

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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p.1

Jacob Zenn

BRIEFS

p.3

Can Kasapoglu

**Maximum Pressure:
Turkey's Anti-PKK
Counter-Terrorism
Campaigns in Northern
Iraq**

p.5

Sudha Ramachandran

**Tehreek-e-Taliban
Pakistan: Is China in
its Crosshairs?**

p.7

Herbert Maack

**Abu Walaa's Islamic
State Network and
Germany's Counter-
Terrorism Prosecutions**

ONE YEAR AFTER THE DEATH OF ABDELMALEK DROUKDEL'S AQIM FALLS INTO OBSCURITY

Jacob Zenn

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been considered a stalwart affiliate of al-Qaeda since its predecessor organization, the Salafist Group for Preaching Combat (GSPC), pledged loyalty to al-Qaeda in 2006 ([Terrorism Monitor](#), April 5, 2007). The GSPC leader who pledged loyalty to al-Qaeda, and therefore AQIM's first leader, was Abdelmalek Droukdel. He led AQIM until his death in a U.S.-supported French operation in northern Mali last year ([France24](#), June 25, 2020). Contrary to reports of Droukdel being aloof, videos leaked by either the French or Algerian intelligence services showed that he had been meeting with the Sahel's top jihadists, Iyad Ag Ghali and Hamadou Koufa, in the months before his death ([europe1.fr](#), February 2). Indeed, it was because of informants within the Sahelian jihadist ranks that Droukdel's location was identified and he was subsequently killed.

Months before Droukdel's death, the top Sahel-based Algerian AQIM member and top Sahel-based Tunisian

AQIM shura member, Jemal Oukacha (Abu Yahya al-Hamman) and Seifallah Ben Hassine (Abu Iyad al-Tunisi), were also killed in northern Mali by French forces. AQIM's leadership in both Algeria and the Sahel have, therefore, been suffering. Nearly one year since Droukdel's death, which took place on June 3, 2020, the results are in—AQIM has not rebounded with any force from the deaths of these leaders and the group itself is on the road to ineffectiveness.

AQIM has carried out virtually no attacks since Droukdel's death and its latest statement in March was unimpressive ([Twitter.com/Mossadnews](#), March 17). It contended that an AQIM member who was captured by Algerian security forces was interrogated under torture, urged Algerians not to join the security forces, and argued that Islamic law, and not protest movements or democracy, was the answer for Algerian Muslims. The statement nevertheless seemed to recognize that protests were Algerians' preferred method for changing the political order, and not jihad.

A previous January AQIM statement also asserted AQIM had "paused" the jihad to allow the protest movements

to take place, but would once again resume operations ([Twitter.com/minalami](https://twitter.com/minalami), January 18). That statement was also the first from Abu Ubaida Yusuf al-Annabi, who replaced Droukdel as AQIM leader. A veteran AQIM commander, and former GSPC member, al-Annabi, however, still has little to show for supposedly resuming the jihad. In contrast, AQIM's Sahelian partner, the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), which is led by Iyad ag Ghaly and his deputy, Kufa, remains highly active in the Sahel. Thus, AQIM's apparent diminishment and the demise of jihadism in Algeria has not translated into the same in the Sahel; rather, the Sahelian jihad is becoming even more violent and widespread than it ever was in Algeria.

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INDONESIA CRACKS DOWN ON PAPUAN MILITANTS

Jacob Zenn

On April 29, Indonesia announced that it would classify as terrorists militants in its largest and easternmost province of Papua, formerly known as Irian Jaya, which borders Papua New Guinea (benarnews.org, April 29). The terrorism label was immediately met with backlash, however, from human right organizations concerned about the label justifying the use of harsher counter-terrorism measures by the Indonesian security forces (thestar.com, May 2). Nevertheless, there was virtually no chance that Indonesia would change its decision.

Only three days before the terrorism designation, and likely catalyzing it, Papuan militants ambushed and killed Indonesia's highest ranking intelligence officer, whose remit covered Papua, Major General I Gusti Putu Danny Karya Nugraha (aljazeera.com, April 26). Moreover, three weeks before then, on April 8, the militants attacked a school in Beoga, Papua and killed a student who they alleged was a spy for Indonesian security forces (antaranews.com, April 22). That attack represented the beginning of a series of targeted killing of school teachers and the burning of schools in and around Beoga and, according to a local priest, harassing women in the area (nusadaily.com, April 29). It was in the context of these school attacks that Nugraha considered the situation grave enough to visit Beoga, but he was killed, further indicating that the militants have an upper hand in the region (antaranews.com, April 27).

Despite these setbacks, Indonesia's State Intelligence Agency (BIN) asserted its "morale" would not be undermined and that the country's security forces would not retreat (tempo.com, April 27). In addition, immediately after Nugraha's death, Papuan police announced that they killed nine militants in a counter-attack. However, the operation was not corroborated by outside media or other sources and it remains possible such claims were intended to boost morale after Nugraha's death and were, therefore, exaggerated (channelnewsasia.com, April 28).

Indonesia matched its words with actions by deploying an additional 450 soldiers to Papua during the peak of

the militants' attacks on schools in Beoga last month (benarnews.org, April 16). Typical of counter-insurgency operations elsewhere in the world, Indonesia is also attempting to win the support of local village leaders. On May 1, for example, the leader of the Ilaga community publicly announced that Papuan independence was no longer necessary because Papuans had all the same rights as every Indonesian (antaranews.com, May 1). At the same time, civic leaders suspect the increase in counter-insurgency operations will lead to economic stagnation in areas where the militants operate in Papua, which may counter-productively boost recruitment to the militants' ranks. Such operations could also lead to civilians joining the militants if they witness or experience the types of abuses by security forces that human rights organizations have reported (ucanews.com, April 30).

While Papuan independence remains a minority demand among Indonesia's Papuan population, there is also a Papuan activist movement that has been demanding greater rights and an end to anti-Papuan discrimination. Their protests throughout Indonesia—especially at universities—have often been met with force from police (thejakarapost.com, June 17, 2020). This may prove counter-productive because if peaceful protests are not tolerated, then Papuans may become more militant.

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Maximum Pressure: Turkey's Anti-PKK Counter-Terrorism Campaigns in Northern Iraq

Can Kasapoglu

In late April, the Turkish military launched a large-scale cross-border counter-terrorism campaign into northern Iraq, targeting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its network. The push into northern Iraq followed two main axes: Operation Claw-Lightning and Operation Claw-Thunderbolt (*Pençe-Şimşek* and *Pençe-Yıldırım*). Thus far, the counter-terrorism campaign has focused on disrupting the PKK's logistical infrastructure and operational capacity. Capitalizing on the Turkish Armed Forces' robust combat capabilities and the nation's burgeoning defense industry, Turkey is pursuing a maximum pressure military policy.

The Geopolitical Calculus of the Campaigns: Revisiting the Doctrinal Roots

In the 1990s, Turkey's military policy was largely shaped by the geopolitical calculus of a 'two-and-a-half war,' which was married to the 'active deterrence' strategy. Within this framework, the 'two wars' referred to keeping high combat readiness for fighting two inter-state conflicts at one time, while the 'half war' was about running large-scale counter-terrorism operations against the PKK. By doing so, Turkey aimed to address national security threats at their source ([Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Center for Strategic Research](#), March–May 1996).

Throughout the 1990s, the Turkish military has, time and again, hammered the PKK's safe havens in northern Iraq. The campaigns always saw large-scale force deployments and troop concentrations. In 1995, for example, Operation Steel (*Çelik Harekatı*) mobilized some 35,000 personnel, penetrating up to 60 kilometers into the Iraqi border ([TRT Haber](#), October 21, 2011). In 1997, Operation Hammer (*Çekiç Harekatı*), which involved a series of cross-border offensives to overwhelm the PKK, paved the ground for Turkey's contemporary permanent presence along the northern Iraqi frontier through the establishment of several forward-operating bases ([CNNTürk](#), March 24; [Habertürk](#), June 7, 2018).

The Maximum Pressure Counter-Terrorism Strategy

From a military-strategic standpoint, the Claw-Lightning and Claw-Thunderbolt campaigns are centered on certain pillars as their principal concepts of operations (CONOPS). The first pillar remains the intensive use of airpower to soften PKK defensive positions. Some 50 aircraft took part in the launch of the offensive, resembling the opening scene of the 2018 Operation Olive Branch in northern Syria, which saw 72 aircraft operating at a time ([CNNTurk](#), April 24; [Habertürk](#), January 21, 2018).

Along with the sheer numbers of platforms employed, the armed forces' operational enablers also commanded Turkish activity in the skies. Turkey's airborne early warning and control aircraft, as well as tankers for aerial refueling, provided defense planners with better real-time intelligence and longer loitering times over the target areas. Further, munitions of choice have loomed large. In recent years, Turkey's growing defense technological and industrial base completed the modernization of legacy 'dumb bombs' and turned them into Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) with GPS/INS guidance kits ([TÜBİTAK SAGE](#), May 5). Thus, the Turkish Air Force's bombardment now has a greater edge in comparison to the 1990s.

The second CONOPS pillar is air-assault offensives. The Turkish Army has a notable arsenal of rotary-wing platforms. The ongoing operations have witnessed the Turkish military's CH-47F Chinook and S-70 *Black Hawk* helicopters delivering elite commando units to raid PKK militants day and night ([Hurriyet](#), April 25).

The third CONOPS pillar, as previously observed in the Syrian expeditions, is the Turkish Army's land-based fire-support units, which do the hard work with salvos ([TRT Haber](#), April 26). In addition, Turkey's military capacity now has a robust drone warfare edge. The campaign in northern Iraq benefitted from this critical capability to pinpoint strikes alongside intelligence and target acquisition missions ([Turkish Ministry of Defense](#), May 6).

Finally, an important aspect of the Claw-Lightning and Claw-Thunderbolt has revolved around subterranean warfare efforts due to the dense tunnel and cave networks of the PKK. Situated in northern Iraq's mountainous terrain, the subterranean infrastructure supports the

PKK's critical logistics needs in that hot and harsh climate zone. Open-source evidence suggests that the Turkish troops cleared the PKK tunnel network one by one, with complex mapping and construction design ([Turkish Ministry of Defense YouTube Channel](#), April 28).

Disrupting the PKK's Arsenal at Turkey's Doorstep

Another important dimension of Claw-Lightning & Claw-Thunderbolt has been to target the PKK's weaponry close to Turkish territory. During a press conference, Turkey's Minister of Defense, Hulusi Akar, stated that the campaign captured advanced arms from PKK hideouts, including advanced missiles. In addition, open-source intelligence released by the Turkish military also showcased significant PKK weaponry, including remote-control anti-aircraft guns, sniper rifles, heavy machine guns, and high-end communications equipment ([Anadolu Agency](#), May 3; [Turkish Ministry of Defense](#), May, 3).

In fact, the Turkish defense minister's remarks pointed to a troublesome pattern for Turkey. The PKK has always benefited from crises and power vacuums in the Middle East. First, back in the early 1990s, following the Gulf War, the PKK network gained a broader *marge de manoeuvre* in the mountainous northern frontiers of Iraq as a result of the weakness of the regime of Saddam Hussein. At the time, the PKK managed to augment its arsenal with heavy arms left behind by the Iraqi military.

Since 2011, the Syrian Civil War has led to a similar vacuum. This time, the PKK obtained tactical game-changers, including anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) and man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). These weapons targeted the Turkish military's advanced platforms, ranging from attack helicopters to fighting vehicles, numerous times. Thus, one of the key objectives of the current Turkish campaigns are to disrupt the PKK's tactically game-changing arsenal deployed along the border ([Turkish Gendarmerie Command](#), June 15, 2018; [Daily Sabah](#), December 19, 2019).

What's Next for the Turkish Anti-PKK Campaigns?

Turkey's military policy in northern Iraq follows the footsteps of the lessons learned from Turkey's 1990s counter-terrorism efforts. In other words, Turkey is striving to eliminate the PKK's operational capacity at its source before the network can pour into Turkish territory.

This time, however, is different than the 1990s because the Turkish Armed Forces can rely on indigenous solutions offered by Turkey's national defense sector.

Given the current trajectory, Operation Claw-Lightning and Operation Claw-Thunderbolt remain promising campaigns for mitigating the PKK threat in the near term. However, when it comes to the PKK network's growing hybrid warfare capabilities based on advanced weaponry, like ATGMs and MANPADS, Turkey will likely have to eventually address the issue in yet another frontier, Syria.

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Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan: Is China in its Crosshairs?

Sudha Ramachandran

Introduction

On April 21, a car packed with explosives detonated in the parking lot of the Serena Hotel in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's restive Baluchistan province. Five people were killed and another twelve were injured in the attack ([Dawn](#), April 21). Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the deadly explosion ([The News](#), April 23). An umbrella grouping of Pashtun militias that operate in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas, the TTP wreaked havoc in Pakistan between 2007 and 2014. It carried out countless attacks on military installations, convoys, police stations, schools, and places of worship for minority religious sects. The violence it unleashed claimed the lives of over 80,000 soldiers and civilians in this period ([Terrorism Monitor](#), March 26). However, the TTP's capacity began to weaken in 2014, relegating it to "near-irrelevance" in subsequent years ([TRT World](#), August 21, 2020). It is in this context that the TTP's attack at the Serena Hotel is significant as it indicates that the grouping is ascending again. The TTP could also increasingly target Chinese projects and nationals in Pakistan.

The TTP's Rise and Fall

The TTP was established in December 2007 in response to the Pakistani military's crackdown on militant clerics holed up in Islamabad's Lal Masjid. Its main objective is to topple the Pakistani state and establish Islamic law in the country. Within a year of its formation, the TTP was in control of much of the seven Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and wielded influence over a large expanse of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. After taking control over much of Swat, it advanced to Buner and seemed within striking distance of Islamabad ([Dawn](#), July 13, 2017).

However, the TTP's audacious attacks on American and Pakistani military targets proved to be its undoing. Its leaders came under American drone strikes while the Pakistan military unleashed a string of robust offensives

on the TTP in the tribal areas. These shattered the TTP's command and control structure and scattered its fighters. Factional fighting, splits, and defections of TTP commanders and fighters to Islamic State Khorasan also took a heavy toll ([TRT World](#), August 21, 2020). By 2014, it was a much-weakened force, reduced to attacking soft targets.

TTP Revival Under Noor Wali Mehsud

Noor Wali Mehsud's assumption of TTP leadership in 2018 set in motion the group's revival. Splinter groups like Jamat-ul-Ahrar and Hizb-ul-Ahrar that had broken away from the TTP, for example, began returning to the fold ([Express Tribune](#), August 19, 2020). Over the past year, factional fighting is said to have almost ended and TTP-aligned militias are now coordinating their operations. This has augmented the TTP's operational capabilities. According to a recent United Nations report, the TTP carried out over 100 cross-border attacks between July and October 2020 ([Dawn](#), February 7). In fact, in 2020, the TTP and its affiliates carried out 67 terrorist attacks, accounting for about 46 percent of all reported attacks that year ([Dawn](#), January 4).

The TTP's rising operational capabilities have also been visible in the growing geographic expanse of its operations. Its attacks have moved beyond its traditional strongholds in the tribal areas to Pakistani cities like Quetta. The attack at Serena Hotel reaffirms this enhanced capacity. The hotel is among the most tightly guarded in Baluchistan as it often hosts government functionaries, diplomats, and international aid workers. Besides, the hotel is located between the Iranian consulate and the Baluchistan Provincial Assembly building ([Gandhara](#), April 21). That the suicide bomber drove a car with explosives through checkpoints en route to the hotel and was able to breach its outer security to enter the hotel premises unobstructed indicates that the TTP has cultivated support in the security apparatus in Baluchistan or otherwise it obtained high-level intelligence to breach the hotel barriers.

TTP: Target China?

The TTP claimed that the suicide attack at the Serena Hotel was aimed at "high officials, including police officers" ([Arab News](#), April 23). However, it is widely believed that China was the target of the attack. The Chi-

nese Ambassador to Pakistan, Nong Rong, and other officials, including the Consul-General in Karachi, were staying at the Serena hotel on the day of the explosion, although they were not present there at the time of the attack ([Dawn](#), April 23). According to Pakistan's embassy in Beijing, the attack took place minutes before Chinese officials returned to the hotel ([Global Times](#), April 22). This is also why it is likely that the attack at the Serena Hotel was aimed at the Chinese ambassador and his delegation.

The recent TTP targeting of China has several explanations. One is China's oppression of Uighur Muslims, which the TTP has condemned in the past. In 2012, for instance, it claimed responsibility for the killing of a Chinese tourist in Peshawar, describing it as "revenge" for the treatment the Chinese government metes out to Muslims in Xinjiang province ([Express Tribune](#), March 2, 2012). Besides this, the TTP is possibly targeting China's vast interests in Pakistan. China has invested billions of dollars in a string of infrastructure projects that are part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Projects in Baluchistan are central to CPEC's success and attacking these and Chinese nationals would "delay or slow down" CPEC projects ([The Nation](#), May 1). This would deal a blow to the Pakistani economy and thus weaken the state.

It is possible, too, that the TTP, which is said to have stepped up operations in Baluchistan's Pashtun areas, is working with Baluch separatist and nationalist groups. Like the TTP, Baluch groups are strongly opposed to the Pakistani state. They have carried out several attacks on Pakistani and Chinese nationals and projects in Baluchistan ([Terrorism Monitor](#), February 12). If the TTP has indeed established ties with Baluch militants there is reason for Beijing and Islamabad to be concerned.

Conclusion

The TTP's recent suicide attack at Quetta's Serena Hotel signals not only its revival, enhanced operational capabilities, and also capacity to carry out attacks on tightly guarded buildings, but also its ability to carry out attacks in regions outside its traditional stronghold in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The attack may also signal the TTP's willingness to target Chinese interests and nationals in Pakistan. This should set off alarm bells in Beijing

and Islamabad, especially if the TTP has joined hands with Baluch militants.

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Abu Walaa's Islamic State Network and Germany's Counter-Terrorism Prosecutions

Herbert Maack

A German court sentenced on February 24 the alleged "Islamic State leader of Germany" to a lengthy prison sentence. The trial against Salafist preacher Ahmad Abdelaziz Abdullah Abdullah, better known as Abu Walaa, lasted three-and-a-half-years and provides insights into radicalization and Islamic State (IS) recruitment in Germany in the years from 2012 to 2016. This article's insights on Abu Walaa and his network are based on his recent court verdict and the memoirs of "VP-01," Germany's top police informant, who successfully spied on Abu Walaa and his network. In addition, this article illustrates how Germany's security authorities and justice system continue to face challenges in bringing terrorism suspects to justice.

Abu Walaa's Network from Germany to IS in Syria and Iraq

Born in Iraq and an ethnic Kurd from Kirkuk, Abu Walaa arrived in Germany in 2000 as a refugee and originally settled with his family, including two wives and seven children, in the town of Tönisvorst in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Subsequently, Abu Walaa established himself as one of the most influential Salafists in Germany while preaching as the imam of *Deutschsprachige Islamkreis* mosque, which was established in 2012 in Hildesheim in the northwestern state of Lower Saxony. The mosque became a hotspot of the Salafist scene in Germany and Abu Walaa was known for his fiery sermons both at his now-banned *Deutschsprachige Islamkreis* mosque and online, where he was called "the preacher without a face" due to his habit of preaching with his back to the camera, leaving his features hidden from view. Abu Walaa was successful in building a strong social media following that at one point amounted to as many as 25,000 fans on Facebook and included followers from across Europe ([Stern.de](#), September 26, 2017; [Deutsche Welle](#), December 11, 2018).

The German security authorities kept a close watch on Abu Walaa after it became clear that several jihadists who left Germany to join IS in Syria and Iraq had regularly visited his mosque before their departure. In addition, Abu Walaa's network was linked to several terrorist plots in Germany, including the bombing of a Sikh-temple in Essen on April 16, 2016, in which three individuals were wounded. The perpetrators, Yusuf T., Mohamed B., and Tolga I., were suspected to have been radicalized by the Abu Walaa and his close associates. [1]

In the summer of 2015, the German police directed one of their key human sources, known only as "VP-01" or his undercover name, "Mustafa Cem", to attend the mosque. "VP-01" was able to confirm to German authorities that Abu Walaa and his close associates were vetting and recruiting individuals to join IS in Syria and Iraq and that the mosque had become a key meeting point for Salafist-jihadists in Germany. [2]

On July 28, 2016, German police conducted a search of Abu Walaa's mosque, although no arrests were made at that point. However, Abu Walaa was alarmed by the searches and became aware that he had been spied on and suspected "VP-01" of working for German security authorities. Abu Walaa posted on September 16, 2016 an audio message to his followers to denounce "VP-01" as a spy and called for his "destruction." This forced "VP-01" to enter a witness protection program. [3] However, as a result of information provided by "VP-01", on November 8, 2016, Abu Walaa and four other leading individuals of his network, Boban Simonovic, Hasan Celenk and Mahmoud O, were arrested on suspicion of establishing a terrorist network to recruit fighters for IS within Germany ([Generalbundesanwaltschaft Press Release](#), November 8, 2016).

Authorities believed that Abu Walaa had designated his associates, the German-Serbian national Boban Simonovic and Turkish national Hasan Celenk, as his regional leaders in the cities of Dortmund and Duisburg in North-Rhine Westphalia, where they taught Arabic and ideologically prepared new recruits to join IS, including by showing them IS propaganda videos. Abu Walaa, for his part, was the final gatekeeper before they joined IS and had the authority to decide which duties were given to individuals when they joined the group. Abu Walaa was, for example, able to direct German foreign fighters

to serve in the IS Intelligence units and IS medical service. The fact that Abu Walaa's influence reached to the IS administration in Syria and Iraq demonstrated how closely connected his network was with the organization ([Oberlandesgericht Celle Press Release](#), February 24).

The investigation into Abu Walaa gained even more attention six weeks after his arrest when Germany suffered its most devastating jihadist attack to date. On December 19, 2016, a Tunisian refugee, Anis Amri, rammed a truck he had hijacked into the Berlin Breitscheidplatz Christmas market, killing 12 and wounding dozens. Amri was able to flee to Italy, where he subsequently died after a firefight with the police. The investigation into his contacts in Germany led the authorities again to Abu Walaa and his network. [4]

The number of people the Abu Walaa network successfully recruited for IS remains unknown. However, it is believed that more than 20 jihadists who traveled to IS in Syria and Iraq from Germany can be traced to his network. These reportedly also include the 24-year-old twins Kevin and Mark Knop, who committed suicide bombings for IS in Iraq in 2015. [5]

Abu Walaa's Trial

[The trial against Abu Walaa and his associates began in 2017.](#) Prosecutors sought sentences ranging from three-and-a-half to 11-and-a-half-years in prison for the men. Key to the prosecution was not only information provided by "VP-01," but also the testimony of Anil O., who was one of the individuals Abu Walaa recruited and sent to IS. Anil O. and his wife had left Germany in the summer of 2015 and, with the support of Abu Walaa's network, successfully traveled via Turkey to IS-controlled territory in Syria. However, after only spending a few months in IS territory, Anil O. and his wife attempted to return to Turkey because they realized the "true nature" of IS and allegedly also after he had been offered a 10-year-old sex-slave. [6]

Their escape attempt failed and IS imprisoned Anil O. in Raqqa. However, Abu Walaa intervened on Anil O.'s behalf and he was freed. Another escape attempt in early 2016 succeeded and Anil O. and his wife were able to cross back to Turkey, where Anil O. entered a plea-bargaining deal with German authorities and agreed to testify against Abu Walaa and his network in exchange for a

lighter sentence. He testified that Abu Walaa had been the “number one IS leader in Germany” and provided details on the Abu Walaa network’s internal workings ([Oberlandesgericht Celle Press Release](#), February 24). [7]

After a lengthy process lasting 243 days that included more than 120 witnesses and expert hearings, the Oberlandesgericht Celle, which in Germany’s federal system is the province (state)-level Higher Regional Court, sentenced Abu Walaa to a ten-and-a-half-year prison term. His associates were also found guilty and sentenced, including Boban Simeonovic for eight years, Hassan Celenk for six-and-a-half-years, and Mahmoud O. for four years ([Oberlandesgericht Celle Press Release](#), February 24).

Germany’s Criminal Justice System and Terrorism Trends

The court trial of Abu Walaa and his network has shown that Germany’s justice system is able to successfully prosecute complex terrorism cases. However, criticism has been voiced about the fact that it took German security authorities too long for the leaders of Abu Walaa’s network to be arrested because police had to rely on an IS defector to get the necessary proof for arrest warrants. In addition, the court process lasted more than three years before a verdict was reached, and cost German taxpayers around 10 million euros ([NDR.de](#), November 8, 2020).

While the threat from far-right terrorism has gained significant attention in Germany, jihadist terrorism continues to present a threat to the country as well. Underlining the transnational nature of the jihadist threat, in February 2021, security authorities in Germany and Denmark arrested three Syrian brothers, aged 33, 36 and 40, on suspicion of plotting a terrorist attack. In subsequent searches in Denmark and Germany, police officers found chemicals suitable for building explosives and a picture of an IS flag on one suspect’s mobile phone. However, the potential target of the bomb plot remains unclear ([Tagesschau](#), February 11).

Even after the conclusion of the Abu Walaa network trials, the German justice system continues to face a significant caseload of terrorism offences. Alone in the first three months of 2021, the German state prosecutor opened criminal investigations and prosecutions for nine

separate terrorism offences, ranging from membership in a foreign terrorist group, including IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Tabka and Jund al-Sham, to terrorism financing and attack plotting. [8] German authorities have assessed that in total over 1,070 individuals left Germany and travelled to Syria and Iraq in IS’s heyday. However, only for approximately half of these cases do German authorities have actual proof that individuals joined a terrorist group or at least provided support to one ([Deutsche Welle](#), July 27, 2020). Moreover, at least 450 Germans are still abroad and continue to represent a potential counter-terrorism risk for Germany and a legal challenge for the German justice system if they are arrested.

Notes

[1] Diehl, Jörg, Lehberger, Roman, Schmid, Fidelius: *Undercover. Ein V-Mann packt aus*. DVA Spiegel Buchverlag, May 2020. The Book is based on interviews with “VP-01” (also uses the pseudonym “Mustafa Cem”) and his career as a police informant.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] For more on Amri’s relationship with the Abu Walaa network, see George Heil, CTC Sentinel February 2017: <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-berlin-attack-and-the-abu-walaa-islamic-state-recruitment-network/>

[5] Ibid.

[6] Diehl, Jörg, Lehberger, Roman, Schmid, Fidelius: *Undercover. Ein V-Mann packt aus*. DVA Spiegel Buchverlag, May 2020. The Book is based on interviews with “VP-01” (also uses the pseudonym “Mustafa Cem”) and his career as a police informant.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See, for example: https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/DE/Presse/Aktuelle_Pressemitteilungen/Aktuelle_Pressemitteilungen_node.html