

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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## LIBYA: HAFTAR'S BRIEF ABSENCE EXPOSES LNA DIVISIONS

*Alexander Sehmer*

Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan National Army (LNA) chief, has returned home, ending rumors that he had been incapacitated by ill health and was dying in a Paris hospital. Since returning to Libya, he has redoubled his campaign against the country's Islamists, but his brief absence has offered some insight into divisions within the LNA.

Haftar returned to Libya via Cairo on April 26, and he was welcomed by supporters at Benghazi's Benina airport. For nearly two weeks, there had been intense speculation that the 75-year-old was gravely ill, had suffered irreversible brain damage and even that he had died ([Almasdar](#), April 13; [MEE](#), April 18; [Libya Observer](#), April 19). In a live television address following his return, he assured his audience and assembled LNA commanders that he was, in fact, in good health ([Libya Herald](#), April 26; [Libya Observer](#), April 26).

While his Islamist enemies will be disappointed, his spell recuperating in France has served to highlight possible division within the LNA. As speculation about Haftar's

health mounted, his backers in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were said to be holding secret talks to decide on his replacement ([Alnabaa](#), April 18). Egypt apparently backed Abdelsalam al-Hassi, Haftar's second-in-command and possibly the least contentious option, while the UAE favored Oun al-Furjani, a former Gaddafi-era intelligence officer and senior commander from Haftar's Furjan tribe.

Haftar's son Khalid has been mooted as a possible future leader. A more likely contender is Abdulrazzak al-Nazuri, the LNA chief-of-staff and eastern area military governor who has the backing of the elite Saiqa forces in Benghazi. He was the target of an assassination attempt on April 18, while Haftar was abroad ([al-Jazeera](#), April 18). A car bomb exploded as al-Nazuri's motorcade swept past on its way to his base in the town of al-Marj, but he appears to have been unharmed.

The recently sidelined Wanis Bukhamada might also consider a move. Haftar "reassigned" him this year—it was briefly rumored he had been sacked—to head the ground assault on Derna, the last city in eastern Libya outside of LNA control. The move was supposedly a result of his failures in Benghazi, but more likely reflected concerns on Haftar's part that the veteran comman-

der was winning himself popular support ([Libya Herald](#), February 18).

The LNA's forces have been arrayed around Derna for more than a year, but the city remains in the hands of the Shura Council of Mujahideen, a collection of jihadist militias. With fears over Haftar's health allayed, the LNA can re-focus its efforts in Derna ([Asharq al-Awsat](#), April 25). Although Haftar's return may for now have put an end to machinations within the LNA, he will be aware that there is no shortage of contenders for his position, and the attack on al-Nazuri suggests these divisions could turn deadly.

## **AFGHANISTAN: KABUL ATTACKS HERALD MORE VIOLENCE TO COME**

*Alexander Sehmer*

The deaths in a suicide attack of a large number of journalists, many of whom have spent their careers covering such events, have understandably attracted particular media attention and outrage in Afghanistan. Their deaths, however, along with those of many other on-lookers, simply underlines what has been a particularly bloody few months in the country.

At least 29 people were killed and scores more injured in two successive suicide blasts in the Shashdarak area of the Afghan capital on April 30 ([al-Jazeera](#), April 30). Among the dead were nine journalists who rushed to the scene to cover the first blast, only to be caught in the second explosion about 30 minutes later when a suicide bomber, reportedly among the crowd of reporters, set off his device ([Tolo](#), April 30).

The death toll made it a particularly deadly day for media workers in Afghanistan, with the Afghanistan Federation of Journalists joining international media organizations in condemning the attacks ([Tolo](#), April 30). The following day, Afghan newspapers ran photographs of the slain journalists in tribute.

Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the blasts. In a message on Telegram, IS named the suicide bombers as Qaaqa al-Kurdi and Khalil al-Qurashi, prompting speculation that the pair were ethnically Kurdish ([Daily Times](#), May 2). The messages also indicated the main target for the attack had been the offices of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security, although the second blast seems to have been a deliberate attempt to hit first responders, including journalists.

In a somewhat macabre move, the Taliban used the event to distinguish itself from IS-Khorasan, the local IS affiliate. On the same day as the Kabul blasts, an Afghan journalist with the BBC's Pashto service was shot dead by gunmen in eastern Khost province ([Tolo](#), April 30). IS-Khorasan claimed that killing too, while the Taliban issued an unlikely defense of media freedom on Twitter, saying it was saddened to learn of the killing of a professional journalist ([Twitter](#), April 30). In an earlier message, the Taliban also disavowed the Kabul attacks.

The Taliban has stepped up its own attacks, launching its annual spring offensive, named "Operation al-Khandaq," on April 25, but making clear its intention to target the security forces and foreigners.

As the Kabul attacks make clear, IS-Khorasan has also intensified its campaign and intends to be less discriminatory. It has focused some of its efforts on disrupting planned parliamentary and local elections, bombing voter registration centers, including an attack on one in the Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood of Kabul on April 22, in which at least 57 people were killed ([al-Jazeera](#), April 22). With the elections tentatively slated for October, Afghanistan appears set for many more bloody months ahead.

## Iraq's Shia Militias Brace for Election Battle

*Rafid Jaboori*

Buoyed by their role helping to defeat Islamic State (IS), a number of the most prominent groups from among the more than 60 that make up Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) have come together under the banner of the al-Fateh coalition to contest this month's parliamentary elections ([Iraqyoon](#), January 11). A number of Iran-backed PMU figures are already members of the existing Iraqi parliament, having been elected two months before IS' advance and the fall of Mosul in 2014, and this time they aim to win a significantly larger share of the Shia vote.

This election is shaping up to be intensely Shia-focused, with the Sunni population weakened in the aftermath of the campaign against IS and the Kurds suffering the consequences of their failed independence referendum last year. However, while al-Fateh may be able to capitalize on its image as a protector of the Shia community, burnished in the fight against IS, it faces strong opposition from other Shia representatives ([Sky News Arabia](#), April 24).

### Parliamentary or Paramilitary

The Iraqi parliament legitimated the PMU on November 26, 2016, formally recognizing it as part of the state security apparatus, despite opposition from Sunni parties. The law gave the PMU greater access to government funding but imposed restrictions on its political involvement ([al-Hayat](#), November 26, 2016). That should have curtailed the PMU's electoral chances, but the militias managed to get around that hurdle by having their parliamentary candidates either resign or claim to hold no official title within the PMU. Nonetheless, the lines are blurred between where the paramilitary ends and the political begins.

A prime example is Hadi al-Amiri, who has occupied positions in the parliament and the cabinet since his return from the exile in Iran. He is now a candidate for prime minister. As the leader of the Badr Organization, the largest of the armed groups within the PMU, he heads al-Fateh ([Baghdad Today](#), February 2). Similarly, there is Qais al-Khazali, who leads another al-Fateh

member party, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (The League of the Righteous, or AAH), and Jamal Jaafar al-Ibrahimi, better known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who leads Kataib Hezbollah.

Unlike Amiri, neither is competing in the elections directly. Al-Khazali hopes to build on his status as a Shia cleric who led an anti-American resistance group, while leaving direct political positions to his aides ([Annahar](#), December 10, 2017). Ibrahimi will likewise deploy his lieutenants in political office.

All three men have strong ties to General Qassim Sulleimani, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds force. Suleimani, whose role coordinating the activities of Shia armed groups in Iraq has become more apparent since 2014, is the most influential Iranian figure in Iraqi politics ([elaph.com](#), June 16, 2017).

### **Aborted Alliance**

All of Iraq's major Shia parties, including the Dawa Party of the U.S.-backed Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, are on friendly terms with Iran. Even so, a fleeting alliance announced on January 14 between Abadi and al-Fateh came as a surprise. To much less surprise, it failed to last. While apparently tempted by the possibility of gaining a potentially greater say in decision-making and the allocation of funds available through an alliance with Abadi, al-Fateh called things off. Such a decision would have been made in consultation with Iran, and while al-Fateh officials cited Abadi's plans to put forward electoral candidates that al-Fateh had not endorsed, it reflects a concern over giving Abadi too much influence too early ([al-Mayadeen TV](#) [Lebanon], January 15).

Abadi appears to have suffered no significant political damage from these events. On the contrary, he has been relieved of the burden of al-Fateh and has moved on to run a campaign more consistent with his perceived image as a moderate Shia, favored by the United States and appealing to Sunnis.

In the last election, Badr ran as part of a coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki, the former prime minister. This time it appears confident enough to go into the elections alone ([al-IraqNet](#), May 30, 2017). While al-Maliki has always been a close ally and supporter of the Iran-backed Shia armed groups, al-Fateh's decision not to join forces with

the former prime minister, known for his sectarian and uncompromising policies, indicates that Iran recognizes just how hard it will be for al-Maliki, now alienated from the United States, to make a political comeback.

Al-Fateh's leaders are far from being Islamist zealots. They are realistic in their political thinking and recognize that Abadi has a good chance to emerge victorious. They also know that the electoral system, and a tendency for Iraqis to vote along sectarian lines, means victory will not give Abadi (or any other candidate) an outright majority. Instead, al-Fateh's leaders are putting their faith in post-election horse-trading, knowing that they have Iran on their side.

### **Muqtada al-Sadr**

Abadi, who is expected to fare well with Shia middle-class voters, is far from al-Fateh's only competition. The anti-U.S. Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr represents an even more difficult challenge. He enjoys a solid following within the Shia poor, a constituency that is also important for al-Fateh.

Additionally, many of the PMU's rank and file came from al-Sadr's old militia, the Mahdi Army, and al-Sadr rarely passes up an opportunity to condemn the PMU for exploiting its role in the fight against IS ([Jawabna.com](#), April 27). Like the PMU, the military wing of al-Sadr's movement—known by its current name, Saraya al-Salam (The Peace Brigades)—was also involved in the fight against IS, but kept its distance from the other groups, which al-Sadr criticizes for violations against Sunnis and frequently terms *al-Miliyat al-Waqiha* ("shameless" militias).

While al-Sadr accepts that Iran and Sulleimani will have a role in Iraqi Shia politics, he claims to be independent and insists he will not fall under Tehran's influence. However, since he is primarily hostile to the United States, he will still likely side with Iran in the case of any U.S.-Iranian disagreement. [1]

Despite being a conservative cleric, al-Sadr has formed a coalition with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in a bid to expand and diversify his voting base. He has also provided Abadi with much needed support over the past four years, albeit primarily due to the bad blood between him and Abadi's main rival, Maliki.

In the expected post-election negotiations, if faced with a possible al-Fateh-Maliki coalition, al-Sadr would likely support Abadi for another term. In such an event, the small party of al-Hikma, led by Ammar al-Hakeem, could emerge as a key player. Al-Hakeem is the former leader of the Iraqi Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), but split from ISCI last year to form al-Hikma. Although ISCI was once a major Shia party, divisions and disagreements have left it weakened, and it has now thrown in its lot with the al-Fateh alliance ([Ashram al-Awsat](#), July 26, 2017).

## Election Outlook

Since Iraq's first multi-party elections after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, Shia parties in Iraq have won the largest number of seats in the 328-seat parliament. No matter how the vote is distributed, however, the choice of prime minister will not be entirely up to the winning parties. Although rarely acknowledged, no politician has managed to become Iraq's prime minister without the endorsement of both the United States and Iran, as well as the blessing of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most senior Shia cleric.

Al-Fateh will struggle to unseat the incumbent Abadi, who will likely find that the split in the Shia vote works in his favor. Instead, they will be aiming to win a larger block in parliament and a greater role in government, with the goal of making it harder for Abadi, or any other prime minister, to curtail their influence in future.

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## NOTES

[1] See al-Sadr's interview with the Iraqi TV station al-Sharqia ([YouTube](#), November 22, 2017).

# Hard and Soft Strategies: The UAE's Approach to Counterterrorism

*Sara Brzuszkiewicz*

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) represents an interesting case study in counterterrorism, having suffered no jihadist attacks, despite being a stated target for Islamist extremists. The UAE considers its implementation of both so-called "hard" and "soft" strategies to tackle potential security threats as the key to its success. However, while there have been no major attacks, the overall threat-level in the UAE remains elevated and a number of small instances have occurred that hint at a larger problem.

From a counterterrorism perspective, the Emirates can be divided into two distinct groups with Dubai and Abu Dhabi—home to thousands of non-Muslim Westerners—on the one side, and the five remaining emirates of Sharja, Ajman, Ras al-Khaima, Fujehira and Umm al-Qaywayn on the other. Both groups might be chosen as targets, albeit for different reasons.

Most expatriates reside in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Along with the incessant flow of tourists, this population—with the concomitant hotels and tourist attractions—represents a potential target for jihadists. In the jihadist worldview, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are emblematic of sin and deviation on Muslim soil, in the *Dar al-Islam*. By contrast, the poorer and less populous emirates offer fewer obvious targets but have less pervasive security measures, making them potentially more vulnerable.

In December 2014, Ibolya Ryan, an American teacher living in the UAE, was stabbed to death by an Emirati woman in Abu Dhabi's Boutik Mall ([The National](#), December 1, 2014). After stabbing her, the *munaqqaba* (a woman wearing *niqab*), planted a bomb, which failed to detonate, in front of the home of an Arab-American physician. The Emirati authorities classified the murder as a lone wolf attack inspired by terrorist ideology acquired online. The woman was later executed.

Separately the following year, the authorities rounded up an Islamist cell that was planning one or more terrorist attacks on shopping malls and hotels, probably with

characteristics similar to those of the 2013 attack on the Westgate Mall in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi ([The National](#), November 16, 2015).

### **Going in Hard**

In adopting “hard” counterterrorism measures, the UAE has cracked down on al-Islah, the Emirati branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, arresting members of the group. More broadly, where possible, the last few years have seen the authorities carry out a high number of precautionary deportations. In September 2015, two men from Kerala, India who posted pro-Islamic State (IS) comments on Facebook were expelled from the UAE ([The Times of India](#), September 16, 2015).

This year, five suspected IS operatives of Indian origin, aged between 20 and 25, were deported from Abu Dhabi. Intelligence agencies had reportedly intercepted communications in which the group appeared to discuss plans to recruit followers and carry out attacks. They were said to be in touch with senior IS leaders ([The Times of India](#), March 1).

The UAE also actively participates in the international coalition against IS and cooperates with its allies to monitor and dismantle terrorist networks. Of particular importance in this regard is the UAE’s efforts to tackle terrorism financing—the Gulf has historically been a hub of private fundraising for Islamist causes.

The UAE is home to significant regional banking infrastructure, with the potential risk of money laundering. Disrupting the informal flows of money from the region to old and new jihadist networks is now a priority for all Gulf States, albeit one that has sometimes been tackled with mixed results.

Partnerships such as the Joint UAE-U.S. Financial Counterterrorism Task Force have enhance cooperation and information sharing to shut down terrorist financing networks and cut off the flow of funds to extremists ([The National](#), October 27, 2014). The UAE has made public few details about the taskforce, but its main focus is likely to be on blocking financial flows from individuals and commercial activities such as black-market oil sales, as well as preventing access to the international banking system.

The UAE has supported increased monitoring of charitable fundraising and further examination of money flows across the region with the Anti-Money Laundering and Suspicious Cases Unit (AMLSCU). Set up by the Central Bank, it is a member of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units.

Notoriously, formal and informal charities and *dawa* (the preaching of Islam) groups represent a danger. Television commercials produced by the Emirati government and aired during periods of religious observance warn citizens and residents to refrain from donating money through unapproved channels—including religious centers—as the funds could “unknowingly” support terrorist causes. From a Western perspective, this might appear to be odd and potentially ineffective. However, in a country with less than 10 million inhabitants—only 10 percent of which are native Emiratis—direct appeals from the government to its citizens appear to have a greater effect than in large democratic countries.

The UAE has also taken steps to prevent its nationals from joining extremist groups in Syria and Iraq through regional policing efforts, although these have been largely ineffective. In 2014, the UAE joined efforts to establish a regional force (known as GCC-Pol) based in Abu Dhabi, and a joint naval force based in Bahrain, to foster regional cooperation ([The National](#), December 9, 2014). Beyond some initial enthusiasm and a few official visits with bodies like Interpol, these new initiatives see little regional cooperation. Such lack of cooperation is resistance toward the inevitable pooling of sovereignty required, and the situation has worsened significantly since the UAE and Saudi Arabia began their blockade of Qatar in June 2017.

### **Softly, Softly**

In the field of “soft” counterterrorism strategies, the UAE focuses on monitoring and influencing the role of religious institutions and centers, as well as countering radical propaganda disseminated online.

Prominent Emirati officials and religious leaders continue to publicly criticize radical ideology and highlight the dangers of radicalization. To prevent violent extremists from preaching in religious centers, the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments (*Awqāf*) claims to be working closely with local religious leaders to monitor possible violations.

The UAE is also home to Hedayah, the Global Center for Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism, a state-funded think tank that was inaugurated in Abu Dhabi in 2012, with the support of members of the Global Counterterrorism Forum. In May 2015, Hedayah launched its STRIVE Program (Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism), a four-year European Union-funded project intended to train “frontline officials” in counter-radicalization strategies.

Another project is *Sawab* (Arabic for “doing the right thing”), a joint initiative in support of the global anti-IS coalition started in 2015 with the United States. It combines long-term campaigns aimed at debunking IS online narratives with immediate reactive messaging intended to amplifying moderate regional voices.

Overall, the recent deportations of suspected Islamist extremists suggests the authorities view attacks perpetrated by individuals arriving in the UAE from other countries as a greater threat than the emergence of Emirati cells. That may be an accurate assessment as the UAE’s close monitoring of its society, and in particular domestic groups at risk of radicalization, has thus far been an effective barrier to the establishment of home-grown terror cells.

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## **Boko Haram’s Senegalese Foreign Fighters: Cases, Trends and Implications**

*Jacob Zenn*

Boko Haram’s international connections have long been a subject of scholarly and analytical inquiry. While the group’s communications since 2009 with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Algeria and, to a lesser extent, al-Shabaab in Somalia—and with Islamic State (IS) in North Africa and Syria since 2015—are increasingly well documented, the group’s ties to Senegal have rarely been explored. Nevertheless, ongoing court cases in Senegal shed light on how a group of Senegalese jihadists interacted with Boko Haram, including the group’s leader, Abubakr Shekau, at a time when the group’s power was at its height. [1]

It appears that Senegal, which was renowned for its tolerant form of Islam—despite the growing influence of a few pro-jihadist Salafist imams—is no longer immune from regional jihadist trends. This has in turn raised concerns over how long the country can remain invulnerable to attacks on its territory.

### **Senegal and Boko Haram**

Given the geographical distance between Nigeria and Senegal and the scarcity of air routes between them, it was far from certain that any Senegalese jihadists would find themselves in Nigeria as foreign fighters. Much more common—and practical—for Senegalese jihadists has been to fight in neighboring countries, such as Mali. In 2012, for example, Senegalese fighters were reported in the ranks of AQIM and its allies in Mali. In 2013, some Senegalese imams voiced public support for jihadists in Mali, supposedly among the first in the country’s history to do so ([Le Figaro](#), July 4, 2012; [VOA](#), May 28, 2013). However, no reports emerged of Senegalese fighters with Boko Haram in 2012 or 2013.

The first Nigerian militant reported to be active in Senegal was Khalid al-Barnawi. He was the founder of the Ansaru group, which broke away from Boko Haram in 2011. He had business interests in Senegal, which he reportedly used to fund major attacks in Nigeria, including the 2011 bombing of the UN headquarters in Abuja

([Fulansitrep](#), November 24, 2015). He did not, however, launch attacks in Senegal itself.

Since the conflict in Mali reached a peak in 2013, interest in Senegalese jihadists has focused on those fighting as part of IS in Libya ([France 24](#), January 2, 2016). Trials now under way in the Senegalese courts, however, have revealed that Senegalese jihadists fought not only in Libya and Mali, but also in Nigeria in 2014-2015. These trials offer some insight into how they arrived there.

### **Makhtar Diokhane**

Makhtar Diokhane was arrested in Niger during a routine border check at the Niger-Nigeria border in November 2015. He was found to be in possession of a suspiciously large amount of money and was transferred by the Niger authorities back to Senegal in May 2016 ([Dakaractu](#), May 3, 2016). Confidential reports that emerged from Diokhane's case show that he was a former student of the Senegalese Salafist imam Alioune Ndao, and that he was paid a "substantial" amount of money to become a Quranic teacher for Boko Haram at a time prior to 2014 when he was based in Mauritania.

Diokhane claimed when he was interrogated in 2016 that in 2014-2015 he had traveled to northeastern Nigeria where he met Boko Haram leader Shekau and set up a Quranic school in the so-called "Islamic State" that Shekau had declared in 2014. Diokhane also told of the difficulty he encountered when leaving Boko Haram. On the one side, there was the Nigerian military, which could arrest anyone found outside the camps and suspected of being a Boko Haram member, while on the other side, there was Shekau, who had to give authorization for anyone to leave the camp in the first place. Diokhane finally received Shekau's permission to leave the camp after some cajoling. Upon his departure from the camp, Shekau reportedly gave Diokhane 6,000,000 naira (about \$20,000) to set up a Boko Haram cell in Senegal ([Dakar Buzz](#), April 11). The cell was to be initially comprised of 11 Senegalese fighters, with the intention of recruiting new fighters to train in Kedougou forest in southeastern Senegal ([PressAfrik](#), December 28, 2017).

Diokhane's arrest in Niger came about following the arrest of four other Senegalese men, aged between 20 and 30, who were found in possession of counterfeit money while crossing the border from northeastern

Nigeria into Maine-Soroa, Niger ([Dakaractu](#), May 3, 2016). After sending the men to prison in Zinder, Niger's second largest city, the authorities learned the four had fought for more than a year as Boko Haram militants and that they had spent time in the Sambisa Forest in Nigeria's Borno State, where Shekau was based. It became apparent that, at the time of their arrest, they were returning to Senegal to help form Diokhane's jihadist cell.

When Diokhane learned of the arrests, he traveled to Niger to "seek a solution to the problem," possibly through some undisclosed back-channel negotiation. By this time, however, French and Senegalese intelligence were already tracking his movements and phone conversations, and the Nigerien security forces were able to arrest him after his arrival in Zinder ([Bamada.net](#), [December 4, 2015](#)).

After Diokhane's arrest in Zinder, the Senegalese security services searched his wife's home in Dakar and found 150,000 euros and a pistol ([Jeune Afrique](#), December 4, 2015). His wife was arrested and the security services went on to raid the homes of several imams connected to Diokhane, who were found to be in possession of literature supportive of al-Qaeda.

### **Momodou Ndiaye (Abu Yusuf) and Moustapha Diatta**

Another Senegalese, Momodou Ndiaye (alias Abu Yusuf), was also a member of Boko Haram between 2014 and 2015, a time when the group was conquering large swathes of territory in rural northeastern Nigeria. Abu Yusuf claimed to have witnessed some of Boko Haram's major battles, including the seizure of the town of Gwoza in Borno State—which became Boko Haram's "capital"—and Mubi in Adamawa State ([Afrique Midi](#), December 28, 2017). He also said that he was nearly killed by rounds fired from a Nigerian army tank, but that the shots hit and killed his Senegalese co-fighter, Moussa Mbaye, instead.

Abu Yusuf's arrest appears to have come about as a result of the Senegalese intelligence services' efforts tracking Facebook connections. Senegal's Division of Criminal Investigations (DIC) was following a Facebook group called "Dahwa Senegal" (or "Proselytize Senegal"), which, among its posts, condemned the celebrating of Valentine's Day. The creator of the Facebook group was Moustapha Diatta, whose friend Aboubacary Ndiaye was in Mauritania with Abu Yusuf sometime after the

latter had fought in Nigeria ([Dakaractu](#), February 18, 2016). Abu Yusuf had supposedly traveled to Libya to fight with IS after his period in Nigeria, and then returned to Mauritania, via Algeria, with Ndiaye.

The security services also discovered that Diatta, who maintained the Dahwa Senegal Facebook page, had met with the imam Alioune Ndao in the Senegalese town of Kaolack, along with two other Senegalese men who went on to join IS in Libya ([EnQueteplus](#), February 27, 2016).

When Diatta was arrested, he admitted he had met Ndao, but claimed it was only to discuss his wedding. He also denied helping the other men travel to join IS, but later said he had assisted a failed attempt to send the daughter of one of them to Senegal. Although he claimed to believe that the group was only going to Libya to “live under sharia,” text messages, electronic documents and Arabic-language videos found at his home made clear he was familiar with IS propaganda ([EnQueteplus](#), February 27, 2016). It also emerged that Diatta himself had sent three of his own children to Libya.

As an aside, Diatta’s arrest appears to have pleased his neighbors, who complained he had previously tried to force them to stop holding dance parties on the grounds they were *haram* (religiously prohibited) ([Dakaractu](#), December 25, 2017).

## Implications

As many as 29 Senegalese citizens have been arrested on terrorism charges related to Boko Haram’s Senegal network, but it is the cases of Diokhane, Abu Yusuf and Diatta that are perhaps the most illustrative of how that network operated. For analysts, there are seven important takeaways:

First, just as in Western Europe, where a single node related to one pro-jihad imam can lead to the development of a larger recruitment network, it appears Ndao, the imam at the center of Diatta’s case, played a key role in the development of the Senegalese jihadist networks. Many of the Boko Haram fighters from Senegal, as well as the Senegalese who fought with IS in Libya, have met him at one time or another. Pro-jihad clerics like Ndao may be few, but they can have an outsized influence. However, although he was arrested in 2015, as with ji-

hadist imams in Europe, it appears to have been difficult to prove that he not only holds extremist views, but has actively incited others to fight for such views.

Second, notwithstanding the influence of clerics like Ndao, the rise of jihadism in Senegal can be attributed to factors in neighboring countries, rather than economic or political uncertainties at home. The Senegalese political system and economy remain stable, but Senegalese fighters have travelled elsewhere instead, fighting in Mali, Libya and Nigeria. However, in the case of the Senegalese in Nigeria, the fighters sought to establish a cell when they returned home. That indicates the possibility of returning fighters, having trained abroad, ultimately targeting Westerners or their own “un-Islamic” governments. Nevertheless, stability in the Sahel region should be supported, and Senegal will likely increasingly send its soldiers to neighboring countries as part of regional counter-terrorism initiatives.

Third, while women do not appear to have fought alongside their male counterparts, the cases of Diokhane and other Senegalese fighters indicate they do collaborate with their husbands. In particular, their role has been to store or watch over money when their husbands have traveled to fight. In other cases, the fighters have sent their daughters to IS in Libya so they can live under sharia. While this raises the question of whether women in these groups are making their own decisions or simply “following” their husbands, it nonetheless shows the need for the Senegalese security services to consider the roles women play as couriers and in other non-lethal capacities.

Fourth, Senegal’s work to uncover the fighters with Boko Haram and in Libya shows it is engaging in a comprehensive counter-intelligence approach. It is tracking otherwise open-source information and social media, as well as working with French and Nigerien authorities on tracking and monitoring the phone calls of suspects. This indicates that regional counter-terrorism coordination may be improving, and it has led to successful arrests.

Fifth, the fact the Senegalese fighters with Boko Haram spoke little English suggests Boko Haram has a sizeable number of Cameroonian, Chadian or Nigerien fighters with whom the Senegalese fighters could communicate in French, if not also Fulani. Since 2015, Boko Haram has increasingly shown French speakers in videos, and it has

been known to recruit extensively in Cameroon since at least 2013. If Boko Haram could host French-speaking recruits from Senegal, it could equally host other French-speaking fighters from elsewhere in West Africa, meaning it could potentially recruit new and experienced fighters from further abroad, such as Mali.

Sixth, the Senegalese who fought with Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Senegalese who fought in Libya appear to have interacted significantly with each other. They have built ties through mutual meetings with Ndao, stays together in Mauritania and shared connections on Facebook. This suggests that rather than, as elsewhere, jihadism expanding into multiple nodes, in Senegal there is one primary individual or group of fighters that has recruited and encouraged others. This could be a positive sign that once that node has been eliminated, there may not, for the time being, be other imminent jihadist threats in the country.

Seventh, and finally, when these Senegalese foreign fighters were with Boko Haram in Nigeria between 2014 and 2015, virtually no analyst knew about them, nor did journalists report on them. Could there be other foreign fighters below the radar from outside the Lake Chad region within the ranks of Boko Haram or its rival IS in West Africa Province in Nigeria now?

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## **NOTES**

[1] In addition to the cited articles, the author has benefited from Abdou Cisse's fastidious journalism in recording the details of trials.