

Côte d'Ivoire: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On June 11, 2020, dozens of suspected jihadists attacked a security post in Kafolo, near Côte d'Ivoire's northern border with Burkina Faso. The assault began at around three in the morning and left at least 10 soldiers dead, six injured, and two others believed missing. It marked the first attack by Islamist militants in Côte d'Ivoire since the March 2016 attack in Grand-Bassam. The attack occurred in the same area where the Burkinabe-Ivoirian militaries launched Operation Comoé in May 2020, an effort to expel extremists from the border region. Analysts warned that the terrorist threat was spreading south from the restive Sahel region to countries that were largely free of jihadist violence, such as Côte d'Ivoire. In the aftermath of the June 11 attack, the Ivoirian army arrested 30 alleged jihadists. Côte d'Ivoire's defense minister claimed the suspected head of a jihadist group was among those arrested but provided no further details. On June 25, an army statement identified the suspected mastermind of the ambush in Kafolo as Burkinabe national Sidibe Ali. (Sources: [France 24](#) [1], [Associated Press](#) [2], [New York Times](#) [3], [Reuters](#) [4])

On March 13, 2016, three gunmen opened fire at a beach resort in Grand-Bassam, a coastal town 25 miles east of Côte d'Ivoire's economic capital, Abidjan. The attack—the first [al-Qaeda](#) [5] attack on Ivorian soil—left 19 people dead, including 16 civilians and three Ivorian soldiers. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [6], [Abidjan.net](#) [7], [Reuters](#) [8])

Al-Qaeda's North African branch, [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb \(AQIM\)](#) [9] is now believed to pose the leading terrorism threat in Côte d'Ivoire, a country that has experienced two civil wars since 2002 but has historically been free from the threat of Islamic extremism. In recent years, Côte d'Ivoire has bolstered its counterterrorism apparatus in response to the growing threat posed by Islamist militants from neighboring Mali. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [10], [RFI Africa](#) [11])

Overview

Côte d'Ivoire ("the Ivory Coast") has been embroiled in political turmoil on and off since 2000, but has largely been free from the threat of Islamic extremism. In June 2015, however, Islamist militants in Mali began to attack closer to the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Months later, Côte d'Ivoire suffered the first al-Qaeda terrorist attack on its soil, when three AQIM gunmen stormed a beach resort east of Abidjan, killing 19 people. Today, the two leading dangers are believed to come from Malian-based groups Ansar al-Dine (AAD) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [12], [Reuters](#) [13], [Bloomberg](#) [14], [BBC News](#) [15])

The vast majority of suspects tied to the March 2016 attacks at Grand-Bassam are believed to come from outside the country. Nonetheless, though homegrown radicalization to al-Qaeda is not believed to pose a major problem, support for foreign terrorist organization [Hezbollah](#) [16] is believed to be high. Of Côte d'Ivoire's large Lebanese diaspora population, 2015 findings from the Institute for Security Studies in Africa show that the majority consider Hezbollah a nationalist movement as opposed to a terrorist organization. Though precise figures are not known, several Ivoirians are found to have joined foreign conflicts in Lebanon and Syria. In 2019, jihadist camps were discovered north of Côte d'Ivoire's Comoé National Park. (Sources: [ISS Africa](#) [17], [Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center](#) [18], [Agence France-Presse](#) [19])

In recent years, Côte d'Ivoire has improved domestic and international efforts to combat the growing threat from terrorism. The country has actively stepped up border security and supported counterterrorism efforts by the African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United States, and has also served as a logistics base for France's Operation Barkhane in neighboring Mali. Côte d'Ivoire is also nominally part of the international coalition to fight ISIS in Syria, although the Ivorian government has to date not participated in anti-ISIS airstrikes. (Sources: [OSAC](#) [20], [CNN](#) [21], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [22])

Throughout 2015 and 2016, Côte d'Ivoire has also bolstered domestic counterterrorism legislation and law enforcement. The government passed several counterterrorism laws in 2015, including laws criminalizing recruitment and advocacy to terrorism and laws allowing officers to tap phone lines and conduct searches at night. After al-Qaeda's attacks in March 2016, the Ivorian government allocated 80 billion CFA Francs (137.2 million USD) to the fight against terrorism and launched a major national counterterrorism investigation, arresting more than 80 people in connection to the attacks, at least 16 of whom were deemed to have been directly involved. In early 2017, Senegal also arrested several suspects, one of whom is believed to have been in contact with one of the attack planners. (Sources: [Independent](#) [23], [RFI Africa](#) [11],

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[Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [24], [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [25], [Abidjan.net](#) [26], [Abidjan.net](#) [27], [Reuters](#) [28], [Jeune Afrique](#) [29])

Prior to al-Qaeda's March 2016 attack in Grand-Bassam, terrorism was not a major source of concern for Ivoirians, according to a 2015 poll by the International Republican Institute. When asked which types of violence were most concerning, less than one percent of the poll's 15,000 respondents listed terrorism as their leading concern. By contrast, 30 percent of respondents named local crime, while the majority—59 percent—said that they were “not concerned by any kind of violence.” (Source: [International Republican Institute](#) [30])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Recruitment and Radicalization

The terrorist threat posed to Côte d'Ivoire is believed to come primarily from outside the country, from violent Islamist groups like AQIM and AAD in neighboring Mali, masterminded by AQIM operative Kounta Dallah and planned in part by a man named Ould Nouwayely. According to government representative Hamed Bakayoko, none of the terrorists involved in al-Qaeda's March 2016 Grand-Bassam attacks were Ivoirian. Speaking in July 2016, Bakayoko said that all the terrorists in the attacks “come from outside” the country and are believed to be motivated “by the desire to create chaos.” In 2019, suspected jihadists were detected in the country's north near the Comoé National Park. (Sources: [Abidjan.net](#) [31], [Ivorian.net](#) [32], [Abidjan.net](#) [27], [Reuters](#) [28], [Jeune Afrique](#) [29], [Outlook India](#) [33], [Agence France-Presse](#) [19])

Since Bakayoko's announcement, Malians, Mauritians, and several Ivoirians, including two Ivorian soldiers, have been arrested in connection to the attacks. Though few details were revealed concerning if or how the Ivorian soldiers were themselves radicalized, the accused were reported to have lived near the terrorist operatives and communicated with the assailants' driver prior to the attack. In August 2016, the soldiers were convicted in a military court on charges of conspiracy to aid the terrorist operatives and sentenced to 10 years in prison. (Sources: [Abidjan.net](#) [34], [Abidjan.net](#) [35], [Reuters](#) [28], [Jeune Afrique](#) [29])

Although Ivoirians are by and large believed to be unlikely to take up violence with regional Islamist groups like al-Qaeda, support for foreign terrorist group [Hezbollah](#) [16] is believed to be high. Pierre Gaho Oulata, the head of Côte d'Ivoire's National Assembly's Security and Defense Commission, also maintains that while the threat may not yet be realized, there is a need to monitor former militants from the country's 2002 and 2010 civil wars to ensure they do not take up arms with violent Islamist groups. (Sources: [ISS Africa](#) [17], [Bloomberg](#) [14])

Foreign Fighters

Several Ivoirians are believed to have joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq, though precise figures are not known. In 2013, at least two Ivoirians were documented joining Shiite fighters in Syria, according to the Israeli-based Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. In 2014, the Institute for Security Studies in Africa (ISS Africa) found that several Ivoirians have also gone to “theatres of war in Lebanon,” where some are believed to have died. (Sources: [Soufan Group 2014](#) [36], [Soufan Group 2015](#) [37], [Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center](#) [18], [ISS Africa](#) [17])

In addition to producing several Shiite foreign fighters to the conflict in the Middle East, Côte d'Ivoire has also served as a destination point for militants from neighboring countries. During Côte d'Ivoire's first civil war in 2002, foreign fighters from Liberia joined the conflict, with an estimated 2,000 militants joining pro-government forces in the country's predominantly Christian south, and 1,000 joining rebel militant groups in Côte d'Ivoire's Muslim-majority north. A few fighters also joined the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire from Sierra Leone. (Source: [United Nations](#) [38])

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

[Al-Qaeda](#) [5]'s North African branch, [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb \(AQIM\)](#) [39], operates out of neighboring Mali and has carried out attacks throughout the Sahel, including in Algeria, Niger, Libya, Mauritania, and Tunisia. On March 13, 2016, three AQIM-affiliated gunmen launched the group's first terrorist operation in Côte d'Ivoire, killing 19 people in the

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country's coastal town of Grand-Bassam. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [40], [BBC News](#) [15])

The March 2016 attack—later determined to have been masterminded by Malian-born [Kounta Dallah](#) [41]—launched questions as to the threat posed by domestic recruitment by AQIM within Côte d'Ivoire. Although more than 80 people were arrested in Côte d'Ivoire in the weeks following the attack, however, the vast majority were believed to be foreign-born, many of whom were Malian. In February 2017, Senegal arrested two suspects in connection to the attack, one of whom came from Mali and the other from Mauritania. (Sources: [RFI Africa](#) [42], [RFI Africa](#) [43], [Reuters](#) [28])

Ivoirians are by and large believed to be unlikely to take up violence with regional Islamist terror groups like al-Qaeda. According to Ivorian government representative Hamed Bayako, the AQIM assailants at Grand-Bassam “come from outside” the country. Bayako said that “no members of the attack come from a community in Cote d'Ivoire” and that the assailants who entered the country and carried out the attacks were “driven by the desire to create chaos.” Bayako advised Ivorian Muslim leaders to work to ensure that “radicalization does not settle” within Cote d'Ivoire's Muslim community. (Source: [Abidjan.net](#) [31])

France had reportedly warned Côte d'Ivoire of threats from neighboring countries. The Ivorian government has actively supported operations by ECOWAS and the African Union in an effort to combat AQIM in Mali, according to a report by the U.S. State Department. The country has also served as a logistics base for France's Operation Barkhane there. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [15], [OSAC](#) [20], [Business Insider](#) [44])

Al-Mourabitoun

[Al-Mourabitoun](#) [45] is a violent terrorist group that broke off from AQIM in 2011 but formally rejoined the group in December 2015. Led by notorious Algerian terrorist [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#) [46], al-Mourabitoun seeks to establish an Islamic state in West Africa. Al-Mourabitoun has claimed responsibility for numerous terror attacks in the Sahel region, including the deadly November 2015 gun and hostage attack in Mali's capital, Bamako. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [47], [Al Jazeera](#) [48], [Long War Journal](#) [49])

By the time that AQIM launched the March 2016 attacks in Côte d'Ivoire, al-Mourabitoun and AQIM were formally operating under the same banner. Nonetheless, the groups are believed to retain some degree of autonomy. Of the three gunmen named in the attacks at Grand-Bassam, two—Hamza al-Fulani and Abu Adam al-Ansari—were reportedly associated with al-Mourabitoun whereas the third—Abdul Rahman al-Fulani—was reportedly a member of AQIM proper. (Source: [SITE](#) [50])

Ansar al-Dine

Ansar al-Dine (“Movement of Defenders of the Faith,” or AAD) was founded in November 2011 by the Malian Tuareg fighter Iyad Ag Ghali, cousin of AQIM senior leader Hamada Ag Hama. A largely homegrown movement comprised of Tuareg and northern Malian Berber Arabs, AAD works closely with AQIM in their joint goal of implementing sharia. Many of its members are Tuaregs who previously fought alongside deceased Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and returned to Mali after his overthrow. (Source: [BBC News](#) [51], [Agence France-Presse](#) [52])

Though AAD is not known to maintain a presence in Côte d'Ivoire, its militants have threatened the country with attacks. In June 2015, the group launched two attacks in southern Mali, close to the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Following the attacks, AAD preacher Ismail Khalil warned that AAD planned to “multiply the attacks in Ivory Coast” as well as other countries that “work with the enemies of Islam.” (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [53], [Abidjan.net](#) [54])

Hezbollah

[Hezbollah](#) [55]—a Lebanese-based, Iranian-backed terrorist group designated by the United States—has reportedly attracted significant support in Côte d'Ivoire, which hosts the fourth-largest Lebanese diaspora population in the world after Brazil, Colombia, and Canada. According to estimates, Côte d'Ivoire is host to between 80,000 and 100,000 Lebanese citizens, 80 percent of whom adhere to Shiite Islam. Findings by ISS Africa indicate that the majority of Lebanese-Ivoirians consider Hezbollah a nationalist movement as opposed to a terrorist organization. (Source: [ISS Africa](#) [17])

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Though Lebanese cultural associations in Côte d'Ivoire largely deny any association with Hezbollah, the largest such group—the Al-Ghadir association—is widely believed to serve as Hezbollah's representative in the country. In August 2009, then-leader of Al-Ghadir [Imam Abdul Menhem Kobeissi](#) [56] was deported from Côte d'Ivoire after he was sanctioned by the U.S. government for raising money for Hezbollah. (Sources: [ISS Africa](#) [17], [Jeune Afrique](#) [57], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [58])

Since then, Ivorian support for Hezbollah is believed to have continued. According to the U.S. State Department's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), members of Côte d'Ivoire's large Lebanese community are "known to provide financial support to Hezbollah." A 2014 study by the Institute for Security Studies in Africa (ISS Africa) found that Lebanese communities in Côte d'Ivoire are a "prime target in Hezbollah's efforts to collect additional financial resources." The study identified that members of Côte d'Ivoire's Lebanese community are "more than likely" to "support [Hezbollah] financially" and that some are even likely to "respond to a possible appeal from the movement to join its ranks." As noted by ISS Africa, several Ivoirians are believed to have joined foreign conflicts in Lebanon. (Sources: [OSAC](#) [59], [ISS Africa](#) [17])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

On March 13, 2016, Côte d'Ivoire suffered the first al-Qaeda attack on its territory and the first major incidence of violence in the country since the end of the country's second civil war in 2011. (Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [6])

The March 2016 attack at Grand-Bassam—which left 19 people dead, including 16 civilians and three Ivorian soldiers—came on the heels of major AQIM terror attacks in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso. The attacks also came months after Islamists in Mali carried out a series of attacks near the border with Côte d'Ivoire. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [6], [Reuters](#) [13])

Grand-Bassam

On March 13, 2016, three gunmen opened fire at a beach resort in Grand-Bassam, a town on the country's southeastern coast, 25 miles east of Abidjan. The attack began at midday when, after drinking beer at a nearby bar, the assailants opened fire on beachgoers, indiscriminately shooting at diners and swimmers at a resort outside three hotels: the Wharf Hotel, Koral Beach, and Etoile du Sud, the last of which was especially popular with foreign tourists and expats. (Sources: [Telegraph](#) [60], [Reuters](#) [8], [New York Times](#) [61], [Chicago Sun Times](#) [62], [BBC News](#) [15])

According to witness reports, the assailants wore casual clothing beneath black balaclavas and an assortment of weaponry, including grenade belts and Kalashnikovs. Witnesses claim that the African assailants—who "didn't speak French" and instead communicated to each other in Arabic—walked "calmly" among the crowd while picking off their victims and intermittently shouting "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great"). (Sources: [Telegraph](#) [60], [Reuters](#) [8])

French and Ivorian forces arrived in the area soon after the attacks began. Among the forces were Côte d'Ivoire's specialized counterterrorism police unit—Force de Recherche et d'Assistance de Police (FRAP)—as well as the country's national army's Special Forces and Intervention units. According to reports, soldiers neutralized the three gunmen and pursued several suspected accessories to the crime who were believed to be at the scene of the carnage. By the end of the day, the armed forces had successfully ended the terrorist attack, although three Ivorian Special Forces soldiers were killed in the gunfire. Among the 16 civilians killed in the attacks were Ivorian nationals, as well as foreign citizens from France, Germany, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Cameroon. (Sources: [Abidjan.net](#) [7], [Reuters](#) [8])

Al-Qaeda's North African branch, AQIM, quickly claimed responsibility for the attack, publishing a release on Twitter and Telegram in four languages—Arabic, English, French, and Spanish. Though initial reports indicated that there were four gunmen at the scene of the crime, AQIM said that three militants were responsible for the attacks, later naming the militants as Hamza al-Fulani, Abu Adam al-Ansari, and Abdul Rahman al-Fulani. The first two militants—Hamza al-Fulani and Abu Adam al-Ansari—were reportedly associated with al-Mourabitoun, a terrorist group that broke off from AQIM in 2011 but formally rejoined the group in December 2015. The third assailant—Abdul Rahman al-Fulani—was reportedly from the Sahara branch of AQIM. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [15], [SITE](#) [50], [Reuters](#) [8])

Following the attack, on March 14, 2016, Ivorian President Alassane Outtara declared three national days of mourning. In

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the days following the attack, the government also launched a national manhunt for [Kounta Dallah](#) [63], a Malian citizen who was allegedly responsible for orchestrating the AQIM attack. In the subsequent weeks, the government arrested more than 80 people, the vast majority of whom were determined to have infiltrated the country from neighboring countries like Mali and Burkina Faso. Nearly a dozen suspects have since also been arrested, in Côte d'Ivoire as well as in nearby countries Mali and Senegal. In April 2016, the government announced that it would devote 80 billion CFA francs (1.37 million USD) to the fight against terrorism. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [8], [Abidjan.net](#) [35], [Jeune Afrique](#) [64], [Reuters](#) [28], [Jeune Afrique](#) [29], [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [24])

The AQIM attack at Grand-Bassam—the first al-Qaeda attack on Ivorian soil—came on the heels of two other AQIM attacks in the region: the January 2016 attack in neighboring Burkina Faso and the November 2015 attack in neighboring Mali. The attack also follows two Islamist terror attacks in southern Mali, close to the border with Côte d'Ivoire. (Source: [International Business Times](#) [65])

- **June 11, 2020:** Dozens of suspected jihadists conduct an early-morning attack on a security post in Kafolo, near Côte d'Ivoire's northern border with Burkina Faso. The assault leaves at least 10 soldiers dead and injures six others, while two are believed missing. It is the first known attack by Islamist extremists in Côte d'Ivoire since the March 2016 attack in Grand-Bassam. The attack occurs in the same area where the Burkinabe-Ivoirian militaries launched Operation Comoé in May 2020. Sources: [France 24](#) [1], [Associated Press](#) [2]
- **March 13, 2016:** Three gunmen open fire at a beach resort in Grand-Bassam, a coastal town located 25 miles east of Abidjan. The attack—the first al-Qaeda attack in the country—leaves 19 people dead, including 16 civilians and three Ivorian soldiers. Sources: [Abidjan.net](#) [7], [Reuters](#) [8], [International Business Times](#) [65]
- **January 15, 2016:** Assailants target a hotel in Burkina Faso's capital of Ouagadougou, taking hostages and killing 29 civilians in an attack claimed by AQIM. In the wake of the attacks, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso announce efforts to strengthen their counterterrorism cooperation. Sources: [Reuters](#) [66], [Abidjan.net](#) [67]
- **December 2, 2015:** Unidentified gunmen attack Ivorian soldiers and civilians in Olodio village, near the country's eastern border with Liberia. The attack—carried out at four in the morning, leaves eleven people dead—including seven Ivorian soldiers. The attack is attributed to Ivorian and Liberian militiamen. Sources: [Reuters](#) [68], [Human Rights Watch](#) [69]
- **November 20, 2015:** Two gunmen storm the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali, killing 20 people in a joint attack carried out by AQIM and al-Mourabitoun. The attack spurs Côte d'Ivoire to tighten its security and devote additional resources to reinforcing its northern border. Sources: [Guardian](#) [70], [BBC News](#) [71], [Reuters](#) [72], [Reuters](#) [73], [Independent](#) [23], [RFI Africa](#) [11]
- **June 30, 2015:** Islamist militants attack Malian government buildings and police bases in Fakola, close to the country's border with Côte d'Ivoire. Malian-based Islamist preacher Ismael Khalil later claims responsibility for the attack on behalf of AAD, saying that it was carried out to "to punish the enemies of Islam." Khalil also warns that AAD militants will "multiply the attacks in Ivory Coast" and other countries that "work with the enemies of Islam." The attack in southern Mali, coming less than two weeks after another AAD attack in the region, prompts the Ivorian government to dispatch security forces to the country's northern border. Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [12]
- **June 10, 2015:** Approximately 30 AAD gunmen attack and burn a Malian police base in Misséni, a village near the border with Côte d'Ivoire. The attack is the closest to Côte d'Ivoire that Islamist rebels in Mali have ventured since the start of the 2012 war in Mali. Sources: [Reuters](#) [13], [Bloomberg](#) [14]
- **January 10, 2015:** Around 20 armed militants carry out two attacks in the country's southwest, targeting Ivorian soldiers stationed near the border with Liberia. Though the militants remain unidentified, the Ivorian government attributes the attacks—which together leave two Ivorian soldiers dead—to Liberian infiltrators from the west. Source: [Abidjan.net](#) [74]
- **February 22, 2014 - February 23, 2014:** Approximately 20 armed militants carry out an attack in Grabo, western Côte d'Ivoire, killing four Ivorian soldiers. Ivorian Defense Minister Paul Koffi Koffi attributes the attack to Liberian infiltrators. Source: [Abidjan.net](#) [75]
- **2010 - 2011:** After the repeal of a controversial citizenship law, the election of northern-born President Alexandre Ouattara sparks a second civil war in Côte d'Ivoire. Three thousand civilians are estimated killed. Source: [Reuters](#) [76]
- **2002 - 2007:** After a September 2002 coup against the Gbago-led government, the country spirals into civil war. Between 5,000 and 10,000 people are killed as a result of the violence. The country is largely divided between the Muslim-majority north and Christian-majority south. Source: *Making War in Côte d'Ivoire*, p. xvii, 19-21
- **September 2000 - December 2000:** Contested presidential and legislative elections spark violence between supporters of the various candidates.

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In September 2000, a controversial citizenship law bars former Ivorian President Bédié and popular northern candidate Alassane Outarra from running in the presidential elections. The political turmoil sparks bouts of deadly violence throughout the country, claiming the lives of at least 50 people. Sources: [United Nations](#) [77], [BBC News](#) [78], *Making War in Côte d'Ivoire*, p.18-19

- **1999:** A coup d'état led by General Robert Gueï leads to the overthrow of Ivorian President Henri Konan Bédié. Source: [United Nations](#) [77]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

The Ivorian government has bolstered its counterterrorism legislation and law enforcement in recent years, in response to the growing threat posed by terrorism. In February 2015, the Ivorian government passed a bill to strengthen its counterterrorism law and meet international standards by outlawing recruitment and advocacy to terrorism and terrorist activities. As outlined by the bill, individuals convicted on terrorist-related charges face a prison sentence of 10 to 20 years as well as a fine of five to 50 million CFA Francs. (Sources: [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [25], [Abidjan.net](#) [26])

The government has since then continued to strengthen its counterterrorism legislation and law enforcement. In July 2015, the Ivorian government passed new counterterrorism laws allowing officers to tap phone lines and conduct counterterrorism-related searches at night, while also extending detention for suspected terrorists for up to 96 hours without formal charges. That month, the government also banned foreign imams from preaching in the north, near the country's border with Mali. After the November 2015 attack in neighboring Mali, Côte d'Ivoire tightened its security and devoted additional resources to reinforcing its northern border. (Sources: [Independent](#) [79], [RFI Africa](#) [11])

In January 2016, French authorities warned Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal of plans by Islamist fighters to attack main cities and tourist destinations, including beaches, using car bombs. In response, the Ivorian government reportedly asked Muslim religious leaders and cultural organizations to notify police of any new members and suspicious activity, according to one anonymous official. The government also carried out joint exercises with U.N. peacekeepers to test responses in the event of a militant attack, according to a statement by the United Nations. (Sources: [Independent](#) [23], [RFI Africa](#) [11], [Bloomberg](#) [80])

Following the March 2016 attack at Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire increased its counterterrorism budget in an effort to better protect its border from terrorist infiltrators. In April 2016, the government allocated 80 billion CFA Francs (137.2 million USD) to the fight against terrorism. According to the Ivorian government, these resources were set aside for the purpose of building capacity and training units, strengthening the country's intelligence apparatus and border security measures, bolstering the operational capacities of the country's defense and security forces, and better equipping its armed forces. (Sources: [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [24], [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [24])

The government has also conducted arrests in the aftermath of the attacks. According to Côte d'Ivoire's Minister of the Interior, more than 80 people have been arrested in connection to the Grand-Bassam attacks, the vast majority of whom are believed to be foreigners. In August 2016, two Ivorian soldiers were convicted in a military court on charges of violating regulations and conspiracy to aid the terrorist operatives. The soldiers—who had lived near the terrorist operatives and communicated with the assailants' driver prior to the attack—were sentenced to 10 years in prison and a fine of 200,000 CFA Francs. Malian and Mauritanian suspects connected to the Grand-Bassam attack have also been arrested in early 2017, in Senegal. (Sources: [Abidjan.net](#) [34], [Abidjan.net](#) [35], [Reuters](#) [28])

The country has also worked to integrate counterterrorism efforts into its migration policy. Bruno Koné—Côte d'Ivoire's Minister of Post and Information and Communications Technology (TIC)—has requested biometric identification for individuals entering the country, saying that although the country should still “respect the principle of freedom of movement,” the Ivorian government “should not be complacent.” (Source: [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [24])

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International Counter-Extremism

The U.S. State Department's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) has rated Côte d'Ivoire positively for its efforts to combat terrorism. As of March 13, 2020, OSAC maintained its assessment that Côte d'Ivoire was at medium risk of terrorism. In 2015, OSAC noted that the Ivorian government has historically been supportive of U.S. counterterrorism efforts and has also supported peacekeeping efforts by the African Union (of which Côte d'Ivoire is a member) in neighboring Mali. The government has actively supported operations by ECOWAS and the African Union in an effort to combat AQIM in Mali, according to a report by the U.S. State Department. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [15], [U.S. Embassy in Cote d'Ivoire](#) [81], [OSAC](#) [82], [OSAC](#) [83])

In December 2015, Saudi Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud announced that 34 Muslim-majority and Muslim-plurality countries were planning to join the international coalition to fight ISIS. Among the countries listed was Côte d'Ivoire, though the government has to date not participated in anti-ISIS airstrikes. (Sources: [CNN](#) [21], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [22])

Representatives of the Ivorian government have cooperated with regional governments and international agencies on counterterrorism-related efforts. The country serves as a logistics base for France's Operation Barkhane in Mali. The Ivorian and Malian governments have also coordinated closely on border security, especially in the wake of the November 2015 AQIM attacks in Bamako. (Sources: [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [84], [VOA](#) [85], [Business Insider](#) [44], [Abidjan.net](#) [86])

Côte d'Ivoire is part of a number of international agencies, including Interpol and ECOWAS. The country participates in ECOWAS's Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), an FATF-style body that works to counter money laundering and terrorist financing in the region. (Sources: [INTERPOL](#) [87], [GIABA](#) [88], [ECOWAS](#) [89], [Portail Officiel du Gouvernement de Cote d'Ivoire](#) [90])

In May 2020, military officials from Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso launched Operation Comoé in Côte d'Ivoire's northeastern region of Ferkessedougou to expel extremists from the shared border. By May 25, the operation reportedly resulted in the killing of eight terrorist suspects, capturing of 38 others, destruction of a terrorist base, and seizure of a cache of weapons, supplies, and electronics. Terrorists were known to seek refuge at bases in Ivorian territory during previous Burkinabe offensives, but a source from the Côte d'Ivoire army said these terrorist bases no longer existed. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [19], [Agence France-Presse](#) [91])

United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI)

In June 2017, the United Nations terminated its peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire, withdrawing its remaining soldiers and nearly all its civilian personnel. The U.N. proclaimed the country had achieved political stability and economic growth, though goals for security sector reform had yet to be achieved. Since April 2004, Côte d'Ivoire had hosted the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), which had an initial mandate to implement the peace agreement from January 2003. In March 2016, there were more than 5,000 U.N.-affiliated personnel in the country, including nearly 4,000 troops. However, by June 2017, that number had dwindled to no troops, 154 U.N. civilian personnel and volunteers, and 241 local civilians, as UNOCI's deployment came to a close. Announcing UNOCI's departure on June 2, 2017, Francois Delattre, Permanent Representative of France to the U.S., praised the political unity, economic growth, and social cohesion that Côte d'Ivoire has achieved, while stating that "important challenges" remain in the areas of security sector reform and reintegration of "ex-combatants." In July 2017, Côte d'Ivoire military personnel fought back disgruntled soldiers in at least two separate attacks on army bases. Soldiers have demanded bonuses and pay increases. (Sources: [United Nations](#) [92], [UNOCI](#) [93], [United Nations](#) [94], [United Nations](#) [95], [Office of the Permanent Representative of France to the U.N.](#) [96], [The Citizen](#) [97])

Public Opinion

Prior to al-Qaeda's March 2016 attack in Grand-Bassam, terrorism was not a major source of concern for Ivoirians, according to a 2015 poll by the International Republican Institute. When asked which types of violence were most concerning, less than one percent of the poll's 15,000 respondents listed terrorism as their leading concern. By contrast,

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thirty percent of respondents named local crime, while the majority—59 percent—said that they were “not concerned by any kind of violence.” (Source: [International Republican Institute](#) [30])

According to OSAC’s 2015 and 2017 Crime and Safety reports, the overwhelming majority of Ivoirians are believed to maintain a favorable opinion of Americans and of the United States. Nonetheless, the country has experienced anti-French rhetoric and attacks. Though Côte d’Ivoire has also largely been spared homegrown radicalization to Islamist terror groups, there is some evidence of support for Hezbollah abroad. Certain members of its large Lebanese community are known to provide financial support to Hezbollah, according to OSAC. Findings by ISS Africa indicate that the majority of Lebanese-Ivoirians consider Hezbollah a nationalist movement as opposed to a terrorist organization. (Sources: [OSAC](#) [83], [OSAC](#) [20], [ISS Africa](#) [17])