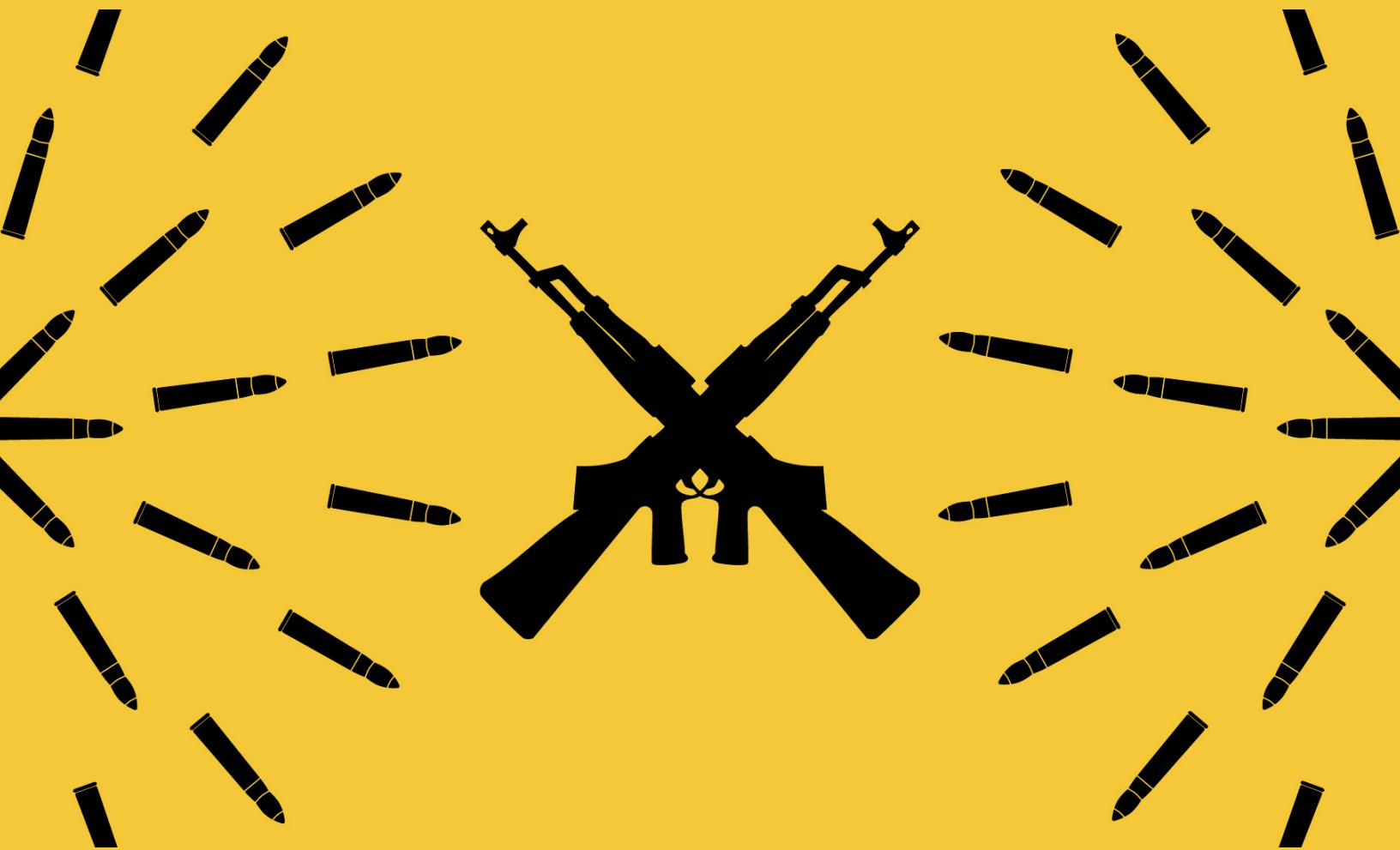


Jamestown

January 15, 2025



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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at a mourning service with Jewish leaders after the attack.
(Source: X/@AlboMP)

Hanukkah Terror Attack Highlights Family Jihad Phenomenon

Jacob Zenn
January 15, 2026

Executive Summary

- On December 14, 2025—the first night of Hanukkah—father and son Sajid and Naveed Akram killed 15 people in a mass shooting at Sydney’s Bondi Beach.
- The Bondi Beach shooting and previous high-profile duo attacks—including the Boston Marathon bombings and the Charlie Hebdo shooting—mirror the “family jihad” phenomenon, which was often fueled by Islamic State (IS) propaganda encouraging collective family migration and action.
- A potential IS resurgence in Syria may revitalize global movements and inspire more family-based attacks, a neglected research area that now warrants significant further study.

Brief

The term “family jihad” became commonplace during the Islamic State’s (IS) heyday in 2014 when families—including husbands, wives, and even children—together engaged in hijrah (Arabic: هجرة; migration) from their home countries to the IS “caliphate” in Syria ([Al Jazeera](#), May 16; [The Guardian](#), November 27, 2015). In particular, Central and Southeast Asians traveled to Syria to live in and fight for the caliphate (see [EDM](#), September 8, 2014). A related phenomenon has involved family members conducting terrorist attacks together, such as the one perpetrated at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, on the first night of Hanukkah on December 14, 2025.

In the Bondi Beach attack, Sajid and Naveed Akram—a father and son duo—killed 15 people in a mass shooting. The father was shot and killed by Australian security forces after the rampage, and the son was taken into custody ([abc.net.au](#), December 15, 2025). Naveed had followed the Sydney-based pro-Hamas and pro-jihadist preacher Wisam Haddad and then preached similar ideas to younger schoolchildren, which appears to explain some of the ideological background to their attack ([abc.net.au](#), August 21, 2025). Naveed was not arrested despite his early jihadist inclinations and pro-Palestinian militancy beliefs. Sajid and Naveed’s IS support—as evidenced by their possession of an IS flag—motivated them to target Jews at the Bondi Beach holiday party ([smh.au.com](#), December 15, 2025).

Other high-profile attacks by family duos include:

- The Boston Marathon bombings on April 15, 2013, when brothers of Chechen origin detonated two homemade bombs near the race’s finish line, killing three people and injuring hundreds ([The Harvard Gazette](#), April 12, 2023).

- The Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris on January 7, 2015, when two al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)-linked brothers of Algerian descent shot to death 12 people at the offices of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, which had mocked the Muslim Prophet Muhammad ([BBC](#), January 14, 2015; [CJR.org](#), January 7, 2025).
- The San Bernardino, California, office shootings on December 2, 2015, when a husband and wife couple of Pakistani origin shot to death an employee at a holiday party and training event, killing 16 people in support of IS ([U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#), February 9, 2017).
- The Jolo, Philippines, suicide bombings at a cathedral on January 27, 2019, when an Indonesian husband and wife couple killed at least 20 people and injured more than 100 others ([mindanews.com](#), January 29, 2019).

Other instances of husbands and wives in multi-person terrorist attacks include the 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings and motorcycle suicide bombings by several members of a family in Surabaya, Indonesia, that same year ([Sri Lanka Campaign](#), April 17, 2025). Most instances of family members conducting attacks together occurred in the 2010s while IS was making global headlines and inspiring followers around the world to conduct attacks anywhere against “infidels” to support the Caliphate ([humanglemedia.com](#), July 7, 2022). IS’s propaganda about the Caliphate being a place where entire families, not just young men, could migrate to may have contributed to the spike in attacks by family duos during this period.

The Bondi Beach investigation will likely remain underway for months, including determining the father-son attackers’ more specific motives. The potential surge in IS attacks in Syria amid the new Syrian government’s challenges in

Brief

uniting the country and engaging diplomatically with former “infidel” Western enemies, however, could breathe new life into other global IS movements and inspire attacks around the world (see Terrorism Monitor, July 15; Al Jazeera, November 10, 2025). More broadly, the revival of father-son or family duo attacks has been a neglected aspect of terrorism research that warrants further study.

Ghali, a relative of Bassiri, was detained in the aftermath of what came to be known as the Zemla Intifada. After a year in the Bir Nazarán prison, Ghali returned to political organizing but was re-arrested and detained for a further three months.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, [click here](#).

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A propaganda cartoon posted to the group's Telegram channel. (Source: Independent Arabia)

Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah's Micro-insurgency in Syria

Daniele Garofalo
January 15, 2026

Executive Summary

- Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah—a Salafi-jihadist “micro-insurgency” group operating mainly in northern Syria’s rural and peripheral areas—stands out among the armed factions to emerge after the fall of Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime in December 2024.
- Led by Abu Aisha al-Shami, the group consists of several hundred fighters, including former Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) members, while displaying strong ideological affinity and potential for future collaboration with the Islamic State (IS).
- Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah’s focus on sectarian violence and symbolic attacks poses a threat to local stability and risks escalating wider community conflicts in Syria, despite the group’s limited overt military capacity.

Militant Ideology

The Syrian civil war (2011–2024) saw the emergence of a multitude of armed actors of different natures, sizes, and ideological orientations. After the fall of the al-Assad regime in December 2024, many factions seemed likely to integrate into the Syrian army, or at least the new government and Ministry of Defense would be able to keep them under control. Among these factions, Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah stands out as a Salafi-jihadist “micro-insurgency” operating mainly in northern Syria’s rural and peripheral areas, which are characterized by structural instability and power vacuums. Although small compared to the Islamic State’s (IS) presence in Syria, Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah has attracted attention for its ability to combine low-intensity armed actions with targeted propaganda campaigns, conveyed through digital channels.

Who is Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah?

Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah emerged in Syria in the spring of 2025. It presents itself as a takfiri (Arabic: تَكْفِيرِيّ) group with attacks and threats directed against religious minorities ([Counter Extremism Project](#), May 7, 2015). In particular, Ansar al-Sunnah targets Shiites, Alawites, Druze, and Christian communities, as well as former members or supporters of the Assad regime ([Shaf Center](#), July 29; [The Arab Center](#), July 12, 2025).

The first reports from Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah media sources describe the group as operating mainly in the northern provinces of Syria, including Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, Homs, Latakia, and Tartous ([Erem News](#), June 24; [Senara News](#), July 7, 2025). Other, more sporadic appearances were in rural areas of Rif Dimashq. Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah has attracted attention for its combination of low-intensity local military actions and targeted propaganda activities, which convey Salafi-jihadist ideology and anti-government messages. The group maintains a

primarily local foothold, operating in community contexts where it can count on networks of sympathizers. The group’s narrative focuses on the religious legitimacy of armed struggle against the Syrian authorities, now led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa. The group considers al-Sharaa—along with his government—a traitor for betraying jihadist ideology, allying with enemy and oppressive countries, and failing to keep promises. Other enemies include so-called “apostates” and minorities, such as Shiites and Christians ([SyriacPress](#), July 4, 2025).

In March 2025, the group claimed to have taken part in sectarian violence against the Alawite community in Latakia and called for intensified punitive attacks against Alawites and former Syrian government officials released by the interim government of al-Sharaa ([SyriacPress](#), July 4, 2025). The group rose to media prominence in June 2025 when it carried out and claimed responsibility for the bombing of Mar Elias church in Damascus, an event that garnered a significant media and political impact ([Erem News](#), June 24; see [Terrorism Monitor](#), July 15, 2025).

Leadership and the IS Question

Abu Aisha al-Shami was announced as the leader of Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah on the group’s media channels. Al-Shami oversees both the ideological and operational direction of the group’s cells ([X/@G88Daniele](#), July 1, 2025). Other prominent members mentioned in communiqués include Abu al-Fath al-Shami and Abu Sufyan al-Dimashqi, who act primarily as religious advisors and local coordinators, but generally maintain low profiles. The group’s organizational structure is fluid and decentralized, based on small, semi-autonomous operational cells, with communication between cells often mediated digitally via Telegram or similar channels. The group is estimated to have

Militant Ideology

several hundred fighters. Most of the group's members originate from local jihadist movements, particularly dissident elements of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and non-aligned groups, some of which were suspected of collaborating with IS ([SyriacPress](#), July 4, 2025).

An analysis of the group's ideology and operational methods also reveals a growing alignment—and potential for future collaboration—between Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah and IS militants in Syria. In some posts on its Telegram channel, the group praised IS and its “efforts to implement Sharia law” and stated that, although it does not collaborate or coordinate with IS, “this could change in the future” (Daniele Garofalo Monitoring, [June 2](#); [July 10](#); [July 25](#); [September 2](#); [October 18](#), 2025). These statements indicate the affinity of the group's leaders and militants with the ideology of IS.

The group has often shared posts on its Telegram channels that include sermons by IS religious leaders, audio lessons from IS's al-Bayan radio station, editorials, and infographics dedicated to Syria from IS's al-Naba newsletter ([X/@G88Daniele](#), December 10; [X/@Minalmi](#), December 26, 28, 2025). The media outlets established by the group also seem to echo names already used by IS. These include, for example, al-Adiyat Media Foundation, Dabiq Media Corporation, al-Yaqeen Media, and al-Sham Newspaper ([X/@G88Daniele](#), July 3, 2025).

Conclusion

The most likely short-term scenario is that Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah will remain a local actor with a highly symbolic impact by continuing to target minorities and conduct mediatic intimidation campaigns. The group's operational capacity, however, remains limited. While it can carry out violent actions at the local

level, it does not pose a significant threat on a national scale.

It is also possible that the group gets absorbed by larger structures in the future. The group's presence in Syria and its possible alignment or alliance with IS could lead to sectarian escalation and violent local reactions. That could degenerate into wider community conflicts in the medium to long term, in which Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah could become a major player.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

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Impending Threats



Photo of RSF leader Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo Musa "Hemedti" surrounded by members of the force. (Source: Rapid Support Forces)

Aftermath of Al-Fashir's Fall to Rapid Support Forces

Andrew McGregor
January 15, 2026

Executive Summary

- The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) captured al-Fashir in late October after an 18-month siege, consolidating RSF control over western Sudan and providing a potential capital for a new state.
- After entering al-Fashir, the RSF carried out mass looting, ethnic targeting, and killed 460 people at the al-Saudi maternity hospital in an attack that brought international outrage.
- Parallel RSF sieges in Kordofan indicate a strategy to divide Sudan. The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) is struggling to maintain control, but still currently favors a military solution over diplomatic negotiations.

Impending Threats

The capture of Khartoum by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the first months of its struggle with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) was possibly the most shocking moment of the ongoing civil war in Sudan. While the RSF has since been driven out of the capital, the RSF's 18-month siege and capture of al-Fashir in late October is likely to have a greater long-term impact. The collapse of resistance in the North Darfur capital consolidates the paramilitary group's hold over its power base in western Sudan while providing a potential capital for the new state the RSF aims to create.

Al-Fashir's Failed Defense

Al-Fashir was defended by the SAF's 6th Division and its allies in the Joint Force, including former rebel movements that had signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA). Many were veterans of various non-Arab Darfur militias who made common cause with the former SAF enemy and the ruling Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC) to defeat the RSF, which succeeded the notorious Arab-supremacist Janjaweed. These militias include elements of two large majority-Zaghawa groups: the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), led by Finance Minister Jibril Ibrahim; and the Sudanese Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM), led by Darfur governor Minni Arko Minawi (see Militant Leadership Monitor, December 7, 2017). Smaller groups include the Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces (GSLF) under Brigadier General Mubarak Bakhit and the Sudanese Liberation Movement-Tambour (SLM-Tambour) led by Mustafa Nasr Aldin Tambour, governor of central Darfur and target of repeated RSF assassination attempts.

Conflict between the western Arabs of the RSF and previously neutral JPA signatories began on April 13, 2024, after months of tensions between the armed groups, the final straw being a

massive cattle raid by Zaghawa gunmen (Ayin Network, April 19, 2024). JEM, the SLA-MM, and part of the GSLF joined the SAF coalition just as the RSF began their siege of al-Fashir.

The RSF weakened resistance in al-Fashir with a siege that gradually starved the city's 260,000 residents and the 6th Division garrison. Artillery and drones assaulted the city daily, and a roughly 45-mile sand berm was constructed to prevent escape except through narrow corridors where RSF personnel subjected those in flight to murder, robbery, and rape (Radio Dabanga, September 30, 2025). The city's non-Arab residents were well aware of the atrocities that befell the Masalit ethnic group after the RSF seized the West Darfur city of Geneina in June 2023 (Terrorism Monitor, June 26, 2023). The RSF targeted the overcrowded refugee camps around al-Fashir, and the main place of refuge became the town of Tawila, 43 miles away and controlled by the Fur militia, SLA-'Abd al-Wahid (SLA-AW).

Only days before the fall of the city, Darfur governor Minni Minawi claimed the RSF was using South Sudanese mercenaries in its assaults, having "exhausted its fighters" (Sudan Tribune, October 23, 2025). Colombian mercenaries supported by the UAE are also believed to have taken part in the RSF siege, operating drones and heavy weapons (Ayin Network, October 10, 2025). By October 21, only a third of al-Fashir's 600,000 people remained, trapped in a city without food or medical supplies and where most water sources had been destroyed by shelling (Ayin Network, October 21, 2025).

RSF Enters al-Fashir

On October 25, the RSF launched attacks from several directions on the SAF's 6th Division headquarters. Tanks and drones drove off the

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initial attacks. RSF resumed the assaults the next morning at dawn, however, with drones and ground units forcing their way through the base's main gate. The RSF seized large quantities of military supplies and reported destroying "huge military vehicles" ([Radio Tamazuj](#), October 26, 2025). Thousands of SAF troops and their allies withdrew to a strongpoint at Daraja, northwest of al-Fashir, leaving behind many comrades taken prisoner or trapped inside the city by RSF fighters ([Ayin Network](#), October 26, 2025).

Later on October 26, the RSF announced that its "forces have broken the backbone of the army and allied armed movements, inflicting heavy casualties on them, destroying massive military vehicles, and seizing all military equipment" ([Ayin Network](#), October 26, 2025). A video of RSF fighters celebrating the capture of the 6th Division's base in al-Fashir was posted to social media ([X/@SudanTribune EN](#), October 26, 2025). According to SAF General al-Burhan, the military command in al-Fashir "decided to withdraw due to the systematic destruction and killing of civilians" ([Radio Dabanga](#), October 28, 2025).

Prior to the final assault on al-Fashir, 'Abd al-Rahim Daglo, [RSF leader Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo Musa] "Hemedti's" brother and second-in-command, was filmed telling RSF fighters: "I declare it here ... I don't need any prisoners at all" ([X/@Sudan tweet](#), October 30, 2025). The entry of the RSF was marked by looting, arson, gang-rapes, the targeting of non-Arab ethnic groups for slaughter, and the summary execution of prisoners and those suspected of supporting the SAF and its affiliates ([Radio Tamazuj](#), November 1, 2025).

In the most appalling incident, incoming RSF fighters killed 460 patients, healthcare workers, and families at al-Saudi maternity hospital ([Radio Tamazuj](#), October 29, 2025). Fighting

continued in the western part of the city even after the RSF began house-to-house "combing operations" throughout the rest of al-Fashir. Besides the Saudi maternity hospital, gunmen targeted aid workers and anyone found in the university or Interior Ministry buildings. In addition, an ordinary soldier in the RSF, Fateh 'Abd Allah Idris "Abu Lulu" discovered a murderous calling during the occupation, joyfully slaughtering civilians attempting to leave the city even as they begged for their lives. After social media videos of his activities attracted international attention, the RSF claimed to have arrested him and denied he was a formal member of the group ([Ayin Network](#), November 10, 2025).

Hemedti's Response

Hemedti deflected international condemnation of the atrocities, insisting that they were the work of individuals who would be investigated by an RSF committee and held responsible ([Ayin Network](#), November 10, 2025). The atrocities have captured the attention of the International Criminal Court (ICC), however, which is beginning to monitor for evidence of war crimes ([Radio Dabanga](#), November 3, 2025).

6th Division and Joint Force survivors, meanwhile, have attempted to regroup in the Wana Mountains (or Hills), northwest of al-Fashir. Without provisions, they will be forced to either regain territory formerly held by the SAF, surrender to the RSF, or attempt an escape to an uncertain welcome in Chad. The storming of al-Fashir has been accompanied by simultaneous sieges of cities in neighboring Kordofan, part of the RSF's strategy to form a western Sudanese state. The strategic city of Bara in North Kordofan fell to three waves of RSF attackers on October 25, followed by the now-typical door-to-door slaughter of its non-Arab civilian population and all those considered sympathetic to the SAF. The

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operation helps the RSF complete its encirclement of the North Kordofan capital, al-'Ubayd ([Mada Masr](#), October 27; [Ayin Network](#), November 7, 2025). On February 27, 2000, the state PWD and Forest Minister, Nagen Sharma, was killed.

In neighboring South Kordofan, the RSF has intensified its sieges of the cities of Kadugli and Dilling with the targeting of civilian homes by drones. The largely Nuba troops of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N), led by 'Abd al-Aziz Hilu, have joined the RSF in these sieges (see [Militant Leadership Monitor](#), July 31, 2011). The capture of Kadugli, in particular, would aid the RSF effort to consolidate its control of western Sudan ([Ayin Network](#), November 6, 2025).

Conclusion

The SAF is struggling to hold parts of Kordofan that it still controls and, at present, cannot muster the strength to push back the RSF, making a division of the country possible. For now, however, the SAF is still seeking a military rather than a diplomatic solution. Pressure to retake western Sudan coming from Darfur-origin Joint Forces allies who are now stranded in central and eastern Sudan will play an important part in the SAF's near-term operational decisions.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

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[Andrew McGregor](#) is a former Terrorism Monitor Editor and Militant Leadership Monitor Editor for the Jamestown Foundation (which he assumed in 2007), and Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the



Image of the Red Fort in New Delhi. (Source: Getty Images)

Red Fort Blast Brings Urban Operations to India

Antara Chakraborty
January 16, 2026

Executive Summary

- On November 10, a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) detonated at the Red Fort in New Delhi, challenging India's conventional understanding of terrorism as geographically isolated or community-specific.
- The attack was orchestrated by a "white-collar" cell of professionals—including doctors from Al-Falah University—linked to transnational groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad and Ansar Ghazwat-ul Hind.
- This event signals a potential operational shift from border-centric militancy toward urban-embedded operations, where actors exploit metropolitan anonymity and logistical networks within India's interior.

Impending Threats

On November 10, a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) went off at the Red Fort in New Delhi, marking one of the most significant urban terrorist incidents in India in the last decade. The blast killed at least 13 people and injured dozens more ([Times of India](#), November 11, 2025). Initial forensic assessments indicate that the explosion was a premature detonation as the vehicle was still in transit. While investigations will remain ongoing and details from the attack will evolve, the event has revealed a significant shift in militant operations in India. Early findings have linked the blast to what has been described as a “white-collar” terror module comprising medical doctors and other professionals, who embedded themselves within India’s urban environments ([Times of India](#), January 4).

Urban Attacks: New or Old?

Terrorism in India has conventionally been understood through the lens of cross-border, geographically isolated groups or community-specific recruitment. These trends have shaped a counterterrorism posture that is focused heavily on border security and external sanctuaries ([The Indian Express](#), April 25, 2025). Despite this focus, terror attacks in urban spaces are not new. The reemergence of a VBIED explosion in the capital city for the first time in thirteen years—and its execution by actors who are highly educated and professionally assimilated—was, however, distinct ([India Today](#), November 11; [India Today](#), November 23, 2025).

The Red Fort blast has challenged New Delhi’s conventional understanding of terrorism, necessitating a rethinking of India’s counterterrorism posture ([The Economic Times](#), November 23, 2025). The individuals who assembled and transported the vehicle used for the attack were linked to Al-Falah University in Faridabad, Uttar Pradesh. Investigations also uncovered “Room 13” within the university’s

medical college, which was reportedly used to store ingredients for the explosive materials ([Hindustan Times](#), November 27, 2025). Concurrent raids in the area led to the discovery of a cache of nearly 2900 kilograms (about 6,393 pounds) of ammonium nitrate and other explosive substances ([Times of India](#), November 26, 2025).

Attacker Profiles: A New Generation?

Investigations suggest the explosion may have gone off prematurely because panic spread within the cell after raids in the university area alarmed the plotters ([Deccan Herald](#), November 12, 2025). This ambiguity, however, does not diminish the importance of the urban space associated with the event. The presence of an explosive-laden vehicle in the capital, under the control of individuals connected to an organized network, indicates that militants are now moving logistical chains, recruitment pipelines, and supply caches through metropolitan environments.

Dr. Umar un-Nabi, a medical doctor and assistant professor, was identified as the suicide bomber in the VBIED explosion. Several co-conspirators, including doctors and associates linked to the cell, were also arrested and charged ([Times of India](#), November 12, 2025). The group used encrypted communications—including “ghost” SIM cards—and stored weapons, reflecting long-term planning and coordination ([The Hindu](#), January 4).

Authorities also apprehended a Bangladeshi national affiliated with Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) for providing logistical support to the operatives linked to the blast ([Deccan Chronicle](#), November 19, 2025). Reports also show that the cell was closely linked to both Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), a banned Pakistani-based jihadist organization, and to Ansar Ghazwat-ul Hind (AGuH), a regional al-Qaeda affiliated cell

Impending Threats

([The Telegraph](#), November 10, 2025). Another operative, Dr. Shaheed Shahid, was reportedly tasked with establishing Jamaat-ul-Mominat, a women's wing under JeM's directives ([India Today](#), November 13, 2025). The group's embeddedness within academic institutions such as the Al-Falah University illustrates a complex but ideologically loosely tied militant infrastructure involving both "white collar" professionals and transnational collaborators.

Conclusion

The Red Fort explosion takes on additional significance when viewed in the context of the recent counterinsurgency events along the India–Pakistan border. On the Indian side, Operation Sindoor was an attempt to deter cross-border infiltration and disrupt the logistical backbones of Pakistan-based militant networks ([NDTV](#), May 7, 2025). The strategic and symbolic appeal of an urban operation in the heart of Delhi is therefore intensified.

Even though the VBIED explosion went off prematurely—making the intended final target still unconfirmed—investigators have suggested that the operation may have been timed for the December 6 Babri Masjid demolition anniversary. It was also likely aimed at a high footfall location in Central Delhi, though no specific site has been officially identified ([NDTV](#), November 12, 2025). The fact that the device was being transported within the capital indicates that militants are nonetheless prepared for risks in the urban interior, where the potential impact of any successful attack becomes amplified.

The explosion should be understood as evidence of an emergent form of militancy, rather than as a failed or successful attack. In this emerging form, actors are embedding themselves in India's urban fabric and exploiting metropolitan

anonymity to pursue activities that once depended on distant sanctuaries ([India Today](#), November 12, 2025). Recognizing this reorientation toward the city as an enabling habitat is essential for understanding the next evolution of militancy. This new phase will increasingly be shaped by the exploitation of India's metropolitan complexity, rather than exclusively by territorial infiltration.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

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Image of Abu Dujanah al-Turkistani posted to the Muhojir Tactical's social media channels. (Source: Daniele Garofalo Monitoring)

Muhojir Tactical Leadership duo Arrested in Syria

Hadeel Oueis
October 22, 2025

Executive Summary:

- In early October 2025, Syrian authorities arrested Muhojir Tactical leader Abu Dujanah al-Turkistani and his deputy, sparking outrage among Central Asian jihadists regarding unfulfilled promises of citizenship and military integration.
- Founded in 2022, the Uzbek-led Muhojir Tactical group provided military training and produced anti-Russian propaganda to support Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

(HTS) operations while maintaining long-term ambitions to fight Central Asian regimes.

- These detentions have suspended the group's operations, raising the possibility of the group's dissolution or that disillusioned fighters may defect to the Islamic State or relocate to Central Asia.

Counterterrorism

In early October 2025, the General Security Directorate of the Syrian provisional government arrested Abu Dujanah al-Turkistani (Arabic: أبو دجانة التركستاني), who was one of the most prominent Uyghur jihadists in Syria ([Terrorism Monitor](#), December 2, 2022; [El Manshar](#), January 31; [The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#), October 15, 2025). He had also been a military instructor for the Uzbek jihadist group Tavhid va Jihod and the Chechen jihadist group Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (Arabic: جيش المهاجرين والأنصار). His detention caused dismay, anger, and frustration among Central Asian jihadist remnants in Syria, sparking a widespread social media campaign demanding his release and criticizing President Ahmed al-Shara's government for not honoring its promises to integrate Central Asian jihadists into the armed forces and grant them Syrian citizenship ([X/@G88Daniele](#), October 10, 2025).

Muhojir Tactical's Evolution

In November 2022, Dujanah announced the creation of a jihadist tactical group composed of Uzbek and Kyrgyz fighters in the Idlib governorate area called Muhojir Tactical ([Terrorism Monitor](#), December 2, 2022). Dujanah founded the group together with Uzbek jihadist fighter Abu Valid al-Shami, and the duo sought to “convey experience on a large scale and teach people how to defend their lives and handle weapons” ([The Khorasan Diary](#), May 2, 2023). [1] From its inception, the jihadist tactical group focused on propaganda, spreading thousands of photos and dozens of training videos about the use of and modifying weapons, various military accessories, and operational tactics. Such propaganda material has been widely disseminated on social media networks (particularly on Instagram and TikTok), messaging apps, and YouTube channels, consistently reaching tens of thousands of views, especially on Russian- and Uzbek-

language sites ([Akhbar al-Aan](#), November 5, 2023).

In 2023, the group began collaborating with other jihadist groups operating in Syria, notably Malhama Tactical and Yurtugh Tactical ([Akhbar al-Aan](#), March 6, 2023). The group, however, remained subject to the policies of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the HTS operations room, al-Fatah al-Mubin ([Akhbar al-Aan](#), November 5, 2023). Muhojir Tactical's objectives in Syria were to support and train Central Asian fighters and help HTS overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime. Yet, the group never hid its desire to support the fight against Russia and train “Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz, with the future goal of fighting Central Asian regimes and Russian influence” ([Akhbar al-Aan](#), February 27, 2023).

From Media to Militant Operations

In June 2024, Muhojir Tactical launched the “Muhojir Podcast,” in which Abu Dujanah and Abu Valid al-Shami interviewed numerous fighters, leaders, and preachers from Central Asia and the Caucasus, with whom they discussed various military, ideological, and geopolitical topics ([X/@88Daniele](#), June 30, 2024). A year and a half later, in November and December 2024, Muhojir Tactical also played a key role in military operations during the “Deter Aggression” campaign, alongside the Uzbek jihadist group Tavhid va Jihod, particularly in Aleppo, Hama, and Homs ([X/@88Daniele](#), December 3, 2024).

In June 2025, the security forces of the local administration of Idlib—on the orders of the General Security Directorate of the Syrian provisional government led by Ahmed al-Shara—arrested Abu Dujanah at his home ([News Net UZ](#), September 8, 2025). Later, in August, his deputy, Islom al-Uzbeki, was also arrested ([KNews KG](#), September 9, 2025). The reasons for

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the arrests were unclear, but several sources claimed that the motive is linked to the accusations that Abu Dujanah and Islom al-Uzbeki have ties to criminal cells, the Islamic State (IS), or al-Qaeda, and posed a security risk to the new Syrian government ([El-Manshar](#), September 4).

Starting on October 2, the co-founder of Muhojir Tactical and Muhojir Podcast, Uzbek jihadist Abu Valid al-Shami, launched a massive media campaign on Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram calling for the release of Abu Dujanah and Islom al-Uzbeki ([X/@G88Daniele](#), October 2). He criticized the al-Sharaa government and accused al-Sharaa of imprisoning those who helped him overthrow the former regime.

Conclusion

The arrest of Abu Dujanah and Islom al-Uzbeki highlights how al-Sharaa is struggling to deal with the sensitive issue of foreign fighters. The new Syrian president had initially declared that he would grant citizenship to foreign jihadists who had helped HTS overthrow the former regime and would integrate them into the new Syrian army. Pressure from non-Sunni Syrian communities and certain foreign countries, such as the United States, People's Republic of China, and Russia, however, is likely influencing the actions of al-Sharaa's government.

Among foreign fighters, discontent has been growing for months, as demonstrated by what is happening to Uzbek fighters in Idlib and French fighters from Firqat al-Ghuraba in the Harem area, who have been repeatedly targeted by security forces and have faced accusations, investigations, and arrests ([X/@88Daniele](#), October 21, 2025). The arrest of Muhojir Tactical's leadership duo was a heavy blow to the group, which has since suspended all training and propaganda activities. This current

situation—along with the possible deaths of its leaders—could lead to the tactical group's dissolution. It could also lead its fighters to decide to move to other potential conflict zones, such as Central Asia, or join the ranks of Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah or the IS's Syrian province, whose propaganda has long invited disillusioned jihadist fighters to join its ranks.

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Notes

[1] The author interviewed Abu Dujanah in 2023. See, “Daniele Garofalo Monitoring: Interview with the founder of Muhojir Tactical based in Syria,” ([Daniele Garofalo Monitoring](#), May 12, 2023).

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