

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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NICE ATTACK SPOTLIGHTS FRENCH JIHADIST RECRUITER

Alexander Sehmer

The Bastille Day terror attack in the French city of Nice, which saw 84 people killed when a Tunisian truck driver ploughed through crowds on the Promenade des Anglais, has refocused attention on the Senegal-born French jihadist recruiter Omar Diaby, also known as Omar Omsen.

Born in Senegal, Omsen lived in Nice from the age of five and had several spells in prison there before moving to Syria in 2013. Although his death had been announced on Twitter in August 2015, he recently re-emerged, allowing a film crew to film him for a documentary aired on French television in June ([France 2](#), May 30). His death had remained unconfirmed and he claims to have staged the announcement so he could undergo "major surgery" in a neighboring country ([Le Figaro](#), May 30).

No established connection exists between Omsen and Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, the Tunisian truck driver behind the Nice attack, a man who appears to have

been a relatively new convert to Islam and who still had images him engaging promiscuous activity saved on his phone ([BFM-TV](#), July 17). But Omsen's influence in Nice is strong. His string of propaganda videos, named "19HH" as a references to the 19 attackers who took part in the 9/11 attacks, have been watched by tens of thousands of people ([Le Monde](#), May 12, 2015). The 19HH website has since been shut down, but the videos continue to circulate.

Omsen and his propaganda videos are at least partly responsible for turning Nice into a hotbed for jihadi recruitment. About 10 percent of all French jihadist recruits abroad are thought to have come from Alpes-Maritimes, the French administrative department of which Nice is the capital. By the end of 2015, French authorities there had at least 236 individuals under surveillance and were tracking five new potential jihadists each week ([Reuters](#), July 15)

Despite the success of Omsen's recruitment videos in enticing French jihadists to venture abroad, he appears to have little connection to domestic terror attacks, such as the Nice attack or the attack on the offices of the satirical Charlie Hebdo newspaper in 2015.

In Syria, Omsen's group is linked to Jabhat al-Nusra; and judging from the France 2 documentary, his sympathies lie more strongly with Syria's al-Qaeda affiliate than with Islamic State. The documentary's portrayal of Omsen and his camp – he describes waking up to coffee and cornflakes in the morning – also possibly bears out earlier assessments that the group engages only infrequently in the fighting in Syria and derives its legitimacy from Omsen's online presence ([al-Jazeera](#), November 30, 2014). Nonetheless, it is this that has made Omsen a security concern for France. As the threat of 'lone wolf' attacks in Europe increases, security services will be monitoring his activities closely.

MALI: AQIM EXPLOITS ETHNIC GRIEVANCES

Alexander Sehmer

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) announced the death of one of its leaders in northern Mali. According to a July 17 statement posted by the group on Twitter, Abu Bakr al-Shinqiti, said to be Tunisian, was killed during a raid on a Malian army barracks near the border with Burkina Faso. His death, in truth, will likely have little impact on the situation in Mali, which is set to deteriorate further unless local grievances are addressed.

It was unclear from the announcement in which engagement al-Shinqiti was killed, but Mali has faced a spike in attacks recently from various militant groups. The most significant recent attack occurred in central Mali, on July 19, when 17 soldiers were killed and 35 wounded in an attack on a base in Nampala, close to the border with Mauritania ([Maliweb](#), July 20). Malian authorities described a coordinated attack, with at least two sets of attackers setting fires and using billowing smoke to cut the base off from its outposts ([Maliweb](#), July 20). The militants appear to have briefly held the base before the Malian troops regrouped and recaptured it.

The attack was claimed by Ansar Dine and the National Alliance for the Protection of the Peul Identity and the Restoration of Justice (ANSIPRJ), a newly formed group that is ethnically Fulani (Peul). A Malian military spokesman also included AQIM among the groups that staged the attack ([al-Jazeera](#), July 20).

Such coordination would not be unusual. Ansar Dine frequently operates as a liaison between AQIM and Fulani fighting groups, and several attacks have been jointly claimed (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), March 3).

However, ANSIPRJ, headed by a former schoolteacher named Omar al-Janah, only came into being on June 18 and casts itself as specifically political rather than jihadist ([MaliActu](#), June 19). The Nampala attack, however, would suggest it has already been co-opted by the Islamists. That is not entirely surprising as the Malian military is a shared enemy for both groups, but the easy alliance between al-Qaeda-linked and Fulani groups is indicative of a wider problem that will ultimately threaten Mali's stability.

June 20 marked the one-year anniversary of the signing of the Algiers Accord, which brought an end to the conflict in northern Mali between the government and separatist Tuareg rebels. Thus far, there is little evidence of the promised institutional reforms and economic development initiatives in the north. Furthermore, the agreement had virtually no input from the central region, and problems there will only increase. As they do, the situation in Mali will become more complex and the Algiers Accord more difficult to implement. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda has shown itself adept at exploiting local grievances in Mali and it will be looking to do so again.

Islamic State's Iraq 'Caliphate' on the Brink of Defeat

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Islamic State's self-styled caliphate in Iraq has been standing on its last legs since June 26 when the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Shia Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) secured Fallujah. Even more significantly, the ISF forces seized the Qayyarah Airfield West base on July 9, linking up with ISF forces coming from Tikrit. Qayyarah will be the launch pad for Iraqi forces to seize Mosul – the de-facto capital for IS in Iraq.

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the chief spokesman for IS, appeared to concede the group's future territorial defeat in Iraq in a statement in May, when he confirmed Mosul, Sirte in Libya, and even Raqqa in Syria could fall and force IS forces to go underground. [1] That, however, will take time.

Fall of Mosul

IS seized the city of Mosul in June 2014, after the Iraqi army disintegrated and fled, and quickly took over most of the provinces Sunni Arab cities under the slogan "remaining and expanding." However, the major losses faced by IS in both Syria and Iraq over the last six months show the group is now neither expanding nor remaining. Instead, IS is trying to divert attention away from its losses by carrying out large-scale attacks both in the region and in the West ([Niqash](#), July 12).

The first operations to liberate parts of the Nineveh Governorate and its capital started on March 24 ([NRT](#), March 2015). The goal was to capture Qayyarah airfield, but the unwillingness of local Iraqis to join the fight meant it took at least four months to finish the first phase of the Nineveh operation.

Morale has since improved. The coalition-trained 15th and 16th brigades in Qayyarah have been joined by the 9th armored division and Counter Terrorists Units (CT), which succeeded in taking Shirqat from IS on July 12 ([Twitter](#), June 18). IS also suffered a major setback with the loss of its most famous military commander, Shaykh Umar as-Shishani, who was killed in the Mosul campaign in the town of Shirqat ([Amaq](#), July 13). An additional 560 US troops, due to be based in the airbase of Qayyarah,

will also be welcomed, but it's possible more will be needed.

These recent battlefield successes, however, do not mean the Mosul operation will be over soon. The city needs to be surrounded from all sides, and the IS supply lines between Iraq and Syria need to be cut. A great deal of manpower will be needed – it will be necessary for more than just US-trained Iraqi troops to play a role. Kurdish forces, fighters from Sunni Arab Tribes, the Iraqi Army, and Iranian-backed Shia paramilitary groups will all need to be included.

Retaking the City

It is possible, then, that Kurdish forces will launch an operation in southern Shingal, while the Iraqi security units push into western Anbar to control the Syrian border gate of al-Qaim and then move towards al-Ba'aj ([Rudaw](#), July 13). [2]

Shia-led PMU forces will most likely clear out the rest of Kirkuk province, possibly in coordination with the Kurds. Although, such an operation could come after Mosul city is secure. They will also play a role recapturing the mixed Shia-Sunni Turkmen town of Tal Afar, where many joined IS after the group took Mosul. That could be a joint ISF-Peshmerga operation, or it could be a PMU operation joined by ISF forces. Either way, taking Tal Afar is important since the town is thought to be home to a number of IS leaders and their families ([Defense.gov](#), March 16).

According to the coalition commander Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland, the idea is to envelop Mosul from the north and the south, and then collapse IS control over the area, as has been done in cities such as Hit, Rutbah, Fallujah, and Ramadi ([Defense.gov](#), July 11). Clearing Mosul is expected to be a major headache. As Major General Gary J. Volesky commented, it took about six months to clear Ramadi, while IS have occupied Mosul, which is three times larger, for two years, giving them time to prepare ([ARAnews](#), May 18). Kurdish Colonel Masoud Salih, an instructor at Zakho Military Academy, suggests the Mosul operation could be one of the toughest battles in Iraq since 2003 ([Rudaw](#), February 17). He suggests a three-stage approach: a pre-planning stage involving the training of Sunni Arabs and ISF forces, the cutting of supply lines, and an operation to take Mosul from three directions – east, south,

and west of the city. Each front in the attack on Mosul would require 10,000 soldiers, and the battle could take up to ten months. Sunni Arabs are already fleeing towards Syria in anticipation of the Mosul operation.

Unless large groups of IS fighters desert and give up the fight, it is unlikely that any operation will be complete this year. The battle in the Syrian town of Manbij and the slow progress in fighting near Makhmour show that most likely IS will try to fight back. The advantage for IS is that fewer fighters are needed to defend a town than are needed to attack. This was evident when IS failed to take the town of Kobani in September 2014 with what they assumed was overwhelming force, a strategic error that cost the group over 4,000 fighters ([Daily Beast](#), November 15, 2015).

Possible Tensions in the Aftermath

Due to the different groups that will contribute to the Mosul operation, once the city has been re-captured there could be more tensions between the various groups. As a consequence, top Kurdish officials, such as security chief Masrour Barzani, have called for an agreement to be in place before the liberation of Mosul ([Twitter](#), November 28).

The Peshmerga forces will play an assisting role and clear out large parts of the Nineveh plains in the east and north of Mosul. They will be backed by Arabic tribes, Christian militias and with support from the Turkish army based in Bashiq camp from Telskuf and Bashiqa.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Peshmerga forces will also play a role in clearing out the south of Sinjar, and they may even play a role in the capture of Tal Afar. Then the Iraqi army, federal police, and Sunni Arab tribal forces – possibly supported by Kurdish units as part of the ISF or Peshmerga forces trained for urban warfare – will take the city.

Mosul's Sunnis oppose the use of Shia paramilitary forces in operations to take Tal Afar and areas surrounding Mosul, but the PMU will doubtless play a role. Sajad Jiyad, a Baghdad-based Iraqi analyst, told Jamestown: "I'm sure they [the PMU] will be involved in the clear and hold operations required before the battle of Mosul begins. I cannot see a role for the PMU inside the city itself [but] there will likely be some terrain to retake elsewhere

in northern Iraq after the city is secured and that will mean PMU involvement as well.” [2]

Political Settlement Essential

The battle for Mosul will most likely take another seven to ten months and will not end this year. Once the IS ‘caliphate’ has been defeated on the ground, however, serious difficulties will likely remain. IS is unlikely to fully disappear, and the group, which has greatly expanded its recruitment base, will go underground and continue to carry out attacks.

Furthermore, once IS is defeated, Iraq will need to handle the return of displaced civilians, as well as competition between the Kurdish, Iranian-backed PMU forces, Iraqi forces, and Turkish-backed Arab tribes. Sectarian tensions evident in the past are still prevalent, and indeed have strengthened with the empowerment of Iranian-backed PMU forces.

It’s likely that PMU forces will even play a security role in Sunni areas in the future, and this will be a source of tension. Thus, a need exists for a more robust Sunni force to hold Mosul and a need for a political agreement on the future of the Sunni territories, which will most likely want greater decentralization from Baghdad.

A pre-Mosul liberation settlement appears essential if Mosul is to be effectively liberated, but political tensions in Baghdad will make this a difficult agreement to achieve.

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NOTES

[1] Abu Muhammad al-Adnani as-Shami, “And Those Who Lived [In Faith] Would Live Upon Evidence,” audio statement published on May 21, 2016, URL

<https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2016/05/22/abu-muhammad-al-adnani-as-shami-and-those-who-lived-in-faith-would-live-upon-evidence/>

[2] Author interview with Sajad Jiyad, an analyst at the al-Bayan Centre for Planning and Studies in Baghdad (July 14, 2016).

Pakistan’s LeJ Baluchistan Operations Ready for Resurgence

Farhan Zahid

Sectarian violence in Pakistan’s troubled Baluchistan province dropped dramatically with the death of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi’s (LeJ) leader Usman Saifullah Kurd in 2015. Attacks, however, have continued under the group’s new leader, Dawood Badini, and LeJ appears as intent as ever on targeting members of the Hazara-Shia community in Quetta.

Although LeJ is a product of Pakistan’s deep-rooted Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict, its anti-Shia operations in Baluchistan were not the organization’s original focus. Formed in the late 1990s, it was primarily a Punjab-based group dominated by ethnic Punjabis; it was named after Haq Nawaz Jhagnvi, the founder of LeJ’s parent organization Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. While Afghanistan was under Taliban rule, LeJ militants received training at al-Qaeda-run training camps in Afghanistan and developed links with al-Qaeda.

During Operation Enduring Freedom and the US invasion of Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, LeJ militants fought alongside Taliban fighters against US forces and Northern Alliance troops at Mazar-e-Shariff, and after 2001 some of the earliest terrorist attacks on foreigners in Pakistan were launched by LeJ fighters.

LeJ in Baluchistan

After Pakistan joined the US “war on terror,” the LeJ deliberately decentralized its structure. It divided into cells operating in different parts of Pakistan, including Baluchistan where a number of ethnic Baluch LeJ commanders came to prominence by carrying out successful attacks.

LeJ’s Baluchistan chapter targeted NATO supply convoys passing through Baluchistan to Afghanistan and launched attacks against Hazaras in Baluchistan as reprisals against Hazara-Shias who were part of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance (and whose fighters were among the first to march into Kabul in December 2001).

Usman Kurd was behind much of LeJ's success in Baluchistan. He modeled LeJ's Baluchistan branch on the organizational structure in Sindh and Punjab provinces and ensured the LeJ's original objective – to transform Pakistan into a Sunni Islamic state with Shias designated as *kafir* (infidels) – remained. In a statement issued after a January 16, 2013 terrorist attack, a LeJ spokesperson called it a "religious duty to kill all Shias, and to cleanse Pakistan of this impure nation" ([al Jazeera](#), January 18, 2013).

Up until his death in 2015, Kurd masterminded at least 36 high profile terrorist attacks against the Shia community in Quetta. His success led the Baluchistan government to put a Rs 5 million (\$47,700) bounty on his head ([News International](#), February 17, 2015). His death, in clash with police in February 2015, was hailed by Pakistani law enforcement as an end to a "reign of terror" in Baluchistan ([Geo TV](#), February 16, 2015).

Kurd had received training in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 and remained close to top leaders of LeJ, such as Malik Ishaq and Riaz Basra, both of Punjab province, and Shafiq ur Rehman Rind of Sindh ([The News](#), February 17, 2015).

He was arrested by police in Karachi in 2006 and handed over to the authorities in Quetta, but managed to break out of the high security Quetta prison in 2008 and resumed his activities.

Reign of Terror

Under Kurd's command LeJ was responsible for some of the deadliest attacks in Baluchistan. The worst occurred between 2012 and 2013, with LeJ responsible for two consecutive bombings at Alamdar Road, a Shia-Hazara neighborhood in Quetta, which killed 93 people and wounded 169 others ([Dawn](#), January 11 2013). Another bombing, less than a month later, killed 80 people and wounded another 200 ([Express Tribune](#), February 17, 2013).

LeJ also assassinated the deputy commissioner of Quetta, opening fire on him and his bodyguards while they visited the scene of a bomb blast that had killed 14 female nursing students at Bolan Medical College. Altogether 25 people lost their lives in multiple attacks ([Dawn](#), June 16, 2013).

The deteriorating security situation in Baluchistan province and vocal protests by members of the Hazara-Shia community led then-Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf to dismiss the Baluchistan provincial government and appoint Nawab Zulfiqar Magsi as governor, giving him a mandate to re-impose law and order ([Dawn](#), January 13, 2013). Magsi had a good deal of success and there was a sharp decline in sectarian attacks, with the army called in to help the governor restore order.

Dawood Badini

Although Kurd was killed in 2015, he had already appointed Badini, a nephew of 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, as his *naib emir* (second-in-command). Badini has strong family ties to terrorism. His cousins include Abdul Basit Abdul Karim (a.k.a. Ramzi Yousaf), the mastermind of first 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, and Amr al-Baluchi, a Guantanamo Bay detainee responsible for the attack on the US consulate in Karachi and husband of convicted al-Qaeda terrorist Aafia Siddiqui ([Express Tribune](#), May 1, 2011).

Like Kurd, Badini was arrested by paramilitary Sindh Rangers in Karachi on June 12, 2003. He confessed to planning and executing major terrorist attacks in Quetta and was handed over to the Baluchistan authorities, but he escaped from custody ([The News](#), January 15, 2013).

LeJ has continued its attacks under Badini, albeit they have been on a less ambitious scale. Gunmen killed five people in an attack on two teashops in June 2015 ([Newsweek Pakistan](#), June 8, 2015). Three members of Hazara-Shia community were killed in an attack on July 6, 2015, and another two killed in targeted killing in downtown Quetta in November 2015 ([The Nation](#), July 6, 2015; [Express Tribune](#), November 7, 2015).

Possibility of Resurgence

LeJ's links to al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban meant that, in the wake of the US invasion of Afghanistan, much of its energy was diverted to events there.

Under Kurd, however, LeJ continued to carry out lethal attacks against the Hazara-Shia community in Baluchistan. Arguably its greatest success was to bring down the Baluchistan government in 2013, paralyzing it to such an extent that the central government had to step in and appoint Governor Magsi.

Although the situation in Baluchistan has subsequently improved, Badini, now at the reins of what is left of LeJ, has the experience and operational legitimacy to revive LeJ in Baluchistan. With the slow drawing down of US troops in Afghanistan, Pakistani law enforcement in Baluchistan would do well to act now and take the remnants of LeJ to task in order to avoid a LeJ resurgence.

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Gulf States Bolster Security Initiatives to Confront Islamic State Threat

Niamh McBurney

Islamic State (IS) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made clear in an audio recording two years ago that the group intended to include the Gulf States among its targets, in particular Saudi Arabia. Despite al-Baghdadi's claims, however, up until October 2015 incidents involving IS in the Kingdom, which has a complicated history with extremist networks and more than a decade of experience battling domestic terrorist movements, remained relatively few-and-far-between. Likewise, Saudi Arabia's Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbors – Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – have experienced fewer incidents than might have been expected, given their strong partnership with Saudi Arabia and position as U.S. allies.

While the GCC States each have their own distinct domestic policies that have helped alleviate the terror threat, there have also been unprecedented efforts to counter the threat of IS on a regional level, efforts that might have been considered unlikely several years ago.

Saudi Arabia

Of all the Gulf States over the last three decades, Saudi Arabia has battled most prominently and most frequently, with radical Islamists. The early 2000s saw the Kingdom, its institutions, security personnel, and foreigners, targeted by a local branch of al-Qaeda. A fledgling counter-terrorism initiative that featured an extensive rehabilitation program was launched. Although the attempted assassination of Muhammad bin Nayif, now the crown prince, during Ramadan in 2009 by a supposedly reformed member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) cast some doubts on its effectiveness.

The presence of IS in Saudi Arabia dates back to November 2014. The attack on a Hussainiyah, a Shia prayer hall in the village of ad-Dawlah, in the Eastern Province sparked a fear among the local Saudi Shia population that they would be the target of a new wave of terrorist attacks. That fear was justified days later when al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of IS "provinces" in

Saudi Arabia – *Wilayat Najd, Wilayat Hijaz, and Wilayat Bahrain* (Terrorism Monitor, March 6, 2015).

By focusing the majority of its energies in the Eastern Province, the group has taken advantage of an unfortunate nexus, exacerbating already difficult social relations while simultaneously scoring points with supporters. By targeting the Shia, a maligned sectarian minority in Saudi Arabia, the group hopes to play on sectarian divisions already present in Saudi society.

In May 2014, the interior ministry announced the discovery of a 62-member, well-armed cell with links to AQAP, IS, and other unnamed groups (Arab News, 6 May 2014). Suggestions have been made that the group is building on dormant AQAP and Salafist donor networks within the Kingdom to construct a more secure presence, similar to its establishment in Iraq and Syria. Given the amount of time such efforts would involve, this may account for its apparent operational limitations to date.

Certain violent incidents have been used to suggest the group's influence may be growing. However, whether a burst of enthusiasm from local supporters will develop into viable planning and execution of an attack is unclear (Arab News, 24 June).

The key targets in incidents so far are security personnel and members of the Shia community, most often around prayer times. There has been little evidence so far of the highly armed and well-coordinated attacks carried out by al-Qaeda between 2002 and 2004. The extent of the group's command-and-control capabilities either within the Kingdom, or communicating from a neighboring country with a proven presence such as Yemen, remains unclear, but is likely poor at the moment.

Bahrain

Despite its well-documented domestic security troubles, Bahrain has yet to experience an IS attack. An incident targeting the Shia community in Bahrain, however, could produce an enormous victory for the group. The social tension and likely unrest could see a repeat of the violence in 2011 and 2012, and would further undermine the ruling Al Khalifah family.

The fact IS has classified Saudi Arabia's Eastern province as within its *Wilayat Bahrain* operational area indicates

the extent to which the group views the two Shia communities as one. Although linked through a shared religious sect, regional history, and aspects of culture, such an assumption demonstrates a lack of understanding of the subtle differences that define each of those local communities. It could account in small part for the lack of interest in Bahrain to date.

The pervasive nature of the security forces may also help explain why IS has not yet carried out an attack on the country that is home to a sectarian majority that it regularly targets elsewhere. The government, with its Gulf allies and Jordan, has been able to efficiently isolate IS most attractive target, undermining the group's potential to further damage social cohesion.

The Shia neighborhoods and villages that ring Manama, and which have seen the most consistent civil unrest since 2011, are effectively cut-off from the rest of the country (Revolution Bahrain, 17 July). Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) block entrances, restrict exit and entry for local residents, and prevent movement entirely during periods of heightened tension (Revolution Bahrain, 17 July). While to keep local Shia residents in, this may also be keeping more threatening entities out.

IS also has more limited room for maneuver socially within Bahrain. With a total population of 1.3 million people, the country's Sunni minority has largely been co-opted – whether willingly or not – by the state. The state's extensively developed intelligence agencies, which are largely focused on uncovering suspected Iranian subterfuge, provide some default defense against IS infiltration. None of these things fully mitigates the risk of an attack, but they do help explain why there have as yet been no reported incidents.

Kuwait

The most notable recent attack in Kuwait, and the most notable in the region outside of Saudi Arabia, was the bombing in June 2015 on the Imam Jafar al-Sadiq mosque (al-Watan, 26 June, 2015). The attack, claimed by IS later the same day, came as a shock to Kuwaiti society (Reuters Arabic, June 26, 2015).

Kuwait's political system is considered the most open in the region. Its supposed liberalism, however, belies a well-organized network of conservative charities and Salafist clerics working, often unofficially, to finance

causes to which some of its allies are averse ([State Department](#), 2015). The government has made considerable efforts to tackle this fund-raising, however it will undoubtedly continue.

Despite the risks associated with domestic fundraising and cash transfers to armed radical groups, Kuwait has so far avoided the problems experienced by Saudi Arabia. Kuwait's intelligence services also reportedly continue to uncover IS plans for attacks in the country: one was discovered immediately in the wake of the Imam Jafar Sadiq mosque attack, and others were announced as recently as two weeks ago ([BBC Arabic](#), 30 June 2015; [BBC Arabic](#), July 4). Beyond continued intelligence sharing with its neighbors, there seems little to reduce the risk to Kuwait in the months and years ahead.

United Arab Emirates

The most prominent Gulf country by reputation, largely due to the ubiquity of its second city Dubai, the UAE has not yet experienced an IS attack. The best known incident to date was carried out by an Emirati national of Yemeni-origin, Alaa Badr al-Hashimi, who stabbed a Hungarian-American school teacher to death in a bathroom of the Boutik Mall on Reem Island in Abu Dhabi. An hour later, a small homemade IED exploded at the front door of an American-Egyptian doctor ([The National](#), June 29, 2015).

During her trial, al-Hashimi explained that she carried out the attacks after her husband was taken in for question by the security services for suspected links to unspecified terrorist groups. Although the UAE is considered at high risk of an IS attack, the country has built up an increasingly overt security infrastructure ([The National](#), July 13). Built on human intelligence and extensive data mining, it is likely to continue to prove an effective bulwark against attacks.

Qatar

Qatar, like Kuwait, juggles a relationship with conservative Islamists and economic wealth, a combination that could leave it open to attack. However, despite maintaining a regime-led adherence to what some consider to be the traditionally quietest form of Wahhabism, Qatar has experienced none of the turmoil seen in Saudi

Arabia and has seen only a single terrorist attack in the last decade and a half.

Oman

Oman's quietly effective security services and military have long used a creative border management policy to limit the potential for the movement of extremists from Yemen into Oman. By local Yemeni tribesman training, equipment, and financial backing, Oman has effectively enabled the tribesmen to police their own border as efficiently as Oman would like, making the country possibly the least likely of the Gulf States to experience an IS attack.

Omani society, although maintaining a strong affiliation with local identities, perceives itself as homogenous in a manner that is arguably distinct within the region ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 27) An IS attack in Oman would bring little benefit to the group. The key conflict risk Oman faces is how to navigate whatever vacuum develops in the event of the death of its ruler Sultan Qaboos. At present, however, it seems unlikely IS would be in a position to take advantage of that.

Regional Security

The threat from IS has refocused GCC officials on regional security as never before. GCC ministers' meetings, so often dominated by rows over the possible location for a central bank for a joint currency that is unlikely to ever be established, have become fundamental to intelligence sharing efforts. These meetings led to the establishment of a region-wide equivalent of Interpol, GCC-POL, in November 2015 ([Gulf News](#), April 27).

The cooperation agreements now in place would have been considered almost impossible a few years ago, as the GCC neighbors jealously guard their domestic security. Yet in certain areas security remains a challenge. The GCC's visa waiver system for Gulf nationals, for example, may have contributed in part to the June 2015 bombing in Kuwait. The perpetrator, a Saudi national, transited from Riyadh through Bahrain to Kuwait without arousing any suspicion, even though records showed the journey was the first he had ever made by plane ([al-Jazeera English](#), June 28, 2015).

The Gulf, in particular Saudi Arabia, faces security threats from multiple groups, and the presence of both

IS and AQAP in Yemen will undermine Gulf security for years to come (Jamestown, August 7, 2015). As IS comes under pressure in Iraq and Syria, it has threatened to resort to guerrilla-style tactics, and if it does so the GCC states could present a greater target.

Although attacks in the Gulf so far indicate IS has a less sophisticated regional network than its rival al-Qaeda, these are early days for a group that has had its plans for a region-wide state under sharia halted in part by an alliance that includes the GCC states.

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