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Contents

FEATURE ARTICLE

- 1 The Facade of Allegiance: Bin Ladin's Dubious Pledge to Mullah Omar**
By Vahid Brown

REPORTS

- 6 Assessing the Al-Qa`ida Threat to the United States**
By Martha Crenshaw
- 9 The Pakistan Military's Adaptation to Counterinsurgency in 2009**
By Sameer Lalwani
- 13 Karachi Becoming a Taliban Safe Haven?**
By Imtiaz Ali
- 16 Uighur Dissent and Militancy in China's Xinjiang Province**
By Chris Zambelis
- 19 Ninawa Province: Al-Qa`ida's Remaining Stronghold**
By Andrea Plebani
- 22 The French Approach to Counterterrorism**
By Charles Rault

- 26 Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity**
28 CTC Sentinel Staff & Contacts

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.

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The Facade of Allegiance: Bin Ladin's Dubious Pledge to Mullah Omar

By Vahid Brown



Usama bin Ladin explains why he declared jihad against the United States. - Photo by CNN via Getty Images

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN al-Qa`ida and the Afghan Taliban is of critical concern to the U.S. foreign policy community. It has repeatedly been cited by the current administration as the central justification for U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan.¹ Yet the precise nature of this relationship remains a matter of debate among specialists.² While some argue that al-Qa`ida and the Afghan Taliban have effectively merged, others point to signs that their respective global and nationalist goals have increasingly put them at odds.³ Behind this debate is

the fear that if the Taliban were to regain control of Afghanistan, it would renew the close relationship that it had with al-Qa`ida prior to 9/11 and thus increase al-Qa`ida's capacity to threaten the United States.

Yet a historical account by an insider who worked for both organizations in the 1990s challenges one of the key assumptions underlying this fear—that Usama bin Ladin had personally sworn allegiance (*bay`a*) to Mullah Omar—revealing that al-Qa`ida's early relations with the Taliban regime were much rockier than is commonly assumed. This remarkable first-person account opens a unique window on a critical moment in the early history of al-Qa`ida's relations with the Taliban, depicting these relations as deeply contentious and threatened by mutual distrust and divergent ambitions.

1 In the words of U.S. General Stanley A. McChrystal, commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, "Rolling back the Taliban is a pre-requisite to the ultimate defeat of al-Qaeda." For more, see his statement to the U.S. House Armed Services Committee on December 8, 2009.

2 For a sense of the spectrum of opinion on this issue, see "The al-Qaeda-Taliban Nexus," Council on Foreign Relations, November 25, 2009.

3 On these respective positions, see Peter Bergen, "The Front: The Taliban-Al Qaeda Merger," *The New Republic*,

October 19, 2009 and Vahid Brown, "Al-Qa`ida and the Afghan Taliban: Diametrically Opposed?" *Jihadica.com*, October 21, 2009.

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Indeed, it alleges that al-Qa`ida's purported endorsement of the Taliban regime was an "outright deception," a calculated political move that provided cover for activities that threatened the Taliban's very existence.

The revelation of Bin Ladin's dubious oath does not prove that al-Qa`ida and the Afghan Taliban can be decisively split, but it is emblematic of the tensions that have long complicated their often volatile relationship. It also suggests that the "allegiance" to the Afghan Taliban professed today by al-Qa`ida and its Pakistan-based allies—including the Haqqani network and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—is more a strategy of expediency than a sign of real harmony. To be sure, there is currently a significant alignment of interest between these groups and Mullah Omar's Taliban movement, as they share a common enemy in the Afghan government and its NATO supporters. Yet at the same time, al-Qa`ida and its militant allies in North Waziristan are bent on waging a much wider conflict, the pursuit of which Mullah Omar has repeatedly denounced as a direct threat to his movement's goals in Afghanistan.⁴ Mullah Omar has characterized the Afghan Taliban as a "nationalist movement," an ideological position that al-Qa`ida has labeled "Satanic."<sup>5</sup> Al-Qa`ida's pursuit of global jihad, aside from having caused the downfall of the Taliban regime in 2001, lies in direct opposition to the stated aims of the Afghan Taliban today, which declares the intent to pursue friendly relations with neighboring countries.⁶

It is critical, therefore, not to mistake the calculated political interactions between the two movements for the

enduring religious and fraternal bonds suggested by al-Qa`ida's propaganda. These significant differences represent key vulnerabilities and invite a closer examination on the part of policymakers and the counterterrorism community.

The Significance of Abu'l-Walid al-Masri

The account of Bin Ladin's dubious pledge of allegiance to Mullah Omar appears in a document written by the Egyptian jihadist Mustafa Hamid, better known as Abu'l-Walid al-Masri, entitled *The Story of the Arabs' Pledge to the Commander of the Faithful Mullah Muhammad Omar*.⁷ The author's long career in international jihadist activism has intersected with almost every militant Islamist group currently active in Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan, including al-Qa`ida, the Haqqani network and the Afghan Taliban.⁸ After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Abu'l-Walid fled Afghanistan for Iran and worked briefly as a journalist under the pseudonym Hashim al-Makki. His publications abruptly ended in 2002 for reasons that remain unclear.⁹ In 2007, however, Abu'l-Walid began posting electronic editions of his memoirs, and in 2009 renewed his relationship with the Taliban's media wing. He is now a regular contributor to the Afghan Taliban's Arabic-language monthly *al-Sumud*, presumably from his "house arrest" in Iran.¹⁰

7 Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay'at al-'arabiya li-amir al-mu'minin Mullah Muhammad 'Umar*, undated, posted on various jihadist web forums on July 19-20, 2007. Thanks to Muhammad al-Obaidi for his translation assistance.

8 During the 1980s and early 1990s, Abu'l-Walid forged a close friendship with Jalaluddin Haqqani and worked as a propagandist and military strategist for what would come to be known as the Haqqani network—helping to edit Haqqani's monthly magazine, *Manba' al-Jihad*. Throughout the 1980s, Abu'l-Walid developed close ties to future leaders of al-Qa`ida, including Abu Hafs al-Masri, and beginning in 1990 Abu'l-Walid worked for al-Qa`ida as a trainer at its camps in Afghanistan. When the al-Qa`ida leadership moved back to Afghanistan from Sudan in 1996, Abu'l-Walid's loyalties became increasingly divided between his old employers and the newly-risen Taliban. By 2000, he was working directly for the Taliban as a co-editor, along with famous jihadist strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, of the Taliban's Arabic-language magazine *al-Imarah* (The Emirate). For an in-depth account of Abu'l-Walid's career, see the author's profile of him at www.ctc.usma.edu.

9 It is possible that the Iranian government imposed greater restrictions on his freedom of movement at that time.

10 On these recent developments, see Vahid Brown,

Although Abu'l-Walid has only recently made his writings available to the online jihadist community, his work has long been known to historians of al-Qa`ida. U.S. troops sent into Afghanistan after 9/11 recovered thousands of pages of documents authored by Abu'l-Walid at al-Qa`ida compounds and training

"The ambiguity of Bin Ladin's bay`a challenges the notion that al-Qa`ida is, or ever was, subservient to the aims and methods of the Afghan Taliban."

camps, and the Combating Terrorism Center's Harmony studies made extensive use of these materials to chronicle al-Qa`ida's history.<sup>11</sup> Abu'l-Walid's memoirs, historical sketches, strategic analyses and letters to other al-Qa`ida leaders shed considerable light on the inner workings of the organization and are unique in their candid and often highly critical tone.¹² While his pre-9/11 writings are often corroborated by multiple other primary

"Abu'l-Walid is Back...with the Taliban (and not al-Qa`ida)," Jihadica.com. Abu'l-Walid's re-emergence has also been discussed at length by Australian counterterrorism expert Leah Farrall on her blog at www.allthings-ctc.wordpress.com, where she first drew attention to the document discussed in this article and posted a fascinating recent exchange of correspondence with Abu'l-Walid himself.

11 The CTC's Harmony reports, along with copies of the original documents, are available online at www.ctc.usma.edu.

12 Participants on jihadist forums have occasionally expressed outrage at some of Abu'l-Walid's criticisms of al-Qa`ida and its senior leaders, although none of the latter have ever publicly contradicted any of the assertions contained in Abu'l-Walid's writings. Fazul Abdullah Muhammad, an al-Qa`ida member since the 1990s and a current leader of its operations in the Horn of Africa, wrote an autobiography in early 2009 where he specifically mentions reading Abu'l-Walid's memoirs, and he cites no inaccuracies. On the contrary, Fazul contends that Abu'l-Walid was the "architect of the strategy" of al-Qa`ida in 1991 and that while Bin Ladin is given most of the credit for this, "it is actually Shaykh Abu'l-Walid al-Masri whose great merit it was to have convinced the al-Qa`ida leadership to confront the United States of America." For details, see Fazul Abdullah Muhammad, *Harb ala'l-Islam 1* (2009): pp. 145f.

4 Mazhar Tufail, "Mullah Omar Orders Halt to Attacks on Pak Troops," *The News*, February 24, 2009; Ahmed Rashid, "Slide into Anarchy," *Globe and Mail*, February 28, 2009.

5 On the Taliban's "nationalism," see Mullah Omar's message of September 19, 2009, available online at www.jihadica.com. Al-Qa`ida has consistently maintained its position against nationalism since it was formed; al-Zawahiri called it "Satanic" in his September 28, 2009 eulogy for Baitullah Mehsud, an English translation of which is available online at www.nefafoundation.org.

6 See Mullah Omar's September 19, 2009 message, and the open letter of the Taliban leadership addressed to the Shanghai Cooperation Conference on October 14, 2009, available online at www.jihadica.com.

sources, he should also not be taken as a “disinterested” observer. He is a Taliban loyalist, and has devoted much of his life to writing jihadist propaganda. His claims must therefore be treated with caution, as they could be advanced in support of a Taliban (or personal) agenda. Yet even if his allegations are tendentious, this would perhaps be no less illustrative of Taliban/al-Qa`ida rifts than if they are accurate, given that Abu'l-Walid's writings are regularly published in an official organ of the Afghan Taliban.

Abu'l-Walid's account sheds new light on the debates about the Taliban's legitimacy that raged within the Arab jihadist community in Afghanistan during the late 1990s.¹³ According to Abu'l-Walid, in the late 1990s the groups most opposed to the Taliban and the idea of pledging allegiance to its leader were Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) organization and the jihadist groups from North Africa.¹⁴ Today, al-Qa`ida's senior leadership is almost entirely composed of former members of these very groups, including al-Zawahiri, Mustafa Abu'l-Yazid and Abu Yahya al-Libi. Of the people identified by Abu'l-Walid as initially open to considering a formal oath to Mullah Omar, only Bin Ladin survives today, and his profile is much lower in al-Qa`ida's public messaging than it was 10 years ago.

The document's most novel disclosure is its account of how Bin Ladin reneged on an initial agreement to give Mullah Omar his oath of allegiance, and finally deputized Abu'l-Walid to perform the *bay`a* on Bin Ladin's behalf, although Abu'l-Walid was not even a formal member of the al-Qa`ida organization.¹⁵

13 On these debates, see Vahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa`ida 1989-2006* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), pp. 13-18; Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 241ff; Alan Cullison, “Inside Al-Qaeda's Hard Drive,” *The Atlantic*, September 2004.

14 These included the “Fighting Groups” (*al-jama`a al-islamiyya al-muqatila*) of Libya and Morocco and the anti-regime jihadist organizations from Tunisia and Algeria, the last of which re-branded itself in January 2007 as al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

15 Although he worked closely with al-Qa`ida for many years, Abu'l-Walid claims that he never gave Bin Ladin a formal *bay`a*. For details, see www.mafa.maktoobblog.com/749972/mustafa-hamed-taliban-and-al-qaeda.

These details are not reported in any other source, nor has the specific timing or nature of Bin Ladin's *bay`a* to the “Commander of the Faithful” ever been known.<sup>16</sup> Much more than a minor historical detail, this information casts in an entirely new light al-Qa`ida's senior leaders' frequent claims of recognition of Mullah Omar's leadership.

The Story of the Arabs' Pledge to Mullah Omar

Abu'l-Walid's narrative of Bin Ladin's oath of allegiance to Mullah Omar begins in the autumn of 1998. He writes that relations between the Taliban and the Arab jihadists in Afghanistan had become more contentious during that year, primarily on account of the escalation of al-Qa`ida's media and operational campaign against the United States. From the outset, the Taliban's provision of hospitality for the al-Qa`ida leadership was limited by two conditions: Bin Ladin was not to communicate with the media without the consent of the Taliban regime, nor was he to directly antagonize the United States.¹⁷ Although he had violated these conditions on a number of occasions during 1996 and 1997, he significantly increased his provocative media stunts during the spring and summer of 1998. Joined by Ayman al-Zawahiri's EIJ organization, Bin Ladin

[com/749972/mustafa-hamed-taliban-and-al-qaeda](http://www.mafa.maktoobblog.com/749972/mustafa-hamed-taliban-and-al-qaeda).

16 According to Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006), p. 288, Bin Ladin “made a pledge of personal fealty” to Mullah Omar after being summoned by the Taliban leader in the wake of the Africa embassy bombings. However, Wright's source for this assertion—Robert Fisk's summary of Ahmad Zaydan's Arabic biography of Bin Ladin, published in the *Independent*, on October 23, 2002—does not make this claim, nor does Zaydan's book. *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), relates that Khalid Shaykh Muhammad said under interrogation that “Bin Ladin had sworn bayat to Omar upon first moving to Afghanistan, following the Shura Council's advice,” an assertion which is flatly contradicted by a number of other sources in addition to the account presented here.

17 Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay`at al-`arabiya*, p. 15. See also Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation*, p. 17. Bin Ladin referred to the restrictions himself in an interview with al-Jazira's Ahmad Zaydan in September 1998: “There is an opinion among the Taliban that we should not move from within Afghanistan against any other state. This was the decision of the Commander of the Faithful, as is known.” For details, see Bruce Lawrence ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 86.

announced the creation of the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders” in February, calling on Muslims worldwide to “kill the Americans wherever you find them.”¹⁸ To further publicize this declaration of hostilities, he gave a series of high-profile interviews and press conferences in May to international journalists at his Zhawar Kili camp complex in Khost, Afghanistan.¹⁹

On August 7, 1998, near-simultaneous bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa were carried out by al-Qa`ida operatives, some of whom had trained in camps in Afghanistan. The U.S. responded with cruise missile strikes on the jihadist training camps around Zhawar Kili. According to Abu'l-Walid, the embassy bombings and retaliatory U.S. strikes led to an immediate influx of new Arab volunteers into Afghanistan, exacerbating the fractious tendencies of the various Arab jihadist groups that had established bases in the country.²⁰ Long-running doctrinal disputes took on new urgency as the foreign jihadist groups competed for a share of the freshly-mobilized human resources, and new training camps were built in various parts of the country.²¹ “A number of the Arab jihadist leaders rose in opposition to Bin Ladin at this time,” writes Abu'l-Walid, “all of them affirming the primacy of the domestic fronts against the Arab regimes, convinced that a shift to a ‘global confrontation’ against the United States was ill conceived.”²² Those opposing Bin Ladin and his “global jihad” had patrons within the Taliban movement and sought to sideline al-Qa`ida and undermine Bin Ladin's unique status among the Arab jihadists, leading to the emergence of pro- and anti-al-Qa`ida factions within the Taliban leadership.²³

18 “Al-Qaeda's Fatwa,” PBS NewsHour, undated.

19 On these interviews, see Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 194ff. For Mullah Omar's irate response to these developments, see Roy Gutman, *How We Missed the Story* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2008), p. 129.

20 For details on these organizations, see Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *Da'wa al-muqawwama al-islamiyya al-`alamiyya*, undated, pp. 727ff., portions of which are translated in Lia, pp. 247ff.

21 Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay`at al-`arabiya*, p. 5.

22 Ibid., p. 6.

23 Ibid. According to Vahid Mozhddeh, a former official within the Taliban government, the Taliban's Foreign

Alarmed at these developments, Abu'l-Walid submitted a proposal to Bin Ladin, Abu Hafs al-Masri and other al-Qa`ida leaders in an attempt to address the growing disunity. Arguing that it was counterproductive to have so many Arab groups in Afghanistan, each with their own *amir* (leader), he urged the Arabs to form one bloc, somewhat like an Afghan tribe, and pledge their collective allegiance to Mullah Omar as *amir al-mu'minin*, the Commander of the Faithful. The suggestion was met with ridicule, and the al-Qa`ida leaders objected that Mullah Omar was only the *amir al-mu'minin* for Afghans and that only Afghans could give him the *bay`a*. Surprised at this objection, Abu'l-Walid asked Mullah Omar's deputy, Mullah Jalil, about the possibility of non-Afghans giving oaths of allegiance to the Taliban leader. Mullah Jalil asserted that anyone within Afghanistan could give *bay`a* to Mullah Omar.²⁴ Abu'l-Walid brought this clarification to Bin Ladin, but Bin Ladin and his senior aides asked for "more time to think about the issue."²⁵

After several weeks, Abu'l-Walid was finally told that Bin Ladin had asked for a consultation on the matter with a delegation of Pakistani religious scholars, and that it would take some time before they had an answer. Abu'l-Walid believed this was just another pretext to avoid the issue:

It was only when it was too late that I realized the real reasons for their procrastination; the whole time they simply wanted to keep

the Taliban from interfering in their freedom to carry out foreign operations.²⁶

Abu'l-Walid writes that relations between Mullah Omar and Bin Ladin were worsening by the day, with Bin Ladin continuing to "disobey commands in a free-wheeling manner," while debate over the issue of the *bay`a* raged within the Arab jihadist community. Two poles emerged within al-Qa`ida on the question, with Bin Ladin and some of his senior aides leaning in favor of considering an oath of allegiance, and the Egyptians from al-Zawahiri's EIJ organization firmly opposed to it.²⁷

In frequent trips to Kandahar from his home in Kabul, Abu'l-Walid continued to press the issue throughout the fall of 1998, only to learn in late October that the al-Qa`ida leaders had returned to their earlier position that *bay`a* to Mullah Omar was only permissible for Afghans. To break the impasse, Abu'l-Walid offered to make a "test run" and pledge allegiance to Mullah Omar himself. Accompanied by Muhammad Tahir Yuldashev, the late leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, whom Mullah Omar "greatly respected and loved," Abu'l-Walid called on Mullah Jalil in Kandahar on November 2, 1998. Mullah Jalil contacted Mullah Omar by radio and arranged for the two to meet at Taliban headquarters. Abu'l-Walid describes the scene:

Mullah Muhammad Omar, tall, thin and with his distinguished bearing, was sitting alone...in a courtyard of the governor of Kandahar's residence...The *amir* stood to welcome us. He shook

our hands and then returned to sit on a low wall. Mullah Jalil was on his right while I sat on his left. For several minutes the *amir* asked Mullah Jalil about various matters, including the condition of the Arab guests...Finally, the *amir* stood up, declared the meeting was over, then shook my hand and Mullah Jalil's. Mullah Jalil then walked me out to the gate. Surprised, I looked at Mullah Jalil and said, "but I did not yet give *bay`a* to the *amir*!" He corrected me, saying "his handshake with you was the *bay`a*." "But I wasn't paying attention," I said, "so I need to shake his hand again." Mullah Jalil laughed and returned to speak with the *amir*. The latter rose from his place and shook my hand again. This *bay`a* was as simple as a handshake, yet profound in significance.

Thinking that he had made a breakthrough in improving the Taliban-Arab jihadist relationship, Abu'l-Walid went immediately to "Arabkhayl," the settlement of foreign jihadists on the outskirts of Kandahar, to share his good news. The guards at the al-Qa`ida compound welcomed him excitedly, "and some cried 'Allahu Akbar' and embraced me as if I had just carried out a successful suicide mission and returned from it safely!"²⁸ He met an entirely different response, however, when he told Bin Ladin, Abu Hafs and al-Zawahiri about his successful *bay`a*. Abu'l-Walid felt that he had immediately plummeted in their esteem, and the reception was hostile. The al-Qa`ida leaders again insisted that they would need to consult further with Pakistani religious scholars. Abu'l-Walid set an appointment with Bin Ladin for later in November, hoping that by then the matter would be resolved.

Finally, on a visit to the al-Qa`ida guesthouse in late November, Bin Ladin walked Abu'l-Walid to the door and took him aside.

[Bin Ladin] said in a low voice that he had agreed to give *bay`a* to the Commander of the Faithful and asked me to arrange an appointment for this purpose...I told him that I

Affairs Ministry was almost uniformly opposed to the extension of hospitality to Bin Ladin and frequently lobbied Mullah Omar to place him under greater restrictions, to such an extent that Bin Ladin was said to have claimed, "Two entities are against our jihad. One is the US, and the other is the Taliban's own Foreign Affairs Ministry." See Vahid Mozhdah, *Afghanistan va panj sal-i sultah-i Taliban* (Tehran, 2003), unpublished English translation, p. 53. Thanks to Roy Gutman for sharing this translation.

²⁴ Mullah Jalil also stated that the issue of *bay`a* being given by those outside of Afghanistan was still under debate, about which Abu'l-Walid writes: "I later learned that this concerned the Pakistani tribes that were seeking to give their allegiance to Mullah Omar, something which the Taliban was being pressured against by the Pakistani government, which had issued a number of warnings in this regard." Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay'at al-'arabiya*, p. 7.

²⁵ Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay'at al-'arabiya*, p. 7.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 8. Here and below the author translates Abu'l-Walid's *al-imarāt* as "the Taliban," as that is how the regime is best known in English.

²⁷ The Egyptian Jama`a al-Islamiyya remained aloof from the debate, with Abu'l-Walid claiming that they were "waiting for fatwas to arrive from who knows where, with nobody really knowing when or whether such fatwas would even arrive at all...The last thing you would expect from them was a clear stance about anything." As for the jihadist organizations from North Africa, "the most tolerant of them saw the Taliban as infidels...Their stance was the most easily comprehensible, simple and contrarian; it began with excommunicating (*takfir*) the Taliban and ended with excommunicating everyone in their vicinity, from Arabs to the residents of Afghanistan." Ibid., pp. 8f.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

would not accompany him, as his meeting with the *amir* would have a greater impact if they were alone and would thus go further toward removing the awkwardness and tensions between the two men. He acquiesced, though he said he'd prefer it if I attend the meeting with him. I told him that I would return the next day to learn the details of this historic event.²⁹

Abu'l-Walid stayed the night as a guest with the Uzbek leader Tahir Yuldashev, and returned to the al-Qa`ida guesthouse the next day.

Abu Abdullah [Bin Ladin] arrived at mid-morning. He lacked his usual smile, so I began to get a bad feeling...I immediately asked Abu Abdullah about yesterday's news and how things went with Mullah Omar. He said he didn't go! I was thunderstruck, and asked in shock, "How? Why?" He briefly replied that he felt he needed further time to think the matter over.³⁰

In dismay, Abu'l-Walid told Bin Ladin how poorly his no-show would reflect upon the Arabs, and how it would only confirm the impression of arrogance and self-importance that Mullah Omar already had of him. Finally convinced of the seriousness of the situation, Bin Ladin agreed to meet again later in the day to discuss it further. That evening, Bin Ladin told Abu'l-Walid that he had decided to go ahead with the *bay`a*, but that he wanted Abu'l-Walid to give the *bay`a* on Bin Ladin's behalf. Abu'l-Walid stressed that he felt it was imperative for Bin Ladin to perform the oath himself to clear the air with Mullah Omar, but Bin Ladin insisted and Abu'l-Walid ultimately agreed. He writes:

I was very embarrassed while setting the new appointment to make the *bay`a* on behalf of Abu Abdullah. I performed the *bay`a* on Abu Abdullah's behalf and then rushed out, as if a great weight had just been lifted off of me, or as if I feared that Mullah Omar would draw back and refuse to accept this proxy pledge of allegiance... Later, when it was already too late,

I asked myself why Abu Abdullah insisted on having me perform the *bay`a* to Mullah Omar on his behalf. Why not do it directly? I think he did it this way in order to leave himself plenty of room for maneuver, in the event that he be pressed on whether or not he indeed pledged allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful. If circumstances require him to deny it, he can honestly say that he did not, as he did not swear allegiance personally. And if circumstances require him to confirm the *bay`a*, he can say he did, and this will likewise be the truth, as the *bay`a* was made—if only on his behalf.³¹

In concluding his account, Abu'l-Walid observes that Bin Ladin's *bay`a* by proxy had little immediate effect on relations between the two leaders. "In general," writes Abu'l-Walid,

Abu Abdullah...continued to disobey the basic instructions of the Commander of the Faithful, which could be summarized under two headings. First was to halt all interviews, for either print or television media. Second was the prohibition on any military strike against the United States, as Pakistan had threatened to intervene directly against the Taliban in the event of such a strike. The Taliban could not bear up under such an intervention so long as it remained unable to control the remaining territory held by the northern resistance.³²

Other sources confirm that relations remained tense throughout 1999. The Taliban ordered several of the Arab jihadists' training camps closed, and there was increased pressure on Bin Ladin from other foreign militants to end

his "troublemaking with the Taliban."³³ In July, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri wrote an angry e-mail to Bin Ladin on behalf of the Taliban for continuing to flout Mullah Omar's directives and urging Bin Ladin to make a personal apology.³⁴ According to Abu'l-Walid, Bin Ladin did eventually make a personal call on Mullah Omar early in 2000—"on the advice of one of the Arabs," a probable reference to al-Suri's e-mail—and relations between them "were relatively improved."³⁵

But it appears that Abu Abdullah was already at an advanced stage of preparation for the attack of September 2001, about which no one knew any details save for three individuals, one of which was Abu Abdullah himself³⁶... Nobody outside the first or second inner circle had any idea of what was going on. Of course, Mullah Omar topped the list of those kept in the dark, though it was on his head that all of the catastrophic consequences of that strike would fall, as his regime collapsed along with the Twin Towers of New York. Naturally, I was also on that list of the un-informed. Had I known, I would never have pushed with all my strength to bring about the *bay`a* of Abu Abdullah to Mullah Omar, since it turned out to have been an outright deception of the Commander of the Faithful, diverting his attention from a dangerous act, plotted behind his back, that undermined his fundamental prerogatives as ruler of the country and threatened the lives and fates of all Afghans.³⁷

Conclusion

The ambiguity of Bin Ladin's *bay`a* challenges the notion that al-Qa`ida is, or ever was, subservient to the aims and methods of the Afghan Taliban. On the contrary, this purported subservience is a useful illusion that obscures al-Qa`ida's fundamental conflicts with the

31 Ibid., pp. 14-16. While it could be objected that Bin Ladin may have given a personal *bay`a* to Mullah Omar after the events described by Abu'l-Walid, there is no evidence to suggest this. Bin Ladin began publicizing his allegiance to Mullah Omar in April of 2001 (see Lawrence, p. 98), when Abu'l-Walid would still have been in a position to know if a second *bay`a* had been given.

32 Ibid., p. 15. Abu'l-Walid notes that after the second intifada in Palestine (September 2000) the Taliban were not opposed to strikes against Israel being carried out from their territory and were "willing to face the consequences [of such an attack] alongside the Arabs."

33 Cullison; Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation*, p. 17.

34 Cullison.

35 Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay`at al-'arabiya*, p. 15.

36 Fazul Abdullah Muhammad also states in his memoirs that only three people knew the details of the 9/11 plot before the fact, identifying them as Bin Ladin, Abu Hafis al-Masri and Khalid Shaykh Muhammad. See Fazul Abdullah Muhammad, p. 392.

37 Abu'l-Walid, *Qissat al-bay`at al-'arabiya*, p. 15.

29 Ibid., p. 13.

30 Ibid.

Afghan Taliban's agenda. Today, al-Qa`ida continues to drape itself in the Taliban flag and proclaims allegiance to Mullah Omar. Yet as it did in the 1990s, it is simultaneously pursuing strategic objectives that directly threaten those of Mullah Omar. In many ways, the Afghan Taliban remain as dependent on support from Pakistan as they were prior to 9/11. Yet it is against this very patron, and under a Taliban banner, that al-Qa`ida and its coalition of Pakistani jihadists are waging a bloody campaign of suicide terrorism. Mullah Omar has flatly condemned this campaign, telling his purported "followers" in Pakistan's tribal areas that they are "bringing a bad name" to the Taliban and "harming the war against the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan."³⁸

The "Commander of the Faithful," however, has proven unable to command these particular faithful, and the violence in Pakistan's cities rages on. This says less about the limits of Mullah Omar's authority than it does about the expedient nature of the allegiances that al-Qa`ida and its partners profess. To achieve its objectives in the region, the policy community must strive for a more nuanced understanding of these allegiances, the purposes they serve, and the underlying tensions they conceal.

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Assessing the Al-Qa`ida Threat to the United States

By Martha Crenshaw

This article is based on testimony before the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment, Committee on Homeland Security, United States House of Representatives, Hearing on Reassessing the Evolving al-Qa`ida Threat to the Homeland, November 19, 2009, Washington, D.C. The author adapted her testimony for use in the CTC Sentinel.

ALTHOUGH AL-QA`IDA IS substantially weaker than it was on the eve of the 9/11 attacks, it still poses an active threat to the United States and its allies.<sup>1</sup> Transnational reach is central to al-Qa`ida's identity, and it is organized to carry out this mission. The expanded U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and continued strikes against the core leadership in Pakistan may cause the remaining al-Qa`ida operatives to grow more desperate to activate supporters in the West. Local militants may be motivated to act to avoid failure and the collapse of the cause. Al-Qa`ida's leaders have likely given up the idea of a repetition of 9/11 and would settle for less spectacular but lethal attacks on civilian targets.

¹ A sampling of many works on jihadist attacks and plots in the West would include: Petter Nesser, "Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:10 (2008): pp. 924-46; Edwin Bakker, "Jihadi Terrorists in Europe," Netherlands Institute of International Relations, December 2006; "Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terror Networks," Forsvarets Forskningsinstitut (FFI) Seminar, Oslo, Norway, 2006, along with many other FFI Reports from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment; Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2006); Jeffrey M. Bale, "Jihadist Cells and 'I.E.D.' Capabilities in Europe: Assessing the Present and Future Threat to the West," unpublished paper, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 2009; Lorenzo Vidino, "Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32:1 (2009): pp. 1-17; Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat," New York City Police Department Intelligence Division, 2007.

This article examines the three levels that constitute al-Qa`ida's overall structure and then assesses the terrorist group's intentions going forward.

The Organization

Al-Qa`ida has always depended as much on local initiative as on top-down direction, and in the aftermath of 9/11 it has dispersed even more. Its complex organizational structure is somewhere between a centralized hierarchy and a decentralized flat network. It is a flexible and adaptable organization that has survived well beyond the lifespan of most other terrorist groups. It is a web of overlapping conspiracies, often piggy-backing on local conflicts and grievances. In many ways it is a transnational secret society. Clandestine cells are the norm, not the mobilization of mass support.

The structure of the organization can be analyzed on three levels: al-Qa`ida central in Pakistan; the second tier leadership; cells (or micro-cells) and individuals.

Al-Qa`ida Central

The key policy issue is leadership and leadership potential. Although the leadership does not control the worldwide organization, it provides ideological direction and guidance as well as some resources (mainly assistance with training and funding). Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri are compelling motivational figures. Locally, al-Qa`ida is a disruptive player in Pakistani politics.

The leadership is reduced in number and many key operational personnel have been captured or killed. There can be no doubt that their loss is a serious blow to the organization. It is demoralizing as well as debilitating. In addition, communication is impeded. Under pressure it is harder to communicate both within the leadership group and to supporters outside, although it is clearly not impossible since al-Qa`ida's media outlet still operates.

There are a number of key questions concerning al-Qa`ida's central leadership. Can the removed leaders be replaced? If there is no effective succession, can the core leadership continue to function under pressure? Can it maintain communication with the rest of the organization and with

³⁸ These quotes are drawn from a letter addressed to leaders of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in February 2009. For details, see Tufail.

the world, which is essential to survival as the vanguard of jihad? Is the top leadership essential to mounting terrorist attacks against and in the West?

Could the al-Qa`ida leadership survive without a base in Pakistan or Afghanistan? Could it be transplanted to another conflict zone such as Somalia or Yemen? Al-Qa`ida has been rooted in the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater for almost 30 years. Rebuilding a base in a new location would be problematic and perhaps impossible.

Moreover, does al-Qa`ida need a territorial location at all? One reason for a base may be to maintain training camps rather than ensure the functioning of the core leadership. Although experts disagree, the author's judgment is that hands-on training is important to the tactical success of terrorist attacks. Expertise in handling explosives, tradecraft, and operational security are learned through experience, not through the internet or training manuals.

Another question is the relationship between al-Qa`ida central and diverse Taliban factions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. One scenario is that if the United States and NATO withdraw forces, the Taliban will regain control in Afghanistan, and al-Qa`ida will return to its pre-9/11 home and pose the same deadly threat as before. Pakistan would then be likely to make an accommodation with both the Taliban and al-Qa`ida. This assumption appears to be the logic behind the current strategy of the Barack Obama administration. On the other hand, there may be no coherent "Taliban" but a mix of local interests. Such a weak coalition is not likely to secure control of the country, and even if a faction of the Taliban did take power it might not be sympathetic to al-Qa`ida and in fact might be hostile. After all, it was al-Qa`ida's recklessness that led to the Taliban's defeat in 2001. In fact, some proponents of the new Afghanistan strategy hope that pragmatic elements of the Taliban will be willing to compromise, which assumes that the Taliban is not monolithic and suggests that its disparate elements would not be able to control Afghanistan.

Another consideration is that al-Qa`ida may not need Afghanistan as long as it has a base in Pakistan. How will

U.S. policy in Afghanistan affect the Pakistani government's willingness and ability to confront al-Qa`ida? Apparently, al-Qa`ida has a closer relationship with the Pakistani Taliban than with the Afghan Taliban, and it is the Pakistani Taliban that committed the spectacular acts of terrorism that provoked a military offensive from the Pakistani government (in terms of a threat to the homeland, recall that the Pakistani Taliban has exhibited a capacity for organizing terrorism outside of the region, such as the 2008 Barcelona plot). Perhaps the United States should leave the eradication of al-Qa`ida to the Pakistani military and intelligence services. On the other hand, Pakistan may not be willing or able to do the job, especially considering the high levels of anti-Americanism among the country's public. Uncertainty about U.S. intentions after the summer of 2011—which is the start of withdrawal date for U.S. forces in Afghanistan—will lead to equivocation.

The Second-Tier Leadership

It is a mistake to think of al-Qa`ida as composed solely of a core leadership at the top and self-generated or self-radicalized volunteers who respond independently to the call for jihad at the bottom. The intermediate level of leadership is equally important.

The first type of interface consists of affiliated or merged local organizations with their own interests in specific conflict zones, such as Lashkar-i-Tayyiba, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, the revived al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) operating in Yemen, or al-Shabab in Somalia. They are either branches of the central organization or associates that have adopted the al-Qa`ida brand or label. In return, al-Qa`ida central acquires transnational reach as well as the all important image of a force that mobilizes Muslims around the world. Some of these alliances are fragile, as local affiliates discover the high price of joining. An important part of the al-Qa`ida brand is suicide attacks on civilian targets, including on Muslim civilians. This requirement has apparently provoked dissension among supporters. Nevertheless, a number of attacks and plots in the West can be linked to these groups. They also pose

real threats to political stability in Yemen and Somalia.

The second mid-level interface is composed of local leaders in Western countries, often Muslim clerics (for example, at the Finsbury Park Mosque in London, which drew adherents from across Europe) but including other activists as well. They are public figures, not covert operatives. It is difficult

“Even if a faction of the Taliban did take power, it might not be sympathetic to al-Qa`ida and in fact might be hostile. After all, it was al-Qa`ida's recklessness that led to the Taliban's defeat in 2001.”

to trace their direct connections to al-Qa`ida central, but clearly they have adopted its principles. They provide more than just inspiration by calling for jihad against the West. They also organize young men in summer camps, sports clubs, and other venues for socialization, indoctrination, and recruitment. In the years since 9/11 and particularly since the London bombings in July 2005, Western governments have arrested or deported radical clerics and closed down mosques (or assisted in a transfer of control).

Recruits and Volunteers

A major concern is transnational recruitment in the West or among individuals who move easily to and from the West. From what little is known, recruitment processes at the individual level vary. Typically, it is difficult to establish a connection between a local militant and al-Qa`ida or to determine who took the initiative in making contact. As seen in the 9/11 conspiracy, the process combines both volunteering and active recruiting by activists or organizers—it is bottom-up and top-down at the same time. Some individuals in the West initially travel abroad to fight, but when they arrive al-Qa`ida leaders persuade them to return home to attack their own societies.

Key factors in recruitment include family and social ties in the local setting as well as to a country of origin, access to training camps, and collective encouragement as well as contacts in institutions such as mosques, sports centers, or prisons. Social network theory is often used to map out these relationships (usually through friendship and kinship networks). The internet also contributes to radicalization and recruitment, but operational control probably requires

“The radicalization process can apparently occur quickly. Individuals can rapidly move from a secular lifestyle to extreme religiosity and then to the endorsement of violence. It is difficult to predict who will take this path.”

face-to-face contact. A recruiter may be in touch with an individual who then reaches out to other individuals to form a conspiracy, or a recruiter may enlist an already-formed group that appears promising. Recruits have included first generation, second generation, and even third generation immigrants as well as converts. Some are citizens, but others are illegal residents. Some appear well-assimilated, well-educated, upwardly mobile, and prosperous, while others are rootless and marginal. Some have criminal backgrounds, some do not. Most participants in these conspiracies are male, and in Western Europe most were initially recruited in their country of residence.

The radicalization process can apparently occur quickly. Individuals can rapidly move from a secular lifestyle to extreme religiosity and then to the endorsement of violence. It is difficult to predict who will take this path.

An important policy question, and yet another point of dispute among experts, is whether or not non-violent Islamist-oriented organizations serve as conveyor belts for recruitment into underground cells or instead as safety valves that

divert potential extremists away from the path to terrorism. Hizb al-Tahrir (also known as Hizb-ut-Tahrir), which seeks the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and is estimated to have a million members worldwide, is a case in point. Western governments have taken different positions on this issue, some banning these organizations and others not (usually on grounds of freedom of speech and association).

These associations may not be effective substitutes for violence because committed extremists are impatient with endless philosophical discussion and are eager for action. They are not attracted to moderate Islamism and do not find its representatives persuasive or credible. This rejection is an impediment to a policy that tries to end terrorism by encouraging moderates within the same general community of belief to take a stand against violent extremism. It is important to remember, however, that those who use violence are a tiny minority.

Al-Qa`ida's Intentions

Considering the diversity of perspectives within the organization, it is unsurprising that al-Qa`ida's motivations are not necessarily consistent or uniform. There are many currents of jihadist thought.² It is also logical that the goals of the top leadership would be couched in vague terms, reflecting their conception of a minimum common denominator. The author's interest is in the beliefs and objectives that drive attacks on the United States, especially attacks on or within the homeland, and on allies of the United States. Will the rationale

2 For a small selection of recent works on ideology and organization, see Devin R. Springer, James L. Regens, and David N. Edger, *Islamic Radicalism and Global Jihad* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Raymond Ibrahim ed. and trans., *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007); Gilles Kepel et al., *Al-Qa`ida dans le Texte* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005); Bruce Lawrence ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005); Mark E. Stout et al., *The Terrorist Perspectives Project: Strategic and Operational Views of Al Qa`ida and Associated Movements* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008); Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qa`ida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

for attacking the West be altered as circumstances change? What is the implication of the surge in Afghanistan, coinciding with a drawdown in Iraq?

The narrative promoted by the top leadership—reflected in statements by Bin Ladin, al-Zawahiri, the jihadist strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, and others—is that violent jihad is an obligatory response to encroachments on Muslim lands by the “Crusaders and Jews.” Jihad is considered fundamentally defensive and thus essential as long as Islam is in danger. It is also an obligation at the level of the individual, as authorized by al-Qa`ida. The framing of terrorism as a defense against aggression toward the *umma* (the Muslim community, not al-Qa`ida itself) and as an individual duty is coupled with another justification. Al-Qa`ida explains terrorism as a way of making citizens of the West suffer as Muslims have suffered—to establish equivalence by bringing the war home. Communications emphasize the suffering of civilians at the hands of the United States and its allies fighting in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Palestinian victims of Israel are also cited as evidence of the enemy's perfidy.

These messages constitute powerful and urgent emotional appeals to defend one's community and one's faith and to take revenge on their persecutors. Martyrdom is the highest expression of commitment (since the war in Iraq, it has become an al-Qa`ida trademark, although suicide attacks began in the early 1980s and were initially conducted by secular or Shi`a groups). There is no indication of a change in the view expressed by al-Qa`ida theoretician Abu Mus`ab al-Suri in 2005: the lesson of history is that terrorism is the most useful political method to compel an opponent to surrender to one's will.³

Demonstrating that Muslims in the West can be mobilized in the service of these collective aims is a legitimizing device for al-Qa`ida. Sponsoring terrorist attacks in the West is an ideological imperative, essential to al-Qa`ida's identity and image. Promoting terrorism

3 See “The Strategy of Deterring with Terrorism,” in “The Global Islamic Resistance Call,” (2005) excerpts translated as an appendix to Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, pp. 413-19. Al-Suri was captured in Pakistan in 2005.

in the West is all the more important to their reputation because challenging the United States in the Middle East has failed so far, although al-Zawahiri boasts that al-Qa`ida has won in every conflict. The al-Qa`ida challenge to Saudi Arabia also collapsed, and Egypt is a lost cause. The outcomes of the conflicts in Yemen and Somalia remain to be determined.

Decentralization is also a practical response to pressure. Following the logic that most terrorism is local, instigating local cells to attack the enemy at home is the most effective way of reaching Western territory. Mounting an attack from abroad is logistically difficult. Al-Suri explicitly acknowledged that dispersion into small units is the most effective way of maintaining the organization and continuing the struggle in the face of the effectiveness of post-9/11 counterterrorism.

It is instructive to look at al-Qa`ida's and its sympathizers' reactions to President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo in June 2009 calling for a new beginning as expressed in online forums. In general, the initiative was interpreted as a threat. Al-Zawahiri was scornful of Muslims who were deceived into welcoming a dialogue or partnership with the West. Al-Zawahiri appealed to nationalism in both Egypt and Pakistan (interestingly, speaking in English to a Pakistani audience and referring frequently to the honor of the military). Jihadist online circles also seemed alarmed by Muslims' positive reception of the Obama message. One theme of jihadist discourse is that Obama's deceptive "sweet-talk" and cajoling cannot be permitted to weaken Muslim hatred for the United States. Another is that U.S. policy will not change—the new approach renouncing the war on terrorism is mere rhetoric, and the United States will continue to kill Muslims and support Israel. These views will be reinforced by the new strategy in Afghanistan; no matter how careful U.S. forces try to be, civilian casualties are inevitable.

A common view in these discussions is that jihadists must act because of the cowardice of leaders in Muslim countries (Egypt and Saudi Arabia in particular), including the *ulama* or clergy. Online comments also remind audiences that

there has not been a successful attack against a target in the West since 2005. Criticism of their passivity presents a challenge for al-Qa`ida loyalists.

Is there Muslim opposition to the al-Qa`ida worldview? Some prominent Muslim clerics have taken a strong stand against al-Qa`ida's doctrine (particularly in Saudi Arabia and Egypt), but their critiques are unlikely to moderate the views of major al-Qa`ida leaders. Delegitimizing the jihadist message might discourage potential recruits who have not yet moved to violence, but it is almost impossible to know. Al-Qa`ida and the Taliban typically deflect internal criticism of bomb attacks that kill Muslim civilians by evoking conspiracy theories: the true perpetrators are invariably the Central Intelligence Agency, the Mossad, Pakistani intelligence, or other shadowy agents of the enemy.

Conclusion

Al-Qa`ida is declining, but it is still a dangerous organization. It is not a mass popular movement, but rather a complex, transnational, and multilayered organization with both clandestine and above-ground elements. It has proved durable and persistent. The determination of its leaders to attack the United States is undiminished and might strengthen as the organization is threatened, but another attack on the scale of 9/11 is unlikely.

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The Pakistan Military's Adaptation to Counterinsurgency in 2009

By Sameer Lalwani

FACED WITH A rising and emboldened insurgency in its tribal belt, Pakistan's military has come under fire in recent years for failure to adapt its military doctrine, which is based around conventional warfare, to tackle the internal threats of insurgency and terrorism.¹ Not adapting to unconventional warfare has been used to explain Pakistan's failures to quell insurgency in the tribal areas, high civilian and soldier casualties, rising levels of resentment and militancy, three major operational failures in South Waziristan, and its overall poor battlefield performance.² Underscoring this concern is the mounting evidence of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) rapid learning and adaptation that poses a serious threat to the state of Pakistan.³

The Pakistan military's failure has been attributed to a number of poor tactical choices since 2002, including: 1) excessive focus on enemy targeting and "high-value targets"; 2) overdependence on large-scale multi-unit forces (mostly brigade level) rather than smaller units dispersed among the population; 3) frequent deployment of forces to static garrisons or defensive positions inhibiting proactive actions; 4) inadequate resources for flexible responses to contingencies such as quick reaction forces; 5) over-reliance on kinetic "direct-action" operations and heavy firepower; and finally 6) an

1 This critique has been advanced by a number of prominent security analysts and includes: David Kilcullen, "Terrain, Tribes, and Terrorists: Pakistan, 2006-2008," Brookings Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, No. 3, September 10, 2009; Ahmed Rashid, "Pakistan's Continued Failure to Adopt a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *CTC Sentinel* 2:3 (2009); Seth G. Jones, "Pakistan's Dangerous Game," *Survival* 49:1 (2007).

2 One anonymous Western analyst quoted by the *Economist* estimated that Pakistan had lost 70% of its battles with the Taliban. See "Pakistan and the Taliban: A Real Offensive or a Phony War?" *Economist*, April 30, 2009.

3 Some examples of analysts underscoring the role of adaptation by both insurgent and counterinsurgent parties includes Ejaz Haider, "Agency to GHQ," *Indian Express*, October 13, 2009; Shaukat Qadir, "The Taliban Diaries," *Daily Times*, June 20, 2009.

underuse of local forces' capacity and knowledge.⁴ These choices generally defy counterinsurgency doctrine—now ascendant in U.S. and Western political discourse—which calls for political over military solutions, population security over enemy targeting, ground forces over airpower, and small rather than large force deployments for missions (such as patrols, intelligence gathering, and development assistance). In essence, these practices expose troops to greater vulnerability to achieve more discriminatory use of force.⁵

While the characterization of Pakistan's doctrinal focus on conventional warfare is correct—an unsurprising feature given the country's high external threat environment⁶—and unlikely to change, the past year has witnessed substantial improvement in the conduct

“Rather than replicating the mistakes of past assaults that had simply displaced the Taliban to neighboring districts, the military combined assets from the army and air force in joint operations to ‘corner, choke, contain.’”

and outcomes of Pakistani military operations. The sustainability of recent gains remains contingent on future political choices, civilian capacity, and successive operational phases. This article, however, contends that the Pakistan military's efforts in Bajaur Agency, the Swat Valley, and South Waziristan Agency have already showcased a diligent institutional learning process that has produced significant tactical adaptations yielding increasing tactical success.

4 Kilcullen.

5 Stephen Biddle, “The New U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual as Political Science and Political Praxis,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6:2 (2008).

6 Sameer Lalwani, *Pakistani Capabilities for a Counterinsurgency Campaign: A Net Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, 2009).

Bajaur: Operation Sherdil (Lion Heart)

After a series of tactical and strategic disasters in the tribal areas,⁷ the military achieved a reversal in fortunes through tactical shifts in Bajaur Agency. The objective of Operation Sherdil, which occurred from August 2008 through February 2009, was more ambitious than previous punitive efforts, seeking to target and dismantle the nerve center of the TTP's northern operations. General Tariq Khan, the former commander of the 14th Infantry Division who took command of the North-West Frontier Province Frontier Corps (FC), stated,

If we dismantle the training camps here, the headquarters, the communication centres, the roots which come in, stop the interagency movement and destroy the leadership...we feel that about 65 per cent or so of militancy [in the five northern Agencies] will have been controlled.⁸

After months of failed brute suppression and coercive assaults, the field reports of many junior officers led General Khan to shift tactics to a more population-centric approach by early 2009, making greater use of patrols, *lashkars* (militias), and tribal councils.⁹ This within-operation adaptation that utilized battlefield reports and substantial junior officer input proved a unique “lessons learned” process and signaled a departure from

7 The Pakistani military exhibited a series of disastrous operations from 2004-2007 that resulted in cycles of offensives, defeats, and three sets of negotiations and concessions with the Taliban (in 2004, 2005 and 2006), providing the insurgency strength and legitimacy. This stemmed from underestimating the enemy, a firepower intensive approach, and overreliance on the Frontier Corps, which at the time was under-equipped and under-trained. The capstone of this humiliation was an ambush in which more than 200 Pakistani soldiers were captured without a fight. One Western analyst estimated that the military had lost 70% of its battles with the Taliban. For details on the ambush, see BBC News, October 9, 2007. For the battle estimate, see *Economist*, April 30, 2009. For more details on prior campaign failures, see Christine Fair and Seth G. Jones, “Pakistan's War Within,” *Survival* 51:6 (2009): p. 168.

8 Brian Cloughley, “Insurrection, Terrorism, and the Pakistan Army,” Pakistan Security Research Unit Brief, December 10, 2009, p. 17.

9 Haider Ali Hussein Mullick, “Helping Pakistan Defeat the Taliban: A Joint Action Agenda for the United States & Pakistan,” Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, August 2009, p. 19.

previous Pakistani military forays in the tribal region.

The patient, methodical clearing of the Taliban from Bajaur strayed from conventional operations and made significant use of new tactics and human intelligence.¹⁰ Militants in Bajaur were deeply entrenched, requiring the military to move out the remaining villagers to utilize airpower and heavy artillery for combined arms maneuvers that drew militants out of their positions.¹¹ Airstrikes and artillery fire were quickly followed by ground forces that took advantage of suppressive fire to better target militants, and used mobile forces and helicopters for transport and intimate air support.¹² By the same token, the more discriminate use of force that reduced civilian casualties increased troop vulnerability resulting in higher Pakistani military casualties.¹³ Despite criticisms of their capabilities and loyalties,¹⁴ the FC evolved into a more competent and useful localized force spearheading the gradual erosion of insurgent power over many months along the central arterial roadways of the tribal agency.¹⁵

Only toward the conclusion of successful operations and the establishment of credible force in March 2009 did the military negotiate with the Mamood tribe to dismantle and surrender Taliban militants.¹⁶ By negotiating from a position of strength and employing local forces to carry out demobilization, the military was able to establish a system of local security that neither appeased militants nor galvanized resistance to a military occupation.

Although militant activity in Bajaur Agency is reported to have flared up in November 2009, with an FC convoy

10 Personal interview, General (Ret.) Mahmud Durrani, former Pakistani ambassador to the United States, December 17, 2009.

11 *Witness: Pakistan's War: On the Front Line*, al-Jazeera, January 4, 2009.

12 Durrani.

13 Cloughley, p. 17.

14 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign Until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier,” *International Security* 32:4 (2008): p. 76.

15 *Witness: Pakistan's War: On the Front Line*.

16 Cloughley.

being ambushed,¹⁷ this is due in large part to strained resources being utilized for the South Waziristan campaign that will test the enduring nature of tactical innovations.

Swat Valley: Operation Rah-e-Rast (Path to Righteousness)

Building on successes in Bajaur, the military turned its attention to a deteriorating situation in the Swat Valley and its surroundings from the end of April to mid-June 2009. Aside from properly resourcing the Swat operation with much higher levels of troops (roughly 52,000) along with intelligence and air assets,¹⁸

“While the military has demonstrated its increasing proficiency in phase one ‘clear’ operations, the ‘hold’ phase will test Pakistani adaptive capabilities as well as the sustainability of its divide-and-rule approach as it seeks to rebuild dilapidated tribal structures to restore stability.”

the distinguishing innovation of the operation was the deliberate mass evacuation of the population to better target insurgents and reduce collateral damage.¹⁹ After clearing out militants, the military merged with some civilian efforts to shift to a more population-centric approach by working to resettle the internally displaced persons (IDPs), re-establish the writ of governance, and rebuild the local economy, although this process is ongoing and remains in the balance.²⁰

Rather than replicating the mistakes of past assaults that had simply displaced the Taliban to neighboring districts,

the military combined assets from the army and air force in joint operations to “corner, choke, contain”—making greater efforts to block escape routes and drive the Taliban out of mountain hideouts.²¹ Pakistan’s Special Service Group (SSG)—basically Pakistan’s special forces—was also deployed to secure areas for helicopter assaults north of Swat’s largest city, Mingora.²² Moreover, rather than moving on to the next target after clearing areas, the military retained an enduring presence with small bases and detachments of troops to conduct local patrols, enforce curfews, and prevent TTP re-infiltration.²³

In contrast to strategic assessments discounting Pakistani military innovation,²⁴ the Swat operation revealed a surprising degree of junior officer creativity on the battlefield including the combined use of human, signal, and imagery intelligence as well as conventional weaponry employed in unconventional ways.²⁵ More importantly, these lessons learned were quickly shared and disseminated to inculcate the practice of bottom-up innovation.²⁶

Consolidating the military’s tactical success in Swat depends upon subsequent phases. The reincorporation of two million IDPs will prove challenging alongside maintaining security and rebuilding decaying economic and governance institutions that had allowed for Taliban takeover.²⁷ Further constraints will be posed by limited resources and systemic problems including historically poor civil-

military relations,²⁸ cycles of political instability,²⁹ and calcified, regressive economic institutions.³⁰

South Waziristan:

Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Salvation)

After suffering three humiliating defeats in South Waziristan since 2004, the military approached its latest operation in the agency better equipped and with an estimated 30,000-60,000 troops.³¹ Although officially launched on October 17, 2009, preliminary efforts to shape the operation began as early as the spring of 2009, preparing the way for the ground assault. Intelligence assets embedded in the area enabled interception of TTP communications³² and assisted with targeting TTP ground establishments for Pakistani airstrikes and the highly controversial U.S. drone attacks.³³ The military established a blockade around the target area for two months prior to the ground assault to cut-off movement and supply routes while airstrikes and shelling softened enemy targets.³⁴ After the military recognized the value of blocking forces in Bajaur and Swat, they were heavily emphasized and utilized during the South Waziristan assault,³⁵ although their efficacy has been disputed by outside assessments.³⁶

28 Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan’s Political Economy of Defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

29 Paul Staniland, “The Poisoned Chalice: Military Culture, Contentious Politics, and Cycles of Regime Change in Pakistan,” MIT working paper, 2009.

30 Omar Noman, *Economic and Social Progress in Asia: Why Pakistan Did Not Become a Tiger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); John R. Schmidt, “The Unraveling of Pakistan,” *Survival* 51:3 (2009).

31 This included at least two regular infantry divisions. See Rahimullah Yusufzai, “Assessing the Progress of Pakistan’s South Waziristan Offensive,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:12 (2009).

32 Bukhari.

33 Haider. For more on the drone strikes, see Jane Mayer, “The Predator War,” *New Yorker*, October 26, 2009.

34 Haider; Cloughley; Frederick Kagan, Reza Jan and Charlie Szrom, “The War in Waziristan: Operation Rah-e-Nijat - Phase 1 Analysis,” www.criticalthreats.org, November 18, 2009.

35 Personal interview, Shuja Nawaz, December 2009. Also see Durrani.

36 Imtiaz Ali, “Military Victory in South Waziristan or the Beginning of a Long War?” *Terrorism Monitor* 7:38 (2009). Also see Yusufzai.

17 Ibid.

18 Shuja Nawaz, “Pakistan’s Summer of Chaos,” *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2009.

19 Durrani.

20 Ibid.

21 Mullick, p. 21.

22 “Pakistan Raids Taleban Stronghold,” BBC, May 12, 2009; Cloughley, p. 14.

23 Mullick, p. 21.

24 Daniel Byman, “Friends Like These,” *International Security* 31:2 (2006).

25 Mullick described how commanders bucked field manuals by using soldiers to help refugees escape before the use of heavy artillery, combining intelligence sources to improve targeting, and deploying tanks in urban areas to target snipers. See Mullick, p. 22.

26 Ibid.

27 Due to a severe economic crunch, reconstruction has not yet begun in Swat. See Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, “New Strategies in Pakistan’s Counter-Insurgency Operation in South Waziristan,” *Terrorism Monitor* 7:37 (2009).

During the operation, significant airpower was combined with rapid follow-on ground assaults.³⁷ For the first time, the Pakistani military purportedly received operational intelligence support from U.S. drones to assist with navigation and targeting in mountainous terrain.³⁸ Learning from the 2004 South Waziristan and the 2008 Bajaur operations, regular forces advanced from multiple axes and seized the high ground to encircle and control valleys. SSG forces were integrated into the operation to mop up insurgents as the army advanced and to secure the heights and key nodal points.³⁹ The military also responded to insurgent innovation and tactical diffusion from Afghanistan that had introduced anti-aircraft weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to the Pakistani battlefield.⁴⁰ Precision-targeting by Pakistani jets was able to neutralize anti-aircraft weapons, which could disrupt close air support, and effective route clearance limited damage from IEDs.⁴¹

Politically innovative tactics also effectively shaped the environment prior to the operation. The first new tactic was narrowing the scope of the mission to target the Mehsud tribe while securing the neutrality of other powerful tribal groups led by Maulvi Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, whose participation in the insurgency had foiled previous regional operations.⁴² Even after they renounced their neutrality when operations began, there seems to be little evidence that fighters from their tribes actually fought with the militants in the Mehsud camp or attacked Pakistani forces, suggesting this was more of a face-saving political gesture rather than a defection from their original agreement with the military.⁴³

Second, the military experimented with psychological operations, distributing leaflets supposedly from religious authorities and local tribes that warned youth of “false jihad” and blamed foreign militants for ushering destruction into the tribal areas.⁴⁴ Third, the military waited for a proximate cause—the insurgent assault on the army’s headquarters in October—to rally popular support and ensure the operation was perceived as Pakistan’s own offensive, not one at the behest of the United States.⁴⁵ The focus on conducting psychological and information operations, amassing popular support, and dividing insurgents to limit the scope of operations all factored into the moderately successful outcome.

While acknowledging the tactical success of the operation, former generals have publicly expressed skepticism over the sustainability of the Pakistan military’s gains, predicting that dispersed militants will regroup and resume hit-and-run operations against the Pakistani Army within months⁴⁶ (a development that appears to have already begun⁴⁷). The military’s expected presence for three to four months in the region could become a target for resistance and attacks, but an early departure could quickly unravel the hard-fought gains.⁴⁸ Moreover, despite being dislodged from their strongholds, a number of factors—the escape of the TTP leadership, the relatively few numbers of militants killed (600 out of an estimated 10,000),

and the expansion of operations against soft targets beyond their conventional theater in recent months—all suggest that the Pakistani Taliban have not been dismantled but remain organizationally intact.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Leading Pakistani national security experts have themselves been divided over the pace of learning and adaptation within the military. While the military leadership has expressed confidence in its capacities and training facilities,⁵⁰ and analysts have praised the military’s swift adaptation and remarkable learning curve under logistical independence,⁵¹ others, such as former Chief Secretary of the NWFP Khalid Aziz and former Inspector General of the Frontier Corps Major-General Mohammad Alam Khattak, have expressed a significant need for Pakistan to adapt faster to the demands of counterinsurgency.⁵²

A close examination of the 2009 operations in Bajaur, Swat, and South Waziristan testify to the Pakistan military’s learning from previous tactical blunders of indiscriminate violence that produced tremendous collateral damage and only enflamed the insurgency.⁵³ The cost of innovation, however, has been high casualty rates and the creation of new challenges, particularly the hundreds of thousands of IDPs created in the 2009 operations. While the military has demonstrated its increasing proficiency in phase one “clear” operations, the “hold” phase will test Pakistani adaptive capabilities as well as the sustainability of its divide-and-rule approach as it seeks to rebuild dilapidated tribal structures to restore stability.⁵⁴ As this process moves from

44 Ibid., p. 20.

45 Ali.

46 Retired General Talat Masood is quoted as saying, “The militants have the capacity to regroup and come back...South Waziristan has been a tactical success of sorts, but by no means is it a victory.” See Alex Rodriguez, “Pakistan Taliban Regrouping Outside Waziristan,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 2009. Retired General Javed Hussein is quoted as stating, “Three or four months from now, they (the Taliban) are going to bounce back.

When the army is deployed to hold the area, the guerillas will start their hit-and-run attacks against the army’s lines of communication, and all over the tribal area.” See Saeed Shah, “Big Pakistan Offensive has Failed to Nab Any Taliban Leaders,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, November 24, 2009.

47 Yusufzai.

48 Kagan et al. indicate that the military will continue to stay for a period of time, but Johnson and Mason predict fierce resistance by Pashtun tribal groups toward any centralizing efforts.

49 Ali; Yusufzai. Based on off-the-record conversations, this appears to be corroborated by Pakistani military assessments as well.

50 This is evidenced by General Kayani’s rejection of counterinsurgency training. See “Counter-Insurgency Training Facilities Developed: Kayani,” *Daily Times*, May 17, 2009.

51 Mullick; Shaukat Qadir, “Guerilla Warfare,” *Daily Times*, September 26, 2009.

52 Khalid Aziz, “Need for a Counterinsurgency Strategy,” *The News International*, June 15, 2008. On Khattak, see Muhammad Khurshid Khan, “Analyzing Domestic Terrorism as a Threat to Pakistan’s Security and the Policy Response,” *IPRI Journal* 9:2 (2009): p. 61.

53 Johnson and Mason, p. 74.

54 Yusufzai. Durrani confirmed the military and stra-

37 Bukhari. One analyst in close contact with Pakistani military headquarters estimated there were initially more than 140 targets slated for airstrikes.

38 Julian E. Barnes and Greg Miller, “U.S. Aiding Pakistani Military Offensive,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2009; Bukhari.

39 Haider; Frederick Kagan, Reza Jan and Charlie Szrom, “The War in Waziristan: Week 1 Analysis of Operation Rah-e-Nijat,” www.criticalthreats.org, October 26, 2009.

40 Johnson and Mason, p. 67.

41 Kagan et al., October 26, 2009.

42 Durrani; Cloughley, p. 19.

43 Cloughley, p. 19.

tactical to strategic shifts, greater resistance will be encountered.

The Pakistan military's learning and adaptation has been characterized by many analysts inside and outside of Pakistan as a cumulative "learning by doing" process,⁵⁵ suggesting that there will be gradual adjustments over time within Pakistan's approach to counterinsurgency rather than a dramatic doctrinal shift⁵⁶ or wholesale adoption of Western militaries' "best practices" by way of U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24. This seemingly languid pace of Pakistani adaptation will continue to be the result of finite and overstretched resources,⁵⁷ the inherently difficult pace of organizational adaptation,⁵⁸ and the divergence of Pakistani strategic interests in the region from the United States and NATO.⁵⁹

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tegic leadership was coming to terms with this insight, made by outside observers including Johnson and Mason, p. 73.

55 Durrani; Stephen P. Cohen and Shuja Nawaz, "Mastering Counterinsurgency: A Workshop Report," Brookings Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series, July 7, 2009.

56 Mullick argues this indicates a doctrinal shift (p. 23) but conversations with other analysts including Shuja Nawaz and Moeed Yusuf imply otherwise—that this is a more graduated adaptation and that doctrinal shift will not occur without a serious investment in retraining through the establishment of a staff college or local counterinsurgency training school.

57 Durrani; Lalwani.

58 Austin Long, "Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine, 1960-1970 and 2003-2006," RAND Counterinsurgency Study, No. 6, 2008.

59 Moeed Yusuf, "Rational Institutional Design, Perverse Incentives, and the US-Pakistan Partnership in post-9/11," *Defence Against Terrorism Review* 2:1 (2009).

Karachi Becoming a Taliban Safe Haven?

By Imtiaz Ali

KARACHI IS THE backbone of Pakistan's economy and the country's largest city of 18 million people.¹ The city has a history of ethnic and sectarian violence, yet in the last few years it has managed to maintain relative peace. Since 2009, however, there has been an uptick in violent activity in Karachi, culminating with the December 28, 2009 bombing of a Shi'a Ashura religious procession that left more than 30 people dead.² The attack was not only followed by an unprecedented level of looting, but it plunged Karachi into a fresh wave of targeted killings.³

These developments are alarming because the destabilization of Karachi would have profound effects on Pakistan. Karachi houses Pakistan's central bank and its largest stock exchange, and generates 68% of the government's revenue and 25% of the country's gross domestic product.⁴

It is clear that fighters from multiple Taliban factions are increasingly moving to the city. Militants continue to flee U.S. drone strikes and Pakistani military operations in the country's northwest tribal regions. In fact, two months ago news reports speculated that Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar himself shifted his base from Quetta to Karachi.⁵ Between late

October and early November 2009, Karachi police arrested more than 450 illegal foreign residents, mostly Afghan and Uzbek citizens suspected of having ties to militants.⁶ Moreover, 70 militants with access to suicide jackets, rocket launchers and other explosives were arrested in the closing months of 2009.⁷

This article will provide background on the city of Karachi, including how it is home to jihadist and sectarian groups, as well as explaining why Taliban fighters are increasingly moving to the city.

Brief Demography of Karachi

Karachi is Pakistan's financial hub and its most populated city. It was the country's first capital after it achieved independence in 1947, until it was moved to Rawalpindi in 1958 and then Islamabad in 1960. Karachi is located in a strategic geographic position. It is on the shores of the Indian Ocean and is a major Pakistani port. It is a primary entryway for supplies to U.S. and NATO troops in neighboring Afghanistan. Its population has grown to more than 18 million, and it is home to several different ethnicities and religions.⁸ Although 96% of the city is Muslim, it is estimated that 30% of that number ascribes to the minority Shi'a faith; this has resulted in sectarian violence over the years between minority Shi'a and majority Sunni Muslims.⁹ Karachi is home to a sprawling network of *madrasas* (religious schools) and jihadist militant groups.

The city is home to the world's largest number of Pashtuns. In Karachi, the more than 3.5 million Pashtuns¹⁰ are second only to the Urdu-speaking Muhajir,¹¹ who are the biggest ethnic

Karachi," *Newsweek*, November 28, 2009.

6 Farhan Sharif and Naween Mangi, "Karachi Police Hunt Terror Cells as Taliban Flee Army," Bloomberg, November 6, 2009.

7 Ibid.

8 Aziz and Birsal.

9 This is according to Pakistan's 1998 census. For details, see www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/pdfs/Karachi.pdf.

10 "Editorial: Prospects of a 'Quick Finish' in Swat," *Daily Times*, May 13, 2009.

11 Muhajir, politically organized into the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), are the descendants of Urdu-speaking Indians who migrated from India after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. They are the biggest com-

1 Pamela Constable, "Bombing and Fire Disrupt a Fragile Peace in Karachi, Pakistan," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2010.

2 A faction of the Pakistani Taliban initially took credit for the attack, but the government blamed Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. See "Suicide Bombing in Karachi Kills 30," CBS News, December 28, 2009; "Taliban Claim Karachi Suicide Attack Responsibility," *The Nation*, December 30, 2009; Geo TV, December 28, 2009; Amir Wasim, "Malik Blames LJ for Karachi Ashura Blast," *Dawn*, January 15, 2010.

3 Salis bin Perwaiz, "Political Violence Continues on Fourth Day," *The News*, January 11, 2010.

4 Faisal Aziz and Robert Birsal, "Pakistan's Karachi the Taliban Revenue Engine - Mayor," Reuters, December 2, 2009.

5 "Mullah Omar in Karachi: Report," *The Nation*, November 20, 2009; Eli Lake, Sara A. Carter and Barbara Slavin, "Taliban Chief Hides in Karachi," *Washington Times*, November 20, 2009; Ron Moreau, "Sheltered in

community in Karachi, dominate the city's administration, are constantly at odds with the Pashtuns, and are ardently anti-Taliban. Karachi's demography has been changing rapidly, attracting people due to its vast business opportunities and educational facilities—both secular and religious. The city suffers from high ethnic tensions and cultural and religious divisions. Karachi's police estimate that there are more than 5,000 armed militants from various jihadist groups located in the city, which has further disrupted the complex fabric of society.¹² Once known as the "Paris of Asia" or the "City of Lights," Karachi is unfortunately quickly turning into a lawless city where banks are looted and businessmen kidnapped for ransom.

Home to Jihadist and Sectarian Groups

Since the early 1990s, Karachi has been a safe haven for leaders of several militant groups such as Harkat-ul-Mujahidin (HuM), Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam (HuJI), Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Jaysh-i-Muhammad (JM), Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LT) and lately Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Al-Qa`ida operatives have also been found in the city, seen through the arrest of Ramzi bin al-Shibh on September 11, 2002. U.S. journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted and beheaded in Karachi in 2002. Moreover, when leading politician Benazir Bhutto's convoy was traveling through Karachi in 2007, she narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in which more than 100 people were killed. Karachi was also used as a launching point for the LT militants who attacked India's financial hub of Mumbai in 2008; moreover, the Mumbai militants reportedly coordinated their assault via cellular telephone with a contact in Karachi.¹³

Karachi has also witnessed several bloody conflicts in recent decades. Three of these conflicts—in 1986, 1994 and

2007—were serious and hundreds of people were killed. Conflicts in Karachi generally erupt over ethnic issues and the struggle for power and resources in the city. Muhajir, Pashtuns and Sindhis have been at the center of the clashes. During the last 15 years, however, the nature of the violence in Karachi has shifted toward sectarianism and jihadism. The Afghan jihad of the 1980s left a deep impact on the city. Karachi attracted not only thousands of Afghan refugees, but it was overrun with weapons and jihadist outfits as well as sectarian militant groups. Since the mid-1990s, Sunni and Shi'a sectarian groups have fought each other in bloody battles. Even groups within the Sunni sect have engaged one another.

Almost all of the sectarian and jihadist outfits in Karachi trace their background to the city's leading *madrasas* where they received ideological and financial support during the anti-Soviet jihad and in the post-jihad era. These *madrasas* may be playing a similar role today.

Madrasa Networks

During General Zia-ul-Haq's 11-year rule, Karachi experienced the tremendous growth of *madrasa* networks. According to government estimates, out of a total of 1,248 *madrasas* in Sindh Province, at least 869 of these exist in Karachi.¹⁴ The Madrasa Federation of Deobandi Wafaq al-Madaris, however, claims to have 1,872 *madrasas* in Karachi.¹⁵ It also puts the number of Deobandi *madrasas* at 1,500, Barelvi *madrasas* at 300 and Shi'a and Ahl-e-Hadith at 36 each.

Deobandi *madrasas* have played a leading role in violence.¹⁶ The Binori town *madrasa* in Karachi has always been at the forefront of jihad. Jihadist leaders from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and some from Arab countries, frequently visited Binori for religious and spiritual guidance during the 1980s and 1990s. The leader of the Binori town *madrasa*, Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai (who was killed in Karachi in 2004) enjoyed close relations with the Taliban and

al-Qa`ida leaders in Afghanistan, including Mullah Omar and Usama bin Ladin.¹⁷ The Binori *madrasa* is also accused of fanning anti-Shi'a and anti-Barelvi violence. Four leading scholars of the *madrasa* were killed in retaliation by other sects.¹⁸ The Binori *madrasa* is known for helping to sustain a number of jihadist outfits, including HuM, JM and SSP.¹⁹

Jamiatul Rasheed Ehsanabad, Jamia Ashraful Madaris, Jamia Ehsanul Uloom, Jamia Anwarul Quran, Madrasa Khalid Bin Walid, and Darul Uloom Rehmania are some of the prominent *madrasas* in Karachi that are suspected of having links to sectarian and jihadist groups.²⁰ These *madrasas* have

“Taliban fighters and other militant groups have long considered Karachi a safe location because it is unlikely the city would ever face a major military operation or drone attacks. Such a development could cause huge political and economic fallout and the ultimate destabilization of Pakistan.”

attracted thousands of foreign students. According to government reports in 2003, 10,905 foreign students were in Karachi studying at *madrasas*.²¹ Due to strict government policies in recent years, their numbers have been significantly reduced, but the exact number of foreign students in Pakistani *madrasas* today is not known. As Taliban fighters move to Karachi, it is likely that they will find support from within the *madrasa* network.

munity in Karachi and dominate the city's administration. During the 1990s, the MQM was involved in bloody factional clashes. Now, however, they are part of the coalition government in Pakistan's parliament. They are anti-Taliban.

12 Huma Yusuf, "The Karachi Question: Ethnicity or Extremism?" *Dawn*, April 30, 2009.

13 Huma Yusuf, "Launch Point for Mumbai Attacks, Karachi Faces Rising Militancy," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 14, 2009.

14 "Karachi: 11,000 Foreigners in Sindh Madaris," *Dawn*, January 16, 2003.

15 "Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism," International Crisis Group, March 29, 2007.

16 For a background report on Deobandi Islam, see Luv Puri, "The Past and Future of Deobandi Islam," *CTC Sentinel* 2:11 (2009).

17 Zarar Khan, "Senior Sunni Muslim Cleric Gunned Down in Karachi, Sparking Unrest," Associated Press, May 30, 2004.

18 "Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism."

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 "Karachi: 11,000 Foreigners in Sindh Madaris."

Growing Taliban Activity in Karachi

U.S. drone attacks are proving to be one of the biggest challenges al-Qa`ida operatives and Taliban leaders have ever faced. Multiple al-Qa`ida and Taliban leaders have been killed by the drones, including the former head of the TTP, Baitullah Mehsud. The U.S. government has clearly increased its intelligence assets in the tribal region, evidenced by the rising number of successful strikes. As a result, al-Qa`ida and especially Taliban operatives find the only way to avoid such strikes is to limit their militant activities or shift to safer locations such as in Quetta and Karachi. According to local police officials in Karachi, TTP militants are heading to the city to seek shelter and rest, as well

“Karachi’s police estimate that there are more than 5,000 armed militants from various jihadist groups located in the city.”

as funding. One Taliban source told reporters last year that Karachi is one of their main destinations for rest and to receive medical treatment. According to the source, every month a group of 20-25 militants arrive in Karachi where they rest for a month while a fresh group of militants replaces them in the region to fight.²²

Taliban fighters and other militant groups have long considered Karachi a safe location because it is unlikely the city would ever face a major military operation or drone attacks. Such a development could cause huge political and economic fallout and the ultimate destabilization of Pakistan.

Karachi’s municipal government, which is run by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), has warned about the possibility of the Taliban taking control of Karachi. There has been an alarming increase in bank robberies and kidnapping-for-ransom, both of which are considered major revenue

generators for the Taliban. There are also a rising number of incidences of Taliban militants threatening music and CD shop owners. In Pashtun-dominated areas such as Sohrab Goth and Baldia Town, walls and bridges carry graffiti such as “Long Live the Taliban” and “Welcome to the Taliban.”²³ The Pashtun community denounces the Taliban and claims that the MQM is exaggerating the level of Taliban activity in Karachi for political reasons.

When Taliban militants from the tribal areas come to Karachi, they reportedly have taken refuge in the city’s *kacha abadi* (slums) such as Quid Abad, Sohrab Goth and Kiamaree, and in the hills of Manghopir and Orangi town and other low-income areas. Taliban militants such as Hasan Mahmood, a senior aide in the TTP, was reportedly arrested in Karachi.²⁴ Karachi police have arrested many militants associated with the TTP, including one militant identified as the TTP’s Karachi chief, Bahadar Khan (known as Sadiq), from the crowded Sohrab Goth area of the city.²⁵ Hundreds of thousands of displaced Pakistanis and Afghan refugees are based in these slums.

An increase in instability in Karachi could put supplies to Afghanistan at risk. The major slums are located on the outskirts of Karachi on the main eastern and western entry points into the city. Sohrab Goth, for example, is next to the super highway that is used for U.S. and NATO supply convoys that travel from Karachi to the Torkham border crossing into Afghanistan. In the past two years, these supplies have been occasionally disrupted in Karachi, allegedly by members of the TTP and other militant groups; insurgents have threatened supply drivers against carrying fuel supplies to U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.²⁶ These disruptions, along with ethnic violence between Sindhi and Muhajir, and between Pashtun and

Muhajir, have led to shutdowns of the super highway.

It has not been easy for the police to arrest Taliban suspects in Karachi. Approximately 200,000 displaced refugees from the conflict zones in the North-West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas have migrated to Karachi in the last year due to ongoing military operations. This makes it difficult for the police to identify militants.

Conclusion

Karachi is a vital city for Pakistan as well as for its allies. The city has a complex demography suffering from ethnic tension and sectarian clashes. Both the MQM and jihadist groups have a large cache of arms and ammunition in Karachi.²⁷ It is home to various militant and sectarian groups, and violence between them could easily flare. Approximately 70% of supplies for U.S. and NATO forces in neighboring Afghanistan depend on this port city.²⁸

Despite these important concerns, the Taliban are not close to overtaking the city. Karachi has a powerful and liberal civil society and progressive political parties. It is a modern, Westernized city with a large education base that should repulse trends of Talibanization. Nevertheless, if left unchecked, the growing influence of the Taliban in Karachi could spark violent clashes and eventual destabilization, which would have powerful ramifications for Pakistan.

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22 “Fear of Taliban Influx Looms in Karachi,” *Dawn*, May 17, 2009; Ashraf Khan and Nahal Toosi, “Taliban Finding Safety in Karachi,” *Associated Press*, May 17, 2009.

23 Naweel A. Mangi and Farhan Sharif, “Taliban Hole Up in Karachi as Pakistan Weeds Out Swat Valley,” *Bloomberg*, June 19, 2009.

24 Samir Quraishie, “CID Report Reveals Taliban Presence in Karachi,” *Daily Times*, February 28, 2009.

25 “Three More TTP Militants Arrested,” *Daily Times*, November 2, 2009.

26 “Taliban Warn Truckers to Stop Supplying Fuel to NATO Forces in Afghanistan,” *Asian News International*, June 21, 2008.

27 A large amount of arms and ammunition is available in Karachi because of the city’s large size, and its role in ethnic and sectarian violence during past decades.

28 Imtiaz Gul, “US-NATO in the Eye of Taliban Storm,” *Weekly Pulse* [Islamabad], December 18, 2008.

Uighur Dissent and Militancy in China's Xinjiang Province

By Chris Zambelis

IN JULY 2009, communal rioting unsettled the provincial capital Urumqi in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XAR). The rioting, between Uighurs—a largely Sunni Muslim and ethnic Turkic minority group—and Han Chinese, highlighted the contentious position of ethnic Uighurs in China and the underlying tensions between Uighurs and Han Chinese in Xinjiang in particular. The worst spate of ethno-sectarian strife in China in decades was sparked by a confrontation between Uighur migrant workers and Han Chinese at a toy factory in Guangdong Province in southeastern China that left two Uighurs dead. Subsequent public demonstrations by Uighurs in Xinjiang protesting the government's handling of the incident spiraled into violence.¹ Approximately 192 people were killed—two-thirds of whom were Han—and thousands more injured on both sides in the ensuing chaos that captured international attention.²

Xinjiang's Uighurs consider themselves the targets of a systematic campaign of state discrimination and repression aimed at destroying Uighur identity and culture and undermining Uighur rights in Xinjiang. Uighur nationalists refer to Xinjiang as East Turkistan or Uighuristan, and it is a region they consider their ancestral homeland. For Uighurs, Beijing's decision to raze the Old City in Kashgar, the Uighur cultural capital and a key stop on the Silk Route, and to build new structures in its place is emblematic of China's hostility toward them.³ China has

long regarded popular expressions of social and political dissent and the vocalization of grievances by Uighurs as a threat to domestic stability. China also perceives the history of Uighur separatist sentiments and activities, to include two short-lived periods of independence in the 20th century⁴ and incidences of terrorist violence and persistent political activism, as a threat to its territorial sovereignty. Frequently downplaying the veracity of Uighur grievances, China instead equates Uighur aspirations with those promulgated by radical Islamists. China links Uighur militants to al-Qa`ida and the Taliban and the specter of radical Islam in Central and South Asia. Public statements by al-Qa`ida that called attention to the Uighur question following the July 2009 riots raised another set of questions regarding al-Qa`ida's possible intentions toward China.

While there is evidence of a fringe extremist current within the larger Uighur nationalist movement that frames Uighur aspirations in a radical Islamist context and is involved in transnational radical Islamist movements, the Uighur question never figured prominently in al-Qa`ida discourse prior to the July 2009 violence. This article will examine some of the key political and cultural aspects of the Uighur question in China, shed light on the regional and global nature and implications of Uighur activism and simmering ethno-sectarian unrest in Xinjiang, and highlight some of the reasons why the Uighurs are attracting increased attention among radical Islamist groups such as al-Qa`ida.

Demographics and Geography

Understanding the demography and geography of Xinjiang is central to comprehending the geopolitics of the Uighur question. Demographic data on the number of Uighurs in China and other parts of the region are often politicized.⁵ The total Uighur population

in Xinjiang is estimated to range between 8-10 million, representing roughly half of Xinjiang's total population of approximately 21 million.⁶ Many observers often mistakenly lump the Uighurs in Xinjiang together with other Chinese Muslims such as the Hui Muslims⁷—a Chinese Muslim group constituting the largest Muslim community in China—or smaller ethnic Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, or Tajik Muslim communities, exaggerating

“The 9/11 attacks, in essence, provided Beijing with an opportunity to frame its campaign against Uighur separatism and other forms of activism—both peaceful and violent—in the context of the U.S. war against al-Qa`ida.”

their actual numbers in the process. The distinction between Uighurs and Hui Muslims is significant in the context of Chinese ethnic politics. Although the Hui are regarded as essentially Chinese culturally, the Uighurs, in spite of their status as an officially recognized minority, are largely viewed as foreigners. Ethnic Uighur minorities are also found in the neighboring Central Asian republics⁸ and Uighurs likewise share close linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with the other Turkic Muslim peoples of Central Asia. While the Uighurs are exempt from China's one-child policy due to their official

effort to diminish their perceived presence or influence in Chinese society.

6 Matthew Teague, “The Other Tibet,” *National Geographic*, December 2009; Joe Havely, “Q & A: China's Restive Uighurs,” al-Jazeera, July 9, 2009.

7 For more background on the history of China's Hui Muslims, see Matthew Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community: Migration, Settlement and Sects* (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1999).

8 With a community of approximately 300,000, Kazakhstan is home to the largest Uighur population outside of China. Kyrgyzstan is home to an estimated 60,000 Uighurs, and approximately 6,000 Uighurs reside in Tajikistan. Smaller Uighur communities are also found in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Turkey.

1 Andrew Jacobs, “At a Factory, the Spark for China's Violence,” *New York Times*, July 15, 2009.

2 Given the generally favorable opinion of China in the Middle East and greater Islamic world, China was sensitive to international Muslim public opinion during the crisis. For more details about the effect of the violence in Xinjiang on Muslim perceptions of China, see Chris Zambelis, “Xinjiang Crackdown and Changing Perceptions of China in the Islamic World?” *China Brief* 9:16 (2009).

3 Michael Wines, “To Protect an Ancient City, China Moves to Raze It,” *New York Times*, May 27, 2009. China justified the action on the ancient city's vulnerability to earthquakes.

4 Two separate albeit short-lived independent Uighur-led “East Turkistan Republics” existed between 1933-1934 and 1944-1949.

5 Uighur or international Muslim activists concerned with the plight of Uighurs may have an interest in inflating the actual numbers of Uighurs in China. Similarly, fearing the specter of emboldening Uighur secessionist or identity activism, China may have an interest in downplaying the number of Uighurs in Xinjiang in a possible

minority status, China's aggressive efforts to encourage the migration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang under the auspices of its "Go West" campaign to offset the Uighur population reflects the true nature of Beijing's concerns about the demographic composition of the province.⁹

Representing its largest political region, China's Xinjiang Province is located in the northwestern part of the country and shares frontiers with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Russia, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. China's concerns about instability in Xinjiang stemming from Uighur nationalism are compounded due to the region's vital strategic significance: Xinjiang is rich in natural resources, boasting the highest concentrations of natural gas and oil reserves in China,¹⁰ as well as extensive coal, mineral, and water resources. Pipelines originating in neighboring Central Asian republics also traverse Xinjiang transporting natural gas to Chinese consumers. Since Xinjiang shares a border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, Beijing worries about the spread of al-Qa`ida- and Taliban-style influence in the province, especially amid the war in Afghanistan and mounting instability in Pakistan. Other threats, such as opium and heroin trafficking, already a serious problem in the region, are also a major concern for Beijing.¹¹

Political Activism and Militancy

Uighur rights advocates in the diaspora who engage in peaceful political opposition to what they often describe as the "Chinese occupation of East Turkistan" are politically savvy, organized, and can often count on allies in diplomatic, human rights, and religious circles.¹² One such group, run by exiled Uighur activists, is the World Uighur

Congress (WUC) led by Rebia Kadeer, a native of Xinjiang living in self-exile in the United States.¹³ Beijing is concerned that foreign powers such as the United States will use the Uighur issue as a political lever over China.¹⁴ Beijing's opposition to the WUC is such that it accused the group of masterminding the July 2009 violence.¹⁵ Despite a lack of evidence, China considers the WUC to be a terrorist organization, an accusation likely meant to tarnish the group's reputation globally.

Since the 1990s, Beijing has implicated a number of Uighur organizations in terrorism, including bombings, arson attacks, assassinations, and abductions in Xinjiang and other parts of China.¹⁶ The ideological impetus for Uighur militancy, however, is a point of contention. China often ascribes all manifestations of Uighur militancy to violent Islamism. The 9/11 attacks, in essence, provided Beijing with an opportunity to frame its campaign against Uighur separatism and other forms of activism—both peaceful and violent—in the context of the U.S. war against al-Qa`ida.¹⁷ This approach afforded China a greater license to crack down on all forms of Uighur dissent.

In reality, Uighur militancy does not comprise a monolith—let alone a radical Islamist monolith—characterized by Beijing.¹⁸ While acknowledging evidence of individual Uighur participation in

radical Islamist movements outside of China, many observers attribute acts of Uighur militancy to nationalist resistance or civil unrest.¹⁹ Uighurs have traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan and joined the Taliban and other radical Islamist militant groups operating in Central and South Asia in the 1990s.²⁰ Yet, many Uighur nationalists fled the province for Afghanistan (as well as Pakistan and other countries) to evade Chinese authorities; others may have intended to travel westward to gain political asylum.²¹ Overall, the radical Islamist strain of Uighur militancy constitutes a fringe among Uighur militants, not the dominant trend claimed by Beijing.

China's accusations regarding the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM),²² an obscure Uighur organization linked to violence and terrorism, provide insight into its approach to the larger Uighur question. Beijing accuses the ETIM of executing more than 200 terrorist attacks over the years.²³ Beijing also accuses the ETIM of having received financial and material support from al-Qa`ida and the Taliban<sup>24</sup> and of maintaining links with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU),<sup>25</sup> an al-Qa`ida-linked group with a presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan and across Central Asia.²⁶ ETIM is also implicated in plots against Chinese interests and other targets outside of China, such as an alleged plot to attack embassies—

9 Henryk Szadziewski, "How the West was Won: China's Expansion into Central Asia," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3:2 (2009): pp. 210-218.

10 "Xinjiang's Oil and Gas Equivalent Ranks First in China," *People's Daily Online*, July 11, 2008.

11 Lei Xiaoxun and Zhu Zhe, "Xinjiang Targets Drug Trafficking," *China Daily*, March 10, 2009.

12 Much to China's chagrin, the Dalai Lama also supports Uighur rights and maintains ties to the WUC, often likening the Uighur question to the situation in Tibet. See Laura MacInnis, "Uighur Unrest Shows China's Failures – Dalai Lama," Reuters, August 6, 2009.

13 For more details about the World Uighur Congress (WUC) and its numerous affiliates, see the official website of the WUC at www.uyghurcongress.org.

14 "'East Turkistan' Forces Seriously Disrupt Xinjiang's Development Progress: White Paper," Xinhua News Agency, September 21, 2009. Also see "White Paper on Development and Progress in Xinjiang," Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, September 21, 2009.

15 "Anti-Terror Expert: World Uyghur Congress behind Xinjiang Violence," Xinhua News Agency, July 7, 2009.

16 James Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment," East-West Center, Policy Studies 6, 2004.

17 Sean Roberts, "Ethnic Clashes in China: Uighurs vs. Han Chinese," *Washington Post*, July 8, 2009. Also see Yitzhak Shichor, "Fact and Fiction: A Chinese Documentary on Eastern Turkestan Terrorism," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4:2 (2006): pp. 89-108.

18 Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, "Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang, China," Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2008.

19 Sean R. Roberts, Ph.D., testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, June 16, 2009. Also see Dru Gladney, Ph.D., testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, June 16, 2009.

20 Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 204; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 128.

21 Roberts, June 16, 2009.

22 The East Turkistan Islamic Movement is also often referred to as the East Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP).

23 Millward.

24 "Uighur Group 'Linked to al-Qaeda,'" al-Jazeera, March 9, 2007.

25 The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, in an effort to showcase its wider, regional focus, now refers to itself as the Islamic Movement of Turkistan (IMT).

26 Bahukutumbi Raman, "Strange Bedfellows: China's Problems in Xinjiang are Forcing it to Reach out to India. But Does India Care?" *Foreign Policy*, August 31, 2009.

including the U.S. Embassy²⁷—and other targets in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek,²⁸ as well as another plot to abduct Chinese diplomats in Pakistan in 2006.²⁹ The United States designated the ETIM a terrorist organization in 2002, a controversial move in light of reports that the U.S. decision was based solely on Chinese information.³⁰ The group's late leader, Hasan Mahsum, who was killed by Pakistani forces at

“The July 2009 violence in Xinjiang, however, prompted al-Qa`ida to issue its first direct threat against China.”

a suspected al-Qa`ida hideout in South Waziristan in 2003,<sup>31</sup> denied that ETIM maintained any links to al-Qa`ida or the Taliban and said that the group had no intention of targeting the United States.³² Details surrounding Mahsum's presence in Pakistan are unclear. In spite of his denials of ETIM links to al-Qa`ida or the Taliban, it is conceivable that Mahsum may have eventually joined ranks with militants.

The veracity of China's claims tying ETIM to al-Qa`ida has come under scrutiny. Although China claims the ETIM has extensive reach and capabilities, little is actually known about the group. Moreover, ETIM may be comprised of Uighur nationalists who fled Xinjiang for Afghanistan in the 1990s to plot against China and not, as Beijing asserts, to join forces with al-Qa`ida.³³ While acknowledging its

separatist agenda, many observers argue that China exaggerates the perceived threat of ETIM by conflating all acts of violence that may occur spontaneously or by the hands of other Uighur groups to ETIM to justify further repression of Uighur political dissent in Xinjiang.³⁴ Since Mahsum's death in 2003, the very existence of ETIM has also come into question due to the lack of credible information about the group that does not originate from Beijing.³⁵ The controversy surrounding the Uighurs held at Guantanamo Bay who China accuses of membership in ETIM also raises questions about China's previous claims about the group.³⁶ The men, who resided in a camp in Afghanistan for Uighur nationalists who had fled Xinjiang, were detained by U.S. forces as enemy combatants. In spite of Chinese protests, the men were exonerated by U.S. authorities, with a number of them subsequently resettled in Albania, Bermuda, and Palau due to U.S. fears that they would be mistreated in China. Seven Uighurs remain in custody at Guantanamo Bay.³⁷

Separate from the ETIM, in July 2008 China was threatened by another obscure Uighur militant group, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). The group released a videotaped statement titled “Our Blessed Jihad in Yunnan” in the Uighur language by “Commander Seyfullah.” The statement claimed responsibility for a series of terrorist attacks, including a string of bus bombings in Xinjiang, the southern province of Yunnan, Shanghai, and elsewhere.³⁸ The video also contained a threat to stage attacks during the summer 2008 Olympics in Beijing: “The Turkistan Islamic Party warns China one more time...Our aim is to target the most critical points related to the Olympics. We will try to attack Chinese central cities severely

using the tactics that have never been employed.”³⁹ What sets TIP apart from other Uighur militant groups is its radical Islamist discourse reminiscent of al-Qa`ida-inspired extremists.⁴⁰ Little is known about the TIP. Despite a lack of concrete evidence, TIP is sometimes referred to as an affiliate or offshoot of ETIM or even ETIM operating under a different label, while others believe that it is tied to other Central Asia-based militants who are themselves tied to al-Qa`ida, including the IMU. Uighur activists have charged that Beijing may be behind the creation of the TIP in an effort to justify further crackdowns against Uighur activists in Xinjiang.⁴¹

Al-Qa`ida Singles Out China

A key feature of al-Qa`ida's platform is its determination to speak on behalf of besieged Muslims across the globe. Compared to al-Qa`ida's emphasis on the suffering of the Palestinians and the overall negative impact on Muslims of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, the plight of Uighurs in China has received only scant attention over

“It is also unclear if al-Qa`ida has the resources required, namely capable networks operating on Chinese soil, to strike inside China.”

the years. The July 2009 violence in Xinjiang, however, prompted al-Qa`ida to issue its first direct threat against China. Al-Qa`ida's Algerian-based North African affiliate, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), reportedly announced their intent to exact revenge against China and Chinese interests, including the approximately 50,000

27 Philip P. Pan, “U.S. Warns of Plot by Group in W. China,” *Washington Post*, August 29, 2002.

28 Millward.

29 “Editorial: Uighur Terrorist in Pakistan,” *Daily Times*, June 27, 2006.

30 Shaun Tandon, “US Lawmakers Seek Review of Uighur ‘Terror’ Label,” *Agence France-Presse*, June 16, 2009.

31 “Military Confirms Killing Chinese ‘Terrorist,’” *Dawn*, December 24, 2003.

32 Mahsum's denial of links to al-Qa`ida or the Taliban is significant considering that allies or affiliates of al-Qa`ida typically boast of their associations with the group. See Roberts, June 16, 2009.

33 Ibid.

34 In addition to ETIM, China implicates a host of obscure Uighur nationalist groups in violence, including the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan (URFET), and the Uighur Liberation Organization (ULO).

35 Roberts, June 16, 2009.

36 Tandon.

37 “Guantanamo Uighurs Sent to Palau,” *BBC*, October 31, 2009.

38 Tania Branigan, “China Plays Down Terror Link as Bus Explodes,” *Guardian*, July 28, 2008; Deborah Charles, “Group Threatens Olympics Attack, Claims Bombed Buses,” *Reuters*, July 26, 2008.

39 Charles.

40 One interesting aspect of TIP is its presence on the internet, namely its release of Arabic-language publications typical of al-Qa`ida and its affiliates. For more details, see Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Journal of the Turkistan Islamic Party Urges Jihad in China,” *Terrorism Monitor* 7:9 (2009). In a related point, since the July 2009 riots, the Uighur question tends to receive more attention on Arabic-language radical Islamist websites and chat room forums.

41 Roberts, June 16, 2009.

Chinese living and working in Algeria, days after the riots in Urumqi.⁴² Additionally, in a videotaped statement that featured senior al-Qa`ida leader Abu Yahya al-Libi that appeared online on October 7, 2009, Abu Yahya called on Muslims to direct their attention to the plight of the Uighurs. Regarding the violence in Xinjiang, Abu Yahya declared:

This massacre is not being carried out by criminal Crusaders or evil Jews who have committed crimes against our nation...Today, a new massacre is being carried out by Buddhist nationalists and communists against the Muslim population in eastern Turkestan... It is a duty for Muslims today to stand by their wounded and oppressed brothers in East Turkestan...and support them with all they can.⁴³

Al-Qa`ida's decision to single out China is noteworthy on a number of levels. Given al-Qa`ida's unshaken focus on targeting the United States and U.S. interests abroad, it is unclear if the group is capable of or interested in expending resources to target China. In this regard, al-Qa`ida may not be interested in opening up another front in its campaign that would entail taking on China directly; this would likely encourage the United States and China to cooperate more closely in destroying the organization. Rather, al-Qa`ida may be content with providing moral support to others who may choose to strike China and Chinese interests in other countries independently.

AQIM, for instance, claimed responsibility for an attack on June 17, 2009 against an Algerian paramilitary police convoy escorting Chinese construction workers; 19 paramilitary police and one Chinese worker were reportedly killed in the incident.⁴⁴ AQIM has a history of targeting foreigners in Algeria, including foreign workers, and the group's apparent intent to target

Chinese in particular following the July 2009 riots may lead to further attacks against Chinese interests in the region. It is also unclear if al-Qa`ida has the resources required, namely capable networks operating on Chinese soil, to strike inside China. At the same time, al-Qa`ida's decision to exploit the July 2009 riots demonstrates its ability to harness current events dominating the news cycle to further validate its narrative as a vanguard of Islamic resistance. In this case, al-Qa`ida saw an opportunity to speak in defense of what it sees as a besieged Muslim minority suffering under an oppressive regime as most of the world—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—stand by in silence.

Conclusion

The nature and scope of the violence in Urumqi in July 2009 and the increasing international interest among Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the Uighur question will impact the future of the region. By all accounts, China will continue to treat the Uighur question as a vital security matter. In doing so, it will go to great lengths to root out all forms of dissent, peaceful or violent, under the guise of counterterrorism. Meanwhile, al-Qa`ida's foray into the politics of Xinjiang should remain cause for further observation. Yet it is unlikely that the group will set their sights on China in the near future when there are far more pressing issues at hand, such as striking their primary targets: the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests abroad.

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Ninawa Province: Al-Qa`ida's Remaining Stronghold

By Andrea Plebani

SINCE THE DEATH of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in June 2006, al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) has been seriously weakened as a terrorist and insurgent organization. The group was unable to achieve its main objective of creating a "genuine" Islamic state in the heart of the Muslim world. Nevertheless, AQI continues to retain sufficient support and capabilities to prevent the complete normalization of the Iraqi system, to wage a prolonged low-intensity conflict (focused on several strategic provinces¹), and to implement high-profile coordinated attacks such as the operations targeting Baghdad on August 19, October 25 and December 8, 2009.² While Baghdad continues to remain AQI's major operational center of gravity, its presence in the capital is limited due to the strong pressure exerted by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and U.S. forces. In this framework, several elements indicate that Ninawa Province is the movement's main stronghold and financial hub.³

This article will show how the death of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 marked the gradual weakening of AQI, identify the factors that have made Ninawa Province the group's main remaining stronghold, and assess whether AQI has moved toward a more traditional terrorism campaign and away from the "mini-state" model.

1 Some 79% of the attacks waged from July to September 2009 took place in four provinces: Baghdad, Ninawa, Diyala and Salah al-Din. See "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," U.S. Department of Defense, report to the U.S. Congress, September 2009.

2 The August 19 bombings hit the Foreign and Finance ministries and killed at least 100 people. On October 25, attacks targeted the Justice Ministry and the Baghdad governorate headquarters, killing at least 150 people. The December 8 attacks targeted a courthouse, two colleges, a mosque and a bank, killing at least 120 people. For details, see Steven Lee Myers and Marc Santora, "Election Date Set in Iraq as Bombs Kill Scores," *New York Times*, December 8, 2009.

3 Eric Hamilton, "The Fight for Mosul," Institute for the Study of War, April 2008.

42 Liam Stack, "China Warns Citizens in Algeria of Al Qaeda Threat," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 15, 2009.

43 "China: Al-Qaeda Urges Holy War to Defend Muslims," Adnkronos International, October 7, 2009.

44 Christian Lowe and Lamine Chikhi, "Insurgents Ambush Algerian Police Convoy, Kill 19," Reuters, June 18, 2009.

The Post-Zarqawi Phase

Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's death in June 2006 dealt a serious blow to AQI. Since its birth, AQI was organized around al-Zarqawi, who offered charismatic, albeit controversial,⁴ leadership. The group was primarily guided by foreign fighters, with Iraqi militants substantially underrepresented in the upper echelons of the organization.⁵ After his assassination, the movement had to reorganize and overcome a crisis of legitimacy as it was increasingly marginalized from its Sunni Arab supporters in Iraq.

To stem losses of local support, the new AQI leadership⁶ tried to strengthen its links to Iraqi society. In October 2006, AQI was involved in the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an umbrella organization of Iraqi insurgent groups led by Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi. AQI's interest in creating the ISI can be seen as an attempt to limit the deepening divisions that were weakening the movement. Yet it did not move fast enough to prevent its near complete marginalization from Iraqi society. A growing number of Sunni Arab tribal elders—whose economic interests as well as authority had become seriously compromised by AQI⁷—began to view the group as a more dangerous enemy than U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi government forces. As a result, a growing number of Sunni Arab tribal leaders began to cooperate with the new Iraqi regime and U.S.-led forces.⁸

In a few months, and in large part due to the strengthening of the Awakening movements⁹ and the new strategic posture adopted by U.S. troops and ISF units in the wake of the "surge," the ISI's power waned and the movement lost much of its ground. Caught between two fires that threatened to put an end to its battle in the "land of the two rivers," AQI gradually abandoned several of its traditional strongholds in central-western Iraq and sought shelter in areas that remained supportive of its cause. It also restructured its logistic and financial networks, strengthened cooperation with the remnants of the insurgency and crafted a new strategy favoring the continuation of its struggle.

Ninawa Province: AQI's Main Stronghold

Ninawa Province is characterized by a series of intertwined elements that have made it the perfect base for AQI's revival. It is situated in an ideal geographic position, it suffers from a strong insurgency not courted by Iraqi government reconciliation initiatives, and has a sociopolitical fabric fragmented along ethno-sectarian lines that is deeply affected by mistrust toward the central government. Select local communities are ready to consider insurgent groups as the only actors capable of restoring the old social order to the area.

The Geopolitical Factor

Ninawa's geographic position has made it the perfect nexus between AQI's needs and the traditional smuggling routes controlled by tribes and communities living on either side of the Iraq-Syria border. The relations between these tribes and AQI were built on solid and shared interests; these interests make it less likely that the relationship will backfire as it did with the Sunni Arab tribes in Anbar Province. As a result, AQI has been able to rely on safe channels, allowing it to take advantage of the supply lines offered by the "facilitation networks" based in Syria,¹⁰

and to count on a flow of fighters, funds and materials that the local security forces have proved unable to halt. Moreover, the population involved in the smuggling activities can benefit from the increased traffic and related money flow. As stated by Matthew Levitt, smuggling is "a lucrative business, and the foreign fighters pipeline in Syria is believed to have benefitted the local populations on both sides of the Syrian-Iraqi border in

"Ninawa's geographic position has made it the perfect nexus between AQI's needs and the traditional smuggling routes controlled by tribes and communities living on either side of the Iraq-Syria border."

the form of jobs, increased cash flow into the local economy, purchase of supplies, staples, and rents."¹¹ Smuggling routes are extremely significant for local communities since they represent one of the main sources of income in areas which—due to the instability of the recent years and the existing Arab-Kurdish standoff—have been neglected by the central government and are traditionally devoid of suitable and attractive economic alternatives.

Smuggling routes are not the only element that has made Ninawa relevant for AQI. The economic importance of Ninawa's capital Mosul, for example, is a major factor helping to transform the province into AQI's main logistical and support center.¹² Beginning with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the area in 2004, the city became the most important financial hub for AQI, capable of providing up to 80% of its

4 For an in-depth analysis of AQI's status after al-Zarqawi's death, see Brian Fishman, "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq," *Washington Quarterly* 29:4 (2006): pp. 19-32.

5 Personal interview, Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, secretary-general of the al-Wasat Front and the former Iraqi national security adviser, Como, Italy, December 6, 2009.

6 AQI is now under the command of "Abu Hamza al-Muhajir," who is presumably the Egyptian militant Abu Ayyub al-Masri.

7 Another important source of hatred against AQI was the movement's disregard of traditions, as described in David Kilcullen, "Field Notes on Iraq's Tribal Revolt Against Al-Qa'ida," *CTC Sentinel* 1:11 (2008).

8 For an in-depth analysis of the causes of AQI's decline, see Brian Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (New York: Combatting Terrorism Center, 2009).

9 On this issue, see John McCarty, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *Washington Quarterly* 32:1 (2009): pp. 43-59; Michael Eisenstadt, "Tribal Engagement: Lessons Learned," *Military Review*, September-October 2007; Kimberly Kagan, "Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al-Qaeda From Its Stronghold in Western Iraq," Institute for the Study of War, April 5, 2007.

10 For more information about these networks, see Mat-

thew Levitt, "Foreign Fighters and Their Economic Impact: A Case Study of Syria and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3:3 (2009); Ryan Mauro, "Has Damascus Stopped Supporting Terrorists?" *Middle East Quarterly* 16:3 (2009); Safa A. Hussain, "Enough is Enough," www.bitterlemons.org, September 10, 2009.

11 Levitt, p. 18.

12 "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq."

internal funds¹³ at its height as a result of a mafia-style network entrenched in the city.¹⁴ Despite several ISF military operations to destroy this network, it continues to provide the movement with a significant financial stream.

Tactical Cooperation with Local Insurgent Movements

Insurgent groups, especially former members of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party, are abundant in Ninawa Province. Their presence has helped AQI regroup in the region. Learning from its losses in Anbar Province, AQI did not try to impose its will on the other insurgent groups active in the area, but instead forged strong tactical linkages to keep the region under the grips of the insurgency.¹⁵ In this framework, particularly relevant is the cooperation between AQI and Ba'athist groups. Several high-level Iraqi officials,¹⁶ as well as U.S. General Ray Odierno, deem this relationship as responsible for the high-profile attacks targeting the country in the last year. According to General Odierno,

the size of al-Qaida has been reduced significantly, they can no longer conduct the attacks independently, they can only do it with the help of others. Baathist elements are no longer capable of operating independently as well, so the successes we've had have forced them to work together.¹⁷

This tactical cooperation shows that the dividing line between AQI and former Ba'athists is thin and at times overlaps. Moreover, a growing ideological rapprochement between the two movements appears underway, as demonstrated by the statement released on December 2, 2009 by Ba'athist leader Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri,¹⁸ who invited the Iraqi resistance and the mujahidin to lay down the basis for the creation of a new Iraqi state founded on a legislative system that considers the Qur'an as its first and main legal source.¹⁹

A Fragmented Sociopolitical Fabric

Ninawa Province's ethno-religious mosaic represents another valuable asset for AQI's revival. While historically dominated by a strong Sunni Arab majority, which traditionally held the levers of power, Ninawa is the seat of important Kurdish, Christian, Shabak and Yazidi communities that claim ancient and strong linkages to the territory. Under Saddam's regime, the region witnessed the effects of a prolonged Arabization campaign—aimed at limiting the relevance of the Kurdish community and strengthening Sunni Arab identity in the area—that altered the original ethno-religious map, fueling the resentment of hundreds of families obliged to abandon their ancestral homes.

The fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 and the transfer of control from U.S. to Kurdish security forces in 2004 in Ninawa pushed many of the Sunni Arab families, which settled in the area in the wake of the government-led Arabization process, to flee their homes. This added hatred to hatred toward the new Iraqi government, which was perceived hostile to the Sunni Arabs and allied with its worst enemies: the United States, Iran and the Kurdish leadership.²⁰ Furthermore, the growing Kurdish military, economic and

political influence in Ninawa, cemented by the victory of its list in the 2005 elections, created resentment among Sunni Arabs.²¹ This resentment has not been extinguished by the pro-Sunni al-Hadbaa coalition's victory in the 2009 provincial elections.²² This has fueled a strong insurgency in Ninawa that the Iraqi government has been unable to tackle.

In this context, AQI has been able to exploit the anger of the Sunni Arab community and the existing local divisions. AQI has adopted a strategy that targets Ninawa's minorities to prevent the stabilization of the area, to display the Iraqi government's inability to provide security, and to perpetuate

“This tactical cooperation shows that the dividing line between AQI and former Ba'athists is thin and at times overlaps.”

a climate of fear that sustains the movement directly (through its mafia-style network) and indirectly (by strengthening the perception that it still retains powerful military capabilities).

This strategy also underlines a deep understanding of the local ethno-sectarian balance: by attacking these communities, AQI can continue its struggle without waging a bloody campaign against local institutions and security forces (which maintain strong linkages with the local Sunni community and have been accused of collaborating with insurgents) and *peshmerga* (or Kurdish militias whose presence in the area AQI recognizes as instrumental in fomenting Sunni Arab anger and distrust).

13 Personal interview, Safa A. Hussain, former brigadier general in the Iraqi Air Force and Iraqi national security adviser, December 2009.

14 AQI fundraising activities in Ninawa (mainly kidnapping, racketeering, extortion as well as oil theft and smuggling) rely on a network of agents located on the territory and are based on an alliance of interests with local criminal gangs. For more details, see Michael Knights, “Al-Qa`ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:7 (2008); Lennox Samuels, “Al Qaeda Nostra,” *Newsweek*, May 21, 2008; Phil Williams, “Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq,” Strategic Studies Institute, June 2009.

15 Knights.

16 Sammy Ketz, “Iraq Security Adviser Warns of Qaeda Threat Ahead of Poll,” Agence France-Presse, December 29, 2009; Khalid al-Ansary, “Iraq's Maliki Blasts Foreign Support for Bombings,” Reuters, December 9, 2009.

17 Jim Garamone, “Commanders: Iraq Progress Will Continue in U.S. Drawdown Year,” U.S. Department of Defense, January 1, 2010.

18 Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri was Saddam Hussein's former deputy chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council and is the leader of one of the two wings of the “new” Iraqi Ba'ath Party.

19 “A statement from the leader believer Mujahid Izzat Ibrahim Al Duri on the occasion of the formation of the Jihad, Liberation and National Salvation Front,” posted on al-Basrah.net, November 2, 2009.

20 “On Vulnerable Ground: Violence Against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories,” Human Rights Watch, November 10, 2009.

21 The 2005 elections were boycotted by the Sunni Arab community.

22 The provincial elections held on January 31, 2009 marked the victory of the al-Hadbaa National List which, appealing to Arab identity in the province, received 48.4% of the votes, defeating the Kurdish coalition that has headed the region since 2005. For a deeper analysis of the political situation in the province, see “Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle over Ninawa,” International Crisis Group, September 28, 2009.

Toward A Major Strategic Shift?

AQI has exploited local conditions to transform Ninawa into one of its main strongholds. Yet this achievement could represent just one element of a broader strategic shift by AQI aimed at reversing the debacle it suffered during the last three years. In this regard, the creation of a solid base in the province and the completion of the Iraqification process of the group that started after al-Zarqawi's death has been coupled with a series of initiatives aimed at adapting the movement's strategy to local conditions and to exploit its traditional strengths.

The recent terrorist attacks that hit Baghdad indicate that AQI is increasing high-profile coordinated attacks against Iraqi political targets and institutions, in addition to continuing its campaign aimed at fostering sectarian divisions. The decision to focus on these types of attacks—widely recognized as an AQI trademark—could indicate a shift from the “ISI paradigm” of transforming areas under jihadist control into states or mini-states administrated according to Shari`a.²³ By concentrating on high-profile attacks, AQI could be moving toward a more traditional terrorism campaign, aimed at reasserting AQI's role in the country and limiting the huge losses experienced by the movement since 2006.

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The French Approach to Counterterrorism

By Charles Rault

IN THE LAST five years, a number of terrorist attacks have occurred in Western Europe. In March 2004, Islamist terrorists attacked Madrid's commuter train system, killing 191 people. On July 7, 2005, Islamist terrorists struck London's public transportation system, killing more than 50 people. A number of other plots in Western Europe have been disrupted. Since the 9/11 attacks on the United States, France has managed to escape a terrorist attack. Nevertheless, the threat to France remains high, and French authorities believe that it is only a matter of time before their country is targeted successfully, likely by militants associated with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹

There are a number of reasons why France has not suffered a terrorist attack in more than a decade. One reason is due to the successes of the country's experienced and well-established counterterrorism apparatus. France's security apparatus was strengthened in the last two decades in response to multiple terrorist attacks that struck the country in the 1990s—effectively foreshadowing today's threat of Islamist terrorism. It is useful to review France's domestic counterterrorism efforts to better understand how other governments have met this growing challenge. This article will provide background on previous terrorist attacks targeting France, the government's overall view toward counterterrorism, and finally the tactics it uses to combat the ongoing terrorism threat.

1 According to French former counterterrorism judge Jean-Louis Bruguière, the current threat level is four, with five the highest. See “L'ancien juge Jean-Louis Bruguière évalue trente ans de terrorisme,” *La Voix du Nord*, November 7, 2009. As for the claim that the greatest terrorist threat to France is likely from AQIM militants, see personal interview, former DGSE intelligence officer, Paris, November 6, 2009. AQIM was formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). French sources argue that the GSPC's connection to al-Qa`ida is nominal, not operational.

History of Terrorist Violence in France

From the mid-1970s, France and other European countries faced threats from separatist or left-wing terrorists. In 1985, for example, General René Audran, the chief of arms sales for the French Ministry of Defense, was assassinated by the urban guerrilla group Action Directe.² In 1986, the same group was blamed for the murder of Georges Besse, the director of the French automotive company Renault.³

From 1982 to 1987, terrorist violence in France peaked after state-sponsored terrorist groups from the Middle East targeted French interests in the context of East-West tensions generated by the Cold War.⁴ Groups such as the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) and Lebanese Hizb Allah, in addition to Carlos “The Jackal,” were the most active. In 1988, the ANO executed four French citizens on a Greek tourist boat, the *City of Poros*. Hizb Allah conducted a campaign of 13 terrorist attacks beginning in 1985 that culminated with an attack against the store “Tati” at Rue de Rennes in Paris in 1986, killing seven people and wounding 66.⁵ Known for having planned the attack on the headquarters of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna in 1975, Venezuelan terrorist Carlos “The Jackal” first joined the Palestinian cause as a member of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) before operating undercover for East Germany's Stasi and Romania's Securitate.⁶ In 1982, Carlos was

2 Frederick Pajnton, William Dowell and William McWhirter, “Terrorism New Generation of Violence,” *Time Magazine*, February 11, 1985.

3 Action Directe denied any responsibility. In Dominique Lorentz's and David Carr-Brown's *La République atomique: France-Iran le pacte nucléaire* film documentary, the authors suggest that Besse might have been killed by Iranian operatives due to his previous involvement in the nuclear-related disagreements between France and Iran.

4 In this context, terrorist groups also targeted U.S. and Jewish interests.

5 There were a number of motives behind Hizb Allah's targeting of French interests. The group demanded the release of Lebanese militant Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, which France refused to do. Moreover, France was targeted due to its alleged support for the Christian Maronites. Iran was also not pleased with French support to Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

6 John Follain, *Jackal: The Complete Story of the Legendary Terrorist, Carlos the Jackal* (New York: Arcade Publish-

23 This strategy seems to be based on Abu Bakr Naji, an important jihadist ideologue who wrote *Idarat al-Tawabbush* (Management of Savagery). In his book, Naji indicates a plan to re-establish the caliphate and, according to his program, under the “management of savagery” stage, the mujahidin should transform the areas under their control into states or semi-states which they should administrate according to Shari`a law.

involved in supplying weapons in the failed rocket attack against the French nuclear power station Superphénix.⁷ In 1983, Carlos' group killed four people in a bombing against two TGV high-speed trains in France.⁸ Reportedly a convert to Islam, Carlos once preceded Usama bin Ladin as the most dangerous global terrorist.⁹ In 1994, Carlos was apprehended by French authorities, and is now serving a life sentence in a Paris prison for the 1975 murders of two French intelligence agents and one of their informants.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Islamist extremists recruited youth in the impoverished French suburbs and radicalized several of them to undertake terrorist operations. The Islamist terrorist threat grew dramatically when the Algerian government annulled the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the largest Algerian Islamic opposition party, in the first round of Algeria's legislative elections in 1991. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) opted for violent tactics in 1992 and 1993 in response to the annulment, and it began to target those suspected of supporting the Algerian government. It also designated foreigners in Algeria and French people everywhere as priority targets.¹⁰ On the pretense that French authorities opposed the GIA by dismantling its logistical and funding networks in France, the group decided to strike France. In addition to assassinating French people in Algeria, the group took an Air France flight hostage on December 24, 1994.¹¹ In 1995, the GIA killed eight people

during attacks against metro stations in Paris.¹²

Despite these attacks, French intelligence moved quickly to disrupt the GIA networks, and this caused the terrorist group to increasingly move its logistical, funding and propaganda activities to other European countries, especially to the United Kingdom. Over time, due to tensions between the GIA's core members on the extreme use of violence against civilians, Muslims included, and successful French counterterrorist efforts, the GIA's operations and influence faltered.

The terrorist incidents of the 1990s showed France the level of sophistication that terrorist groups could achieve. The GIA and other networks took advantage of European laws—such as a lack of extradition agreements—to build extended networks. This had ramifications throughout North Africa and Western Europe. Although it was on a smaller scale when compared to today, France nevertheless saw the 1990s as a period that foreshadowed the current fight against al-Qa`ida and related groups. Today's Islamist terrorist groups share a similar ideology that is hostile to democracy and that rejects social and political progress.¹³ Moreover, “homegrown” converts to Islam engaged in jihadist actions as early as 1996 in France, when the “gang de Roubaix”¹⁴ robbed banks and attempted to blow up a car with gas cylinders at a G7 meeting in Lille, France.¹⁵ The case demonstrated to French intelligence the danger posed by a few fanatic individuals and the interaction between violent crime and terrorism. Indeed, Islamist terrorism was already international, long before 9/11.

12 “Attentats de 1995: le procès tant attendu,” RFI, September 30, 2002. In December 2005, Rachid Ramda, accused of organizing the 1995 metro bombings, was extradited to France from the United Kingdom. Ramda was convicted in 2007 for involvement in the GIA and the metro bombings. He received a life sentence.

13 Abdelhak Layada, one of the founders of the GIA, was quoted as saying “political pluralism is equivalent to sedition.” See *Jeune Afrique*, January 27, 1994.

14 The Gang de Roubaix was run by two French converts to Islam, Christophe Caze and Lionel Dumont. It counted up to six members.

15 Mary Dejevsky, “Islamic Terror Link to French Siege,” *Independent*, April 2, 1996.

Today, France remains a priority target for al-Qa`ida and its affiliates.¹⁶ In December 2008, for example, the counterterrorist section of the French criminal investigation department and the domestic intelligence organization, the Central Directorate of Interior Intelligence (DCRI), detained several people for questioning who had suspected ties to Afghan networks.¹⁷ The suspects planned to attack the newly-built headquarters of the DCRI in Levallois-Perret with a car bomb.¹⁸

More recently, in October 2009 Adlene Hicheur, a 32-year-old French nuclear physicist of Algerian origin, discussed possible terrorist attacks targeting

“Although it was on a smaller scale when compared to today, France nevertheless saw the 1990s as a period that foreshadowed the current fight against al-Qa`ida and related groups.”

French businesses and military barracks.¹⁹ He allegedly exchanged e-mails with members of AQIM in North Africa. Although he never reached the operational stage, Hicheur is now being held under “provisional detention” with no time limit. What raised concern in the intelligence community is that he was working on the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), a unique scientific project led by the Switzerland-based European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and that uses state-of-the-art nuclear-related technology.

ing, 1998).

7 Mycle Schneider, “The Threat of Nuclear Terrorism,” speech to the French National Assembly, December 10, 2001.

8 “Suspected Terrorist ‘Carlos the Jackal’ to Face Trial,” NewsMax, May 4, 2007.

9 David Yallop, *Tracking the Jackal: The Search for Carlos, the World's Most Wanted Man* (New York: Random House, 1993).

10 Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, *Histoire du terrorisme, De l'Antiquité à Al Qaïda* (Paris: Bayard, 2006).

11 The hostage-taking on Christmas Day in 1994 of Air France flight AF8969 and the successful neutralization of the four Algerian GIA terrorists by the National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (GIGN) task force made the French people realize the seriousness of the threat. It also gave them confidence in the government's capacity to address it. The terrorists' final objective was to crash the plane into the Eiffel Tower, a tactic later used on 9/11.

16 “Al Qaeda Threatens France for Perceived Anti-Burqa Stance,” CNN, June 30, 2009.

17 “Comment on traque les terroristes,” *Le Point*, March 12, 2009.

18 Ibid.

19 “Suspect Physicist Discussed Attacks on French Army,” Associated Press, November 17, 2009.

The French Government's View on Counterterrorism

Led by judges from the counterterrorism section of the public prosecutor's office, counterterrorism investigations—whether domestic or foreign—are conducted in the same manner as a criminal investigation. Terrorists are treated as any other dangerous criminal to delegitimize their “cause.” From the French viewpoint, the special jurisdiction for enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay is counterproductive because it elevates terrorists to a higher level of importance, bolstering their narrative. Moreover, the French government views the threat of terrorism differently from the United States. Although France considers Islamist terrorism a major threat, it does not view terrorist actions as an “act of war” against France or against the West as a whole.²⁰ France defines terrorism as the violent expression of extremism, which is sometimes motivated by religion and other times motivated by different factors.

This definition was borne out of France's extensive history of dealing with guerrilla and terrorist tactics. In the Algerian War,²¹ for example, France learned that military victory on the ground did not guarantee an end to terrorist attacks. Moreover, it realized that the “hearts and minds” of a population could not be won through military action alone. Indeed, as it faced growing resilience from National Liberation Front (FLN)²² networks, the French military increasingly used harsher measures to the detriment of conventional military procedures. Although these harsher tactics were more successful in gathering intelligence, it turned a large part of the local Arab population in Algeria against

the French.²³ Algeria eventually gained independence.

French Counterterrorism Tactics

France pursues a number of strategies to counter terrorist groups. France's intelligence agencies emphasize international cooperation, human sources and the training of counterterrorist operatives. It addresses the psychological dimension of the mission by following a strict three-tier approach that combines compliance, coherence and convergence.²⁴ This means that to reach optimal efficiency, counterterrorism must be inventive

“In basic terms, French law authorizes the arrest and prosecution of any individual who played a role, however minimal and remote, in connection with a terrorist plot, or ‘enterprise.’”

and flexible while remaining within the confines of the law. Renouncing democratic principles to further a counterterrorism mission will only help terrorists spread their ideology and bolster their “martyr” narrative.

The main tool in the French counterterrorist arsenal is a unique and far-reaching law that makes “an intention to commit a crime a crime itself.” By accusing an individual of “association with wrong-doers involved in a terrorist enterprise,” the French judiciary can arrest and detain any suspect for any crime that could have ultimately assisted terrorist activity. In basic terms, French law authorizes the arrest and prosecution of any individual who played a role, however

minimal and remote, in connection with a terrorist plot, or “enterprise.”²⁵ This law can be somewhat compared to the U.S. Federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) that stipulates

it shall be unlawful for any person employed by or associated with any enterprise engaged in, or the activities of which affect, interstate or foreign commerce, to conduct or participate, directly or indirectly, in the conduct of such enterprise's affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity or collection of unlawful debt.²⁶

Another tactic used by French law enforcement to prevent terrorist attacks is to “incite” one or several suspects to break the law, often through the use of undercover agents. This is permissible in the French legal system if the objective is to prevent a more dangerous or impending offense. The intelligence services employ the same tactics to trace a network. Such special clauses only apply to cases related to procurement, narcotics and threats to the security of the state, which includes terrorism. Only a few magistrates control the legality of these actions, and their activities are highly classified. The French penal code that was modified in 2006 allows counterterrorism agents to investigate cases and testify anonymously by providing the judiciary with their administrative registration number.²⁷ An agent's real identity can only be unveiled upon the decision of the attorney general at the Court of Appeal in Paris. Consequently, the law authorizes the agents to “enter,” or infiltrate, networks under their agency's supervision. These agents are compartmentalized from conventional units of their own service and their operations are carried out in complete secrecy. France has a long history of infiltrating terrorist and criminal networks, and its intelligence and law enforcement agencies have been successful at this tactic for decades.

²⁰ This is a marked difference to the former U.S. administration of George W. Bush, which declared a “global war on terrorism.”

²¹ The Algerian War began on November 1, 1954 and ended on March 19, 1962. Although the French led a successful counterinsurgency strategy and achieved military victory, Algeria gained independence. The memory of this conflict still hampers good relations between the two countries.

²² The National Liberation Front is a socialist political party in Algeria. It was established on November 1, 1954 from a merger of smaller groups, with the objective of obtaining Algerian independence from France.

²³ For details on the war, see: Lt.-Col. James D. Campbell, “French Algeria and British Northern Ireland: Legitimacy and the Rule of Law in Low-Intensity Conflict,” *Military Review*, March-April 2005; David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2006); Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: NYRB, 2006).

²⁴ Personal interview, André Tarrat, former DST senior intelligence officer, Paris, November 7, 2009.

²⁵ French Penal Code, Article 421-2-2.

²⁶ Chapter 96 of Title 18 of the United States Code, 18 U.S.C. § 1961-1968, enacted in 1970, Section 1962, paragraph c.

²⁷ French Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 706-24.

French authorities have also progressively built a robust surveillance network that privileges the use of human sources. It identifies people who spend time with individuals known for having extremist views. Foreign intelligence identifies and monitors specific locations where jihadists pass through (such as in Pakistan's tribal areas). Allied intelligence agencies often inform their French counterparts of the presence of people of interest. Occasionally such individuals are recruited for intelligence purposes. Moreover, French intelligence services have identified and extracted relevant data from the mass of information available on the internet.

Similar to the constantly changing tactics of terrorist groups, French counterterrorism authorities are constantly adapting to recent developments. At the end of 2009, for example, French Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux announced that France would be grouping its elite police intervention units into a single force to better fight potential terrorist attacks.²⁸ The move will combine three existing units—comprising a total of 500 people—under a single command, known as the Intervention Force of the National Police (FIPN).²⁹

On a larger scale, considering that counterterrorism cannot rely solely on specialized agents, the search for operational intelligence is one of the primary missions of non-specialized internal security forces. This results in all agencies' and units' contribution in the detection and upward flow of intelligence for use in counterterrorism. For a good understanding of what is at stake, the government renewed law enforcement training programs and developed continuing education models so that all units know about the social and religious environment in French society so that they can better recognize and identify indications of possible terrorist activity.³⁰ Moreover, information-sharing between government officials and academics has fostered a better

understanding of the threat. Specific studies programs exist, such as the Paris-based Research Department on Contemporary Criminal Threats (DRMCC), which develops relevant theories on "early detection"³¹ and trains people from various backgrounds on the concept.³²

The population is the last line of defense. Since the events of the 1990s, the French people have become accustomed to living under the terrorism threat, and there are a number of public vigilance programs. For two decades, the French public has been encouraged to report any suspicious package or activity to the authorities.

Finally, the French would argue that counterterrorism and intelligence agencies in the country benefit from a higher level of secrecy and centralization. Contrary to the United States, there is no independent authority in charge of controlling France's intelligence agencies. Following the reshaping of the counterterrorism law in 2006, however, an eight-member parliamentary delegation in charge of intelligence affairs was established to monitor the general activities of the country's intelligence services. Nevertheless, the body has never delivered a report to the public, except the names of the delegation's members. Moreover, no public testimony has been given by any high-ranking French intelligence official; in the United States, on the other hand, this happens several times a year. Foreign intelligence conducted by the General Directorate for External Security (DGSE) is placed under the direct authority of France's president and prime minister. Domestic intelligence conducted by the DCRI is monitored by the criminal justice system, although disagreements are rare. Military intelligence under the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DRM) and the Security and Protection Department (DPSD) is controlled by

the army controller general from the Ministry of Defense.

Conclusion

France has faced terrorist threats for decades. As a result, it has a well-established counterterrorism apparatus that benefits from a number of laws that do not have real parallels in the United States, from being able to detain any individual who is even remotely connected to a "wrong-doer," to operating in a more secretive political environment. Moreover, the role of counterterrorism judges greatly assists the centralization of the French security apparatus, as these judges are in constant interaction with the judiciary, law enforcement and the intelligence agencies. The purpose of the counterterrorism judges—such as the well-known former judge Jean-Louis Bruguière—is to "connect the dots." Many of these benefits are unique to France, as the population supports practices that in the United States would be viewed as a violation of civil liberties. Nevertheless, it is useful for Western governments to study French counterterrorism practices due to their success in countering multiple terrorist plots after the violence of the 1990s.

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28 "France to Form Special Force to Fight Terrorists," Associated Press, December 1, 2009.

29 Ibid.

30 *La France face au terrorisme, Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme* (Paris: La documentation Française, 2006).

31 "Early detection" consists of making an early diagnosis of a potential security threat to act precisely and decisively.

32 Including a master-level degree in the analysis of contemporary criminal threats which the author of this article attended. In French, the theory is named *le décèlement précoce*. For details on the theory, see Xavier Raufer, *Les Nouveaux Dangers Planétaires - Chaos Mondial, Décèlement Précoce* (Paris: CNRS-Arès, 2009).

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

December 1, 2009 (UNITED STATES): U.S. President Barack Obama announced that 30,000 additional U.S. troops would be deployed to Afghanistan as part of the administration's strategy to stabilize the country by reversing Taliban "momentum." The troops would also prevent al-Qa`ida from establishing a safe haven. President Obama said that the troops would be deployed starting in early 2010 "with a goal of starting to withdraw forces from the country in July 2011." – *CNN, December 2*

December 1, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a provincial politician, Shamsheer Ali Khan, in the Swat Valley. Khan was a member of the Awami National Party. The bomber reportedly walked unchallenged into the grounds of Khan's house and then detonated his explosives. – *al-Jazeera, December 2*

December 2, 2009 (UNITED STATES): U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano warned, "Individuals sympathetic to al-Qaeda and its affiliates, as well as those inspired by their ideology, are present in the U.S., and would like to attack the homeland or plot overseas attacks against our interests abroad." – *Washington Post, December 3*

December 2, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a security checkpoint outside Pakistan's naval headquarters in the heart of Islamabad. Two naval personnel were killed in the blast. – *Bloomberg, December 2; BBC, December 2; Dawn, December 2*

December 2, 2009 (PAKISTAN): The mayor of Karachi said that the city is the "revenue engine for the Taliban." Mayor Syed Mustafa Kamal told Reuters, "People are being kidnapped here in Karachi and the ransom is taken in Waziristan." – *Reuters, December 2*

December 2, 2009 (SOMALIA): Abdinasir Seraan, the spokesman for the leader of the Ras Kamboni insurgent faction in Somalia, said that the group now considers al-Shabab to be the greatest threat to the country. The Ras Kamboni faction is part of the Somali insurgent coalition Hisbul Islamiyya, which has previously allied itself with al-Shabab. This relationship,

however, has been increasingly strained. Al-Shabab, a major insurgent group in Somalia, is linked to al-Qa`ida. – *Voice of America, December 2*

December 3, 2009 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed the head of Salah al-Din Province's anti-terrorism squad in Tikrit. Lieutenant-Colonel Ahmed al-Fahel died in the blast, along with three of his bodyguards. – *AFP, December 3*

December 3, 2009 (SOMALIA): A suicide bomber struck a graduation ceremony for medical students at the Shamo Hotel in Mogadishu, killing three cabinet ministers and at least 16 other people. The bomber was disguised as a veiled woman. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, although authorities blamed al-Shabab. An al-Shabab spokesman denied that the group was involved. – *Los Angeles Times, December 4; Independent, December 4; AP, December 5*

December 4, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Twenty-five NATO allies agreed to send 7,000 more troops to Afghanistan in support of U.S. President Barack Obama's December 1 decision to send 30,000 more U.S. soldiers to the country. – *Reuters, December 4*

December 4, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A mosque frequented by military officials in Rawalpindi was targeted by two suicide bombers during Friday prayers. At least two other militants then opened fire on worshippers. Approximately 36 people were killed. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed credit for the attack. – *Reuters, December 4; CNN, December 7*

December 6, 2009 (IRAQ): Unidentified gunmen killed four policemen guarding a vegetable market in Abu Ghurayb on the outskirts of Baghdad. – *AFP, December 6*

December 6, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded outside a mosque in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing two anti-Taliban tribal leaders. – *AFP, December 6*

December 7, 2009 (IRAQ): Five gunmen shot dead six members of an anti-al-Qa`ida militia as they were manning a checkpoint in Nadim village, 19 miles north of Baghdad. – *AFP, December 5*

December 7, 2009 (IRAQ): A bomb ripped through a school for boys in Baghdad's

Shi'a district of Sadr City, killing at least eight people. Among the dead were reportedly six children between the ages of six and 12. – *al-Jazeera, December 7*

December 7, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed 10 people outside a courthouse in Peshawar, the capital of the North-West Frontier Province. – *AP, December 8*

December 7, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Two suicide bombers detonated their explosives at a popular market in Lahore, killing at least 50 people. – *AP, December 8; The News International, December 9*

December 8, 2009 (IRAQ): At least five car bombs exploded in neighborhoods across Baghdad, killing 127 Iraqis. Three of the car bombs reportedly involved suicide bombers. The Islamic State of Iraq, which is directly tied to al-Qa`ida in Iraq, claimed credit for the attacks. – *St. Petersburg Times, December 9; Telegraph, December 9*

December 8, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed at least three militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The strike occurred in Spalga, 10 miles east of Miran Shah. – *Reuters, December 7*

December 8, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed Salah al-Somali in Pakistan. Al-Somali was identified as the head of al-Qa`ida's operations outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan. U.S. officials took credit for the operation, saying that al-Somali was on the Central Intelligence Agency's list of the top 20 al-Qa`ida targets. – *Wall Street Journal, December 12*

December 8, 2009 (NORTH AFRICA): Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed credit for the November kidnappings of three Spanish aid workers in Mauritania, and the kidnapping of French national Pierre Kamat in Mali. – *Voice of America, December 8*

December 9, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani authorities arrested five Muslim-American men in Sargodha, a major city in Punjab Province, on suspicion of having ties to Pakistani extremist groups. The men, who are all from the Washington D.C. suburbs, were allegedly on their way to North Waziristan Agency for training

with the Taliban and al-Qa`ida. It appears that the men used the internet—including Facebook and YouTube—to connect with extremist groups in Pakistan. The men were reportedly recruited on the internet by a man identified as “Saifullah,” who authorities in Pakistan are trying to find. – *New York Times*, December 10; NPR, December 11; *Washington Post*, December 13

December 11, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives on a busy street in Paktika Province, killing three people. One of the dead was a policeman. – *AFP*, December 11

December 13, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Approximately 70 suspected Islamic militants broke through a concrete wall and then stormed into a jail in the southern Philippines, freeing 31 inmates. At least five of the escaped militants were members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and 12 were from the Abu Sayyaf Group. – *The Scotsman*, December 14

December 14, 2009 (SPAIN): A Spanish court convicted 11 Islamic militants of membership in a terrorist group. The court, however, acquitted the men of a “specific” conspiracy to attack Barcelona’s metro subway system in January 2008. The judges found that the “Barcelona plot” had “not advanced sufficiently” to be considered a crime of conspiracy under Spanish law. – *CNN*, December 14

December 15, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least eight people near a hotel in the Wazir Akbar Khan district in Kabul. – *BBC*, December 15

December 15, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed two British soldiers out on patrol in Helmand Province. Two Afghan army soldiers also died in the blast. – *BBC*, December 15

December 15, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber rammed his vehicle into the outer wall of a provincial minister’s home in Punjab Province, killing at least 20 people. The lawmaker, Zulfikar Khosa, was not at home during the time of the attack. – *Bloomberg*, December 15

December 16, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine authorities have arrested Abdul Basir Latip, who has been identified as a founding member of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Authorities allege that Latip

played a role in forging links between the ASG and Jemaah Islamiya and al-Qa`ida. The United States is asking for his extradition for the 1993 kidnapping of an American missionary in Pangutaran, Sulu Province. According to the *Philippine Inquirer*, “Latip was arrested by Indonesian authorities last Nov. 21 and turned over to the Philippine Embassy in Jakarta, which sent him back to the Philippines.” – *BBC*, December 16; *Philippine Inquirer*, December 17

December 17, 2009 (GLOBAL): A wife of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Omaima Hassan, purportedly released a message to Muslim women urging them to “raise your children to obey Allah and love jihad and to defend the Muslim lands.” The message further said, “Fighting is not easy for women because they need a male guardian by their side...But we can place ourselves in service of the mujahidin and do what they ask of us. We can help by supporting warriors with money or information or even by a martyrdom operation.” – *CNN*, December 17

December 17, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed two people in a vehicle in Dosali village, located in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AP*, December 17

December 17, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Five U.S. unmanned aerial drones attacked two compounds in the Ambarshaga area of North Waziristan Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing 15 people. Zuhair al-Zahibi, an al-Qa`ida commander, was reportedly among the dead. – *Washington Post*, December 18; *AP*, December 17

December 17, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at the home of a local political leader in Bannu District of the North-West Frontier Province. The bomber was the only casualty. – *AFP*, December 17

December 17, 2009 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle targeted a group of policemen at a checkpoint in the city of Nazran, located in Ingushetia. The explosion wounded seven officers. – *AP*, December 17

December 17, 2009 (YEMEN): Yemeni security forces killed at least 28 suspected al-Qa`ida militants at a training camp in al-Maajala, Abyan Province. Yemeni

authorities identified one of the dead as Mohammed Saleh Mohammed Ali al-Kazemi, described as a deputy in an al-Qa`ida cell in Yemen. – *Washington Post*, December 17; *CNN*, December 18

December 17, 2009 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab militants stormed three UN Mine Action Service compounds in Baidoa. – *AFP*, December 18

December 18, 2009 (UNITED STATES): Three suspected members of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb arrived in New York to be charged with plotting to transport drugs through the Sahara desert to raise money for terrorist attacks. The men, all apparently from Mali, were arrested by local authorities in Ghana in the past week and then turned over to U.S. agents. – *AP*, December 18

December 18, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a mosque next to a police headquarters in Lower Dir District of the North-West Frontier Province. At least 11 people were killed by the explosion. – *Los Angeles Times*, December 19

December 18, 2009 (MAURITANIA): An Italian couple was kidnapped by gunmen in Mauritania. On December 27, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. – *AP*, December 19; *Reuters*, December 28

December 21, 2009 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed a local leader and three of his guards in Tal Afar, Ninawa Province. The leader, Hussein Akris, was an independent politician who heads the Tal Afar governing council. – *Reuters*, December 21; *AP*, December 21

December 22, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives outside a press club in Peshawar, killing three people. – *AP*, December 21; *AP*, December 22

December 23, 2009 (INDIA): Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram said that “twelve to 13 terror attacks [in India] were neutralized in 2009 which could have been like Mumbai.” – *AFP*, December 23

December 24, 2009 (IRAQ): Two bombs ripped through a busy bus station in Hilla, Babil Province, killing 15 people. – *AFP*, December 24

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The Combating Terrorism Center would like to express its gratitude to its financial supporters, for without their support and shared vision of the Center products like the CTC Sentinel could not be produced. If you are interested in learning more about how to support the Combating Terrorism Center, please visit <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/support/> or call Wayne Richardson at West Point's Association of Graduates at 845-446-1553.

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.

December 24, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber driving a horse-drawn cart loaded with explosives blew up in Kandahar, killing eight people. – *New York Times*, December 24

December 24, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed five people near a security checkpoint in Peshawar, the capital of the North-West Frontier Province. – *Washington Post*, December 24

December 24, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives outside a Shi'a shrine on the main road from Islamabad to the international airport, killing a six-year-old girl. – *AFP*, December 24

December 24, 2009 (YEMEN): Yemeni aircraft killed 34 suspected al-Qa`ida militants in Shabwa Province. – *AFP*, December 23

December 25, 2009 (UNITED STATES): Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian, attempted to blow up Northwest Airlines Flight 253 en route from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan. His explosives did not detonate properly, allowing passengers to subdue him. Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed credit for the failed attack. – *AFP*, December 26

December 25, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): The Taliban released a video showing Bowe Bergdahl, a U.S. soldier captured by insurgents on June 30, 2009. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Bergdahl had not been heard from since July 19, nearly three weeks after his capture." – *Los Angeles Times*, December 25

December 26, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Authorities found the beheaded body of an anti-Taliban Salarzai tribal elder in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP*, December 26

December 27, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Militants blew up the home of a government official in Kurram Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing the official and five members of his family. Sarbraz Saddiqi, his wife and four children died while sleeping when the house was destroyed with dynamite. – *BBC*, December 27

December 28, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a Shi'a religious procession in Karachi, killing at least 40 people. – *CNN*, December 29

December 28, 2009 (YEMEN): Yemeni authorities arrested 29 suspected al-Qa`ida members and announced that they foiled an attack on government targets in addition to the British Embassy. – *Christian Science Monitor*, December 28

December 29, 2009 (INDIA): The U.S. government issued an alert for Americans traveling to India, stating, "The US government continues to receive information that terrorist groups may be planning attacks in India." – *AFP*, December 29

December 30, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed seven CIA agents at Forward Operating Base Chapman in Khost Province. An officer of Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate was also killed. Multiple Taliban factions claimed credit for the attack. – *New York Daily News*, December 31; *Washington Post*, December 31

December 30, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants kidnapped two French journalists, their translator and driver in Kapisa Province. – *Reuters*, December 31

December 30, 2009 (IRAQ): A car bomb and a suicide bomber exploded at a government building in Ramadi, killing at least 27 people and wounding the Anbar Province governor. – *Financial Times*, December 31

December 30, 2009 (YEMEN): Yemeni authorities arrested Mohammed Abdu Saleh al-Haudali, who they identified as "one of the most dangerous terrorists wanted by the security forces." – *CNN*, December 31

December 31, 2009 (PAKISTAN): The United Nations announced that it will withdraw some of its staff from Pakistan, citing increased safety concerns as a result of Taliban attacks. – *Reuters*, December 31