

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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## EGYPT: HASM MOVEMENT TAKES A MORE ISLAMIST TONE

*Alexander Sehmer*

The Hasm Movement's bomb attack on the Myanmar embassy in Cairo adds weight to claims that the group, which portrays itself as a nationalist movement intent on bringing down Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, may be developing a more overtly Islamist slant.

On September 30, an improvised explosive device was detonated at the Myanmar embassy in Cairo's Zamalek district, causing damage but no casualties. Initial reports claimed the explosion was the result of a gas leak in an apartment.

In a statement released on Telegram following the blast, Hasm claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was in response to events in Myanmar's Rakhine State, where Muslim Rohingya are fleeing in the wake of a violent military campaign ([Egyptian Independent](#), October 2; [Egyptian Streets](#), October 2). The statement also attempted to draw parallels between the actions of the Egyptian government and the events in Myanmar, condemning a supposed "global silence" in both cases.

Two days later, police reportedly killed three alleged Hasm members in a gun battle and called for further raids on the group ([Daily News](#), October 2).

The Hasm Movement has been careful to avoid civilian casualties in its attacks, preferring to target security officials and state institutions (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), September 22). Although the blast at the embassy is in keeping with that to an extent — at least in respect of the care taken to avoid civilian casualties — it is a potentially significant development in terms of the group's alignment and popular appeal.

The situation in Myanmar is not a uniquely Islamist issue, instead it has galvanized a diverse range of activists and experts, but the messaging behind the embassy blast lends more weight to the belief that the Hasm Movement is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, a claim made by the Egyptian authorities, one which they are yet to substantiate ([al-Monitor](#), October 15).

It is a belief that appears to be shared by Islamic State (IS), which accuses the Hasm Movement of pursuing self-interested nationalist goals rather than "pure" jihad ([SITE](#), October 4). IS' disdain of Hasm stems in part from the Movement's unwillingness to endorse IS attacks on

Egypt's Copts. IS fighters killed scores of people in separate suicide bombings on Coptic churches in Tanta and Alexandria in April ([Daily Sabah](#), April 9).

Hasm condemned both of those attacks, but with the Myanmar embassy bombing and its play on the plight of the Rohingya, the Hasm Movement appears to be attempting to broaden its appeal and may be growing more Islamist in its outlook.

## **MALI: A STEP FORWARD FOR THE PEACE PROCESS**

*Alexander Sehmer*

After months of clashes, a ceasefire deal between Malian rebels and the pro-government Platform militia is a positive development for Mali, but attacks by jihadists continue to undermine security.

On September 20, the Tuareg separatists of the Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) and members of the Platform militia signed a peace deal in Bamako ([Africa-News](#), September 22). The deal built on an earlier truce that had allowed Kidal State Governor Sidi Mohamed Ag Ichrach to return to the regional capital in northern Mali for the first time in several years ([Sahelien](#), August 23).

The move is a boost for Mali's stuttering peace process, but the gains remain tempered by jihadist violence. Even as the rebels signed their truce, there were a number of attacks on Malian soldiers and troops with the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) ([MaliActu](#), September 20). A second attack later in the month killed three MINUSMA Peacekeepers ([MaliActu](#), September 24). Unsurprisingly, the government has extended for another year the state of emergency in Mali, which has been in place since November 2015 ([MaliActu](#), October 21).

The Mali-Niger border area has also grown increasingly dangerous ([Asharq al-Awsat](#), October 21). Over the border, the killing of four U.S. soldiers, along with four of their Nigerien counterparts, in an ambush near the village of Tongo Tongo in the Tillaberi region on October 4 adds to the concern ([AllAfrica](#), October 5; [MaliActu](#), October 6).

It appears to still be unclear exactly who the perpetrators of the attack were, and there are troubling suggestions that villagers may have been complicit by delaying the troops from leaving.

Possibly, it was the work of the local arm of IS, led by Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, the former spokesperson for the Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) ([see Hot Issue](#), October 26). The group could be attempting to gain greater prominence. That in turn could bring them into conflict with the dominant al-

Qaeda alliance, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).

Earlier this month, jihadists with JNIM, which is led by the Ansar Dine chief Iyad Ag Ghali, released a video announcing they had executed local hostages as a warning to those who might collaborate with the security forces ([aBamako](#), October 9). That tactic is more closely associated with IS, and if true could indicate an attempt to consolidate its position.

Positive steps in the peace process should allow the government to better focus on tackling the jihadists. The Sahel G5 force could help in that regard. The joint anti-terror effort between Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania is supposedly edging closer to becoming operational. The pace of developments, however, remains painfully slow.

## Sudan's Controversial Rapid Support Forces Bolster Saudi Efforts in Yemen

*Nicholas A Heras*

In late September, the military leader of Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), General Muhammad Hamdan Daqflu (a.k.a. "Hametti"), unintentionally sparked controversy by announcing that 412 Sudanese soldiers had been killed in the war in Yemen, a figure of which most Sudanese people were wholly unaware ([al-Sayha](#) [Khartoum], September 27; [Akhbar al-Yemen](#) [Sanaa], September 27).

In fact, Sudanese military forces have been participating in the coalition campaign in Yemen since 2015, fighting against the Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement and its allies, composed mainly of forces loyal to the former Yemeni president Ali Abd-Allah Saleh ([Press TV](#) [Tehran], August 26; [YouTube](#), March 22; [YouTube](#), November 9, 2015; [YouTube](#), October 27, 2015). [1] They are a core ground component of coalition forces in Yemen, serving in multiple regions of the country ([al-Araby al-Jadid](#), June 13).

Saudi Arabia's recent efforts to create a buffer zone inside northern Yemen have led to the increasing deployment of the RSF ([al-Sudan al-Youm](#) [Khartoum], September 29; [Sudan Tribune](#) [Khartoum], June 9). Their presence, however, is not without its drawbacks as a Houthi information war has made much of the RSF's highly problematic past.

### Janjaweed Militias

The RSF is one of the most powerful components of the Sudanese military. It is deployed mainly for counter-insurgency operations and includes among its troops a significant number of the Janjaweed militias that were linked to systematic human rights abuses in the Darfur region, particularly between 2003 and 2008. These forces have also been implicated in further systematic human rights abuses in Sudan, allegedly carried out in more recent counterinsurgency campaigns ([YouTube](#), August 2; [Asharq Alawsat](#), May 14; [Human Rights Watch](#), May 3; [Human Rights Watch](#), September 9, 2015). [2]

The force is considered to be a type of “praetorian guard” for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, himself the subject of an International Criminal Court indictment for war crimes and genocide due to the activities of the Janjaweed militias in Darfur. [3]

Al-Bashir’s decision to deploy the RSF in Yemen reflects the nature of the coalition’s counter-insurgency campaign there, particularly for Saudi Arabia, which has seen its southwestern provinces become the target of debilitating cross-border raids and missile attacks by the Houthis and their allies. [4] As coalition forces have made gains in central and southern Yemen, generally under the command of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Saudi military has sought to consolidate its position in the north, clearing the border regions and capturing critical Red Sea ports from the Houthi movement and its allies. [5] Now Saudi Arabia is looking to aggressively clear and hold large areas of northern Yemen and, limited by its own military’s manpower constraints, Riyadh made sure the RSF’s counterinsurgency capabilities were written into its planning for its campaign. [6]

Sudan’s participation in the coalition campaign in Yemen is also reportedly tied to an effort by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to pull al-Bashir away from his previous close ties to Iran ([al-Monitor](#), November 23, 2015). The Gulf States are underwriting the Sudanese military’s participation in Yemen, and that financial support is believed to be crucial for al-Bashir whose government is reeling from ongoing insurgencies at home, the loss of oil revenue from the independence of South Sudan and the imposition of sanctions ([al-Jazeera](#) August 10).

### **Controversial Counterinsurgency Force**

The RSF has supported Saudi border security operations, and it is one the lead forces in the Saudi directed campaign to capture several northwestern Yemeni provinces, particularly in Hajjah governorate ([al-Akhbar](#) [Beirut], September 30; [Sudan Tribune](#) [Khartoum], May 27).

In January, the coalition captured the strategic Red Sea port city of Midi, which was believed to be one of the hubs for arming the Houthi movement via maritime supply lines maintained by Iran’s Republican Guard Corps (IRGC). The wider Hajjah governorate, however, remains the site of ongoing and fierce clashes between

coalition forces and the Houthis and their allies ([Sudan Tribune](#), August 23; [YouTube](#), May 21). [8]

The RSF’s experience as al-Bashir’s lead counterinsurgency force in Sudan, where it also engages in interdicting smugglers, makes it potentially (at least in Saudi eyes) well-suited for this ([Ida’at](#), August 17; [Xinhua](#), May 28; [Asharq Alawsat](#), May 14). However, there is evidence that the RSF is facing difficulties in adapting its tactics to the more treacherous mountain terrain of Yemen, a landscape to which the Houthi movement and its allies are already well-adapted ([Arabi 21](#) [Sanaa], September 28). Indeed, the Houthis claim the majority of the casualties they have inflicted on the RSF over the course of 2017 are the result of ambushes in Hajjah governorate ([al-Masdar News](#) [Damascus], June 11; [al-Masdar News](#) [Damascus], May 23).

The RSF’s participation in the coalition campaign in Yemen is also raising fears among international non-governmental organizations that the force could commit similar abuses against civilian communities that support the Houthis as it is accused of perpetrating in Sudan ([IRIN News](#), April 25). However, the Sudanese government has not disclosed which RSF units have been deployed in Yemen, and that information has not been furnished elsewhere for public analysis, making it difficult to realistically determine if components of the RSF that committed human rights abuses in Darfur are currently present in Yemen.

To date, the Sudanese military forces deployed in Yemen have not been linked to systematic human rights abuses. Nonetheless, their presence has provided opponents of the Saudi-led coalition with ample ammunition for information operations aimed at shifting the opinion of the international community against Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their coalition partners ([Yemen Press](#) [Sanaa], March 10).

### **Anger in Sudan**

The Houthi movement and its allies have tried to implicate the RSF in what they claim is the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hajjah governorate ([Yemen Press](#) [Sanaa], July 4). Rather than presenting a battlefield challenge to the Houthis, the Sudanese forces may be more of a public relations liability for the Saudis, one exploited by the Houthi movement and its allies ([Russia Today](#), August 4). These pro-

paganda efforts portray the RSF, which is the core component of the Sudanese military contribution to the coalition in Yemen, as atrocity-prone Janjaweed mercenaries, hired out to Saudi Arabia for the profit of Sudan's war criminal president ([Yemen Press](#) [Sanaa], May 13).

The information campaign has further implications for both Sudan's al-Bashir and the coalition leadership, as the Houthi movement and its allies have focused their information operations on what they describe as the heavy casualties suffered by the RSF and other Sudanese forces in Yemen ([al-Alam](#) [Tehran], September 28; [al-Masdar News](#) [Damascus], June 11; [YouTube](#), May 12).

Those losses play badly at home, and the outcry in Sudan in the wake of Hametti's statement that nearly 500 Sudanese had been killed in Yemen, demonstrates just how much anger the topic can spark against al-Bashir and his decision to participate in the Yemen war ([YouTube](#), August 2; [Sudan Tribune](#) [Khartoum], June 23; [Middle East Monitor](#), May 25).

As the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition seeks to escalate its operations against the Houthis, particularly in the Red Sea and northern Saudi-Yemeni border regions, the RSF provides an important and battle-hardened force to compliment the coalition's local Yemeni partners. Its presence in Yemen, however, will continue to be an important subject for use in the information war against the coalition.

Further, the expeditionary deployment of the RSF to the Yemen conflict is significant, as it represents the next stage in the development of a multi-national force, led by the leading Gulf Arab states, to confront Iran and its partner and proxy forces in the wider Middle East region. Meanwhile, the RSF provides Sudan's al-Bashir with a revenue-generating force that can be used to support allies in conflicts throughout Africa, particularly in the trans-Sahara region, and in the Middle East.

*Nicholas A. Heras is a Fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) and a Senior Analyst for the Jamestown Foundation.*

## NOTES

[1] Author's interviews with Saudi national security officials planning the coalition campaign in Yemen. Interviews conducted in Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (May 10-14, 2017).

[2] Jérôme Tubiana, Remote-Control Breakdown: Sudanese Paramilitary Forces and Pro-Government Militias, Small Arms Survey, April 2017, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/57467515-a864-4b5d-839a-4d85945e857a>.

[3] Ibid

[4] Author's interviews with Saudi national security officials planning the coalition campaign in Yemen. Interviews conducted in Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, (May 10-14, 2017).

[5] Author's interviews with Saudi national security officials planning the coalition campaign in Yemen. Interviews conducted in Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (May 10-14, 2017).

[6] Author's interviews with Saudi national security officials planning the coalition campaign in Yemen. Interviews conducted in Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (May 10-14, 2017).

# How Long Will Italy Weather Europe's Rising Terror Threat?

Dario Cristiani

In recent months, Islamic State (IS) has made a number of public threats against Italy, with a number of its fighters expressing their willingness, via their Telegram channels, to target the country and claiming they will “conquer Rome” ([La Repubblica](#), August 19, 2017, [La Stampa](#), August 24, [Il Corriere della Sera](#), September 24). However, while Europe has witnessed a significant rise in terrorist attacks over the past few years, Italy has so far managed to escape the violence.

Italy's exceptionalism cannot be explained purely as good fortune. A mix of socio-demographic factors is also at play, and the Italian security services have acquired considerable experience over the years in their fight against other forms of terrorism, tackling the Red Brigades, one of the fiercest and more efficient European terrorist organizations, in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the Mafia.

Yet recent developments have meant that Italian intelligence agents and terrorism experts are now questioning not *whether* an attack will happen, but when and how ([Il Post](#), December 22, 2016).

## Demographic Advantage

From a demographic perspective, Italy is very different to France, the United Kingdom (UK), Belgium and other northern European countries, benefiting from its peculiar demographic and social composition, the result of its migrant communities.

Although Italy was a colonial power between the late 19th and early 20th centuries — extending its influence to a greater or lesser extent in Libya, Ethiopia and Somalia — its colonial links have never been as deep as those of other European countries. This was reflected in the lack of mass migration from imperial territories to Italy in the years after the Second World War. In fact, Italy was primarily a country of emigration and, to a certain extent, remains so today ([La Repubblica](#), February 26, 2016).

Nonetheless, since the late 1980s, and particularly in the early 1990s with the eruption of the Balkans wars, Italy has become a major immigration center in Europe, and migrants from Muslim countries have made up a large number of these new arrivals. Since then, significant Islamic communities have developed, particularly in northern Italy. In the 1990s, Milan became a fundamentalist center in the landscape of European jihadism. Led by radical preacher Anwar Shabaan, Milan's Viale Jenner mosque was a recruitment hub for al-Qaeda and fighters headed to Bosnia ([Corriere della Sera](#), August 8).

In demographic terms, however, this is incomparable to the inflows other European countries have seen, especially Germany, which actively encouraged the migration of Turkish laborers. The influx of migrants from Islamic countries to Italy is still young, and its second-generation — typically the generation more prone to radicalization — is still numerically weak compared to other countries in Northern Europe.

## Micro-culture of Inclusion

While the numerical weakness of the second generation is well acknowledged, it is often overlooked that in Italy, particularly outside of the major urban centers, there is a significant micro-culture of inclusion. This is linked to the economic structure of Italy, a structure that has emerged particularly following the collapse of big industry, but which has ensured that social relationships are very much centered around personal contacts and communitarian activities.

The Italian corporate landscape is dominated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are spread all over Italy, not only around major urban centers. These account for 99 percent of Italy's economic activity, with 95 percent of them employing fewer than ten workers, according to Confcommercio ([Confcommercio](#), May 7, 2009). In addition, at the time of Italy's post-war industrial expansion, the country did not rely on workers from abroad, instead it saw a significant wave of migration from the south of the country to the more industrialized north.

As a consequence, when Italy opened its doors to immigration, these factors meant that immigrant workers largely ended up settling in small urban enclaves or towns, avoiding the ghettoization of larger urban cen-

ters. This has meant that despite having a number of dangerous suburban peripheries — such as Tor Sapienza and Tor Bella Monaca in Rome; Lambrate and Quarto Oggiaro in Milan; and Secondigliano and Scampia in Naples — Italy has not seen the development of urban centers of radicalization such as Molenbeek in Brussels, the *banlieues* of Paris or certain areas of London, Birmingham and Luton in the UK.

Researchers continue to search for a definitive common pattern that can explain the process of radicalization, many experts agree that in most cases radicalization occurs at the intersection between “an enabling environment and a personal trajectory.” [1] Cultural and social narratives focused on divisions, conflicts and fears are likely to engender an enabling environment for radicalization, fostering division and alienation.

Although in some cases Italy’s population centers are dominated by local parties that are right wing or xenophobic in their politics, local relations are based on a less confrontational and more nuanced micro-culture. Residents often know each other, sometimes work together and frequently interact with their neighbors. They generally have greater exposure to each other, something that is in stark contrast with the segregation that has developed in some European cities over the past 30 years.

### **Lessons From The Past**

The third fundamental factor is Italy’s past experiences combatting the Mafia, domestic terrorism and the politicization in jails.

In the 1970s, Italy witnessed a wave of politicization in its prisons, through the interaction of radical students and workers who started socializing, within the jails, with criminals. The phenomenon fed the rise of left-wing terrorism. Italy recognized the phenomenon early on. One of the key players in Italy’s *Anni di Piombo* (the “Years of Lead”), Cesare Battisti, currently at the center of a thorny diplomatic dispute over his extradition from Brazil, was simply a “regular criminal” who became politicized in jail, as described by Judge Armando Spataro (*L’Espresso*, October 5).

When, shortly after 9/11, an Italian painter named Domenico Quaranta, who suffered from mental health problems, became radicalized in jail and attempted to

carry out a number of attacks in Sicily, Italian authorities were forced to take action against potential radicalization well before it became an established trend in Europe ([La Repubblica](#), July 17, 2002, [Il Tempo](#), January 21, 2015). In another case in which radicalization occurred away from incarceration, Mohammed Game, a Libyan, tried to carry out an attack in Milan in 2009 (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), November 20, 2009).

Some observers claim that Italy is safe from terrorism because of the presence of Mafia groups, which acts as a deterrent against jihadist organizations ([Il Giornale](#), Nov 18, 2015). This is somewhat far-fetched, but the presence of organized criminal groups in Italy has compelled the state to strengthen its investigative and security capacities.

Despite claims to the contrary, the fight against the Mafia, particularly over the past 25 years, has been relatively successful in Italy ([ADN Kronos](#), June 30; [il Denaro](#), April 27, 2016). In many cases, the leadership of these groups have been brought to book. Mafia organizations still operate in Italy and internationally, and remain involved in significant illegal activities, but they pose much less of a structural threat today than was the case in the 1980s and the 1990s.

The fight against these organizations has honed Italian security and investigative capacities. From the struggle against the Mafia, Italy has also learned to employ a more pro-active and preventive approach for dealing with suspects, extending the personal preventive measures usually reserved for those accused of links with criminal organizations. This has become clear over the past few years, with Italy relying heavily on instruments such as expulsion. An average of 14 people per year were expelled between 2004 and 2014, but this number has grown to about 123 per year in the past two years ([Il Post](#), December 22, 2016).

### **A Potential Target**

To date, these factors have allowed Italy to remain free from Islamist terrorist attacks. However, Italian analysts and experts on counterterrorism are increasingly worried these buffers are now eroding. Second- and third-generation immigrants are set to become numerically more prominent in the coming years, complicating prevention and control efforts.

Meanwhile, economic problems, the rising centrality of right-wing xenophobic and populist parties, the return of openly fascist groups (something forbidden by the Italian constitution) and a public discourse that is increasingly centered on an anti-migration focus have the potential to dismantle the micro-culture of inclusion that has so successfully mitigated against radicalization.

Finally, as a consequence of Italy's reliance on expulsion, militants are becoming increasingly aware that any overheard word or taped conversation could be used against them, and as such may reduce their public exposure. These changes may diminish Italy's ability to stave off an Islamist terror attack, a concern since by virtue of its geographic position and its political role in the world, Italy remains a target by default for many radical Islamists.

*Dario Cristiani is adjunct professor in International Affairs & Conflict Studies and the director of the Ex Training in Global Risk Analysis and Crisis Management at Vesalius College in Brussels. In addition, he is a political risk consultant. He received his PhD in Middle East & Mediterranean Studies from King's College, University of London, in 2015.*

## NOTES

[1] Rogelio Alonso et al., 'Radicalization Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism. A Concise Report Prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization', 2008, 9.

# How Kenya's Failure to Contain an Islamist Insurgency is Threatening Regional Prosperity

*Andrew McGregor*

Life in parts of Kenya's traditionally Muslim coastal region has become a nightmare of beheadings and midnight raids by masked assailants, compounded by the ineptitude of local security forces. In Lamu County, a historic center of Swahili culture, growing ethnic and religious tensions have proved to be fertile ground for the spread of a Kenyan offshoot of Somalia's al-Shabaab terrorist group. The struggle for Lamu is not an unfortunate but obscure episode in the War on Terror however; it is a battleground for the economic prosperity of East Africa.

Lamu County is the planned site of one of the most ambitious economic initiatives attempted in Africa — the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport Corridor (LAPSSET), a \$24.5 billion project creating a network of roads, rail-lines and pipelines connecting South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya, with the additional construction of three resort cities and a modern port and refinery at Lamu.

The county faces the Indian Ocean. It is culturally and religiously distinct from most of inland Kenya and traditionally Sunni Muslim, with an emphasis on Sufism. The county is divided into two parts — the mainland sector, and a region of 65 islands once prosperous from the trade in slaves and other products of the African interior. The largest economic activity is tourism, mostly restricted to the centuries-old Swahili trading ports on the islands. On the mainland, locals rely on agriculture, fishing and mining.

The local population consists of Swahilis, the dominant culture formed by a mixture of Bantu peoples with Arab and Persian traders that began in the 9th century; Orma, related to the Oromo of Ethiopia, Somalia and northern Kenya; Bajuni islanders; and the Aweer and Watta, both traditional hunter-gatherer groups.

Politically uninfluential and subject to ethnic and political violence in recent years, the region has been designated an operational security area since September 15, 2015. Social services such as healthcare and education are lacking, fresh water is scarce, food supplies are insecure and unemployment is high. [1]

Much of the region's violence is the result of a strategy by al-Shabaab to punish Kenya on its own soil for initiating an operation by the Kenya Defense Force (KDF) — named Linda Nichi (Swahili for "Protect the Country") — against al-Shabaab within Somalia in October 2011. The operation's declared intent was to stifle cross-border incursions by Somali militants. In practice, however, the deployment has created a Kenyan-controlled buffer zone known as Jubaland in southern Somalia.

### **The Mpeketoni Massacre**

On June 15, 2014, al-Shabaab struck Lamu County, massacring 65 men, mostly Kikuyu Christian migrants from inland Kenya. The local police station offered no resistance and was quickly overrun, the police fleeing, leaving behind their weapons, which were collected by the attackers. Despite the presence of nearby police and military installations, the attack continued for ten hours without interference from security forces, who were apparently watching a broadcast of a FIFA World Cup soccer match.

Al-Shabaab claimed the massacre was in response to the "Kenyan government's brutal oppression of Muslims in Kenya through coercion, intimidation and extrajudicial killings of Muslim scholars" ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], June 16, 2014).

Rather than address the al-Shabaab threat, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta, a Kikuyu, attempted to shift blame for the attack to opposition politicians, claiming the massacre had nothing to do with al-Shabaab, despite al-Shabaab claiming responsibility for the attack on its official Twitter account earlier the same day ([Reuters](#), June 16, 2014; [Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], June 16, 2014). Kenyatta also claimed that local police had received advance warning of the attack but ignored the warning ([BBC](#), June 18, 2014).

Ethnicity is a relevant factor here. During the 1952-1960 colonial-era Mau Mau rebellion, British administrators used the Mpeketoni region for the resettlement of

Kikuyu from Kenya's Central Highlands where the rebellion was concentrated. Mpeketoni was later used as a resettlement site for Kikuyu farmers who had returned to Kenya from Tanzania in the 1970s. These transfers of members of Kenya's largest and most powerful ethnic group created a lasting turbulence over land ownership issues and turned the Muslim Swahili community into a religious and ethnic minority in their traditional homeland. [2]

Typical of more recent attacks in Lamu County was one conducted on the evening of September 5-6, when terrorists in military gear struck two villages in the Hindi district of Lamu. Calling residents out by name, the gunmen beheaded four individuals in front of their wives and children before fleeing into the Boni Forest. Protests the next day over the security forces' inefficiency were broken up by riot police ([The Standard](#) [Nairobi], September 6). The Hindi police chief was later suspended for sleeping on the job ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], September 11).

### **Operation Linda Boni: Security Failure in Lamu County**

Kenya's counter-insurgency effort in the region, Operation Linda Boni, began in September 2015 and was expected to last 90 days ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], November 16, 2015). Operation Linda Boni is now in its third year, despite repeated pronouncements that all its objectives have been achieved. The operation involves a number of security agencies, including the KDF, the National Police Service, the Administration Police and the National Intelligence Service (NIS). Agents of the latter infiltrate the villages to identify supposed terrorist collaborators.

Despite the operation's massive expense, the Boni Forest, used as a base by Islamist militants, is still far from secured even though U.S. special forces reportedly provide logistical and training support to Kenyan troops operating there ([The Star](#) [Nairobi], February 10; [Daily Beast](#), August 2). The multi-agency operation suffers from infighting, poor coordination and inappropriate equipment. Mounting casualties have demoralized police and soldiers who have little to show for their efforts, and the increasing tempo of attacks in Lamu County has alarmed Kenyan security officials.

Coast Regional Coordinator Nelson Marwa, an outspoken security hardliner, made some pointed criticisms of the Operation Linda Boni: “We have the Operation Linda Boni in place. It is now almost two years and the way things are, it’s like we haven’t achieved the objective of flushing out criminals inside the forest... How do al-Shabaab find their way past our forces ... to get into villages, kill people and go back into the same forest or cross the same borders where our KDF soldiers are? We have enough airplanes and I wonder why most of them are just lying in the bases instead of being put out there to patrol these places. People must be [held] responsible...” ([The Nation](#) [Nairobi], September 10).

Lamu County Commissioner Gilbert Kitiyo responded by claiming, without documentation, that the operation had reduced al-Shabaab’s capacity to mount attacks by 80 percent ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], September 20). On October 5, Operation Linda Boni director Joseph Kanyiri announced the al-Shabaab presence in Lamu County was “almost at zero level” ([The Star](#) [Nairobi], October 6).

### **LAPSSET: East Africa’s Economic Hope**

In a region already beset by land ownership disputes, the LAPSSET project has led to rampant speculation and fraudulent land transactions. The project is being implemented without consultation with the local community and is expected to bring an influx of one million migrants to the region, few if any of them Muslims. It will be a massive and irreversible demographic shift that al-Shabaab’s Jaysh Ayman unit is already exploiting to recruit local Muslims.

Despite government promises, local benefits of LAPSSET are already proving to be illusory. A presidential directive to LAPSSET to provide 1,000 scholarships worth \$550,000 to train local youth on the technical aspects of port operations was ignored by the agency, which provided only ten scholarships worth \$17,000 to non-locals ([Business Daily](#) [Nairobi], September 17).

The construction of Kenya’s pipeline to Lamu from the oilfields in Turkana County is also now in jeopardy after its budget was cut by 70 percent to help pay for a court-ordered repeat of the fraud-plagued presidential election on October 26, and the failure to pass the 2015 Petroleum Bill after President Kenyatta attempted to cut

local communities’ revenue shares in half ([Business Daily](#) [Nairobi], October 8).

### **Al-Shabaab’s Kenyan Affiliate**

Though directed by Somalia’s al-Shabaab movement, Jaysh Ayman (“Army of the Faithful”) presents itself as a local movement defending Swahili Muslims while fighting a corrupt Kenyan government and pursuing the creation of a caliphate on the Kenyan coast. As well as night attacks on settlements, Jaysh Ayman has struck power infrastructure and frequently ambushes cars, passenger buses and trucks on highways running through Lamu County ([The Star](#) [Nairobi], August 8; [Standard](#) [Nairobi], August 2; [The Star](#) [Nairobi], August 7). Security on the main roads has grown so bad that vehicles can only move safely in police-escorted convoys.

As well as hundreds of Kenyan Muslims, Jaysh Ayman includes foreign fighters. Maalik Alim Jones, a Maryland native and Jaysh Ayman volunteer, was arrested in December 2015 while trying to board a boat from Somalia to Yemen. A convicted child abuser who abandoned his family in the United States to join al-Shabaab, Jones pleaded guilty to various terrorism-related charges on September 8 ([Baltimore Sun](#), January 18, 2016; [Baltimore Sun](#), September 8).

Jones was a suspect in the Mpeketoni massacre and appeared in an al-Shabaab propaganda video before joining an unsuccessful June 14, 2015 attack on a KDF camp in Lamu County ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], January 12, 2016). Also prominent in the video was a 25-year-old English al-Shabaab volunteer and convert to Islam, Thomas Evans (a.k.a. Abd al-Hakim, or “the White Beast”), who was killed in the attack. [3] Evans, who married a 13-year-old Somali girl and gained a reputation for beheading Christians, is seen in the video greeting a German fellow convert and al-Shabaab fighter, Andreas Martin Muller, (a.k.a. Abu Nusaybah, or Ahmad Khalid) ([Express](#) [London], June 25, 2015; [Telegraph](#), October 11, 2015). Eleven other Jaysh Ayman members were killed in the firefight, including Luqman Osman Issa (a.k.a. Shirwa), who is believed to have directed the Mpeketoni massacre ([Reuters](#) [Nairobi], June 15, 2015).

### **Weak Security Response**

A particularly effective al-Shabaab tactic involves ambushing rescuers after a poorly protected armored per-

sonnel carrier (APC) has struck a mine. As anger over poor equipment grows in the ranks, the government has promised to purchase and deploy mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) APCs.

The militants make extensive use of roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to dissuade security forces from patrolling. The bombs take a steady toll on security personnel who remain helpless against an invisible enemy. The Chinese-made VN-4 “Rhinceros” multi-role light APCs, in use by government forces, protect only against small arms fire. In addition, they are poorly ventilated, making them unsuitable for use in the hot and humid conditions of the coast. The only other export customer for the VN-4 is Venezuela, which has used them extensively against civilian protesters but not in combat situations.

Thirty of the VN-4 APCs were purchased in February 2016 after widespread criticism of the capabilities of Serbian, Chinese and South African-made APCs obtained through a corruption-plagued procurement system ([The Standard](#) [Nairobi], June 1, 2017; [Defence Web](#), June 26, 2014). The VN-4s are deployed by the General Service Unit (GSU), a paramilitary unit within Kenya’s national police that dates back to the Mau Mau uprising. Many GSU members have received Israeli training, while some officers have been trained in the United Kingdom.

In partial fulfillment of the government’s promise, 35 CS/VP3 “Bigfoot” APCs were delivered to the government by China’s Poly Technologies in January 2017 ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], June 11). Classed as MRAP and already in use in Nigeria and Uganda, the APCs were sent to the Rural Border Patrol Unit, established in 2008 after multiple disturbances along the Somali border. The border patrol unit is part of the Administration Police (AP), a paramilitary police force responsible for guarding public buildings and providing a rapid deployment unit for emergency use.

Kenyan officials and security experts have suggested al-Shabaab is being provided with local intelligence by elements within Kenya ([Sunday Nation](#) [Nairobi], June 4). This gives the militants an edge over police forces, which are often drawn from Christian inland communities and view the Muslim communities of the Coast with suspicion and distrust at best. The heavy hand of the KDF and other security forces in terms of torture, disap-

pearances and the unsolved murders of dozens of Kenyan Muslim leaders in recent years continues to work against the development of an effective intelligence network in Lamu County. [4]

### **Sacrificing Boni Forest**

An investigation by a Nairobi daily found a number of security agents asserting that intelligence reports from 2012 that described how al-Shabaab was establishing bases in the 517 square mile Boni National Reserve were ignored. The reports detailed how al-Shabaab was bringing in equipment including GPS trackers and night-vision goggles. According to one agent: “We alerted local police to be aware and watch over these dense forests. No one cared” ([Daily Nation](#) [Nairobi], July 20).

The Boni Forest canopy is dense, restricting aerial surveillance, and roads are few, limiting the mobility of security forces. Al-Shabaab’s strategic placement of mines and IEDs complicates the efforts of security forces to infiltrate the forest.

Marwa, the Coast regional coordinator, has insisted on the necessity of bombing “that forest completely,” adding in bombastic fashion that he “will enter the forest if others fear going there ... I am ready to die while fighting al-Shabaab in the forefront as the commander” ([The Star](#) [Nairobi], June 29).

Bombing the Boni Forest, however, poses a risk to its native inhabitants, the Aweer (or Boni), a group of 3,000 indigenous hunter-gatherers whose traditional lifestyle has already been challenged by forced resettlement and a government ban on hunting. The Aweer are now forbidden to enter the forest during military operations, but have not been provided with food aid since last year ([Standard](#) [Nairobi], June 18). The forest is also home to several rare endangered species.

Joseph Kanyiri, the director of Operation Linda Boni, has struck back at environmentalist critics of the bombing: “I cannot comprehend why someone feels this way when a number of trees are destroyed in order to save a thousand lives ... This is serious business and that’s why I am asking activists and conservationists to stick their necks elsewhere. We are here to protect lives and end terrorism and that will happen at any cost. The Aweer community remains intact and their lives go on. After all,

the bombing is happening thousands of miles away from their habitats" ([The Star](#) [Nairobi], August 25).

In reality, the Boni Forest measures roughly 25 miles by 25 miles, and the bombing has made it impossible for the Aweer to forage for food or to obtain food from traders who are now afraid to venture into the region.

### Putting Pressure on the Government

Al-Shabaab and its Jaysh Ayman offshoot share a determination to expose the weaknesses of Kenya's security forces, terrorize Christian migrants to the region and inhibit the tourism industry. It seeks to put pressure on the government by creating a general state of insecurity in a part of the country where, as a result of LAPSSSET, the administration now has a substantial interest.

On the government side, there is a pattern of corruption constraining action by the security forces, while intelligence is being collected but not acted on. This appears to be a result of lassitude on the part of the security forces and a belief among government officials that the blame for poor performance can be quickly and easily shifted to others.

Even though al-Shabaab's radical Salafism has little appeal in a region traditionally influenced by Sufist Sunni Islam, the movement is trying to exploit Muslim alienation from the central government and the bitter land issues that are at the core of much of the violence in Lamu County. It is unlikely that al-Shabaab actually believes there is an opportunity to create a caliphate on the Kenyan coast. Instead, their real goal is to hold the LAPSSSET development hostage and encourage local and regional pressure on Nairobi to abandon the KDF's deployment in southern Somalia.

*Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world.*

### NOTES

[1] M. Bradbury and M. Kleinman, "Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Kenya," Feinstein International Center, 2010, <http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/WinningHearts-in-Kenya.pdf>

[2] Herman Butime, "Unpacking the Anatomy of the Mpeketoni Attacks in Kenya," *Small Wars Journal*, September 23, 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/unpacking-the-anatomy-of-the-mpeketoni-attacks-in-kenya>

[3] Captured al-Shabaab video of the dawn firefight is available here.

[4] Michael Nyongesa, "Are Land Disputes Responsible for Terrorism in Kenya? Evidence from Mpeketoni Attacks," *Journal of African Democracy and Development* 1(2), pp. 33-51