

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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## CAMEROON: BIYA’S REELECTION AND WORSENING SEPARATIST VIOLENCE

*Brian Perkins*

The reelection of Cameroonian President Paul Biya in October likely forebodes the further destabilization of the Central African nation. Cameroon has been a relatively reliable counterterrorism partner against Boko Haram since 2013, with Cameroonian forces helping reduce the group’s operations within their borders and denying them a safe haven outside of Nigeria. Violent tactics and repressive policies directed at both Boko Haram and Cameroonian citizens, however, have already fomented further violence elsewhere in the country, particularly the Anglophone areas known locally as Ambazonia.

The roots of the separatist insurgency in Ambazonia date back to the 1960s and Cameroon’s independence. The conflict has escalated significantly since 2016 when the government violently responded to civil society groups protesting the economic and political marginalization of the region. The government’s response helped lead to the formation of several armed groups in the region, including the Ambazonian Defense Forces,

the Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front and other smaller, less-organized groups. The Ambazonian Defense Forces eventually declared war against the government in September 2017 ([All Africa](#), August 30).

Clashes between separatists and Cameroonian security forces since late 2017 have resulted in the death of several hundred individuals and the arrest of even more—many of whom do not have firm ties to separatist groups. Furthermore, civilians have repeatedly come under fire as security forces have allegedly carried out countless extrajudicial killings, razed entire villages in the search for separatists, and incidentally killed civilians in the crossfire ([Journal du Cameroun](#), November 7). Notably, U.S. missionary Charles Wesco was shot and killed while traveling in a vehicle with his wife, son and a driver to a marketplace in Bamenda on October 30 ([Afrik](#), November 2).

President Biya’s reelection for another seven-year term makes him the second longest serving African head of state, a testament to the lack of viable political opponents and unlikelihood of significant political reforms. During his inauguration speech on November 6, Biya promised to uphold the unity and integrity of Cameroon

and to defeat terrorism, undoubtedly referring not only to Boko Haram but also to the armed separatists ([Punch Nigeria](#), November 6).

His speech was fittingly preceded by the mass kidnapping of 79 students and three employees of a Presbyterian school in Bamenda, though he made no mention of the incident in his speech. All of the kidnapped individuals were released unharmed near Bamenda just two days after being taken. Biya quickly blamed the separatists, though an unidentified spokesman reportedly denied the claim ([Punch Nigeria](#), November 7). While the kidnapers have yet to be identified and no group has claimed responsibility, separatist attacks and clashes with security forces have largely centered on Bamenda. Separatist groups have also repeatedly forced the closure of schools and have warned students and parents not to attend as they believe the lessons contain government propaganda.

The government banned all vehicular traffic aside from emergency vehicles in Bamenda while security forces scoured the area to identify and arrest the kidnapers. Clashes have been ongoing in the region since. It is unclear at this time what the full response to the kidnappings will be. With Biya just reelected amid promises to defeat terrorism and Cameroonian security forces' track record, there will likely be an escalation in violence that will only further destabilize Cameroon.

## LIBYA: MEETING HIGHLIGHTS DIVISIONS

*Brian Perkins*

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte hosted a meeting of key Libyan stakeholders in Palermo, Italy on November 12-13. The meeting was called in an attempt to chart a roadmap to bring rival factions together after years of fighting between warring militias and competing government bodies. The meeting in Palermo was held just days after UN Special Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, announced that a "National Conference" bringing together key Libyan political and military figures would take place early in 2019 to start the process for the country's long-delayed presidential and parliamentary elections, which he anticipates will occur later in the spring of 2019 ([AlJazeera](#), November 10).

Renewed efforts to jumpstart the political process after attempts to push for elections to occur by the end of the year have fallen flat. Additionally, it comes after months of fighting between rival militias in Tripoli that left more than 100 people dead and amid increasing insecurity throughout the greater Sahel region as militancy continues to spread around the country's borders.

International attendees included Prime Minister Conte, Special Envoy Ghassan Salame, Russian Premier Dmitry Medvedev, Egyptian President Abdel Fatah Sisi, Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay as well as delegates from Algeria, Tunisia, and Qatar among others ([AlJazeera](#), November 13). Among the most notable Libyan attendees were Fayez Al-Sarraj, leader of the UN-backed presidential council and General Khalifa Haftar, the head of the Libyan National Army. General Haftar, however, did not confirm he would be attending until the last minute, stopping in Russia for meetings beforehand and skipping the main conference for separate parallel informal talks with international leaders, including a brief meeting with his rival Al-Sarraj.

Going into the conference, the most obvious international rivalry on display was that between France and Italy, as the conference in Palermo followed a similar summit in Paris in May. Both France and Italy are vying for European primacy in Libya to bolster their own economic and security interests. Meanwhile, Egypt and Russia's participation in the meeting was key to ensuring Haftar's participation, which subsequently led to Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay leaving the conference after

Haftar requested that he be excluded from a meeting between Haftar, Sarraj, and other international leaders ([Hurriyet](#), November 13).

The meeting, unsurprisingly, did not result in any profound solutions to the ongoing tumult. The informal meeting between Sarraj and Haftar was reportedly cordial but no agreements were made. Instead, it underscored not only the contentious politics within Libya, but also the competition between external stakeholders. The relative success of the meeting hinged on whether Haftar would decide to come to the table, and once he did show up he managed to dictate the inclusion or exclusion of international stakeholders, most notably excluding both Turkey and Qatar from discussions with Sarraj.

*Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor*

## **Khashoggi, the Hudaydah Offensive and Prospects for Peace in Yemen**

*Brian Perkins*

Saudi Arabia's dubious military tactics in Yemen have long been underreported and have drawn surprisingly little scorn from international leaders. The death of Saudi journalist and Washington Post columnist, Jamal Khashoggi, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, however, has led many Western nations to reevaluate their relationship with the Kingdom and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. The Khashoggi saga seemingly created an opening for several heads of state to use the widespread condemnation of the Saudi regime as leverage to push for an end to the war in Yemen and renewed peace talks in Sweden. Saudi Arabia, however, went the opposite direction by launching a fresh offensive on the vital Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, a city that is a strategic linchpin for the Houthis and the main entry point for the delivery of humanitarian supplies.

### **Renewed Focus on Saudi Involvement in Yemen**

For the past several years, many Western nations have been wary to condemn Saudi Arabia for its tactics and the subsequent death of countless civilians during the course of the military intervention. Neither has the West fervently used available diplomatic tools to push for an end to the war. The fear of riling such a close, strategic ally in the Middle East while most other nations remained cordial generally prevented such rhetoric. Khashoggi's murder, the location in which it occurred, and the extensive actions taken to cover it up, however, was apparently too much for the international community to ignore. Country after country issued statements spurning the crown prince and the Saudi government for summarily killing an outspoken critic of the Kingdom on foreign soil ([al-Bawaba](#), October 22).

During an event at the U.S. Institute for Peace, Secretary of Defense James Mattis called for all parties involved in the war in Yemen to agree to a ceasefire, stating,

"the longer-term solution, and by longer-term, I mean 30 days from now, we want to see everybody sitting

around the table, based on a cease-fire, based on a pullback from the border, and then based on ceasing dropping of bombs, that will permit the [U.N.] special envoy—Martin Griffiths, who's very good, he knows what he's doing—to get them together in Sweden and end this war" ([USIP](#), October 31).

Mattis released a statement on November 9 indicating that the United States would no longer refuel Saudi planes in Yemen, another step in U.S. efforts to distance itself from the war in Yemen ([Department of Defense](#), November 9). This statement was echoed by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other international leaders.

## Hudaydah Offensive 2.0

Saudi Arabia and its allies in Yemen, primarily UAE-backed and trained forces, launched a fresh offensive on Hudaydah in early November, shortly after Mattis's comments calling for a ceasefire within 30 days. The UAE-backed al-Amaliqah (Giants Brigade) is one of the primary forces leading the ground charge in Hudaydah. With support from Saudi Arabia, on November 2 al-Amaliqah began the offensive after moving forces toward the front line in late October. Pro-government forces have been working to surround the city, trying to cut it off from the main port area while Saudi planes bombard Houthi positions. Some of the heaviest fighting was reported near the airport to the south of the city, Kilo 10 and 16 to the east, and al-Thawra Hospital near the Red Sea. Heavy bombing by Saudi planes was reported throughout the governorate, but most notably in al-Hawak and al-Hali just outside Hudaydah City. Dozens of civilians were reportedly killed and civilian infrastructure destroyed. [1]

Similar to Mattis, UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt also made stern statements and attempted to use shuttle diplomacy to de-escalate the offensive ([Al-Monitor](#), November 13). For a few brief days, it appeared his efforts might have helped as the Houthis and Saudi coalition reportedly came to an informal ceasefire agreement. A lull in fighting was reported on November 12 and many believed a concerted effort was underway to de-escalate the conflict in Hudaydah. The leader of the Houthi's Supreme Revolutionary Committee, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, indicated that the rebels were halting drone and

missile strikes on the Saudi coalition. [2] Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam, however, posted on Twitter that the pause was not a ceasefire—it was Saudi Arabia taking time to reinforce its lines before restarting the offensive.

While the situation remains relatively unclear, reports of heavy clashes between pro-government forces and Houthi fighters have been ongoing since November 18, with fighting and civilian casualties being reported within three miles of the port as well as in southern and eastern suburbs of Hudaydah City. [3] UAE-backed forces are also reportedly beginning to send reinforcements to the outskirts of the city, suggesting the fragile ceasefire might be coming to an end.

## Conclusion

The renewed offensive on Hudaydah is undoubtedly worsening prospects for peace in Yemen. The short lull in violence was unlikely to hold, even if it had been a genuine effort by Houthi and Saudi leaders. It is unclear how much of a handle the Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia have on many of the important forces fighting against the Houthis in Hudaydah and surrounding areas. If Saudi Arabia again fails to seize control of Hudaydah from the Houthis it will likely only serve to bruise their ego and bolster their resolution to secure a military victory as opposed to conceding defeat and pushing for a diplomatic solution. Similarly, given Saudi Arabia's rhetoric and past attempts to broker peace, a victory in Hudaydah would likely only lead to a longer military push to further eradicate the Houthis. This would remove the group from the political equation as much as possible, paving the way for a political settlement more amenable to the Kingdom's goals. At this juncture, it appears that further international condemnation and more coordinated diplomatic action are the only avenues that would bring Saudi Arabia to the table after another defeat in Hudaydah. Khashoggi's death could be the spark that finally starts that process.

*Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor*

## Notes

[1] Author's interviews with Yemenis based in Hudaydah on November 12

[2] Official statement released via Twitter on November 18 [https://twitter.com/Moh\\_Alhouthi/status/1064266212786520069](https://twitter.com/Moh_Alhouthi/status/1064266212786520069)

[3] Author's interview with Hudaydah-based aid worker on November 19

## Jihadism in Jordan

*Andrew Devereux*

On August 10, one police officer was killed and six civilians were wounded in al-Fuheis, Jordan when an IED detonated near a police vehicle ([Alaraby](#), August 11). The attack prompted a swift response from the security forces, which identified the suspected perpetrator's hideout in al-Salt. Five security personnel were killed during a siege of the property the following day. The building was laden with explosive tripwires, and the terror cell engaged Jordanian state forces in a gun battle. Authorities arrested three suspected jihadists after the siege, and the bodies of five others were identified in the rubble of the building ([Asharq al-Awsat](#), August 13).

Despite its proximity to Syria and the Islamic State's proto-state, Jordan has been spared the frequent jihadist attacks which have punctuated the Middle East since the Islamic State (IS) began seizing population centers in 2014. The most notable incident was the armed raid of Karak Castle in December 2016, in which 14 people, including four attackers, were killed ([Jordan Times](#), December 18, 2016). While fatal attacks have been rare, reports of the security forces arresting suspected jihadist sympathizers have been more common. In January 2018, the security forces announced they had dismantled a terrorist cell which was buying bomb parts and staking out potential targets in Amman ([Jordan Times](#), January 8). The aggressive operations of the jihadist cell have raised concerns of a resurgence in terror attacks in the Hashemite Kingdom.

### **Sleeper Cells**

In the immediate aftermath of the security operation, assumptions that the assailants were foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria were swiftly proven wrong following an announcement by Interior Minister Sameer al-Mobaideen. The cell was comprised of Jordanian nationals who were externally influenced by IS's substantial caches of online propaganda, but had neither known links to the IS hierarchy nor past foreign travel ([Arab News](#), August 14). While the priority for the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) has been deterring the 3,000-4,000 Jordanians who left to join IS in Iraq and Syria from returning, less attention has been afforded to creeping radicalization within the Jordanian border.

The attack displayed the insurgency tactics that are a key facet of cells influenced by IS ideology. Targeting assets associated with the security forces are an attempt to destabilize the kingdom without alienating potential domestic support—many still remember the burning of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasaabeh in January 2015, which was met by public revulsion. The cell had also accrued significant capabilities, with numerous explosive devices primed and ready for use while significant caches of firearms were seized ([Arab News](#), August 14). Despite the security forces being able to quickly identify the group's hideout following the attack, the cell was previously operating without infiltration by the GID, and its presence highlights the potential for domestically radicalized factions.

### **Domestic Radicalization**

The GID has suggested the cell was independent and newly formed, increasing the likelihood that radicalization was influenced by domestic factors. While radicalization is a complex process with no clear roadmap, factors known to contribute to jihadism are evident in Jordan. These include political disenfranchisement, economic degradation and marginalization. Accusations of state repression are commonplace. Since a controversial anti-terrorism law was passed in 2014, the state has arrested thousands of suspected IS sympathizers using the broad conception of terrorism outlined in the legislation ([Jordan Times](#), September 18). It is difficult to know how many have been detained, charged or imprisoned, as the state does not release official records. In an attempt to pursue a hardline approach against potential jihadists and create a viable deterrent, the state has fostered an atmosphere of resentment.

State influence over both social and religious rights has furthered accusations of repression. The government has created a “unified sermon” policy, which provides imams with a “party line” for all Friday prayers, limiting the potential for radical speech or jihadist interpretations of Islam ([Albawaba](#), July 17, 2017). Islamist political parties complain of suppression due to laws which limit electoral opportunities. Jordan's Western ties, especially with the United States, have furthered accusations that the state is a Western proxy, foregoing the rights and wishes of its own citizens to display commitment to its Western relationships. Although Jordan is far from a breeding ground for radicalization, a complex socio-po-

litical relationship with marginalized communities is driving perceptions of state repression.

### **Conclusion**

Following the al-Fuheis attack, King Abdullah responded using fiery rhetoric, vowing to end the existence of terrorism in Jordan ([Ma'an](#), August 13). Such claims indicate the state is likely to continue its hardline stance against jihadist sympathizers. The GID has significant resources and aid from Western allies, and the trend of frequent arrests in the name of counter-terrorism is likely to continue. Concurrently, the accusations of state repression are unlikely to subside.

It is highly likely the GID have refocused efforts on identifying and subduing any further domestic sleeper cells in light of the attack. Despite unconfirmed reports of numerous raids following the al-Salt siege, the organisation decides which information regarding anti-terror arrests or investigations is made public, and their secretive nature makes this difficult to confirm. It is likely however, that the GID would have been eager to publicise the recent infiltration and dispersal of any similar cells, as both a deterrent and to reinforce their own capabilities. Since the al-Fuheis attack, there have been no further jihadist attacks, soothing initial concerns of a swift increase in insurgent incidents.

Jordan exists in a fine balance—spared the violent sectarianism of its neighbors, but consistently subduing ever-growing social, political and economic issues. Owing to the state's rejection of Salafi-jihadist interpretations of Islam, the increased presence of seasoned jihadists and Jordan's perception as a Western ally, jihadism in Jordan could become a burgeoning problem.



# The Shifting Narrative of Women's Role in Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh's Islamic Jihad

*Animesh Roul*

Bangladesh's most lethal home-grown militant organization, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)—which has multiple ideological and operational factions, including the Islamic State (IS)-inspired neo-JMB and al-Qaeda linked core Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JM)—has gained notoriety over the last few years for recruiting and nurturing a network of women militants. Despite robust counter-terrorism operations following the July 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attacks in the capital Dhaka, an alarming number of women are taking up the cause of militancy. The intermittent arrests and events involving JMB's women operatives across the country and beyond in the last couple of years have become a major headache for Bangladesh's security establishment.

Two cases in 2018 involving JMB's female operatives made national and international headlines. In February 2018, two sisters linked to the neo-JMB faction and inspired by the IS's jihadist ideals were arrested and charged for carrying out separate knife attacks in both Melbourne, Australia and in Dhaka. On February 9, Momena Shoma, a Bangladeshi student enrolled to study linguistics at La Trobe University stabbed her homestay's landlord Roger Singaravelu in the neck to fulfil a moral obligation to the Islamic State's call for jihad ([Sunday Morning Herald](#), February 14; [Prothom Alo \[Dhaka\]](#), September 21). Her sister, Asmaul Husna, carried out a similar knife attack targeting Dhaka Police's Assistant Commissioner Tohidul Islam on February 12 when the local police officials were enquiring about the Melbourne incident and possible JMB-IS links ([Daily Star](#), February 14). Both sisters were in their early twenties and admitted to their neo-JMB links and IS inspiration during the following investigations.

In Bangladesh, myriad militant extremist groups such as the JMB, Ansar al-Islam (formerly Ansarullah Bangla Team) and Hizbut Tahirir-Bangladesh (HT-B) have been engaging women operatives mostly for religious teaching and as supporting members like couriers and infor-

mants. A new trend has been emerging since mid-2016, where women operatives are found to be carrying out violent combat operations. One media estimate suggested that by December 2016, Bangladesh police had arrested at least 20 women militants from different groups including JMB, with evidence of a possible all-women suicide team ([The Independent](#), December 25, 2016).

Evidently, JMB is a pioneer in engaging women for jihadist activities that include suicide missions in addition to supporting tasks. They even trained the women cadres to use hand grenades and knives. Between July and September 2016, Bangladeshi authorities arrested around 12 women JMB operatives. [1] In early September 2016, the detective branch of the Bangladesh police arrested four female members of JMB belonging to a suicide group from the Kazipur area of Sirajganj district. They were arrested in the house of senior JMB leader, Faridul Islam, while holding a meeting to discuss the recruitment of new women cadres to carry out violent attacks ([Poriborton News](#), September 5, 2016).

After two months investigating the suicide bombing conspiracy, Bangladesh police encountered an actual female suicide bomber for the first time. In late December 2016, Shakira, a female neo-JMB member detonated her suicide vest during a search and sweep operation in a JMB safe house located in the Ashkona area of Dhaka while feigning surrender ([BanglaNews24.com](#), December 24, 2016). During this police raid—code-named Operation Ripple 24—the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) department arrested two other female neo-JMB jihadists. Not surprisingly, Shakira had been radicalized by her husband, fugitive neo-JMB militant Rashid-ur Rahman Sumon. Like Shakira, most of JMB's women members who were arrested were found to be closely related to the JMB's leadership ([Bangladesh News 24](#), December 27, 2016).

Until April 2018, the counter-terrorism unit, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), had little to no information on the top leaders of neo-JMB's women's wing. With the arrest of Humaira Jakir Nanvi on April 5, the police unearthed the working of the women wing—or “Bat Women” squad—as they were called. Humaira was arrested for her involvement in a foiled suicide attack on August 2017, targeting a National Mourning Day program in Dhanmondi ([Bangladesh News 24](#), August 15,

2017; [Daily Star](#), April 5). The investigations into the foiled suicide attack revealed Humaira as the chief financier of the neo-JMB. She was also in charge of recruiting new women into the rank and file of the group. Interestingly, in October this year, two neo-JMB operatives identified as Khadija Akhtar Meghna and Israt Jahan—accused in the Holey Artisan Bakery attack case—surrendered after a raid on their hideout in Madhabdi area in Narsingdi district ([New Nation](#), October 18). The irony is that these two female operatives had been arrested earlier, in mid-2016, under suspicion of being involved in militant activities, but were later released as the investigating agency could not establish their militant links.

Like Khadija and Israt, there are many others who had earlier been released from custody without any charges. Later, the police found that several female operatives who had been released were becoming involved in these subversive activities. Cases such as this demonstrate law enforcement agencies' lenient attitude toward female suspects, which is commonly exploited by the JMB.

Interrogations with several women operatives suggested that they nurture a specific anger against the Bangladeshi security forces. One of the apprehended militants, Aklima Rahman, confessed to having been trained to target Bangladeshi police and the elite Rapid Action Battalion. During the training, she learned how the security agencies arrested jihadists and tortured their male counterparts in custody and how to avenge those acts.

It is not clear, however, whether the women cadres are pressured into following their husbands, lovers and brothers already waging jihad in the country and beyond, or if they are voluntarily attracted to Islamist ideals. While the police versions depict a narrative of coercion and forced recruitment, the February 2018 knife attacks involving sibling sisters illustrated a different picture of individual motivation, without material assistance or moral push from the neo-JMB.

It is also found that neo-JMB recruited women from beyond their established family networks. The group focused on recruiting those with moderate educational background and who belonged to elite schools and universities. For example, the three female members of the neo-JMB— Aklima Rahman Moni, Khadija Parveen

Megna, and Israt Jahan—who were arrested on August 15, 2016, were students of Manarat International University in Dhaka. Khadija Akhtar and Israt Jahan were arrested again in October this year from Madhabdi in Narsingdi district. Another member arrested around the same time was Istishna Afroz Oishee, an intern at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Similarly, the sisters involved in the knife attacks in February this year are also well educated and belong to affluent families of Bangladesh. The chief financier and recruiter of the neo-JMB, Humaira Jakir Nanvi, was an alumna of the North South University (NSU) and had been educated in Malaysia as well ([Daily-Sun](#), April 9).

Unlike the old, core JMB, the neo-JMB faction went a step further in recruiting female militants by romanticizing the concepts of jihad, foreign fighters and martyrdom. The new wave of recruitment and indoctrination of female militants into the fold materialized virtually through the use of various social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and other encrypted social media applications like Threema and Telegram ([Daily Star](#), August 20, 2016).

While the participation of women in militant violence in the subcontinent (Indian Kashmir and Sri Lanka) is not completely unusual, Bangladesh began witnessing this trend in 2004 when the JMB core established a dedicated women's branch. This so-called "sister branch"—under the guidance of the wives of the top leaders of JMB—was mostly responsible for daawa activities (proselytization) and religious teachings. Between February and April 2009, security officials in Bangladesh arrested nearly 25 suspected JMB female militants who were later released from custody without any charges. These women arrestees never admitted to being a part of the JMB but were family members and relatives of JMB's male operatives ([Daily Star](#), February 21, 2009; [Indian Express](#), April 23, 2009). Bangladeshi agencies, however, admitted that prior to these arrests, they did not have any evidence that JMB had a woman wing or trained female members.

Certainly, the traditional women's roles in Islamic militancy in the country have evolved dangerously over the last few years. Young girls have joined the rank and file of jihadist organizations and have redefined their role in groups like the neo-JMB. With effective female combat units along the lines of al-Qaeda inspired jihadist sisterhood or Islamic State's "jihadist brides" (or for that mat-



ter Al-Khansaa brigade), the increasing trend of female participation in militancy or Islamic jihad in Bangladesh is likely to take a novel turn in the coming years.

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## **Notes**

[1] Author's estimation based on local media reports.