MOROCCO CONTINUES TO FACE TERROR THREAT DESPITE SUCCESS OF BCIJ

Brian M. Perkins

It has been more than six months since a group of Moroccans inspired by Islamic State (IS) brutally slayed two Scandinavian hikers in the Atlas mountains between Imlil and Mount Toubkal. Moroccan authorities were quickly able to identify and capture the individuals directly responsible as well as others suspected of involvement. 24 individuals were charged with various terrorism-related crimes and have or are still facing trial in a criminal court in Sale, just outside Rabat. Court documents surrounding the investigation have shed significant light on the individual's backgrounds and activities prior to the attack that demonstrate a common and persistent theme among radicalized individuals in Morocco. Additionally, their cases highlighted the fallibility of Morocco's Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ), considered among the top counterterrorism forces. Meanwhile, reports of similarly sized terrorist cells being identified across the country continue at an alarming pace, despite a recent Moroccan Public Prosecutor's Office report in

dicating a declining terror threat (Morocco World News, July 1).

Homegrown radicalization and recidivism of prisoners charged with terrorism are a persistent struggle in Morocco, and the Imlil terror case is evidence of that threat. Early reports regarding Abdessamad Ejjoud, the ringleader of the attack, noted that he was previously imprisoned. However, this information only came out during further investigations and during the trial it was confirmed that he was, in fact, imprisoned for attempting to travel to join IS before being released early and joining up with other prison mates. It was also revealed that the group had plotted several other attacks using different methods, including storming hotels, detonated improvised explosive devices, and ramming pedestrians in rented vehicles.

Since the Imlil attack, the BCIJ has dismantled dozens of small, 3-10 person cells across the country. Most of these cells were inspired by IS and were caught for amateurish tactics (Morocco World News, June 25). The BCIJ's success in dismantling these groups is partly due to its strong surveillance and intelligence tactics, but also owes to the fact that many of the cells have so far exposed themselves by engaging in inflammatory

rhetoric online, attempting overly sophisticated plots involving explosives, or using unsecure communication systems.

While the BCIJ's failure to track Ejjoud's activities following his release is undoubtedly a failure, his use of the Telegram messaging app and unsophisticated tactics are additional reasons for the attack's success. With the high level of radicalization currently occurring in Morocco, the return of IS fighters, and outreach by IS central to facilitate attacks ranging in sophistication from the Sri Lanka bombings to more rudimentary attacks, it is likely a matter of time before there is another successful attack in the country. British intelligence services named Morocco among a "hit list" of targets IS is seeking to attack and noted hotels and tourist locations among the top targets (The Sun, June 2). With no solid plans to reduce radicalization, the BCIJ will continue to face an uphill battle against terrorist cells that will learn from the failures of those arrested and become increasingly savvy to avoid detection.

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ISLAMIC STATE BRANCHES RENEW PLEDGES TO AL-BAGHDADI

Brian M. Perkins

Over the past several weeks, Islamic State (IS) has revived its coordinated media campaign dubbed "And the Best Outcome is for the Righteous" to demonstrate the interconnection between its central *shura* (council) and branches across the globe (Jihadology, June 15). IS offshoots in Africa, the Caucasus, the Pacific, and elsewhere have begun publicly renewing their pledges of allegiances to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The renewal of this campaign, which was first run in 2016, comes amid the group's reorganization and the rebranding of its global branches, and could ultimately shed light on IS central's relationship with its more nascent groups, notably its branches in Central Africa, Pakistan, and India.

The first to renew its pledge in the series was Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in a video released on June 15, featuring fighters located in what was identified as Burkina Faso and Mali renewing their pledge and touting operational victories (Jihadology, June 15). ISWAP's video was followed by similar videos released by Wilayat Sinai, Wilayat Southeast Asia, Wilayat Caucasus, and Wilayat Khorasan. Each of the videos depicted its fighters and included renewed pledges.

The videos are evidence of IS central's communication and coordination with these branches, but one notable factor to consider is that these branches have been longstanding supporters with unquestioned ties and communication back to the core IS cadre. The groups that have noticeably been absent from the media campaign thus far are, Wilayat Pakistan, Wilayat India, and Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—the latter two of which being the newest among the group's branches and holding less demonstrable evidence of strong connections with IS central.

IS began claiming attacks under the banner of ISCAP on April 18. However, factions of the ADF with previously reported links to IS are in fact the likely culprits (Twitter.com/SimNasr, April 18). There has, however, not been a public pledge to Baghdadi from ISCAP and very little evidence of close communication between the two. There have also not been any verifiable photos of IS fighters in the DRC, though photos have allegedly shown weapons the group has seized from security

forces. Similarly, Wilayat India is also a nascent group with little evidence of strong ties back to IS central. Wilayat India, a.k.a. Wilayat-e-Hind, is a spin-off of the previous Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir branch, comprised of a pro-IS group of militants fighting against the Indian government. There have been several militants belonging to ISJK that have publicly pledged allegiance to Baghdadi ([The Hindu](#), September 16, 2018). The rebranding to Wilayat India, however, suggests an expansion into India proper, though there is no evidence of an organized group outside of Jammu and Kashmir. There is a clear history of IS operations in Pakistan under Wilayat Khorasan, which previously comprised Afghanistan and Pakistan, but it is unclear how the Pakistan branch will fare in terms of leadership and capabilities following the split from its Afghan counterparts and reports of infighting.

With the bulk of IS provinces lining up to renew pledges and demonstrate their coordination, continued silence by these groups could help shed some light on the nature of their relationship and ability to coordinate with IS central. Conversely, if these branches do release videos depicting their leaders and fighters, it could provide essential hints as to the size and composition of these branches as well as potential clues indicating where they are operating.

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Two New IS Wilayat in South Asia: IS Reinvigorates Itself in Pakistan and India

Farhan Zahid

After the unexpected terrorist attack in Sri Lanka in May, Islamic State's (IS) Central Shura announced the establishment of two new *Wilayat* (governorates) in South Asia. The seven simultaneous and well-concerted terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday were orchestrated by National Tawheed Jamaat (NJT), a small cell of radicalized but educated individuals of affluent Sri Lankan Muslim families.

The first announcement by IS' official Amaq Media was concerning the creation of Wilayat-e-Hind on May 12, followed by Wilayat-e-Pakistan on May 14 ([VOA Pakistan, May 15](#)). The new *Wilayat* are named after countries, which is a break from IS' previous standards of naming its units after historic regions such as "Khorasan" for South and Central Asia. The move is in fact a departure from its past policy of not accepting nation-states as *Wilayat* of the self-proclaimed caliphate, especially in the case of Pakistan, a country carved out of British Indian dominions.

More interestingly, the Central Shura did not mention IS-Khorasan (IS-K), implying that IS-K would only be looking after the IS activities in Afghanistan and Central Asia. IS has not yet made any decision to dissolve or merge it with two new *Wilayat* and it is believed that IS-K would continue to operate under its current Emir Shaikh Aslam Farooqi from its areas of control in eastern Afghanistan. It is pertinent to mention that IS-K was established by IS after the proclamation of the Islamic Caliphate in June 2014. IS-K remains one of the most resilient chapters of IS around the globe as it continues to operate despite the loss of four consecutive emirs to US drone strikes since 2015. [1]

Wilayat-e-Pakistan and Wilayat-e-Hind

The decision to establish Wilayat-e-Pakistan must have been made earlier, but it was not announced by IS until after the NJT attacks in Sri Lanka, which was followed by two terrorist attacks in Pakistan's Baluchistan province along the Afghanistan border where IS-K is believed to be active. The attacks were targeted killings that took

place on May 12 and 15, and resulted in the death of two police officers in Baluchistan's southern Mastung district . The Amaq Media Agency also claimed it targeted militants from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Quetta, the provincial capital of Baluchistan province (Twitter.com/robertpostings, May 15). The reasons for targeting TTP members were not specified. Furthermore, the Central Shura also nominated Dawood Mehsud as Emir of Wilayat-e-Pakistan. [2]

Unlike Pakistan, IS' penetration in India's Muslim community is relatively low. Only the Islamist terrorist groups Ummat-e-Mohammadiya and Harkat ul Harb-e-Islam were found to have some links with IS. Both groups are relatively unknown and obscure. According to estimates, around 100 Indian Muslims have traveled to IS-controlled territories in Iraq and Syria, most of them from the southern Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and others (Terrorism Monitor, May 31). Around 13 Indian Muslims were reportedly killed when the United States dropped the Mother of All Bombs (MOAB) in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan in 2017. In the troubled Indian state of Kashmir, IS flags have been noticed during demonstrations against the Indian government and protestors have used IS slogans in recent years (First Post, December 29, 2018).

On May 12, the Amaq Media announced the establishment of IS' Wilayat-e-Hind after it claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in Amshipora village in the Shopian district of Indian Kashmir. IS' media wing claimed that its militants fought a fierce battle with Indian security forces. According to Indian authorities, an IS militant, Ishfaq Sofi, was killed in that gun-battle (Xinhua, May 10). Previously, IS had identified its Indian branch as Jundul Khalifah Hind or Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK). ISJK's media wing, Al-Burhan Media, had already spoken about the establishment of Wilayat-e-Hind in its recent edition of Al-Sawt (the Voice) magazine (SITE, May 2019).

IS' Logic in Establishing Two New Wilayat and Implications

IS' apparent logic in establishing the two new wilayat is rising amid internal rifts within IS-Khorasan and attempts to further penetrate Pakistan and India. IS-K is divided between followers of Shaikh Aslam Farooqi, a former Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militant, and another led by Moavia Uzbeki. Both factions do not trust each other and while Farooqi's faction has stopped fighting with the Afghan Taliban, the Uzbeki faction did not. In fact, this faction faced the wrath of the Afghan Taliban during the battle of Darzab in Jawzjan province, which resulted in more than 300 casualties and the group's ouster from Jawzjan (Terrorism Monitor, August 10, 2018).

In India, IS received some response in Islamist-insurgency-ridden Indian Kashmir, and there was some level of support culminated in the form of ISJK. Moreover it also revealed by the Sri Lankan authorities that NJT militants visited Indian Kashmir. IS was in fact late to recognize the potential of opening a new branch in India.

In Pakistan, IS-K has already made inroads and conducted a number of large-scale terrorist attacks resulting in mass casualties. One IS-K suicide attack in July during the 2018 general elections resulted in 149 fatalities in Mastung district (Express Tribune, July 16, 2018). The rich jihadist landscape of Pakistan offers more to IS and reduces the likelihood of factional issues inherent in making it a part of a larger *Wilayat* comprised of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asian States. IS has already been able to tap into the plethora of Islamist terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan and capitalized on their human and material resources.

There will certainly be implications for Pakistan and India. The security organizations of both countries need to reinvigorate their existing internal security apparatus. The IS branch in Pakistan is certainly more concerning, as IS-K has already been perpetrating acts of terrorism in the country since 2014. For Indian security policymakers, it is a matter of concern because of an ongoing Islamist insurgency in Indian Kashmir and rising radicalization in southern states. IS-K in Afghanistan has potential, and gained access to substantial resources when it settled in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, but consecutive U.S. drone strikes have not allowed the group to rapidly expand. The separation of the IS branch in Pakistan could lead to an expansion that would be much more difficult to contain than the branch in Afghanistan.

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Notes

[1] Hafiz Saeed Orakzai (killed July 2016), Abdul Haseeb Lgari (killed April 2017), Abdul Sayed Bajuari (killed July 2017) and Abu Saad Erhabi (killed Aug 2018).

[2] Discussions with a senior police officer of Punjab police on May 19, 2019.

A Neighbor's Dilemma: The Implications of the Libyan Crisis on Tunisia

James Pothecary

Introduction

In April, paramilitary forces loyal to the Libyan National Army (LNA)—the armed wing of the Tobruk administration—began its campaign to take the capital Tripoli from the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and its loose coalition of militia units (Africa Times, April 11). Fighting is ongoing, and GNA defenses are currently holding. While the effect Libya's endemic instability has had domestically has been well documented, there has been less analytical focus on the implications the escalation in violence has on Libya's western neighbor, Tunisia (Terrorism Monitor, April 5). Indeed, Tunisian defense officials explicitly responded to the campaign's commencement by stating it would "take all necessary measures" in the border provinces of Medenine and Tatouine (Middle East Monitor, April 6).

Implications

The collapse of a centralized Libyan security and law enforcement apparatus has led to a proliferation of non-state actors seizing control over small sections of territory in western Libya. This has led to an inability to police the Libyan side of the border and has provided militant groups with a reasonably safe zone to train, arm, and prepare to carry out attacks in Libya. Said Rezgui, who carried out the attack against tourists in Sousse in June 2015, trained at an Islamic State (IS) camp near Sabratha. The gunmen responsible for the Bardo Museum assault also attended this facility. As recently as March, three Jund al-Khalifa fighters were shot dead by Tunisian border guards while attempting to penetrate border defenses (Alaraby, March 7). The insecurity on the Libyan side, therefore, creates the conditions for militants to surveil, plan, and infiltrate Tunisia with relative ease, despite security forces' best efforts. Although at the time of writing information is still emerging over the network that carried out a series of suicide attacks in the capital on June 27, it is likely that it had some level of support from across the border (Alarabiya, June 27).

This complicated patchwork network of territorial control also complicates any attempts by Tunis to secure support from its Libyan counterparts. As territory changes hands and alliances shift, it is exceptionally challenging for Tunisian diplomatic and intelligence staff to maintain and update the necessary contacts, let alone secure support for border security. Indeed, checkpoints are valuable strategic areas, and the groups controlling them are likely to seek to acquire as much economic revenue as possible by extorting fees from those passing through, rather than controlling or checking them. This means that security will entirely be Tunisia's responsibility for the foreseeable future, as even if the LNA takes Tripoli it is unlikely it will prioritize securing the border areas until after it has consolidated its hold over vital oil infrastructure and ports.

The second consequence of the violence in Libya is the flow of refugees into Tunisia. Although the vast majority of Libyan refugees returned home following the end of the 2011 civil war, there has been a recent uptick in the number of people fleeing across the border due to the return of violence. In the event that LNA forces break through Tripoli's southern districts and intra-urban fighting breaks out in the city proper, there will be a further spike in the number of people fleeing across the border. Given Tunisia's political tensions and weak economy, even a relatively modest increase in refugee flows would prove a serious challenge for the government.

However, the most serious security risk the Libyan conflict poses to Tunisia is not individuals coming in, but a shutdown of trade across the border. Cross-border trade, both licit and illicit, is the primary economic activity in the southern border areas, which have been historically economically neglected by the government. Intermittent border closures and increased security deployments render this trade impossible to continue at the same levels. Protests regularly impact Tunisia and often start as small local issues that resonate with the wider population and have the potential to cripple normal business functions. Further restrictions at the borders will likely lead to demonstrations in Ben Guardane and other key border towns, which in turn have the potential to trigger major unrest, which is particularly destabilizing in the context of imminent elections.

Furthermore, the deprivation of economic opportunity could in turn lead to an increased susceptibility among the local population to sympathize, cooperate, or even directly join terrorist organizations. During the apex of IS' territorial control, there were over 5,000 Tunisians within its ranks, and despite numerous counterterrorism operations, IS and al-Qaeda both retain the domestic recruitment infrastructure to take advantage of rising unemployment and poverty for their own purposes.

Response

The Tunisian border has been well-secured over the past few years. Situated in a military buffer zone, the border is protected by physical infrastructure— trenches, observation posts, fences and towers—and with U.S. and German support, electronic surveillance measures including regular UAV flights. However, these are not deployed uniformly and there are multiple areas in the southern desert areas of Tatouine where militants can circumvent these checkpoints. Upgrading these insofar as is practical is undoubtedly a good start but does not solve the basic dilemma facing the Tunisian security establishment—reinforcing the border worsens the economic situation in the southern provinces and raises the specter of a worse security crisis than the one they seek to avoid.

The solution lies in balancing the two competing impulses; ensuring security while simultaneously minimizing disruption. Over the long term, the Tunisian government must invest in its southern provinces—improving educational and business opportunities and alleviating local perceptions that they are forgotten by their fellow citizens in the north. This would fundamentally change the political calculation. However, significant development is measured over years rather than months, and given Tunisia's ongoing economic issues, is not something that can realistically be achieved in any timeframe meaningful to the current crisis. As such, the balancing act must continue.

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US-Iran Tensions Overshadow Houthi Agenda in War in Yemen

Brian M. Perkins

Continued tensions between the United States and Iran have begun having second order effects on the war in Yemen. The war was, somewhat wrongfully, originally characterized as a proxy war with Iran, but the conflict is now more at risk of being driven in that direction than it ever has been before. While many recent Houthi attacks and security incidents in Yemen have coincided with the ongoing tensions, responding to them simply through the lens of Iranian puppeteering risks further escalation and foreign entanglement in Yemen that could make the "proxy war" description far more apt and any political solution even more elusive. The escalation of Houthi attacks does, however, indicate increased operational capabilities and the group's ability to sustain prolonged offensives. However, the Houthi's political goals remain their own.

Among the most notable recent developments directly linked to actors in Yemen have been the Houthi's downing of a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper, a cruise missile attack on Abha Airport and other Saudi infrastructure, and sporadic drone attacks. The level of Iranian involvement in the planning and execution of these attacks is still up for debate, but each demonstrates an increasing level of sophistication as well as the group's ability to sustain a campaign of military operations against Saudi Arabia.

These attacks follow a relatively steady trend in terms of target selection progression and the evolution of planning and tactics that has been evident over the past year or more. The Houthis have fired countless ballistic missiles at Saudi infrastructure over the past several years, with varying degrees of success, and their use of drones has been well documented for quite some time. The first attack on Abha airport on June 12, however, was allegedly a cruise missile, likely the Iranian Soumar—a modified version of the Russian Kh-55 air-launched cruise missile (al Jazeera, June 12). The attack marked only the second known time the Houthis have used a cruise missile, the first being the attempted strike on a nuclear plant in the UAE (Al-Arabiya, December 3, 2017). Similarly, the downing of the Reaper on June 6 demonstrates air defense capabilities generally above

what has been seen during the war. MQ-9's fly at a much higher altitude than the other aircraft that the Houthis have successfully shot down in the past (CENTCOM, June 16). The combination of tactics illustrates the variety of tools and methods the Houthis can use to persistently strike Saudi Arabia.

The attacks show an increased level of sophistication. The frequency at which the attacks have occurred recently—and while alarming given the timing—are not entirely unprecedented as their attacks have come in similar waves in the past and in direct response to Saudi war efforts and developments surrounding the embattled port city of Hodeidah. Similarly, their selection of targets is not entirely new and should not be viewed as unique to Iran's agenda. For instance, the Houthis have previously attempted to target airports—including King Khaled International in Riyadh—and critical infrastructure such as the desalination plant in Jazan, which has been the most targeted location in terms of Houthi missile attacks (al Jazeera, November 5 2017). The Houthi's intention of striking such targets is to continue pressuring the country and demonstrate the economic and human costs Saudi Arabia faces in hopes of pushing the country to realize how untenable it is to continue the war.

At present, there is no denying that Iran has provided material and technical support to the Houthis and that improved capabilities are linked to Iranian technology, but it remains a misnomer to label Yemen as a full-scale proxy war and few analysts believe Iran has actually been pulling the Houthi's strings. The uptick in attacks might be in response to stalling peace efforts and continued clashes in Hodeidah throughout May and June, as well as tit-for-tat operations by Saudi Arabia and its allies elsewhere in Yemen, as stated by Houthi officials as the reason for the attacks (Al-Arabiya, June 21). The escalation could also easily be the group's own decision to exploit the ongoing tensions by sending a warning that further foreign involvement in the region risks retribution and a broader, more detrimental conflict for all parties, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In fact, the UAE has reportedly begun withdrawing a substantial number of troops and military equipment from Yemen, potentially to begin eliminating itself from the Yemen equation while reinforcing its presence of troops at home.

It is easy to see how recent events viewed in the context of the attacks on the tankers in the Gulf of Oman and

Iran's downing of a U.S. Global Hawk surveillance drone near its coastline might paint a different picture of the Houthi's connection to Iran (CENTCOM, June 20). However, it is important to maintain a clear perspective on the Houthi's local agenda and goals. There is a real risk that these attacks, if viewed solely as being directed by Tehran, will alter the strategic calculus of the Saudi coalition and the United States and lead to a broader escalation or military miscalculation in Yemen.

Currently, the Houthis are still highly unlikely to take any direction from Tehran that does not benefit their interests or fit in line with their previous tactics. The escalating clashes around Hodeidah and elsewhere that have occurred concurrently to the rise in tensions cannot reasonably be reduced to Iranian involvement, as some have been initiated by Saudi forces. If the ongoing tensions lead U.S. policymakers to misinterpret Iran's influence over the Houthis and respond militarily in Yemen, the most likely risk is that Iran will double down on its support to the group and attempt to influence their decision making. There is no significant evidence to prove Tehran has been successful at directing the Houthis in the past. Doubling down, however, will further exacerbate the war in Yemen and make the conflict even more intractable. A strike on Iran—which no longer appears imminent given President Trump's cancellation of alleged plans to hit targets inside the country—would be more likely to manifest attacks by proxies in other countries that Iran has tighter control over as opposed to the Houthis (Asharq Al Aswat, June 21).

What is more likely than a strike against Iran is a U.S. response vis a vis the Houthis due to the perception that Tehran has directed the escalation of attacks. The response could come either through direct action or through added support to Saudi Arabia. An attack on the Houthis or bolstered support for the Kingdom would harden its position against the United States and dry up the group's previously stated willingness to engage with U.S. policymakers (VOA, April 14). While the Houthis might not take field-level directions from Tehran at their own expense, they would undoubtedly be accepting of an increase in weapons and technology transfers spurred by such action. An influx of weapons would assuredly be used to further the group's goal of striking Saudi Arabia, which in turn punishes the United States and continues the cycle.

Most observers agree that there is currently no viable military solution in Yemen that would not wreak further

havoc on a country already deemed the most significant humanitarian disaster in the world today. The Houthis have benefitted from Iranian weapons, but even if Tehran ceased shipments today they could sustain the conflict for the foreseeable future with what remains in their stockpile. It is unlikely that the U.S. or Saudi coalition can force an end to Iran's material support through military or security operations. The Houthi's ties with Iran have always seemingly been more about sustaining its military operations to achieve the group's own political goals rather than fulfilling Iran's agenda. The most viable way to prevent a deeper Iranian connection is through a political solution that ends in the Houthi's military needs. As such, it is critical that U.S.-Iran tensions do not overshadow the unique local dynamics of the conflict and push the conflict into deeper territory and the Houthis closer to Iran. Instead, it is necessary to deescalate in the region and continue efforts to reach a political solution.

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