

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XVIII, ISSUE 1

p.1

*Brian Perkins*

**BRIEFS**

p.3

*Rafid Jaboori*

**Calls for U.S. Troop Withdrawal From Iraq Continue as al-Amiri Emerges as Leader of PMU**

p.5

*Sunguta West*

**Islamic State’s Mixed Fortunes Become Visible in Somalia**

p.7

*Sudha Ramachandran*

**India: Fanning the Flames of Extremism and Terror at Home**

## PHILIPPINES LIFTS MARTIAL LAW AMID FRAGILE GAINS

*Brian M. Perkins*

On January 1, the government lifted martial law on the embattled Philippines island of Mindanao, which has long been plagued by Islamic State (IS)-linked violence and has grappled with a communist rebellion by the New People’s Army (NPA). Martial law has been lifted for the first time since 2017, but the state of emergency and the security situation largely remains the same. The declaration of martial law has been highly controversial since it was first imposed, and its end does not necessarily signal a significant improvement of the security environment.

The persistent militant threat in Mindanao was made evident just days after President Rodrigo Duterte announced he would lift the ban in early December. On December 22, individuals suspected to belong to the IS-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) conducted a grenade attack on the Notre Dame Cathedral in Cotabato City that injured at least a dozen people and was followed by blasts that injured several more

in Libungan ([Rappler](#), December 22, 2019; [Mindanews](#), December 22, 2019).

The NPA’s activities have also declined, but locals have long accused the government of inflating the “rebellion” to justify its crackdown on activists, who the government has arrested and branded as communists. While security officials have claimed that gains against communist and terrorist groups is the cause for martial law being lifted, it is clear that it is also due to activists’ pressures to restore normalcy to the island. Additionally, the government is attempting to control the external perception of the situation to entice investment and reduce international scrutiny.

While the martial law order was largely deemed excessive, it is important that security forces maintain pressure on Islamist groups in the region and avoid becoming complacent. IS has placed a significant rhetorical emphasis on its branches in the Pacific region and a lapse in pressure could see them quickly regroup, which is particularly troubling considering the fact that they are far from being completely eradicated.

Mindanao has continued to see a steady flow of militants from nearby Malaysia and Indonesia, and crack-

downs in those countries could see increasing numbers of militants landing in the Philippines ([Benar News](#), December 23, 2019). The state of emergency still allows for many of the same security measures, including enforcing curfews, but it could lead to a reduction in security efforts in areas deemed “secure.” The threat now is that militant groups will quickly reintegrate themselves into these areas to kick off another wave of violence.

On the other hand, however, the government must be careful to avoid the misgivings it has perpetrated since 2017 and recalibrate its strategy to avoid prolonging the conflict in the region. Disdain toward the government and military is already high and continued military impunity after the lifting of martial law will only push residents, particularly youths, closer toward violence.

*Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.*

## **TURKEY'S INVOLVEMENT IN LIBYA THREATENS TUNISIAN STABILITY**

*Brian M. Perkins*

The conflict in Libya has affected the security and stability of neighboring countries since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, and rising involvement by international actors has only served to complicate the matter. Turkey is one of the most recent entrants into the Libyan conflict and the country's increased involvement has already started to set Libya's neighboring country's on edge. Despite several other state actors already having a hand in the conflict, it appears that several countries in the region now view Turkey's involvement and attempts to use neighboring countries as launching off points as a step too far in the spiraling conflict.

Turkey struck a deal with the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) that is expected to see increased cooperation and the deployment of Turkish troops to hold off General Khalifa Haftar's LNA, as well as a maritime deal that effectively allows Turkey to block Greece, Egypt, Israel and the Greek Cypriot's EastMed project, which was initiated without consultation from Ankara.

The maritime agreement aside, Turkey's rising involvement in Libya is a gamble that pits the country against the Russia and UAE-backed LNA, and could easily see the conflict escalate and destabilize neighboring countries, particularly Tunisia. Tunisia's political and security environment remains fragile and is highly susceptible to developments in the Libyan conflict.

Tunisia has struggled with arms smuggling and the flow of Libyan refugees. Tunis fears Turkey's involvement will serve to escalate the conflict, causing a new surge of refugees to flow across its border into the already volatile governorates of Tataouine and Medenine. Tunisia increased security along its borders in late December following Turkey's Libya announcement and request for coordination with Tunis. Shortly after, on January 9, Tunisian authorities claimed they had seized a cache of Turkish-made weapons and cash near the border that was en route from Turkey to Libya ([North Africa Post](#), January 9). Authorities have yet to reveal the identities or nationalities of those responsible.

Border security, arms smuggling, and the persistent threat of terrorism are not the only threats Tunisia faces regarding Turkey's involvement and potential escalation

of the conflict. The Tunisian government still remains fragile and regularly faces unrest due to high poverty levels, lack of economic opportunities, and trade stifling border controls, among other issues. Protestors gathered in Tunis following President Erdogan's surprise visit, and rumors emerged that the government had agreed to cooperate with Turkey in Libya, which President Kais Saied has since attempted to dispel ([Asharq Al-Awsat](#), December 29, 2019). Tunisia has attempted to remain neutral in the Libyan conflict, with the government recently announcing its refusal to allow Turkey to use Tunisian territory for its involvement in Libya ([Middle East Monitor](#), January 8). This calculus, however, could eventually change and there is a chance that circumstances could force President Saied into some level of cooperation. For instance, the issue of arms smuggling is particularly sensitive, and there is an inherent risk that Turkish arms bound for Libya will wind up in the hands of radicalized Tunisians if the country does not agree to some level of logistical support or acquiescence. Any sort of cooperation with Turkey could lead to significant unrest around the country, further destabilizing the fragile democracy.

Rising international involvement in Libya, and Turkey's involvement in particular, poses significant challenges for Tunisia. The threats along the border are a double-edged sword as they necessitate tightening security measures, which in turn hampers cross-border trade and often prompts anti-government unrest from residents of the country's restive border regions. President Saied will face diplomatic pressure to cooperate with Turkey and risks covert violations within its borders if it does not. At the same time, outward cooperation with Turkey has the potential to cause significant unrest in the country as Tunisians, already frustrated with the country's economic and security environment, see involvement in Libya as detrimental to Tunisian society.

*Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.*

## **Calls for U.S. Troop Withdrawal From Iraq Continue as al-Amiri Emerges as Leader of PMU**

*Rafid Jaboori*

The crisis in relations between the United States and Iraq's Shia-led government has deepened over the last few weeks and especially after the killing of Iran's top general, Qassim Soleimani, as he arrived at Baghdad International Airport on January 2. Soleimani was killed alongside Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy chairman of Iraq's official Shia militia umbrella organization, the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) ([al-Quds](#), January 3).

The killing of Soleimani and al-Muhandis, whose real name is Jamal Jaafar al-Ibrahim, is a major blow to Iran and its allies in Iraq and across the Middle East. Since 2003, Iraq has been a place where U.S. and Iranian influences coexisted and competed. The country emerged as the main theater of a new phase in the confrontation between the United States and Iran. On January 7, Iran launched missile attacks on two Iraqi military bases where U.S. troops are stationed. Washington decided to avoid further escalation after there were no reports of casualties, but that by no means marks the end of the confrontation as both sides continue warning each other of possible retaliation and escalation ([Asharq al-Awsat](#), January 8).

### **Attempts to Expel U.S. Troops**

The strategy of Iran and its allies in Iraq after the killing of Soleimani has been clear; to drive U.S. troops out of the country through political and violent means. Iranian-backed Shia factions in the parliament have managed to secure a vote to expel U.S. troops. Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, although resigned and in a caretaking role, has encouraged the vote and has since attempted to find a way to implement it ([Aljazeera](#), January 5).

The vote happened in a parliamentary session that was boycotted by all Kurdish parties and the vast majority of Sunni political groups ([Rawabet Center](#), January 5). Although the Kurds have their own historical ties with Iran, they still prefer to maintain the U.S. military presence in

their semi-autonomous region for strategic interests and protection from powerful neighbors. The Sunnis are worried about their future if U.S. troops leave Iraq under increasing control by Iran and its Iraqi Shia allies who control the government and military.

### **Al-Muhandis and his Militias**

The PMU is comprised of dozens of different militias ([Annahar](#), June 10, 2016). In his speech in parliament, Abdul-Mahdi praised al-Muhandis for what he described as his role in controlling the militias. Kataib Hezbollah (KH) is a militia that has never revealed the details of its hierarchy. It is widely believed that al-Muhandis was its leader, though it was never confirmed. There are two main reasons to conceal the militia's hierarchy. First, it helped the group remain ambiguous in order to make it more difficult for its enemies to target its leadership. KH has been involved in the anti-U.S. insurgency since the 2003 invasion, but managed to avoid suffering major casualties or the arrests of its leaders. In comparison, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AHH)—led by Sheikh Qais al-Khazali—was a target of the U.S.-led campaign and its leader was arrested in 2007 along with his brother Laith al-Khazali and a Lebanese militia leader, Ali Mousa Daqdoq ([Seyassah](#), March 14, 2019).

### **Al-Muhandis's Successor**

Leaders of the most powerful militias within the PMU decided to support Hadi al-Amiri, the leader of the Badr Organization militia, to succeed al-Muhandis in the role of deputy chairman of the PMU ([Alsumaria](#), January 3).

Like al-Muhandis, al-Amiri is expected to be an effective leader of the PMU. Although they were close allies and shared a long history of fighting alongside the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) since the 1980s, al-Amiri and al-Muhandis were two different characters. Al-Amiri is the leader of Badr, which is the largest Shia militia. He has played a hands-on role in the fight against Islamic State (IS) since 2014, but he does not have the same charisma as al-Muhandis. Al-Muhandis was someone who was viewed as fully dedicated to the cause of Shia jihadism. He was modest, soft-spoken, and spent most of his time with his men. His influence extended across all Shia militias while al-Amiri's image was tainted by his time in government positions since 2003, including serving as minister of transportation in former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's second cabinet

between 2010 and 2014. Public anger and resentment has been on the rise against the whole political class, which is accused of corruption and illegally directing government resources for the benefit of their political groups or personal gain.

The PMU chairman, Faleh al-Fayadh, will remain in his position as someone who provides the political and official cover through his capacity as the national security advisor in the Iraqi government, a position he has held since 2009. Al-Fayadh has been well known for his relations with various parties, even those who do not agree with each other. Over the last ten years, he has visited both Washington and Damascus several times. Internally, he maintains good relations with parties from across the political spectrum. However, he still lacks the charisma that al-Muhandis had or al-Amiri's field experience.

### **Conclusion**

The United States has so far dismissed the vote of the Iraqi parliament to expel its troops. Iraqi Shia parties, however, will keep calling for its implementation. It is unclear if and how the United States will address the issue with Iraq's three main communities—Shia, Sunni and Kurds.

The Kurds have always wanted the United States to maintain its military presence in Iraq without condition. They were against the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 and unsuccessfully offered to host U.S. military bases. It is possible that the United States, if pushed by the Shia-led government, might consider the option of keeping troops in the Kurdish region ([24.ae](#), February 21, 2019).

Most of the large military bases that host U.S. troops, including the al-Asad base, which was targeted by most of the Iranian missiles on June 7, are currently located in the Sunni majority part of Iraq. The Sunnis are in a significantly more difficult position. Although the Sunni public are worried about overwhelming Iranian domination of Iraq if the United States pulls out its troops, it will not be easy to call for U.S. forces to remain as the Iranian-backed militias already control most of the Sunni majority areas in western and central Iraq. When the United States withdrew in 2011, it was criticized for handing over its Sunni allies from the Sahwa militias, which fought al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, to the Iraqi Shia-led government of the then Prime Minister al-Maliki. Al-

Maliki was accused of pursuing sectarian policies that alienated the Sunnis and helped IS to gain control of their areas. The United States has even fewer options now if the country eventually decides to withdraw from Iraq ([al-Arab](#), July 3, 2014).

Not all Shia Iraqis want the U.S. troops to withdraw. Major street protests have occurred in Baghdad and in predominantly Shia southern Iraq since October calling for genuine reform and reduced Iranian influence. However, the political parties that represent them in parliament overwhelmingly support the withdrawal. As Iran seems to have concluded its direct response to the killing of Soleimani, Qais al-Khazali, the leader of AAH, said that the campaign to avenge the killing of al-Muhandis has not yet begun ([Aljazeera](#), January 9).

*Rafid Jaboori is a journalist, writer and researcher. He is a former BBC World Service Reporter. He covered The Iraq War and its aftermath, the conflict in Syria, and several other events. He is an expert in militant groups in the Middle East.*

## Islamic State's Mixed Fortunes Become Visible in Somalia

*Sunguta West*

Islamic State's (IS) attempts to gain ground in Somalia and beyond have remained slow, five years after a splinter group from al-Shabaab emerged in a mountainous region in the northern state of Puntland and declared its allegiance to the caliphate.

The factions' leadership re-asserted that allegiance in November, swearing support to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashim al-Qurayshi, the new leader of IS. Al-Qurayshi was picked to lead the group following the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a U.S. airstrike. Some analysts argue that the Somali faction is now a pivotal outpost for the group after its losses in Syria ([Goobjoog News](#), November 4, 2019).

Shaykh Abdulqadir Mumin, a former al-Shabaab propagandist and imam, unveiled the faction in October 2015. A fiery preacher who had traversed Europe before returning to Africa, Mumin had assembled a group of 200 or so heavily armed fighters, and pledged allegiance to the late IS leader, al-Baghdadi. The announcement was made from a secret hideout in the Golis Mountains and Galgaga ranges near the border between Puntland and the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland ([Intelligence Briefs](#), October 23, 2015).

IS' emergence occurred at a time when al-Shabaab was experiencing deep divisions and leadership struggles. Disillusionment with al-Shabaab seemed as if it would prompt many of its fighters to line-up to join IS ([Quartz Africa](#), April 28, 2016). The group, however, has remained visibly static, or at least has enacted very minimal changes to its operations. Its presence is still focused in northern Somalia, with minimal expansion into Mogadishu. Although its exact military strength is not known, analysts estimate that it has between 200 and 300 active fighters, similar to its size in 2015. Some reports suggest that the group has increased its operations and is competing for space with al-Shabaab, but the latter has a much larger fighting force and has remained Somalia's most adept terrorist group since 2006 ([Africanews](#), April 14, 2019).

IS has so far failed to expand, recruit more fighters, and gain territory, despite earlier predictions of an upward trajectory. The group has faced pressure from al-Shabaab as well as the Somali army, which has been backed by U.S. airstrikes. IS and al-Shabaab share common objectives but have frequently clashed over control of territory and religious authority. Al-Shabaab has described IS in Somalia as a disease that must be eliminated in order to stop frustrating the mujahedeen's objectives. The militant group has moved aggressively against the IS faction ([Citizen Digital](#), December 28, 2018).

IS has also lost fighters and leaders in suspected U.S. airstrikes. The most significant victim of the targeted airstrikes was Abdulhakim Dhuqub, the IS branch's deputy leader, in April 2019. His vehicle was struck near Hiriro village in the Bari area of Puntland. Dhuqub was in charge of the faction's daily operations, including the planning of attacks and procurement ([The East African](#), May 10, 2019). His death was followed by several other airstrikes in Puntland, including a drone strike in April that hit a base near the remote village of Ameyra about 150 kilometers south of Bossaso, Puntland State's business capital, and another that killed 13 in the Golis mountains. It is not clear if any lives were lost in this particular strike.

Despite being under relentless offensives by al-Shabaab and the Somali government, the group has managed to carry out several deadly attacks and has tentatively claimed responsibility for others in Puntland and the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

Its operations in Puntland have involved suicide attacks, armed assaults, and the brief capture of towns. In October 2016, the group captured the town of Qandala in Puntland's Bari region and declared it the seat of the Islamic Caliphate in Somalia. A month later, the faction was forced out by Puntland forces backed by US army advisors ([Daily Nation](#), November 11, 2017). In February 2017, IS fighters stormed a village hotel in Bosasso, killing four guards. In May of the same year, the group carried out its first suicide attack at a checkpoint near the town killing five people ([Garowe Online](#), February 8, 2017; [Daily Nation](#), November 11, 2017).

The group's operations have been considerably more limited in Mogadishu. IS operations in the capital have mostly consisted of low-level assassinations, mainly targeting security forces.

Beyond Somalia, there has also been a visible attempt to expand into other countries in East Africa, including Kenya and Ethiopia. In September, Ethiopia's deputy army chief said the group had tried many times to establish a base in the country without success. The official warned that the group had recruited, trained, and armed many Ethiopians. Many of them were reportedly arrested, but a large number were still on the run ([Africanews](#), September 23, 2019).

The developments in Ethiopia came one month after the Somali-based group said it would release jihadist materials in Amharic, a dialect widely spoken in Ethiopia. In doing so, IS aims to ignite a recruitment drive among the country's Muslim community amid ongoing ethnic and political unrest.

Despite its slow start, the group continues to pose a threat and is still eyeing regional expansion. With reports suggesting that the Somali faction is an important outpost for IS, its actions need to be closely monitored, particularly given its collapse in the Middle East and expansion elsewhere in Africa. Moreover, the faction could serve as IS' gateway into East Africa and a bridge for other IS groups in the region.

*Sunguta West is an independent journalist based in Nairobi.*

# India: Fanning the Flames of Extremism and Terror at Home

*Sudha Ramachandran*

A string of decisions and actions taken by India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government could result in a rise in militancy, religious extremism, and terrorist attacks in the country. Since it came to power in 2014, and following its reelection with a stronger mandate in May of last year, the BJP and its fraternal organizations in the Sangh Parivar—an umbrella grouping of organizations that espouse Hindutva (a Hindu supremacist ideology)—have unleashed violence against the country's religious minorities, especially Muslims. Not only has Prime Minister Narendra Modi been reluctant to rein in Hindutva extremists, but his government has also enacted legislation that discriminates against Muslims. It has used extreme force to silence dissent and shut down protests in various parts of the country. With democratic forms of protest closing, an increasing number of angry Indian youth could choose the path of militancy and terrorism.

## Hindutva Agenda

Hindutva extremism is an important source of violence in contemporary India, especially in recent years as BJP governments at the federal and state levels and Sangh Parivar activists act to implement their Hindutva agenda. This agenda, which is aimed at making secular India a Hindu state and homogenizing its plural society and culture, is being furthered through a series of actions, including the enactment of laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) and implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Such laws not only discriminate against Muslims, but could also be used to deny many of them Indian citizenship.

Hindutva activists are using violence to impose Hindu culture, eating habits, etc. on religious minorities. For instance, in the name of protecting cows, which are revered by Hindus, they are attacking—even lynching to death—tanners, cattle traders and beef exporters, who are predominantly Muslim. Approximately 114 cow-related incidents of violence were recorded between 2015 and 2018, and of the 45 people killed in these incidents,

35 were Muslim. Muslims accounted for 92 percent of victims murdered in cow-related hate violence in 2017, up from 78 percent in 2016 and 82 percent in 2015 ([Fact Checker](#), December 28, 2018).

## Ignoring Hindutva Extremism

Rarely have these violent attacks been unequivocally condemned by the government. In most incidents, police refused to register complaints and in cases that did go to court, the accused were acquitted ([NDTV](#), August 15, 2019). Despite strong evidence against the activists of Hindutva groups, most of them continue to roam free. These violent activists include those from the Sanatan Sanstha group who were allegedly responsible for the Malegaon blasts of 2006 and 2008, the Mecca Masjid bombing in 2007, bomb attacks in the Indian states of Maharashtra in 2008 and Goa in 2009, and the assassination of well-known rationalist scholars in recent years. The Hindutva group Abhinav Bharat were also linked in the Samjhauta Express bombings of 2007. ([Hindustan Times](#), April 16, 2018; [India Today](#), October 8, 2018; [Firstpost](#), March 29, 2019).

Even more worrying is the endorsement that those facing serious terrorist charges have received from the highest levels of government. Pragya Singh Thakur, who is accused of perpetrating the 2008 Malegaon blast case, is a BJP member of parliament. While she is yet to be convicted, the fact that she faces serious charges under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and that the trial court refused to discharge her from the case should have deterred the BJP from fielding her in the general election ([The Hindu](#) May 21, 2019). It did not. In fact, the party endorsed her spectacular rise in parliament, even nominating her to the parliamentary consultative committee on defense ([India Today](#), November 21, 2019).

The BJP's reluctance to rein in Hindutva extremists and the failure of the government and India's criminal justice system to convict and punish those who carry out terrorist attacks is providing a boost to Hindutva extremism. This "will immensely encourage fringe Hindutva elements who see mass murder as a legitimate instrument in their war against other communities as well as against Hindus" who do not subscribe to their views ([IndiaToday](#), March 29, 2019). The lack of action from the government is encouraging extremists to act with impunity.

## **New Generation of Muslim Terrorists**

The rise of Hindutva will likely trigger the radicalization of Indian Muslim youth, who have primarily stayed away from global jihadist groups. Their radicalization stems instead from incidents that have targeted local Muslims. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 2001 and the communal violence that followed, the anti-Muslim pogrom in the western state of Gujarat, and the failure of the Indian courts to deliver justice in terrorist attacks targeting Muslims have contributed to scores of angry youth becoming radicalized and joining militant groups in the 1990s and 2000s. Recruitment to groups like the Students' Islamic Movement of India and the emergence and proliferation of groups like the Indian Mujahideen grew in this period.

So far, protests against the CAA and NRC have been articulated through social media and mass demonstrations, which have been peaceful. While gautankvad (roughly translating to cow terrorism) has triggered a wave of insecurity among Muslims, the recent Supreme Court verdict handing over the site of the demolished Babri Masjid to Hindu organizations to build a temple has triggered sullen resentment in the community. But rage is building, and with police using force on protestors and India's democratic institutions not rising to the occasion, the flow of alienated Muslim youth to radical groups could grow. Hindutva is breeding a new generation of young Muslim terrorists.

## **Boost to Kashmir Militancy**

The Modi government's decisions relating to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) are highly likely to provide a shot in the arm to the anti-Indian militancy there. In August 2019, the government revoked special status granted to J&K under the Indian Constitution. Anticipating mass protests against the controversial decision, it stepped up its already huge troop deployment in the Kashmir Valley to suppress street protests ([Asian Age](#), August 18, 2019). Leaders and activists of Kashmiri political parties have been placed under house arrest ([Business Standard](#), November 21, 2019). The media has been silenced, and Internet and mobile phone services have been shut down for five consecutive months ([The Telegraph](#), December 28, 2019).

Anti-Indian militancy in Kashmir, which was on the decline since the mid-1990s, gathered momentum in 2016. The death of a popular local militant commander,

Burhan Wani, triggered a surge in militant attacks, local recruitment to militant groups, and public support for militancy ([Terrorism Monitor](#), April 15, 2016; [Rising Kashmir](#), July 6, 2017). However, counter-insurgency operations have resulted in the elimination of hundreds of militants. According to official figures, there was a 30 percent reduction in terrorist incidents in the Kashmir Valley in 2019, and 139 local Kashmiri youths joined militant groups compared to 218 in 2018 ([Indian Express](#), December 31, 2019). That is now poised to change.

By detaining mainstream Kashmiri politicians, the Modi government has removed them from the political arena and rendered them irrelevant. It has undermined democratic and moderate politics and empowered the violent extremists. The government's brutal crackdown on Kashmiris has triggered widespread anger with the Indian state. Denied platforms to air their grievances and express dissent, Kashmiri youth will likely pick up arms in large numbers in the coming months. Local recruitment of militants is also likely to surge once communication services are restored and winter ends.

## **Troubled Waters**

The surge in anti-Indian sentiment in Kashmir will provide Pakistan with the opportunity and space to fish in troubled waters. It can be expected to step up the movement of militants and weapons into the valley in a few months once summer temperatures make the mountain passes accessible.

Equally as worrying is Bangladesh's possible response to the Modi government's decisions and actions on the citizenship question. Bangladesh fears that millions of Bengali-speaking Muslims living in the northeastern state of Assam, who are excluded from the NRC and denied Indian citizenship, will be pushed into Bangladesh. The Awami League (AL) government, which is already under pressure from Islamists at home, is apprehensive that the exodus from India to Bangladesh will provide them with a weapon to attack it and boost local extremism ([Frontline](#), January 3).

Additionally, the AL government is also upset with the CAA's text, as it implies that Hindus are being persecuted in Bangladesh. This is understandable given the fact that the AL is a secular party and pro-India. Over the past decade, it has been sensitive to India's security concerns, and has not only shut down anti-Indian mili-

tant camps on Bangladeshi soil, but also handed over militants to Indian custody.

The Modi government's decisions on the citizenship question have grave implications for Bangladesh's domestic politics and security. It could potentially prompt the AL government to permit anti-Indian militants to operate from its soil again.

## **Conclusion**

While the Modi government has adopted a muscular posture in dealing with terrorism emanating from Pakistan—it sent ground forces to destroy anti-Indian terrorist launch pads in Pakistani-administered Kashmir in 2015 and carried out aerial strikes on a Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp at Balakot in Pakistan in 2019—it is fanning the flames of religious extremism and terrorism inside the country. Its intolerance of dissent and shutting down of democratic spaces is paving the way for the assertion of political violence. India can expect to see a rise in militancy in 2020.

*Dr. Sudha Ramachandran is an independent researcher and journalist based in Bangalore, India. She has written extensively on South Asian peace and conflict, political and security issues for The Diplomat, Asia Times and Geopolitics.*