

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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### STC GAINS HIGHLIGHT THE NEED FOR A SUCCESSION PLAN FOR PRESIDENT HADI

*Brian Perkins*

Representatives from the Southern Transitional Council (STC) met with Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed in Riyadh on August 13 to discuss the creation of a new government that will form the basis of a power-sharing agreement. The formation of a new government aims to revive the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, which stalled again after the STC declared self-rule over southern governorates in April ([Arab News](#), August 14). The declaration was followed by deadly clashes between STC forces and those aligned with Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The power sharing agreement, as well as the fact that Hadi left his exile in Saudi Arabia before the meeting was held to receive medical treatment in the United States, serves as evidence of the Yemeni government's loss of legitimacy and control over key political outcomes, as well as the need to find a successor ([Middle East Monitor](#), August 12).

President Hadi's legitimacy as the country's leader has been tenuous since the GCC initiative first led to his appointment in 2012, which eventually saw him controversially overrule the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference—one of the key catalysts of the ongoing war. These facts alone are enough to point to Hadi being unviable as Yemen's president, but a string of political missteps since the war began, such as firing his well respected Vice President Khaled Bahah and the rise of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council, serve as further evidence that maintaining Hadi as the leader while attempting to wind down the war is entirely untenable. Equally as untenable is moving past Hadi to his controversial Vice President and Islah figurehead, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.

The STC, while not universally popular across southern Yemen, has managed to leverage its UAE-trained forces and large, strategically located support base to dictate political settlements with the Yemeni government. The STC has not accomplished this all at once, but through the aggregation of marginal gains, providing enough resistance to force the government's hand but not so much that it provokes an enduring, larger scale con-

flict—at least not yet—that could push its Emirati backers into a decision between them and Riyadh.

The new power sharing agreement being discussed in Riyadh highlights these marginal gains and the steady erosion of Hadi's government. Government representation is expected to be split between north and south, and STC Secretary General Ahmed Hamid Lamlas from Shabwa was appointed governor of Aden. STC General Mohammad Ahmed Salim al-Hamedi was selected as Aden's head of security, a significant departure from the previous agreement that would have seen the STC lose some military authority in the city ([Aden Press](#), July 29). These appointments further solidify the STC's power-base in the country's temporary capital and position the group to be a primary political voice in any future political settlement.

Any legitimacy that Hadi has left comes primarily from outside of Yemen and with every gain made by the STC, the Hadi government's legitimacy recedes. Adding the 74-year-old Hadi's documented heart condition to the situation and the need for a succession plan becomes even more imperative. If the Saudi coalition and international community ever hope to facilitate a fruitful political settlement, they will likely need to take the risk of identifying Hadi's successor or successors who can take the reins before the transition even begins. Hadi's track record with the National Dialogue Conference does not bode well for what has become an even more complex and fragmented political scene. Simply moving down the government hierarchy is also an untenable plan, not only due to Ali Mohsen being both the Houthi and STC's nemesis, but also because it would likely be viewed as repeating the same mistakes that led to Hadi's ascension through the GCC initiative. The best hope for a settlement is for Hadi's successor to be a politically representative council or a central figure who is a relatively consensus choice that could carry the country through the transition. The latter is particularly elusive.

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

## **GERMANY PLOT UNDERSCORES TAJIK'S ROLES IN ISLAMIC STATE**

*Brian Perkins*

Albania transferred a Tajik Islamic State (IS) cell member to Germany on August 4, following his arrest in Tirana on April 29. The suspect, identified as 24-year-old Tajikistani citizen Komron Zuhurov, was arrested under an international warrant issued by a federal court in Karlsruhe, Germany on April 21 on charges of helping to establish an IS cell in Germany. Zuhurov's arrest and extradition to Germany highlights the emerging role of Tajik IS members in Germany and in official IS provinces, raising questions regarding IS facilitator networks in Albania and other Balkan states.

Two weeks prior to Zuhurov's arrest in Tirana, German law enforcement arrested four other Tajikistanis, identified as Azizjon B., Muhammadali G., Farhodshoh K., and Sunatullokh K., from the same cell in North Rhine-Westphalia for reportedly joining IS in 2019 and for plotting attacks on U.S. military facilities in Germany ([Generalbundesanwaltschaft](#), April 15). A fifth suspect from the cell, identified as 30-year-old Tajikistani national Ravsan B., was already in custody following his arrest on March 15, 2019.

Zuhurov had reportedly been previously extradited to Tajikistan by the European Union before the other members of the cell were arrested. It is unclear how or when he left custody in Tajikistan, but his lawyer in Albania claimed he had been tortured by Tajikistani authorities before he managed to travel to Tirana on February 17 to stay with family.

In addition to Zuhurov being arrested in Albania, the cell undoubtedly had deeper connections to the country as evidenced by their failed attempt to finance the plot in Germany in which they accepted a \$40,000 contract to kill an Albanian businessman. At least two of the members of the cell, including Ravsan B., travelled to Albania to carry out the killing, but reportedly returned to Germany upon the plot's failure. The cell's contacts in Albania and whether Zuhurov helped facilitate the contract killing plot remain unclear.

The cell, however, was reportedly in contact with influential IS members in Afghanistan and Syria. Their Tajikistani nationality potentially offers some clues as to who their IS handlers might have been and highlights the role that

some Tajik IS fighters have played in facilitating attacks in Europe.

Several Tajikistani nationals have risen through the IS ranks to become both highly influential leaders or recruiters. Most notably, Tajikistan national Sayvaly Shafiev became an influential leader and Shura council member of Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), reportedly commanding upward of 200 men from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and other Central Asian and Balkan countries ([UN](#), July 15, 2019). Shafiev has also been heavily engaged in recruitment and has reportedly trained fighters in Afghanistan before sending them back to Tajikistan and further afield to create sleeper cells. It is within reason to suspect that Shafiev or someone within his core network could have been coordinating with the cell in Germany. A high number of Tajiks have also played significant roles within IS in Syria, but one individual particularly worth noting given the plot in Germany is Parviz Saidrahmonov, a.k.a. Abu Daoud. Saidrahmonov, who reportedly went missing from a prison in Afrin in June after being imprisoned in December 2019, is a notorious IS recruiter wanted for facilitating terrorist attacks committed by other Tajiks in Sweden, Russia, and Tajikistan ([RFE/RL](#), December 18, 2019).

While it is impossible to speculate who the cell's IS handlers were, both Shafiev and Saidrahmonov underscore the roles Tajikistanis have played within the IS structure as well as the roles they have played in facilitating attacks or sleeper cells using Tajiks outside their respective provinces. Komron Zuhurov's arrest in Albania and the cell's failed assassination plot there raise further questions as to its connections in Albania and the extent of IS facilitator networks within the country and the greater Balkan region, particularly at a time when many Balkan states are beginning to repatriate IS fighters from prisons in Syria.

*Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor*

## Motivations and Roadblocks for South African Intervention in Mozambique

*Brian M. Perkins*

The need for a military intervention in northern Mozambique is becoming more clear with each passing week, particularly after Islamic State Central Africa Province (IS-CAP) captured the key port of Mocimboa da Praia on August 12 following several days of fighting that killed more than 50 Mozambican soldiers ([Daily Maverick](#), August 12). It has been nearly three months since the South African Development Community (SADC) first held an emergency session of its Organ Troika on Politics, Defense and Security (consisting of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana) to discuss potential responses to the ongoing IS-CAP insurgency ([SADC](#), May 19). The meeting concluded with no clear directives, and little aside from vague platitudes have been offered since. With the rest of the SADC member states demonstrating indifference or a lack of will to intervene, Pretoria is seemingly mulling the idea of taking on a leading role. The South African government's motivations for pressing forward in Mozambique are multifaceted, but it will need to tread carefully as it navigates the SADC's internal politics, conditions on the ground in Cabo Delgado, and the Mozambican government's reticence as well as the fallout from what has thus far been an ill-conceived strategy for combating the militants.

South Africa has experienced little terrorism over the past ten years, aside from a string of small-scale attacks in Durban in 2018. South Africa, despite bordering Mozambique, is far removed from the insurgency's heartland in Cabo Delgado province, which itself is worlds away from southern Mozambique economically, demographically, and in terms of nearly every social indicator. Despite largely being spared from terrorist attacks and there being little threat of the violence spreading from Cabo Delgado to South Africa's borders, the country has served as a transit point and financing hub for international terrorist organizations, including in Mozambique.

IS cautioned South Africa from intervening in Mozambique in an editorial featured in its al-Naba #241 newsletter, stating that South Africa had enough of its own

internal problems and threatening to open up a new fighting front within the country's borders if it intervened ([Jihadology](#), July 2). In addition to this threat, recent arrests have underscored Pretoria's angst over the country's internal security and the growth of IS-CAP in neighboring Mozambique. A police raid on an alleged kidnapping ring in Kliprivier led to the arrest of five foreign nationals, including a Somali and an Ethiopian, that are reportedly linked to the cell responsible for the string of attacks in Durban in 2018 ([Daily Maverick](#), July 30). IS flags and videos were found during the raid and sources have indicated the kidnapping cell is also linked to individuals who have travelled from South Africa to fight alongside militants in Mozambique.

The IS threat and the recent arrests provide Pretoria with even more tangible motivation to intervene, but South African President Cyril Ramaphosa—who is also the Chair of the African Union—will need to carefully navigate increasingly complicated relations among many SADC members, as well as the relationship between the SADC and AU as a whole.

President Ramaphosa has faced increasing domestic and international pressure to step in and address rampant reports of human rights violations in Zimbabwe, one of the few SADC member states that has expressed willingness to participate in a regional military intervention in Mozambique ([New Zimbabwe](#), August 8). Making matters even more complicated, officials within the SADC troika have noted that they are facing a significant methodological dilemma, as Mozambican President Felipe Nyusi is allegedly refusing to accept a regional military intervention and prefers a bilateral agreement with Zimbabwe ([Zimbabwe Independent](#), August 7). The Zimbabwean government is in the midst of its own domestic crisis and has stated it would only intervene as part of a regional response or when its interests are directly threatened. Meanwhile, Tanzania is the country most likely to be affected by the insurgency, but has shown little interest in intervening or providing support beyond half-hearted measures to secure its southern border.

Should South Africa or the SADC intervene, they will also have to ensure they intervene with an approach that goes beyond the military dimension and with an understanding of the complex situation on the ground in Cabo Delgado. This feat is made more difficult by the Mozambican government's reluctance to share intelligence and banning of journalists from entering the area.

The government's heavy-handed response, laden with allegations of human rights abuses, also risks dragging any country that intervenes into a reputational nightmare. With no other SADC member seemingly willing to take charge and given South Africa's current standing within the AU, the country's reputation is on the line whether or not it takes the reins to facilitate an intervention.

South Africa is the best positioned to push forward on an intervention plan and should use every SADC and AU mechanism available to promote a strategy at the SADC's 40th Annual Summit, which will see Tanzania pass the SADC chair to Mozambique.

*Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor*

# What Does the Future Hold for Libya's GNA Militias?

*Jacob Lees Weiss*

## Introduction

The success of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) in forcing the withdrawal of the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) from northwestern Libya has led to a temporary *détente* in the conflict. As GNA officials contemplate an assault on the strategic city of Sirte, divisions have resurfaced between Tripoli's numerous militias. These divisions indicate the significant internal difficulties the GNA will likely face, regardless of further military success.

## Tripoli's Militias

Since its creation in 2015, the GNA has relied heavily on myriad militia groups. These groups not only provide security in GNA territory, they also make up the majority of its fighting force against the LNA. In return, militia groups have gained access to state institutions and increased funding, which has bolstered their influence and power.

Despite apparent alignment with the GNA, ideological orientations and loyalties vary among the militias. The inter-militia differences within the GNA have been exacerbated by the increasing presence of foreign militias—notably the Syrian militants flown in by Turkey to strengthen military support in the conflict against the LNA ([The National](#), July 18).

Rivalries between domestic militia groups temporarily halted due to the existential threat posed by the LNA's 15-month assault on Tripoli. Since the LNA's withdrawal from Tripoli on June 4, however, signs of divisions have resurfaced. On July 8, GNA-funded militia groups clashed in the Janzur neighborhood of Tripoli ([UNSMIL](#), July 11). Ten militants were killed in these clashes, apparently over access to energy infrastructure ([Libya Herald](#), July 11). Further inter-militia clashes occurred on July 31 in the Ain Zara neighborhood of southern Tripoli following an argument over the purchase of fuel ([al-Ain](#), July 31). The latter incident forced the GNA Ministry of the Interior to establish patrols in Ain Zara to maintain security ([Ministry of the Interior](#), August 4).

The increased presence of foreign militants has also affected the inter-militia balance. The changing demographic caused by the influx of Syrian militants has provoked fears of a major divide in the GNA camp. Hundreds of Syrian militants were filmed holding up the Turkish flag and pictures of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Janzur on August 5 ([al-Arabiya](#), August 5). While no clashes have occurred between foreign and domestic militias, a Tripoli security source stated that tensions between the two groups have increased due to differences in ideology and allegiance ([al-Arabiya](#), August 2).

## The Battle for Sirte

With the frontline of the civil war solidified around Sirte in the center of Libya, GNA forces are now stretched over an expanse of 400 kilometers. Some of the more nominally GNA-aligned militias will be able to take advantage of the increased security vacuum to solidify control and power. Territorial encroachment and competition for assets are a major driver in inter-militia conflict, and clashes are likely to intensify over the coming months.

The resultant instability could also be intensified if an escalation occurs in the battle for control of Sirte. Due to its key strategic location, major GNA stakeholders, such as Turkey, will bolster the GNA's military capabilities ahead of any future battle to ensure victory. Rather than relying on domestic militias, Turkey and the GNA are likely to increase reinforcements from abroad. Both Turkey and the GNA prefer to resort to foreign militias because it reduces their dependency on domestic militias looking to benefit from a future political settlement.

However, the increased dependency on foreign militias will further destabilize security in GNA territory. Domestic militias are likely to become increasingly resentful as they are crowded out and replaced by their foreign counterparts. The more these militia groups fear they will not benefit from a country controlled by the GNA, the more they will be open to defection to the LNA or other actors. Even without defection, their decreased involvement in the conflict may lead some militias to focus their profit-making efforts elsewhere, whether through increasing control over state assets in GNA-controlled territory or through other criminal activities, such as movement taxes and kidnapping.

This potential instability makes it imperative for the GNA to establish control over or disarm its militias. While the United States has intensified calls for security sector reform and militia disarmament, the GNA has not shown a real willingness, let alone the capability, to carry out these reforms ([U.S. Department of State](#), June 26).

### **GNA Security Sector Reform**

Security sector reform is also vital for the stability of the GNA in the long-term. Militia groups may have played a prominent role in the GNA's recent military successes, but their influence harms the GNA's political legitimacy. The GNA cannot showcase itself as a democratic, civilian-led, rule-of-law state while unaccountable militia groups wield significant and independent control. Until the GNA achieves a monopoly on the legal use of force by its various actors, it will struggle to establish itself as a legitimate political force.

The GNA will face significant difficulties if and when they decide to carry out the reforms. Incorporating militia groups into a coherent and unified security force while coercing other militia groups to disarm remains a massive task. Such an undertaking is unlikely to be viewed as an attractive option while negotiating an imminent and potentially crucial battle over Sirte.

Delaying reform until the GNA takes control of Sirte, however, would be equally problematic. Control over the city would give the GNA access to significant oil revenue, which could lead to a flurry of militia attempts to divert a percentage of the profits. Likewise, the increased delay in undertaking reform would allow militias further time to entrench control and extend power.

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## **No Foothold for al-Shabaab in Somaliland**

*Michael Horton*

The tempo of al-Shabaab's operations in Somalia has steadily increased, despite a dramatic escalation in U.S.-led drone strikes in Somalia. In July alone, al-Shabaab targeted the head of Somalia's military and launched attacks on five different targets in a single day ([al-Jazeera](#), July 13). The targets included a well-fortified base defended by Ethiopian soldiers and a military encampment manned by Kenyan forces ([Garowe Online](#), July 19).

Rather than becoming weaker and less capable as a result of increased pressure from the United States and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), al-Shabaab's ability to plan and carry out complex operations against hardened targets remains intact. In fact, indications have emerged that al-Shabaab is gaining new capabilities and tactics, such as the use of hand-launched drones.

Al-Shabaab has failed to establish an enduring presence in the autonomous but unrecognized Republic of Somaliland. In contrast, al-Shabaab and the Islamic State enjoy considerable operational freedom in the neighboring Somali state of Puntland.

The government of Somaliland's military budget is the equivalent of an accounting error when compared with what has been—and continues to be—spent in Somalia by its international backers. Somaliland does not rely on foreign forces and the United States is not allowed—and there is not any need—to carry out drone attacks in the unrecognized republic. Yet, with its limited resources, Somaliland has achieved what the military forces of Kenya, Turkey, Ethiopia, and the United States have failed to achieve in Somalia: it has denied al-Shabaab a foothold.

How has Somaliland achieved this? First, Somaliland has a government that is relatively responsive to its citizen's needs and demands. Consequently, even though there are growing political divisions, most Somalilanders support and trust their elected representatives and the presidency. Second, and more directly, human intelligence (HUMINT) forms the bedrock of Somaliland's counter-

terrorism strategy. Accurate and timely human intelligence that allows for quick responses to threats stemming from close informal and formal ties between Somaliland's military and intelligence service and those communities most vulnerable to al-Shabaab.

Localized support for—and participation in—counter-terror efforts are critical components of Somaliland's battle against al-Shabaab. Without this, al-Shabaab operatives infiltrate vulnerable towns and villages and, more often than not, establish an enduring presence.

Al-Shabaab's ability to insert itself into communities is clear in parts of Somalia and Puntland, where it often provides greater predictability and more security than the Somali government. Despite harsh tactics and an ideology that alienates most Somalis, al-Shabaab enjoys genuine support. Al-Shabaab also uses its capable intelligence and security apparatus, the Amniyat, to cow and kill those who oppose it. Like all successful and durable insurgent and terrorist groups, al-Shabaab understands that abiding ties to local elites and the HUMINT that they provide are essential. Granular, timely, and accurate HUMINT is the ultimate force multiplier. It costs little or nothing and is not dependent on vulnerable and expensive war making technologies.

Those in charge of Somaliland's military and intelligence service also understand the importance of human intelligence. It is this understanding that informs most of their counter-terror efforts and it is what allows their small and chronically underfunded military and police forces to successfully take on al-Shabaab.

Somaliland's National Intelligence Service (NIS) and the army and police's own intelligence officers prioritize community-led efforts to monitor and assess potential encroachments by al-Shabaab. Intelligence collection relies on both formal and informal networks for information. These networks encompass clan elders, local police, merchants, and even qat traders.

Information about new arrivals to towns and villages or any activity that does not fit accepted patterns is relayed up the chain of command to authorities in regional capitals or the national capital of Hargeisa. Responses by the police and military to threats are usually precise, timely, and most critically tailored to the specific socio-political dynamics of the area at risk.

This kind of response was demonstrated in late 2019 when al-Shabaab operatives entered the region of Sanaag in eastern Somaliland. Sanaag shares a border with Puntland and, as one of Somaliland's least developed regions, is especially susceptible to infiltration by al-Shabaab. The region's topography, which includes rugged, well-watered, mountains, and a lengthy coastline make it attractive to al-Shabaab.

During November of 2019, al-Shabaab dispatched fighters across the border with Puntland and briefly occupied two towns nestled in the Garof Hills ([Horseed Media](#), November 17, 2019). Within hours of the incursion, officials within the NIS and the Somaliland Army initiated a response that marshaled local militias and select police and army units. Police and army units coordinated their efforts with those of local militias, who had first raised the alarm about the incursion, to evict al-Shabaab's operatives. [1] To date, al-Shabaab has not returned to this area—at least not overtly. Al-Shabaab's Amniyat maintains its own network of informants in Somaliland.

The armed forces of Somaliland do not possess aircraft, and even transport vehicles are in short supply. The government struggles to rapidly deploy soldiers and police to where they are required, especially in areas with rough terrain and few roads. First rate HUMINT and the close relationships with community leaders is the government's primary way of compensating for these deficiencies. Some within Somaliland's government have even proposed reviving mounted patrols as a way of increasing force mobility and keeping costs down. [2] To compensate for limited budgets, a lack of transport, and limited manpower, the government of Somaliland must rely on the relationships it builds at the local level. While this approach is partly driven by constraints on resources, it is one of the primary reasons why al-Shabaab has yet to establish a foothold in Somaliland.

The HUMINT that Somaliland relies on and the good relations that its military and intelligence services have with communities throughout much the country are co-constructive: one does not exist without the other. As al-Shabaab launches ever more brazen attacks on the well-equipped military forces of Kenya, Ethiopia, and even the United States, much can be learned from Somaliland's counter-terrorism efforts ([al-Jazeera](#), January 6). Ironically, Somaliland's limited resources force it to make better decisions than neighboring Somalia.

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## **Notes**

[1] Author interviews with Somaliland-based analyst and Puntland based journalist (November 2019).

[2] Author interview with official from the government of Somaliland (September 2019).