April 21). The victory was claimed by both the Libyan military under General Khalifa Haftar and the local “Shura Council of the Mujahideen of Derna and its Outskirts,” or SCMD, which released a two and a half minute-long video entitled “The joy of the people after liberation” via its al-Sabeel Media Foundation (*North Africa Post*, April 22). The film consists of aerial footage of the city, apparently filmed using a drone and overlaid with the sounds of congested traffic.

IS found a foothold in Derna in May 2014 with the return of members to the city of the Syria-based but Libyan-led al-Battar Brigade (*Terrorism Monitor*, April 1). These militants formed the Islamic Youth Shura Council, which mounted highly visible street patrols but never quite managed to take control of the city from their Islamist rivals. In fact, the groups behind the SCMD had already pushed IS forces out of central Derna into the city’s eastern outskirts of Al Fatayih as early as last year.

Meanwhile, there is no love lost between the SCMD and Haftar, whose Operation Dignity fought Libya’s Islamists for more than a year until a ceasefire in 2015 and his official appointment as head of the military. The SCMD, for its part, is an umbrella group of local Islamist militias that includes the Abu Slim Martyrs Brigade and was formed in opposition to Haftar in 2014 (*Al Jazeera*, December 13, 2014).

In the days following the IS retreat from Derna, the SCMD accused Haftar of ordering airstrikes on the town that killed at least three people (*Libya Observer*, April 23). Mohamed al-Mansuri, the SCMD’s media spokesman, also accused Haftar and the military of cooperating with IS, calling the parties “two faces of the same coin” (*Libya Herald*, April 24).

IS fighters appear to have retreated towards Sirte about 370 miles away following their defeat in Derna. The military can be expected to pursue them, but clashes in Derna are likely to continue. Additionally, with IS gone, the remaining al-Qaeda-linked groups will be dominant but General Haftar will be unwilling to let them regain free reign of the city.

# Jahba East Africa: Islamic State Alters the Dynamic of Somalia's Conflict

*Sunguta West*

With the emergence of a group in Somaliland calling itself Jahba East Africa, it appears Islamic State (IS) is becoming an independent entity in Somalia's insurgency. This development will likely complicate the conflict both for the African Union forces in the country and the indigenous al-Qaeda-linked *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahdeen*, or al-Shabaab.

IS already had a presence in Somalia following a split within al-Shabaab itself, but the extremist group has slowly become more autonomous, supposedly carrying out its first attack in Somalia in April via an unnamed affiliate.

## IS Makes Its Entrance

In April, an unnamed pro-IS group claimed responsibility for an attack on troops from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The group claimed to have detonated an improvised Explosive Device (IED) on the outskirts of the capital, damaging an AMISOM vehicle. Although both AMISOM and Somali government officials have acknowledged the attack, they have refused to accept that IS was behind it (*Horseed Media*, April 26, 2016).

This is the first time a pro-IS group has made an official claim of an attack in Somalia, a country dominated by al-Shabaab. For many, the incident is a confirmation of the emergence of IS in Somalia and underlines a change in the fortunes of al-Shabaab, which—although controlling large swaths of southern Somalia—has been weakened by AMISOM's superior firepower.

The supposed pro-IS attack in Mogadishu comes at a critical juncture for al-Shabaab. The group has been in seeming retreat recently, abandoning strategic territory it has held since 2006 when it swept largely unchecked across southern Somalia while promoting its radical form of *sharia*. While it has suffered major setbacks, al-Shabaab remains a deadly force, continuing to carry out

strikes on targets in Somalia and neighboring Kenya. It is now also proving itself willing to combat IS.

## Al-Shabaab Hits Back

In recent years, al-Shabaab has proven to be a resilient force with the ability to mount devastating attacks against better armed forces, often inflicting heavy casualties. In January, its fighters overran a Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) camp in El Adde in southern Somalia. There has been no official confirmation of the number of Kenyan troops killed in the attack, but it is thought to be high—possibly as many as 200—although Kenya has denied that figure (*Kenya Daily Post*, January 26, 2016).

Al-Shabaab is now attempting to ease the pressure in central and southern Somalia by moving further north into the semi-autonomous states of Gulmudung and Puntland, as these areas are presently outside of AMISOM's zone of operations. Reports indicate that the militants have been planning attacks in Puntland, using fishing boats to move arms and ammunition up the coast (*Wardheer News*, March 21, 2016). In March, senior al-Shabaab leaders were reported to be delivering fiery sermons from the coastal village of Garmaal after secretly entering Garacad, a historical fishing town in Puntland State (*Garowe Online* March 15, 2016). Garmaal residents identified senior al-Shabaab leader Saacid (Mahan) Karate, who reportedly urged them to cooperate with the militants because they were promoting the Islamic faith. The fighters hoisted their flag in the village, but later retreated.

Al-Shabaab has staged other similar temporary takeovers of a number of villages; the moves have led to a new and unprecedented security challenge for Puntland President Abdihakim Abdullahi Haji (*Garowe Online*, March 15, 2016).

## Internal Divisions

Al-Shabaab has encountered some resistance to its northern push. In late March, fierce fighting in Gulmudung left at least 115 al-Shabaab fighters dead, with more than 100 others captured by the state's security forces (*Ethiopian News Agency*, March 28, 2016). The more significant challenge to al-Shabaab's operations, however, comes not from external resistance or even from AMISOM forces and the Somali national army

(SNA), but from the emergence of IS in Somalia, which has forced a split, thereby weakening the group.

In November 2015, there were clashes between the two factions after al-Shabaab attacked bases belonging to its pro-IS faction. Then in December came the first reports of a clash between the two factions in the remote region of Bari, in semi-autonomous Puntland State (*Horseed Media*, December 24, 2015). The clashes have made it difficult for Sheikh Ahmad Umar (alias Abu Ubaidah), the al-Shabaab leader since the killing of Sheikh Ahmad Abdi Godane, to keep the group united.

Godane was killed in a US airstrike in August 2014 (*Daily Nation*, September 5, 2014). When Umar took control of al-Shabaab, he pledged loyalty to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Now threatened by a major split in the group, Umar has allegedly detained, tortured, and even killed those attempting to abandon their allegiance to al-Qaeda in favor of IS (*Intelligence Brief*, November 2015; *The Star*, April 28). It would appear, however, that such actions have only helped boost IS recruitment.

Indeed, the emergence in April of Jahba East Africa—which pledged its allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—is a significant indication that IS is becoming an independent entity in Somalia (*Shabelle News*, April 9, 2016). Jahba's strength and military capabilities are still unknown, but an official indicated that the group had militants from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania among its ranks (*Horn Affairs English*, April 17, 2016). The group is believed to be headed by former high-ranking al-Shabaab military and spiritual leaders, who pledged allegiance to IS in October 2015 (*Citizen TV*, October 25, 2015). A key actor among them is Abdulkadir Munin, who once lived in London but moved to Puntland in 2010 to join al-Shabaab. When he announced his allegiance last year, Munin, a charismatic preacher, had a following of about 100 fighters (*Radio Dalsan*, October 23, 2015).

### **Changing Conflict Dynamics**

From the outset, Jahba has criticized al-Shabaab over what it describes as a failure to fully appreciate the ideal of the Caliphate. According to Jahba leadership, al-Shabaab has become a physical and psychological prison from which all Somalis should free themselves (*Tuko*, April 7; *Twitter*, April 9).

Reeling from recent successful operations by AMISOM and the SNA, al-Shabaab appears to feel the pressure from the emerging IS presence in the region, a threat it appears unable to contain. With the establishment of Jahba East Africa and the growing divisions within al-Shabaab, Somalia's insurgency risks becoming a three-way conflict between al-Qaeda loyalists, fighters linked to IS, and the 22,000-strong AMISOM force that continues to try to bring a decisive end to the conflict.

*Sunguta West is an independent journalist based in Nairobi, Kenya.*

# Iraq's Shia Militias: Helping or Hindering the Fight Against Islamic State?

Zana K. Gulmohamad

The rise of Islamic State in Iraq has contributed to the increasing prominence of Iraq's Shia militias. However, while the militias are united in their desire to defeat IS, there are nonetheless clear divisions among them arising from narrow self-interest, differing ideologies and political loyalties, and Iranian interference. There is additional competition between some militias over aid and salaries (*al-Monitor*, September 8, 2015).

The al-Hashd al-Shaabi, or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella group for majority Iraqi Shia militias, was established in June 2014 in response to the IS seizure of nearly one-third of Iraq. PMF forces are combating IS in southern Iraq and the Shia shrine cities (Karbala, Najaf and Samara). The PMF spearheaded the military campaign alongside the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in the Baghdad belt, Salah al-Din, and Diyala governorates. Compared to the less effective ISF, the PMF have been both active and eager in the fight against IS, due in part to their ideal of Shia jihad in a conflict between two rival religious doctrines.

In February, in a move to tighten control over the disparate groups that make up the PMF, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi installed Muhsan al-Kaabi, a former senior Iraqi army officer, as his administrative deputy to the PMF. Al-Kaabi's appointment was intended to limit the PMF deputy chairman, the pro-Iranian Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (*Iraqi News Network*, March 3). Efforts at reform, however, have a long way to go.

## Establishment of the PMF

The PMF was created on the order of Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq's then-Prime Minister, in 2014 with the unanimous backing of the Council of Ministers. Recruitment was aided substantially by a historic fatwa from Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest *marja* ("Source of Emulation") of the Shias, which called on "all able-bodied Iraqis" to defend their country (*Terrorism Monitor*, April 17, 2015). The number of active PMF members is unclear, but unofficial estimates range from 80,000 to

120,000 (*The World Weekly*, February 26, 2015; *al-Hashd al-Shaabi*, August 3, 2015).

The group falls under the authority of the prime minister, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the defense ministry. Its supporters have been lobbying for the group to gain full legal status as part of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) (*al-Mada*, February 25). While the Iraqi Council of Representatives (ICR) has approved and allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to the PMF from the 2015 and 2016 budgets (*Rudaw*, January 6), however, debate continues among Iraqi officials over what its exact legal framework should be (*al-Jazeera*, March 10, 2015).

## Categorizing the Militias

The militias can be divided into three major unofficial blocs, based on similar objectives rather than formal alliances, with a fourth constituting affiliated non-Shia militias that include Sunnis, Yazidis, Christians, and other minorities (*Niqash*, June 20, 2015; *al-Bayan*, July 7, 2015).

The first and most influential bloc is the pro-Iranian militias, established by the Iranian regime. Of these, the Badr Organization, headed by Hadi al-Amiri, is the largest and best equipped, manned by approximately 20,000 fighters (*al-Jazeera*, June 10, 2014). Others include Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Kataib Hezbollah (KH), Saraya al-Khorasani, and Harakat al-Nujaba, that follow the Iranian supreme leader's doctrine, *wilayat al-faqih*, and have political aspirations.

They have also been the most effective against IS, with the Badr Organization dominating Diyala governorate (*Hatha al-Youm*, May 25, 2015). They have access to rockets, heavy weaponry, and intelligence both from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and the Iraqi government, as well as benefitting from the expertise of Iranian military advisors (*Kitabat*, March 5, 2015; *Fars News Agency*, July 17, 2015).

The second bloc are the pro-Sistani militias, the *Hashd al-Sistani*, made up of the Liwa Ali al-Akbar, Furqat Imam Ali al-Qitaliyah, and Furqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah (*Shabakat Imam Ali*, May 18, 2015; *Imam Hussain*, January 3, 2015; *Imam Hussain*, November 1, 2014; *al-Kafeel*, March 1). They are close to Prime Minister Abadi and have gradually increased to approximately 20,000

fighters, though they have the potential to reach 50,000 (*al-Jazeera*, June 10, 2014).

Their recruits are largely volunteers who signed up in response to Sistani's fatwa and most have no political ambitions. They are backed by pro-Sistani institutions or Shrine Foundations such as Ataba Al-Abbasya, Ataba al-Alawyyia al-Muqadasa, and Ataba Al-Hussaniya al-Muqadasa (*al-Sumaria*, September 26, 2015; *Wakalat al-Nnabaa*, February 5). They are fewer in number than their pro-Iranian counterparts, but have the support of the Iraqi defense ministry and increasingly fall under the ISF's command (*al-Jazeera*, February 26).

Furqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah and Liwa Ali al-Akbar have a relatively high percentage of Sunni fighters among their number; in Liwa Ali al-Akbar's case, the number is as high as 16% (*Middle East Eye*, December 1, 2015).

The third bloc is made up of loyalists of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and militias supporting the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), led by Ammar al-Hakim. These are two powerful Shia political factions with complex links to Iran. Despite their rivalries, they are categorized together due to their loose adherence to the federal government in Baghdad. Such pro-Hakim militias include Saraya Ansar al-Aqeeda, Liwa al-Muntathar and Saraya Ashura, while the main pro-al-Sadr militia is Saraya al-Salam (*Saraialaqeda*, March 1; *al-Hurriya*, March 14, 2015). The leaders of both factions have said their forces will follow the ISF's instructions in the battle against IS (*al-Hayat*, March 30, 2015).

The Shia militias are disorganized and undisciplined, however, as well as prone to confrontation with each other and occasionally the Iraqi government. There were clashes between Saraya al-Salam and AAH in Baghdad in 2015 and in al-Muqdadia in 2016 (*Sqqur al-Arab*, February 6; *Baghdad Center Human Rights*, 2015), while Saraya al-Khorasani has clashed with police in Balad in Diyala (*Baghdad Center Human Rights*, April 3, 2015). AAH's leader Qais Khazali denounced Iraq's parliamentary political system, calling for a presidential system to be put in place instead (*The New Arab*, August 17, 2015). Khazali's demands should be interpreted in light of his support of al-Maliki.

Further, when Operation Conquest "Fatah," the preparatory Mosul operation intended to liberate the areas surrounding the city, was launched on March 24, it

coincided with some of the PMF militias—notably those with strong ties to Iran and Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr—rejecting the U.S.-led anti-IS coalition in Iraq (*Iraq Krama*, March 18; *al-Mustaqbal news*, March 26).

### Consequences for the Fight Against IS

The political divisions between the Shia militias have had significant consequences in regard to their effectiveness on the ground and their coordination with other anti-IS forces, particularly with the U.S.-led coalition.

When the Iraqi government operation in Tikrit launched on March 1, 2015, headed by Iran's Qud's Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, faced a stalemate, Abadi ordered the militias to pull back to pave the way for US air strikes. However, the pro-Iran militias who were leading the fighting refused, angry at U.S. involvement (*Fars News Agency*, March 11, 2015; *al-Etejah TV*, March 29, 2015). The pro-Iranian militias then announced their withdrawal from the battlefield, leaving the pro-Sistani and al-Sadr militias to back the ISF and continue the operation. This marked the first apparent split on the battlefield between the prime minister's allies and the pro-Iranian militias (*al-Araby al-Jadeed*, March 28, 2015; *al-Jazeera*, March 30, 2015).

Then, once Tikrit was liberated on March 31, the pro-Iranian militias returned to carry out revenge attacks and have subsequently been accused of human rights violations (*Human Rights Watch*, September 20, 2015). Pro-Iranian militias in Amerili in Salah al-Din governorate and in Jurf al-Sakhaer (southwest of Baghdad) have faced similar accusations (*Alalam*, October 26, 2014; *Herak*, December 17, 2014).

Pro-Iranian militias were sidelined during the operation to free Ramadi, which fell to IS in May 2015, because the central government wanted to tread delicately in Sunni tribal areas. The city's liberation in December that year represented a success for the ISF, particularly the counter terrorism forces of the elite al-Firqah al-Dhabiya, or "Golden Division," and hundreds of local Sunni tribes. But smaller groups of pro-Iranian militias tacitly infiltrated the Ramadi operation to avoid being marginalized in the operation (*Sky News Arabia*, September 23, 2015; *Rudaw*, December 29, 2015).

The buildup to operations in Mosul was beset by a heated political dispute over the PMF's proposed in-

volvement. While the PMF insisted on being part of the Mosul operation, many Iraqi Sunni politicians—among them a Sunni bloc in the ICR known as Tahaluf al-Quaa and council members from Ninewa province (of which Mosul is the capital)—refused to agree to it (*Iraq Network*, February 20).

Instead, the Sunnis supported the participation of Arab Sunni tribes (Hashd al-Watani and Hashd al-Ashaari) and the ISF (*al-Hayat*, February 21; *Donia al-Watan*, March 21). They joined the ISF, Peshmerga, and local Sunni fighters, along with U.S. advisors and marines based at Fire Base Bell in Makhmour in the vicinity of Mosul (*Rudaw*, March 8; *Kurdistan 24*, March 9). It is still possible Shia militias will join the operation or smaller units may participate covertly in order to fight IS (*Nahrain Net*, March 21).

### Looking Forward

While Iraq's Shia community has praised the role of the PMF in defending Baghdad and liberating parts of the country from IS, the indiscipline and division between the various Shia militias will ultimately hamper Iraq's ability to effectively tackle IS and poses a risk to the country's future political stability.

Greater understanding between major anti-IS factions should be encouraged. Pro-Iranian and Muqtada-aligned militias should also be kept out of the Mosul operation and other military operations in non-Shia areas. Ultimately, all of the militias will need to be dismantled and integrate into the ISF.

*Zana K. Gulmohamad is a PhD Candidate in Politics at the University of Sheffield where he is researching Iraq's politics, security and foreign relations.*

## How Islamic State Gained Ground in India Using Indigenous Militant Networks

*Animesh Roul*

A series of arrests this year in India has highlighted how India has been unable to escape its overtures as Islamic State (IS) continues its attempts to expand its geographical and online reach beyond Iraq and Syria.

While IS propaganda has so far struck a chord with only a small number of India's Muslims, reports have emerged that the group's jihadist ideals spread via web forums and social media have inspired many individuals formerly affiliated with indigenous militant formations such as the Indian Mujahideen and the Student Islamic Movement of India.

Following sporadic incidents over the last couple of years—such as the appearance of IS graffiti and the group's black flag in Kashmir and Tamil Nadu, and even reports of masked men dressed in fatigues bearing IS insignia—India seems to be waking up to the reality that IS has made both a real and virtual footprint in the country (*Daily Excelsior*, June 18, 2015; *The Hindu*, August 7, 2014).

### Radicalization

The call of IS has not only resonated with South Asia's myriad militant groups, but has also reached new individuals, galvanizing support and fomenting radicalization through effective use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The oft repeated exhortations of IS are based on the supposition that all "true Muslims" should be part of its brand of jihad and serve the Caliphate. This has resonated relatively well across South Asia, including India with its 170 million-strong Muslim population.

IS began its efforts to infiltrate India with the aim of acquiring resources and manpower. Several Muslim youths from India have reportedly traveled to fight under the IS banner in Iraq and Syria since June 2014. The official "guestimate" suggests that so far, over 25 young people of Indian origin have joined and fought alongside IS forces in Syria. Of those, seven fighters have been killed

and a number of others have returned home and undergone rehabilitation (*The Hindu*, December 27, 2015). Overall, the statistics suggest a relatively poor performance by IS in India, but the interdiction of many young IS aspirants at the exit points of the country and the unearthing of the IS-inspired extremist network the Junud-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind (JKH, or Soldiers of the Caliph in India) in late January 2016 demand serious attention (*DNA India*, January 27).

India's National Investigating Agency (NIA) and Maharashtra State police, along with other domestic intelligence agencies, made a total of 14 arrests of JKH members in the final week of January 2016 (*Asian Age*, January 24). Among those arrested were Muddabir Mushtaq Sheikh (alias Abu Musab), the apparent leader of IS in India. He was apprehended in Thane in Maharashtra, while four followers were apprehended from Uttar Pradesh's Haridwar locality. The rest were apprehended from different parts of the country as a result of a nationwide search and sweep operation covering at least five states: Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. Muddabir's arrest brought IS and its systematic online recruitment drive in India into the limelight. As a result, it emerged that JKH was planning to carry out terror strikes at installations in major cities across India as part of an IS network, although the alleged plot appears to have only been in its early stages.

### **Army of the Caliph**

The remnants of the indigenous Indian Mujahideen, which is now in disarray, have developed linkages with the IS leadership in Syria and Iraq. This can be seen in the establishment of Ansar-ut Tawhid fi Bilad al-Hind (AuT), an India-centric militant group based on the Afghanistan and Pakistan borders. Shafi Armar, a former Indian Mujahideen militant and one of the founders of AuT, along with his elder brother, Sultan Armar, were the first to pledge support to IS. By joining with IS and pledging *bayat* to its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, they hoped to unite IM and sympathizers of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). The Armar brothers fled to Pakistan to set up AuT in the wake of the countrywide crackdown on the IM network in 2008. Via its media arm called al-Isabah Media, AuT has focused on recruiting Indian-origin fugitives in Pakistan to participate in fighting in both Syria and Afghanistan.

Sultan Armar died in March 2015 on the Syrian battlefields fighting alongside IS forces (*Indian Express*, March 20, 2015). When his elder brother was killed in Kobani, Syria, Shafi Armar took the reins of the AuT and al-Isabah Media, with the intention of expanding the group's network inside India. He pumped money and online resources into recruiting operatives to form JKH, using internet chatrooms and messaging applications such as Trillian and Facebook to recruit mostly former IM cadres and members of SIMI. Before forming JKH, Safi Armar had attempted to raise another IS-linked unit. Known as the "Ratlam Module," it was led by an individual named Imran Khan Muhammad Sharif and four others in Madhya Pradesh, but all of its members were arrested in April 2015 (*The Pioneer*, May 7, 2015).

Shafi Armar is believed to have died in a U.S.-led drone strike against IS forces in Syria in late April 2016 (*The Hindu*, April 25).

### **Use of Online Resources**

JKH's use of the internet was significant. Following the NIA-led raids in January, the intelligence agency confirmed that those arrested were connected online, and that their online involvement had led subsequently to physical meetings at different locations in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Tumkur, Saharanpur, Lucknow, and Pune. Nafees Khan of Hyderabad and Rizwan of Uttar Pradesh were recruited via Facebook and accessed bomb-making knowhow from publishing platforms like "just-paste.it" (*The Quint*, January 29). From the social media accounts of Obeidullah Khan of Hyderabad, investigating agencies found IS videos and images that were frequently shared by him with his followers. It is also clear the group's members used the internet to connect with Shafi Armar who was based in Syria at the time.

The last secret meeting of JKH, according to the NIA investigation, was held sometime in the first week of January. The arrested men were instructed not only to plan terror attacks in India, but also to recruit and strengthen the group's cadre base. Under the guidance of Shafi Armar in Syria and Mudabbir in India, JKH's objectives were to carry out attacks with the intention of establishing the rule of *sharia* in India and encouraging submission to the Islamic Caliphate. In addition, JKH has been working to spread IS propaganda and recruit young Indians to travel to Iraq and Syria (*Indian Express*, February 8; *Economic Times*, February 9).



While Mudabbir served as the chief of the JKH in India, he identified Rizwan Ahmed Ali (Khalid) of Uttar Pradesh as the group's deputy chief. Meanwhile, Najmal Huda, originally of Uttar Pradesh and later resettling in Karnataka (Mangalore), was identified as the military commander of the JKH. He acted as a recruiter for aspirant youths, communicating to them the activities and ideology of the IS. The Hyderabad-based Nafees Khan (also known as Abu Zarrar), originally from Mumbai, has been identified as JKH's logistics and finance chief (*Economic Times*, February 10).

Mudabbir and his lieutenants had amassed nearly INR 10 lakhs (approximately \$15,000) in different banks. He received nearly INR 6.50 lakh (\$9,000) through the *hawala* informal banking channels from Shafi Armar or Yousuf Al Hindi. Substantial amounts of those sums were distributed among the members of the group for planning and logistics purposes (*Economic Times*, February 9). Another concerning development was that the JKH leadership was planning to set up a central media wing with subsidiary units in almost all of India's major cities, including the capital of New Delhi and the financial capital of Mumbai.

JKH also made use of the teaching and sermons of senior Islamic scholars like Mufti Abdus Sami Qasmi, a resident of Delhi and an alumnus of the infamous Darul Uloom Deoband Islamic institution in Uttar Pradesh. As a preacher of the IS ideals, Qasmi often gave incendiary, anti-India sermons and lectures on Islamic affairs at madrasas across India (*Indian Express*, February 7). In addition, the group also engaged Mohammed Abdul Ahad (also known as Bada Ameer), a U.S.-educated computer professional who was deported from Turkey, along with his family; Turkish officials arrested them as they attempted to travel to Syria in January 2015. Ahad reportedly helped the group by sharing his knowledge of Syrian terrain and IS ideology (*The Hindu*, January 25).

The discovery of JKH and the arrests of its members in January have brought to light the threat of IS-inspired extremism in India. While the bulk of the Indian Muslim population has rejected the group's ideals, a small number of extremists were able to organize themselves to a worrying degree simply by using the internet and social media to tap into existing indigenous militant networks. Despite cracking down successfully on the Indian Mu-

jahideen in 2008, the Indian authorities cannot afford to be complacent.

*Animesh Roul is the Executive Director of Research at the New Delhi-based Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC).*