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VOLUME X, ISSUE 11 | NOVEMBER 2019

Al-Shabaab Recruiter and DusitD2 Attack Planner Fawaz Ahmed Hamdun

Sunguta West

As security experts maintain their watch over East African football fields because of youth recruitment into terrorism, the figure of Fawaz Ahmed Hamdun has become the object of particular focus.

On September 28, a multi-security agency team smoked the youthful terrorist suspect out of his hideout in Majengo, a low-income majority Muslim settlement in Mombasa. He was detained by police in the coastal city ([Daily Nation](#), October 1).

Before his arrest, security agencies had listed Hamdun as one of Kenya’s most wanted terrorists. He is believed to have played a key role in the planning and execution of Nairobi’s DusitD2 office complex terrorist attack over January 15-16 of this year.

Al-Shabaab, the Somalia-based al-Qaeda affiliate in East Africa, took responsibility for the attack, which killed at least 21 people. The five terrorists who stormed the upmarket complex in

the Westlands area were also killed ([Tuko News](#), October 1).

Hamdun is believed to have facilitated the re-entry into Kenya of Mahir Khalid Riziki, the suicide bomber who blew himself up at the entrance of the complex.

Like Hamdun, Riziki had been on the Kenyan police’s list of most wanted terrorist suspects since 2014. His face had been emblazoned on “wanted dead or alive” billboards. The young suicide bomber sneaked out of Kenya in 2014, when he was barely 20, and sneaked back in early in 2019 to participate in the DusitD2 terrorist attack.

Riziki lived in the Majengo area—like Hamdun—and attended prayers at the Masjid Musa Mosque. The two were allegedly influenced by two radical imams at the mosque, Shaykh Aboud Rogo and Shaykh Abubakar Sharif, a.k.a. Makaburi. The two shaykhs, who were shot dead in 2012 and 2014 respectively, were suspected of being ideologues who directed al-Shabaab terrorist cells in Nairobi and Mombasa.

The shaykhs’ followers in the coastal region went underground after their death, later emerging as Jaysh al-Ayman, a Kenyan al-Shabaab cell active

in Lamu County's Boni forest ([Standard Digital](#), January 21).

In the lead up to the security agencies' raid in 2014, the mosque, at the direction of the two imams, had become a hotbed of extremism. The government also said the mosque had turned into a breeding ground for young terrorists like Hamdun who were being funneled into Somalia ([Daily Nation](#), October 1; [Citizen Digital](#), January 19).

In September, Hamdun was blamed for the disappearance of a youth known as Salim Fariz Hadin who, it is believed, had traveled to Somalia to join the ranks of al-Shabaab. Before Hadin's disappearance, he was seen walking the streets of Mombasa with Hamdun. His family made reports to human rights organizations and circulated posters of their missing family member on September 29.

Before turning into a lethal terrorist and recruiter, Hamdun was renowned for his exploits as a star footballer in the coastal region. Between 2008 and 2012, as a student at Kikoan Primary school, he helped his team win many football trophies. He then played for Korea FC and lived in old Mombasa town. After becoming famous, he dropped out of school to play football full time.

But a turning point came in 2012, when he went off the grid after moving from Mombasa's old town to the Majengo slums. It is believed that, while living in Majengo, Hamdun was radicalized at the Masjid Musa Mosque and began recruiting for al-Shabaab.

After that, he recruited for al-Shabaab through the Ramadan Kufungwa terrorist network. The network is named and associated with an al-Shabaab diehard named Ramadan Hamisi Kufungwa ([K24news](#), October 6).

Kufungwa, together with Abdifatah Abubakar Ahmed and the late Ahmed Iman Ali, were in 2015 identified as key al-Shabaab recruiters in

Kenya, especially the coastal region of Mombasa. The trio was accused of luring youth into the group using promises of huge cash amounts and non-existent scholarships, police reported in 2015. The three were said to exert immense influence on the coastal youth. ([Standard Digital](#), August 18, 2015).

Hamdun's arrest followed the killing of three other terrorist suspects, who were planning to carry out an attack in the coastal region. According to the police, seven terrorists had been sent by al-Shabaab to strike the Kenya Ports Authority, Moi International Airport, and the new Standard Gauge Railway terminus. All these sites are in Mombasa and are government installations.

Hamdun's arrest sheds light on a new crop of terrorists in Kenya and East Africa. While al-Shabaab is seeking to widen its pool of terrorist recruits and attacks in more nations, it is targeting young people. This gives the militant group confidence in the future of its insurgency.

Despite al-Shabaab's recent focus, increased border surveillance and timely intelligence sharing could disrupt and curtail this new threat.

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Abu Zainab al-Lami—The Mastermind Behind the Bloody Crackdown in Iraq

Rafid Jaboori

The ongoing protests in Baghdad and in the predominantly Shia areas of southern Iraq are unprecedented in both their scale and the degree of violence they were confronted with by the authorities. The Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia militias and its umbrella organization, the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), have been accused of spearheading the crackdown and killing hundreds of protesters and injuring thousands. Abu Zainab al-Lami—the head of the PMU security department—is accused of playing a key role in the campaign to repress the protests. Although the vast majority of the protesters are Shia, the demonstrations were seen by Tehran and its allies in Iraq as being a part of a grand conspiracy against Iran and its allies in the Middle East ([Arabi21](#), October 30).

The Iraqi authorities have responded to the protests with heavy handed policies since the first days of the demonstrations. In order not to surrender key areas in central Baghdad, snipers were deployed on top of buildings and masked men were seen operating within the ranks of the security forces. Both groups were believed to be militiamen who received orders from al-Lami ([Independent Arabia](#), October 17).

Al-Lami's role was reportedly bigger than the direct involvement of his men in clashes with protesters. In his capacity as head of security in the PMU, he has the power to supervise the activities of powerful militia leaders. This authority has made him into one of the most powerful person within the PMU. His power also comes from his direct link to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) commander general Qassim Soleimani. It is

believed that al-Lami is responsible for the security details of Soleimani whenever he visits Iraq ([Aliraqnet](#), October 8).

Abu Zainab al-Lami's real name is Hussein Faleh. He is a member of the militia Kata'ib Hizballah in Iraq (KHI), led by Jamal Jafar al-Ibrahim (better known by his nickname Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis). KHI and al-Muhandis were designated as threats to coalition forces and stability in Iraq by the U.S. Treasury in 2009 ([U.S. Treasury Department](#), July 2, 2009).

Yet when the PMU was formed in 2014, al-Muhandis became its deputy commander of the PMU and al-Lami its head of security. Until the recent protest crisis, al-Lami's name was rarely mentioned in the media. Unlike other leaders of the PMU groups who publicize their activities, give interviews, and frequently make fiery statements, al-Lami avoided the media like any typical intelligence professional.

The government of the Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi has not accepted responsibility for the killing of the protesters. The PMU also denied any involvement in the killing of the protesters, but its leaders warned that they were ready to crush what they saw as a conspiracy. Al-Lami is reported to be in charge of this mission. Soleimani himself came to Baghdad as soon as the protests broke out to lead the efforts to repress them. His tools to do that were the Shia militias and his confidant al-Lami, who has power and influence over the commanders of those militias ([Al-Arabiya](#), October 31).

On the tactical level as a member of the KHI, al-Lami is an expert in forming and commanding small groups that operate separately to achieve certain objectives in various locations, a tactic the militia used against the U.S.-led coalition forces during the Iraq war. The same tactic has been used during the ongoing

protests, but this time it is being used against protesters instead of organized militaries. It has not been as effective in stopping the protests and has still resulted in significant casualties.

In addition to the snipers and killing squads operating in Baghdad and the southern provinces, al-Lami's men also launched a campaign to gather intelligence about key figures in the leaderless protest movement. Activists who were believed to be instrumental in the protest movement in Baghdad and elsewhere were kidnapped or assassinated. Protesters and Iraqi security forces accuse the militias, and al-Lami and his associates in particular, of being behind the campaign ([Al-Quds](#), October 6).

Al-Lami is based in Baghdad and is known in its affluent quarters as someone who loves to socialize in luxurious hotels. Business people, who understand the power of the militias, often try to establish and maintain good relations with him. He is believed to have accumulated personal wealth by providing protection or using his power to take over expensive properties.

Conclusion

The speculation that there is a growing rivalry between al-Lami and Muhandis is likely to be exaggerated. Al-Muhandis has historical ties to Iran and he is and will likely always be one of the most trusted figures in the IRGC-QF circles. In fact, al-Lami owes his very position to al-Muhandis. In his mid-sixties and involved in military activities, al-Muhandis needed a trusted person to take over the tasks that require hands on supervision, such as imposing discipline and commitment within the PMU's several militias and protecting senior figures like Soleimani. But as al-Muhandis heads to retirement, al-Lami, believed to be in his early forties, is in the best position to succeed him, whether on top of the KHI or the PMU. He was chosen to be the head of intelligence in the interior ministry after the

formation of prime minister Abdul-Mahdi's government last year, but political turmoil meant that his appointment had to wait ([24.ae](#), October 17).

As long as he maintains and consolidates his links to Soleimani and influential parties in Iran, he will be in a good position. The protest movement succeeded, with the help of Iraq's most senior cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to force Abdul-Mahdi to declare that he would resign. Still they are unlikely to change the whole regime in Iraq as none of the parties that have real influence—namely the United States, Iran, and Sistani—want such an outcome. That means the power of the militias will not be shaken easily. But al-Lami will still be tested. Recent media reports suggest that leaking his name as a prime suspect in the crackdown had actually come from within the PMU in order to save the reputation of more high ranking politicians like Falih al-Fayadh, head of the PMU and a national security advisor ([Ultra Iraq](#), October 20).

If al-Lami is not presented as a scapegoat for the regime and survives the ongoing crisis, he could emerge as one of the most prominent figures in a new generation of militia leaders in Iraq.

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ARRESTED: Islamic State's Maldivian Mole Mohamad Ameen

Animesh Roul

In a significant turn of events, on October 23 Maldivian security agencies arrested Mohamad Ameen, an Islamist militant recruiter associated with Islamic State (IS). His arrest came around a month after the Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances named him as the leader of an IS-linked group operating in the Maldives. Ameen's arrest came as a surprise for many in the region, as successive governments in the Maldives had earlier failed to act against a homegrown Islamist-criminal gang nexus and radicalized Maldivians traveling abroad for jihad in Syria and Afghanistan.

A week after his name emerged in the Commission's September 2019 report, the U.S. Department of Treasury added Ameen's name to its terrorist list and imposed sanctions on him. The listing noted that he had "materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, IS-Khorasan (IS-K)." ([U.S. Treasury OFAC](#), September 10).

Since 2016, Maldivian governments intermittently attempted to have a robust national policy to prevent rising violent extremism in the Indian Ocean archipelago. However, successive governments in the Maldives often downplayed the threat posed by jihadist groups influencing domestic Islam and groups enticing Maldivians to participate in conflicts and terrorist activities abroad. This lackadaisical posture toward the growing menace of domestic extremism has changed drastically after a series of targeted threats and

Islamist-inspired killings in the country in the last several years.

An empowered Presidential Commission under Husnu al-Suood confirmed in early September 2019 that both al-Qaeda and IS are active in the country and have been recruiting fighters for the Syrian and Afghan conflict zones. The Commission's interim report specifically named Mohamed Ameen as the leader of the IS-affiliated group and Mohamed Mazeed as the leader of the al-Qaeda faction in the Maldives. According to the report, a split in the al-Qaeda-linked emerged within the jihadist group in June 2014. While one faction supported al-Qaeda and its affiliate Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly, al-Nusra front) in Syria, the other faction pledged allegiance to Islamic State led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Both the factions used the al-Furqan and al-Noor mosques in the capital Male as centers of jihadist activities, including for the recruitment of radicalized Maldivians and in order to send them to fight in Syria ([Maldives Independent](#), September 1).

Though detailed information about Ameen's activities and his networks in the Maldives is sketchy and still emerging, available information suggests that his involvement in terrorism in the country dates back to September 2007, when the first-ever terrorist bombing took place in Male. A crude improvised explosive device (IED) explosion injured several foreign nationals in Sultan Park in the capital, including tourists from China, Japan, and the United Kingdom. The attack was clearly targeted against the country's flourishing tourism industry and its supposed un-Islamic practices that diluted the local Islamic culture. A large-scale crackdown across the country prompted extremists to flee, mostly to Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Ameen, who was one of the suspected militants involved in the Sultan Park bombing, fled to Pakistan before the incident. However, a subsequent Interpol red

notice helped locate and capture him in Sri Lanka in 2011, when he entered that country with a forged passport ([Edition, October 24](#)). He was intercepted at Payagala, Sri Lanka on the Galle road with two fake Maldivian passports as well as a Pakistani passport in his possession ([Minivan News Archive](#), October 15, 2011). This arrest did not last long, as the Maldivian criminal court set him free from police custody in May 2012 “on the condition that he not get involved in any terrorist activities in the country, and he would not leave the country.” ([Minivan News Archive](#), May 12, 2012).

Now in his mid-30s (he was born in May 1984), Ameen was reportedly educated in Male’s Majeediyya school and went on to become the school prefect in 1997 at the age of 13. What happened after his schooling and how he entered the world of Islamist extremism remains a mystery. Ameen is said to have joined the little-known Maldivian extremist group, Jama’ath-ul Muslimeen (JuM), which was sympathetic to al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Pakistan. At least two of JuM’s leaders, Asif Ibrahim and Ali Jaleel, have tried to establish JuM’s foothold in Maldives, though unsuccessfully. Like Ameen, Ali Jaleel also studied in the prestigious Majeediyya school. He died in Pakistan in late May 2009 when he carried a suicide attack on Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) headquarters in Lahore ([Express Tribune](#), March 6, 2013). It is intriguing to note that the same Majeediyya school that produced some of the most famous Maldivians—including five of the country’s presidents—also includes Islamist extremists like Ameen and Jaleel on its list of alumni.

According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Ameen was an active recruiter for IS until April 2019. He and his associates held regular recruitment sessions under the guise of Islamic classes in Male. He even used his house as a base

for recruitment and indoctrination activities ([U.S. Treasury](#), September 10). One of the interesting facts is that Ameen and his followers recruited people from various Maldivian criminal gangs and enticed them to join IS’s jihad. A specific case mentioned by the U.S. Treasury Department shows a lot about his position in the IS ranks. Ameen reportedly recruited and sent a Maldivian national to work in Afghanistan for the IS-Khurasan branch for a monthly pay of \$700, specifically to translate Islamist literature for Ameen back in Maldives. ([U.S. Treasury](#), September 10).

Ameen and his group were also found to be behind a spate of robberies in the capital, including the theft of approximately \$149,000 (2.3 million Maldivian rufiyaa) in March 2019. In this daring daylight robbery, some four men attacked an Indian national and fled with the cash near the State Bank of India branch in Male ([Maldives Independent](#), March 11; [Maldives Independent](#), September 1).

The Maldivian security and political establishment have consistently overlooked various signs of IS’ burgeoning influence in the country. IS announced the establishment of a Maldives branch on the group’s Facebook page in the last week of July 2014. In the following months, IS flags were hoisted in the capital’s Raalhugandu area and used as banners and placards during a protest march against Israel’s Operation Protective Edge in Gaza. In September that year, hundreds of people marched in Male carrying IS black flags and calling for enforcement of Islamic Shariah ([Minivan News Archive](#), September 06, 2014; [Twitter.com/hisaanhussain](#), August 2, 2014). In subsequent months and years, news emerged of Maldivians fighting and dying alongside radical Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq (both for al-Qaeda and IS) intermittently, leaving the

government befuddled and clueless ([Minivan Archive](#), October 23, 2014; [Minivan News Archive](#), January 08, 2015). Only then did the Sunni Muslim-majority South Asian country realize that a flourishing, grassroots radical Islamist surge was underway in its own backyard. This situation ultimately prompted the current government to list some 17 terrorist groups under the “Terrorism Prevention Act” in September 2019. This list includes IS, al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), among others ([The Edition](#), September 20).

Recently, a number of Maldivian fighters and their families surrendered to the Afghan government in the country’s eastern Nangarhar province. This news has reinforced the fact that a robust IS network was in operation in Maldives and that Ameen was at the center of the IS operations in the country ([The Sun](#), November 20). More information about Ameen’s support system and his work for IS in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan is expected to emerge as investigations into IS’s influence in the country continues. It is imperative that the security agencies unravel Ameen’s deep-rooted recruitment network in the troubled island nation.

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The Commander of Hezbollah’s Second Front Threatening Israel—Hajj Hasheem

Andrew Devereux

Since the start of the Syrian civil war, Iran’s expanding presence in southwestern Syria has been apparent, building upon its material capabilities and networks. Aiding Tehran to this end has been various proxy groups, with Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed political and militant organization primarily based in Lebanon, at the heart of operations. Hezbollah was one of the main actors that fought in defense of President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, providing logistical and practical support to the pro-government forces ([Asharq Al-Aswat](#), January 12).

With the civil war allowing Hezbollah troops to entrench themselves in territorially strategic locations throughout Syria’s southwest, Israel has perceived this as a deliberate provocation. The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has undertaken a sustained bombing campaign against positions, infrastructure and military convoys suspected of being linked to Hezbollah or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) ([Arab News](#), November 15). Certain locations, such as the vantage point of Tel al-Hara on the Syrian side of the border near the disputed Golan Heights, have been repeatedly targeted by Israeli forces owing to the alleged presence of Hezbollah assets ([al-Monitor](#), July 26).

Iranian forces have not attempted to dispel this narrative, with Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier-General Mehdi Rabbani claiming that “Our defensive depth has stretched to the Mediterranean Sea and our front has extended to the borders of the Zionist regime,” while referencing the growing strength

of Hezbollah ([Jerusalem Post](#), August 5). Out of the myriad Hezbollah assets entrenched in Syria attempting to forge the second front against Israel, few have been as central as Hajj Hashem, a Hezbollah commander who has been embedded in the region since 2017.

Hezbollah's Man in Syria

Hashem, born Munir Ali Naim Shaiti, is commanding the Syrian Army's "Southern Command" in the Hauran region of Daraa ([Israel National News](#), July 1). Elements of his role are disputed and unclear, but Hashem's likely remit is to lead Hezbollah operations south of Damascus. Information regarding Hashem and his activities is scarce. It should be noted that reporting from southwestern Syria is similarly sparse, with both Syrian and Iranian news sources rarely offering information that could be relied on as on-ground realities, and the bulk of reporting is provided by the Israeli media, which has its own agenda and biases.

Thought to be around 52 years old, Hashem is a father of four from southern Lebanon. During the second Lebanese war, he commanded a combat front and gradually became an influential figure within Hezbollah. Prior to deployment in Syria, he was the deputy chief of the Bader Brigades, a division of Hezbollah assigned to operations north of the Litani River in Lebanon. Hashem was deployed to Syria following the assassination of Mustafa Badreddine, and given command of Hezbollah in southwestern Syria ([Ynet](#), October 25, 2017).

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) publicly identified Hashem in 2017, with numerous news sources covering his profile, role, and command objectives ([Haaretz](#), October 29, 2017). The IDF has a history of deliberately leaking the profiles of enemy actors to the media, largely so it can claim a propaganda victory when the individuals are neutralized, as was the case with Jihad Mughniyeh and Samir Kuntar, two members of the Hezbollah network in Syria who were killed

in 2015. By making Hashem's profile public, the IDF was also likely hoping operatives in Syria would be able to expedite his demise. Despite this, Hashem remains operational in 2019.

He is a unifying figure in Syria, coordinating Hezbollah operatives, IRGC networks, and the Syrian forces under his command. Communication and operational instructions from IRGC Quds Forces leader Qassem Soleimani are increasingly key, as Soleimani is ordering Hashem to increase the size of the Iranian-backed forces close to the disputed Golan Heights ([Israel Today](#), October 24). Hashem is proving successful at implementing Iran's goal of regional consolidation in southwestern Syria, expanding its territorial and material influence, prompting a significant operational response from Israel, which recently declared its staunch military goal of preventing further Iranian consolidation ([Jerusalem Post](#), November 20).

The Syrian Advantage

The current situation on the ground in Syria is conducive to expansion. In Quneitra Governorate, Iranian forces are embedded into the local community and have set up military bases in four strategic locations—Daraa city, al-Lajat, the Brigade 52 base and the al-Sabr base ([Asharq as-Awsat](#), October 2) Hezbollah assets have also started to utilize discontinued military infrastructure in the area previously occupied by the Syrian Army.

Hezbollah has been actively recruiting in the area, and increasingly is not discriminating along sectarian or ethnic lines. Since it became apparent that Assad has managed to consolidate his position, Hezbollah and Iranian operatives have widened their recruitment drive to include Sunni Muslims, Christians, and members of the Druze community. The IDF has attempted proactively to counteract this, by promising to protect Druze towns on the Syrian side of the border near Majdal Shams, in order to ingratiate

themselves with the Syrian civilian populous and push back against the spreading influence of Iranian networks among Syrian communities. Some communal leaders recently declared allegiance to Israel ([Breaking Israel News](#), November 10).

The narrative surrounding recruitment has also changed of late. Recruitment drives used to focus on the threat posed by Islamic State, but since that group's territorial defeat in Syria, the focus has shifted towards military capabilities near the Golan Heights and a second front with Israel. Even members of Sunni Islamist militias have been successfully recruited, with Hezbollah operative Ali Musa Daqduq actively recruiting beleaguered Islamists ([Israel National News](#), July 1). A large part of this is due to the instability the civil war has created: Hashem is offering \$250 a month to recruits, creating a financial incentive that for many takes precedence over ethnic or religious considerations. Hezbollah and Hashem have had little difficulty in recruiting locals to their cause ([Times of Israel](#), June 24).

Integration within the Syrian Army is also aiding operations. Hashem is suspected of commanding large swaths of the Syrian Army units in the area, giving him access to an unprecedented amount of intelligence and resources ([Israel National News](#), July 1). Although it is unclear if Hashem himself has direct control over military units or is part of a wider network assisting Syrian military operations, it demonstrates how Hezbollah has managed to weave itself into the heart of military operations in southwestern Syria.

Military Considerations

The implications of Hezbollah expanding its territorial entrenchment in southwest Syria are significant. In terms of its military capabilities, the Israeli media has claimed that the Syrian army is stockpiling heavy weaponry in the area, including surface-to-air and anti-tank missiles, which could be rapidly deployed during kinetic

operations against Israeli forces, settlements, and assets ([Israel National News](#), July 1). Hezbollah has also been suspected of helping to set up manufacturing warehouses on the Syrian side of the border to produce and distribute weaponry ([The Jerusalem Post](#), February 7). Training barracks have also opened to house the Iranian-backed militias that are now embedded in the area, with Hashem overseeing operations.

Iran's significant presence in Syria has allowed it to increase land supply chains to Hezbollah in both Syria and Lebanon, a long-time goal for Tehran. The transfer of precision missiles to Lebanon has led Israel to become concerned that Tel Aviv's military advantage over Hezbollah is gradually declining. If conflict between Lebanon and Israel escalated, Hezbollah's ability to attack Israel on two fronts would create a whole new dynamic for any military confrontation, especially as the group has significant capabilities established on the newly-formed southern front.

Owing to the increased tensions, Israel is proactively attacking Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria. In June and July of this year, unidentified aircraft bombed suspected Hezbollah infrastructure in the aforementioned Tel al-Hara area of Syria. It is highly likely the IAF carried out those attacks ([al-Monitor](#), July 26). The conflict in and around the Golan Heights has thus far not escalated into a wider confrontation; all parties involved are keen to avoid total warfare owing to their respective agendas, and tit-for-tat reciprocal attacks in the Syrian proxy theater are likely to continue without significant escalation.

Israel is not only carrying out airstrikes. In July, Zidan Mashour, a Druze resident of the village of Hader, was killed when his vehicle exploded. According to reports, Mashour had close ties to Daqduq and was involved in Hezbollah's recruitment drive ([al-Monitor](#), July 26). The assassination was likely a "targeted killing" by the IDF, indicating Israeli forces are able to

penetrate the Syrian Golan and target high-profile Hezbollah and Iranian actors. Despite this, they have not yet been able to neutralize Hajj Hashem.

Conclusion

Hashem is known to be cautious, and always travels with a security detail. This has perhaps allowed him to avoid being targeted by the IDF, which has dedicated significant resources to tracking his actions and movements. In the event of any conflict between Lebanon and Israel, Hashem would highly likely be given control of the southern front, making him a crucial actor. With Hashem alive, active and dictating Hezbollah's expansion in the Syrian Golan, his operational importance will only continue to grow.

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Bringing Down the West: Kémi Séba and the Pan-Africanist Revolution

Andrew McGregor

An unforeseen consequence of Western intervention against African terrorist groups has been the revitalization of pan-Africanism, an ideology that maintains indigenous and diaspora Africans share a common history and destiny as a unified people free of Western “domination.” Though pan-Africanism has been roundly criticized for its belief that the diverse peoples of Africa share a common race and culture, its proponents have taken leading positions in recent demonstrations in West Africa and the Sahel demanding the withdrawal of Western (especially French) troops and the creation of new monetary systems that are not tied to the European or American economic systems.

Among the most prominent of these new pan-African leaders is the French-born activist Kémi Séba. Intellectually unpredictable and politically mercurial, Kémi Séba has dallied with or espoused a number of intellectual and philosophical trends that have played or continue to play a major role in shaping the security picture in Africa and Europe.

Early Life

Kémi Séba was born to Beninese parents in 1981 in Strasbourg, France, as Stellio Gilles Robert Capo Chichi.

In his youth, Séba travelled to the United States, where he was influenced by Louis Farrakhan’s black supremacist Nation of Islam (NoI) ([BBC](#), August 30). Founded by Wallace Fard Muhammad in Detroit in 1930, the NoI shares some beliefs with Sunni Islam, but differs on several essential theological points, leaving it generally unrecognized as a form of Islam by orthodox Muslims. In recent years, the NoI has

grown closer to the Church of Scientology and its teachings.

Following his return to France, Séba joined the French branch of the NoI at age 18, though he did not appear to formally convert to Islam at this time. Séba was also influenced by the Marxist-based studies of decolonization produced by Martinican psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon.

In an interview with the Nation of Islam's *Final Call* newspaper, Séba stated that the "key to the resurrection of Black people throughout the world" is "the teachings of [the second NoI leader, 1934-1975] the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad, today taught by the leader of us all, the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan" (*Final Call* [Chicago], March 7).

From Neo-Paganism to Islam

After visiting Egypt in his twenties, Séba became the spokesman for the *Parti Kemetite*, a movement formed in 2002 and based on Ancient Egyptian thought and religion.

Followers of Kemetism spend an inordinate amount of energy engaging in intellectual disputes with long-dead 19th century scholars whose works have long since been dropped from the curricula of respectable universities. The works of these earlier writers, some of whom suggested the Ancient Egyptians were "white Caucasians," survive mainly due to the insistence of Kemetists, who maintain that they continue to represent the views of modern, scientifically trained Egyptologists. Rejecting scholarly approaches to Ancient Egyptian linguistics, history or archaeology, few Kemetists are familiar with contemporary Egyptological literature, which typically acknowledges the "African" and indigenous origins of Ancient Egypt (with the constant input of regional influences), but does not accept the popular Kemetite view that the Ancient Egyptians, Nubians, Carthaginians, and other ethno-

cultures of Northern Africa were related to or identical with the Bantu peoples of West Africa. In its extreme form, Kemetists claim that Egyptologists, who, in their view are exclusively "white," deliberately mutilate or destroy evidence proving the "Black African" origin of Ancient Egypt.

Kemetists rely on a mix of Black nationalism, esoteric spiritualism, and the works of revisionist historians such as Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop, British academic Martin Bernal and Khalid Abdul Muhammad (1948-2001), an American member of the NoI until his expulsion from the movement after a 1993 speech that referred to Pope John Paul II as "a no-good cracker," labelled Jews as "bloodsuckers" and called for the murder of all white South Africans (*Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 2001). Despite Diop's centrality to Kemetite thought, Séba has personally rejected his work as invalid due to the Senegalese scholar's marriage to a white woman (*Le Monde Afrique*, September 1, 2017).

Kemetism may be classed as a form of neo-paganism as it can involve the worship of Ancient Egyptian gods. Within the movement there are disputes on whether it can accept Black Christians or Muslims. According to Kémi Séba, "Three Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have cursed Blacks from the beginning, through the curse of Ham. These monotheisms have structured all thought in the broad sense by considering Blacks as inferior" (*Le Figaro*, October 1, 2007). [1]

Tribu Ka and Anti-Semitism

Séba's critical view of Jewish people is largely influenced by a 1991 NoI publication entitled *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews*. Though much derided for its highly selective use of sources, the work's central thesis that Jews and Zionists gained financial power through investment in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade has gained traction in certain quarters.

In 2004, Séba formed the *Tribu-Ka*, a French version of Farrakhan's NoI blended with elements of Kemetism, such as Séba's leadership role as the guarantor of *ma'at*, the Ancient Egyptian conception of truth, order, and justice.

Tribu Ka is a short form for the Atenian Tribe of Kemet, Aten being the image of the Ancient Egyptian sun god as a solar disk, later imposed (unsuccessfully) as the sole god of Egypt by King Akhenaten of the 18th Dynasty. Nonetheless, anti-Semitism proved to be the core dogma of the *Tribu Ka*.

Séba used the internet to post anti-Semitic messages, including some accusing Zionists of creating AIDS, leading to his arrest in September 2006 and calls from Jewish groups to ban his website ([European Jewish Press](#), September 19, 2006).

When *Tribu Ka* was banned by the French Ministry of the Interior in July 2006, it was quickly replaced by a new formation known as *Génération Kémi Séba* (GKS). The move did not fool authorities, who banned the GKS and handed Séba a one-year suspended sentence for his efforts. A further arrest followed in February 2007 for calling a public official "Zionist scum." The result was five months imprisonment for criminal contempt. Undeterred, Séba formed yet another group called *Jeunesse Kémi Séba*, likewise banned in June 2009.

On May 27, 2008, Séba led some 50 followers armed with bats and other weapons to a heavily Jewish district of Paris to "defend the interests of Blacks." The mob shouted anti-Jewish slogans and threatened bystanders, leading to an investigation of the group by the Ministry of Justice. Séba maintained that, "It is not anti-Semitic to defend the interests of blacks. When a Jew breaks a fingernail, the whole state apparatus has a broken arm!" ([Le Figaro](#), October 1, 2007).

Séba has accused international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World

Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) of being controlled by Zionists "who impose on Africa and its diaspora living conditions so excremental that the concentration camp of Auschwitz can seem like a paradise on earth" ([Causeur](#) [Paris], July 6).

After his release from prison in July 2008, Séba announced his conversion to Islam and fled to Senegal. Séba also joined the newly-formed *Mouvement des damnés de l'impérialisme* (MDI – Movement of the Damned by Imperialism) as its secretary-general and later president. The MDI, self-described as anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist with a focus on internet activism, attracted Holocaust deniers and formed a sympathetic association with Lebanon's Hezbollah ([Le Monde](#), September 23, 2008). Séba eventually resigned as president of the MDI in July 2010.

Séba's spiritual views, encompassing both Kemetism and Islam, are also strongly influenced by Guénonian Islam, also known as "Traditionalism." Derived from the works of French convert to Islam René Guénon (1886-1951), Traditionalism combines Western esoteric traditions with Islamic Sufi philosophies. This unorthodox approach has found little resonance in the Islamic world but is popular with some Western intellectuals who have converted to Islam. [2]

Séba has written four books: *Supra-négritude* (2013), *Black Nihilism* (2014), *Obscure Époque – fiction géopolitique* (2016) and *L'Afrique libre ou la mort* (2018). *Black Nihilism* was described by a Senegalese reviewer as "a porridge of thought," in which "activism is substituted for thought, virility for strength of argument," while the author levels men and women on the sole pretext of a common skin color, an "inverted racist cliché" ([SenePlus](#), May 8). Senegalese journalist Racine Assane Demba has denounced Séba's works as expressions of black supremacism, particularly over white people ([Le Monde Afrique](#), September 1, 2017). African critics of Séba's

ideas and intellectual approach are regularly derided by his supporters as puppets of Paris.

Séba has spoken approvingly of the dictatorships of the late Thomas Sankara (Burkina Faso) and Mu'ammarr Qaddafi and their refusal to relinquish power before both were killed, explaining: "As long as you fight for your country so that your country can access a certain number of things, [dictatorship] does not bother me" ([BeninWebTV](#), April 8).

Séba and the New Black Panthers

After his time with the MDI, Séba was appointed head of the French branch of the New Black Panther Party (NBPP) by Malik Zulu Shabazz (a.k.a. Paris Lewis), chairman of the NBPP from 2001 (after taking over from founder Khalid Abdul Mohammed) to 2013. Shabazz, best known for his extreme and often crudely expressed hatred for Jews and Zionists, gave Séba a new name, Kemiour Aarim Shabazz. Most surviving members of the original Black Panther Party reject the NBPP's claim to be a successor to their movement.

Fighting *Françafrique*

Séba moved to Senegal in 2011, where his ideas and rhetoric found resonance in academic and media circles. In Europe, however, Séba was coming to be regarded as a toxic presence, beginning with his expulsion from Switzerland in 2012 for inciting violence.

Séba was arrested during a visit to Paris in September 2014, after making a public appearance at a theater commonly used by his friend, controversial anti-Jewish comedian Dieudonné M'bala M'bala. The activist was detained for violating the terms of a 2009 suspended sentence ([AFP](#), September 1, 2014). Séba has also worked with Dieudonné's associate, right-wing ideologue and filmmaker Alain Soral, who has been convicted on charges of anti-Semitism ([Causeur](#) [Paris], July 6).

In 2016, Séba launched a new NGO, *Urgences Panafricanistes* (Pan-African Emergencies), with himself as chairman. According to Séba: "We are neither communists nor nationalists nor liberals. We are Pan-Africanists. We are developing a new path, that of traditionalism mixed with an understanding of geopolitics" ([BeninWebTV](#), December 13, 2017).

Séba claims *Urgences Panafricanistes* is financed by soccer players, including French-Martinican Nicolas Anelka (a friend of Dieudonné who was cited for making anti-Semitic gestures on the field), French-Senegalese Demba Ba and "many African footballers who are friends" but cannot allow their commitment to be known ([Le Monde](#), October 30, 2017).

One of the main ambitions of the group is the elimination of the *Communauté Financière Africaine* franc (CFA franc), a currency used by 14 former French African colonies. The CFA franc was created after World War Two for use in France's African colonies. Today, it is the last colonial-era currency in use in Africa, though it is now pegged to the Euro and backed by the French treasury, where member nations must deposit half their foreign exchange reserves. The 14 countries that use it benefit from monetary stability and protection from inflation.

In March, Séba identified several reasons for his struggle against the CFA franc: according to him, the currency is far too strong for local economies, destroying competitiveness. "When you are told that you are independent and that the representatives of the Bank of France have the right of veto in your banks... the adage says that the one who controls you economically, will control you politically" ([Yecllo.com](#) [Abidjan], March 28). Similar points have been made by prominent Senegalese anti-French activist Guy Marius Sagna.

On August 25, 2017, Séba was arrested on a complaint from the Central Bank of West African States after publicly burning a 5,000

CFA francs (\$8.39) banknote six days earlier in Dakar, Senegal. Though acquitted ten days later on a technicality (the relevant law cited destruction of “banknotes” rather than “a banknote”), he was deported to France on September 6 after being declared “a serious threat to public order” ([Le Monde](#), September 6; [Senego](#), October 16).

Séba was now becoming an undesirable in much of West Africa. In March 2018, he was expelled from Guinea, where he had hoped to address a conference, and in August of the same year he was ejected from Togo. Séba was expelled from Côte d’Ivoire to Benin in March 2019 after expressing harsh criticism of President Alassane Ouattara’s defense of the CFA franc (including a description of the president as a “voluntary slave”) and attempting to hold a conference against “French colonialism” that authorities said posed a potential risk of unrest ([Jeune Afrique](#), March 27; [SeneNews](#), April 8; [Le Monde](#), March 29). The activist was arrested once his plane touched down in Cotonou, Benin, and interrogated regarding potential connections to Russia, China, and Venezuela, questions that had already been asked by the security forces of Côte d’Ivoire. Séba took to Facebook in response: “You put me in prison, I come out stronger. You expel me from a country, I come out stronger” ([Jeune Afrique](#), March 27).

On January 20, 2019, Allesandro Di Battista, one of the leaders of Italy’s populist Five-Star Movement (M5S), tore up a fake 10,000 CFA franc banknote on Italian television while denouncing French “neo-imperialism.” On the same day, M5S President Luigi Di Maio accused France of “preventing development” in countries using the CFA currency, adding that French policies are contributing to massive migrant flows across the Mediterranean. Following a diplomatic scandal, Kémi Séba emerged on Facebook days later to reveal “a well-kept secret,” namely that he had visited Five-Star leaders in Rome in September 2018, where he

provided them with documents concerning *Françafrique* (the French sphere of influence in Africa) and the CFA franc. Séba claimed that this visit was the origin of the Five-Star attacks on France, and predicted: “What African leaders are unable to do, other non-African leaders will do, under our urging, until we ourselves take power in our countries.” The M5S would only confirm that a “frank exchange of views on Europe and Africa” had occurred with Séba ([La Nouvelle Tribune](#), January 22; [RFI](#), February 2; [Le Figaro](#), February 4).

In the face of moves by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to develop its own currency (the Eco), French Minister of the Economy and Finance Bruno Le Maire announced in mid-October that France was open to “an ambitious reform” of the CFA franc. [3] Séba denounced the statement, saying Le Maire was “spitting once again in the face of African youth” ([BeninWebTV](#), October 16).

Relations with Russia

Séba was invited to Moscow in December 2017 by controversial Neo-Eurasian ideologue Alexander Dugin, one of the most important influences on Kremlin policy in Putin’s Russia and the target of U.S. sanctions related to the Russian occupation of eastern Ukraine. Taking its inspiration from the Eurasian political philosophy developed by Russians of the 1920s, Neo-Eurasianism, in its most reductionist form, advocates the development of a Russian-centered Eurasian empire based on traditional values, anti-modernism and opposition to Western liberalism. As such, proponents of Neo-Eurasianism are prepared to seek common ground with anti-Western Pan-Africanists like Kémi Séba. Neo-Eurasianism also incorporates elements of Slavic neo-paganism (*rodnovery*), similar to Séba’s Afro-centric embrace of Egyptian neo-paganism.

Séba described Dugin as “the most important theoretician and political advisor in Russia” and

said their discussion “focused on metaphysics and geopolitics. We shared our view that neither communism nor liberalism nor nationalism can bring salvation to our respective peoples” ([BeninWebTV](#), December 13, 2017).

Moscow is fully aware of Séba’s importance to African anti-colonial and anti-French movements and invited him to attend the October 23-24 Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, where Séba continued his denunciations of France ([YouTube](#), October 24). In the lead-up to the summit, Séba expressed his preference for a Russian presence in Africa: “Russia will never be our messiah; the only messiah of Africa is the African people themselves. But because we cannot live in autarky for the moment, Russia is better as a partner than France...” ([BeninWebTV](#), October 2). Russia is believed to have an interest in playing a part in the development of a new ECOWAS currency intended to replace the CFA franc.

Conclusion

Based on an intellectual fallacy, namely the common identity and goals of all Africa peoples whether in Africa or the diaspora, pan-Africanism is vulnerable to entanglement with other ideologies, some of which are based on similarly shaky foundations. In the Soviet era, pan-Africanism became closely identified with Marxist thought and socialist politics. Currently engaged in a broad effort to renew Russian influence in Africa, Moscow will undoubtedly use pan-Africanism or any other useful ideology to achieve its goals. A recent statement from Kémi Séba demonstrates the growth of a radical rejection of the West among pan-African ideologues:

Dear Neocolonialist French, you live your last hours. The New African generation is ready to stop your plundering of our motherland. We stand in solidarity with the French Proletariat... but

against its oligarchy that plunders us ([Facebook](#), September 14, 2019).

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Notes

[1] The Curse of Ham (son of Noah) refers to a biblical passage, Genesis 9:20-27, that is often used to explain the existence of black people (though the passage makes no reference to race or skin color) and the reason for their servitude to the descendants of the other sons of Noah. It was later used to provide justification for the existence of slavery.

[2] ISIM Newsletter, 7/01, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, n.d., <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/15605118.pdf>

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