

Terrorism Monitor

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MALDIVES: PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION FINDS PROMPT PROPOSED CHANGES TO ANTI-TERROR ACT

Brian Perkins

The Maldivian government introduced a sweeping new bill that would amend the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act as the country continues to grapple with rising radicalization and the prospect of returning fighters. The proposed bill came just days after the release of alarming findings by a presidential commission's inquiry into the deaths and disappearances of several prominent secularists, including journalist Ahmed Rilwan ([Maldives Independent](#), September 1).

The commission revealed the extent of al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) recruitment networks in the Maldives as well as the prominence of Maldivians within IS. The inquiry found that Maldivian extremists first established ties with al-Qaeda in 2008 before the group eventually split into two factions, one loyal to al-Qaeda and the other to IS. The IS group, which seems to currently be the most active, is led by Mohamed Ameen. Following the commission's findings, the United States designated Ameen as a key terrorist leader and recruiter for IS and

imposed targeted sanctions against him.

According to the commission's findings and the designation by the United States, Ameen began by recruiting Maldivians to fight alongside IS in Syria before beginning to send them to Afghanistan to fight with IS' local branch, Islamic State Khurasan (IS-K) ([Treasury.gov](#), September 10). Ameen and his network were reportedly holding around 10 recruitment sessions a week in the Maldivian capital, Male. Ameen is also believed to have been involved in the Sultan Park bombing that injured more than a dozen on September 29, 2017 and was arrested in Sri Lanka in 2011 and subsequently returned to the Maldives, where he was again released in May 2012 ([Minivan News](#), October 15, 2011).

The revelations regarding Ameen shed further light on the expansive IS recruitment network in the Maldives as well as the intelligence gaps and legislative flaws that allowed him to go free and continue to operate. The new bill seeks to correct these deficiencies, namely by criminalizing speech and forms of expression in support of terrorist organizations, and criminalizing the act of facilitating any individual's travel to fight alongside a terrorist group or any unsanctioned travel to countries specifically designated by the president and national

security council ([Maldives Independent](#), September 12). Additionally, the bill seeks to address the issue of repatriating fighters and their families, focusing on individual threat assessments and de-radicalization programs.

While the new legislation seemingly addresses many fundamental flaws that allowed militants such as Ameen to be released and operate recruitment networks, Maldivian citizens have already raised concerns over whether or not the government can fairly enforce the proposed laws or if they will increase the number of reported abuses and arbitrary detentions. Additionally, there has yet to be any announcement of a comprehensive security plan to address the alarming rate of radicalization or any notable successes in disrupting the expansive recruitment network.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

AFGHANISTAN: AL-QAEDA'S GROWTH ALONGSIDE TALIBAN FACILITATES MILITANTS IN KASHMIR

Brian Perkins

The long running and fraught peace negotiations with the Taliban appear to be faltering as the Taliban continues to conduct mass casualty attacks across the country and the U.S. government distances itself from the process. Internal turmoil within the Trump administration has undoubtedly affected the process and Trump declared the peace talks dead on September 9. The Taliban is currently at its strongest since the beginning of the war, and without any further steps to reduce the conflict, will continue to make gains across the country, which in turn has increasingly allowed al-Qaeda to regroup.

Despite the widespread notion that al-Qaeda is on the decline and that Afghanistan is no longer significant to the group, the country is likely to still prove key to its survival and to its global brand. Al-Qaeda still maintains its incredibly close relationship with the Taliban and Haqqani Network and has been reportedly regrouping and growing in Badakhshan, Kunar, Zabul, Helmand, and Kandahar (See [Terrorism Monitor](#), June 12). Additionally, there have been reports of al-Qaeda taking in foreign fighters in Afghanistan. The location of al-Qaeda's safe havens clearly correlates to the areas most tightly controlled by the Taliban.

Al-Qaeda is not only using the havens to regroup, grow, and communicate, but are also using Taliban cover to facilitate operations and logistics within Afghanistan as well as across the Indian subcontinent. Most notable of these connections is that between al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and its Kashmiri branch Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGH), whose leader Zakir Musa was killed in May (See [MLM](#), July 31). Following his death, al-Qaeda announced Hameed Lelhari (a.k.a Haroon Abbas) would take Musa's place and emphasized the strong connection between its Afghan members and its Kashmiri front as well as relations with the Taliban ([The Hindu](#), June 8). There have been multiple reports of Kashmiri militants fighting alongside al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, including Abdul Haseeb al-Kashmiri, who was killed in Ghazni in June ([Twitter.com/RosannaMrtnz](#), June 22). Ghazni is also where Afghan forces uncovered a large weapons cache shared by the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Afghanistan's ministry of defense claimed that the materials had entered from a "neighboring country"—avoiding directly

stating Pakistan—and that al-Qaeda explosive experts were aiding the Taliban ([Twitter.com/MoDAfghanistan](https://twitter.com/MoDAfghanistan), September 14).

The conflict in Kashmir and al-Qaeda's resurgence in Afghanistan, particularly along the Afghanistan-Pakistan, are seemingly primed to increase in the coming months as peace negotiations falter and the Taliban grows stronger. Further, there is evidence of the cross-border movement of weapons and militants spanning from Kashmir across Pakistan and into Afghanistan. As the war in Afghanistan drags on, al-Qaeda will only gain further ground by drawing in more foreign fighters and providing key support to militants in Kashmir, a region primed for jihadist activity.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

Cairo's Struggle to Contain North Sinai Militancy

Jemimah Hudson

On July 18, militants executed four individuals in the town of Bir al-Abd, in North Sinai, for alleged cooperation with the Egyptian security services. One day later, at least two people, including a civilian and a member of the security services, were killed in an attack on a security checkpoint in Sheikh Zuwaid, near the border of the Gaza Strip and Egypt ([The Algermeiner](#), July 18). Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for both attacks, which were carried out by its local affiliate, Wilayat Sinai, formerly known as Ansar Jerusalem (AJ). These incidents followed a similar spate of violence one month earlier. On June 4, militants killed eight Egyptian security personnel in an attack on a security checkpoint west of al-Arish, the capital of the North Sinai governorate, timed to coincide with the holiday of Eid, marking the end of Ramadan ([The National](#), June 5). IS subsequently claimed responsibility for this assault. Local reports the following week said that militants had kidnapped at least fourteen civilians on the highway leading to al-Arish ([Middle East Eye](#), June 14). Later that month, militants also killed seven police officers near the same city ([Al-Arabiya](#), June 26).

The rapid succession of attacks in this period were most likely a response to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's call in April for intensified operations. IS' mainland Egypt affiliate has weaker capabilities than Wilayat Sinai has in North Sinai, and so the group will have focused these renewed efforts on their namesake region.

Increased Insurgency and Operation Sinai

Insurgency in North Sinai has increased significantly since 2013, with militants looking to exploit that instability that followed the military coup that ousted former President Mohamed Morsi. In November 2017, militants killed around 300 individuals in an attack on a Sufi mosque in Bir al-Abed, North Sinai—the deadliest ever attack in Egypt ([Haaretz](#), November 25, 2017). IS did not issue a claim of responsibility, although its local affiliate was credibly behind the attack. Local reports suggested the group had warned civilians ahead of the attack not to attend the mosque, which is frequented by members of the security services. Militants also reportedly bran-

dished IS' black flag during the assault ([Ahram](#), November 25, 2017).

In response to this insurgency, Cairo launched Comprehensive Operation Sinai in February 2018, shortly before the Egyptian presidential election in March. Wilayat Sinai carried out a number of retaliatory attacks—including an assault on the Gouda 3 checkpoint near al-Arish airport in February that killed and injured fifteen Egyptian soldiers—to show that the major military operation had not damaged its capabilities and to maintain its credibility ([Mada](#), February 21). Meanwhile, the military's aggressive counter-insurgency tactics heightened local resentment toward Cairo. Operation Sinai, for instance, involved the displacement of thousands of civilians living in the region and contributed to longstanding tensions between local tribes and security services. Wilayat Sinai has in turn been able to capitalize on such tensions to increase support for its insurgency.

Challenge to al-Sisi's Presidency

Wilayat Sinai intends for its insurgency to undermine confidence in the security services and, in turn, embarrass and destabilize the central government. The group also hopes to damage the tourism industry, Egypt's main source of foreign revenue, by sustaining its campaign of violence. The effectiveness of this strategy was demonstrated when militants downed a Russian passenger aircraft leaving Sharm el-Sheik in October 2015, killing 224 people. The incident contributed to both a significant drop in visitor numbers and foreign currency shortages.

There is evidence to suggest the government is taking steps to limit instability in the region, in addition to its ongoing security crackdown on militants. Cairo has, for instance, launched a number of development initiatives in the Sinai peninsula, while coming up with plans for free trade zones in al-Arish, Rafah, and Nuweib, which it hopes will stimulate job creation. Last month, the planning ministry announced infrastructure and development funding of \$316 billion, or (EGP 5.23 billion) for the Sinai covering the 2019-2020 fiscal year—a 75 percent increase in funding from the last financial year ([Al-Monitor](#), September 1). This will help provide opportunities for the local population, making it harder for Wilayat Sinai to exploit credible socio-economic grievances among Sinai residents. It will, however, take several years for Sinai residents to feel the benefits of such funding, and the ongoing fighting between the Egyptian military and insurgents will delay the construction and implementation of planned projects.

Containing militancy in North Sinai will, therefore, remain a major long-term challenge for President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, with recent changes to the Egyptian constitution meaning that he is set to remain in power until 2034. Any inability on al-Sisi's part to prevent major attacks in the Sinai would damage his security credentials, and increase the risk of rivals emerging to challenge his position, particularly from within the military establishment. Wilayat Sinai will aspire to attack high-profile targets, such as places of worship, airports, and infrastructure—including a new gas pipeline between Israel and Egypt expected to be fully operational in November. Militants' limited capabilities and ongoing security operations will, however, foil the majority of significant plots, and as such the primary targets of attacks will remain security personnel and other government interests.

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Insurgent Violence and Growing Russian Involvement: The Tense Elections in Mozambique

Brian M. Perkins

As violence continues in northern Mozambique, a series of important developments that will undoubtedly affect the ongoing insurgency are beginning to unfold. The country is gearing up for its October 15 general elections, which will likely see the ruling party, the Mozambican Liberation Front (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*—FRELIMO) and President Filipe Nyusi retain control for another term. Meanwhile, the country has just signed energy and security deals with Russia, which will see increased Russian military and economic involvement in a region already disenfranchised by resident's lack of involvement in governance and economic development.

The combination of a politically fraught and likely violent elections coupled with foreign involvement, primarily in the restive northern province of Cabo Delgado, are likely to have a lasting effect on the security landscape in the country.

Significance of General Elections

Mozambique's general elections mark several significant shifts in the country's political landscape, even more so if incumbent President Nyusi does not secure another term. The election marks the first time that the country will vote for the governors of its 10 provinces. Previously, the president directly appointed provincial governors, a system that created significant animosity as the governors were accused of only representing the interests of the Maputo-based government rather than that of locals.

This change was introduced as part of a decentralization effort that stemmed from negotiations through the Maputo Peace and National Reconciliation Agreement between FRELIMO and the National Resistance of Mozambique (*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*—RENAMO). However, despite the newly signed peace accord, RENAMO's military junta has refused to lay down its arms in opposition while vowing to conduct attacks

and prevent the elections from taking place ([Club of Mozambique](#), September 8). RENAMO leader Ossufo Momade signed the agreement on behalf of his party and has stated the group will begin integrating into the Mozambican military, but rival leader Mariano Nhongo has stated he does not accept Momade's authority or the agreement, raising fear the party has lost control of its military wing.

The election presents both positive and potentially devastating outcomes. If FRELIMO and RENAMO can successfully rein in the splintering RENAMO junta, there is an opportunity for the country's provinces to gain greater political consensus and control that could potentially see profits from development reinvested in the provinces in which the money is generated. A key driver of conflict and tensions in Cabo Delgado has been the lack of political representation and the fact that windfalls from oil exploration would inevitably be diverted to enrich the Maputo-based political core and other choice provinces.

Conversely, a return of violence at the hands of RENAMO's military junta could plunge the country back into widespread political turmoil, which would further open the door for the insurgency of terrorist group Ansar al-Sunna in Cabo Delgado. Additionally, such instability would create an easier path for the regional Islamic State (IS) affiliate Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) to gain a stronger foothold in the country, after recently claiming responsibility for multiple attacks.

Russian Military and Economic Involvement

Against the backdrop of what is already shaping up to be a contentious and potentially violent election, the Mozambican government has signed a number of key agreements with Russia amid strengthening relations between the two nations. Russia's relationship with Mozambique dates back to the Soviet Union, which supported FRELIMO during the Mozambican War of Independence and subsequently against RENAMO. In August, President Nyusi announced that Moscow had agreed to forgive 95 percent of its debt and that Russia would work to increase investment in Mozambique. The two countries also signed an energy deal that involves Russian oil producer Rosneft as well as a military agreement ([Tass](#), August 22). While the oil blocks already won by Rosneft are at the Angoche and Zambezi deltas, it is highly likely the producer will also end up involved in the oil blocks off the coast of Cabo Delgado.

In terms of the military partnership, reports have already begun to emerge of Russian military equipment and personnel arriving in Mozambique, despite the Russian Embassy denying any Russian military presence. The government, however, signed a resolution allowing Russian military vessels to dock at Mozambican ports in late August and by mid-September reports began to emerge of Russian military equipment being present, including at Nacala Port, Nampula Province and in Mueda and Palma, Cabo Delgado Province—Palma is one of the areas most affected by the Ansar al-Sunna insurgency and is the base of Cabo Delgado's offshore LNG operations ([Twitter.com/Felix_Nuno](https://twitter.com/Felix_Nuno), September 8; [Twitter.com/Jasminechic00](https://twitter.com/Jasminechic00), September 19; [Opais](#), August 27). While reports of Russian military personnel cannot be independently verified, the security agreements do pave the way for the Russian military to train and advise Mozambican forces, and Russia has made similar moves into countless other African nations.

Conclusion

Preventing violence during the run up to the general election will be essential to the success of the recent peace accord between RENAMO and FRELIMO. If the military junta derails the peace accord and the elections, a return to widespread violence could set the country back decades and open further in-roads for IS. Meanwhile, the results of the election of president and provincial governors will set the tone for what to expect out of the political and security landscape. While the results are unlikely to bring about any rapid changes, the appointment of a governor willing to engage in dialogue and improve community development in Cabo Delgado could open future avenues that could potentially prevent the insurgency from worsening. A significant victory for RENAMO could be a result of rising suspicion of the burgeoning relationship with Russia, which came about during FRELIMO's reign. At the same time, however, RENAMO officials have suggested engaging in dialogue and working toward an agreement with Ansar al-Sunna ([Club of Mozambique](#), March 13).

Meanwhile, Russia's increasing economic and military involvement in Mozambique could further stoke animosity against the government and fan the flames of the insurgency by furthering local claims of local resources being exploited for foreign gain and the enrichment of the government. Additionally, there have already been countless claims of military abuses in Cabo Delgado and a Mozambican military emboldened by foreign involve-

ment, training, and equipment could see an even more violent crackdown affecting civilians and ultimately serving to boost recruitment of insurgent groups.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

Baluch Raji Ajohi Sangar: Emergence of a New Baluch Separatist Alliance

Farhan Zahid

The surfacing of a new Baluch separatist organization in Pakistan's terrorism-ridden Baluchistan province marks a major new development. The newly established organization, Baluch Raji Ajohi Sangar (BRAS) (in English, Baluch National Freedom Movement), is an alliance of three Baluch nationalist-separatist terrorist groups—Baluchistan Republican Army (BRA), Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), and Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF) ([CSCR](#), April 18). It is the first alliance ever formed by Baluch terrorist organizations.

BRAS is reportedly the brainchild of Dr. Allah Nazar Baluch, the leader of BLF. The combination of the various nationalist-separatist groups' forces was a long-time dream of Nazar Baluch. He held a meeting with the various groups prior to the alliance's formal announcement on November 10, 2018. Prior to BRAS' announcement, the slain leader of the BLA's Majeed Brigade (suicide squad) Aslam Baluch (a.k.a. Achu) announced the formation of an alliance between the BLA and BLF. BRA formally joined the alliance in June 2019, under the Nazar Baluch's leadership. [1]

The primary reason for the alliance was a growing feeling among Baluch nationalist-separatist groups that rifts among them only weakened their insurgent movement. Additionally, the alliance allows the major Baluch nationalist-separatist terrorist groups to share and pool resources. The groups now intend to share weapons, equipment, human resources, intelligence sources, safe havens, and other materials to conduct operations against security forces and Chinese working on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects in a more effective manner. The Baluch nationalist-separatist groups have not been able to coordinate their efforts because of the geographic vulnerabilities and different areas of operations of all of these organizations. After joining hands together, these groups assessed that an alliance will result in better operational performance.

Aims, Ideology, and Areas of Operation

Apart from Nazar Baluch, Bashir Zeb of BLA, Gulzar Imam of BRA, and Akhtar Nadeem of BLF are perceived to be commanding the alliance. Nazar Baluch acts as a patron and the main mastermind of the alliance. Baluch Khan is the official spokesperson of the alliance. Little is known about the leaders other than Nazar Baluch, who commands the BLF, one of the oldest insurgent groups in the Baluch nationalist-separatist movement, having formed in 1964.

BRAS's ideology revolves around establishing a separate Baluch state and not allowing outside powers (including both China and Pakistan) to extract resources from Baluchistan's territory. Their nationalist-separatism is influenced by Marxist-leftist ideology.

BRAS militants operate in the southwestern portion of Baluchistan—along the Arabian Sea and Iranian border—and have safe havens in Kacha, DG Khan, and Koh Suleman. Some militants of BRAS operate mainly from Iran in the far south Mekran division of the province. Nazar Baluch operates from Veish, along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and from the Afghan city of Kandahar. [2]

BRAS' primary intended targets are Chinese workers and CPEC projects in Baluchistan. The terrorist alliance has also targeted both military and paramilitary security force personnel near the Makran coast. Individually, these groups have faced significant challenges as they have been isolated over large swaths of territory in Baluchistan, creating difficulties in coordinating attacks against security forces outside of their primary areas of operation. Logistical issues and supply lines have also been a notable challenge that will be improved by combining resources.

Since its formation, BRAS has perpetrated four major acts of terrorism.

- On December 14, 2018, an ambush on paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) convoy in Kech resulted in the death of 10 personnel ([Dawn](#), December 15, 2018).
- On February 16, 2019, an ambush on an FC convoy in Panjgur district killed 6 FC personnel ([Business Standard](#), February 20).

- On April 18, 2019, an attack on a bus in Ormara killed 14 members of the army and navy ([Samaa News](#), April 20).

- In early July, militants kidnapped 8 people in Turbat district to extort a ransom. The victims are still being held captive ([Pakistan Today](#), July 6).

Relations With Other Terrorist Organizations

BRAS militants have sporadically engaged in violent skirmishes with Jaish al-Adl—a Salafi-jihadist terrorist group in Iran’s Sistan and Baluchistan province—along the border of Pakistan and Iran. Two of the BRAS member groups, BLA and BLF, are beneficiaries of Iranian support and consider Jaish al-Adl its enemy because it conducts terrorist attacks against Iranian security forces. Blogs maintained by BRAS supporters on social media are highly critical of Jaish al-Adl and its tilt toward Pakistan. The clashes and discord between BRAS and Jaish al-Adl also stem from underlying ideological differences. BRAS is a left-leaning nationalist-separatist militant organization whereas Jaish al-Adl is an anti-Iranian Sunni-Islamist terrorist group. BRAS considers Jaish al-Adl to be a threat because it is dividing the Baluch youth on religious grounds.

BRAS generally maintains cordial relations with other terrorist organizations working in Baluchistan. The level of relations the group enjoys with the local Islamic State affiliate, Islamic State Khurasan (IS-K), is unclear. IS-K has a strong base in some southern districts of Baluchistan and neighboring Afghanistan. Lashkar-e-Jahngvi (LeJ), a violent sectarian terrorist organization is also based in Baluchistan and time and again targets the Shia community living in Baluchistan. The BLA group within BRAS does enjoy working relations with LeJ. [3]

Conclusion

The emergence of a new Baluch nationalist-separatist organization in the restive Baluchistan province is a matter of serious concern for policymakers due to the significant security and economic implications. The government of Pakistan proscribed the group as a banned terrorist organization on July 26. The BRAS alliance showcases the surge of Baluch nationalist-separatist tendencies and a pragmatic shift for previously disparate groups. The pooling of resources will not only help the terrorist groups to conduct more, and likely increasingly sophisticated, attacks but will also significantly improve

the group’s ability to attract new recruits. Pakistani security and law enforcement agencies need to act quickly and decisively to coordinate efforts to deter and counter further terrorist attacks before the alliance can grow any stronger.

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Notes

[1] Telephonic discussions with senior police officer of Baluchistan Police, September 12, 2019.

[2] Discussions with senior security officials, April, 12, 2019.

[3] Discussions with security official on the issue of BRAS, September 12, 2019.