

Terrorism Monitor

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Mozambican Militants Launch New Offensive

Jacob Zenn

On September 2, Portugal's Prime Minister, António Costa, completed a two-day official visit to Mozambique, where the main focus of his meetings with his Mozambican counterpart, Filipe Nyusi, was economics. During the visit, Costa also offered Portugal's support to Mozambique's counter-terrorism struggle against Islamic State (IS)- militants plaguing the country's north (theportugalnews.com, September 2). Nevertheless, Costa highlighted that Mozambique's disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation of the repentant or surrendered jihadists had

been making significant progress (africanews.com, September 1).

The optimism underlying the bilateral meetings was seemingly countered by the recent success of the militants, who began launching a new offensive in August (voafrica.com, August 23). Whereas previous offensives since 2018 have generally seen the jihadists push north, this one has seen them, in contrast, move further south to Ancuabe, Chiure and Mecufi districts. Typical of previous jihadist offensives, the fighting is causing numerous civilians to be displaced, including nearly one-million during this offensive.

IS also has taken note of the Mozambican jihadists success as well as the simultaneous attacks by their fellow Congolese jihadists, who until this year were all part of IS's "Central Africa Province." It was only this year that IS decided to detach the Mozambican jihadists from the rest of the province, while establishing a separate "Mozambique Province." The Mozambican jihad has nevertheless been designated as a distinct terrorist organization by the U.S State Department since August 2021 ([state.gov](https://www.state.gov), August 6, 2021).

Most recently, on August 19, IS released videos from both the Congo and Mozambique, with the jihadists in each country calling for attacking Christians ([Twitter/Jihad Analytics](https://twitter.com/JihadAnalytics), August 19). Indeed, one of the main similarities—and certainly challenges—for IS fighters in both Congo and Mozambique is that they must recruit Muslims in predominantly Christian nations. Therefore, they need to frame their narratives in terms of embattled Muslims seeking to implement sharia law in the face of "infidel" laws surrounding them. At the same time, they must recruit hyper-locally within Muslim villages based on narratives opposing the un-Islamic governments under which they live and promoting the broader narratives of establishing an Islamic state and eventually the establishment of a global caliphate.

One of the key factors determining whether Mozambique can turn the tide of the recent jihadist offensive is the contribution of Rwandan troops to the country's counter-terrorism effort. There is no sign Rwanda is relenting in its mission in Mozambique, which is fortunate for the Mozambicans. On August 16, for example, Paul Kagame, who is not only the President but also the

Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) Commander-in-Chief, promoted Major General Eugene Nkubito to lead the RDFs battle against the Mozambican jihadists ([ktpress.rw](https://www.ktpress.rw), August 24).

On the economic front, what Mozambique needs is to restart the Total Gas facility that was crucial to the country's GDP (allafrica.com, September 1). It was shut down in April 2021 during the last major offensive by the Mozambican jihadists, which prompted international attention to be directed towards ensuring Mozambican security and the ensuing Rwanda-led intervention ([aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com), April 26, 2021). If, as the Mozambican government expects, the facility can reopen in 2023, the jihadists will need to be held at bay while the economy has a chance to recover its pre-war trajectory.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Indonesia Deradicalizes Bali Bombing Jihadists

Jacob Zenn

In what appears to be a major paradox for a longtime jihadist ideologue who once condemned the Indonesian Constitution and demanded its replacement by the Quran, on August 17, Abubakar Baasyir participated in Indonesia's Independence Day ceremony ([jakartaglobe.id](https://www.jakartaglobe.id), August 17). The ceremony took place at the Baasyir-founded Al-Mukmin Boarding School in central Java, which at one time had the reputation as being the "university of terror" because of all the alumni who went on to join terrorist organizations like

Jemaa Islamiya (JI) (news.com.au, June 14, 2017).

However, in recent years Al-Mukmin has experienced great change, with the school publicly embracing the legitimacy of the Indonesian state. This is reflective of the apparent success of the Indonesian deradicalization campaign, which has seen former terrorists, including Al-Mukmin alumni, abandon terrorism after consistent engagement with moderate Indonesian Islamic scholars as well as financial, psychological, and professional assistance from the state (jakartapost.com, January 13; Terrorism Monitor, March 25).

Baasyir himself may represent successful deradicalization programming, despite the fact this would have been nearly impossible a decade ago. After Baasyir was granted clemency and released from prison early (on terrorism charges of establishing a jihadist training camp in Aceh in January 2021), he condemned violence and even denied any foreknowledge of JI's Bali bombings in 2002, which killed more than 200 people (benarnews.org, February 18, 2021). Whether his statement is true or not, the fact that Baasyir would say this beside Indonesian counter-terrorism officials indicated he now accepted not only the Indonesian state, but also counter-terrorism operations against his former organization JI.

In contrast, at the 2011 trial that resulted in Baasyir's imprisonment, he proclaimed that he was a jihadist who is "defending Islam and Muslim people from the despotism of the pharaohs from America, Australia and their allies," with an emphasis on Indonesian counter-terrorism officials being such "allies" (smh.com.au, February 23, 2011). Although he was sentenced to serve a prison sentence until

2026, his age at 83-years old and poor health were cited as reasons for his early release (tribunnews.com, January 8, 2021). Australians, whose compatriots were among the most victimized in the 2002 Bali bombings, vociferously opposed Baasyir's release from prison, but Indonesia went ahead with the move so long as Baasyir disavowed violence and terrorism (indonesiaexpat.id, January 9, 2021).

Besides the Baasyir case, the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights has also announced that Umar Patek is scheduled to be paroled (belu.inews.id, September 4). Unlike Baasyir, who denies a role in or knowledge of the 2002 Bali bombings, Patek admits his role, but has apologized for the attack and now claims to have been deradicalized (abc.net.au, August 8). His initial apology to Christians was in 2012 and he evidently has continued on the course of repentance since then (kompas.com, May 5, 2012).

While Indonesia's clemency to former jihadist ideologues like Baasyir and jihadist attackers like Patek is somewhat unique in the Islamic world, the country has also seen decreasing terrorism in recent years. This suggests Indonesia's deradicalization programs, unlike the programs found in other states, may be having a positive effect. If so, Indonesia deserves to be studied by other states seeking to deal with jihadist prisoners and as well as those currently pursuing deradicalization programs.

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Al-Shabaab's Attack in Ethiopia: One-off Incursion or Persistent Threat?

Sunguta West

Ethiopian forces in July contained and repulsed an attack conducted in the eastern part of the country by Somalia-based al-Shabaab. Fighters from the militant group entered from southwestern Somalia and targeted four border towns in Ethiopia's Somali regional state known as Ogaden Region. The estimated 500 al-Shabaab fighters had moved 150 kilometers inside Ethiopia before being met by the Ethiopian military and retreating ([Garowe Online](#), July 30).

After several days of fighting, the Ethiopian military claimed it killed as many as 800 militants, including Fuad Mohammad Khalaf, who is also known as Fuad Shangole and was a senior al-Shabaab leader. The U.S. designated Shangole as a foreign terrorist in 2010 and placed a \$5 million bounty on his head in 2012 ([People Dispatch](#), August 1). Al-Shabaab, however, later denied the Ethiopian claims about the death totals and asserted it had killed at least 100 Ethiopian servicemen, including policemen, before taking control of the town of Aoto ([Sudan Tribune](#), August 7).

The attack came as surprise since al-Shabaab had not launched cross-border attacks into Ethiopia in years. However, the group has frequently targeted the nearly 4,000 Ethiopian troops operating in Somalia under the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), which was formerly known as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). On August 21, Somali security forces, which are backed by ATMIS, for example, fought off a 30-hour al-Shabaab attack on Hotel Hayat in Mogadishu, which left at least 21 people dead. The attack was the first major attack since Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohammad took office in May ([Nation](#), August 22).

A More Confident and Expansionist Al-Shabaab

The attempt by al-Shabaab to spread to Ethiopia appears to have been thwarted by Ethiopian forces, but the attack underlines a resurgent, more confident, and strengthened al-Shabaab. Despite the group losing key territories to ATMIS forces and some of its top leaders in U.S. airstrikes, such as Aden Hashi Farah "Ayro" in 2008 and Moktar Ali Zubeyr in 2014, the group continues to show resilience after each setback, always launching fresh attacks. It has also carried out continuous recruitment campaigns throughout the East Africa region ([Garowe Online](#), January 1).

At the same time, the current political circumstances in Ethiopia create favorable ground for the militant group's continued attacks. Ethiopia's security forces have been struggling with internal unrest since the launch of the military operation in the northern state of Tigray in November 2020 ([Terrorism Monitor](#), December 7, 2021). As the conflict persists, it is likely that al-Shabaab will take advantage of the turmoil to launch more cross-border attacks ([Africa News](#), August 5).

Additionally, the push into Ethiopia can be seen as part of al-Shabaab leaders' attempts to expand the conflict beyond Somalia. The vision was first articulated by the late Shaykh Ahmed Abdi Godane, who was the group's emir and was killed in a U.S. airstrike in 2014 ([aljazeera.com](#), September 6, 2014). Less than a year before the attacks in Ethiopia, Ahmed Diriye, who is al-Shabaab's current emir, appeared to restate Godane's vision. He called for external attacks beyond Somalia with emphasis on American and French interests, especially in Djibouti ([Africa News](#), March 29, 2021).

Northern Kenya Under Threat From a Financially Emboldened Al-Shabaab

Apart from the attack in Ethiopia, al-Shabaab has persistently attacked parts of the northern and coastal regions of Kenya. In one of the latest attacks, five policemen were injured in Mandera in northern Kenya after suspected al-Shabaab fighters ambushed them while they were on patrol. In January, six people were also killed in Lamu in another attack by suspected members of al-Shabaab ([The Star](#), January 3).

Moreover, while controlling large swathes of territory in southern Somalia, the group has also outpaced the government in revenue collection. This provides al-Shabaab with the financial muscle it needs to further expand the insurgency ([Somali Guardian](#), February 22). As a result, al-Shabaab has been strengthening its arsenal by spending a reported US\$24 million out of its annual budget of US\$180 million on arms purchases. The money is raised through taxation at checkpoints in Somalia or persuading or coercing the local population into paying tax ([Hiraal Institute](#), October 2020).

Besides purchasing guns, ammunition, explosives and other heavy weapons, the manufacture of explosives and some ammunition also comprises part of al-Shabaab's budget. The weapons are being obtained from the local black market and international sources, with Yemen as a key exporter. Other weapons are also seized in battles with the Somali national army and ATMIS troops ([Africa News](#), February 22).

Conclusion

Al-Shabaab's attempt to spread to Ethiopia appears to have been contained, but this was not a one-off attack and more attacks should be anticipated in the near future. At the same time, the current political circumstances in Ethiopia are creating fertile ground for the militant group's attacks. The resolution of the Tigray crisis

is paramount if any further spread of al-Shabaab into Ethiopia is to be stopped.

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ISKP Challenges Indian Interests in Afghanistan by Attacking Sikh Worshippers in Kabul

Riccardo Valle, Iftikhar Firdous

On June 18, the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed an attack which targeted a Sikh Gurdwara in Karta-e-Parwan area of Kabul ([Dawn](#), June 18). While ISKP stated there were 50 Sikh and Taliban casualties, two people were reported killed. The operation lasted for several hours and, according to Islamic State (IS)'s Amaq News Agency, one militant named Abu Muhammad al-Tajiki conducted an *inghimasi* (fighting until death) operation inside the Gurdwara while other supporting members ambushed a Taliban patrol outside it ([Twitter/IftikharFirdous](#), June 19).

The statement released by IS noted that the attack was conducted in revenge for the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s national spokesperson Nupur Sharma's blasphemous remarks against the Prophet Muhammad. This statement triggered a backlash not only from Muslims generally, but also from jihadist organizations, who condemned the comments, including ISKP through its propaganda. By conducting this attack and spreading propaganda, ISKP is at the same time fulfilling two objectives: undermining the Taliban as a would-be state actor and demonstrating its capabilities as a jihadist competitor to the Taliban.

Warnings Signs of an Attack

There were many early warnings from ISKP propaganda releases that hinted at a possible attack from the group somewhere in the region, whether India, Pakistan, or Afghanistan, as a result of Nupur Sharma's words. The first was a 55-page detailed pamphlet published as early as June 9 titled "Sons of Cows [Hindus] and Their New Friends [the Taliban]", which was clearly aimed toward the Taliban ([TheKhorasanDiary](#), June 9). Written in Pashto, the pamphlet harshly criticized Taliban policies in Afghanistan, such as the preservation of Buddha statues in Mes Aynak, which ISKP considered an act of polytheism by the Taliban, and promised revenge for the Prophet's honour ([Dawn](#), March 28).

The following week, on June 14, ISKP's Al-Azaim Foundation published a 10-minute-long video titled "The Polytheists are Brothers to the Polytheists", describing Indian-Taliban relations as a betrayal of Muslims and Islam considering Nupur Sharma's comments. It further stated that the Taliban merely issued a tweet condemning BJP officials, but took no other action since the Taliban themselves are guilty of un-Islamic behavior, including pledging to preserve and protect Buddhist heritage in Bamiyan. The video ended by threatening Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan and referred to the March 2020 attack at the Gurdwara in Kabul carried out by ISKP's Kerala, Indian militant Abu Khaled al-Hindi ([Dawn](#), March 25, 2020).

The final alarm bell was the third issue of Khurasan Ghag released on June 16, which is ISKP's Pashto magazine and was first published on May 11 ([Terrorism Monitor](#), June 16). As usual, the magazine lashed out against the Taliban by arguing that instead of defending the honor of the Prophet, the movement preferred its own "nationalist interests," including siding with the Hindus and accepting their offer of training Afghan soldiers ([The Tribune](#), June 4). The magazine specifically threatened

the Taliban and its "Hindu brethren" and drew a parallel between Hindus and Shias by stating that just as the Taliban were unable to protect Shias in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, Kandahar, Takhar, and other places in Khorasan, it would not be able to defend the Hindus there either ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 6).

ISKP's Reaction after the Gurdwara Attack

On the day of the Gurdwara attack, and before officially claiming the operation, ISKP internal channels had already begun to rejoice ([TheKhorasanDiary](#), June 18). At the same time, the group released a 12-page statement in response to the remarks by BJP officials, in which they condemned India-Taliban ties. The statement equated the "betrayal" the Taliban committed by siding with the Shias with its "alliance" with the "Hindus" of India, which brought three "polytheistic" groups together against Islam. Again, the statement threatened to kill "Hindus today or tomorrow" and officially declared the start of jihad against the Hindus. Significantly, the statement, which was initially published in Pashto, was subsequently translated into Uzbek, Urdu, English, Tajik, Farsi, Hindi, and even Russian. ([Twitter/ValleRiccardo](#), June 18). Two days after the attack, on June 20, Al-Azaim Foundation also issued a six minute audio statement in Pashto, which described the Gurdwara operation and praised the attacker Abu Muhammad al-Tajiki and IS as the sole defenders of the Prophet's honor, in contrast to the Taliban.

Finally, on June 30, the fourth issue of Khurasan Ghag featured an article specifically dedicated to Abu Muhammad al-Tajiki, disclosing his unblurred picture for the first time, and the English translation of the article was published by Voice of Khurasan ([Twitter/ValleRiccardo](#), June 30). In the text, the Gurdwara attacker was identified as Ustad Abdullah Abu Muhammad [al-Tajiki], who served the group as a scholar by writing and translating books and pamphlets and working in the Tajiki language media

department. He allegedly was part of a four-man team, which provided military training in the field of *istishhadi* operations, including for Julaybib al-Kabuli, who carried out an attack in Peshawar on March 4 on a Shiite shrine, and Shahram Muwahid, who attacked the memorial ceremony of former Taliban Emir Mullah Akhtar Mansoor on May 22 in Kabul ([Twitter/ValleRiccardo](#), March 4; [Twitter/ValleRiccardo](#), May 23). According to the article, Abu Muhammad al-Tajiki specifically asked ISKP's emir Shahab al-Muhajir for permission to conduct the operation at the Gurdwara.

Despite the Gurdwara attack, ISKP anti-India and anti-Taliban-India relations propaganda did not stop. On July 21, the group issued a new 116-page long book, which quoted a decree of IS's Diwan al-Harb (Ministry of War). The decree legitimized attacks against Hindus and stated that their "polytheism" is among the most impure ones not only in Afghanistan but also in India. Further, the book reminded readers that India is an established province of IS where jihad is open and argued that the Taliban is actively promoting Hinduism and Sikhism in Afghanistan to cultivate Indian favor and investments.

More recently, between August and September, issues 12 and 13 of Voice of Khorasan featured two articles dedicated to the biography of two IS militants originally from India who travelled to Libya and Afghanistan. The publication exploits their stories to attract Indian recruits ([TheKhorasanDiary](#), August 19; [TheKhorasanDiary](#), September 2).

Conclusion

Following this attack in Kabul and the targeting of the local Sikh community, ISKP has once again capitalized on international and regional developments to pursue its own goals. All the while, the group continues to portray itself as the only legitimate jihadist organization in the South Asian region. In addition, ISKP propaganda again signaled careful planning

by the group, which continues to be a threat to regional stability, and specifically Afghanistan and Pakistan. With the announcement of al-Qaeda's veteran leader Aymann al-Zawahiri's death in Kabul, ISKP will find another fresh opportunity to push its own narrative of a U.S-Taliban alliance and potentially attract more disgruntled militants from the region.

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Will Iraq's Potential Purchase of French Rafale Fighter Jets Turn the Counter-Terrorism Tables in the Middle East?

Sine Ozkarasahin

Iraq's request to purchase Dassault Rafale fighter jets from France will raise some eyebrows in Washington. Paris is eyeing the Middle Eastern weapons market and has signed significant agreements with Egypt and the UAE—and now Iraq. In a time of growing competition in the 4.5th / 5th generation aircraft segment [1], a French deal with Iraq would significantly increase the former's share and leverage in a burgeoning fighter jet sales market.

Besides the geopolitical risks of a potential sale for the delicate regional power balances between Iraq and its nearby rivals, Baghdad's quest for the Rafales will have consequences more broadly to

regional security from a technical standpoint. If the jets' weapon systems configuration includes the Meteors instead of the Mica missiles, the regional power balance may rapidly shift in favor of one of Iran's biggest allies—Iraq. A Baghdad-Paris agreement would, therefore, cause a paradigm shift in the counter-terrorism policy of a key NATO country—Türkiye. With the Rafales, Iraq could deny Turkish manned aircraft into its airspace and block Türkiye's ongoing counter-terrorism operations in the north of Iraq ([Terrorism Monitor](#), August 12).

Turkish Counter-Terrorism in Iraq

For decades, its fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its offshoots has been Türkiye's primary national security agenda. In essence, the Turkish counter-terrorism campaign centers around two main pillars. The first is enforcing border security by eliminating PKK havens concentrated in northern Syria and Iraq to prevent renewed series of attacks in Türkiye. The second is to render PKK and affiliated organizations ineffective. This relies on heavy intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) activities and targeting the leaders in the PKK as well as the transmission routes for arms transfers to the People's Defense Units (YPG), which is a PKK offshoot.

Drones have become an integral part of the Turkish intelligence efforts in these respects. For both pillars, Turkish intelligence expertise and precise deep-strike capabilities are key. In times of conflict, especially in asymmetrical situations, unmanned platforms can improve endurance and reduce risks to human life. Reliance on unmanned systems also provides additional risk minimization for the Turkish Air Force, as the capture of

pilots in hostile territory beyond Türkiye's borders remains highly dangerous.

After the start of the Syrian civil war, Turkish counter-terrorism operations in the area shifted to a Concept of Operations (CONOPS) that was heavily unmanned, with the aim to minimize risks and reduce loss of personnel. The Syrian airspace remains an especially dangerous zone, and Türkiye even lost a F-4 Phantom to the Syrian Arab Air defense forces back in 2012. Currently, the Iraqi Air Force cannot stop Turkish air raids against the PKK. However, a scenario where the Iraqi Air Force flies the Rafales with advanced air-to-air missiles might be a disruptive factor in Ankara's counter-terrorism strategy in northern Iraq.

Why Iraq Can't Resist Rafales

Given the Rafales' versatility and combat-proven performance, Iraq's preference for them is sensible ([Dassault Aviation](#), August 8). The Rafale is indeed a sophisticated aircraft, with high demand in the Middle East, as illustrated by the Egyptian and Emirati cases, where both countries opted for the Rafales instead of the F-35s. In Baghdad's case, the main factor that pushed Baghdad into the arms of Paris was, however, the denial by Washington to provide Baghdad with the necessary munitions to operationalize its F-16s at full potential.

Currently, the Iraqi Air Force has 34 F-16s. However, Western intelligence claims that at least 10 of those jets are permanently grounded due to a lack of maintenance and equipment ([Forbes](#), May 11, 2021). This creates a vulnerability in the Iraqi air capabilities, which prevents Baghdad from being able to fully operationalize its F-16s. Following the attack on the Balad Airbase,

which hosts U.S. troops, in April 2020, Lockheed Martin and other large defense companies withdrew their staff from Iraq. This disrupted maintenance support and training to the Iraqis ([Rudaw](#), May 11, 2021).

Therefore, while its rivals were rapidly transitioning to 4.5th generation solutions, Iraq urgently needed to find alternatives to its aging fleet. This need was mainly driven by the fear of lagging behind, but another major factor was the lack of certified munitions provided by Washington to Baghdad. All in all, what makes a weapons system truly effective is not only the platform itself, but also the weapons and sensor configuration with which it comes, which France might be willing to provide to Iraq.

Enter Paris

Paris already made a successful entry into the Middle Eastern defense market before the rumors of Iraq's potential Rafale procurement. In the past year, France sold the Rafales to the Egyptians and the Emiratis, with the latter purchasing a record total of 80 jets ([Disclose](#), May 3, 2021; [France 24](#), December 3, 2021). Thus, the potential French-Iraqi deal would deepen France's already prominent footprint in the Middle Eastern defense industry. Bolstered by burgeoning demand and increasing threat perceptions, the regional arms market has no shortage of countries that are turning to alternative Western technologies amid the void created by the U.S.

Another aspect that makes Iraq a particularly appealing client for France is its alleged proposal to pay for its fighter jets with oil ([Al Ain](#), July 22). Crippled by a looming oil crisis that resembles the shock in 1973, Paris now urgently needs to find

an alternative to Russian energy ([France Bleu](#), March 9). Its new customer, Iraq, might provide the solution.

However, acquiring the Rafales is not a magic solution to air superiority. In fact, the game-changing factor will be the munitions that accompany the Rafales. While a deal including the medium-range Mica missile will not have a drastic effect on regional power balances, a scenario where Paris provides Baghdad with the Meteor missiles would be the real turning point. Acquiring the Meteor beyond-visual-range (BVR) missiles would mean Iraq obtains improved strike capabilities that can engage with a wide set of targets ranging from unmanned armed vehicles (UAVs) to cruise missiles. This would empower Baghdad with flexible military capabilities, as well as an advantage in the regional airspace. Indeed, certain advantages in some technical aspects, such as the effectiveness of its propulsion system, means the Meteor remains equivalent, if not better, than its American counterpart, the AMRAAM. While the deals signed thus far have only included the Mica missiles, a new configuration cannot be ruled out ([Eurasian Times](#), July 25). However, doing so would sour France's relations with its regional allies, such as Egypt, which recognizes Israel, and would lead to criticism of Paris' decision to provide critical weapon systems to a nation that does not recognize Israel.

Implications of Meteor Missiles

A scenario where Iraq's Rafales come with the Meteor missiles will have two drastic implications. First, such a procurement would change the power balance between Israel and regional countries. Providing Tel Aviv's adversary, Iraq, with Meteor missiles would directly undermine Israel's

qualitative military edge (QME) in the region.

Second, equipping the Iraqi Air Force with the Rafale fighter jets and Meteor missiles would have implications for Turkish counter-terrorism policy. At present, the Iraqi Air Force has no advantage over the Turkish Air Force. This will still hold true if Türkiye procures the F-16 modernization from Washington or opts for a stopgap alternative. However, a scenario where Ankara fails to transition into 4.5th generation air combat or a configuration that would include the Meteor missiles will then provide Baghdad with a clear advantage over Ankara. Superior Iraqi aerial capabilities would allow Iraq to deny Türkiye its national airspace and block Turkish operations in northern Iraq.

Additionally, an Iraqi Air Force equipped with the Rafales and the Meteor's BVR missiles would pose a great risk to Türkiye's manned aircraft. This would demand a revision to Türkiye's counter-insurgency strategy involving a transition from manned solutions to unmanned technologies to conduct counter-terrorism operations in northern Iraq. In the past, Türkiye has successfully carried out aerial operations in an 'unmanned' manner, and its activities in Syria loom large as a prime example. With sophisticated deep strike capabilities, a combat payload of 1,350 tons, and advanced radars, the Turkish Baykar's Akıncı UCAV would become a highly suitable asset for Türkiye's unmanned counter-terrorism activities ([Baykar](#), August 8). Because Akıncı's weapons configuration may soon include high-precision missiles such as the TRG-230, the UCAV would be able to penetrate high-value targets in northern Iraq with a minimal margin of error. This new strategy would constitute a potentially higher rate of

attrition for Türkiye's drones, but it also would greatly minimize human casualties in one of the world's most hostile terrains.

Conclusion

Exploiting the void created by Washington, Paris is rapidly filling the Middle Eastern arms market with sophisticated systems and generous technical assistance. Moreover, Paris is determined to meet the region's growing demands, even if this comes at the expense of changing the regional power balance and rewriting the rules of counter-terrorism for a key NATO ally like Türkiye, if not also Israel. In short, Iraq's quest for Rafales might soon transform regional dynamics, and the U.S reluctance to share its technology will be a factor behind this development.

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Notes:

[1] The former refers to fourth-generation jets upgraded with AESA radars, high capacity data-link and enhanced avionics, while the latter refers to jets with stealth capabilities, high maneuverability, advanced avionics, super cruise characteristics and networked data fusion.