

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XVI, ISSUE 14

p.1

Alexander Sehmer

BRIEFS

p.3

Sunguta West

Ominous Silence: Why Has al-Shabaab Refrained From Condemning This Year's World Cup?

p.5

Farhan Zahid

Pakistani Taliban: Mullah Fazlullah's Death Revives Mehsud Clan Fortunes

p.7

Christian Jokinen

'Terrorist Intent': How Finland's Justice System Struggles to Tackle Terrorism Offenders

IRAQ: BAGHDAD TAKES 'RETRIBUTION' ON IS IN THE SOUTH

Alexander Sehmer

The killing by Islamic State (IS) militants of Iraqi security force personnel that the group had been holding hostage has prompted a vicious response from the government. Further, it highlights just how dangerous the jihadists in Iraq remain.

On June 27, Iraqi forces found the mutilated bodies of eight men along a road linking Baghdad and Kirkuk in Salahuddin province ([Iraqi News](#), June 27; [Kurdistan 24](#), June 27). The men, all members of the police and the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), had been held hostage by IS. Six of them were identified as having appeared in an IS video posted online days earlier via the group's *Amaq* media outlet, demanding the release of Sunni female prisoners from Iraqi jails ([Kurdistan 24](#), June 23). In the video, the IS militants threatened to kill the men within three days if their demands were not met.

The government response to the killings was to order the immediate execution of convicted terrorists on

death row as "just retribution" ([Facebook](#), June 28; [Kurdistan 24](#), June 29). Since over the last few months Iraq has put on trial and convicted more than 300 people of belonging to IS, many of them foreigners, the situation has the potential to quickly escalate ([The National](#), July 4). Not least—as rights groups are likely to be concerned—given qualms over the Iraqi justice system and reports that some death penalty trials have taken just 10 minutes.

In addition, Iraqi security forces have launched a major operation—dubbed "Vengeance for the Martyrs"—to hunt down IS militants ([New Arab](#), July 4). According to a statement from Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC), it will see the Iraqi military, special forces, police and Kurdish peshmerga fighters hunting down IS cells.

While this crackdown has come as a direct response to the killing of the hostages, Iraq has seen a troubling rise in IS attacks in recent months, with sporadic attacks on the highway linking Baghdad to the country's north and reports of fake checkpoints manned by IS fighters ([Iraqi News](#), July 8).

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared Iraq "fully liberated" from IS on December 9, 2017, but the group

remains a serious security threat. Its fighters are spread throughout rural Sunni-majority areas in Salahuddin, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Nineveh provinces, and IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is believed to be still alive—likely holed-up in the Euphrates River valley along the border with Syria, although one recent report placed him in Iraq’s western desert ([Iraqi News](#), July 2).

IS in Iraq has adapted since it was pushed out of the territory it controlled, returning to its earlier tactics of targeting local security force personnel and sowing fear among the civilian population by publicizing its own brutality—the killing of the men in the hostage video is just the most recent example. Baghdad knows it must come down hard on the group if it is to prevent it from attempting to recreate its past successes.

PHILIPPINES: ISLAMIC STATE MILITANTS REMAIN RESISTANT

Alexander Sehmer

Security forces in the southern Philippines have been keen to tout successes against Abu Sayyaf, but the recent gains belie the apparent difficulties in tackling other Islamic State (IS) militants.

A number of Abu Sayyaf militants hoping to take advantage of a government amnesty handed themselves over to the authorities this month. Thirteen surrendered peacefully on July 7 in a village, in the Philippines’ Sulu Archipelago, handing over weapons and promising to cooperate with the authorities ([PhilStar](#), July 8, [Manila Times](#), July 8). Three more militants reportedly turned themselves in the following day ([Mindanao Examiner](#), July 9).

In June, the security forces announced the arrest of Suaib Hayudini, an Abu Sayyaf militant who also goes by the name of Enteng, who was picked up during an operation on Jolo ([Manila Bulletin](#), June 25; [GMA News](#), June 25). Hayudini has a government bounty on his head, and he is wanted in connection with past terrorist incidents—the April 2000 kidnappings of 21 people, 19 of them foreigners, from a resort island off the eastern coast of Borneo and involvement in a 2001 attack by Abu Sayyaf fighters on the village of Balobo, a predominately Christian settlement in Basilan Province, in which 11 people were killed.

The situation on the ground is hard to know. With Mindanao still under martial law, however, it is difficult to escape the feeling that these incidents are easy wins. Conspicuously, the military appears unable to track down Abu Dar, thought to be the new IS “emir” in Southeast Asia, despite supposedly closing in on his stronghold ([al-Jazeera](#), June 20). Dar was part of the Maute Group that took over Marawi last year but escaped when security forces reclaimed the city.

Meanwhile, IS claims to have carried out a series of successful attacks against the security forces. In a statement on June 28, it claimed to have shelled a military base in Patikul, in Sulu, killing three soldiers; and in an earlier statement, the group claimed to have killed 10 soldiers in a separate clash also in Patikul the same month. The

claims are hard to verify. If the incidents occurred, they appear not to have been picked up by local media.

Other attacks by self-proclaimed IS militants have received coverage. One soldier was killed and six others were wounded in a clash with fighters in Maguindanao on July 3 ([Manila Bulletin](#), July 4). The fighters were reportedly from the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), an Islamist separatist group that pledged allegiance to IS in 2014, although the nature of their relationship with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's jihadists is unclear ([Rappler](#), August 15, 2014).

With IS' territorial defeat in the Middle East, the southern Philippines is among areas coming under the spotlight. The group still has resources and territory in Mindanao, and the IS threat there is still some way from being neutralized.

Ominous Silence: Why Has al-Shabaab Refrained From Condemning This Year's World Cup?

Sunguta West

Al-Shabaab insists on a strict interpretation of sharia in areas of southern Somalia that it controls. This typically means that the group prohibits watching the World Cup, but the hardline al-Qaeda affiliate has, unusually, not pronounced a ban on watching this year's event.

Given that several months ahead of the Russia 2018 World Cup militants forced the closure of 20 stadiums and playgrounds near the Somali capital Mogadishu, arguing that people had called for a ban, their silence now may be significant ([The Standard](#), March 8) Some speculate that, with its leadership currently in disarray, the militant group is on the verge of defeat at the hands of the forces of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its international backers.

Some analysts have interpreted the silence as an indication that the group is losing its grip on its territory ([Capital FM](#), June 17; [Daily Nation](#), January 27). Others have also suggested the silence may be part of a strategy to boost the group's popularity, which has been badly damaged by recent attacks in which large numbers of civilians have been killed. One attack in October last year at a road junction in Mogadishu left an estimated 500 people dead, which seriously damaged the group's reputation ([Daily Nation](#), January 27).

On High Alert

Ahead of the Russia 2018 World Cup, security agencies had warned of possible al-Shabaab attacks during the tournament, encouraging vigilance by patrons and proprietors of venues showing the matches ([Capital FM](#), June 17). During previous such events, the group has targeted makeshift cinemas and small hotels in Mogadishu and towns in southern Somalia where it has found screenings of the final matches taking place.

In 2010, at least 50 people were killed in Uganda when three synchronized blasts hit gatherings of World Cup

fans watching the final on outdoor screens in Kampala city. The bombs struck a popular Ethiopian restaurant and a rugby field in a separate neighborhood where hundreds were watching the match.

During the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, the militants shot randomly at fans watching the matches in bars and hotels in the Kenyan coastal town of Mpeketoni in Lamu, leaving at least 49 people dead ([Daily Nation](#), June 16, 2014).

However, this year the group is on the back foot, struggling financially, militarily and politically. These challenges have continued to hurt the group, amid speculation that its top leader Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah (a.k.a. Ahmed Diriye) is dead or close to death as a result of a deadly kidney disease or stomach cancer ([Shabelle News Network](#), June 27).

For several years, African armies and their international backers have hammered the militant group, forcing its fighters to flee their frontlines in southern Somalia. The action has forced the group out of strategic territories, towns and seaports. That has seen its revenue shrink as it frequently shifted its bases and turned more toward guerrilla tactics and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

In the last few months, the use of IEDs has risen in Kenya's northeastern counties, bordering Somalia. In the latest series of attacks, six police officers were injured when an IED struck their vehicle in Masalani area in Garissa County ([The Standard](#), July 4). On June 6, at least five officers belonging to Kenya's paramilitary unit—the General Service Unit (GSU)—were killed when their vehicle hit an IED in Liboi in Garissa while on routine patrol in the area ([Daily Nation](#), June 6).

However, with al-Shabaab leader Umar allegedly on his deathbed, analysts say that some of his commands are going unheeded and that infighting over his succession has widened within the jihadist group ([Intelligence Briefs](#), June 14). Already, some reports suggest that the elusive hardliner has died, possibly from stomach cancer, at an al-Shabaab base in Jilib, about 410 kilometers south of Mogadishu ([The East African](#), June 18). Although al-Shabaab has denied the allegation, analysts say that, if confirmed, it would significantly damage the militant group's organizational structure ([Garowe Online](#), June 27).

'Unclean' Entertainment

In April, al-Shabaab carried out an attack on a soccer stadium in the port of Barawe, claiming responsibility for a blast that killed five spectators and wounded seven others. The bomb, which had been buried in a sandy area near the pitch, went off during a match, apparently detonated by remote control ([The Standard](#), April 13; [The East African](#), April 13).

Justifying such attacks through its radical interpretation of sharia, al-Shabaab maintains that the Quran forbids watching soccer, as well as other forms of "unclean" secular entertainment such as music, dancing and watching movies. Mohamed Osman Arus, a leader of the Somali Islamist group Hizbul Islam, which later folded into al-Shabaab, once asserted that true Muslims should not be "pre-occupied with semi-nude, crazy men jumping up and down who are chasing an inflated object" ([The National](#), June 26, 2010).

Since then, however, there may have been a shift, with a government official saying that militants in fact want to play soccer and have been attending soccer matches, although he gave few details ([Tuko](#), 2016). Al-Shabaab apparently commands those playing soccer to wear long pants when they go out on the pitch.

In Kenya, the group is alleged to have been distributing jihadist material and recruiting at sports tournaments. The recruiters have moved from mosques, schools and madrassa—traditional areas of recruitment—and instead in northeastern Kenya have allegedly been posing as soccer coaches and encouraging young people to join the militant group ([The Star](#), April 16, 2015).

Following the deadly attack on soccer fans in a town in Lamu in 2014 and the synchronized attacks in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, in 2010, al-Shabaab's apparent unwillingness to condemn this year's World Cup has prompted speculation is that all is not well with the group.

While its top leader is allegedly critically ill, and its top commanders are fighting over succession, the apparent failure (as at the time of writing) to attack screenings of World Cup matches or issue an outright ban on watching the tournament may be seen both as a sign of weakness and as an attempt by the group to reclaim some of its diminishing popularity.

Pakistani Taliban: Mullah Fazlullah's Death Revives Mehsud Clan Fortunes

Farhan Zahid

Mullah Fazlullah, the notorious Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emir, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in June, along with four of his commanders, in the Marawar district of Kunar province in eastern Afghanistan ([Tolo News](#), June 15). With Fazlullah gone, the group will likely change direction under the leadership of its new emir, Noor Wali Mehsud.

Since taking over as TTP leader in 2013, Fazlullah has planned a relentless series of terrorist operations in Pakistan from his base in neighboring Afghanistan. Under his command, however, the group was unable to remain the efficient terrorist organization it had been under the previous two emirs, Baitullah and Hakimullah Mehsud. While Fazlullah was known for a series of ruthless acts of terrorism in Pakistan—including instigating the 2007 and 2009 Islamist insurgencies in Pakistan's Malakand Division, ordering the attempted assassination of Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai in 2012 and masterminding the shocking killing of school children at the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014—on his watch, factions splintered from the group and a series of TTP commanders joined with Islamic State's (IS) Afghan chapter, IS-Khorasan.

Pakistani officials should also note that Fazlullah's elimination would likely only have been achieved with U.S. help. Despite the large number of military and security forces operations in tribal areas and settled districts in Pakistan, the Pakistani security forces have proved to be unable to eliminate significant senior jihadist figures. Baitullah and Hakimullah Mehsud, along with other key al-Qaeda leaders—such as Naek Mohammad Wazir, Qari Yasin and Atiya Abdul Rehman—have only been slain over the last 14 years as a result of U.S. drone strikes.

An Unlikely Leader

Fazlullah had been by some measures an unlikely choice for leader of the TTP as he was neither from the tribal

areas nor, unlike the first two TTP emirs, from the Mehsud tribe.

Born in 1974 in the Kuza Bandia area of Swat, Fazal Hayat (a.k.a. Mullah Fazlullah) briefly studied at a madrassa but dropped out and joined Tehreek-e-Nifaz Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), the militant movement led by Moulvi Sufi Mohammad, a former district leader for the Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami and who later became his father-in-law ([Dawn](#), November 7, 2013).

From the platform of TNSM, Fazlullah participated in Islamist insurgencies in 1994 and in 2001, amid the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Between 2007-2009 his fighters managed to overrun large swaths of the Malakand division of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, taking over territory as far as Swabi district, less than 100 kilometers from Islamabad. For six months, TNSM under Fazlullah ruled over the Swat Valley and Malakand Division. Fazal relocated to Afghanistan in 2009 after he was pushed out by Pakistani security forces. From there he masterminded terrorist attacks up until his death on June 13. [1]

The Fazlullah-led TNSM fell under the umbrella of the Pakistani Taliban when the TTP was formed by Baitullah Mehsud in 2007. The TTP provided human and material support to Fazlullah during his Islamist insurgency in Swat, and he later found safe haven in TTP-controlled areas.

Although he was not a member of the Mehsud tribe, Fazlullah managed to rise high enough in the TTP shura that after the death of Hakimullah Mehsud in a drone strike in 2013 he was selected as the group's new emir. There was disappointment and anger among the TTP that Fazlullah was not from the tribal areas, nor a Mehsud, and a number of shura council members parted ways with the group as a result. Chief among them was Omar Khalid Khurassani, the former TTP emir of Mohmand district, who later formed his own faction of TTP, the Jamaat ul Ahrar.

Fazlullah's strategy as TTP leader was to attempt to create an environment of fear and perpetual disturbance in Pakistan, and to some extent he was successful. Omar Mansoor Naray planned the December 2014 Army Public School attack on his directions. It was the most lethal terrorist attack in Pakistan's recent past—TTP fighters

killed 144 people, 132 of them school children ([Dawn](#), October 18, 2017).

In other high profile terrorist attacks executed by Fazlullah, the group used an IED to attack the convoy of Lieutenant General Sanaullah Niazi, the man responsible for the Swat military operation against TTP. Niazi and four others were killed in the attack in the suburbs of Swat in September 2013 ([News International](#), September 16, 2013). Prior to that, Fazlullah sent a team of assassins to target Malala Yousafzai, the teenage female education rights activist, who was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and two other girls who were part of Malala's campaign ([News International](#), June 16).

Changes Ahead

After losing Fazlullah, TTP's central shura initially selected Fazlullah's deputy, Omar Rehman (a.k.a. Ustad Fateh), as interim emir. Rehman was a contemporary of Fazlullah and hailed from Swat district. He played a pivotal role in the Islamist insurgency in Swat from 2007 to 2009 and had remained active perpetrating attacks on security forces.

Over time, however, a new TTP can be expected to emerge. The TTP's central shura announced its appointment of Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud as the new TTP leader on June 23, while Mufti Hazratullah was named deputy emir ([NDTV](#), June 24).

Born in 1978, Noor Wali Mehsud hails from the South Waziristan district of the tribal areas of Pakistan and studied at madrasahs in Karachi, Gujranwali and Rawalpindi. ([BBC Urdu](#), June 23). His selection indicates that the TTP shura is keen to avoid the kind of ructions that occurred following the selection of Fazlullah, a non-Mehsud emir.

Mehsud, another wanted Islamist jihadist, is notorious for masterminding major terror attacks, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on December 2007, and an earlier attempted attack at a rally she held in Karsaz, Karachi. Mehsud claimed responsibility for these attacks on TTP's behalf in a 690-page book he wrote entitled, *Inquilaab Mehsud South Waziristan: Farangi Raj se Ameriki Samraj tak* (The Mehsud Revolution in South Waziristan: From British Raj to Oppressive America). He can be expected to plan

lethal strikes in Pakistan and against U.S. interests in Pakistan to avenge the killing of his predecessor.

Outlook

Fazlullah's death in a drone strike reaffirms the importance of U.S. assistance to Pakistan in countering terrorism both at home and in the region. Islamabad would achieve less without it. Pakistani military operations have pushed the Islamist terrorists out of tribal areas of Pakistan, but the operations have not been enough to eliminate them, and a number have found safe haven in neighboring Afghanistan where the weakened government has been unable to tackle them.

Fazlullah's death may help turn the page on the deteriorating U.S.-Pakistan relationship, at least in countering terrorism in the AfPak region. For Pakistan and Afghan policymakers, it is time to capitalize on the opportunity provided by the transition to a new TTP leader, before the group begins to recover. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan could do more in partnership with the United States if they take advantage of the situation and stamp out militant safe havens in the region, whether they belong to the Afghan or Pakistani Taliban.

Farhan Zahid writes on counter-terrorism, al-Qaeda, Pakistani al-Qaeda-linked groups, Islamic State, jihadi ideologies and the Afghan Taliban.

NOTES

[1] Author's discussions with an Islamabad-based journalist (June 20, 2018)

'Terrorist Intent': How Finland's Justice System Struggles to Tackle Terrorism Offenders

Christian Jokinen

On August 18, 2017, 22-year-old Abderrahman Bouanane, a Moroccan citizen, attacked pedestrians in the center of Turku, Finland's third largest city, armed with a knife. The incident was Finland's first jihadist-inspired terrorist attack, and it might have received more coverage internationally had it not been overshadowed by the Madrid terrorist attack the previous day.

The attack lasted three minutes, during which time Bouanane covered a distance of 465 meters, stabbing innocent pedestrians. A police patrol was able to stop him, shooting him in the thigh as he held a female hostage in front of him ([MTV](#), April 26). While Bouanane survived—much to his disappointment—he left two female victims dead, and wounded eight other people. He was charged with two counts of murder and eight accounts of attempted murder with terrorist intent. The subsequent court case has revealed interesting details of Bouanane's radicalization, but also highlighted some of the deficiencies within Finland's judicial system when it comes to tackling jihadist terrorism cases.

Individuals of Interest

Bouanane arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker at the beginning of 2016 ([YLE](#), August 21 2017; [Turun Sanomat](#), June 17). Instrumental to his radicalization seems to have been a 23-year-old Uzbek-Finn named Zuhridin Rashidov, who he met at a local mosque. Rashidov showed him Islamic State (IS) propaganda material and introduced him to IS-focused chatrooms on Telegram ([Iltasanomat](#), April 22; [Turun Sanomat](#), June 17).

Bouanane had contemplated travelling to France to commit his attack there, but Rashidov appears to have convinced him that Finland was "as guilty as France" because, he said, it had decided to send soldiers to Syria "to fight the caliphate" ([Helsingin Sanomat](#), April 18). In fact, there are no Finnish troops in Syria, but since 2015

Finnish soldiers have been training Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi Security forces in Iraq as part of Operation Inherent Resolve.

During the court hearings, Bouanane insisted that nobody had been aware of his attack plan beforehand and that he had acted alone. Rashidov seems to have left Finland sometime before the attack, travelling to Dubai. It is thought he continued on from there to "a conflict zone" and has joined IS either in Iraq/Syria or in Afghanistan ([Aamulehti](#), September 1, 2017; MTV April 24; [Turun Sanomat](#), June 17).

Until Bouanane's attack, the first to hit Finland, many Finns had considered jihadist terrorism to be a distant threat, albeit one that had geographically been moving slowly closer. In a subsequent Europe-wide survey, Finns sided with the French in demanding that counter-terrorism be the main theme of the upcoming European Parliament elections ([YLE](#), May 23). While the public perception of the threat has changed, the Finnish security authorities had in fact been raising the alarm for some time. Bouanane's attack—and Rashidov's role as his radicalizer—should be seen within the framework of a growing jihadist caseload for the Finnish authorities. That caseload—consisting of radicalized individuals, individuals with direct contacts to terrorist organizations and/or with first-hand experience in fighting in the ranks of terrorist organizations—has grown rapidly in the last few years.

Finland was not spared the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) mobilization that took place across Europe between 2011 and 2015. The Finnish security and intelligence service (known as SUPO) says it has identified more than 80 suspected FTFs who travelled to Syria/Iraq from Finland, and in January, it assessed that the true number could be 10-20 percent larger ([YLE](#), January 23). A few days later, Antti Pelttari, the director of SUPO, stated his agency was in watching more than 370 persons, all categorized as radical Islamist "target individuals." [1] In comparison to the year 2012, the number of these so-called target individuals has grown by 80 percent, an increase that appears due mainly to the mobilizing effect of the conflict in Syria-Iraq ([Iltasanomat](#), August 27, 2017). Besides the target individuals SUPO has identified, an additional 500 asylum seekers had been assessed to have an increased "risk of violence" ([Turun Sanomat](#), January 30).

As a result of the growth of the Finnish jihadist scene, SUPO has upgraded its terrorism threat assessment on several occasions since 2015. In January, SUPO's Pelttari reaffirmed that the threat of terrorism to Finland was now higher than at any time in the past ([YLE](#), January 27). A few days later, the Finnish interior ministry stated that the EU-wide refugee crisis, which has brought at least 32,000 asylum seekers to Finland, had increased the terrorism threat in the country.

Heightened Risk From Asylum Seekers

Besides Bouanane's attack, the hybrid nature of the risk Finland is facing was shown by three other cases, all involving asylum seekers. In March 2016, a 29-year-old Iraqi asylum seeker was convicted on war crime charges for acts he committed as a fighter in a Shia militia in Iraq. The asylum seeker had uploaded pictures of himself posing with a severed head, allegedly belonging to an IS-fighter. The man was given a 16-month suspended jail sentence ([Keskisuomalainen](#), March 18, 2016). A week later, another Iraqi asylum seeker, a 23-year-old former Iraqi soldier, was convicted for posing in a similar picture and given a 15-month suspended sentence ([MTV](#), March 30, 2016).

On December 8, 2015, Finnish police arrested Iraqi twin brothers who had come to Finland as asylum seekers. The authorities suspected the pair of participating in the 2014 Camp Speicher massacre in Iraq, where as many as 1,700 Iraqi army cadets were murdered by IS fighters. The brothers were held on "probable grounds" for committing 11 terrorist-related killings during the massacre. As evidence, the prosecution had video footage of the massacre and eyewitness testimonies conducted in Iraq ([YLE](#), December 10, 2015).

All the material appeared to confirm the participation of at least one brother in the killings, however the Tampere district court acquitted both of the accused on May 24, 2017, claiming insufficient evidence. According to the ruling, the evidence presented was *inadequate* to prove guilt. There were additional problems with identification and the court also saw it as problematic that witnesses gave their testimonies anonymously via video-link from Iraq, hampering the defense ([YLE](#), May 24, 2017). The Finnish justice system has struggled with terrorism offences, a new legal territory for Finnish prosecutors, judges and defense lawyers alike. The situation has led Finland to be, until June 2018, one of the few countries

in Europe without any successful prosecution of terrorism offences.

Failing Judicial Response

On June 15, the Turku district court handed down a life sentence to Bouanane ([Turun Käräjäoikeus](#), June 15). His imprisonment was considered an indication that the Finnish justice system was competent and an updated penal code was working effectively ([Kaleva](#), June 15). However, it is worth noting that prosecuting Bouanane was relatively easy because of the concrete form of his crime and as a result of his own behavior and statements during the trial, which hampered the efforts of his lawyer.

The evidence against Bouanane was persuasive—his confession to have committed the murders, claims that he acted as a "Daesh soldier" and evidence that he produced a video claiming responsibility and posted it to an IS Telegram chat rooms prior to the attack. Nonetheless, his lawyer was still able to question whether the motive behind the attack had been "terroristic" in nature and query whether Bouanane's actions were really able to threaten the Finnish state—a legal requirement that the prosecution claimed stemmed from a translation error and which should, they said, be more properly interpreted as "society" ([Helsingin Sanomat](#), April 8; [MTV](#), May 15). According to his lawyer, since Bouanane was not intending to "terrorize" the Finnish population, the killings were therefore not "terroristic" in nature ([YLE](#), June 19; [Turun Sanomat](#), June 19). The Turku district court disagreed, taking the view that Bouanane's attack was terrorism, but the verdict will now be tested at the appeals court.

While it remains to be seen (probably sometime next year) whether Bouanane's appeal will be successful, in the case of more abstract terrorism crimes—such as terrorism financing or participation in the activities of a terrorist group abroad—the Finnish judicial response has been weak. As well as the case of the brothers suspected of involvement in the Camp Speicher massacre, two other Finnish counter-terrorism prosecutions have ended with the suspects being acquitted.

In 2011, four Somalis from the diaspora community in Finland were prosecuted for suspected terrorism financing. They were accused of sending thousands of euros to the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group al-Shabaab. The

main perpetrator was additionally suspected of recruiting his brother to join al-Shabaab, and for planning the kidnap of his nephews, in a chilling form of forced recruitment, in order to take them to an al-Shabaab training camp in Somalia. The Helsinki district court—in what was Finland's first terrorism prosecution—sentenced all four to suspended jail sentences in December 2014. All four appealed the verdict and farcically the alleged ring-leader, named only as "O" in media reports, did not stay to see the result of his appeal but fled with his Finnish convert-wife and their children to Syria, where the family settled in the IS-controlled territory ([YLE](#), March 4, 2017).

The court nevertheless proceeded to hear the appeals of all sentenced individuals, and in March 2016 overruled the district court sentences, taking the view that while the accused had most likely supported al-Shabaab, the prosecution had not shown to which specific terrorist offences in Somalia the funding had contributed, a legal requirement in place at the time the crimes had taken place ([Helsingin Hovioikeus](#), March 23, 2016). Meanwhile in Syria, O's wife, using the pseudonym Umm Khalid al-Finlandiyyah, threatened Finland in an interview published a few months later in the IS-run *Dabiq* magazine, and eulogized her son, who had reportedly died as a "martyr" for the caliphate ([MTV](#), July 31, 2016).

In a court hearing in January, three Finnish men who travelled to Syria in 2013 and joined the jihadist group Katibat al-Muhajireen, were acquitted of terrorism-charges. Finnish security officials had arrested the three after their return to Finland. The prosecution presented pictures of the men in Syria, armed and taking part in a meeting of Katibat al-Muhajireen fighters. A fourth member died later in the ranks of IS, while a fifth member remains in Syria. In Finland's first court process against returning FTF-fighters from Syria, all three accused were acquitted as the three judges ruled that the intention to commit and the offences themselves in Syria had not been proven ([YLE](#), January 24). The prosecutors' office decided not to challenge the ruling ([YLE](#), January 31).

In the light of above mentioned court verdicts, Pelttari, the SUPO director, commented diplomatically that in Finland "criminal accountability for terrorism offences is weaker ... in comparison to other Nordic countries" ([YLE](#), January 27). Indeed, Finland's western

neighbors Sweden and Norway have prosecuted successfully several terrorism cases, as has Estonia across the Baltic Sea. ([Postimees](#), January 13, 2016).

The Need for Deterrence

Discussions on the difficulties of securing convictions in terrorism prosecutions and its wider ramifications for Finland's internal security have been mute. Instead, the increase in the threat level and in the number of "target individuals" has resulted in an effort to study the level of radicalization in Finland. In January, the interior ministry announced its plans to commission a study on radical Islamism in Finland, including on domestic networks and their connections abroad. A separate study will focus on radical Islamist propaganda consumption in Finland ([Turun Sanomat](#), January 30).

Curiously, although Bouanane will be the first individual to see out his sentence for terrorism crimes in a Finnish prison, Finland has not been spared prison radicalization. The Finnish Department of Corrections started in a 2016 study of prison radicalization in Finland that it had identified 84 individuals who had shown signs of religious radicalization, spanning from physical assaults against other inmates carried out with a suspected religious motive, to celebrating terrorist attacks in Europe ([Rikosseuraamuslaitos](#), September 8, 2017). The study, which was only made public in February, concluded pessimistically that violent extremism had "reached Finnish prisons" and "will remain" a challenge going forward ([Rikosseuraamuslaitos](#), February 28).

If Bouanane's behavior during his months-long stay in prison is an indicator for things to come, this assessment has already been proven correct. A few nights after his first court appearance, Bouanane rioted in his prison cell, tried to attack a prison guard and had to be subdued with the help of a taser gun ([MTV](#), April 18).

Finland's response to the increased threat from terrorism has been two-fold. In 2016, the interior ministry launched an updated national action plan against radicalization that aims at educate authorities to detect the signs of radicalization, and report and intervene early to stop the spiral of radicalization. The focus of the plan has been on youth and "at-risk" groups, with the latest progress report focusing on women and children ([Sisäministeriö](#), April 16). Secondly, Finland has been increasing its intelligence capacities in the field of

counter-terrorism by modestly increasing staff levels at SUPO ([YLE](#), January 27).

More significantly, a new intelligence law is being debated in the Finnish parliament. If adopted, the law would give SUPO and its Finnish military equivalent broader intelligence gathering powers ([Helsingin Sanomat](#), May 22). The Turku-attack has helped focus minds in this regard.

These extra measures do not, however, address the fundamental problem Finland is facing with rising number of "target individuals" and a justice system where the state prosecutors have, until Bouanane, been unable to secure convictions for terrorism offences. For its part, the State Prosecutors' Office has started training five of its prosecutors in counter-terrorism law, including study trips to observe their counterparts abroad ([YLE](#), October 17, 2017).

With its current track record of failures, Finland risks being seen as a benign territory for jihadists, unintentionally attracting former IS and al-Qaeda fighters. While efforts focusing on preventing and countering violent radicalization are needed for rehabilitating already radicalized individuals and for addressing the potential next generation, a credible deterrence in the form of law enforcement is also needed.

While SUPO has been able to identify, and the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to investigate several terrorism suspects, the failure to secure convictions has contributed to an image of the Finnish justice system as struggling to address terrorism-related crimes. Without a functioning system to sanction terrorist offenders, an important part from a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy is missing.

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NOTES

[1] SUPO defines "target individuals" as those who may "have links to terrorist organizations, receive training or train others with a terrorist purpose, spread terrorist or-

ganizations' propaganda and try to recruit new individuals for terrorist activity, finance terrorist networks or raise finance for them, or participate in terrorist activity."