



A Fading Illusion of Relative Safety from Islamic Terrorism in Senegal

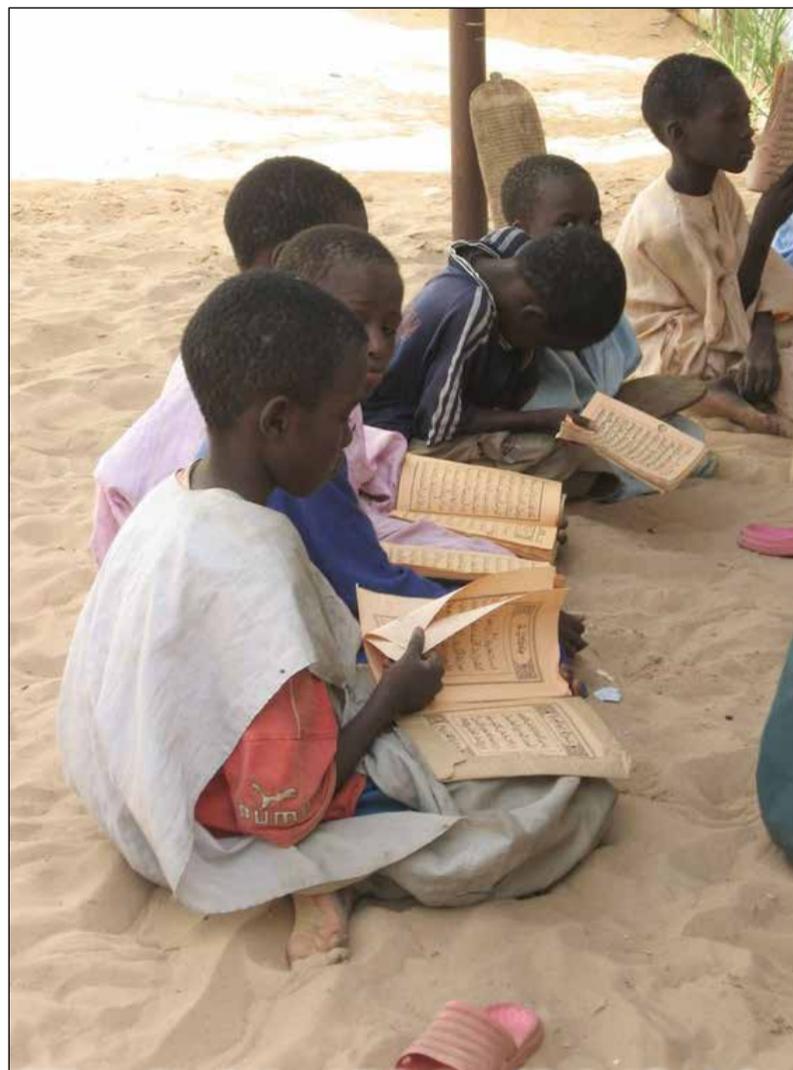
OE Watch Commentary: Senegal, a country that is over 90 percent Muslim, has generally been spared from threats of radical Islamic terrorism, unlike some other West African countries. Some ascribe this peaceful situation to Senegal's Muslims being relatively moderate, in large part because of Sufi influences. However, as excerpts from the accompanying article published online by *IRIN* reveal, Senegal's days of having escaped the violence that has plagued its neighbor Mali may now be over. A trial of 29 Senegalese citizens accused of trying to establish an extremist cell in the Casamance region, while only a mixed success for the prosecution, did reveal that Senegal is not immune from Islamic terrorism despite its peaceful tradition.

There are several reasons Senegal has attracted extremists. To begin with, the country has military agreements with both the US and France. Additionally, Senegal is a major supplier of troops to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali known as MINUSMA. While Senegal has been a traditional ally of the West, many of its people oppose Western intervention in Mali and are particularly angry that Senegal has sent troops there to serve. Compounding the situation has been foreign money flowing into Senegal to build mosques and Koranic schools that preach an alternative interpretation to the religious texts than had previously been taught. As a result from this interference in Senegal's school system, more conservative Salafi and Wahhabi influences are taking root.

The problem is not just homegrown terrorists from rising religious conservatism within Senegal. In 2017, several groups in northern Mali merged to form Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which has been busy since then launching numerous attacks, including on the French embassy and the national army headquarters in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou. JNIM's leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, confirmed that Senegal is also on its list of countries that would be targeted by the terrorist group. Boko Haram is also a factor in Senegal, with numerous defendants in the terrorism trial supposedly having links to the terrorist organization. This includes the Senegalese group's alleged ringleader, Makhtar Diokhané. He received one of the stiffer sentences, 20 years in prison for terrorist acts by criminal association.

Senegal thus finds itself with numerous influences causing a rise in extremism. However, as the article notes, it has been relatively hesitant to act to counter this phenomenon, in large part because while the country is secular, its political leaders are dependent upon religious leaders to deliver the vote. Thus, the political leaders tend to leave the religious leaders and their institutions unsupervised and unregulated. As the trial reveals, such complacency has come with a tremendous price. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Unlike other nearby West African countries like Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali, Senegal has so far been spared a major attack by Islamist extremists. But experts say an unprecedented trial of dozens of Senegalese terror suspects that concluded two weeks ago in Dakar is a timely wake-up call about a nascent and growing threat.”



Children studying the Koran in Touba, Senegal. Foreign influences have resulted in a more conservative interpretation of the teachings.
Source: Ho Visto Nina Volare/Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Touba3.jpg>, CC BY-2.0.

Source: Lucinda Rouse, “High-profile terror trial speaks to an emerging threat in Senegal,” *IRIN*, 1 Aug 2018. <http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2018/08/01/high-profile-terror-trial-speaks-emerging-threat-senegal>

Unlike other nearby West African countries like Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali, Senegal has so far been spared a major attack by Islamist extremists. But experts say an unprecedented trial of dozens of Senegalese terror suspects that concluded two weeks ago in Dakar is a timely wake-up call about a nascent and growing threat.

As the regional hub for numerous international institutions, Senegal is “a luxury target... like the jackpot for terrorist groups,” said Bakary Sambe, director of the Dakar-based Timbuktu Institute, which tracks violent extremism.

Islam in Senegal, which is followed by some 94 percent of the population, is dominated by a moderate, tolerant form of Sufism headed by powerful brotherhoods that have long been considered the country’s principal defence against extremism.

Another shortcoming in Senegal’s response may be a general unwillingness to acknowledge the problem. The jihadist threat is not a common topic of discussion, and few Senegalese journalists cover the issue.