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About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

The Dilemma of the Yemeni Detainees at Guantanamo Bay

By Gregory D. Johnsen and Christopher Boucek



Camp Delta at Guantanamo Naval Base. - Photo by Mark Wilson/Getty Images

MORE THAN ONE-THIRD of the remaining 255 detainees at the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay are Yemenis, representing the single largest national contingent. Since the detention facility opened in early 2002, Yemenis have consistently comprised a sizeable percentage of the population. Other countries, most notably Saudi Arabia, have successfully repatriated many of their nationals, but Yemen has been unable to convince the United States to release detainees into its custody. There is even widespread speculation in both the United States and Yemen that the Yemeni government does not actually want the detainees back and is content to let them remain in U.S. custody. The Yemeni government, however, maintains in private its stated, public goal to return the detainees to Yemen, charge those it has evidence against and release the rest. For the United States, this has been insufficient, and

it has repeatedly sought assurances from the Yemeni government that it will set standardized restrictions before any individuals are released. Part of this hesitation stems from security concerns about what would happen to the detainees once they are returned to Yemen.

This article seeks to examine the dilemma posed by the detention of Yemeni nationals at Guantanamo Bay. Following an overview of Yemen's previous attempts to engage Islamists, the article will focus on some possible risks associated with the repatriation of the Yemeni detainees. This will include identifying individual detainees who have connections to al-Qa`ida members involved in the recent upsurge in terrorist violence in Yemen. It will conclude with a brief look at some possible solutions under consideration.

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Extremist Disengagement in Yemen¹

In recent years, the Yemeni government has engaged in a series of ambitious programs designed to counter Islamist radicalization in the country. These have included traditional poetry recitals, the internationally-supported “Shaykhs Against Terror” initiative, and the use of religious dialogue. While admirable unconventional approaches, some of these efforts—such as religious dialogue—have left many in Washington dissatisfied.

In September 2002, the Yemeni government established the Committee for Religious Dialogue. Led by Judge Hamoud al-Hitar, it was created to interact with security detainees held by the government on suspicion of involvement with Islamist extremists and terrorists. The committee sought to

“Unlike in other countries that have since adopted extremist rehabilitation programs, the Yemeni government provided freed detainees with little external social support.”

dialogue with these men, and through their religious discussions and debates demonstrate that terrorism based on religious grounds was impermissible. The initiative was the first post-9/11 prison rehabilitation program for extremists, a format that has now been adapted in a number of Arab and Muslim countries.

On September 15, 2002, al-Hitar and three other *ulama* met for the first time with prisoners at the Political Security Organization Center in Sana`a.² The committee met with prisoners collectively, and they exchanged questions and responses directly. At the first meeting, it was collectively

decided that the Qur’an and the sunna would serve as the basis for the dialogue, with the hadith providing a firm foundation. The dialogue sessions were explained to participants as being comprehensive and that detainees were encouraged to persuade the *ulama* that their understandings of Islam were correct, just as the committee would seek to convince the detainees of their position. Some sources have questioned the effectiveness of the process.³

Initial discussions were focused on whether or not Yemen was an Islamic state, and the legality of President `Ali `Abdullah Salih’s rule. Sana`a’s foreign treaty obligations and relations with non-Muslim states were also discussed, as was the permissibility of killing non-Muslims. The committee worked to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Yemeni government and attempted to show the appropriate rules for jihad. It was clearly stated that those who renounced violence would be eligible for release through a unique presidential amnesty program.⁴

Much of the committee’s efforts focused on getting participants to recognize the authority of the state and obtaining assurances from them that participating in violence within the country was forbidden. The “covenant of protection” (when the government issues a legal visa) that exists between the state and foreigners was also stressed. In essence, once detainees acceded to these points, they were released. Unlike in other countries that have since adopted extremist rehabilitation programs, the Yemeni government provided freed detainees with little external social support. Many released detainees were absorbed into the military and security services,⁵ and there was some attempt made to assist others through a non-governmental organization. These efforts, however, were minimal. Passports were reportedly not confiscated, nor did the Yemeni government maintain close tabs

on former prisoners.⁶ A total of 364 individuals were released through the dialogue process. Some have escaped while others have reportedly been killed in Iraq. After some initially promising results, the committee was eventually suspended for a variety of reasons.

The committee’s primary objectives were to get participants to recognize the legitimacy of the Yemeni state, not commit violent acts within Yemen, and ensure that foreigners were not targeted in the country. With respect to these objectives, the committee

“Yemen’s once promising rehabilitation program now appears to be a failure, while its recent record of releasing convicted al-Qa`ida members has done little to ease U.S. fears.”

achieved some relative successes. It appears, however, that the committee was less concerned with affecting actual ideological change in participants than it was with obtaining their acquiescence on sensitive political matters. Following the 9/11 attacks, Washington exerted considerable pressure on Sana`a to round up Islamist extremists, terrorists and activists. Many of these individuals had broken no laws. Others had gone abroad to fight in Afghanistan, and some were suspected (tangentially) of involvement in the October 2000 attack on the USS *Cole*. It has been argued that religious engagement and dialogue was thus used as a method to process the large numbers of security detainees, and, in exchange for their allegiance to the Yemeni government, release them from prison.

The first participants in the program are believed to have fared better than later participants, aligning with those individuals radicalized at home versus those radicalized through the global jihad. Initial participants recognized authority and were thus more susceptible to dialogue and negotiation.

1 Section based on Christopher Boucek, Shazadi Beg, and John Horgan, “Opening up the Jihadi Debate: Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue,” in Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 181-192.

2 Boucek et al., “Opening up the Jihadi Debate: Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue,” p. 185.

3 Ibid.

4 Abd al-Mun’im al-Jabri, “Yemeni Interior Minister Discusses Terrorism Issues, Cooperation with US,” *26 September*, October 17, 2003.

5 Eric Westervelt, “Growing Repression in Yemen May Feed al-Qaeda,” National Public Radio, November 10, 2005.

6 Personal interview, Yemeni analyst, Sana`a, July 2007.

Individuals who participated later, the so-called younger generation, did not do as well. When the government eventually attempted to use the committee to deal with combatants from the conflict in Sa`da in the north, it met stiff opposition within Yemen.⁷

Yemeni Population at Guantanamo: Gauging the Risk

Yemen's once promising rehabilitation program now appears to be a failure, while its recent record of releasing convicted al-Qa`ida members has done little to ease U.S. fears. With the exception of a handful of cases, most Yemenis remain in Guantanamo. According to a list produced by the Yemeni government, there are 101 Yemenis currently being held in Guantanamo. Of these, only two—Ramzi bin al-Shibh and Walid bin Attash—have been designated “high value” detainees. Two others have recently been convicted by military commissions in Guantanamo.

The remaining 97 are an eclectic group of intentional, unrepentant combatants and accidental warriors. Yet, separating the detainees into two groups, and determining where different individuals fall on a spectrum of past and potential violence, is a nearly impossible task. Part of the problem in such determinations stems from the circumstances of their incarceration. How capable, mentally or physically, such individuals will be of taking up arms against the United States after years in Guantanamo is difficult to predict from the outside. The situation in Yemen has also changed. Some of these detainees were born and raised in Saudi Arabia and will be returning to a country they know only superficially, if at all. Others will be returning to a country where close family members have been arrested and mistreated as a result of being related to a Guantanamo detainee.

Another difficulty in determining who the detainees are and what they are likely to do if returned to Yemen has to do with the list of detainees initially provided by the Department of Defense in 2006 as a result of a lawsuit brought by the Associated Press. It is possible to read the list either as evidence of an uncooperative Department of Defense or as illustrative of the confusion and lack

of knowledge that hampered U.S. efforts in the fearful months after the 9/11 attacks. The most accurate description is probably a combination of both. The Department of Defense seemed to be genuinely confused in the first few years, compiling lists of detainees that identified them as citizens of the wrong country, listing the equivalent of only a first name and the detainees' father's name, or even in some cases merely the *kunya* or nickname of a detainee. Gradually, as its information about the detainees improved, it seems to have corrected many of the early mistakes. By and large, however, these corrections

“For instance, four detainees currently being held in Guantanamo had brothers among the 23 al-Qa`ida suspects who escaped from a Yemeni prison in February 2006.”

do not seem to have made their way into the public list of detainees. Nor is there a public list in Arabic, which hampers predictions and analysis, as the current list has a number of curious transliterations of Arabic names, many of which appear not to adhere to any standard other than the interrogator's transcription.

Broader Connections

Some of those for whom full and fairly accurate information does exist have been linked to the new generation of al-Qa`ida in Yemen, which has been responsible for, among other operations, the recent September 17 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sana`a. For instance, four detainees currently being held in Guantanamo had brothers among the 23 al-Qa`ida suspects who escaped from a Yemeni prison in February 2006. The prison break was the opening salvo in the second phase of the war against al-Qa`ida in Yemen, which is still ongoing.

Among the Yemenis currently in Guantanamo are two of four brothers, Ghalib and Tawfiq al-Bayhani, from one of Yemen's leading jihadist families. The other two brothers, Mansur and

Zakariya, were among the 23 escapees. Both turned themselves in to Yemeni authorities in late 2006 and were placed under loose house arrest, which required them to periodically sign-in with authorities. Mansur, however, was able to flee the country and made his way to Somalia, where he was killed in a U.S. naval strike by the USS *Chafee* on June 2, 2007.⁸ If eventually released in Yemen, it is impossible to predict how the two brothers would react to the news of their brother's death at the hands of U.S. forces. Al-Qa`ida in Yemen, for example, has developed a rationale of revenge during the past few years, and it has effectively utilized this in its statements and journals as justification for a number of attacks. While al-Qa`ida has morphed and changed during the years in Yemen, it has clearly demonstrated the existence of a long institutional memory.

The rationale of revenge could also be a factor with Salman al-Rabi`a, whose older brother, Fawaz, was killed by Yemeni forces in October 2006 after masterminding a dual suicide attack a month earlier. Another brother, Abu Bakr, is currently in a Yemeni prison on terrorism charges. One of the other Guantanamo detainees, Ali al-Raymi, is the younger brother of the current deputy commander of al-Qa`ida in Yemen, Qasim al-Raymi, who likely had a leading role in the September attack on the U.S. Embassy. If eventually released by the Yemeni government, it is probable that Ali al-Raymi and other like-minded detainees would join al-Qa`ida in Yemen, giving the organization an influx of new and dedicated members. The last time al-Qa`ida received such a shot in the arm was in the wake of the February 2006 prison break, which sparked the most recent al-Qa`ida campaign in the country.

Next Steps

There appears to be growing consensus that Guantanamo will eventually need to be shut down. During the campaign, President-elect Barack Obama was critical of the facility and pledged to close it. One notion apparently under consideration by

⁸ For more information, see Gregory D. Johnsen, “Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives – Part I,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5:18 (2007); Gregory D. Johnsen, “Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives – Part II,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5:19 (2007).

⁷ Ibid.

Obama advisers would be to prosecute some detainees in the domestic criminal court system, repatriate others to their countries of origin, and possibly send the remaining highly classified cases to a new special court.⁹

How this will impact the Yemeni nationals remains to be seen. One now abandoned notion had been to finance the construction of a supermax-style prison in Yemen to house returnees. It appears that there is renewed interest in reviving Yemen's Dialogue Committee as a reintegration program for former Guantanamo detainees; however, some recent information that possibly three of the seven U.S. Embassy attackers may have been graduates of al-Hitar's program makes this extremely unlikely.¹⁰ To be modeled in part on Saudi Arabia's relatively successful program to care for Guantanamo returnees,¹¹ it is presently unclear how such a reintegration system would operate in Yemen. While there had been hope that some Yemenis would be sent back before the end of the Bush administration, this appears increasingly unlikely. Facilities have reportedly been created to accommodate returnees; however, a successful reintegration program will require a detailed program, thorough curriculum, trained and qualified personnel, and massive financing. One possible way to move forward on addressing the plight of the Yemenis held at Guantanamo could be for Washington to financially underwrite the costs associated with applying some of the methodologies being developed in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere to reintegrate former detainees. All told, the costs of finding a solution to this dilemma are far cheaper than the costs of maintaining the status quo.

In the end, the best option could be for the United States to prosecute in civilian courts those it believes it can convict based on the lawful evidence it possesses. Transparency, due process, and the power of the rule of law are

some of the strongest weapons in the struggle against violent extremism. For the remainder of the Yemeni detainees, which would likely be a sizeable portion, the United States may find that its best option is to silently partner with the Yemeni government and support a modified hostage system,¹² which has a long tradition in Yemen

“The alternative of just releasing the detainees whom the United States cannot convict will almost certainly result in more deaths in Yemen at the hands of individuals who were once in American custody.”

as a tool of governing. Historically, the United States has found this practice unpalatable, but the current situation may render such criticisms moot. Yemen has also shied away from any private deals with the United States, particularly after 2002 when such a deal was made public by a U.S. leak. Intense and concentrated pressure, however, should ensure Yemen's cooperation. The alternative of just releasing the detainees whom the United States cannot convict will almost certainly result in more deaths in Yemen at the hands of individuals who were once in American custody.

There are already signs that such a system could work. According to a number of sources in Yemen, during the late summer Yemen was negotiating an agreement with Qasim al-Raymi that would have taken him off the warpath.

Although negotiations eventually broke down, what al-Raymi reportedly wanted is telling: the release of al-Qa`ida suspects in Yemeni prisons. The outline of the story seems to be confirmed by al-Raymi's authorial absence from the fifth issue of *Sada al-Malahim*,¹³ which was written in August and September, but only released on November 9. Had the negotiations been successful, it is possible that the September 17 attack on the U.S. Embassy would have never taken place. It did, of course, and al-Raymi returned to writing for *Sada al-Malahim* in its sixth issue.

The hostage system would also further fracture al-Qa`ida in Yemen by exacerbating tensions and loyalties within the group. Such a system would force Qasim al-Raymi and numerous others to ask themselves whether they are more loyal to Nasir al-Wahayshi—the *amir* of al-Qa`ida in Yemen—or to someone such as Ali al-Raymi—who was once in Guantanamo and is now being held by the Yemeni government. The answer is far from clear, but even forcing individuals in al-Qa`ida to face such a question would likely do more to disrupt the group's Yemeni branch than have years of counter-attacks. This system would require the United States to temper many of its criticisms of Yemen's opaque practice of individual deals with terrorists, such as Jamal al-Badawi and Jabir al-Banna. Years of Guantanamo, however, have removed the good courses of action from the table and left the United States with only a limited set of options.

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9 Matt Apuzzo and Lara Jakes Jordan, "Obama Planning US Trials for Guantanamo Detainees," Associated Press, November 10, 2008.

10 Personal interview, anonymous Yemeni political analyst, November 2008.

11 Christopher Boucek, "The Saudi Process of Repatriating and Reintegrating Guantanamo Returnees," *CTC Sentinel* 1:1 (2008).

12 Different governments in Yemeni history (for instance, the imams in addition to the current republican system of government) have utilized a hostage system that kept relatives, traditionally males, under the control of the state to ensure the good behavior of their relatives. The United States could use this option with the "in-between" detainees—those it does not have enough evidence against to prosecute but are considered too dangerous to release—as a weapon to splinter al-Qa`ida by turning the organization against itself. This is not so much outsourcing detention as it is using one of al-Qa`ida's main strengths, tight-knit relationships, against it.

13 *Sada al-Malahim* is a jihadist publication in Yemen.

Al-Qa`ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon

By Bilal Y. Saab

THERE IS NO OFFICIAL consensus in Lebanon on whether al-Qa`ida has a presence in the country. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, all politics in Lebanon has been polarized. It is on the threat of terrorism where the gap is arguably most pronounced.¹ On the one hand, the anti-Syrian political coalition, led by Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and parliament majority leader Saad Hariri, believes that al-Qa`ida does not have an indigenous presence in Lebanon. What the country faces instead is a fabricated threat by Damascus and its intelligence services that is intended to destabilize Lebanon and restore Syrian hegemony.² On the other hand, the pro-Syrian alliance, spearheaded by Hizb Allah (also spelled Hezbollah) and the Free Patriotic Party of Michel Aoun, judges that al-Qa`ida exists in Lebanon and poses a real threat to national security. For them, the rise of al-Qa`ida in the country is largely attributed to a devilish pact between Lebanese Sunni politicians and extremist Islamic factions in the north, the purpose of which is to counter-balance the perceived ascending power of Shi`a Hizb Allah. The Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF), an institution that is perceived to be fairly loyal to Siniora—in addition to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the two most influential regional patrons of the anti-Syrian coalition—are also accused by the pro-Syrian alliance of having a hand

in financing and arming these terrorist groups.³

It is critical for Lebanese from all sides of the political spectrum to come to a clear understanding of the nature of the terrorism threat. While terrorism may not be an existential threat to Lebanon, it has hit hard in various regions and in multiple directions. The past three years alone have registered more than 18 terrorist attacks that have taken the lives of innocent civilians, high-profile officials and politicians, prominent journalists and commentators, military personnel, and international peacekeepers. Furthermore, the two theories about al-Qa`ida in Lebanon as proposed by the anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian coalitions are not mutually exclusive. Their common denominator is the Lebanonization process of the Salafi-jihadi movement in the country. Five years after the start of the war in Iraq, Islamic radicalization is still on the rise in the Middle East. The spillover effects of the war in Iraq, the resurfacing of political and sectarian tensions in Lebanon following the May 2005 withdrawal of Syrian troops, the 2006 war between Israel and Hizb Allah, and the Sunni perception of ascending Shi`a and Iranian power in the region gave new life and meaning to the Salafi-jihadi movement in Lebanon.

During the course of a six year period starting in 2002, the author conducted both practical and theoretical research on the subject of Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon.⁴ The findings, updated by

current events, support the following conclusions, each of which will be examined in detail:

- Al-Qa`ida's senior leadership, based in the tribal areas of Pakistan-Afghanistan, has no franchise or coordinated group in Lebanon.⁵

- The Salafi-jihadi movement has neither a local insurgent presence in Lebanon nor a unifying leader of the stature of Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the presumed leader of al-Qa`ida in Iraq.

- The Salafi-jihadi movement in Lebanon is neither fictional nor a mechanical creation of the Syrian intelligence services. It also has an important Lebanese constituency and is not exclusively Palestinian.

- The current Salafi-jihadi threat is caused by a network of capable terrorist cells scattered across the country, mostly in northern Lebanon. The most dangerous terrorist axis is the one that links, by land and sea, regions in the north—such as Tripoli, al-Koura and Akkar—to the Palestinian refugee camp of `Ayn al-Hilwa in Sidon. Pockets in the Bekaa Valley are also increasingly witnessing Salafi-jihadi activity.

- Al-Qa`ida's senior leadership values the target of the international peacekeeping force in the south⁶ and has a profound interest in attacking Israel, but it also understands the limitations and difficulties of waging jihad on Lebanese soil.

The Salafi-Jihadi Movement in Lebanon

Lebanese government attention on and local media coverage of Sunni Islamic militancy has always been episodic and tangential, focusing exclusively on a limited geographical area—the refugee camp of `Ayn al-Hilwa—and scrutinizing a specific ethnic population—the Palestinian refugees. `Ayn al-Hilwa is located on the southeastern part of the port of Sidon in southern Lebanon and has been historically known to

1 Many would dispute this assumption and argue that the issue of Hizb Allah's weapons is the most divisive issue among Lebanese politicians.

2 Media coverage by outlets sympathetic to or associated with the anti-Syrian coalition, such as the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation and Future Television, have largely reported that the threat posed by al-Qa`ida is more imaginary than real, more Syrian-orchestrated than driven by domestic factors, and as a result less worthy of thorough coverage or investigative journalism. Anti-Syrian newspapers, such as *al-Nabar* and *al-Mustaqbal*, either totally dismiss the thesis that al-Qa`ida exists in Lebanon or argue that the threat is exaggerated. Most of their editorials and opinion pieces argue that the majority of the political murders that have taken place in Lebanon during the past two decades have been committed by the Syrian intelligence services, not by an al-Qa`ida-affiliated group.

3 Leading the campaign of warning against the rise of Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon are the leftist-leaning newspaper *al-Safir*, the pro-Hizb Allah newspaper *al-Akbbar*, and the pro-Syrian newspaper *al-Diyar*.

4 This research was conducted around the country from south to north including the regions of Akkar, Majdar Anjar, Tripoli, Qarun, Arqoub, Sidon, and others, where the phenomenon of Salafi-jihadism in its concrete and spiritual manifestations was investigated. This article relies on interviews of leaders from the mainstream Sunni Islamist community in Lebanon, militants who voluntarily associate themselves with the Salafi-jihadi movement, academics who specialize in political Islam, reporters who are experienced in covering terrorism, Salafist preachers, Lebanese politicians, leading intelligence officers in the ISF, and senior officers in the Military Intelligence Directorate. For more, see Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:10 (2007): pp. 825-855.

5 This is in contrast to, for example, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb or al-Qa`ida in Iraq.

6 Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, "Al Qaeda's Terrorist Threat to UNIFIL," Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution and the Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies at the Swedish National Defence College, June 2007.

have served as a hotbed for Sunni Islamic militancy. A number of high-profile terrorist attacks with Salafi-jihadi imprints emanated from the camp, including the bombing of the Lebanese Customs Directorate and the killing of four Lebanese judges in the Justice Palace in Sidon in 1999,⁷ and the attack against the Russian Embassy in

“Salafi-jihadi factions in Lebanon are not united under a single umbrella or organization. They have dissimilar agendas and are relatively small and clandestine semi-autonomous entities with informal organizational structures.”

Beirut with rocket-propelled grenades in 2000.⁸ For too long, however, vast swathes of territory throughout the country that are fertile for terrorism have evaded the public eye.

Investigating the complex root causes of Salafi-jihadism in Lebanon is not easy.⁹ Since its awakening in the early 1980s, Salafist militancy in Lebanon was largely defensive and reflected the perceived severity of local crisis conditions. Systematic security crackdowns by the Lebanese authorities, large-scale foreign (particularly Israeli) aggression against Lebanon, and violent clashes with rival Islamist groups tended to awaken and mobilize the Salafi-jihadi movement as a whole in defense of an Islamic order. Still, Salafist militancy remained grounded in local realities and only marginally (if ever) connected to al-Qa`ida's global Islamic insurgency.

The two Salafi-jihadi groups that are closest to al-Qa`ida ideologically are Usbat al-Ansar and Jund al-Sham,

both based in `Ayn al-Hilwa. These two groups, whose relationship often fluctuates between cooperation and hostility, share a history of terrorism and politically motivated violence against the Lebanese state and society. In addition, the two groups have sent many young men to the Iraqi battlefield.¹⁰ Of the two groups, Usbat al-Ansar is the senior partner and arguably the most capable Salafi-jihadi group in `Ayn al-Hilwa with an estimated strength between 200-300 members, according to estimates by the Lebanese Military Intelligence Directorate (MID). Jund al-Sham, on the other hand, can be described as a relatively small group of 25-50 freelance jihadists that has no coherent organizational structure or important terrorist potential. Jund al-Sham militants have been accused, however, of murdering Hizb Allah senior official Ghaleb Awali in July 2004 and of attempting to assassinate Hizb Allah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in April 2006. Other Salafi-jihadi entities—such as the Qarun group and the Majdal Anjar group—have also been involved in building networks of local fighters in their villages to join the jihad in Iraq. The village of Majdal Anjar, for example, became a focal point after five of its residents were killed in Iraq in 2005 fighting coalition forces.¹¹ In September 2004, half a dozen men from there were arrested on various terrorism charges including attempting to blow up the Italian Embassy in Beirut.¹² Lebanon's interior minister at the time, Elias Murr, stated that the group was planning to pack a car with 300 kilograms of explosives and ram it into the Italian Embassy in addition to plotting a sophisticated attack against the Ukrainian Embassy.

Although sympathetic to one another, Salafi-jihadi factions in Lebanon are not united under a single umbrella or organization. They have dissimilar agendas and are relatively small and clandestine semi-autonomous entities with informal organizational structures. Each is more concerned about its own survival than waging an offensive jihad

against “infidels.” Some are also divided along political lines. Importantly, these groups have faced constant recruitment challenges within the Lebanese Sunni community, whose solid majority is opposed to Salafi-jihadi ideology. In fact, this acute lack of support to al-Qa`ida's ideology and agenda explains why the two most ambitious attempts by the Salafi-jihadi movement to create a durable and potent insurgent force in the country have failed miserably.

The first attempt happened on December 31, 1999 in al-Dinniyeh, which is approximately 30 miles away from the northeastern part of Tripoli. A group of Lebanese Sunni Islamic militants, led by Afghanistan returnee Bassam Kanj, launched an attack on the Lebanese Army and fought it for six days. The army eventually defeated the insurgents and foiled their alleged plot of establishing an Islamic state in Tripoli. The second more deadly attempt was in the summer of 2007 when a group called Fatah al-Islam¹³ attacked a Lebanese Army outpost near Tripoli and slaughtered several soldiers during their sleep,¹⁴ an action that triggered an army counter-offensive. The three-month battle between the army and Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp ended on September 2, 2007 when most of the surviving few dozen militants punched through army lines in a desperate bid to escape. Several were rounded up in subsequent sweeps of the hills to the east, but an unknown number, including their leader Shakir al-Abssi, have so far evaded the dragnet. Even though the army crushed Fatah al-Islam in Nahr al-Bared, the organization still exists in an unknown number of cells, mainly in Tripoli, including in the Badawi camp, but also in `Ayn al-Hilwa. More recently, Fatah al-Islam seems to have established a presence in the Bourj al-Shemali and Rashidieh camps, where it appears to have amalgamated with Jund al-Sham. Scattered in the north, these cells (some of which are remnants of Fatah al-Islam) that have proven links

7 Agence France-Presse, June 9, 1999.

8 For more information on the history of terrorism and politically motivated violence in Lebanon, see Saab and Ranstorp, “Securing Lebanon from the threat of Salafist Jihadism.”

9 Ibid.

10 Usbat al-Ansar frequently issues statements from the camp confirming that its members became “martyrs” in Iraq after facing the “crusaders.”

11 Fawaz A. Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist, Inside Muslim Jihadism* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 2006), pp. 273-277.

12 Agence France-Presse, September 27, 2004.

13 For a detailed account of the story of Fatah al-Islam, see Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, “Fatah al-Islam: How an Ambitious Jihadist Enterprise Went Awry,” The Brookings Institution and the Swedish National Defense College, November 2007.

14 This information is based on the account provided to the author by the MID.

with jihadists in `Ayn al-Hilwa have been responsible for a number of recent terrorist acts including the twin attacks on the Lebanese Army buses on August 13, 2008 and September 29, 2008, which killed 15 soldiers and six civilians.¹⁵

The story of Fatah al-Islam is important because it underscores the transformation of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Lebanon and sheds light on its future trajectory. That story, however, is anything but conclusive.

“Al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership has yet to unequivocally declare Lebanon a theater for major operations.”

The author’s analysis of Fatah al-Islam’s statements and behavior prior, during, and after the battle, coupled with intelligence assessments by senior officers in the MID and European intelligence agencies worried about the safety of their troops in southern Lebanon, support the following account: Fatah al-Islam is not merely a Syrian tool, but an actual jihadist group whose goals are inimical to Syrian interests and whose creation was greatly facilitated by spillover from Iraq.¹⁶ The conclusion reached by senior members of the Swedish, Danish, German and Italian intelligence agencies is that al-Qa`ida has a real presence in the country and is determined to strike hard against their interests in Lebanon and their troops in the south.¹⁷ It appears that this appraisal is now shared by most intelligence agencies in the U.S. government.¹⁸ This is evidenced by

15 *Al-Safir*, October 13, 2008; *al-Hayat*, October 14, 2008.

16 While local actors may have sharp disagreements over the nature of the threat of terrorism in Lebanon, all foreign governments and intelligence agencies that are concerned about the rise of terrorism speak with one voice on this matter and state that al-Qa`ida has a presence in the northern part of the country.

17 These conclusions were privately communicated to the author during several meetings in Stockholm, Berlin, Copenhagen and Beirut in the summer and winter of 2007.

18 For the past year, the author received a sense of the thinking of most intelligence agencies in the U.S. govern-

ment on the issue of al-Qa`ida in Lebanon during conferences and briefings in which he presented.

the public statements of several U.S. officials—including Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte—confirming that al-Qa`ida does have a presence in northern Lebanon,¹⁹ and by the visits of a handful of high level intelligence officers to Lebanon, including CIA Director Michael Hayden.²⁰

The argument that Syria did not create Fatah al-Islam or is not responsible for causing the recent wave of Salafist militancy in Lebanon does not exonerate Damascus from the terrorism threat and leaves a number of important questions unanswered. For example, it is concerning that there is no reliable information or explanation as to why Fatah al-Islam leader Shakir al-Abssi was released from Syrian prison in the fall of 2002. While Syria may not have given birth to the Salafi-jihadi movement in Lebanon, it surely has aided it and aggravated its threat by allowing the transfer of al-Qa`ida fighters and terrorist finances and equipment from Iraq and Syria into Lebanon. The Syrian regime understands the dangers of the game it is allegedly playing,²¹ given the strong ideological enmities between secular Damascus and militant Islamist movements and the bloody history they have shared since the 1970s. Damascus, however, has shown it is willing to accept the risks given the relative benefits such policies have earned it over the years.

Lebanon as Viewed by al-Qa`ida’s Senior Leadership

Al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership has yet to unequivocally declare Lebanon a theater for major operations. For al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership, notwithstanding the many advantages the Lebanese battlefield offers to the Islamic insurgency in the Middle Eastern corridor (most importantly the geographical proximity to the Israeli-Palestinian theater in general and the spiritual significance of Jerusalem in

19 Andrew Wander, “UNIFIL Says Attack Plot May Not Have Been Aimed at Peacekeepers,” *Daily Star*, October 22, 2008.

20 It is worth noting that Hayden’s visit was never publicly confirmed or commented on.

21 It is also accused of playing this game more explicitly in Iraq by providing a range of support to Iraqi insurgents.

22 Al-Zawahiri released two messages on December 20, 2006 and February 13, 2007 in which he briefly addressed Lebanon and Security Council Resolution 1701.

23 For an analysis of the letter, see Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, “What Zawahiri’s Really Mean for Lebanon and the War on Terror,” *al-Hayat*, May 5, 2008.

particular), Lebanon is not a priority.

Recently, Ayman al-Zawahiri released yet another long message²² urging Muslims worldwide to join insurgencies, mainly in Iraq.²³ Reserving a few words for Lebanon, which he called a “Muslim front-line fort,” he said that the country will play a “pivotal role in future battles with the Crusaders and the Jews.” While Lebanon is not a “Muslim front-line fort,” al-Zawahiri was correct in his assessment that the country may play an important role in al-Qa`ida’s global Islamic insurgency. The events of Nahr al-Bared last summer were indicative of the relative ease with which al-Qa`ida in Iraq was able to transfer fighters—via Syrian territories and with Syrian acquiescence—to Lebanon to cause terror and havoc.

Al-Qa`ida’s senior leaders recognize the big challenges their organization would face in waging jihad on Lebanese soil. This is why they may have settled for using Lebanon as a staging ground to the Palestinian and European theaters

“It is naïve to assume that removing the grievances of Salafi-jihadists in Lebanon will prevent terrorism from occurring, for the nature or root causes of these grievances are not clear.”

and not so much as a jihadist battlefield. Still, terrorist operations against the international force in the south would be praised and welcomed, as al-Zawahiri has repeatedly reminded his followers. The reality is that Lebanon has turned into a place where jihadist travelers can quietly meet, train, and plan operations against Israel.²⁴ This

24 This is the most recent terrorism threat assessment reached by several European intelligence agencies on the

happens mostly along the axis that links by land and sea regions in the north to the troublesome Palestinian camp of `Ayn al-Hilwa in Sidon. Given how al-Qa`ida views Lebanon, the country might be spared the fate of Iraq. The international community, however, still needs to work closely with the Lebanese government to prevent al-Qa`ida from setting up operations.

Combating Terrorism: The Lebanese MID Role

The MID is pursuing a number of initiatives to combat terrorism in Lebanon,²⁵ some of which are listed below.²⁶

- Inside the MID (unlike other government institutions), there is overall agreement that these local cells are inspired by al-Qa`ida's ideology and have extremist ambitions, but have no verifiable connections with al-Qa`ida in Pakistan-Afghanistan. They are self-starters who are trying hard to earn the endorsement of Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri. They hope to catch their attention by staging terrorist attacks across the country and planning spectacular operations against high-value targets such as the United Nations headquarters in Beirut and the international force in southern Lebanon. While most of these cells are active, some of them are dormant. Their connection to al-Qa`ida's franchise in Iraq is traceable.

- The estimated number of members of these terrorist cells, according to military intelligence, is 3,700. Their nationalities range from Lebanese, Palestinian, Saudi Arabian, Algerian, Egyptian, Iraqi, and a small minority of non-Arabs. Experts in explosives occupy the biggest chunk of these members.

situation in Lebanon. It was privately shared with the author during meetings in European capitals.

²⁵ Due to the prevalent bickering and divisiveness in the Lebanese political sphere, the Lebanese Military Intelligence Directorate (MID), the leading public counter-terrorism institution, operates in a challenging environment. To effectively analyze and combat the terrorism threat, the MID has had to virtually insulate itself from politics.

²⁶ This information is based on several meetings the author had during the past five years with senior members of the MID. For more on the counter-terrorism effort in Lebanon, see Bilal Y. Saab, "Lebanon on the Counterterrorism Front," *Middle East Times*, March 19, 2008.

- The MID claimed it produced a clear map that shows the location and distribution of these cells, whether in the rural or urban areas in the north. The MID also said it possessed reliable intelligence on the means with which these cells communicate and secure weapons and funding.

- The MID, with the authorization of the Lebanese cabinet, has sent out letters to the Arab League, Arab embassies, and Arab intelligence agencies asking for old and new information about the terrorist cells in the north. The MID did not hide the fact that it was seeking the cooperation of elements in the Syrian intelligence services and coordinating with U.S. covert agencies.

- The MID's offensive plan to eradicate the threat of terrorism in the north is divided into four fronts: one, the army's 10th Brigade constantly monitors and tracks the cells to keep them on the run and in a state of disarray; two, lure the cells to closed areas and break them one by one; three, deny the cells any kind of support or sympathy from the few disenfranchised members of the northern populace; four, avoid confrontation with all the cells at once and avert a repeat of the Nahr al-Bared incident which resulted in heavy loss of lives on both sides.²⁷ Instead, apply a gradual approach and expand the network of informants (be they agents or citizens) to procure the best intelligence.

- The MID confirms that its plan, which it coordinates with the ISF, is working, as evidenced in the recent breaking of three cells in the north that perpetrated or planned terrorist attacks against Lebanese Army posts and vehicles. The military intelligence service, however, is badly funded, lacks sophisticated equipment and is overstretched. It claims it cannot do the job alone and needs the help of regional and international intelligence agencies who have an interest in neutralizing the terrorism threat in Lebanon.

²⁷ For more on that battle and the lessons learned by the army, see Bilal Y. Saab and Bruce Riedel, "Lessons for Lebanon from Nahr al Bared," *The Brookings Institution*, October 4, 2007.

Conclusion

The most reassuring aspect of the history of Salafi-jihadi terrorism in Lebanon is that it is not widespread and has few followers. Yet, in a small country such as Lebanon, even a small number of cells can cause havoc and terror. It is naïve to assume that removing the grievances of Salafi-jihadists in Lebanon will prevent terrorism from occurring, for the nature or root causes of these grievances are not clear. This is not to recommend an exclusive reliance by the Lebanese government on military approaches to solve the problem. Balanced economic and political development policies in the deprived north may deny the Salafi-jihadi movement additional recruits. It should be emphasized, however, that heavy-handed approaches by the MID are essential at this relatively nascent stage of the post-Iraq Salafi-jihadi movement because they help contain the threat and prevent it from inflating.

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U.S. Cross-Border Raid Highlights Syria's Role in Islamist Militancy

By Anonymous

AN OCTOBER 26 RAID by U.S. special forces on Syrian territory highlights the long-festering issue of foreign jihadist networks operating between Syria's Deir ez-Zour region and Iraq. According to various press reports, a group of U.S. military helicopters attacked the al-Sukariyya Farm, which lies approximately five miles west of the Iraqi frontier in Syria's Deir ez-Zour Province. Al-Sukariyya is near the Iraqi border city of al-Qaim, which the U.S. military has identified as a major crossing point for foreign fighters and supplies from Syria into Iraq. During the raid, U.S. forces reportedly killed eight people,¹ including Badran Turki Hishan al-Mazidih (also known as Abu Ghadiya), an Iraqi national sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in February for "facilitating and controlling the flow of money, weapons, terrorists, and other resources through Syria to al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)."² Another unconfirmed report identified the dead as members of the Mashahda tribe, which has members in the Tikrit area of Iraq.³ The Syrian government statement claimed that the raid killed eight civilians, and denied any relationship between al-Qa`ida and those killed.⁴

According to an anonymous U.S. military official speaking to the Associated Press, the raid demonstrated that the United States was "taking matters into our own hands" to shut down the network of al-Qa`ida-linked foreign fighters moving between Syria and Iraq, and using the former country as a safe haven.⁵ This article will examine the

publicly available information about the raid, Syria's role in border security and whether Syria risks "blowback" by foreign fighters who, after being forced out of Iraq, may be turning their sights on the Syrian government.

The Syria-Iraq Border Region

According to a November 9 *New York Times* report, the attack was the latest in a dozen of previously undisclosed U.S. special forces raids on al-Qa`ida militants in Syria and Pakistan.⁶ The only previously reported raid in Syria occurred on June 18, 2003, when a U.S. task force penetrated 25 miles inside Syrian territory in pursuit of a convoy of SUV's suspected of carrying senior Iraqi Ba`athists. Unlike the October 26 attack, which could be justified as "self-defense" under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, that raid was carried out under the rules of "hot pursuit," which allows security officials to cross international boundaries to apprehend criminals.

While Syria thus far has been more forthcoming about its version of the raid, getting to the bottom of U.S. accusations of al-Qa`ida activity in Deir ez-Zour Province is difficult given the regime's tight grip on security affairs in the region. The regime, together with its local informant network, tightly controls independent access by foreign media and diplomats to the area unless they have authorization from the Syrian government. State minders are assigned to "protect" visiting foreigners. All Syrian territory east of the Euphrates River is the domain of Syrian Military Intelligence, headed by President Bashar al-Assad's brother-in-law, Asif Shawqat. The regime's concern with Deir ez-Zour is based on the allegiance of the area's residents to tribes that extend eastward into Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. The largest Sunni tribes in Syria with brethren on both sides of the border include the al-Baggara (Mosul and Tikrit), al-Ughaydat (Mosul) and al-Mashahda (Tikrit).⁷ Despite the region's oil wealth, which accrues directly to the state's coffers, Deir ez-Zour is historically Syria's poorest province. The state has encouraged

Syrian tribes to give up their nomadic life in favor of settlement in and around the Euphrates River and its (often dry) tributaries. Farms in the area produce cotton and wheat, and the arid lands and dry streambeds from which the tribes hail are particularly good for smuggling livestock and contraband. To shore up support for the government, the Assad regime, which is led by Alawites, an obscure offshoot of Shi'a Islam, employs a large proportion of the region's Sunnis in the country's army and security services, creating much needed jobs in Syria's poorest region.⁸

Leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Syria publicly gathered "volunteer" fighters by the busload to wage "jihad" against coalition forces.⁹ This was later confirmed by U.S. forces who captured or killed hundreds of fighters with passports showing they had transited Syria into Iraq. As security worsened in Iraq, and coalition intelligence lapsed, the degree of Syrian support for the Iraqi insurgency remained unclear. In response to repeated accusations by the United States that it was allowing foreign fighters to travel across its borders, the Syrian government constructed a four foot high "sand berm" along the frontier and laid fallen electricity poles to flip smugglers' fast moving vehicles.¹⁰ Damascus repeatedly claimed that it was doing all it could to patrol the 375-mile border, comparing its task with unsuccessful U.S. attempts to keep foreign migrants crossing its border with Mexico.

With the advent of Iraq's Awakening Councils, greater details of foreign fighter flows through Syria have emerged. This includes the Sinjar Records, documents that coalition forces in Iraq seized during a raid on a suspected al-Qa`ida safe house in Sinjar, an Iraqi town 10 miles east of the Syrian frontier. The records, compiled by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, indicate that hundreds of foreign fighters between September 2006 and September 2007 transited through Syria.¹¹

1 Bill Roggio, "US Strike in Syria 'Decapitated' al Qaeda's Facilitation Network," *The Long War Journal*, October 27, 2008.

2 "Treasury Designates Members of Abu Ghadiyah's Network - Facilitates Flow of Terrorists, Weapons, and Money from Syria to al Qaeda in Iraq," U.S. Department of Treasury, February 28, 2008.

3 "Syrian Witness Reacts to Raid," BBC News, October 27, 2008. In this case, family means "extended family" or a subsection of a tribe.

4 Albert Aji, "U.S. Special Forces Launch Rare Attack Inside Syria," *Associated Press*, October 26, 2008.

5 Ibid.

6 Eric Schmidt and Mark Mazzetti, "Secret Order Lets U.S. Raid Al Qaeda in Many Countries," *New York Times*, November 9, 2008.

7 Personal interview, resident of eastern Syria, August 2006.

8 Ironically, eastern Syria's oil production makes the area technically Syria's richest region. According to Syrian law, however, all oil proceeds accrue to the state.

9 Neil MacFarquhar, "For Arabs, New Jihad Is in Iraq," *New York Times*, April 2, 2003.

10 Personal observation, Abu Kamal, August 2004.

11 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qaida's Foreign*

Reduction in Foreign Fighter Flow?

During the past few months, U.S. officials have said that there has been a sharp reduction in foreign fighters in and out of Iraq. Yet it remains unclear how much of the reduction is due to the *sabwa* (awakening) in Iraq and how much is due to a recently announced “change” in Syria’s policy on border security. Beginning with a meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her Syrian counterpart, Walid Mouallem, at the May 2007 Iraq neighbors conference in Sharm al-Shaykh, the United States has repeatedly asked Syria to improve its border security. This has primarily involved two areas: scrutinizing single military-aged males entering Syria from Arab countries, and closing off smuggling routes across the Syrian frontier.

The degree of Damascus’ compliance with Washington’s request remains unclear. In July, a group of Syrian academics in good favor with the Syrian regime visited Washington and claimed that Syria had shifted its policy and had now secured the border “to the best of our abilities.”¹² One delegation member claimed Damascus has “its own interest to play a stabilizing role” and that Syria had done a “very good job” on policing the border.¹³ They claimed that “several U.S. field commanders” at the border had even shared such kudos with Syrian officials.¹⁴ Such claims come in sharp contrast to U.S. statements before and after last month’s raid. A U.S. military official told the Associated Press that “the one piece of the puzzle we have not been showing success on is the nexus in Syria.”¹⁵ This was supported by statements in the days leading up to the raid by U.S. Major General John Kelly, who said that Syria’s border was “uncontrolled by their side” and was

a “different story” from the security situation on Iraq’s borders with Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which have tightened security considerably.¹⁶

Adding to the confusion, in the days following the raid Western journalists based in Syria and Lebanon published stories attributing the raid to secret security cooperation between Damascus and Washington. One report in London’s *The Sunday Times* said that Syrian security personnel seemed to be complicit in the raid, which was confirmed by anonymous “sources in Washington.”¹⁷ The report claimed that “Abu Ghadiya was feared by the Syrians as an agent of Islamic fundamentalism who was hostile to the secular regime in Damascus. It would be expedient for Syria if America would eliminate him.”¹⁸ Another report from the Damascus-based correspondent of the Abu Dhabi-based *The National* also alleged Syrian complicity. It quoted a U.S. intelligence officer, Major Adam Boyd of the third armored cavalry regiment responsible for Mosul and a 236-mile stretch of the Iraqi-Syrian border in Ninawa Province, as saying that Syria had “been relatively good in the near recent past, arresting people on their side of the border.” Boyd also explained the “gray area” surrounding Syria’s position on foreign jihadists traveling in and out of Iraq from Syria:

For every example of cooperation from Syria, there are an equal number of incidents that are not helpful...We just captured someone who was trying to escape into Syria and found out that he’d been arrested last November on the Syrian side after they caught him with a bunch of fake passports. But he bribed his way out and managed to get back in. But, again, I don’t know I necessarily attribute that to the government as to an individual Syrian border patrol unit.¹⁹

Damascus Facing Threat of Blowback?

Although it appears that Syria has taken some steps to limit the number of foreign fighters crossing the border into Iraq, the October 26 raid highlights the role of Syria in Iraq’s insurgency, a point often eclipsed by announcements of indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel and political dialogue in Syria’s western neighbor, Lebanon. In light of recent successes in defeating al-Qa`ida in Iraq, Syria’s role as a staging ground for the Iraqi insurgency threatens to endanger its own interests. As coalition efforts continue to push foreign jihadists out of Iraq, and U.S. Arab allies tighten controls on the return of foreign fighters to their home countries, Syria could become the foreign fighters’ refuge of last resort.

If Damascus’ claims that it is doing more to crack down on foreign jihadists and similar militant groups is true, this could help explain the motivations behind a number of recent violent incidents in Syria: the September 27 suicide bombing near a new military security bureau outside Damascus;²⁰ an October firefight between security forces and Sunni militants that claimed four lives in the Yarmouk Palestinian camp;²¹ and the mysterious July riot by Islamist prisoners at Syria’s Saydnayya military prison. Syria’s role in Islamist militancy could present Damascus with increased security problems, as radicalized foreign fighters could turn their skills against their hosts, especially in an era of diplomatic talks between Syria, Israel, and the United States.

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Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008).

¹² “Engaging Syria: New Negotiations, Old Challenges,” The Brookings Institution, July 23, 2008. In a subsequent article, one of the delegation’s members, Sami Moubayed, put “recognition of Syria’s cooperation on border security with Iraq” on a 10-point list of demands that President-elect Barack Obama must do for Syria to receive him in Damascus “like Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton.”

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Aji, “U.S. Special Forces Launch Rare Attack Inside Syria.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Marie Colvin and Uzi Mahnaimi, “Questions Raised over Syrian Complicity in U.S. Raid,” *The Sunday Times*, November 2, 2008.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Phil Sands, “Syria Stops Insurgents on Iraq Border,” *The National*, November 2, 2008.

²⁰ On November 8, Syrian state television aired “confessions” of members of Fatah al-Islam, a Sunni Islamic militant group that grew out of Fatah Intifada, a Palestinian militant group closely controlled by the Syrian regime. The report claimed Saudi support for the attack channeled via Saad Hariri, Rafiq Hariri’s son. The report remains highly controversial and unconfirmed.

²¹ “A Puzzling Raid,” *Economist*, October 30, 2008.

²² The author’s name has been withheld to protect the sources involved in the research.

Afghanistan's Heart of Darkness: Fighting the Taliban in Kunar Province

By Brian Glyn Williams

MOST OBSERVERS SEE Afghanistan's southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar as being the heart of the country's insurgency. Northeastern Kunar Province, however, has been described in mythic proportions as the "most dangerous terrain for U.S. forces anywhere in the world."¹ U.S. soldiers who fight a bold enemy in Kunar Province's rugged mountains have dubbed it Afghanistan's "Heart of Darkness." In 2007, the province saw 973 insurgent attacks making it the second most active Afghan province after Kandahar. The Kunar battlefield is not the flat open plains or scrub covered desert mountains of the south, but forested mountains similar to those found in Colorado's Rockies. What Kunar does share with Helmand and Kandahar is a "bleed over" of tribes and loyalties between Pashtuns living in Afghanistan and those found in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan.²

The combination of lush tree cover, rugged mountains, cross-border sanctuaries, and prickly mountain tribes that resent outside rule is a volatile mixture that has made Kunar prime insurgent territory. Kunar Province has been a "no-go zone" since its people rose up against the Communists in 1978. In many ways, it remains one today. Kunar made headlines across the world for the coalition's two deadliest actions in Afghanistan to date, namely the spring 2006 ambush of a U.S. Navy SEAL team followed by the shooting down of a Chinook helicopter sent to rescue them, and the summer 2008 swarm attack on a newly built U.S. outpost that almost succeeded in overwhelming it. Both attacks revealed the existence of a bold enemy that had seemingly found the way to use the local terrain and the enemy's unfamiliarity with Kunar's history, tribal politics, culture and tactics

against them. This article will examine the history of warfare in Kunar Province up until the present day, in an effort to provide a context of understanding for U.S.-led international forces.

A Natural Fortress: The History of Kunar

In Afghanistan, Kunar is a rare forested valley carved by the Kunar River, which flows 300 miles southward along the Pakistani-Afghan border from Chitral down to the Kabul River near Jalalabad. Along the way, the Kunar River is joined by numerous tributaries—such as the Pech Dara—that add to its flow. Kunar's population is roughly 380,000.³ The north-south Kunar Valley parallels the Pakistani border and has been used as a corridor of communications between the uplands of Badakshan (Tajik territories to the north) and the Pashtun lands of the south for centuries. Insurgents have long used the Kunar-Nuristan corridor for attacking Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. Alexander the Great saw the strategic importance of Kunar and invaded the valley in fourth century BC on his way into Bajaur, the tribal land to the east. When he invaded, the local inhabitants burnt their houses and fled to wage guerrilla warfare against his troops, a style of warfare their descendants would continue right up until the modern era.⁴ In the late 19th century the British found that the best way to suppress the local Pashtuns was to divide their lands artificially and place the Pashtuns of Bajaur in British India (later Pakistan) leaving the remainder in Kunar, Afghanistan. The artificial border did not prevent the Kunari Pashtuns from joining with their Bajauri Pashtun kin in waging guerrilla jihad against the British up until the late 1930s.

The vast majority of Kunar's population is Pashtun, with the Pech-based Safi tribe the most prominent.⁵ Yet if one goes up the Kunar Valley, into the Pech

and Korengal Valleys which reach up to the remote mountains of Nuristan, one encounters non-Pashtun tribes previously known as "Kafirs" (pagan unbelievers). The Kafirs were conquered by the Afghan-Pashtun state in the 1890s and converted to the *nur* (light) of Islam; their land was renamed Nuristan. By the mid-20th century, these two remote peoples had put aside their differences and came to be included in one province known as Kunar.⁶ Fundamentalism came to Kunar in the 1950s via the neighboring Pakistani Pashtun province of Bajaur. Like new converts elsewhere, the Nuristanis became zealots, and the Kunari Pashtuns similarly developed a reputation for being fundamentalists.

The Kunari Pashtuns and the newly converted Nuristanis were driven closer together in 1978 by the clumsy policies of the new Communist government that assumed power in the Saur Revolution of April 1978. Both conservative tribal groups resented the new government's interference in their lives and rose up in opposition to Kabul's efforts to arrest their elders, de-emphasize Islam, empower women, and redistribute land. In fact, the first sparks of what would become the mujahidin resistance were lit in the mountains of Kunar by the summer of 1978 as local *lashkars* (fighting units) began to attack regional Communist government police and garrisons.

The Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan's (PDPA) army eventually responded to these attacks by carrying out the systematic massacre of Kunari Pashtuns in the farming village of Kerala in April 1979. In this tragic event that has come to define the Kunari Pashtuns' deep distrust of outside government forces, some 200 Afghan Army troops and Soviet advisers executed and bulldozed almost 1,700 men into a mass grave.⁷ The slain men's women and children fled over the border into Bajaur, and became the first of millions of Afghan war refugees who would soon settle in Pakistan. By the summer of 1979 Kunar had become "virtually independent," and the local government forces had been forced into their compound in the

1 Tim Hetherington, "The Fight for Korengal," *Vanity Fair*, December 3, 2007.

2 Kunar shares a border with FATA's Bajaur Agency, which can be crossed through the Nawa and Ghahki mountain passes.

3 For a virtual tour of Kunar featuring its landscapes and tribes, see the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1uJG16M3k. Also see www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiuPV6wB-3E.

4 A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 121.

5 The Safis or Safays are broken down into the Masaud, Gurbaz, and Wadir sub-tribes. Smaller tribes include the Shinwari, Mahmud, Kuchis, Pashai, Hisarak, among others.

6 In 2004, Nuristan was administratively separated from Kunar and now forms its own province.

7 Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 107-110.

provincial capital of Asadabad.⁸ This garrison later mutinied and joined the rebels who, for a brief time, seized the provincial capital.

In response to these insurgent activities, the PDPA's Soviet allies helped the Afghan Communist government shore up garrisons in key points along the Kunar Valley at Asadabad, Asmar and Barikot. While the Soviets initially aimed to hold static positions and allow their Afghan Communist allies to move out into the countryside to fight, they eventually got sucked into the fighting. They launched several large-scale military operations in Kunar designed to open up the valley, such as their first major Afghan operation in February-March 1980. The Kunar invasion included approximately 10,000 Soviet troops backed by 7,500 Afghan Communist troops.⁹ The invasion forced as much as two-thirds of the local population (estimated to have been around 330,000 at the start of the war) to flee to Bajaur in Pakistan. While the Russian *spetsnaz* did occasionally issue out from their bases to destroy mujahidin bases and groups or launch air assaults to relieve bases, for the most part the Soviets and their Afghan Communist allies remained "bottled up in their forts" and under a state of "semi-siege."¹⁰ The Soviets spent most of their time fighting off local mujahidin swarm attacks and being shelled by rebels who had an almost ritualistic style of warfare.¹¹ The Soviets responded to these attacks with large clumsy sweeps and by using close air support that led to high civilian casualties.

By the mid-1980s, Kunar had become one of the "hottest" zones in all of Afghanistan for the Soviets. By this time, all the major mujahidin resistance groups had established a presence in the valley. The independent commander Jamil ur Rahman from Pech, a Salafist religious leader belonging to the Safi tribe (and former Hizb-i-Islami

commander), succeeded in expelling Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami and establishing an independent Wahhabi-style state with Saudi aid.¹² Soon thereafter, scores of Arabs made their way to Kunar via Bajaur to fight the Soviets alongside Jamil ur Rahman. Saudi and Egyptian fighters in particular came to consider the province to be their home base. One of these Arab volunteer mujahidin, Abu Ikhlas al-Masri, married a local woman and was to play a key role in reintroducing Arab fighters to Kunar after 2001.

When the Soviets began to pull out their troops in 1988, the Afghan Communist government saw its position in Kunar as untenable and withdrew troops from the isolated garrisons in spring of that year. By November 1988, Asadabad had

“The first sparks of what would become the mujahidin resistance were lit in the mountains of Kunar by the summer of 1978 as local lashkars (fighting units) began to attack regional Communist government police and garrisons.”

been taken by the rebels, making it one of the first provincial capitals to fall to the mujahidin. With the removal of the Communists, Jamil ur Rahman set up a Salafist-Wahhabi "amirate" in Kunar. Jamil ur Rahman crushed all other local fighting groups and fought to fend off attacks by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami, which aimed to control the entire northeast. In August 1991, Hekmatyar launched a major invasion of the Kunar Valley that led to the deaths of 50 of Jamil ur Rahman's Arab allies and the sacking of his capital at Asadabad. In response, Jamil ur Rahman fled across the border to Bajaur, where

he took refuge. On August 30, 1991, he was assassinated by an Egyptian, presumably on Hekmatyar's orders. Hizb-i-Islami took control over most of the valley.

In 1996, Hizb-i-Islami's dominance in Kunar was threatened by a new anti-mujahidin force emerging from the south: the Taliban. By late 1996, the Taliban had defeated Hizb-i-Islami and forced its leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, to flee into exile. The Taliban subsequently claimed the right to rule. Most local Salafists rejected the Taliban due to their insistence on referring to Mullah Omar as *Amir ul Mui'meen* (Commander of the Faithful), a claim that the Salafist puritans did not accept. The main Salafist leader in Kunar, Haji Rohullah, in fact moved to Pakistan to avoid the Taliban and stayed there in exile until the Taliban regime was destroyed in 2001's Operation Enduring Freedom.

Kunar Post 9/11: The Crucible of the Afghan Insurgency

When Operation Enduring Freedom commenced, the locals either waited on the sidelines or helped their former Taliban and al-Qa`ida opponents escape through their territory into Pakistan out of a feeling of Islamic solidarity or because they were bribed. The locals began to turn against the government and its coalition allies in June 2002 when an elder from Ganjgal named Abdul Wali, who was wanted by the coalition, was taken to their headquarters. He subsequently died under mysterious circumstances. When his body was released¹³ two days later, the locals decided to revolt much as they had in 1978. Additionally, the locals began to complain that policemen sent to the province from Kabul were extorting money from them. To compound matters, the recently returned Salafist leader Haji Rohullah was arrested by the coalition on grounds that he was collaborating with the Taliban.¹⁴ As these events were taking place, the local Salafists began to lose power as their leaders were displaced by professionals

8 Anthony Hyman, *Afghanistan Under Soviet Domination: 1964-1981* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 124.

9 Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 156.

10 Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *Afghanistan the Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 1989), p. 132; Michael Scheuer, "Assessing the Six Year Hunt for Osama bin Laden," *Terrorism Focus* 4:30 (2007).

11 Ibid.

12 Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 230. A similar Wahhabi state known as the *Dawlat* (the state) was also formed in neighboring regions of Nuristan at this time by Maulvi Afzar.

13 One popular account said his body was thrown on the side of the road.

14 Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 71-72. Antonio Giustozzi points out that the accusations against Rohullah may have been false.

sent to rule the province from Kabul. This bred further resentment against the Hamid Karzai government.

Fears that Kunar would turn on the coalition seem to have been borne out. Fighting began in late 2002 as the 82nd Airborne arrived in the valley. Kashmir Khan, the Hizb-i-Islami commander who had earlier fought against the Taliban, seemed to be leading the revolt. In an effort to flush out Kashmir Khan's Hizb-i-Islami fighters as well as dozens of foreign fighters led by Abu Ikhlas al-Masri, who was declared al-Qa`ida's *amir* in Kunar and Nuristan, the United States launched Operation Mountain Resolve

“The new counter-insurgency strategy has resulted in the construction of small, platoon-sized outposts throughout the province. These have become magnets for local insurgent attacks.”

on November 7, 2003. The operation involved a Soviet-style airdrop into the Hindu Kush mountains by the U.S. 10th Mountain Division and resulted in the killing of Hizb-i-Islami commander Ghulam Sakhee, a few clashes with the enemy, and the discovery of some minor weapon caches.¹⁵

The next U.S. operation was Operation Red Wing, which occurred on June 28, 2005. The small operation involved the insertion of four elite Navy SEALs into Kunar to track and kill Ahmad Shah Ismail, a mid-level Taliban/al-Qa`ida mercenary commander said to be leading a group of 200-300 Afghan and Arab fighters calling themselves the *Bara bin Malik*. The operation failed when the Navy SEAL team operating on a 10,000-foot high ridge known as Abas Ghar (near Korengal Valley) was spotted by local shepherds. The shepherds informed Ahmad Shah Ismail, who sent roughly 140 fighters to surround and

attack them.¹⁶ Reinforcements arrived, but one of the Chinooks carrying SEALs was shot down en route by a Taliban rocket-propelled grenade. Sixteen soldiers were killed in the ensuing crash. Meanwhile, three of the encircled Navy SEALs on the ground were killed, while the fourth escaped.¹⁷ In the aftermath, Regional Command East decided that Kunar and the neighboring province of Nuristan needed a greater military presence. In response, it launched Operation Whaler in August 2005, Operation Pil in October 2005 and Operation Mountain Lion in April 2006. Hundreds of Taliban-linked fighters were killed in the operations. Since then, Regional Command East has also been active in building roads (including a \$7.5 million road linking the Pech Valley to Asadabad), bridges, schools and other Provisional Reconstruction Team projects as part of a “hearts and minds” strategy.

The military has been active in establishing forward operating bases far from the town centers controlled by the Soviets in the 1980s. This has meant inserting a U.S. presence¹⁸ deep into a countryside that is hostile to the coalition and generally supportive of the local Pashtun, Pashai, Nuristani and Arab insurgents. Moreover, the new counter-insurgency strategy has resulted in the construction of small, platoon-sized outposts throughout the province. These have become magnets for local insurgent attacks.¹⁹ While this forward base policy has increased U.S. casualties in the region, it has

also extended the writ of the Afghan government to places where there has been no government presence for decades. It has helped cut off insurgent “rat lines” over the Ghahki and Nawa passes from Pakistan into Kunar and on to Nuristan. Writing about one such base in the Salafist-Wahhabi-dominated Korengal Valley,²⁰ Elizabeth Rubin of the *New York Times* explained:

Unlike in Iraq, where the captains and lieutenants could let down their guard in a relatively safe, fortified operating base, swapping stories and ideas, here [Korengal Operating Post] they had no one to talk to and were almost as vulnerable to enemy fire inside the wire as out...And unlike every other place I've been in Afghanistan—even the Pech River valley, just an hour's drive away—the Korengal had no Afghan police or district leaders for the Americans to work with.²¹

The enemy in Korengal and nearby Pech consists of a variety of fighters belonging to Kashmir Khan's Hizb-i-Islami faction, Abu Ikhlas' al-Qa`ida, angry local Afghans who resent the presence of “infidels” or any outsiders in their valleys, Lashkar-i-Tayyaba, Taliban fighters led by Dost Muhammad and Qara Ziaur Rahman, Nuristanis led by Mullah Munibullah, Arab fighters from a group calling itself Jami'at al-Da`wa al-Qur'an wa'l-Sunna, and Pakistani volunteers. Among these groups are hundreds of fighters who routinely ambush U.S. patrols, plant IEDs, snipe at exposed soldiers, shell observation posts, and on occasion even attempt to

¹⁵ Sergeant Greg Heath, “10th Mtn. Div. Shows its Mettle In Operation Mountain Resolve,” *Defend America*, U.S. Department of Defense, November 2003.

¹⁶ “US Navy Seal's Afghan Disaster,” *BBC News*, July 25, 2005.

¹⁷ The story of this tragedy, the worse loss of Navy SEALs in its history, was vividly recounted in a *Time Magazine* article entitled, “How the Shepherd Saved the SEAL,” and a book entitled *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 2007). The target of this failed operation, Ahmad Shah, escaped his pursuers and survived a subsequent B-52 strike on his compound, but was eventually killed two years later.

¹⁸ The Marines, 173rd Airborne Brigade, 10th Mountain Division and 503rd Infantry Regiment have all been involved.

¹⁹ These attacks are often posted online. For a Taliban perspective video of the fighting in Kunar, see “Part 2 of BM Rocket Operation in Kunar,” at www.liveleak.com/view?i=3c9_1174862660&c=1. See also “Mujahideen Launch Hawk Rockets at American Post in Kunar” at www.liveleak.com/view?i=a37_1174985631.

²⁰ For remarkable video footage shot by Sebastian Younger for ABC on life in an outpost in Kunar's deadly Korengal Valley, see www.liveleak.com/view?i=d0f_1197424119.

²¹ The story of the insurgency in Korengal Valley begins with the Americans getting caught up in a feud with rivals from the nearby Pech Valley. According to Elizabeth Rubin, the Americans were duped into bombing the house of a local lumber magnate named Haji Matin. Several of Haji Matin's family members were killed in the attack. To gain revenge, he took his men over to al-Qa`ida commander Abu Ikhlas al-Masri and began to fight against the Americans. As more blood was spilled, Matin's *lashkar* gathered up the support of locals in the Korengal who made it their mission to destroy the U.S. forward operating post in their valley.

storm forward operating bases.²²

This last point was vividly demonstrated in one of the boldest insurgent attacks in Afghanistan to date: the July 13, 2008 mass assault on a partially established overt observation post in the Kunar/Nuristani border village of Wanat. The attack was launched by Hizb-i-Islami commander Maulawi Usman and involved between 200-400 Arab and Afghan fighters in a pre-dawn ambush on 45 Americans and 25 Afghan Army soldiers who were protected only by concertina barbed wire, earthen barriers and a wall of Humvees. At one point they breached the post and fighting was done face to face before the insurgents were repulsed.²³ In the eight hour firefight, the Americans came close to being overrun and were only saved when A-10s, F-15s, Apaches, and a Predator drone bombed and strafed the perimeter of the base. When the smoke cleared, nine members of Chosen Company serving in Wanat had been killed, 21 wounded, and four allied Afghan soldiers wounded. Between 15 and 40 of the enemy were also killed in the assault. While the operation was a Taliban military failure, it was a strategic success because of the propaganda value of the attack. Three days later, the U.S. military decided to evacuate the base altogether.

The Future of Kunar

From a larger perspective, the United States has little presence along the porous Kunar-Bajaur border and its authority is largely limited to the Jalalabad-Asadabad-Asmar highway, the same area the Soviets tried to control. The arrival of thousands of Pashtun refugees into Kunar fleeing a Pakistani offensive across the border in Bajaur in the fall of 2008 might exacerbate problems.²⁴ Thus a pattern of revenge killings, spontaneous tribal jihad, and counter-insurgency that goes back 30 years to the original *lashkar* uprising against the Afghan Communist regime continues in the Kunar Valley

and its tributaries. While the coalition has advantages over its Soviet predecessors in terms of intelligence, training, equipment, and fighting spirit, it will continue to sustain heavy losses as it fights valley by valley for control of Kunar. Qari Ziaur Rahman, the overall Taliban commander for Kunar, Bajaur, and Nuristan, summed up the importance of the battle for Kunar as follows:

From the Soviet days in Afghanistan, Kunar's importance has been clear. This is a border province and trouble here can break the central government. Whoever has been defeated in Afghanistan, his defeat began from Kunar. Hence, everybody is terrified of this region. The Soviets were defeated in this province and NATO knows that if it is defeated here it will be defeated all over Afghanistan.²⁵

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Al-Qa`ida's Changing Outlook on Pakistan

By Jarret Brachman

ON THE MORNING of November 19, 1995, a terrorist cell operating under the authority and financing of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) organization unleashed two vehicle-based improvised explosive devices on the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad. The attack leveled the embassy's main wing, killing 17 and wounding another 60. While al-Zawahiri was clearly no fan of the Pakistani government during the mid-1990s, it would be a mistake to construe the incident as an attack against Pakistan. It is true that al-Zawahiri was perturbed with the joint Egyptian-Pakistani crackdown on the "Afghan Arabs," but he was also a student of international politics. Al-Zawahiri believed that Pakistan's ongoing cooperation with enemies such as Egypt and the United States was less the Pakistani government's fault and more a structural outcome of the Zionist-Crusader "New World Order" that had been established.

Today, al-Qa`ida's high command is likely holed up in the Afghan-Pakistan tribal territory, overstretched, embattled and perplexed, especially when it comes to their Pakistani policies. By spending the past eight years arguing that President Pervez Musharraf was the source from which all of Pakistan's evils emanated, al-Qa`ida had failed to rhetorically prepare themselves or their audiences for a post-Musharraf Pakistan. Now, al-Qa`ida's propagandists are scrambling to convince their constituencies that the new regime is no different than Musharraf's. At the same time, al-Qa`ida continues to falter on fulfilling Khalid Shaykh Muhammad's dream of integrating the domestic Pakistani jihadist movement with al-Qa`ida. A strong indicator about how poorly the integration is going is the extent to which senior al-Qa`ida leaders have been willing to pander to the Pakistani populace in their public statements during the past two years. Given the range of operational and strategic challenges they now face, there is growing reason to believe that al-Qa`ida's high command is in dire need

²² For video of an example of a typical ambush on one of these patrols, see www.liveleak.com/view?i=2b1_1193703874. Also see Sebastian Junger, "Return to the Valley of Death," *Vanity Fair*, October 2008.

²³ This was the first time a U.S. post had been breached.

²⁴ This problem may be mitigated, however, by the Pakistani Army's recent success in taking back much of the neighboring cross-border Taliban sanctuary in Bajaur Agency in late October 2008.

²⁵ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "At War with the Taliban: A Fighter and a Financier," *Asia Times*, May 23, 2008.

of a face-saving respite. The incoming U.S. administration will, therefore, need to think carefully and creatively about how to best capitalize on al-Qa`ida's self-inflicted wounds.

Zawahiri vs. Egypt

In 1995, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's terrorist infrastructure inside Egypt had been decimated. More than 1,000 of his operatives were wrapped up by Egyptian security services, his mentor abandoned him and the EIJ's incidental yet highly publicized killing of a schoolgirl soured much of the Egyptian population's attitude toward his operations. The Egyptian security collaboration with Pakistan became particularly troubling for al-Zawahiri beginning in April 1993, when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak passed Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif the names of 1,500 Egyptians living in Pakistan, 600 of whom were deemed terrorists.¹ Pakistan's new prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, followed suit by expelling a number of Egyptians who were working in Pakistan-based relief organizations.² The Egyptian-Pakistani security relationship came to a head for al-Zawahiri when the Pakistani justice minister visited Egypt to sign an extradition agreement between the two countries, ensuring that Egyptians apprehended in Pakistan could be more efficiently mainlined back to Cairo.

By 1995, Egyptian jihadists had declared an open war on Egypt around the world, including an assassination plot on President Mubarak during a trip to Ethiopia, a bombing of a Croatian police station in retaliation for the capture of a senior Egyptian jihadist spokesman, and the killing of an Egyptian trade attaché in Geneva for his suspected role in tracking down Egyptian jihadists in Europe. Al-Zawahiri's decision to bomb the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad fits squarely in line with these other attacks, which were fundamentally a reaction "to the Egyptian government's expansion of its campaign against Egyptian fundamentalists outside the country."³ For al-Zawahiri, "the rubble

of the embassy left a clear message to the Egyptian government," not the Pakistani government or people.⁴

1990s Bin Ladin: Positively Pakistan

Pakistan was not at the forefront of the jihadist leadership's mind in the mid-1990s. In Usama bin Ladin's well-known August 1996 and February 2008 *fatawa*, for example, the topic of Pakistan comes up just once in passing. In an undated interview with *Daily Ausaf* editor Hamid Mir, published on March 18, 1997, Bin Ladin briefly mentioned Pakistan's decision to send Pakistani military forces into Somalia in support of U.S. and UN peacekeeping operations

"Al-Qa`ida finds itself in a variety of predicaments with regard to the Pakistani government, its army and its jihadist population. Al-Qa`ida's headaches are U.S. opportunities."

there. Given the fact that the United States was "run by the Jews," Bin Ladin explained, any Pakistani cooperation with the United States, particularly in supporting military operations where Muslim soldiers could be killed, had to be rejected. Pakistan's decision, however, was not a deal-breaker for Bin Ladin at the time.⁵ To the contrary, in a May 1998 interview he suggested that a resurgence of Pakistani nationalism might help it achieve nuclear capabilities vis-à-vis India.⁶

Even in the early months of Musharraf's rule, jihadists were tolerably irritated with the Pakistani regime. In August 2000, for instance, Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, a trusted adviser to al-Zawahiri at the time, warned jihadists against committing terrorism in Pakistan because it had no critical Jewish and

Christian targets.⁷ Furthermore, its geopolitical importance, particularly its ready access to the Kashmiri front, made it better not to raise the Pakistani government's ire. "We don't burn the ground we pass through," Suri counseled.⁸ Before 9/11, Pakistan was simply not on the operational or ideological radar for al-Qa`ida.

Slipping into the Abyss

Bin Ladin had hoped that the 9/11 attacks would unite the Islamic world under the banner of al-Qa`ida as a way of dislodging the Zionist-Crusader "New World Order." When the U.S.-led coalition began its retaliation in Afghanistan, however, he did not see the kind of overwhelming resistance movement for which he had hoped. On September 24, 2001, Bin Ladin appealed to the Pakistanis, "we incite our Muslim brothers in Pakistan to deter with all their capabilities the American crusaders from invading Pakistan and Afghanistan."⁹ Four days later he said,

Pakistan is a great hope for the Islamic brotherhood. Its people are awakened, organized, and rich in the spirit of faith. They backed Afghanistan in its war against the Soviet Union and extended every help to the mujahidin and the Afghan people.¹⁰

Bin Ladin finally realized that the Musharraf-led government would be unwilling to actively or indirectly support Bin Ladin's call for mass mobilization against the Americans. By October 2001, Bin Ladin had enough. "Unfortunately," he explained, "the position taken by the Pakistani Government has made it a pillar in this ominous alliance...The brethren in Pakistan must take serious action."¹¹ Bin Ladin's call for unspecified "action" inside of

1 'Abd al-Rahim 'Ali, "Planners Behind Bombing of Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad Flee," *al-Ahali*, November 26, 1995.

2 Ibid.

3 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet Muhammad," published in serialized format in

al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 3, 2001.

4 Ibid.

5 Hamid Mir, "Interview with Usama Bin Ladin," *Daily Ausaf*, March 18, 1997.

6 Abu Shiraz, "May 1998 Interview With Bin Ladin," February 20, 1999.

7 Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *The Brigades of the Global Islamic Resistance: The Call - The Way - The Method*, recorded in August 2000.

8 Ibid.

9 "Text of Bin Ladin's Letter to the Pakistani People," al-Jazira, September 24, 2001.

10 "Exclusive Interview With Usama Bin Ladin on 11 September Attacks," Karachi Ummat, September 28, 2001.

11 Taysir Alluni, "Full Text of Interview Held with Al-Qa`ida Leader Usama Bin Ladin," al-Jazira, October 21, 2001.

Pakistan was a clear, final signal to Musharraf's regime to back away from the United States or face all out war. When the prospect of a large-scale U.S.-led ground invasion into Iraq became real, al-Qa`ida concluded that the United States was finally initiating its push to divide and conquer the Middle East. Bold action had to be taken. In February 2003, Bin Ladin demanded that his followers overthrow the Pakistani government to save the nation from impending American domination.¹² In April 2003, Bin Ladin pushed harder, pleading for suicide operations against Musharraf's regime.¹³

During the next few years, al-Qa`ida codified its grievance list against Musharraf, charging him with blindly supporting the U.S. military agenda in Afghanistan at the expense of the lives of mujahidin, intentionally reducing hostilities with India—an unrepentant enemy of Islam—disarming Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, recognizing the Jewish state of Israel, withdrawing its support for the legitimate jihadist resistance ongoing in Kashmir and sending the Pakistani military into the tribal areas to hunt down Taliban and al-Qa`ida forces.

Al-Qa`ida's Pakistani Predicament

Even though Musharraf is now out of power, the inertia of al-Qa`ida's anti-Pakistan policy has made it difficult for them to back-peddle without admitting strategic weakness. In al-Qa`ida propagandist Adam Gadahn's recent video dedicated to explaining al-Qa`ida's post-Musharraf policy, he dismissed the Pakistani government's public anger with recent U.S. raids into the tribal areas as nothing more than a "cynical public relations ploy," similar to those used by Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan or by the Saudi regime.¹⁴ Gadahn explained that he would be more apt to believe Pakistani rhetoric if "Pakistan had not continued to pledge its unwavering support" to U.S. military campaigns in Afghanistan, if the Pakistani Army was not "still engaged in a massive, bloody, and tyrannical anti-Islam campaign in Bajaur and Swat," if Pakistan denied

its territory and airspace to the U.S. military, or if the Pakistani government held Musharraf accountable for the crimes he committed against Islam during the past seven years.¹⁵

Gadahn's argument, likely developed in coordination with al-Zawahiri, can be viewed in two ways. First, it might be seen as an attempt to decouple their grievances with Musharraf to shore up the relevance of its anti-Pakistan argument with its jihadist constituency. This interpretation would be borne out by the incessant chatter of al-Qa`ida's talking heads in recent months trying to reiterate al-Qa`ida's old indictments against Pakistan in new, "Musharraf-less" language. The second more interesting interpretation is that al-Qa`ida is communicating with Pakistan and the United States about what kind of face-saving measures it needs to back off from its current anti-Pakistan trajectory. Gadahn's list of grievances may actually be a diplomatic communiqué coded in screed. His low-level status in the organization fits well with general diplomatic protocols about where such talks are initiated. Al-Qa`ida may, in fact, be trying to negotiate their way out of the corner.

The fact is that al-Qa`ida finds itself in a variety of predicaments with regard to the Pakistani government, its army and its jihadist population. Al-Qa`ida's headaches are U.S. opportunities. Nevertheless, a wounded animal can be extremely irrational, unpredictable and dangerous. It may be useful for the United States to find ways to decrease the domestic pressure on the ruling Pakistani regime while maintaining pressure on extremists. The less that Pakistan appears to be the handmaiden of the United States, the easier time it will have garnering the domestic support that it needs to effectively deal with its extremist problems itself.

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¹⁵ Ibid.

Violent Trends in Algeria Since 9/11

By Hanna Rogan

AFTER A LETHAL LATE summer in Algeria, with several high-casualty bombings and suicide operations, the month of Ramadan—often a preferred time for attacks by militant Islamists—turned out to be relatively peaceful. In fact, the main Islamist insurgent group in Algeria, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has so far been less active in 2008 than in recent years. This article presents the preliminary findings of a quantitative analysis of militant Islamist activism in Algeria from 2001 until October 2008. The study includes a sample of 1,580 incidents. It identifies a number of trends in militant Islamist activism in Algeria since 2001. For example, there has been an increase in high-casualty attacks, but also an increase in operations with no casualties, or failed operations. Non-lethal operations pursuing economic aims are on the rise, while bomb explosions have become the most common means of attack. There are now fewer operations targeting civilians, although this group remains vulnerable. Geographically, the area of operations has been significantly reduced inside Algeria, but there is emerging activity in neighboring countries. These findings will be examined in detail.

A Quantitative Study

The period of 2001 to October 2008 covers the activity of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which was established in 1998 by Hassan Hattab. In October 2006, under the leadership of Abdelmalek Droukhal, the GSPC officially joined al-Qa`ida, and in January 2007 the group adopted the name al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. This study suggests that certain, although not all, changes in operational patterns can be traced to and probably explained by this alliance between a mainly nationally-oriented Islamist group and Usama bin Ladin's global al-Qa`ida network.

The study is based on open source accounts of militant activity attributed to armed Islamist groups in Algeria and elsewhere in the region. The author has used the online archives of French and

¹² "Usama Bin Ladin's Message to Iraq, Urges Muslims To Overthrow Regime," al-Jazira, February 11, 2003.

¹³ "Usama Bin Ladin Urges Muslims To Launch 'Suicide Attacks' Against US," *Daily Ausaf*, April 9, 2003.

¹⁴ Adam Gadahn, "The Believer Isn't Stung From The Same Hole Twice," al-Sahab, October 4, 2008.

Arabic language Algerian newspapers, as well as collections of press reports compiled through private initiatives.¹ Although there are 1,580 incidents included in the study, it does not claim to present a comprehensive overview of all violent operations in Algeria in the selected period. It should also be noted that press reports sometimes present an incomplete narrative or even contradictory information about incidents. For instance, numbers of reported casualties tend to diverge, and in these cases this study has chosen to register the most modest estimates. Furthermore, many press reports do not adequately identify the perpetrators of attacks, particularly for the first few years in the sample when remnants of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) were still active. It should also be noted that the Algerian Security Services have been accused of being behind a number of massacres that took place in the name of militant Islamism in the 1990s and early 2000s. Despite certain elements of uncertainty, and even if not comprehensive, the study suggests certain trends in the use of violence by Islamist militants in Algeria during the period 2001-2008.²

Number of Incidents

At the beginning of the current millennium, Algeria emerged from a decade of violent civil war that claimed the lives of between 100,000 and 250,000 people. Compared to such numbers, the levels of violence and numbers of attacks that have taken place during the last eight years have been limited and relatively constant. Yet, certain variations must be considered significant. This study indicates that the decrease in incidents since the late 1990s was a trend that continued until 2004. With 324 reported incidents in 2001, the curve fell gradually to 141 in 2004. From 2005, the number of reported incidents rose slightly, reaching 203 incidents last year. The figures for 2008, however, do not seem consistent with this trend, with 106 incidents so far through September 30.

Explaining such numbers requires in-depth analysis of the armed group in question and the context in which it operates. In brief, possible explanatory factors include: the amnesty programs initiated by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika since 1999 that at least temporarily reduced the strength of the armed Islamists; the split between remnant groups of the GIA at the beginning of the 2000s and infighting over control of the Islamist scene; the ideological conviction of Hassan Hattab, who by 2001 led the largest militant Islamist group in Algeria, fervently opposing the civilian massacres of the GIA; the “new generation” that took over the leadership of the GSPC in 2004 and that sought alignment with the global jihad; and finally, the recent increased military offensive against militant Islamist activity in Algeria.

Number of Casualties

With fewer incidents during the last eight years, there has also been a general decrease in the number of casualties. There is no correlation between the two factors, however, and the efficiency rate regarding the number of killed per incident has declined. On the other hand, the number of wounded per incident has increased. Yet, this relationship does not tell the whole story. The material in the database suggests that the 2005-2008 period, as compared to 2001-2004, experienced both an elevated number of high-casualty incidents and an elevated number of incidents without casualties. There are several possible explanations. First, suicide operations that have been carried out during the last two years have inflicted large numbers of dead and wounded. The same goes for some of the bomb explosions, which have been increasingly popular since 2005. At the same time, a striking number of bomb explosions have been failed operations—in the view of the Islamists—resulting in only injuries, or no casualties at all. Reportedly, Algeria’s first incident of a cell phone remotely-detonated bomb explosion took place in 2005.³ While one would assume that such a technique would increase the precision of the attack and thereby increase casualties per incident, it seems that this has not been the overall result. Secondly, one cannot take for granted that the

sample is complete, and it should be assumed that the first four years also included operations with no casualties. It is likely that, at times with high numbers of violent incidents, the press does not prioritize reporting on “failed operations.”

Target Selection

The targets of the militant Islamists can be classified into two main categories, separating civilians from the combined security forces (including the military, police, gendarme, municipal guard and local militia).

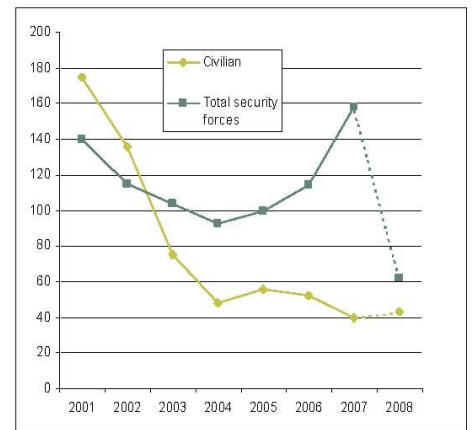


Figure 1. Targets: Civilian and Security Forces.

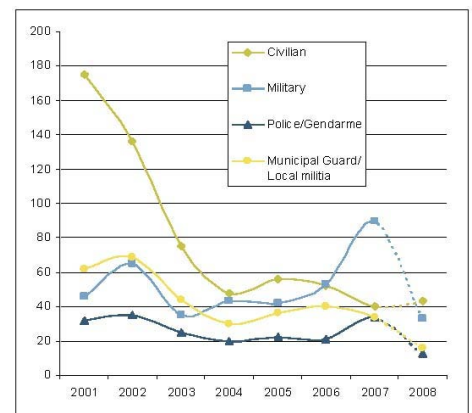


Figure 2. Targets: Civilian and Security Force Components.

Figure 1 indicates GSPC founder Hassan Hattab’s vow not to target civilians (as opposed to the GIA’s massacres of civilians) and to focus on the security forces coincided with a decrease in attacks on civilians. Since 2003, the number of incidents targeting civilians has indeed been lower than the number of incidents targeting security forces. Breaking down the numbers further in Figure 2, however, it is revealed that the number of incidents targeting civilians has remained higher than the number of incidents targeting the

1 This information was drawn from the online archives of *Liberté*, *El-Watan* and *El-Khabar*, in addition to press collections by Algeria-Watch and TROUBLES.

2 The last date for which figures were collected is September 30, 2008.

3 “Ould Abbès échappe à un attentat,” *Le Soir d’Algérie* Online, November 16, 2005.

military—with the notable exception of 2007. Moreover, the number of incidents targeting municipal guards and local militia (both form armed citizens' units that supplement police in rural areas) has overall been higher than the number of incidents targeting police and gendarme. This suggests that civilians and armed citizens' units, which are probably less well-equipped than the military and police, remain highly vulnerable groups.

Operational Variety

As shown in Figure 3, the main types of operations that the militant Islamists have conducted include ambush, fake roadblock, clash (often during military security operations), raid for economic purposes, abduction (also often with economic aim), bomb explosion and suicide operation, and what has been labeled “killing.” The “killing” category includes assassination, most commonly by firearm or knife, but also other operations in which people are reported dead without further details. It is important to note that one incident may include several of the above-mentioned techniques.⁴ In such cases, both techniques have been registered in the database under one incident, in order to document the widest operational capacity of the militant Islamists.

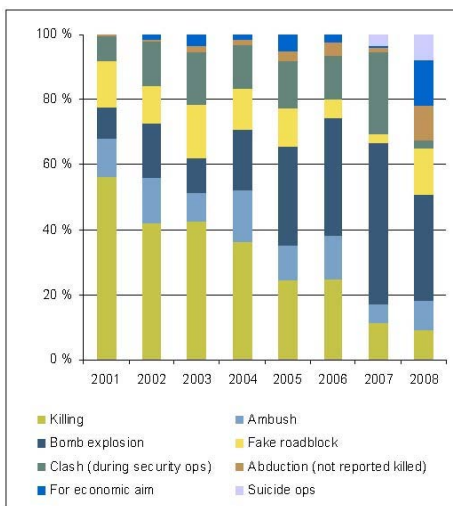


Figure 3. Operational Variety.

For some types of operations there is little variation over time, yet four trends appear to be significant. First, the number of “killings” has decreased noticeably. This may be due to the halt in

4 For instance, one incident may combine ambush and bomb explosion, or fake roadblock and abduction.

collective massacres that were common around the turn of the millennium and to the adoption of more sophisticated means of attack. This tendency is possibly linked to the second trend, the manifest increase in the use of bomb explosions. From 2005 onward, this technique was the single most used in operations by militant Islamists in Algeria. Third, suicide operations emerged as a new tactic in Algeria in 2007. There has been an increase in the use of suicide operations in 2008. This operational technique has been attributed to the GSPC's merger with al-Qa`ida in late 2006. Likewise, the use of bomb explosions in general has been linked to the practices of al-Qa`ida in Iraq, a front for which the GSPC/AQIM has recruited heavily.⁵ Fourth, and perhaps more interestingly, there has been an increase in the reporting of violent incidents pursuing economic objectives in 2008. Such operations include raids on villages, attacks on commercial institutions, fake roadblocks with robberies of motorists, and abductions (where those abducted are not reported killed). Such incidents coincide with press reports about the difficult financial and material situation of AQIM, and may indeed support the media's claim about poor economic conditions for Algeria's militants.⁶ In this regard, it is also worth noting that the GSPC was known to finance itself through illegal businesses, such as the smuggling of drugs, cigarettes and weapons across the Sahara. The joining of the GSPC with al-Qa`ida, however, allegedly created a split between the northern cells, which supported the alliance, and the southern cells which opposed it, and thus possibly caused a halt in financial support from the Sahara region.

Geographical Dispersion

One of the clearest trends in militant Islamist activity in Algeria during the last eight years is less geographic dispersion. In 2001, violent operations were reported in 36 out of 48 wilayat (provinces). In 2008, there have been

5 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qaida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008). Also see “Ces bombes humaines qui reviennent d'Irak,” *L'Expression*, August 21, 2008.

6 “Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb...Requests Money and Men,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 10, 2008.

incidents in only 18 wilayat. Overall, as shown in Figure 4, the main region of activity is the populated north, comprising cities, mountains and plains. The vast south has seen few incidents on the whole. The wilaya of Algiers, including the capital Algiers, also has relatively few reported incidents overall. In addition to a reduced area of operation during the period under study, one can observe a distinction between the northeast (NE) and northwest (NW) of the country. In 2001, there was an approximate 50/50 ratio of operations in the NE and NW. From 2003 onward, more than 60% of total incidents happened in the NE. Since 2006, around 80% of militant activity has taken place in the NE.

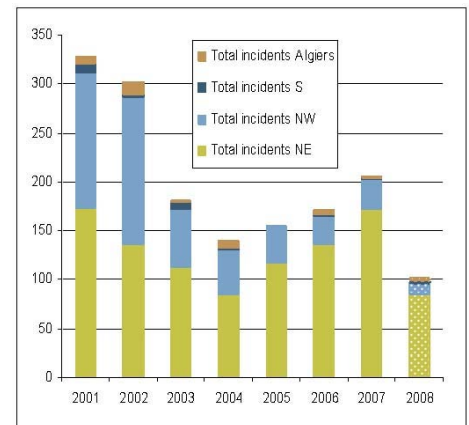


Figure 4. Geographical Dispersion.

Within the northeastern region, one area stands out with disproportionately high activity. The area has been nicknamed the “triangle of death” and is composed of the three wilayat of Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdes and Bouira. Interestingly, these three wilayat also form Zone 2 of AQIM, which essentially constitutes the central command of the group. The area has traditionally been a stronghold of insurgents in Algeria, mostly due to its mountains and maquis, which make it difficult for the security forces to access. The recent 2008 development, in which the so-called “triangle of death” represents approximately 70% (2008) of all militant Islamist activity in Algeria, suggests that AQIM has been forced into one of its traditional strongholds and is seriously weakened in other areas. The number of incidents carried out outside Algeria is very low.⁷ The database includes none before 2004, and only

7 Operations abroad that were registered in the database are only ones claimed by the GSPC/AQIM.

slightly more than a handful altogether, including the three reported so far this year. Although it may be too early to speak of a trend, the reported incidents may indicate ambitions to extend AQIM's area of operations to include the Maghreb region and more specifically Mauritania, Mali and Tunisia.

Conclusion

There has been little variation in the timing of attacks, and only the months of April, June and October (2001-2007) stand out by being a subtle two percentage points higher than average activity. As for October, it should be noted that it coincided partly with Ramadan from 2003-2007. Yet during this year's Ramadan, Algeria did not experience heightened militant Islamist activity. Overall, 2008 has experienced slightly less violence by militant Islamists than previous years. Nevertheless, there is a steady increase in activities that include new operational techniques, such as suicide operations and large-scale bomb explosions, which target indiscriminately and may inflict high casualties. The increase in such operations, well known from Iraq and Afghanistan, can probably be explained as an effect of the GSPC's alliance with al-Qa'ida. Likewise, the emerging pattern of militant activism in the Maghreb region may be attributed to this global alliance. The geographical area of activity within Algeria, however, has been drastically reduced over the years, possibly a sign of a weakened movement.⁸

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⁸ The findings presented here are preliminary conclusions based on a collection of press reports about militant Islamist activity in Algeria. This study points out some tendencies and trends, but the material in the database is suitable for further analysis. Likewise, the study has not provided any in-depth examination of the reasons for certain developments, which also should be undertaken in the future.

Interview with a Former Terrorist: Nasir Abbas' Deradicalization Work in Indonesia

By Nick O'Brien

A PROBLEM WITH countries that suffer terrorism is that they often do not understand the enemy and therefore lack the framework to counter the terrorist threat. Understanding how and why people are radicalized to the extent that they want to kill others and sometimes themselves is fundamental to countering terrorism. Once the radicalization issue is understood, steps can be taken to introduce deradicalization and counter-radicalization strategies and policies.

The best way to understand the radicalization process is to question those who have been radicalized themselves to the point of turning to violence. This article will examine the case of Nasir Abbas, a former senior member of the Southeast Asian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiya (JI) who now works with the Indonesian government in their deradicalization program. In February 2008, Abbas agreed to be interviewed on film about radicalization and deradicalization for Charles Sturt University's postgraduate distance education program. During the interview, Abbas was accompanied by a senior Indonesian police officer, and Abbas had to be careful not to incriminate himself since he has not been charged with any terrorism offenses. The Indonesian police officer was himself an expert in their deradicalization program, having been instrumental in introducing a strategy following the recent Muslim-Christian clashes in Poso. He also agreed to be interviewed. What was learned from the two interviews is described in detail below.

Before Afghanistan: Nasir Abbas' Upbringing

JI was organizationally split into four "mantiqis" under a regional consultative council, with each mantiqi covering a different region in Southeast Asia.¹

¹ Mantiqi I covered Singapore and Malaysia; Mantiqi II was based in Indonesia; Mantiqi III's area was Sabah, Sulawesi and the southern Philippines; Mantiqi IV covered Australia. For more, see "The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism," Singapore Government

Nasir Abbas became the head of Jemaah Islamiya's Mantiqi III in April 2001.² In 2003, Abbas was arrested by the Indonesian police and prosecuted for immigration offenses. He agreed to work for the police in their deradicalization program, and in 2004 he identified Abu Bakar Bashir as the head of JI in an Indonesian court of law.³

Nasir Abbas was born on May 6, 1969 in Singapore. Early on, he and his parents moved to Malaysia, where he earned citizenship. He described his upbringing as normal and not very Islamic; his mother did not wear a headscarf nor was his father an activist. He stated that he did not even pray five times a day as required and was not a good Muslim. In 1983-84, he began reading about the Soviet-Afghan war in newspapers and magazines. It was at this time he became aware of the mujahidin. During the interview, he described the mujahidin as "holy warriors" having "holy status" and fighting for Islamic rights and defending Islam. He said that at this time his "dream" was to go to Afghanistan.

Abbas said that he was a poor student and not good at school; therefore, at age 16 he asked his father if he could drop out. His father initially refused, but Abbas found a school attached to a mosque that ran a course in translating Arabic and taught students about the Qur'an. Abbas persuaded his father that he should attend the school. He explained that the school was not radical and that he would not learn about killing or fighting—just Arabic and the Qur'an. Some Indonesians, however, started preaching at the school. Abbas identified three of the preachers as Abu Bakar Bashir, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Jibril, all of whom would become prominent members of Jemaah Islamiya. Abbas stated that they did not speak about fighting, but talked about Islam and the obligations of Muslims. Some of the preachers sold the students books about Afghanistan and jihad. Abbas was impressed by the Indonesian teachers because they were wise and could speak Arabic.

White Paper, January 2003, p. 10.

² Personal interview, Nasir Abbas, February 25, 2008.

³ "Ex-JI Member Names Bashir as Leader," *The Age*, May 25, 2004.

In 1987, one of the visiting preachers approached Abbas' teacher and asked him to speak to Abbas about going to Afghanistan. By this time Abbas was a valued resource at the school since he had spent two and a half years there and had become an assistant teacher. His teacher did not pass the message on to Abbas and consequently one day he was asked by a visiting preacher whether his teacher had spoken to him about Afghanistan. When Abbas questioned his teacher, the two of them prayed together, had lunch and then his teacher spoke to him "with heavy heart" about going to Afghanistan. His teacher made one proviso before allowing the young Abbas to leave: he had to receive permission from his parents. Abbas stated that he knew his mother would not allow him to go, so he asked his father who agreed to him leaving because he considered the fighting in Afghanistan an "Islamic struggle."

Abbas thought that this was a "dream come true" and said that he was curious about the mujahidin and jihad. He understood that the conflict was about repelling the Russian invaders and helping the Afghans fight for their homeland. He did not see anything wrong about the fighting.⁴

To Afghanistan and Back

In 1987, Abbas went to Afghanistan in a group of 15 comprising 13 Indonesians and two Malaysians. On arrival, he was sent to a military academy. He was frustrated at being told that he had to spend three years at the academy, the inference being that he would have preferred to get involved in the fighting immediately. Yet, Abbas stayed the course. He said that life in the academy was disciplined and included saluting senior officers and flags and wearing a military style uniform. His instructors were from the Afghan military, most of whom had been trained at the military academy in India. As well as learning about Islam and jihad, Abbas was taught about weaponry, navigation, leadership, physical training, self-defense and marching. Each year Abbas

4 During this point in the interview, Abbas was asked whether he thought Muslims looked at the situation in Iraq in the same way. He replied that Muslims had an obligation to fight in Iraq but that there was a difference between fighting troops and killing civilians. His view was that it was "sinful" to kill civilians.

was granted a month and a half leave, and it was during these times that he went to the battlefield. During these periods, he engaged in various military activities, including clearing minefields. He was experienced in many aspects of warfare, from small-arms to guided missiles. Abbas said that following his training period he became a trainer at the academy.

After six years in Afghanistan, Abbas returned to Southeast Asia where he joined Darul Islam (DI) and later Jemaah Islamiya.⁵ He subsequently established a "training camp" in the Philippines. Abbas explained that the aims of DI

"JI used a mixture of Islamic preaching, education, and social and economic outreach to radicalize supporters."

and JI were different, since DI wanted to form an Islamic state in Indonesia, whereas JI was pursuing a wider agenda, witnessed by its mantiqi structure. Abbas alleged that the radicalization of Muslims started in earnest when the terrorist operative Hambali became a "representative for JI," a comment supported by the section on Hambali in the 9/11 Commission Report.⁶ In 1997, Hambali started to send JI personnel to a camp established by Usama bin Ladin in Kandahar.

Abbas stated that it was about this time that Bin Ladin was urging revenge against the Americans on "both military and non-military" targets.⁷ Abbas said that the effect of Bin Ladin's message was

5 Rohaiza Ahmad Asi asserts that many members of Darul Islam were recruited into Jemaah Islamiya. For more, see Rohaiza Ahmad Asi, "Darul Islam: A Fertile Ground for Jemmah Islamiyah's Recruitment," in Rohaiza Ahmad Asi, *Fighting Terrorism: Preventing the Radicalisation of Youth in a Secular and Globalised World* (Singapore: Taman Bacaan Pemuda Melayu Singapura, 2007), p. 114.

6 *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), pp. 150-152.

7 A useful abbreviated version of this declaration is published in Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 23-30.

that Hambali carried out the bombing of the Philippine ambassador's residence in Jakarta on August 1, 2000. Abbas also said that a cache of "explosives" and "armalites" that were seized in General Santos City, Philippines, were destined for Singapore.⁸ According to Abbas, Bin Ladin's message was counter to what he believed, which was that the killing of civilians was wrong. Abbas claimed, however, that at the time he could not protest as he was at a "low level in the organization." Abbas also stated that he believed the first Bali bomb was "sinful." He asserted that when he became head of Mantiqi III in April 2001, he tried to protect his men against the influence of Hambali.

Abbas offered some comments about JI's method of radicalizing supporters, explaining that it was achieved through activities other than military means. JI used a mixture of Islamic preaching, education, and social and economic outreach to radicalize supporters. This in itself is interesting as it appears that JI leaders may have been attempting to copy similar successful strategies employed by other groups such as Lebanese Hizb Allah, which is known for its delivery of social and other public services.⁹ Abbas was asked how people become so radicalized that they would be willing to kill themselves in a suicide attack. He answered that it was because of "misfaith," stating that "heaven is a gift; it's not our goal." He believed that some Muslims were preaching that heaven was a goal and that becoming a suicide attacker would make one a *shahid* (martyr) and go straight to heaven.

Turning Abbas into an Asset

After Abbas' arrest, the Indonesian police were able to convince him to work in their deradicalization program. Abbas was treated with respect when he was arrested and spent his first night in captivity wondering why God did not let him die. In his own words,

I tried to make myself to be killed, I mean not to kill myself, but make people to kill me because I fight against the police. When I got

8 This seizure was mentioned in a speech on February 7, 2002 by the Philippine president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

9 J.P. Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 80.

arrested, I had Kung Fu fighting with the police, me one against six policemen because I try to make them to kill me or to shoot at me but they did not shoot at me with one bullet. So I am thinking, all night long I am not saying any words I am just saying God forgive me, God forgive me, God forgive me. They are asking me 'what is your name?' I just say God forgive me, 'who are you where is your origin?' God forgive me, I just only say that. All night long because I don't want to answer the police questions before I am answering my own questions. My own question is, the first question is, why God not let me die? Why God not let them to shoot at me? I tried, I tried, they are pointing the gun against me, maybe six guns. In the police training when you are being asked to stop, don't move, OK, so once you move, one step you move, they are allowed to kill you, or to shoot at you. I am not only move one step but I am rushing I am going forward but they not kill me so this is a big question, why God not let me die? I tried, I tried to make them to kill me, so this is something, something mysterious that I do not know but God knows, he knows.

Although the above is only the account of one man, there are some interesting indicators as to what causes a person to become radicalized to the extent that they will use violence, and also what can assist to deradicalize. In Abbas' case, he went to fight in Afghanistan in response to the Soviet-Afghan war. His goal was to join the mujahidin in defending Muslim lands. Similar to the case of London bomber Shehzad Tanweer, who mentioned Iraq and Afghanistan in his video will as being the reason for his attack, Abbas was driven by foreign policy grievances.¹⁰

What is also of note are the circumstances of Abbas' arrest. The fact that Indonesian police treated him well

was certainly a factor that led him to assist their deradicalization program, although it must be acknowledged that not being charged with a terrorist offense may have also played a role. The Indonesian police officer who was present during the interview—from this point referred to as "K"—spoke about the Indonesian National Police's (INP) deradicalization program. K said that the INP had realized that they had been responding to terrorist incidents in a "fire-brigade" style and that they needed to change mindsets to contain terrorist violence. He believed that there was no single reason for people joining terrorist groups, commenting that some joined because they believed jihad to be a spiritual obligation. He identified both Abbas and Imam Samudra, however, as people who had been initially motivated by "fun and adventure." K believed it was important to teach police officers to treat Islamists well and that torture would only make people more aggressive when released.

The Indonesian Solution

According to K, one test case of a solution to Islamist violence occurred in Poso, which was plagued by Christian-Muslim violence. The Indonesian solution was identified as multifaceted but basically had two elements: the hard and soft approach. The hard approach was to identify, arrest and prosecute those responsible for terrorist acts. The soft approach involved changing mindsets using a number of different strategies. The INP worked with local people and local governments to identify Islamist preachers and to "encourage local people to kick those people out of Poso." They also identified two Islamic boarding schools that were run by JI. They encouraged the school foundations to initially close the schools, and to replace the Islamist teachers with others who held moderate views. Modern and large Islamic boarding schools were also constructed with \$2.5 million funding from the central government. Compensation was given to widows who had lost their husbands in the conflicts, and the local government offered scholarships to the children of the widows. Work opportunities were also provided in consultation with non-governmental organizations. K believed that it was especially important to ensure that military-trained civilians were given work opportunities. He

commented that the majority of people in Poso—both Christians and Muslims—were "fed up with fighting" and that "dialogue was really important."

For the hard approach, the INP established a police unit in 2005 specifically to deal with the Poso situation. After one year, they had arrested 64 individuals and seized 135 weapons, more than 11,000 rounds of ammunition, 168 homemade bombs and 414 detonators as well as miscellaneous bomb making materials. They had also solved 46 cases connected with the conflict. As a result, between January 2007 and the February 2008 interview there were no terrorist attacks in either Poso or Central Sulawesi.

Although there are a number of weaknesses in Indonesia's deradicalization program—discussed in detail by Dr. Kirsten Schulze¹¹—the fact remains that Indonesia is one of the few countries to have initiated a robust program that has had some success. It is important for Western governments to study Indonesia's program more closely, as its expansion could help further reduce the risk of terrorist violence in Southeast Asia.

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¹⁰ "London Bomber Video: 'Just the Beginning,'" CNN, July 7, 2006. This was also the case in the 2006 UK plot to blow up aircraft. Police found six video wills and three of these mentioned the West's presence in Muslim lands. Also see "Suicide Videos: What They Said," BBC, April 4, 2008.

¹¹ Kirsten E. Schulze, "Indonesia's Approach to Jihadist Deradicalization," *CTC Sentinel* 1:8 (2008).

Shi`a Leaders Disagree on Integration of Sons of Iraq into Army

By Reidar Visser

ONE OF THE MOST acute issues in the post-surge debate in Iraq concerns the integration of the Awakening Councils/Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi Army. There is growing fear that the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki will approach this issue much in the way it has dealt with other important questions relating to national reconciliation: by sticking to its own agenda of continued sectarian dominance instead of exploiting the opportunity to reduce sectarian tensions by offering specific and real concessions. This article will examine al-Maliki's and other Shi`a groups' stance on the integration process of Sunni armed groups, in addition to examining growing political differences between al-Maliki and the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI).

Maliki Takes Conservative Approach

In taking a conservative approach to integrating the Sunni-dominated Sons of Iraq into the army, al-Maliki can rely on support from at least some of the Shi`a parties that participate in his government. ISCI, in particular, has a history of skepticism when it comes to this issue. While it did pay its respect to the martyrs of the Anbar Awakening back in 2007 (and at one point even tried to establish a rather strained genealogy back to its own proposal of creating "popular committees" to support the state back in 2006), the suspicion that the *sabwa* (awakening) councils could become a threat to the dominance of the al-Maliki government was evident early on. For example, in an interview with the al-Furat television station in December 2007, the head of ISCI, `Abd al-`Aziz al-Hakim, mentioned the "mistakes of the multinational forces in arming certain tribal councils without the knowledge of the government."¹ Similarly, as early as November 2007, Ammar al-Hakim, in an interview with al-Alam, the Arabophone Iranian satellite channel, portrayed the *sabwa* as a somewhat suspect phenomenon, describing it as "70,000 armed men in Baghdad outside

1 Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, press release, December 27, 2007.

the government's control and under the title of al-Sahwa," and stressed the government's lack of knowledge about them and their "loyalties."² This latter theme was developed more fully in another television interview in January 2008:

Questions remain concerning the identity of the members of the *sabwa*. Are they decent and national in orientation? Are they from all the colors present in their areas? Are they from among the people of the area, or have they been recruited from a different area?³

In fact, to the extent that ISCI has been interested in the Awakenings, it has emphasized their role in maintaining order at the very local and often peripheral level where state forces are not present. Conversely, in the question

"Fadila's approach has differed from that of the ISCI in that it has included the *sahwa* in a wider national vision of an integrated security force."

of integration at the national level, the skepticism of the al-Hakims has been echoed, and the reluctance to see them become part of (or "infiltrate") the Iraqi security forces has been pronounced. In August 2008, ISCI preacher Jalal al-Din al-Saghir reportedly went as far as saying that "the state cannot accept the Awakening...their days are numbered."⁴

Fadila Party Takes Anti-Sectarian Attitude

It is noteworthy, however, that not all Shi`a parties support al-Maliki's hard line on this issue. The Fadila Party, in particular, has been markedly more positive toward the tribes as a potential instrument of national integration. In January 2008, their spiritual leader,

2 Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, press release, November 30, 2007.

3 Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, press release, January 13, 2008.

4 Richard Opiel, "Iraq Takes Aim at US-Tied Sunni Groups' Leaders," *New York Times*, August 22, 2008.

Muhammad al-Yaqubi, emphasized the vital role of the tribes, and highlighted the role of the *sabwa* in bringing an end to terrorism. He also envisaged a tribal awakening and "support councils" for the state in the "central and southern" areas of Iraq, code for the Shi`a majority areas south of Baghdad.⁵ Later, he criticized the Iraqi government for not providing sufficient and regular pay for the *sabwa*.⁶ The generally positive approach to the *sabwa* among the Fadila leadership has been followed up at the local level as well, with meetings between the tribal committees of the local branches of the Fadila Party and the local *sabwa* leadership, in places such as Mada'in near Baghdad.⁷ Finally, Fadila's approach has differed from that of the ISCI in that it has included the *Sahwa* in a wider national vision of an integrated security force: "Our proposal to join the *sabwa* to the Iraqi security forces will lead to stabilizing the situation in a bigger way...the person who belongs to the *sabwa* will work for all of Iraq and not for his area only."⁸

The Fadila Party is often dismissed in the Western press as the faction that broke away from the al-Maliki government when it was not awarded the oil ministry, and whose only remaining interest is to hold on to the governorate position in oil-rich Basra. This viewpoint, however, overlooks the many positive initiatives by the party in the area of national reconciliation, where it repeatedly has proven itself more prepared to work across sectarian lines than the Shi`a parties that currently enjoy Washington's attention, Daawa and ISCI. Thus, with regard to its stance on the *sabwa*, Fadila has once more taken a position that resembles the anti-sectarian attitude also seen in its intervention in the heated federalism debate in Iraq.⁹

Fadila stands out among the Shi`a Islamist parties since it generally takes a more pragmatic and realistic attitude

5 Muhammad al-Yaqubi, *bayan*, January 9, 2008.

6 Fadila Party, press release, February 17, 2008.

7 Activities report of the Rusafa branch of the Fadila Party, March 2008.

8 Fadila Party, press release, January 15, 2008.

9 Reidar Visser, "Suffering, Oil, and Ideals of Coexistence: Non-Sectarian Federal Trends in the Far South of Iraq," November 2007, available at www.historiae.org/south.asp.

to Iraq's Ba`athist past, partially due to the fact that many of its members held relatively high positions inside Iraq before 2003. This is in contrast to the exiles in organizations such as ISCI, which in the 1990s in Iran developed a highly purist attitude to the question of Ba`ath membership.

Rift Develops Between al-Maliki and ISCI

During the summer of 2008, the struggle over the *sabwa* acquired an additional dimension beyond the Fadila/ISCI dichotomy. Until this time, there had been skepticism inside the al-Maliki government toward any extension of the *sabwa* concept south of Baghdad, where it might pose a challenge to the hegemony of the ISCI and the Badr forces, whether inside or outside the Iraqi security forces.¹⁰ During the course of "the surge," however, al-Maliki gradually extended his control inside the Iraqi security forces quite dramatically, and increasingly came to see himself as a Shi`a leader speaking an Iraqi nationalist and centralist language that did not resonate with the ISCI's vision of decentralization. As a result, tension between al-Maliki and the ISCI grew perceptibly during the first months after the security sweeps in Basra and Amara in early 2008.

This eventually turned into a kind of tribal awakening of al-Maliki's own through the so-called "support councils," which were gradually rolled out in Iraq in 2008, mostly in Shi`a-dominated areas south of Baghdad but also to some extent elsewhere. The exact objective of these new councils remains unclear. ISCI has accused al-Maliki of creating these Shi`a groups for political purposes, while one of its proponents, Muhammad Abbas al-Uraybi, the minister of state charged with organizing them, in November 2008 characterized the new council in Diwaniyya as

a national project declared by the prime minister building on the success of the tribal support councils around Baghdad and in the west of Iraq...they should support national reconciliation, establish an atmosphere of dialogue and solve disputes in the central and

southern parts of Iraq.¹¹

While the government's explanation of the exact mission of the new councils thus remains somewhat Delphic, it is interesting that Nuri al-Maliki finally seems to turn to the tribes in the south as a potential source of political support. This kind of "awakening" south of Baghdad is something which for a long time did not make it onto the Iraqi agenda, primarily because the United States yielded to pressure from ISCI, whose leaders were eager to avoid the emergence of a Shi`a tribal force that could challenge its own hegemony in the Iraqi security forces. Still, the narrow structure of al-Maliki's new electoral coalition suggests that rather than constituting a project of true national reconciliation, the Iraqi premier's tribal maneuvers are first and foremost aimed at fishing for votes in the next provincial elections (which his government has, for a long time, tried to postpone and obstruct).¹² His new rivals in ISCI are already busy visiting the tribes of the Albu Muhammad, the very tribe of the minister of state that directs al-Maliki's scheme.¹³ If the new scheme by al-Maliki is a mere attempt at winning voters for the next elections, more fundamental issues—such as integrating the Sons of Iraq and winning over the anti-Iranian Shi`a tribes in the south that approve of neither al-Hakim nor al-Maliki—are likely to remain unresolved.

*Dr. Reidar Visser is a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and editor of the Iraq-focused website www.historiae.org. His publications on Iraq include the books *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* and, edited with Gareth Stansfield, *An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?**

¹¹ *Aswat al-Iraq*, November 10, 2008.

¹² For the relationship to the Daawa-ISCI struggle in the upcoming provincial elections, see Reidar Visser, "The Map of Electoral Coalitions South of Baghdad Is Taking Shape," October 31, 2008, available at www.historiae.org/coalitions.asp.

¹³ Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, press release, November 13, 2008.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

October 16, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban gunmen fired on a passenger bus and seized control of another in Kandahar Province. During the incident, Taliban fighters killed at least 25 of the civilian passengers and took a number of hostages. The Taliban, however, claim that those killed were Afghan soldiers. – *Reuters, October 19; AP, October 19*

October 16, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): An Afghan policeman threw a grenade and opened fire at a U.S. military patrol in Paktika Province, killing one U.S. soldier. – *Minneapolis Star Tribune, October 16*

October 16, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. missile strike killed an alleged foreign militant in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. On October 30, a senior European counter-terrorism official identified the dead militant as Khalid Habib, a veteran Egyptian jihadist working in al-Qa`ida. – *AP, October 16; Los Angeles Times, October 31*

October 16, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a police station in Mingora of Swat District in the North-West Frontier Province. Four security officers were killed in the blast. – *AP, October 16*

October 16, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The BBC reported that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) spokesman Maulvi Omar said the TTP was "willing to negotiate with the government without any conditions" and "also willing to lay down our arms, once the military ceases operations against us." Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper, however, claimed that Omar told one of their journalists on October 15 that "a threat [U.S.-led forces] is looming large on our western borders and, therefore, Taliban can't disarm themselves unless the occupation forces leave Afghanistan." – *UPI, October 16; Dawn, October 16*

October 16, 2008 (MOROCCO): The trial of accused al-Qa`ida insurgent Abdul Kader Belliraj began in Morocco. According to UPI, "Belliraj was arrested in February along with 32 other people and has been accused of planning terror attacks in Morocco in an attempt to

¹⁰ Michael Gordon, "The Last Battle," *New York Times*, August 3, 2008.

overthrow the government.” Belliraj claims that he was working for the Belgian government. – *UPI, October 17*

October 17, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani fighter jets destroyed a training camp for Taliban-linked militants in Swat District of the North-West Frontier Province. During the attack, security officials claimed 60 pro-Taliban fighters were killed. – *AFP, October 17*

October 18, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber exploded—possibly after receiving gunfire from an Iraqi police officer—at a checkpoint in Dhuluiyya, Salah al-Din Province. There did not appear to be any casualties, other than the death of the bomber. – *CNN, October 18; AFP, October 18*

October 18, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Suspected Abu Sayyaf Group gunmen attempted to kill a Catholic priest in Basilan in the southern Philippines, although the priest’s bodyguards were able to repel the attackers. The assailants were able to inflict a number of injuries. – *AFP, October 18*

October 19, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and international soldiers killed 34 Taliban militants during an operation south of Lashkar Gah in Helmand Province. – *AP, October 20*

October 19, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told a news conference that the West should not engage in negotiations or talks with the Taliban. Mottaki warned, “We advise them to think about the consequences of the talks [with the Taliban] which are taking place in the region and in Europe and avoid being bitten in the same spot twice.” – *AFP, October 19*

October 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban gunmen shot to death a Christian aid worker as she walked to work in western Kabul. The aid worker, Gayle Williams, was a dual South African-British national, and she primarily worked with handicapped Afghans. A Taliban spokesman charged that Williams “came to Afghanistan to teach Christianity to the people of Afghanistan.” – *AP, October 20*

October 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Suspected Taliban militants killed five

policemen, including a district police chief, in Faryab Province. – *AP, October 20*

October 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked German soldiers in Kunduz Province, killing two of them in addition to five Afghan children. – *AFP, October 20*

October 21, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters told mobile phone operators to shut down their networks during the day in Ghazni Province, alleging that signals from their towers help government and international troops track their movements. “We have informed mobile companies operating in Ghazni to turn off their signals during the daytime now as it endangers the lives of our fighters,” a Taliban spokesman said. “We want the companies to cut off their signal for 10 days from now.” – *Reuters, October 21*

October 21, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A long gunfight between Taliban-linked fighters and paramilitary soldiers broke out in the Kabal area of Swat District in the North-West Frontier Province. The incident resulted in the deaths of at least 15 paramilitary soldiers and five Taliban-linked fighters. – *Reuters, October 22*

October 21, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): A Philippine court extended a freeze on the assets of Hilarion Santos, the alleged leader of the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM). Santos was arrested three years ago and is on trial for kidnapping and rebellion. The freeze, which makes it illegal to sell off any properties owned by Santos, will be in effect until January 25, 2009. The RSM spun off from the Abu Sayyaf Group, and is primarily composed of Filipino Christians who converted to Islam. – *AFP, October 21*

October 21, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): According to a statement made by Philippine Colonel Eddie Maningding, Jemaah Islamiya operatives are using Mindanao as a “as training and exposure area” for recruits. He also alleged these operatives are “supporting some rogue MILF [Moro Islamic Liberation Front] elements for extortion and other criminal activities. Recently, they are eluding government counter-terrorist operations and co-opting with local radicals for sanctuary and propagation of their extremist beliefs.” Maningding

claimed that 58 foreign terrorists were operating in the Philippines and were constantly on the run from government troops. “The 30 JI members and 28 other foreign terrorists are now on the run due to extensive government pressure,” he said. – *GMA News.tv, October 21*

October 21, 2008 (SAUDI ARABIA): The Saudi media reported that the government has indicted 991 suspected al-Qa`ida militants for carrying out 30 attacks since 2003. According to Reuters, some of the accused include clerics who had publicly supported al-Qa`ida’s violent campaign in the country. Al-Arabiya reported that most of the suspects are Saudi nationals. – *Reuters, October 21*

October 21, 2008 (SAUDI ARABIA): Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal announced that, in September, his country hosted talks between Afghan officials and the Taliban in Mecca. According to press reports, one of the Taliban representatives was Abdul Salam Zaeef, the former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan. – *Washington Post, October 22*

October 22, 2008 (IRAQ): The head of the al-Qa`ida-linked Islamic State of Iraq, Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, confirmed the death of Abu Qaswarah, who was killed by U.S. forces on October 5 in Mosul, Ninawa Province. Abu Qaswarah has been identified as the second-in-command of al-Qa`ida in Iraq. Al-Baghdadi said that the Moroccan native Abu Qaswarah was a “unique, beloved and close knight whose departure is painful and hard.” – *AP, October 22; Reuters, October 15; TimesOnline, October 16*

October 22, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb exploded and killed three U.S.-led coalition soldiers in western Afghanistan. The exact location of the incident was not reported. – *AP, October 23*

October 22, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani parliament unanimously passed a resolution calling for dialogue with extremist groups and an end to military action. According to the resolution, “Dialogue must now be the highest priority, as a principal instrument of conflict management and resolution. The military will be replaced as early as possible by civilian law enforcement agencies.” The British

Guardian newspaper, however, reported that “the document is not binding on the government even though it was party to it. The army remains the ultimate arbiter of security policy.” – *Guardian*, October 24

October 23, 2008 (GLOBAL): 21-year-old German citizen and convert to Islam Eric Breininger appeared in a new online video stating, “I am in Afghanistan and, personally, do not plan to carry out an attack on Germany.” On September 25, German federal prosecutors issued a public alert seeking the whereabouts of Breininger, who they thought had slipped back into Germany after attending a terrorist training camp in Pakistan. The web video was Breininger’s response to the German alert. He further stated, “We declare war on any country that fights against Muslims at the side of the United States. However, the Germans are so blinded by the press that the people apparently demanded even more soldiers and intelligence services, which logically increase the risk of attacks on German territory.” – *ABC News*, October 23

October 23, 2008 (GERMANY): The head of Germany’s Federal Intelligence Service, Ernst Uhrlau, warned that al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which is based in North Africa, could pose a threat to Western Europe. According to Ernst, out of al-Qa`ida’s various “franchises,” AQIM is “developing the most dynamically.” Uhrlau also identified the internet as a prime “vehicle for preparations” for terrorists who hope to attack Europe. – *The Canadian Press*, October 23

October 23, 2008 (AUSTRALIA): An Australian jury found 35-year-old Muslim convert Joseph Thomas not guilty of receiving funds from al-Qa`ida. Thomas was, however, convicted on a lesser charge of possessing a falsified passport; that charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine. Thomas, often referred to as “Jihad Jack,” was arrested after leaving Afghanistan where he had spent time in an al-Qa`ida training camp and had personally met Usama bin Ladin. Thomas explained that he went to Afghanistan in 2001 with the intention of fighting with the Taliban, but claimed to have mistakenly ended up at a training camp for al-Qa`ida. This marked Thomas’ second trial on the charges. He was released on

bail as he awaits his sentencing. – *AP*, October 22

October 23, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber rammed his vehicle into the convoy of Iraq’s labor minister in downtown Baghdad, killing at least 11 people. The minister, Mahmud Jawad al-Radi, escaped injury. – *AFP*, October 23

October 23, 2008 (IRAQ): The U.S. military handed control of Babil Province to the Iraqi government. Babil is the 12th province out of 18 that has been handed over to Iraqi government control. – *AP*, October 23

October 23, 2008 (IRAQ): The U.S. military announced that Iraqi security forces had captured 66 people allegedly connected to al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI). The arrests, which occurred during separate operations in northern Iraq over a few days, included 45 operatives from AQI and 21 others part of the Islamic State of Iraq. – *CNN*, October 23

October 23, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta said that his government would negotiate with the Taliban since “peace requires that we talk with the armed opposition.” Yet, according to Spanta, any negotiations with the Taliban must be on the premise that they will accept the current Afghan constitution. – *AFP*, October 23

October 23, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. unmanned aerial drone fired a missile at a *madrassa* near the town of Miran Shah in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The site was a suspected training area for Taliban militants. Approximately nine people were killed. – *The Times*, October 24

October 23, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Pakistan’s Frontier Constabulary told journalists that security forces killed at least 35 Taliban during ground and air assaults in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The offensive began late on October 22 and continued to the next day. – *Daily Times*, October 24

October 24, 2008 (GLOBAL): A report in Pakistan’s *The News* claimed that al-Qa`ida sources informed the newspaper that Usama bin Ladin is writing an Arabic-

language book on al-Qa`ida’s continued struggles. The al-Qa`ida sources said that Bin Ladin is writing the book in response to the “negative propaganda and insufficient information” about the al-Qa`ida network. The sources also stated Bin Ladin “is writing the book with the assistance of a young man with a Middle Eastern background who will later translate the text into English.” – *The News*, October 24

October 24, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Arturo Lomibao, the head of the Philippines’ counter-terrorism unit, warned that Indonesian and Malaysian jihadists, with ties to Jemaah Islamiya, continue to infiltrate the Philippines despite stricter border controls. “Jihadists associated with [JI operative] Umar Patek continue to arrive intermittently in Mindanao,” he said. – *GulfNews.com*, October 24

October 24, 2008 (SOMALIA): Islamist insurgents attacked the Hodan police station in Mogadishu. Although the insurgents were eventually pushed back, at one point it is believed they infiltrated the station. The number of casualties was not clear. The attack was just the latest in escalating violence in southern Somalia as Islamist insurgents continue to attack Transitional Federal Government, Ethiopian and African Union forces. – *Shabelle Media Network*, October 24

October 25, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Two senior officials of the international shipping company DHL, along with a bodyguard, were shot to death in front of their Kabul office. Early reports identified the assailant as a company security guard. – *Voice of America*, October 25

October 26, 2008 (SYRIA): U.S. soldiers launched an attack on Syrian territory close to the Iraqi border and killed approximately eight people. The purpose of the attack was to shut down a network moving al-Qa`ida-linked foreign fighters from Syria into Iraq. According to the *New York Times*, U.S. sources confirmed the death of Abu Ghadiya, an Iraqi suspected of leading the cell. – *AP*, October 26; *New York Times*, October 30

October 26, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. missile strike killed at least 16 people, including Taliban

commander Haji Omar Khan, in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. It is believed that all of those killed were tied to the Taliban and involved in sending fighters into Afghanistan. Khan had ties to Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani. – *AFP, October 27*

October 26, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a security post in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing 10 soldiers. – *Bloomberg, October 27*

October 26, 2008 (SOMALIA): Somalia's transitional government signed a cease-fire agreement with some opposition leaders during a meeting in Djibouti. The agreement read: "Effective 26 October 2008, cease-fire observance has been announced. It will become effective 5 November 2008...starting 21 November 2008, the Ethiopian troops will relocate from areas of the cities of Beledweyn and Mogadishu...The second phase of the troop withdrawal shall be completed within 120 days." Somalia's Islamist opposition group is not united, however, and the deal was not accepted by all of the warring factions. One of these hard line leaders, Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, questioned the agreement, stating, "The agreement reached in Djibouti Sunday is an illusion to deceive the Somalis. Neither the international community nor Ethiopia itself announced the complete withdrawal of Ethiopian troops." – *Reuters, October 26*

October 27, 2008 (UNITED STATES): During the opening day of the military trial for al-Qa`ida suspect Ali Hamza al-Bahlul at Guantanamo Bay, both al-Bahlul and his Pentagon-appointed lawyer refused to participate and did not answer questions from the judge. Al-Bahlul, a Yemeni, faces a possible life sentence for his alleged role in conspiracy, supporting terrorism and solicitation to commit murder. – *AP, October 27*

October 27, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber wearing a police uniform blew himself up inside a police station in Baghlan Province, killing two American soldiers and a child. The Taliban immediately claimed credit for the operation. – *New York Times, October 27*

October 27, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban gunfire forced down a U.S. Blackhawk helicopter in Wardak Province, although the crew were extracted safely. Coalition troops responding to the attack also came under fire, and they proceeded to kill 12 Taliban fighters. The helicopter was recovered and brought to a nearby NATO military base. – *AFP, October 28*

October 28, 2008 (GLOBAL): Top al-Qa`ida leader Abu Yahya al-Libi appeared in a new video posted on Islamist web forums. The video apparently was released several weeks later than planned, as in the video al-Libi commemorated `Id al-Fitr, which was celebrated during the first week of October. – *ABC News, October 30*

October 28, 2008 (UNITED STATES): A State Department official told reporters on the condition of anonymity that the United States was examining ways to negotiate with "reconcilable" elements of the Taliban in Afghanistan. "If people are willing to renounce violence, give up their arms...it makes sense," the official said. Negotiations could occur if Taliban elements were willing to "give up their arms, renounce violence, pledge allegiance to the Afghanistan constitution and become part of the political process instead of getting in the way of the political process." – *AFP, October 28*

October 28, 2008 (PAKISTAN/AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and Pakistani tribal and political leaders released a declaration after a two-day meeting calling for the establishment of contacts with Taliban factions in order to end the insurgencies affecting both countries. Both the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments endorsed the declaration. – *AP, October 28*

October 29, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell told reporters that Taliban leader Mullah Omar should not be involved in any negotiations between the Taliban and Afghanistan. According to Morrell, "Mullah Omar has the blood of thousands of Americans on his hands, based upon the support that he provided Osama bin Laden." Morrell also addressed recent attempts made by the Afghanistan and Pakistan governments to negotiate with the Taliban: "You have to figure

out a way to embrace those who are willing, ultimately, to work with the central government, lay down their arms—at least stop pointing them at the government and at us—and work in a constructive manner for the good of all the Afghan people." – *Reuters, October 29*

October 29, 2008 (CANADA): Mohammed Momin Khawaja was found guilty in a Canadian court for his involvement in a foiled terrorist plot in the United Kingdom. Khawaja was found to have "knowingly participated" and "knowingly facilitated" a terrorist group's plan to attack civilians in London. He was arrested in March 2004. According to an Agence France-Presse report, "The devout Muslim was born in Canada of Pakistani immigrant parents and once worked as a computer expert at Canada's Foreign Affairs Department." He will be sentenced on November 18. – *AFP, October 29*

October 29, 2008 (AUSTRALIA): After being found not guilty of receiving funds from al-Qa`ida in an Australian court on October 23, 35-year-old Muslim convert Joseph Thomas was sentenced to nine months in jail for possessing a falsified passport. Since Thomas had already spent that amount of time in custody, he was immediately set free. – *Herald Sun, October 29*

October 29, 2008 (SOMALIA): Five suicide car bombs ripped through various key targets in the northern Somalia autonomous areas of Somaliland and Puntland. In Hargeysa, Somaliland, the presidential palace, Ethiopia's diplomatic compound and the UN Development Program building were all targeted. In Bosasso, Puntland, two separate offices affiliated with the Interior Ministry were targeted. The coordinated attacks killed 19 people. There were no immediate claims of responsibility, although U.S. authorities suspect al-Qa`ida involvement in conjunction with local insurgents. – *AFP, October 29; Fox News, October 30*

October 30, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber blew himself up inside the Information and Culture Ministry in Kabul, killing five people. Two other assailants were possibly involved in the attack, but they escaped. Authorities believe that the intended target was the minister, Abdul Karim Khoram, but he

was not in the building at the time of the blast. The Taliban claimed credit for the operation. – *AFP, October 30*

October 30, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): One of two aid workers held hostage by the Abu Sayyaf Group for 45 days in the jungles of the Philippines was released unharmed. The gunmen did not release the second hostage. According to a press report, the released hostage said she “lived in constant fear during her ordeal, with the rebels at one time threatening to cut off her fingers if her family refused to pay a ransom of two million pesos.” It was not clear whether a ransom was paid. – *The Age, October 30*

October 30, 2008 (MALI): After spending 252 days in captivity, two Austrian tourists who were kidnapped by al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) on February 22 in Tunisia were released to the Malian Army. According to a Bloomberg report on their release, “5 million euros (\$6.4 million) and the release of 10 of its [AQIM] members from Tunisian and Algerian prisons” was demanded in exchange for the hostages. The Austrian Foreign Ministry did not immediately say whether a ransom was paid for the pair’s release. One of the released hostages, Wolfgang Ebner, told reporters after his release that “the conditions of detention were harsh, it was not at all easy, but we were treated normally.” – *Bloomberg, October 31; AFP, October 31*

October 31, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed nine people in an attack targeting the police in Mardan in the North-West Frontier Province. – *Reuters, October 31; The Nation, October 31*

October 31, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. aerial drone fired two missiles at targets in Mir Ali, North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Approximately 15 to 20 people were killed in the attacks. Separately, an additional suspected U.S. aerial drone fired two missiles at a house in Wana, South Waziristan Agency. Around seven people were killed during that attack. Various news reports stated that al-Qa`ida’s propaganda chief—an Egyptian known as Abu Jihad al-Masri—was killed in the North Waziristan attack. – *Reuters, October 31; AP, October 31; AFP, November 1*

November 1, 2008 (YEMEN): A Yemeni security official said that the suicide team that attacked the U.S. Embassy in Sana`a on September 17 had ties to al-Qa`ida in Iraq. The official said that three of the six had previously fought in Iraq, and that the team had trained in al-Qa`ida camps in southern Yemen. – *AP, November 1*

November 1, 2008 (SOMALIA): Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad, who chairs the oppositionist Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ARS), returned to Jowhar in Somalia, two years after the Ethiopian intervention forced him to flee. On October 26, the ARS signed a cease-fire agreement with the Transitional Federal Government. Ahmed told supporters in Jowhar that “we need you to support that agreement, which we believe serves the interest of the nation.” – *AFP, November 1*

November 2, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber slammed his vehicle into a security checkpoint in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing eight soldiers. – *Reuters, November 2*

November 3, 2008 (UNITED STATES): A military court at Guantanamo Bay convicted al-Qa`ida operative Ali Hamza al-Bahlul of three terrorism-related charges. On the opening day of the trial, al-Bahlul refused to defend himself. He was sentenced to life in prison. – *Reuters, November 3*

November 3, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A French aid worker was kidnapped in broad daylight on a street in Kabul. A local intelligence worker intervened to stop the kidnapping, but he was shot dead by the assailants. A Taliban spokesman denied involvement. – *AP, November 3*

November 4, 2008 (THAILAND): Two bombs ripped through Narathiwat Province in southern Thailand, wounding 62 people. It appeared that one of the bombs targeted an outdoor meeting of village chiefs. – *Reuters, November 4*

November 5, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber attacked a police patrol on the road to Baghdad’s airport, killing six people. – *AP, November 5*

November 5, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Authorities apprehended a sub-leader of the Abu Sayyaf Group—identified as Sakirin Andalin Sali—in Sulu Province in the southern Philippines. – *GMA News, tv, November 5*

November 6, 2008 (IRAQ): U.S. and Iraqi forces killed a senior al-Qa`ida in Iraq leader in the Tarmiyya area north of Baghdad. The dead operative was identified as Abu Ghazwan. – *AP, November 7*

November 6, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives amid a meeting of anti-Taliban Salarzai tribal leaders in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing at least 17 of them. – *Bloomberg, November 6; AFP, November 6*

November 6, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked paramilitary forces in Swat District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing two people. – *AFP, November 6*

November 7, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected U.S. aerial drones fired missiles at targets in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Approximately 13 militants were killed, five of whom were foreigners. – *Reuters, November 7*

November 8, 2008 (UNITED KINGDOM): Abu Qatada, an Islamist cleric with suspected ties to al-Qa`ida, was arrested and placed in prison in the United Kingdom after allegedly planning to violate his bail conditions by fleeing to Jordan. In June, Qatada was released from jail on the condition that he would be under house arrest for 22 hours a day. – *Bloomberg, November 10*

November 8, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber attacked a police checkpoint in Anbar Province, killing eight people. – *AP, November 8*

November 9, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber exploded in front of a hospital in Falluja, Anbar Province, killing three people. – *AFP, November 9*

November 9, 2008 (INDONESIA): Three men convicted of the 2002 Bali bombings—Amrozi Nurhasyim, Imam Samudra and Ali Ghufuron—were executed by firing squad. – *Bloomberg, November 10*

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

November 9, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a military convoy in Herat Province, killing two Spanish soldiers. – *AP, November 9*

November 10, 2008 (IRAQ): At least two bombs ripped through a shopping district in Baghdad's Adhamiyya neighborhood, killing at least 30 people, most of whom were civilians. – *Seattle Times, November 11*

November 10, 2008 (IRAQ): A 13-year-old female suicide bomber killed five Iraqi guards in Ba`quba, Diyala Province. – *The Australian, November 11*

November 10, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Militants hijacked 13 supply trucks for Western forces in Afghanistan as they traveled through the Khyber Pass in northwest Pakistan. Later that day, the Pakistani military claimed they recovered the trucks. – *Reuters, November 10; Daily Times, November 11*

November 11, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a crowded sports stadium in Peshawar, killing four people. – *AFP, November 11*

November 12, 2008 (IRAQ): Iraqi troops arrested "a very high level, wanted terrorist" responsible for training al-Qa`ida operatives who specialized in beheadings. The terrorist, identified as Riyadh Wahab Fleih, was apprehended in Diyala Province. – *AP, November 12*

November 12, 2008 (IRAQ): Gunmen killed two Christian sisters at their home in Mosul, Ninawa Province. They then planted a bomb in the house before they left. – *Reuters, November 12*

November 12, 2008 (IRAQ): An Iraqi soldier killed two U.S. soldiers at an Iraqi military base in Mosul, Ninawa Province. According to the Associated Press, which received information from the U.S. military, "the attacker strolled into the courtyard carrying a Kalashnikov rifle and a drum of ammunition, walked to a corner, turned and opened fire." – *AP, November 13*

November 12, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A tanker truck filled with explosives detonated outside Kandahar's provincial council office, killing at least six people. – *New York Times, November 12*

November 12, 2008 (PAKISTAN): U.S. aid worker Steve Vance and his driver were shot to death in the University Town area of Peshawar. – *AP, November 13*

November 12, 2008 (SOMALIA): Islamist rebels seized control of the town of Marka, increasing their geographic control to much of southern Somalia. – *Bloomberg, November 12*

November 13, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber targeted a coalition convoy near a market in Nangarhar Province, killing one U.S. soldier and 10 civilians. – *AFP, November 13*

November 13, 2008 (PAKISTAN): An Iranian diplomat was kidnapped in Peshawar, and the policeman assigned to protect him was shot to death. – *Reuters, November 13*

November 14, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected U.S. aerial drones fired missiles into a village on the border of North and South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing 12 people, including five foreigners. – *Reuters, November 14*

November 14, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine Marines killed an Abu Sayyaf Group militant—who was linked to a 2001 kidnapping of three Americans—on Jolo Island in the southern Philippines. The operative was identified as Faidar Hadjadi. – *AP, November 16*

November 15, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Coalition troops killed five al-Qa`ida-affiliated insurgents and apprehended eight in Paktia Province. One of the apprehended militants allegedly facilitated the flow of foreign fighters into Afghanistan. – *AP, November 16*