



# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

## Personalities Behind the Insurgency

### BRIEF

**Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh: New Updates in Daniel Pearl Murder Case**

FARHAN ZAHID

**Former Beauty Queen and Rapper-Turned-Jihadist Highlight Islamic Extremist Recruitment on Social Media: The Cases of Aamani Noor and Marouen**

HALLA DIYAB

**What's Behind Taliban Leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar's Heightened Diplomatic Visits?**

SUDHA RAMACHANDRAN

**A Profile of Northwestern Nigeria's Kidnapping Duo: Nasiru Kachalla and Dogo Gide**

JACOB ZENN

JOHN FOULKES

## VOLUME XII, ISSUE 2 | February 2021

### Indonesia Arrests Last Fugitive Leader of 2002 Bali Bombings

*John Foulkes*

On December 10, the Indonesian National Police's Densus 88 counterterrorism force arrested Aris Sumarsono, better known as Zulkarnaen, in Purbolinggo, in the East Lampung province of southern Sumatra. Zulkarnaen is the military commander of Jemaah Islamiyah, and has been on the run for 18 years since having a prominent role in the planning of the infamous 2002 Bali bombing, which killed over 200 people ([Jakarta Post](#), December 15, 2020).

Zulkarnaen was born in 1963 in the regency of Sragen, in Central Java province. A gifted student, he reportedly graduated in the top five of his class in biology and took a position the Gadjah Mada University. However, from 1975 to 1981 he attended the Islamic boarding school, al-Mukmin, which became infamous for producing jihadists. There, he came into contact with Jemaah Islamiyah founders Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir. Zulkarnaen quit his job at the university to be among the first

Indonesians sent by Sungkar to Afghanistan for military training in the mid-1980s ([Asia Times](#), December 14; [Rewards for Justice](#), May 12, 2005).

Then a member of the Darul Islam-Negara Islam Indonesia (DI-NII) extremist group, formed in the 1950s to fight for the creation of an Islamic state in Indonesia, Zulkarnaen eventually became the head of a training camp in Afghanistan for fighters from Southeast Asia, called Camp Saddah. He led the training camp for approximately a decade ([UN Security Council](#), April 17, 2019). Zulkarnaen joined the new Jemaah Islamiyah group when it was founded in 1993 as a splinter organization from DI-NII. He departed Afghanistan in the 1990s, as the civil war there worsened. He temporarily settled in the Malaysian town of Raub in the late 1990s, before returning to Indonesia in 1999 alongside Sungkar and Baasyir, who had stayed out of the country for 17 years out of fear of arrest by the dictatorial Suharto regime ([Asia Times](#), December 14).

In the 1990s, Jemaah Islamiyah's leadership authorized Zulkarnaen to organize a group of fighters, known as Laskar Khos (meaning special

force). Made up of approximately 300 Indonesians who received training in Afghanistan and the Philippines, the group was sent to Poso, Central Sulawesi province, and the island of Ambon, Maluku province between 1998 and 2002 to take part in a sectarian conflict that was raging there, and which eventually killed 6,000 people ([Straits Times](#), December 13, 2020).

Zulkarnaen and Laskar Khos were also involved in the Bali bombings that rocked Indonesia in October 2002. Killing 202 people and injuring 209, Zulkarnaen held a key planning role in the attack and is suspected of having made the bombs that were used ([UN Security Council](#), April 17, 2019; [Straits Times](#), December 13, 2020). Zulkarnaen was also reportedly involved in bombings in Jakarta that hit the JW Marriot Hotel in 2003 and the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing. Zulkarnaen was also reportedly involved in the December 2005 bombings in Bali and additional bombings in Jakarta in July 2009. Zulkarnaen ascended to the position of operations chief following the arrest of his predecessor Riduan Isamuddin in Thailand in August 2003 ([UN Security Council](#), April 17, 2019).

Zulkarnaen has been on the run since the Bali bombings, evading capture by Indonesian forces for over 18 years. He was sanctioned by the U.S. State Department in May 2005 for his position within Jemaah Islamiyah's central command, and by the UN Security Council in the same year ([treasury.gov](#), May 12, 2005; [UN Security Council](#), April 17, 2019).

Zulkarnaen's arrest marks the end of an era for Jemaah Islamiyah. Zulkarnaen was one of the only remaining leaders of the group involved in the 2002 Bali bombings to still be alive and not imprisoned. Upik Lawanga, another senior Jemaah Islamiyah leader and bombmaker involved in the 2002 Bali bombings, was arrested

on November 23, 2020 ([Jakarta Post](#), December 15, 2020). The group's founder, Baasyir, has been released from jail, but his advanced age and poor health, combined with intensive counterterrorism missions by Densus-88, makes it unlikely that he will lead any new jihadist efforts.

With the old guard of Jemaah Islamiyah either dead, in prison or too old for active leadership, Indonesia is likely to see the rise of a new generation of Islamic State-oriented jihadists, as opposed to the insurgents of Zulkarnaen's generation who came of age with the Afghan jihad and were loyal and connected to al-Qaeda (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), February 12). Signaling this change, in August 2014 Baasyir, long affiliated with al-Qaeda, swore an oath of loyalty to then-Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ([Jakarta Post](#), August 13, 2014). The Islamic-State linked East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT) group were responsible for an attack on a remote village in Indonesia's Central Sulawesi province, killing four Christians and burning six buildings, including a home that was used as a church by the local community. Central Sulawesi continues to see conflict between government security forces and MIT insurgents ([Benar News](#), March 2).

Indonesian insurgents affiliated with both Islamic State and al-Qaeda continue to gain from the loose maritime borders between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in the Sulu and Celebes Seas. On February 20, the police commissioner of the Malaysian state of Sabah warned that the region could see attacks reminiscent of the 2002 Bali bombings if nothing is done to curb militant activity in the state. The comment highlights the continuing threat of terrorism in the region, as loose maritime borders allow extremists from Indonesia, likely including those once overseen by Zulkarnaen, to use the ungoverned areas of Sabah state as a springboard to reach the

Philippines, where they are able to acquire weapons and training from extremists in the country's Mindanao region and Sulu archipelago. The police commissioner specifically cited Jemaah Islamiyah as using these routes. He stated, "They usually come from Indonesia and enter Sabah's east coast through Tawau, before moving on to the Philippines... There (in the Philippines), they are provided various training, such as in firearms use, bomb-making and combat situations" (Daily Express, February 20).

Furthermore, Indonesian police recently released footage from a laptop seized during Zulkarnaen's arrest. The video showed training camps where Jemaah Islamiyah recruits were receiving weapons training and practicing kidnapping and ambush tactics. A police spokesman said that the footage showed training camps running in 12 different locations. The footage was reportedly taken between 2013-2018, and the trainees shown were allegedly sent to fight in Syria after completing their training (SBS News, March 1). The return of fighters to Indonesia continues to be a security risk to the country.

The hideout where Upik Lawanga was arrested in November was also found to have a bunker containing weapons and bombmaking equipment, raising speculation in the Indonesian media that Jemaah Islamiyah was plotting a new series of attacks (al-Jazeera, January 7).

The Indonesian police and the Densus-88 force's arrest of Zulkarnaen is the latest in a string of successful security operations against Jemaah Islamiyah. Indonesian security forces have arrested over 30 militants linked to Jemaah Islamiyah in the past year and has shown success in breaking up terrorist cells. The group has been evolving in order to survive, however, with recent reports showing that Jemaah Islamiyah has been using charity boxes at mini-markets to illicit funds from an unwitting public, recruiting new

members from universities and publicly pushing its sectarian ideology (al-Jazeera, January 7; Straits Times, January 2). Zulkarnaen has been an active leader of the group for decades, and though the security environment in the country has drastically changed during that time, a new generation of fighters will continue to be a threat to Indonesia and the wider region.

*John Foulkes is the Editor of Militant Leadership Monitor*

## Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh: New Updates in Daniel Pearl Murder Case

*Farhan Zahid*

The Supreme Court of Pakistan's acquittal of Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh is a recent but shocking development in the Daniel Pearl murder case. The kidnapping and beheading of the *Wall Street Journal* correspondent in Pakistan riveted international attention due to the fact that the victim was a Western journalist while the perpetrator turned out to be the head of al-Qaeda's military committee and mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, and local Pakistani al-Qaeda affiliates were complicit in the crime. Legal gaps in the case resulted in the benefit of doubt being given to the accused.

### Background

Daniel Pearl, a 39-year-old *Wall Street Journal* correspondent, came to Pakistan to research an investigative story about the financing of the 9/11 attacks and the Richard Reid case, better known as the shoe bomber case. Pearl attempted to meet several jihadist figures, including Pir Mubarak Gillani of the then U.S.-based organization Jamaat ul-Fuqra, but was kidnapped by Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh at the behest of al-Qaeda. [1] Shaikh, a British-Pakistani and a London School of Economics dropout who was a senior leader of Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen, cajoled Pearl to meet him, setting up his kidnapping in Karachi in December 2001. Pearl was held in a cellar in the suburbs of Karachi. A previously unknown terrorist group, the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty, issued demands for Pearl's release in an email to a local newspaper, including the "freeing of Pakistani prisoners in U.S. prisons, release of U.S. fighter jets F-16 to Pakistan, and release of Mullah Abdul Salam

Zaeef, the former Afghan ambassador to Pakistan" ([News International](#), February 11).

After a month of silence, a video was sent to the U.S. Consulate in Karachi of Pearl's beheading by a masked assailant, who turned out to be Khalid Shaikh Mohammad. Pearl's body was later found buried in a plot on the outskirts of Karachi. Pakistani police launched investigations, and a number of accused, including Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh, were arrested, charged and sentenced to death in 2004.

### Recent Developments

The Daniel Pearl case remained closed for more than 18 years. However, last April, the Sindh High Court responded to an appeal filed by Shaikh's father. In a short trial, the local appellate court dropped the murder charges against Shaikh but upheld the charges against him for Pearl's kidnapping. Still, the court allowed Shaikh to walk free, as he had already completed his seven-year sentence for kidnapping. The Pakistani government filed an appeal against the Sindh High Court's verdict with Pakistan's Supreme Court. The Supreme Court trial began after a delay of several months and a verdict was issued in February 2021.

According to Azaz Syed, a senior Islamabad journalist who was interviewed for this piece, the prosecution's case had a number of problems from the beginning, but since the charges were framed efficiently by the prosecutorial team at the time, they were overlooked by the court. [2] However, the charges began to fall apart upon scrutiny in the Sindh High Court. A state witness turned out to be fake, two confessional statements from Fahad Nasim and Syed Sulaiman Saqib, who were also accused of taking part of the kidnapping, were deemed inadmissible, as they were made under duress, according to the magistrate who recorded their statements.

The court also ruled the testimony of a handwriting expert inadmissible, as he did not have the required experience as an expert witness. In addition, the dates of the police's data extraction of the accused's computer conflicted, the murderer's face was not visible in the video shown to the court, and the murder weapon was never recovered. Amid these discrepancies, Shaikh's presence at the crime scene could not be confirmed, and he was granted the benefit of the doubt considering the lacunas in the investigations and the prosecution's witnesses and evidence.

The Sindh High Court had already dropped the murder charge, and it ultimately confirmed only the kidnapping for ransom charge. The Supreme Court went further, acquitting Shaikh of the kidnapping charge, as the only witness, a taxi driver, turned out to be a false witness and a police employee. Eventually, all charges against Shaikh were dropped ([News International](#), February 11). [3]

### **Conclusion**

Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh, whose multiple talents and London School of Economics background led many to consider him a terrorist of exceptional ability, is now free. As a free man, he could reenter the insurgency by joining al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) or even al-Qaeda Central, as both organizations are facing an acute shortage of veteran leaders to command and reinvigorate the organizations in the region and globally. For the counterterrorism community, the acquittal is a setback, as a free Omar Shaikh could contribute his experience to -- and provide a propaganda opportunity for -- any extremist group he joins. However, it is unclear how Omar Shaikh is going to behave, as he is no longer the young man he was in the 1990s. Both policymakers and jihadist circles in Pakistan and abroad are waiting with great interest to see what path he will follow following his release from prison.

*Farhan Zahid has done his Ph.D. in Counter Terrorism (Topic: Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist violent Non-State Actors in Pakistan and their relationship with Islamist Parties) from Vrije University Brussels, Belgium. He writes on counter-terrorism, al-Qaeda, Pakistani al-Qaeda-linked groups, Islamist violent non-state actors in Pakistan, militant landscapes in Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban.*

### **Notes**

[1] Ahmad Omar Saeed Shaikh is a veteran jihadist who had fought in Bosnia during the Yugoslav Wars in the early 1990s and in the Islamist insurgency in Indian Kashmir. He was arrested in New Delhi in 1994, but was released in 1999 after Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen hijacked Air India flight IC-814 from Kathmandu and landed it in Taliban-ruled Kandahar, Afghanistan. He was released in exchange for the hostages, along with two other Indian prisoners, Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Zargar.

[2] Discussions with Azaz Syed about the case on February 16, 2021.

[3] Ibid.

## **Former Beauty Queen and Rapper-Turned-Jihadist Highlight Islamic Extremist Recruitment on Social Media: The Cases of Aamani Noor and Marouen Douiri**

*Halla Diyab*

With Islamic State (IS) increasingly turning to social media to spread its propaganda amid its territorial defeat, the group has utilized apps like Tik Tok, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube to recruit and radicalize youth. With social media often heralded as platforms for inspiration, online recruitment remains a means by which the group can survive, pulling adherents into a rising subculture of online-influenced militants. This subculture, often defined by upbeat and catchy propaganda, makes IS and other jihadist organizations appealing to vulnerable teens.

### **Miss Teen Turned Jihadist Bride**

A prominent example is the case of Amaani Noor, 21, a former Miss Teen Great Britain semi-finalist and performing arts student turned bride to a jihadist fighter in Syria. Noor was reportedly radicalized on Telegram after receiving texts from Hakim Hubi (a.k.a. Hakim Mylove) ([alaraby.co.uk](http://alaraby.co.uk), December 21, 2019). On Telegram, Hubi claimed to be an “independent” fighter against the Syrian government, and not a member of IS. He and Noor met on Telegram, and before ever meeting in person, they were married over a video link in the presence of an imam from Waterfront, Liverpool. Noor, in a message to Hubi, stated that it's been “her dream to marry a fighter for a long time” and her dream “to be a fighter, even longer” ([independentarabia.com](http://independentarabia.com), December 25, 2019).

Noor later set up a PayPal account with a fake name to transfer approximately \$45, or 35 British pounds, to a group called, “The Merciful Hands,” linked to rebel fighters in Syria. Noor claimed she sent the funds to support women and children in Syria, but UK prosecutors argued that she “knew or should have known that [her] donation may have been used to buy weapons and supplies for terrorists in Syria” ([cps.gov.uk](http://cps.gov.uk), December 12, 2019).

She also booked a ticket to travel to Turkey to join Hubi in Syria in 2018. Her plan failed, however, when she was arrested before being able to leave the country ([alarabiya.net](http://alarabiya.net), December 14, 2019). Noor, who ran an online jewelry shop, reportedly was aided by several people, including Victoria Webster, a radicalized 28-year-old mother-of-two from Lancashire. Webster was arrested and sentenced to jail alongside Noor ([bl3rabia.com](http://bl3rabia.com), December 12, 2019).

### **The Path to Radicalization**

Noor's path to extremism was largely facilitated through Telegram group chats. Her online conversations reveal that she engaged in extremist correspondence with Webster. The Telegram message groups she was a part of brought her into contact with videos of beheadings, torture and people being burned alive. Noor was sentenced to 18 months in jail after being convicted of funding terrorism ([alroeya.com](http://alroeya.com), December 14, 2019).

### **Rapper-Turned-Jihadist**

An important facet of IS propaganda is advertising the group's fighters as a way of radicalizing young extremists. A prime example of this is Marouen Douiri, a 25-year-old Tunisian rapper turned IS jihadist. He is better known by his stage name “Emino,” and later, after he became a jihadist, as Abu Ayman.

Douiri, who caused an online stir on March 18, 2014, when he took to social media to pledge allegiance to then IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, came from a middle-class Tunisian family and owned a music studio in his home town, Manouba. He is best known for his song, “Boulcia Kleb” (Cops are Dogs), which he wrote with Tunisian rapper Weld El 15, who was given a two-year prison sentence for insulting the police ([YouTube](#), March 15, 2015). Douiri was listed as among Tunisia’s best rappers for 2011, and led a life there as a pop star, regularly commenting on and singing about drugs, cannabis and alcohol. However, in 2013, he was imprisoned in Mornaguia prison for eight months for substance abuse, during which time he was reportedly radicalized. After his release, Douiri abandoned his music career and traveled to Turkey, and then to Syria to join IS. He joined the group’s media wing in the Syrian city of Raqqa, the capital of IS’ self-proclaimed caliphate, before settling in the Iraqi city Mosul, then also held by IS ([mena-monitor.org](#), September 12, 2020; [albayan.ae](#), January 10, 2017)

Douiri then regularly posted on social media, including his Facebook and Twitter accounts, in an attempt to put a positive spin on his new life in IS-held territory. These posts regularly showed Douiri posing with guns in Mosul, and performing rap songs venerating jihadism ([Assabah](#), March 28, 2015). Douiri used his sizable social media network to promote IS, using his perch as a former musician to spread propaganda to young people on behalf of the international terrorist organization ([alaraby.co.uk](#), March 23, 2015). Douiri was reportedly killed in a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on November 28, 2016. His family in Tunisia has not confirmed his death, but confirmed that he disappeared from social media in 2016 ([zoomtunisia.net](#), November 28, 2016).

## Conclusion

The transformation of Noor and Douiri from a beauty queen and a rapper, respectively, into extremists highlights how social media and online apps have become effective tools of jihadist groups. Both Noor and Douiri had enjoyed high-profile public positions before becoming aggrieved over and resentful toward the socio-political systems they were living in. Apparently, both wished to air their grievances and be heard on a larger platform, which they found on social media.

Despite their different paths to jihadism, both Douiri and Noor found saw insurgency as a global platform to win viewers and followers, turning them onto internet sensations.

*Halla Diyab is an award winning screen-writer, producer, broadcaster and published author. She holds a Ph.D. in English and American Studies from the University of Leicester, UK. She carried out research in New Orleans, USA while working on her thesis “The Examination of Marginality and Minorities in the Drama and Film of Tennessee Williams.” She holds an PGDip in post-colonial and world literature, and an MA in Gender and Women Studies from the University of Warwick, UK. She has written a number of scripts for TV dramas countering Islamic extremism and international terrorism, which were aired across the Middle East and Europe, resulting in her being awarded the Best Syrian Drama Script Award 2010 and the Artists Achievement Award 2011. As a highly successful drama writer, she was dubbed “one of the most influential women in Syria” in 2011. She also produces documentary films on Islam and British Muslims for UK and international channels. She is also the Founder & Director of Liberty Media Productions which focuses on cross-cultural issues between Britain and the Middle East. She is also a columnist at al-Arabiya English, writing on Syria, Islam and Middle East political affairs.*

## What's Behind Taliban Leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar's Heightened Diplomatic Visits?

*Sudha Ramachandran*

On February 16, the Taliban's deputy leader and chief of its Qatar political office, Mullah Abdul Ghani, better known as Mullah Baradar (meaning brother), issued an "open letter" to the American public calling on "the American side to remain committed to the full implementation" of the Doha Agreement, which the United States and the Taliban signed on February 29, 2020. Striking a non-aggressive tone in the letter, Baradar said that "the Afghan issue cannot be resolved through the use of force" and stressed that the Taliban is "sincerely committed to finding a political solution to the ongoing conflict" ([Voice of Jihad](#), February 16).

Baradar's letter came amid reports that the U.S. is considering a review of the Doha Agreement, under which it committed to a full troop withdrawal by May 2021. It appears now that American troops will remain in Afghanistan beyond the 18-month deadline the U.S. agreed to ([Tolo News](#), February 19). The Taliban has warned that if American troops do not leave it will use its "legal right to free its homeland" through "every lawful means necessary" ([Arab News](#), February 2).

Since December, the Taliban has stepped up its global diplomatic outreach, and Baradar and Sher Mohammed Abbas Stanikzai, deputy head of the Taliban's Qatar political office, have led Taliban delegations to Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Russia ([Gulf Today](#), February 3). According to an Afghan government official, Baradar had been "sidelined" by the appointment last August of hardline cleric Abdul Hakim Ishaqzai as the Taliban's top negotiator

in the intra-Afghan talks. However, as of December, Baradar is "back in the spotlight." [1] So who is Baradar, and why is he important to the Taliban's recent diplomatic drive?

### Role in the Taliban Regime

A Durrani Pashtun of the Popalzai tribe, Baradar was born in 1968 in the village of Yatimak in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province. He spent his early years in a madrassa in Kandahar. He joined the mujahideen to fight the Soviets in the 1980s and was active in the Kandahar province's Panjwayi area. Baradar's close relationship with Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's founder-chief, can be traced back to the 1980s. The two were part of the same mujahideen group and reportedly related by marriage through two sisters. In 1994, they co-founded the Taliban ([Afghan Bios](#), June 25, 2020).

In addition to playing an important role in the military operations that culminated in the Taliban's capture of Kabul in 1996, Baradar also held key posts in the Taliban regime (1996-2001). He was a corps commander for western Afghanistan and later was garrison commander of Kabul ([Dawn](#), February 17, 2010). He also served as Deputy Minister of Defense. Baradar was reportedly "responsible for a number of massacres in 1998-2000." During the Taliban's military offensives in the Shamali region north of Kabul in 1999, he is said to have personally ordered and overseen summary executions. [2] His role in the Taliban regime led to his inclusion on the United Nations Security Council Sanctions List ([United Nations Security Council](#), February 23, 2001).

### Mullah Omar's Deputy

Baradar was among several top Taliban leaders who reportedly offered to surrender following the ouster of the Taliban regime toward the end of 2001. In return for "immunity from arrest,"

these leaders apparently agreed to “abstain from political life” and accept the leadership of Hamid Karzai. But their surrender offer was not accepted ([Afghanistan Analysts Network](#), October 28, 2018). Soon afterward, Baradar and other Taliban leaders fled to Pakistan, from where they have waged the almost two-decades-long insurgency. Considered “more cunning and dangerous” than Omar, Baradar is said to have played an important role in reviving the Taliban and reorganizing it to fight a guerrilla war against the U.S.-led coalition forces ([Dawn](#), February 17, 2010).

Baradar rose steadily in the Taliban hierarchy in the 2000s. In 2003, he was appointed second deputy to Omar and thus stood third within the Taliban hierarchy, after Omar and Mullah Obaidullah. Following Obaidullah’s arrest in 2007, Baradar took over the number two position within the Taliban ([Afghanistan Analysts Network](#), October 28, 2018). Omar’s failing health saw Baradar take charge of the organization. In addition to running the group’s military affairs and the Rahbari Shura (leadership council), Baradar was managing its financial affairs and appointing and dismissing commanders ([Dawn](#), February 17, 2010).

### **‘Best Hope for Peace’**

Then, in February 2010, Pakistani authorities arrested Baradar in Karachi. Baradar was reportedly engaging in secret talks directly with the then-government of Hamid Karzai. Pakistani authorities were apprehensive that such talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban would result in a deal that could leave Islamabad with less clout in Kabul, and apparently decided to pre-empt this by taking Baradar into custody ([Indian Express](#), August 23, 2010).

All the main actors in the Afghan conflict perceive Baradar’s potential value to peace talks. In Kabul, he is “seen as a moderate, someone

who is interested in a political settlement. If during the Karzai years he was seen as capable of bringing moderate Taliban leaders on board a negotiated settlement, he is now seen as Afghanistan’s best hope for peace.” [3] According to U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, both Karzai and President Ashraf Ghani saw Baradar’s potential to “play a pivotal role in the peace process” ([The Hindu](#), February 9, 2019). They repeatedly pressed the Pakistanis for his release. [4] According to terrorism analyst Abdul Basit, Baradar’s significance to Pakistani authorities can be gauged from the fact that they did not release him for eight years despite strong requests by the Afghan and American governments, and the Taliban, for his release. [5]

Pakistan regarded Baradar as its “winning pawn in the unfolding Great Game in Afghanistan” ([Indian Express](#), March 23, 2019). It saw him as “a valuable card to be played at an appropriate time and was unwilling to surrender this card” by releasing him early in the game. As for the Americans, they have long viewed Baradar as a “moderate and a useful facilitator in peace talks.” [6] Consequently, when the administration of President Donald Trump became interested in negotiating an agreement with the Taliban that would pave the way for American troop withdrawal, Khalilzad urged Pakistan to release him, a request that Islamabad agreed to ([The Hindu](#), February 9, 2019).

Following his release from Pakistani custody in October 2018, Baradar engaged in talks with the Khalilzad-led U.S. delegation. The negotiations resulted in the Doha Agreement, which Baradar signed on behalf of the Taliban. His role in negotiating this agreement, which is widely looked on by the Taliban as a U.S. “surrender document,” boosted his stature in the Taliban. [7]

## At the Forefront Again

Yet, within a few months of this achievement, Ishaqzai replaced Baradar as the Taliban's chief negotiator in the talks with the Afghan government. Appointing Ishaqzai, who is experienced in Islamic jurisprudence, as the top negotiator to the intra-Afghan talks was aimed at assuring conservatives in the ranks that the Taliban leadership remains committed to Islamic values and sharia law (see [Militant Leadership Monitor](#), December 4, 2020). Keeping Baradar at the helm of the Taliban team at the intra-Afghan talks would not have served that purpose. However, with these talks having been in a state of suspension since January and the Taliban seeking to influence world opinion in the context of the uncertainty over the Doha Agreement's future, Baradar is once again at the forefront of the group's diplomacy.

The flurry of Taliban visits abroad in recent months is in "retaliation" for Washington's review of the Doha agreement. The Taliban is mobilizing the support of major powers and Afghanistan's neighbors for its position that the United States must pull its troops out of the country. [8] To draw the support of these countries, Baradar has been projecting the Taliban as a responsible actor that will contribute to regional security and stability. In Ashgabat, for instance, Baradar expressed the Taliban's support for multilateral gas pipeline projects, rail corridors and power lines ([The Express Tribune](#), February 18). Baradar's diplomatic blitz has also been aimed at bolstering the Taliban's legitimacy in the Afghan political landscape. [9] His image as a "moderate" leader helps the Taliban achieve these objectives.

## Role in "Future Set-up"

There is speculation in social media that Baradar is being considered for an "important position in a future set-up" in Afghanistan. His recent diplomatic blitzkrieg could be aimed at boosting

his profile and stature. As one of the Taliban "old guard" and a co-founder of the group, he commands respect in the Taliban. Unlike other Taliban leaders, many of whom are seen as "mass murderers," Baradar "comes across as a moderate" and "will find more acceptability among ordinary Afghans." He also seems "acceptable to the U.S. and Pakistan"; they see him as "someone they can work with." However, Baradar has not been active on the battlefield for decades and is not in touch with the new generation of Taliban fighters, who question his military credentials. [10]

Questions abound relating to his eight years in Pakistani custody. How did it impact him? This reportedly has "fueled suspicions over his loyalties." [11]

Importantly, will Baradar be acceptable to the Taliban conservatives and hardliners? Given the deep divisions within the Taliban, Baradar could find the strongest opposition to his taking on a future leadership role in the organization coming from his hardline colleagues.

*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 and Jamestown Foundation's China Brief and Terrorism Monitor.*

## Notes

[1] Author's Interview, Kabul-based Afghan government official, February 18.

[2] The Afghanistan Justice Report, "Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001," accessed on February 22, <http://afghanistanjusticeproject.org/warcrimesandcrimesagainsthumanity19782001.pdf>

[3] Afghan official, n. 1.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Author's Interview, Abdul Basit, associate research fellow at the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, February 15.

[6] Afghan official, n.1.

[7] Basit, n. 5.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Afghan official, n.1.

## **A Profile of Northwestern Nigeria's Kidnapping Duo: Nasiru Kachalla and Dogo Gide**

*Jacob Zenn*

Since Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the Kankara kidnapping in northwestern Nigeria's Katsina State in December 2020, concern about banditry in the country has gained increasing national and international attention (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), January 15). In the Kankara incident, the more than 300 schoolboys kidnapped from a school were subsequently released by bandits who had a link to Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau. However, many other targets of bandits have not been so fortunate. These victims have included Christian villagers, local village or political leaders, wealthy individuals whose family members have been abducted for extortion, herders whose cattle have been pilfered, and road passengers whose money and other belongings have been stolen.

The Kankara kidnapping bandits was reportedly were reportedly led by a man named Adamun Daudawa, and his accomplices were identified as Nashamuwa, Alhaji Auta, Na-Bajjallah, Dankarmi and Auwalu ([Twitter.com/ankaboy](#), December 15, 2020). While they were known locally before the Kankara kidnapping, they lacked the prominence of two other leading bandits in northwestern Nigeria in recent years -- Nasiru Kachalla and Dogo Gide. These careers of these two bandits are significant, demonstrating how northwestern Nigerian bandits mix criminal activities with jihadism while clashing with Nigerian security forces and rival bandits. Most of all, these bandits cause harm to local civilians who are in their way. The profiles, activities, alliances and rivalries of this bandit duo are detailed in this article.

## Nigeria's Bandit Duo

*Nasiru Kachalla*

Nasiru Kachalla was reported killed on December 28, 2020 in a clash with a rival bandit group in Kaduna State, which borders Katsina ([pmnewsnigeria.com](http://pmnewsnigeria.com), December 28, 2020). Several kidnappings had been attributed to him by the security forces, including:

- the January 24, 2020 kidnapping of Bola Ataga, whose husband, Philip, is a prominent doctor, and their two children;
- the January 9, 2020 kidnapping of four seminarian students of Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna;
- the October 3, 2019 kidnapping of six students and two teachers at Engravers College in Kakau village of the Chikun local government, Kaduna.

Some of Kachalla's methods can be gleaned from analyzing these operations. After kidnapping Bola Ataga, Kachalla's bandits demanded a ransom of 150 million naira -- nearly \$400,000 ([thecable.ng](http://thecable.ng), February 2, 2020). Because the ransom was not paid, Bola Ataga was killed, and the bandits instead demanded \$26,000 (10 million naira) for her two sons, which was paid. After the kidnapping, Philip Ataga financed the construction of a police station in his local community to help improve security there. Local youths also protested against the government's failure to protect communities from the bandits. The demonstrations highlighted the deaths of Bola Ataga and a guard at her house who was killed when she was kidnapped ([thecable.ng](http://thecable.ng), February 1, 2020; [thecable.ng](http://thecable.ng), February 2, 2020).

The Good Shepherd Major Seminary kidnapping had a less tragic conclusion than the kidnapping of Bola Ataga. The three seminarian students were released shortly after the

kidnapping, with no report of a ransom being paid. However, it is likely that a ransom was paid but not publicly disclosed ([Sahara Reporters](http://Sahara Reporters), January 31, 2020). Nevertheless, the kidnapers reportedly released the first student after contacting his family, believing he was ill and would die in their hands ([cathnews.com](http://cathnews.com), January 21, 2020). The dormitory where the students were abducted hosted 268 students, although they were Christians, and not Muslims like the Kankara schoolboys ([punchng.com](http://punchng.com), January 10, 2020).

This seminary kidnapping targeting Christians occurred after various Kaduna bandit groups began raiding Christian villages and abducting Christian leaders. Such raids have continued ([thenationonlineng.net](http://thenationonlineng.net), December 27, 2020). It represents a sectarian angle to northwestern Nigerian banditry, even though the bandits, including Kachalla, rarely proclaimed Islam as their motivation, unlike jihadists. Nevertheless, it is common in Nigeria for Christians to attribute the scourge of banditry to "Fulani Muslims," since many bandit leaders are Fulani and Muslim ([crisisgroup.org](http://crisisgroup.org), September 19, 2017).

Meanwhile, the Engravers College kidnapping resulted in a reported 10 million naira (\$26,000) ransom being paid for the release of six female students and two teachers ([premiumtimesng.com](http://premiumtimesng.com), October 26, 2019). This school was also Christian-run, and the targeting of students resembled the Good Shepherd Major Seminary kidnapping. Moreover, both of these kidnappings, and the kidnapping of Bola Ataga and her sons, were in Kaduna state's Chikun local government area. Chikun, which was created in 1987 and is majority Christian with a significant Muslim minority, had managed to avoid the Muslim-Christian clashes plaguing the rest of Kaduna through political power-sharing ([projects.harvard.iq.edu](http://projects.harvard.iq.edu), 2013). However, Kachalla's bandits threatened to disturb Chikun's relative calm and showed how it was

not only his victims who were harmed, but also the broader community.

### *Dogo Gide*

While Kachalla's tactics may have resembled those of jihadists, including Boko Haram, no reports have emerged pointing to him being involved with jihadism. Nevertheless, the al-Qaeda-loyal Boko Haram breakaway faction, Ansaru, which had been inactive since 2015, resurfaced in Kaduna in 2020 ([thisdaylive.com](https://www.thisdaylive.com), August 16, 2020). Ansaru's most significant claimed operation was attacking a Yobe emir's convoy that was passing through Kaduna. The attack killed several of the emir's bodyguards before an operation by security forces forced Ansaru's members to retreat ([punchng.com](https://punchng.com), February 6, 2020).

It was Dogo Gide, not Kachalla, who reportedly established contacts with Ansaru and jihadists elsewhere in the Sahel ([HumAngle](https://www.humangle.com), June 9, 2020). However, like Kachalla, he conflicted with rival bandit groups. Dogo Gide was reportedly injured in a Nigerian air force strike in June 2020, but those reports turned out to be false. At the time, Dogo Gide was attempting to arrange a ceasefire with those rival bandits so that they could form a unified bloc to fight the Nigerian military. However, not all of the bandit groups abided by the ceasefire, which led Dogo Gide to attack them. At this time, Kachalla, whose nickname was "Yellow," was reportedly allied with Dogo Gide ([HumAngle](https://www.humangle.com), June 14, 2020).

It was unclear if Dogo Gide was with Ansaru elements when he was injured ([HumAngle](https://www.humangle.com), June 9, 2020). However, his forest hideouts and reported deputies from Zamfara overlapped with Ansaru. Ansaru founder Khalid al-Barnawi designated a Fulani deputy from Zamfara—who held his own weapons stash in Kaduna—to be his deputy before he was arrested in 2016 ([thecable.ng](https://www.thecable.ng), April 13, 2016). Ansaru also

released photos of its fighters in a forested area when it once again announced its presence in Nigeria in October 2019 ([Telegram](https://www.telegram.com), October 27, 2019). Ansaru and Dogo Gide were, therefore, operating in the same areas and all that was needed was for Dogo Gide to ally with Ansaru for them to find each other's locations and coordinate. Presumably, Ansaru could provide tactical expertise to Dogo Gide's bandits while the bandits could provide cover to Ansaru, helping it hide from the counter-terrorism pressure prevalent in other parts of the country.

After Dogo Gide was injured and due to his inability to unify the bandits to combat the security forces, he ended up calling for bandits to put down their weapons. He began preaching to local communities. He even went so far as to kill the most brutal bandit leader in northwestern Nigeria, Buharin Daji, although it is unclear what role, if any, Gide played in Kachalla's death ([punchng.com](https://punchng.com), September 21, 2019). Thus, although Dogo Gide caused much pain during his banditry career, his legacy is apparently becoming one of reform. At the same time, although Dogo Gide's killing of Buharin Daji was intended to end the bandit leader's ruthlessness and reign in northwestern Nigeria, the reality is it did little to improve local security ([thenewhumanitarian.org](https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org), September 13, 2018). Moreover, it is unclear if Dogo Gide is committed to dialogue for the long-term, as it seems Ansaru appears to be lurking in the background of Gide's latest talks with Nigerian Salafi scholar Ahmad Gumi (see [Terrorism Monitor](https://www.terrorismmonitor.com), February 26). Should such talks break down, Gide could again resort to attacks, with Ansaru by his side.

### **Conclusion**

The cases of Nasiru Kachalla and Dogo Gide show the complex ways that Nigerian bandit leaders interact with each other, their communities, the Nigerian security forces and

jihadists. A key difference between them and the jihadists is that they do not justify their violence in terms of establishing an Islamic state. Rather, they perceive themselves as victims of an unjust government, which compels them to engage in banditry and violate the law to sustain their livelihood. This may have correlations with, for example, piracy, either in the Gulf of Guinea off Nigeria's coast or even off the Somali coast, where pirates justify their activities as necessary to respond to government and international companies' violations of their coastal waters and fishing rights.

Given the growth of banditry in northwestern Nigeria, and the inability of the Nigerian security forces to curb it or the corruption and inequalities that facilitate the problem, new leaders like Nasiru Kachalla and Dogo Gide are likely to emerge. If these cases show anything positive, it is that bandit leaders may be willing to negotiate and even put down their arms. This is easier than with jihadist leaders, especially Shekau, because bandits are mostly interested in improving their lives here on earth, whereas Shekau's top consideration is fighting for jihad and heaven in the afterlife. This means there may be opportunities for local civic actors, including village chiefs and religious leaders, to work together, engage bandits and find ways for them to put down their arms.

However, as Shekau and his larger rival, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), attempt to recruit bandits to their cause and preach among them, there is a risk that they will become increasingly enmeshed with jihadists, who are now mostly active in Nigeria's northeast. This makes the consequences of not reigning in banditry even more pressing. This explains why Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has publicly identified banditry as a security crisis equal to that of jihadism ([guardian.ng](http://guardian.ng), January 9).

*Jacob Zenn is editor of The Jamestown Foundation's Terrorism Monitor. Follow @Bokowatch*

Militant Leadership Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. It is designed to be read by policymakers and other specialists, yet also be accessible to the general public. In order to purchase a subscription, please visit <https://jamestown.org/product-category/militant-leadership-monitor/mlm-subscription/>. Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.