

Terrorism Monitor

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Islamic State Jihadists in Mozambique Attack Tanzanian Troops

Jacob Zenn

On November 19, Islamic State in Mozambique Province (ISMP), which split from its Congo-based allies in what was formerly Islamic State in Central Africa Province (ISCAP), claimed an attack on a joint patrol of Tanzanian and Mozambican troops ([Twitter/@ibnsiqili](https://twitter.com/ibnsiqili), November 19). According to the claim, the ISMP fighters burned three vehicles belonging to the Mozambican and Tanzanian troops and seized some of their weapons and forced

them to flee. This is not an isolated event, however, as ISMP rhetoric indicates increasing attention will be directed toward targeting Tanzanian troops.

For example, on November 18, in Islamic State (IS)'s flagship newsletter *al-Naba*, IS discussed engaging in "maritime jihad" in which the coastal areas of Tanzania and Mozambique could be struck ([Twitter/@paulybrown](https://twitter.com/paulybrown), November 18). While that discussion may seem aspirational, it would not be completely unprecedented for IS. The Mozambican jihadists demonstrated the intent and capability to attack liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants when it ransacked them in Afungi, Cabo Delgado in April 2021. This

caused the plants to shut down, leading the oil giant Total to withdraw its personnel from the site and declare force majeure on the project (totalenergies.com, April 26, 2021). "Maritime jihad" would have similar objectives. In essence, its goal would be to disrupt offshore energy sites, if not also the shipping industry, through piracy.

IS also has the numbers and new recruits to expand the jihad from Mozambique into Tanzania and elsewhere on the Swahili coast. Not only is one of the group's leaders from the Swahili Coast of Tanzania, but that coast, including Tanzania as well as Comoros and Mauritius, has proven to be an increasingly fertile terrain for jihadist recruitment, including to IS during the organization's heyday in 2015 (clubofmozambique.com, March 14, 2021; Terrorism Monitor, December 17, 2020). Thus, IS has the potential to live up to its promises to engage in "maritime jihad" and to continue to target Tanzanian troops.

Tanzanian territory has also been struck by the IS-loyal jihadists in cross-border attacks from Mozambique as well (Terrorism Monitor, December 3, 2020). However, since 2021, the Rwandan military's 1,000-soldier intervention in Mozambique has placed the jihadists on the back foot and threats to Tanzanian territory have subsided (mod.gov.rw, July 10, 2021). Thus, the latest attack on Tanzanian troops in their joint patrol with Mozambican troops on top of the resurgence in jihadist attacks in Mozambique could suggest that ISMP's regional threat is increasing once more.

Tanzania itself had initially pledged to support Mozambique's fight against the jihadists even earlier than Rwanda, with a deal signed in coordination with the Mozambican counterparts as early as

November 2020 (aljazeera.com, November 23, 2020). This pledge was reaffirmed again one year later in November 2021 (allafrica.com, November 16, 2021). Shortly afterwards, in January, the Tanzanians and Mozambicans acknowledged the security concerns along their mutual border and the potential for cross-border attacks in their discussions on how their counter-terrorism partnership could continue to "evolve" (channelstv.com, January 28). Finally, just before this latest attack targeting Tanzanian troops, Tanzania signed defense and security agreements with Mozambique in September (africanews.com, September 22). As a result, there is no doubt that ISMP has every incentive to strike Tanzanian troops both in Mozambique and in Tanzanian territory, as the latest attack and the *al-Naba* newsletter have indicated.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Western Countries Reconsider Repatriation of Islamic State Families in Syria Amid Changing Conflict Dynamics

Jacob Zenn

The conflict dynamics in Syria continue evolving, with the latest development being Turkey's airstrikes against Kurdish allies of the U.S in Syria in what might become a precursor to broader Turkish military action in northern Syria (alarabiya.net, November 26). These Turkish airstrikes occurred in response to a bombing in Istanbul that killed six people which Turkey attributed to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian affiliates (dailysabah.com, November 17).

At the same time, however, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has opened the prospect of diplomacy by expressing a willingness to negotiate with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad ahead of Turkish elections in 2023 because both leaders have a mutual interest in weakening the Kurdish forces (Hurriyetdailynews.com, November 23).

Beyond the Turkish and Syrian leaders, Iran also seems to be taking advantage of the opportunity to weaken the Kurdish forces as well. On November 25, U.S Central Command (CENTCOM) claimed the U.S patrol base in al-Shaddadi was attacked with rocket fire and that the Kurdish forces inspected the site, albeit without the base suffering any significant damage (centcom.mil, November 25). CENTCOM did not name Iran, but Syrian sources suggest the attacks came from “pro-Iranian militias” in Syria (arabnews.com, November 26). Iran, Syria, and Syria’s main foreign backer and increasingly close ally to Iran, Russia, all seek to eliminate the U.S presence in Syria, while Turkey aligns with those three countries on diminishing the influence of the Kurdish forces there.

While Islamic State (IS) remains a factor in the security equation in Syria and the Kurdish forces claim they will halt anti-IS operations in light of the impending Turkish operation, the group is a fragment of its former self (theArabweekly.com, November 27). It conducts ambushes, but no longer controls territory and still has not named a caliph to replace the successor of Abubakar al-Baghdadi (alarabiya.net, June 23). One of lingering humanitarian effects of IS, however, is that its captured fighters remain in Kurdish-run prisons and their families languish in Kurdish-run camps. Ahead of a potential Turkish offensive and

Kurdish retreat, although not necessarily because of these dynamics, various Western governments that were previously reluctant to repatriate IS fighters or their family members are now making an about-face.

Kazakhstan was the first country to fully repatriate all of its citizens, including fighters and their families, who were subsequently admitted into rehabilitation programs (astanatimes.com, May 28, 2021). Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries likewise followed suit (ohchr.org, December 7, 2021). Nevertheless, most other countries rejected the opportunity to repatriate their citizens, including Indonesia, which debated the issue but ultimately decided against repatriation (scmp.com, February 11, 2020).

Whether because of the impending Turkish operation in northern Syria, which could lead to IS fighters and IS-sympathetic family members escaping from prison, or because of genuine humanitarian concerns, Western countries are now increasingly repatriating their citizens from Syria. For example:

- On November 22, Spain released plans to repatriate three women and 13 children before the end of 2022, including one wife and two widows of IS fighters who claimed they were “tricked” into traveling to Syria, but they still may face terrorism charges upon their return (thelocal.es, November 22).
- On November 1, the Netherlands announced that more than ten women and roughly 30 of their children would be repatriated from a Kurdish-run camp after a Dutch court ruled that they must be

brought home (dw.com, November 1).

- On October 29, the Australian government repatriated four Australian women and their 13 children from Syria, saying that they would be the first of dozens of others who would be repatriated from Kurdish-controlled camps in northeastern Syria (aljazeera.com, October 29).

In addition, despite the Canadian government claiming it would be “unprecedented and unprincipled” to bring IS fighters or their families back into the country, lawsuits from the families and public pressure could lead Canada to reverse course (globalnews.ca, November 15). Given that these IS fighters and their families have been detained for nearly five years and there is no end in sight to the fragmentation and geopolitical tensions in Syria, other Western countries may assess their national security is better protected by engaging in repatriation. This may prove more effective than risking those IS fighters or their families escaping or even being freed in IS operations. Early indications from Spain, the Netherlands, and Australia, if not also from the “success stories” from Central Asian cases, suggest repatriation may gain momentum in the near future.

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Jihadists Condemn Qatar and the World Cup with Hostile Rhetoric

Lucas Webber

Major international sporting events have long been a target for jihadist groups looking to capitalize on these moments to bring attention to themselves, promote their messages, and malign their enemies. At present, there is no other professional athletics competition on the scale of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, which takes place from November 21 to December 18. This spectacle has been a focus of hardline Islamists as well as jihadist groups and their affiliates, including, al-Qaeda Central (AQIC), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and the Islamic State (IS) ([Akhbar Alaan](#), November 26). These groups have taken aim at the World Cup, its Qatari hosts, nation-state participants, and even the sport of soccer itself.

Hardline Islamists and Al-Qaeda Jihadists Condemn the World Cup in Qatar

One of the earliest and most detailed critiques of the World Cup and Qatar came from a hardline British Islamist who published an entire magazine on the subject ([MEMRI](#), November 16). The magazine was uploaded to the Internet Archive on November 15 by an account named “Birds of Jannah328” ([Internet Archive](#), November 15). It begins by declaring that “one of the biggest diseases which have been injected into the hearts of the Muslims is that of nationalism (*asabiyyah*)” and that “instead of being united under a Khilafah (an Islamic State implementing the Sharia) Muslims are today divided into 56 nations each with its own flag, national anthem, football team, [and] illegitimate leader.” Additionally, Qatar is scorned for being the first nation amongst the Arab states to establish relations with Israel and the World Cup is derided for the “free mixing between men and women,” the association of the

tournament with the promotion of alcohol and gambling, "FIFA rulings contradicting the Shari'ah", and the influence of soccer stars as negative role models because many have been "involved in sex scandals, adultery, drunkenness, criminal behavior etc." ([Internet Archive](#), November 15).

AQAP, meanwhile, was among the first jihadist groups to formally comment on the event ([Jihadology](#), November 19). Its November 19 statement criticizes Qatar for pursuing friendly relations with the West, permitting Christian churches to be built on the Arabian Peninsula and for hosting the World Cup itself, which the group argues leads to religious and moral corruption, including homosexuality and drawing masses of infidels to Islamic lands. AQAP suggests Qatar should instead use its resources to help oppressed Muslims in the Levant, Yemen, Myanmar, and across the African continent.

This was followed by an AQC release titled "Regarding the Pornographic Invasion of the Peninsula of Muhammad through the Qatar World Cup 2022" ([Jihadology](#), November 20). The article condemns the Qatari government for poisoning, subverting, and domesticating Islam in the country and alleges that the World Cup promotes a culture of homosexuality, debauchery, prostitution, corruption, and atheism. AQC asserts that professional sports in general - and the World Cup in particular, given its powerful influence - are nefariously weaponized against Islam and its values.

The Islamic State's Sentiments on the World Cup and Qatar

Days after the AQC release, IS published its own editorial on Qatar and the World Cup in its *al-Naba* weekly newsletter ([Jihadology](#), November 24). IS declared Qatar a tyrant that is among the most powerful Arab states, claiming that the country is waging war on Islam. The publication also lambasts Qatar for hosting al-Udeid Airbase, where U.S troops are present. Anger at Qatar for hosting this

base is a theme in the aforementioned Islamist magazine, the AQAP statement, as well as in posts by the pro-IS Uzbek- and Turkish-language *Islom Tavhid Xabarlari* propaganda network. The pro-IS outlet *At-Taqwa* amplified the *al-Naba* article by creating an image with a quote from it about Qatar being subservient to "the Crusaders." [1]

Islom Tavhid Xabarlari has been laser-focused on the World Cup and the sport of soccer. It posted two videos on Telegram featuring text commentary about how the sport is used by world powers to hypnotize people and misdirect their passions, which prevents people from seeing who their real enemies are ([Telegram/Islom Tavhid Xabarlari](#), November 2). Further, the propaganda network posted a lengthy statement about how soccer has become a "religion" and causes Muslims to leave Islam and convert to the sport, with stadiums becoming "churches" and fans gathering to see their "prophets," who are the athletes ([Telegram/Islom Tavhid Xabarlari](#), November 26).

Moreover, the pro-IS *Talaa al-Ansar* Foundation posted an image showing Qatar's main stadium and warned against allowing such things to distract Muslims from their duty of jihad. [2] *Talaa al-Ansar* doubled down with a short video released on November 29 drawing a contrast between Qatari soccer fans and reverent IS militants. [3] Another widely circulated image in the online IS space showed scrawny children with Qatar's arena in the backdrop and featured a caption about how \$4.3 billion has been spent on the facility while thousands of Muslim children are dying of hunger ([YouTube/Rasanae Tawhid](#), November 20). This again demonstrates IS's disdain for Qatar.

Conclusion

Al-Qaeda and IS stopped short of explicitly calling for attacks in Qatar and had only limited general comments about the duty of jihad against the country. Yet there have been some calls for attacks online. For

instance, pro-IS social media has widely circulated an image showing the flags of the international coalition “versus” the IS flag, with football stadium lights as the background and the word “SOON” alongside pictures of a grenade and dynamite. This release’s timing coincided with the start of the World Cup ([Telegram/Sawt Al-Zarqawi](#), November 21). A second image posted on TamTam urges IS supporters to sabotage and firebomb World Cup targets, release scorpions and poisonous snakes into the stadium, and kill soldiers and then use weapons to murder others in the vicinity. [4]

Nevertheless, despite the sporadic threats by jihadist groups and their online sympathizers, the Qatar World Cup has thus far mostly been a vector for IS and AQ to rhetorically attack their enemies rather than to incite acts of violence against the event. It remains to be seen if such hostile sentiments will be successful in inspiring attacks among the masses of their online followers, however.

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Notes:

[1] At-Taqwa published the image on a Telegram channel on November 29.

[2] Talaa al-Ansar Foundation posted the image in a now-deleted TamTam channel sometime in late November.

[3] Talaa al-Ansar Foundation published the video on Telegram on November 29.

[4] This image was found in a TamTam online messaging application channel and was posted on November 21.

Muhojir Tactical: A Profile of the Newest Uzbek Jihadist-Linked Tactical Group in Syria

Daniele Garofalo

On November 16, a new tactical group and militant contractor in Idlib governorate, Syria was announced on various social networks and messaging platforms through a video called “Tactical Accessories” ([Muhojir UZ](#), November 16). The propaganda of this new group, Muhojir Tactical, is managed by two media channels. The first media channel, Muhojir UZ, previously disseminated propaganda for the Uzbek jihadist group in Syria, Katibat Tavhid vo Jihad (KTJ) [1] and more generally the propaganda of the Abu Obaida bin Al-Jarrah Brigade of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) to which the KTJ is aligned [2]; and the second media channel, UZ Tactical, also disseminated KTJ and HTS material ([Enab Baladi](#), March 8). Already in the days leading up to the announcement of Muhojir Tactical’s birth and the release of its first video, all media and private channels of non-Arab fighters on various social media platforms had relaunched the online manifesto advertising the launch of Muhojir Tactical’s new media product.

Muhojir Tactical’s rise takes place in the complex Syrian context and witnesses the collaboration between several jihadist groups comprised of non-Syrian fighters with a very strong presence on social media networks. The group not only trains new fighters, but also acts as an important glue linking the independent jihadist groups in northwestern Syria and HTS brigades. Unlike the other tactical and contractor groups, Muhojir Tactical appears less aligned with a single jihadist group, which contributes to its inter-factional versatility.

An Overview of Jihadist Tactical Groups

Militant tactical and contractor groups in Syria are hardly new. A precursor to Muhojir Tactical formed in 2016 and was

called Malhama Tactical. It was comprised of immigrants from various Central Asian countries ([Al-Jazeera](#), December 27, 2018). Consequently, Malhama Tactical collaborated with HTS as well as with other jihadist groups operating in Syria, such as Ajnad al-Kavkaz (Soldiers of the Caucasus) and the Syrian branch of the Uighur-led Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) [3]. Subsequently, Albanian Tactical, which was comprised of Albanians, Kosovars, and Macedonians from the jihadist group Xhemati Alban in northern Syria emerged around 2019, with one of its wings aligned with HTS. ([al-Akhbar](#), September 25, 2019) [4]. Since 2021, Yurtugh Tactical, which is associated with the TIP, whose Syrian branch is aligned with HTS, has also operated in Syria ([Middle East Online](#), March 3, 2020).

It is important to point out that all the mentioned tactical groups as well as the new Muhojir Tactical are referred to as “contractors” and provide in-person and online combat training, weaponry building, and special mission’s lessons. However, they are not paid for this because they are highly ideological groups that train and support fellow jihadist groups, including those close to them and others not operating in Syria. Funding, however, is provided to them through donations and the sale of weapons and other military materials.

Muhojir Tactical’s Mission

Propaganda concerning Muhojir Tactical started several weeks before the November 16 announcement. This propaganda was seen on various platforms, such as Instagram, Tiktok and Telegram. Already on November 9, for example, a 10-minute video was released in which the formation of Muhojir Tactical was announced and the speaker, Abu Valid al-Shami, explained what its mission would be: “In this project there will be introductions on how to use weapons, we will explain mistakes not to make in battle and actions that should be done, what uniforms and tactical material to use, and how it should be worn”. The

video also introduced the Muhojir Tactical instructor who would be giving the first tactical lessons.

From the propaganda, Muhojir Tactical seems to be linked to KTJ because some fighters on social media networks who filmed and promoted the group, such as Abu Valid al-Shami, Abdulloh Muhojir, and Abdul Saloh, are KTJ members involved in the production and dissemination of videos published by Tavhid Media, which is KTJ’s official media channel. However, there is likely collaboration with the jihadist group Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar as well because the instructor featured in the video, Ayyub Hawk, who displayed different types of military clothing and tactical accessories, belongs to LMA. [5] He is a member of the group’s Special Forces and featured in a recent LMA video entitled “Men at Work” ([As-Sabiqun Media](#), October 29).

Conclusion

The emergence of Muhojir Tactical reveals two notable elements. The first element is the definitive establishment and evolution of tactical and contractor groups within the “jihadist galaxy.” Albanian Tactical and Yurtugh Tactical, meanwhile, continue to produce weekly video and photographic material of the highest quality, and Muhojir Tactical will likely follow the same propaganda line. The second element is that although the tactical groups appear to be divided according to nationality and connection to a particular jihadist group, they actually often collaborate with each other [6].

It is also necessary to pay close attention to Muhojir Tactical and its propaganda, which reveal three important elements. The first is that the Syrian jihadist theatre is becoming increasingly complex. The second is that jihadist groups, including the smaller or independent ones, have achieved a very high military and training capacity. And third, and perhaps most important, the Syrian theatre is for Muhojir Tactical as well as for other tactical groups

only the bridgehead from which they can take the jihadist fight to other theatres of operation, including KTJ's native Central Asia region.

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Notes:

[1] The group also includes Tajik and Kyrgyz elements.

[2] Alignment with HTS was sealed by an oath of allegiance in September 2015. The group is also allied with Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari (KIB), an Uzbek jihadist group operating in Syria, and with LMA.

[3] Although it has not produced propaganda material since January 2022, the group is active in several training camps in northern Syria, as reported by a local source in a recent interview with the author (danielegarofolo.substack.com, August 2).

[4] Xhemati Alban has two wings: one led by Abu Qatada al-Albani, who is loyal to and collaborates with HTS; and another opposed to HTS led by Musa Al-Albani.

[5] Founded in the summer of 2012, Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar is made up of Syrian and Arab fighters more generally, as well as a high number of foreign fighters from Chechnya, Dagestan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. In 2015, Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar pledged allegiance to Jabhat al-Nusra and in 2017 the group was integrated into HTS and now fights alongside it in various military campaigns.

[6] This was seen in a recent Yurtugh Tactical video published on September 18, which was conducted in coordination with Albanian Tactical (Yurtugh Media, September 18).

Sindhi and Baluch Separatists Team Up to Target Chinese Interests in Pakistan

Syed Fazl-e-Haider

On September 28, a Chinese national was killed and two others were injured when an unidentified assailant opened fire at a dental clinic in Pakistan's largest city of Karachi, the capital of Sindh province. Chinese-origin Pakistani dentists, Dr. Richard Hu and his wife Phen Teyin, sustained bullet injuries ([Dawn](#), September 29). Ronald Raymond Chou, their Chinese employee, however, died on the spot ([Dawn](#), September 29). All three victims held Chinese and Pakistani dual nationality, but were targeted because of their "Chinese" appearance, if not also lack of accompanying security. The Sindhudesh People's Army (SPA), a new Sindhi separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attack ([Samaa TV](#), September 29).

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin expressed condolences to the victims but asserted that the individual killed in the attack at Karachi dental clinic, Ronald Raymond Chou, was not a Chinese citizen, but a Pakistani citizen by way of his being a dual national (China does not recognize dual nationality and assumes anyone with a Chinese passport and the passport of another nation is a citizen of the other nation) ([Friday Times](#), September 30). Pakistani investigative authorities, meanwhile, claimed that India was funding the SPA and, therefore, that India was responsible for the attack ([Daily Times](#), September 30).

This was the second attack in five months on Chinese (or perceived Chinese) nationals in Karachi. On April 26, four other people, including three Chinese professors,

were killed at Karachi University as a result of a suicide attack by a female suicide bomber. The Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), which is a banned separatist group fighting for an independent Baluchistan, claimed responsibility for that suicide attack carried out by the group's first ever woman suicide bomber, Shari Baloch ([Dawn](#), April 26). These two attacks in Karachi indicate that Sindhi and Baluch separatists are joining forces to target Chinese interests in Pakistan.

The Sindhi-Baluch Separatist Nexus

In 2020, Baluch separatist groups, including the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF), Baluch Republican Army (BRA) and the Baluch Republican Guards (BRG), joined hands with the banned Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) to form the Baluch Raji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS) with an aim to target Chinese interests in Pakistan ([India Narrative](#), August 7, 2020). At that time, BRAS stated that "Sindh and Baluchistan are equally affected by the expansionist and oppressive China. Through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China aims to subjugate Sindh and Baluchistan and occupy the coasts and resources from Badin to Gwadar ([The Commune Mag](#), August 2020)." This showed the consensus between Baluch and Sindhi separatists regarding China's exploitative role in both provinces and their desire to resist China by targeting Chinese interests and nationals.

Baluch insurgent groups have reportedly provided training to Sindhi separatist groups in order to enhance the latter's operational capacities. In return, Sindhi separatists provide logistical support to Baluch separatists for their operations in Karachi and other areas of Sindh ([Dawn](#),

October 16). The Sindhi militants' support has allowed the Baluch separatists to expand their operational area to Karachi, where they carried out several attacks on Chinese targets before the most recent ones. For instance, in 2018, Baluch separatists mounted an attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi itself ([Dawn](#), November 23, 2018). Two years later, in 2020, the Baluch separatists also attempted to storm the Pakistan Stock Exchange compound in Karachi, but all four attackers were killed by security forces stationed there ([Dawn](#), June 29, 2020). The attack on the stock exchange was reportedly directly facilitated by Sindhi separatists ([The Commune Mag](#), August 2020). In 2020, Sindhi separatists claimed 10 attacks across their home province, including in Karachi. The last attack took place in Karachi in December 2020 and targeted Chinese nationals in a shooting, but missed them ([The News](#), January 4, 2021).

Most recently, on November 3, a suspected SRA member was arrested by Pakistani counter-terrorism authorities after they uncovered the member's plot to murder another Chinese dentist in Hyderabad, Sindh. The investigation revealed that the suspect was in direct contact with SRA's exiled leader Zulfiqar Khaskheli, who sent money to the suspect to buy the pistol and motorcycle. A handgun and motorbike were also recovered from the suspect ([Geo.TV](#), November 3).

Comparing Sindhi and Baluch Separatists

Unlike Baluch insurgents, Sindhi separatists lack extensive support among the public. Sindh province's growing middle class and educated youth does not provide fertile grounds for the growth of separatist

groups and recruitment. For Sindhi separatists, the political landscape is also not favorable in Sindh, as compared to Baluch separatists. The Pakistan People Party (PPP), which is a federal political party and Sindh's most popular party, has governed the province for the last three decades ([Dawn](#), October 16). Although PPP has not been able to fully resolve the issues plaguing the Sindhi people, its progressive and liberal ideology has attracted the majority of Sindhi people. As a result, Sindhi nationalists have thus far been unsuccessful in challenging its electoral dominance.

Unlike Baluch separatists, Sindhi separatists are also unorganized and lack the capability to carry out mass attacks. As a result, they usually choose soft targets simply to make their presence known. The Pakistani Counter-Terrorism Department's (CTD) Transnational Terrorists Intelligence Group (TTIG) head, Raja Umar Khattab, said as much when he stated, "If you have reviewed the attacks carried out by the Sindhi separatist groups, then you would know that they always choose soft targets ([Minute Mirror](#), September 29)."

In contrast to Sindhi separatists, the Baluch separatists are well trained and armed with modern weapons. Therefore, they have been carrying out deadlier and more sophisticated attacks on Pakistani security forces, Chinese nationals and interests in Baluchistan. One of the most notable Baluch militant attacks on a hard target, for example, was the killing of five foreign tourists, including Chinese nationals, at a five-star hotel in the port city of Gwadar in 2019 ([al-Jazeera](#), May 12, 2019).

Conclusion

Chinese nationals who are not engaged in development projects related to CPEC projects are usually the types of soft targets to attack in Pakistan. However, the Chinese engineers and workers associated with CPEC have been provided strong security by Pakistani authorities. With limited operational capacity, Sindhi separatists have been choosing the softest of targets, such as dentists, as opposed to Chinese nationals associated with the all-important CPEC. At the least, the attack on the dental clinic is making the Sindhi separatists known in the province.

At present, Pakistani counter-terrorism authorities do not view Sindhi militancy a major threat to security in the province. The Baluch-Sindhi nexus however, could make both contingents more lethal and aggravate the threat to the Chinese nationals and projects in Sindh. The anti-China agenda of this separatist alliance will continue to upset Pakistani authorities, which will face immense pressure from Beijing over the increasing attacks on Chinese nationals.

Another catalyst for Sindhi and Baluch separatists is the potential breakdown of law and order in Pakistan, which would give a boost to both separatist groups. Pakistan witnessed chaos, violent protests, and destruction in December 2007 following the assassination of the country's popular leader and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in a suicide attack in Rawalpindi, Punjab province. In the aftermath of the Bhutto assassination, emotionally charged protestors set dozens of trains, thousands of vehicles, and public properties on fire across the country. This resulted in a civil war-like situation, and particularly in

Sindh, which was the slain Bhutto home province ([Asia News](#), December 28, 2007).

The Bhutto tragedy would have revisited Pakistan on November 3 if the assassination attempt on former Prime Minister Imran Khan in Wazirabad, Punjab had not failed ([Dawn](#), November 3). Khan's party workers had already declared that Khan himself was their "red line." Had Khan been killed, therefore, the country could have plunged into a civil war, which would have provided the separatists a favorable environment to strengthen their relationships and expand their areas of operation.

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