



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

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Contents

FEATURE ARTICLE

1 American Perceptions of Terrorism in the Post-9/11 Decade

By Paul R. Pillar

REPORTS

3 The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria

By David Cook

5 Religious Allegiances among Pro-Iranian Special Groups in Iraq

By Reidar Visser

8 AQIM Returns in Force in Northern Algeria

By Andrew Lebovich

12 Violence Escalates in China's Xinjiang Province

By Jacob Zenn

15 The UK's Efforts to Disrupt Jihadist Activity Online

By Raffaello Pantucci

17 Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

20 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.

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.

American Perceptions of Terrorism in the Post-9/11 Decade

By Paul R. Pillar



THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY of the 9/11 attacks has become an occasion for reevaluating the terrorism threat to the United States. Three key questions have been raised. What is the status and current strength of al-Qa`ida, the group that perpetrated 9/11? Have measures taken since 9/11 made Americans any safer today? Why has the United States not been attacked again—at least in the sense of being attacked on a scale approaching 9/11? These are worthwhile questions, although they each involve a restricted perspective toward terrorism and counterterrorism. The first is inherently limited by being focused on only a single variety of terrorism or even just a single group. The second usually omits reference to any standard of success and failure in securing Americans from terrorism or to the costs and trade-offs entailed in obtaining a given degree of safety. The third question is usually a

yearning for an explanation that would be too simple to be an accurate analysis of what has determined the amount of terrorism directed against the United States during the past decade.

9/11 was one of the most traumatic events in U.S. history. It powerfully shaped perceptions and emotions of the American public to a degree that few other events have. It is not an exaggeration to say that the thoughts of most Americans about terrorism and counterterrorism revolve almost entirely around 9/11. Most Americans believe a “war on terror” began with 9/11, notwithstanding all the terrorism and efforts to counter it before that one event. Trauma and emotion are not generally conducive to good understanding of any topic, terrorism included. It should not be surprising that Americans’ trauma-driven attitudes and beliefs about terrorism are misplaced or inaccurate in important respects.

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Therefore, this article examines another set of questions, which are at least as useful as those posed above. How has 9/11 molded American attitudes about terrorism during the subsequent decade? To what extent do popular attitudes and perceptions conform with, or differ from, actual threats of terrorism today? Have counterterrorism policies been driven more by public perceptions than by the terrorist reality?

Inconsistent Interest in Counterterrorism

The enormous public reaction to a single event points to one important respect in which public perception diverges from reality. Public concern about terrorism and support for efforts to counter it tends to spike upward immediately after terrorist attacks and to subside gradually downward as time passes without another attack. Interest in counterterrorism thus produces a sawtooth pattern, and the policy priority and resources devoted to it tend to follow that pattern. Yet terrorist attacks are only the aperiodic outward manifestations of an underlying threat that does not vary with sudden upward spikes in a way that corresponds to changing public attitudes.

The off-the-chart spike in Americans' concern about terrorism in response to 9/11 was another instance of the same phenomenon, albeit one greatly amplified by the salience and physical impact of the attack. The U.S. public and political response would lead one to believe that the terrorist threat to the United States was far greater on September 12, 2001 than it had been on September 10. This was not the case, however. Public (and by implication, political) attention to terrorism was probably too low before 9/11. With the overwhelming preoccupation the subject became after the attack, it was too high. The greatly augmented priority and resources devoted to counterterrorism since 2001 have assuredly mitigated threats, through responses ranging from defensive security measures at home to offensive actions against individual terrorists abroad. But it is still fair to ask whether, by any reasonable measure of how terrorism compares with other threats to U.S. security and of how resources can be efficiently utilized, the augmentation was an overreaction.

Like spikes of attention following earlier terrorist attacks, the one after 9/11 is subject to fading over time until another attack occurs. The spike after 9/11, however, was so high that any fade will persist longer before returning to the level of public interest in terrorism before 9/11. Terrorism is still a major public worry. In a Gallup poll taken in 2010, Americans ranked it alongside government debt at the top of their list of dangers to the well-being of the United States.¹ To the extent the American public's enthusiasm for vigorous counterterrorist measures has lessened at all since the first couple of years after 9/11, the lessening has little to do with an objective assessment of the status and strength of any foreign terrorist group. It instead is a function of—in addition to the usual pattern of interest fading over time—the competition for attention from economic and other national problems and a backlash against some measures taken in the name of counterterrorism (especially involving compromises of privacy and treatment of detained suspects) that have come to be seen as excesses.

The American View of Foreign Threats

Another attribute of public perceptions about terrorism in the decade since 9/11 stems from a habitual American way of perceiving any foreign security threat in terms of specific, named countries or groups or the leaders of those countries or groups. In that respect, the notion of a “war on terror”—terrorism being a tactic rather than a specific foe—always was, on the face of it, an unnatural fit with the American way of thinking about security threats as well as with logic. (As Zbigniew Brzezinski once observed, a “war on terror” is no more logical than a “war on blitzkrieg.”) Yet the term “war” was used given the popular demand for a strong, forceful response to the horror of 9/11. Americans made the concept of a “war on terror” fit more comfortably with their usual way of perceiving foreign threats by equating the war with a struggle against al-Qa`ida, the group that had perpetrated 9/11, and to some degree with the group's leader, Usama bin Ladin.

The equation of counterterrorism with a fight against al-Qa`ida has pervaded much of the public discourse as well as the framing of public policy in the decade since 9/11. Analysis of almost any terrorist incident or terrorist-related discovery or individual is couched in terms of whether or not the subject of attention is “linked” to al-

“The broader phenomenon of Sunni jihadist terrorism to which the label al-Qa`ida is commonly applied is not weaker. Instead, it is even more widespread than it was 10 years ago.”

Qa`ida—the implication being that one should worry more if it is and less if it is not. A highly disproportionate share of U.S. resources expended in the name of counterterrorism have been directed against this one group. This particularly includes military operations in South Asia, especially a 10-year-old counterinsurgency in Afghanistan where the chief rationale has been to prevent al-Qa`ida from re-establishing a safe haven in the country.

The persistence of the equation of counterterrorism with a fight against al-Qa`ida is clearly illustrated by the “National Strategy for Counterterrorism” that the Barack Obama administration published in June 2011.<sup>2</sup> The document would have been more aptly titled the “National Strategy for the War on al-Qa`ida,” because that is the strategy's primary focus. All other terrorist acts or threats of terrorism in the world are noted and set aside in a few paragraphs.

If counterterrorism, as a subject of public discussion and governmental policy, were conceived as a result of a zero-based review conducted in 2011—unencumbered by the emotions from the disaster that struck on 9/11—the commentary and policies would look and sound much different. They would recognize that radical Sunni terrorism of

1 Lydia Saad, “Federal Debt, Terrorism, Considered Top Threats to U.S.,” Gallup, June 4, 2010.

2 “National Strategy for Counterterrorism,” U.S. White House, June 2011, available at www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf.

the sort exemplified most recognizably by al-Qa`ida is only one manifestation of international terrorism. There would be further recognition that even within the radical Sunni variety of terrorism, al-Qa`ida is only one element. Bin Ladin himself recognized that al-Qa`ida would only be a part of the picture, even if the picture is narrowed to include only those radical Sunnis with a transnational bent. The group he established is called, in English, "The Base"—one he never intended would do everything itself but instead would be the base from which larger efforts would be inspired and grow.

A present-day, zero-based review also would avoid the terminological confusion in the way the name "al-Qa`ida" has come to be used. Sometimes it refers to the group that Bin Ladin led—the one that executed 9/11, the bombing of the *USS Cole*, and the bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa. Often it is used much more loosely to refer to transnational Sunni terrorism in general. Sometimes it refers to some subset of that brand of terrorism, vaguely defined in terms of a group's own adoption of the al-Qa`ida brand name or some other "links" to the al-Qa`ida of Bin Ladin. Besides the overall confusion regarding what is being discussed, this broad use of a single name misleadingly implies more structure and central direction of a phenomenon that is far more diffuse and decentralized.

Real Trends

Al-Qa`ida's actual history in the past decade has made the discrepancy between popular perception and reality even greater than it was in the first years after 9/11. At the risk of oversimplification, that history can be summarized in two observations. First, al-Qa`ida narrowly defined—that is, the group that was led by Bin Ladin and is now headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri—is weaker and less capable of major operations than it was at the time of 9/11. That weakening has several causes, including U.S. kinetic operations in South Asia. Second, the broader phenomenon of Sunni jihadist terrorism to which the label al-Qa`ida is commonly applied is not weaker. Instead, it is even more widespread than it was 10 years ago. It has taken the form of a variety of individuals, cells, and groups on several continents.

These two observations together imply that the equation of counterterrorism with a fight against any single group is at least as misleading as at any time in the past 10 years. That equation obscures from where most of the initiative for terrorist operations is coming, which is at the periphery and not from a center in South Asia. This is true not only of groups in Asia and Africa (some, but not all, of which have adopted the al-Qa`ida name), but also would-be jihadist terrorists in the United States whose cases have come to light during the past few years.

The death of Bin Ladin in a U.S. raid in Pakistan in May 2011 has little direct effect on these patterns. As the materials confiscated in the raid confirmed, Bin Ladin had already been reduced in recent years to exhortation much more than direction. Bin Ladin's role as an operational commander had become negligible, and his role as an inspiration and source of ideology, which was still substantial, will continue even with his death.

The far greater effect of the raid is on perceptions back in the United States. It is too soon to gauge the full effect. Bin Ladin's passing may provide some beneficial corrective to the overly narrow focus on this one man, but it may also lead to a mistaken and detrimental belief that his departure has significantly reduced terrorist threats to the United States.

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The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria

By David Cook

ON AUGUST 26, 2011, a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at a United Nations compound in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, killing at least 21 people. Boko Haram, a militant group based in Nigeria's northwestern states of Yobe and Borno, claimed responsibility. Boko Haram is the popular title for a group that calls itself Jama`at ahl al-sunna li-da`wa wa-l-qital, and it has operated in Nigeria since 2002-2003. Its popular name connotes "[Western] education is forbidden" as a result of the perception that the group stood against any form of non-Islamic education. It has gained recent notoriety because of its transition from being a local radical Salafist group, which until 2009 had a largely quietist nature, to a Salafi-jihadi group that has demonstrated the capacity to carry out major operations, including suicide attacks in central Nigeria. It is in Boko Haram that one can see the possibility of a homegrown Salafi-jihadi group that could destabilize Nigeria for the foreseeable future (not unlike the more tribal and local nationalistic groups operating in the Niger Delta to the south).

This article chronicles the rise of Boko Haram, identifying the two phases in which the group has passed. It also suggests how the group may proceed in the future.

Boko Haram in Context

The roots of Boko Haram lie in the Islamic history of northern Nigeria, in which for some 800 years powerful sultanates centered around the Hausa cities close to Kano and the sultanate of Borno (roughly the region of the states of Borno and Yobe together with parts of Chad) constituted high Muslim civilizations. These sultanates were challenged by the jihad of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (that lasted from 1802-1812), who created a unified caliphate stretching across northern Nigeria into the neighboring countries.¹ Dan Fodio's legacy of jihad is one that

¹ Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of Shehu`Uthman Dan Fodio* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994).

is seen as normative by most northern Nigerian Muslims. The caliphate still ruled by his descendants (together with numerous smaller sultanates), however, was conquered by the British in 1905, and in 1960 Muslim northern Nigeria was federated with largely Christian southern Nigeria.

Since independence until 1999, Nigeria was ruled largely by military rulers, a number of whom were northern Muslims (although the longest ruling of them, Yakubu Gwon, was a Christian). During this period, Nigerian Islam was riven with doctrinal debates between the Sufis and the Salafists (led by the charismatic Abu Bakar Gumi until his death in 1992), oblivious to the fact that Christians were heavily proselytizing throughout the country, especially in the region of the Middle Belt. The growth of Christianity was reflected in the 1999 election of Olusegun Obasanjo (re-elected in 2003), and the continued southern Christian domination of Goodluck Jonathan (successor to the brief Muslim presidency of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2010).

The Muslim response to the Christian political ascendancy was the move during the period of 2000-2003 to impose Shari`a in 12 of the northern states in which they predominated.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, imposition of Shari`a brought the previously feuding Muslim groups together, and there was no further use of *takfir* (accusations of being non-Muslim).³ While the imposition of Shari`a did satisfy the official manifestations of Islam in the north (both Sufi and Salafi), it is clear that radicals who were *takfir* doctrinally—such as members of Boko Haram—were left outside.

Boko Haram: Phase I

Relations between Boko Haram and other Nigerian radical groups are unclear. Although most observers state that the group's name is actually *Jama`at ahl al-sunna li-da`wa wa-l-qital*, and that it is the descendent of the group that in 2002 was referred to as the Nigerian Taliban,⁴ it is not

absolutely certain that all of these groups are the same.

What can be stated with certainty is that the charismatic figure of Muhammad Yusuf, who was killed in July 2009, was the one who initiated Boko Haram's first phase. This phase was mainly focused first upon withdrawal from society—following the example of Dan Fodio—and establishing small camps and schools in the remoter regions of

“Yet Boko Haram has definitely been able to tap into discontent among northern Muslims, who have not been satisfied with the imposition of Shari`a during the years since 2000.”

Borno and Yobe states during the years 2002-2005. As police pressure against these smaller *jama`at* groups began to grow toward the end of that period, the group morphed into more of an urban phenomenon practicing *al-amr bi-l-ma`ruf wa-l-nahy`an al-munkar* (enjoining the good and forbidding the evil). From such operations, usually against consumption of alcohol and other non-Islamic practices, the group began to shape its identity.⁵ Again, the entire methodology is very much according to the example of Dan Fodio. What made Boko Haram stand out among other Nigerian radical groups were its operations against the police that began in 2004.

The last period of Boko Haram, phase I, was direct confrontation with the Nigerian police and military, which culminated in the Nigerian military assault upon Muhammad Yusuf's compound, associated mosques, and his judicial murder, videotaped by soldiers. Hundreds of members of the group were killed with him, and it is clear that one of the lessons learned by Boko Haram for its second phase was to avoid having an obvious base.

Boko Haram: Phase II

There is no doubt that the suppression operation of 2009, and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf by Nigerian security forces in July of that year, was a turning point for Boko Haram. The group was frequently said at this time to be defunct.⁶ In September 2010 (coinciding with Ramadan), however, Boko Haram carried out a prison break (said to have released some 700 prisoners),⁷ and the group began operations again. Its major operations since that time can be divided into the following attack categories: 1) military (three operations); 2) police (at least 16 operations); 3) teachers/university (five operations); 4) banks and markets (two operations); 5) carrying out *al-amr bi-l-ma`ruf* attacks on beer drinkers, card-players, etc. (at least five operations); 6) attacks on Christian preachers and churches (at least three operations); and 7) targeted assassinations (at least five major operations). While the major methodologies of drive-by shootings and bombings from motorcycles have not changed, the group has demonstrated in its second incarnation a considerable range, carrying out operations in Adumawa, Katsina and a number of times in Abuja.

The targeted assassinations are the most revealing, involving political figures, such as Abba Anas bin `Umar (killed in May 2011), the brother of the Shehu of Borno, and secular opposition figures (Modu Fannami Godio, killed in January 2011), but also prominent clerics such as Bashir Kashara, a well-known Wahhabi figure (killed in October 2010), Ibrahim Ahmad Abdullahi, a non-violent preacher (killed in March 2011), and Ibrahim Birkuti, a well-known popular preacher who challenged Boko Haram (killed in June 2011). The shootings of these prominent clerics seem to be in accord with Boko Haram's purificationist agenda with regard to Islam. It is interesting also that in Boko Haram's second incarnation there has been no figure who has replaced Muhammad Yusuf as the charismatic leader.

² Ruud Peters, *Islamic Criminal Law in Nigeria* (Abuja: Spectrum, 2003).

³ Personal interview, Ismail Ja`far of the Shari`a Board, Kano, Nigeria, May 12, 2005.

⁴ Anna Borzello, “Tracking Down Nigeria's ‘Taliban’

Sect,” BBC, January 14, 2004.

⁵ Murray Last, “Who and What are the Boko Haram,” Royal African Society, July 14, 2011.

⁶ Passing through Maiduguri in 2009, one did not sense much fear of the group.

⁷ “‘Boko Haram Attack’ Frees Hundreds of Prisoners,” BBC, September 8, 2010.

Most dramatic has been the transition of Boko Haram toward the use of suicide attacks, starting with the attack on the police General Headquarters in Abuja on June 16, 2011 and then culminating with the attack on the UN headquarters, also in Abuja, on August 26, 2011.⁸ Other than al-Shabab in Somalia and to some extent al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, no other African radical Muslim group has used suicide attacks. Indeed, there were reports that al-Shabab had trained at least one of the attackers against the UN building.⁹ While the attack on the police General Headquarters can be seen as a continuation of Boko Haram's fixation upon the Nigerian police and army, the United Nations attack is much more in line with other globalist *takfiri* organizations, and is strongly reminiscent of the suicide attack in Baghdad against the United Nations in August 2003, which was one of the opening blows of the Iraqi insurgency.

Overall, Boko Haram is demonstrating the paradigm of a *jama`at* group, such as Jemaah Islamiya in Southeast Asia, which had a quietist stage of local *amr bi-l-ma`ruf* and then transitioned into an activist stage as the result of outside influence. The assassination of the charismatic Muhammad Yusuf seems to have been such a catalyst, and now released from its previous strictures the group is able to expand its field of operations.

Connections and Prospects

Boko Haram has been able to project power over the northeastern section of Nigeria, where the police and army have effectively lost control. They have not, however, succeeded in going beyond their ability to impose terror upon the capital of Borno State, Maiduguri, into actually attempting to assume power. Yet Boko Haram has definitely been able to tap into discontent among northern Muslims, who have not been satisfied with the imposition of Shari`a during the years since 2000 (people expected that the draconian punishments would curtail corruption and crime; Boko Haram offers a more direct and violent

solution). There are reports that even northern Muslim soldiers sent to infiltrate the group have joined it. Opposition from major Muslim religious figures in the north suggests that Boko Haram has local opposition that it needs to silence to maintain its control.

Boko Haram's transition into the use of suicide attacks suggests that the group might have connections to other major Salafi-jihadi organizations. The release of a martyrdom video in September 2011, a media event not associated with regional radical Islamic groups, suggests connections with either AQIM or al-Shabab, both of whom use this methodology. It is interesting, however, that no major ideological statement can be associated with Boko Haram that states the group's objectives or program.¹⁰ The group, as its name implies, is only defined by what it stands against rather than what it stands for. It is interesting, however, that its targets have been very specific, and that in contradistinction to other Muslim groups Boko Haram has only rarely attacked Christians. The vast majority of its targets have been either obviously official or in line with a purificationist agenda toward Muslims.

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Religious Allegiances among Pro-Iranian Special Groups in Iraq

By Reidar Visser

PRO-IRANIAN "SPECIAL GROUPS" are once more the focus of attention in Iraq. As the United States prepares to withdraw its forces from Iraq at the end of 2011, the U.S. military has highlighted increasing paramilitary activity by the Special Groups, supported with weapons and explosives from Iran, as a potential threat to political stability in the years ahead. Yet it is not accurate to suggest that all Special Groups share the same relationship with the regime in Tehran.

This article explores the religious allegiances of pro-Iranian Special Groups in Iraq. The links between militant groups and religious authorities are investigated for four such groups: Kataib Hizb Allah, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Promised Day Brigades and the Badr Organization. It is concluded that Kataib Hizb Allah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq are most closely integrated into the tradition of the Iranian revolution, but also that an exclusive focus on the Special Groups and their ties to the Iranian clergy involves missing the wood for the trees. With signs of increasingly close ties between the Da`wa Party of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the Iranian clergy, the study of the activities of the Special Groups in isolation from the broader Iranian strategy in Iraq is somewhat myopic.

Special Groups and Iranian Religious Leaderships

Much of the literature on Special Groups in Iraq only focuses on the following three organizations: Kataib Hizb Allah, Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Promised Day Brigades. This article, however, also examines a fourth Special Group: the Badr Organization, formerly known as the Badr militia.¹ This is necessary for two reasons. First, it has never been documented convincingly that the militant elements of the Badr Organization have been fully disarmed.

8 There are claims that the June 2011 suicide attack was actually a botched bombing. See "Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists 'Bombed Abuja Police HQ,'" BBC, June 17, 2011.

9 "Nigeria UN Bomb: 'Al-Qaeda-Linked' Man Named as Suspect," BBC, August 31, 2011.

10 The so-called "manifesto" from the internet is clearly false. For details, see www.islamizationwatch.blogspot.com/2009/07/nigerian-taliban-boko-haram-manifesto.html.

1 For prior literature on Special Groups in Iraq, see Michael Knights, "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq," *CTC Sentinel* 3:11-12 (2010).

Second, since the Badr Organization in many ways represents the Special Group par excellence—it was designed by Iran with the aim of maximizing its military influence within the Iraqi opposition in the 1980s—it must be included in an analysis of pro-Iranian paramilitary forces in Iraq.

Kataib Hizb Allah

Among these four groups, Kataib Hizb Allah may be the easiest to classify in terms of its religious allegiances. At least in the group's publications and on its website, Kataib Hizb Allah indicates straightforward acknowledgment of the basic governing principle of the Iranian revolution—*wilayat al-faqih*—and also speaks of current Iranian leader Ali Khamenei as the “leader imam” (*imam al-qa'id*). Kataib Hizb Allah's website uses a work by the Khomeinist scholar Muhammad Momen Qommi to explain its political theory and in particular why it follows the *wilayat al-faqih* principle, which historically has met with greater skepticism in Iraq than in Iran. The pro-Iranian line is also reflected in the website content more generally, with many articles focusing more on U.S.-Iranian relations—or even on the United States itself—than on the situation in Iraq.²

Asaib Ahl al-Haq

Asaib Ahl al-Haq was once part of the Sadrist movement, but the group now indicates that its spiritual leader is Kazim al-Haeri, a Khomeinist scholar of Iraqi origin who resides in Iran and is followed by some but not all mainline Sadrists. Several *fatawa* by al-Haeri are reproduced on the Asaib Ahl al-Haq website, with subjects ranging from rejection of a continued U.S. military presence in Iraq to the desirability of keeping the Shi'a unified in a single bloc during the government-formation process in August 2010. This suggests that the group is more closely aligned with Iran. In an interview, Muhammad al-Tabatabai, a cleric active in the Asaib Ahl al-Haq network, explained that he is currently finishing his top-level Shi'a studies as a student of al-Haeri. Unlike the Sadrists proper, Asaib Ahl al-Haq seems to have established a reasonably straightforward Khomeinist relationship between al-Haeri as a

spiritual leader and their own members acting as subordinate lieutenants. For example, Qais al-Khazali³ is quite consistently referred to as a lower-rank *hujjatulislam*, a field commander (*qa'id al-mujahid*) or simply as secretary-general of the Asaib Ahl al-Haq party. As such, he forms a closer parallel to Hassan Nasrallah in the case of Lebanese Hizb Allah than does the mainline Sadrist movement.⁴

Badr Organization

When it comes to the Badr Organization and the Promised Day Brigades, the picture of their religious allegiances is murkier and more complicated. With respect to Badr, it began as an outfit directly controlled by the leaders of the Iranian revolution in the 1980s. The main question surrounding it in the post-2003 period has been to what extent it has shed its revolutionary

“The religious allegiances of the Special Groups become a marginal question since Iran instead would use its influence within the mainstream Shi'a Islamist parties in Iraq, such as the Da'wa Party, as the primary tool to promote its own interests.”

baggage upon returning to Iraq. Further complicating the analysis is the question of the relationship between Badr and its supposed political affiliate, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)—which was symbiotic in the 1980s but grew more strained after 2003 as a result of succession problems in SCIRI after the death of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. In 2007, al-Hakim's brother and successor, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, changed the name of SCIRI to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and started a media campaign

to indicate that the movement was gravitating more toward the religious authorities of Najaf than to those of Iran. Al-Hakim's moves in this respect, however, were never completely unequivocal, and with a renewed leadership struggle in ISCI after his death in 2009 and the emergence of his young and inexperienced son Ammar as ISCI's new head, tensions between Badr and ISCI have once again become more pronounced. With these tensions, the question of allegiances to Iranian and Iraqi religious leaderships has been propelled to the forefront.

A look at the Badr Organization's media can provide an indication of the problem. Most of the provincial Badr websites are now defunct—possibly an indication of the disarray in which the organization currently finds itself. Yet the Badr newspaper is still published, and seems to offer some subtle hints about differences with ISCI. In particular, the current ISCI leader, Ammar al-Hakim, does not seem to be offered as much space and attention as one would expect. Even in relation to the annual commemorations of the death of his father Abd al-Aziz and his uncle Muhammad Baqir, most comments by Ammar are reported in the Badr newspaper alongside those of other Iraqi politicians rather than as statements by a person with a special and privileged relationship to the Badr Organization. Only on a few occasions is Ammar himself highlighted. By way of contrast, in relation to the commemoration of the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the current Iranian leader Ali Khamenei is referred to as “Imam Ali Khamenei” in the Badr newspaper.⁵ True, at times at least there are references in the Badr media to the Najaf religious leadership as well, for example when Ahmad al-Safi, a representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, is referred to as “representative of the highest religious authority.”⁶ Yet the dualism and ambiguity regarding political leadership in Badr circles is certainly sufficiently strong to raise questions about where they will turn—to Iraq or Iran—if the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani dies and there is a change in the Najaf religious leadership.

³ Al-Khazali was one of Moqtada al-Sadr's rivals, and a protégé of al-Sadr's father.

⁴ Asaib Ahl al-Haq's website is accessible at www.iraq-moqawama.com.

⁵ *Badr*, June 5, 2011.

⁶ *Badr*, June 4, 2011.

² Kataib Hizb Allah's website is accessible at www.kataibhizbollah.org.

Promised Day Brigades

The Promised Day Brigades is a successor organization to Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. Determining its religious allegiances inevitably touches on the whole set of questions connected with the Sadrist leader himself. Despite al-Sadr's assurances that he remains nothing more than a *hawza* student, the habit of his followers to refer to him with terms such as "leader sayyid" (*al-sayyid al-qa'id*)—and his own habit of issuing *fatwa*-like declarations, especially on political questions—create ambiguities in terms of describing religious alliances among his various followers. This is especially true because as a mere student, Moqtada al-Sadr does not possess the formal qualifications required to issue *fatawa*. Accordingly, when he does so, he is in fact implicitly challenging the hierarchical order of both traditional Shi'ism and the order of the Iranian revolution through methods that are perhaps best described as a form of neo-Akhbarism. Of course, the Iranian revolution has also established a habit of swiftly transforming aspiring clerics to the ranks of ayatollahs once they have proven their credentials as defenders of the interests of the Islamic republic, but despite many rumors about imminent ayatollah-hood, al-Sadr still remains somewhat young to perform this metamorphosis. For now, this means his followers must remain in a vacuum where they see him as their spiritual leader but where he enjoys no proper leadership status within traditional or indeed Khomeinist Shi'ism.

As far as the Promised Day Brigades themselves are concerned, their website features pictures of the two canonized Sadrs—Muhammad Baqir and Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq—as an indication of the origin of their allegiances. Many of the public statements of Moqtada al-Sadr are also reproduced, in particular when they refer to political issues such as the question of the legitimacy of armed resistance to the U.S. military presence in Iraq. Importantly, unlike both Kataib Hizb Allah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq—and typical of the original Sadrist movement—the Promised Day Brigades website does not contain references to any living ulterior religious authority in Iran other than Moqtada al-Sadr himself. This makes them more similar to the indigenous Sadrist movement

of Iraq than to Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hizb Allah, whose links to Iran in terms of religious leaderships seem firmer.⁷

It should be added that cross-pollination among these groups does occur and makes the exercise of performing a neat classification of them more difficult. For example, the website of Kataib Hizb Allah contains links to both Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Promised Day Brigades. Recently, a public pronouncement by Moqtada al-Sadr dealt with a query from a Kataib Hizb Allah member who seemed to address him as a religious authority in a way that would be at variance of the image of the Kataib as an organization steeped in the tradition of the Iranian revolution with its emphasis on hierarchical rank in the Shi'a world of learning. For their part, many Badr members today probably oscillate between Khamenei and al-Sistani in a parallel to what many Hizb Allah members did in Lebanon in the mid-1990s, when Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah openly challenged Khamenei.

Relevant Recent Developments in the Najaf Marjaiyya

Ever since its emergence as a preeminent center of Shi'a learning in the early 20th century, Qom in Iran has been in a state of tension vis-à-vis Najaf in Iraq, its main competitor. These tensions have certainly persisted after the Iranian revolution, and it would be unwise to ignore them in any analysis of religious leaderships among pro-Iranian groups of Iraqi Shi'a.

After having fended off a challenge from Iran's leader, Ali Khamenei, in the early 1990s, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf today remains the dominant global figure within Shi'ism. This has forced some players, such as SCIRI/ISCI, to tone down their ties to the Iranian establishment (which disagrees with al-Sistani on the key question of the extent to which the clergy should be actively integrated into state institutions). It has prompted others to try to criticize al-Sistani on a more paradigmatic basis, as seen in the case of the Sadrists (who have introduced a distinction between their own "articulate" clergy and al-Sistani

as the supposedly "sleeping" or passive force of Najaf). No one among the Shi'a Islamist parties, however, can afford to ignore al-Sistani entirely.

Al-Sistani heads a group of altogether four clerics in Najaf—himself plus the grand ayatollahs Fayyad, Najafi and Muhammad Said al-Hakim—that is widely considered preeminent among the clergy of the city and indeed of Iraq. One should not, however, confine the discussion of possible successors to al-Sistani to these four. It should be observed that the three others in the group lag considerably behind al-Sistani in terms of popular followings. It is true that in the early 1990s, al-Sistani was himself not a very prominent figure immediately following the death of Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasem al-Khoei in August 1992, and other candidates for succeeding al-Khoei prevailed for some time. Nonetheless, it would be unwise to ignore the segment of somewhat younger, mostly Arab *ulama* in their 60s and 70s who have emerged in Najaf in the post-2003 period. This motley crew involves people such as Ala al-Din al-Ghurayfi, Qasem al-Taie, Saleh al-Taie, Muhammad Shubayr al-Khaqani, Hussein al-Sadr and Shamsudin al-Waezi, all of whom now call themselves grand ayatollah. Not all of these seem equally fitted to challenge the established elite of Najaf, but they are old enough to repeat what Muhammad al-Yaqubi (a spiritual source of inspiration for the Fadila Party) did with some success in 2003: use a diploma of *ijtihad* (the ability to interpret Islamic law and issue *fatawa*) signed by a relatively obscure cleric to obtain a popular following and climb to a position of a certain influence on the Iraqi scene. This in turn could produce a succession scenario after al-Sistani in which several clerics strive for prominence before someone emerges in a preeminent position.

All of this suggests that the succession struggle after al-Sistani may be a messy affair, with implications for the Special Groups. When al-Sistani dies, leaders such as Moqtada al-Sadr and Qais al-Khazali must once more consider their options. To some extent, this will be a choice between becoming Iraqi Nasrallahs or Fadlallahs: following the pattern of Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon and his Hizb Allah party, they could tone down their clerical aspirations and

⁷ The Promised Day Brigades website is accessible at www.almaoad.com.

instead focus on politics and/or armed struggle based on complete loyalty to the Iranian leadership; conversely, if there is no obvious successor to al-Sistani and a more level playing field emerges, there may also be room for *ulama* with limited scholarly credentials (like Moqtada al-Sadr) to try to copy what Fadlallah did with some success in Lebanon—namely, to become a regional *marja* (Shi'a source of emulation) with some distance from Iran.

Conclusion

Prior to the death of Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah in Lebanon in 2010, many members of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Da'wa Party emulated him as their *marja*. To some extent, this was seen as a deliberate policy by the Da'wa since the 1980s aimed at signaling greater distance from Iran and the Iranian concept of *wilayat al-faqih* than their competitors in SCIRI/ISCI. The Da'wa Party often stressed the choice of *marja* as an individual and not a party-controlled act.

Since the death of Fadlallah, however, there has been an interesting growth in the number of news stories suggesting that Da'wa Party members could be gravitating toward Mahmud Hashemi Shahrudi—a member of the Iranian guardian council of Iraqi origin—as their new *marja*. To a certain extent, the media presenting these stories are of the kind that is in the habit of publishing slander about the Da'wa, and some of what has been said about the matter should probably be taken lightly. Nonetheless, it is interesting that several Shi'a sources of a more neutral category seem to corroborate these rumors.

Any move from Fadlallah to Shahrudi by the Da'wa would be a giant leap of enormous political significance. Whereas Fadlallah was a critic of the monolithism of the Iranian revolution and a defender of a more pluralistic vision of *wilayat al-faqih*, Shahrudi is a scholar of the Khomeinist tradition who is seen as close to the current Iranian leader, Ali Khamenei. Since Shahrudi takes a doctrinaire approach to *wilayat al-faqih*, the whole point of “individual choice” with respect to the *marjaiyya* for Da'wa members would fast become somewhat academic since loyalty to Shahrudi would automatically translate into loyalty to the Iranian revolution.

If this trend grows stronger, it would create an ideological superstructure to much of what the Da'wa Party has done in practical politics in Iraq since the disappointing parliamentary election result in March 2010. Returning to a sectarian definition of politics with open Iranian and tacit American support, using dirty tricks in an attempt to manipulate the election result, and holding on to power through ever more authoritarian means all seem more closely related to the kind of politics practiced by the current Iranian regime than what the Da'wa were trying to accomplish in Iraq in 2008-2010, when they clearly tried to play a role as Iraqi nationalists. In this kind of scenario, the religious allegiances of the Special Groups become a marginal question since Iran instead would use its influence within the mainstream Shi'a Islamist parties in Iraq, such as the Da'wa Party, as the primary tool to promote its own interests.

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AQIM Returns in Force in Northern Algeria

By Andrew Lebovich

ON AUGUST 26, 2011, al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) deployed two suicide bombers to attack Algeria's premier military academy, the Académie Militaire Interarmes (AMIA) at Cherchell, killing 18 people, including at least three foreign military officers.¹ The dual bombing, which struck the officers' mess hall just after the breaking of the Ramadan fast, made major headlines in Algeria, and earned sharp condemnations from the United States, the European Union, the African Union, France, Italy and the United Kingdom.² AQIM's statement claiming credit for the attack called Cherchell “the most important symbol of the Algerian regime” and blamed the government for its “support of the regime of [Libyan dictator Colonel Mu'ammarr] Qadhafi,”³ referring to charges made by Libyan rebels and others of Algerian military support to Qadhafi, as well as the alleged presence of Algerian “mercenaries” fighting against the Libyan rebels.⁴

The attack was alarming not just because of the important symbolic value of the Cherchell academy, but also because it was the third successful suicide bombing and fourth attempted suicide bombing in Algeria in a two-month span, after the country had seen a steady decline in such attacks after August 2008.⁵ Yet the sudden resurgence in suicide bombings in northern Algeria is not an anomaly; rather, it is part of a wider upward trend in terrorist violence in the area, one that follows several years of decline.

1 “18 Dead in Algeria Military School Bombing: Ministry,” Agence France-Presse, August 27, 2011.

2 “Washington, Londres, Paris, Rome, l'UE et l'UA condamnent, ‘Il n'y a aucune justification à cette violence,’” *Liberté*, August 29, 2011.

3 Béatrice Khadige, “L'Algérie visée par Aqmi pour son soutien presume à Kadhafi,” Agence France-Presse, August 26, 2011.

4 Despite these charges, the rebel Transitional National Council (TNC) has produced no firm evidence of Algerian support or the presence of Algerian fighters with Qadhafi's forces.

5 Kamel Omar, “Le retour inquiétant des kamikazes,” *El-Watan*, August 28, 2011.

This article seeks to explain and contextualize the attack trends, provide possible explanations for the bloody revival, and deal with the potential political consequences for Algeria's *système*, which manages to be both resilient and brittle more than a decade after the country emerged from a harrowing civil war.

Escalation of Violence in the North

Descended from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), AQIM has a long pedigree in northern Algeria, especially the part of the Kabylie region that became known during the country's civil war as the "Triangle of Death," comprising the provinces of Bouira, Tizi Ouzou and Boumerdes.⁶ Mountainous, heavily forested, ethnically diverse, and difficult to control throughout both the colonial and post-colonial period, this area has formed a key center of GSPC and then AQIM activity, and it is believed to shelter the group's central command, including AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus`ab `Abd al-Wadud). Nominally divided into four zones encompassing northern Algeria and the Sahel,⁷ the borders between AQIM zones of activity have increasingly become restricted to Kabylie in the north and a broad swath of territory touching Mauritania, Mali and Niger.

While GSPC activity increased throughout 2005 and into 2006,⁸ it was the use of dramatic suicide bombings, including two particularly deadly and prominent attacks in April and December 2007, combined with accelerated violence in Kabylie, Algiers and to the west of the city, that truly announced the group's presence within al-Qa`ida. Yet even by the latter part of 2008, as noted by Norwegian scholar Hanna Rogan and others, the group's

pattern of violence had gradually changed, as the organization became focused on lower-casualty attacks, often using remote-detonated Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and gun and knife attacks (although the number of "high casualty" and suicide attacks also increased during this period, Rogan noted that overall violence was slightly less than in previous years).⁹ While violence picked up again in 2009, by 2010 both the number of bomb and gun attacks had dropped precipitously.¹⁰

In 2011, however, violence returned rapidly to northern Algeria, with more attacks and casualties than in previous years.¹¹ Basic data gleaned from the Francophone journals *El-Watan* and *Liberté*, as well as consulting *Ennabar* and *Echorouk*,¹² reveals that attacks suddenly picked up in April of this year, as a coordinated assault on an army post at Azazga in Tizi Ouzou Province killed 17 soldiers, while ambushes and gun-battles against *gendarmes*, soldiers and police officers in Thénia (Boumerdes Province), Ammal (Boumerdes Province), and Bouderbala near Lakhdaria (Bouira Province) killed at least seven, while the use of IEDs against municipal guard and police patrols killed at least eight.

The months of May and June saw a move back toward the use of IEDs interspersed with armed assaults on police and army posts (seven IED attacks, one ambush, two armed assaults, and a rifle assault). Of the 11 attacks in these two months, seven targeted the Algerian Armée Nationale Populaire (ANP), two targeted police, and one each targeted a group of civilians and municipal guards. From April to June, militants executed at least 17 attacks.

The months of July and August, meanwhile, witnessed at least 23 attacks, including 13 IEDs, six gun attacks, and the four suicide bombing attempts. Nearly half targeted ANP convoys, patrols and bases, while police convoys and posts, *gendarmerie* patrols, and civilians were also targeted. Additionally, this period saw two attacks against local militia members known as *patriotes*, who were first armed by the military during the civil war but have been progressively disarmed in the past few years.¹³

Yet of all these attacks, the rash of suicide bombings has caused the most disquiet in northern Algeria. The first was a dual suicide attack on July 17 against the police station in the town of Bordj Menaïel, which killed two people, followed by a failed attack disrupted outside of Algiers that resulted in the deaths of three AQIM members (including Abdelkabar Belhadj, the son of prominent and oft-jailed Islamist leader Ali Belhadj), a suicide car bombing on a police headquarters in Tizi Ouzou that wounded 33 people on August 14, and finally the Cherchell attack on August 26.

These attacks are notable and concerning for several reasons. First, they show that AQIM units, or *katibat*, in the north still have access to willing suicide bombers as well as the explosives needed to create mass carnage. Reports indicate that all three suicide bombings may have been committed by the Katibat al-Arkam, while the failed Algiers bombers also are said to have belonged to al-Arkam.¹⁴

6 The region east of Algiers is considered the "Central Zone" of AQIM activity, one of four such zones simplified from the nine zones of activity used by the GSPC as well as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). See Camille Tawil, "The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb: Expansion in the Sahel and Challenges from Within Jihadist Circles," The Jamestown Foundation, April 2010.

7 The Sahel refers to the band of semi-arid land bordering the Sahara.

8 Ayman al-Zawahiri announced the merger of the GSPC and al-Qa`ida in a video released September 11, 2006, and the re-born AQIM released a video under its new name in January 2007.

9 Hanna Rogan, "Violent Trends in Algeria Since 9/11," *CTC Sentinel* 1:12 (2008).

10 Jacques Roussellier, "Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel: Al-Qa`ida's Franchise or Freelance?" Middle East Institute, August 2011.

11 Djaffar Tamani, "Retour de la Peur en Kabylie," *El-Watan*, April 19, 2011; "La Kabylie vit un de ses étés les plus chauds," *Le Temps d'Algérie*, August 19, 2011; Hadjer Guenanfa, "Août, le mois le plus meurtrier depuis le début de l'année," *Tout Sur Algérie*, August 31, 2011.

12 For the purposes of this survey, this author considered attacks that included shootings, bomb attacks, ambushes, and assaults on posts or security structures. Rogan, however, used a somewhat more inclusive data set, taking into account actions such as robberies, false roadblocks, raids on villages and more. This author's estimates are not meant to be conclusive or comprehensive, and are certainly lower than the number of actual incidents that could be attributed to AQIM or other violent groups. The data, however, does give a strong sense of both the trend in number of incidents, as well as the targets and tools chosen by militants.

13 Tamani; Salima Tlemçani, "Le général à la retraite Abdelkader Maïza 'La recrudescence des attentats est due aux événements qui se sont succédé depuis 2006,'" *El-Watan*, September 4, 2011.

14 M.T., "L'ANP frappée au Cœur," *Liberté*, August 28,

Al-Arkam has historically been known, along with Katibat al-Nour, for producing suicide bombers in the north,¹⁵ and al-Arkam was, according to some sources, responsible for both major suicide bombings in 2007. It has shown that it can still engage in major attacks despite the death of its “brain,” Bourihane Kamel, in February 2011 in an ambush staged by Algerian security forces.¹⁶

Second, the outcomes of the attacks could have been far worse. While the ChercHELL bombing was the deadliest single attack in several years in northern Algeria, both the Bordj Menaïel and Tizi Ouzou bombings involved cars packed with explosives that were stopped just short of reaching their intended targets.¹⁷ Moreover, in the case of the planned Algiers bombing, there is no telling if security forces would have been able to stop the truck, again packed with explosives, had one of the bombers not thought better of the plan and tipped off the authorities.

Finally, these attacks show that the organization can still attack outside of its Kabylie stronghold, while also adopting new tactics, such as the use of motorcycles and explosive belts in addition to car bombs in suicide attacks.¹⁸

Factors Explaining the Rise in Violence

While any explanation for the rapid increase in violence since April based on publicly-available information would be at best informed speculation, it is possible to trace some of the most likely factors contributing to northern Algeria's bloody spring and summer.

Changes in Algerian Security Practices

After being surprised by the sudden virulence of AQIM attacks in 2007, Algerian security forces slowly chipped away at AQIM's *katibat*, especially in Kabylie, combining an increased security force presence and aggressive

combined arms operations (known as *ratissages*) with more subtle methods, ranging from concentric circles of roadblocks around cities and sensitive locations and even strict controls on the distribution of fertilizer within villages.¹⁹ These methods were so successful, according to observers, that by mid-2010 Algerian security forces were “increasingly regarding the situation as a police problem, rather than a military problem,” in the words of Stephen Tankel, an expert on militant groups who has conducted field research in Algeria.²⁰ While it is unclear what security practices on the ground may or may not have changed by 2011, the security services have faced charges of becoming lax in the aftermath of the most recent violence.²¹ In response to the recent attacks, Algerian forces have again begun aggressively conducting sweeps in Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdes, and Bouira, reinstituted efforts to control automobile routes, and increased coverage of possible targets, all possible indications that the security forces had grown complacent, as some sources have alleged.²²

Others, notably members of the country's military and journals like *El-Watan* that are known to be sympathetic to the security services, have rejected accusations of lapses in behavior and enforcement in favor of critiques against the way the government of Abdelaziz Bouteflika has dealt with terrorism. Notably, these arguments have focused on Bouteflika's 2006 reconciliation plan, which provides the possibility for repentant terrorists to receive amnesty for their crimes. Some, such as the former commander of Algeria's 1st Military Region, Abdelkader Maïza, have argued that the progressive dismantling and disarming of local *patriotes* and militias known as the *groupes de légitimes défense* (GLD), who have faced sustained attack from militant groups since the 1990s, has contributed to a security vacuum in the area that has allowed violence to increase.

Regardless, there seems to be general agreement that the security situation in northern Algeria has been more permissive this year than in previous years, potentially allowing AQIM the breathing room to rebuild some of its arsenal and plan new attacks.

Instability in Libya

Since March 2011, Algerian and other African leaders have struck an alarmist tone about the prospect of the unrest in neighboring Libya—then in the throes of NATO bombardment and armed rebellion—fueling instability in Algeria. The arguments are two-fold. They argue that the unstable situation and armed conflict in Libya will encourage jihadist action and the movement of people back and forth. They also suggest that AQIM could gain possession of arms stolen from Libyan stocks.²³ Evidence has since emerged that surface-to-air missiles and other unspecified weapons have been looted from Libyan stores, weapons that, according to European officials, have fallen into the hands of AQIM, although the concern has been focused on AQIM's southern units obtaining weapons, rather than the northern ones.²⁴

Algerian press sources have argued that the increased aggressiveness and deadliness of AQIM attacks have been due in part to the situation in Libya.²⁵ These comments from official sources, however, could have been motivated by a desire by the Algerian government, who have pointedly opposed Western intervention in Libya, to show that continued unrest leads to disorder in the region.

It is, however, impossible to dismiss the possibility that some of the weapons leaking into the Sahel could have made their way north, and AQIM attacks in the north since April have certainly made use of high quantities of explosives and arms, in a manner not seen for

2011; Mélanie Matarese, “Alger sous la menace terroriste,” *Le Figaro*, July 27, 2011.

15 Tawil.

16 Neïla B., “Le dernier cerveau des attentats-suicides abattu à Bouira,” *Liberté*, February 6, 2011.

17 “Droukdel tente briser l'étau resserré sur ses fiefs terroristes,” *El Khabar*, July 17, 2011.

18 M.T., “Les terroristes algériens galvanisés par la guerre en Libye,” *Liberté*, August 29, 2011.

19 Personal interview, Stephen Tankel, August 2011.

20 Ibid.

21 Tlemçani.

22 Ibid.; Walid Ramzi, “Algeria Responds to Ramadan Terror Wave,” *Magharebia*, September 2, 2011; M'hamed Houaoura, “Pourquoi l'académie militaire était facilement ciblée,” *El-Watan*, September 2, 2011.

23 “Le Tchadien Déby affirme qu'Aqmi s'est emparé de missiles en Libye,” Agence France-Presse, March 25, 2011; Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, “Does AQIM Have Some Libyan Missiles?” CNN, March 30, 2011; “Security Official: Al-Qaida Exploiting Libya Unrest to Acquire Weapons,” Reuters, April 4, 2011.

24 “Libya: al-Qaeda Acquires Weapons,” *Telegraph*, September 5, 2011.

25 M.T., “Les terroristes algériens galvanisés par la guerre en Libye.”

some time before. Yet this explanation is predicated both on the availability of Libyan arms in the Sahel and the ability (and willingness) of AQIM's southern units to move weapons north.

Support from Sahelian AQIM Units

Any weapons that have come into AQIM's possession have likely either traveled through southern Tunisia (where suspected AQIM fighters have clashed with local security forces multiple times)²⁶ or through Sahelian countries such as Niger.²⁷ Yet while analysts generally perceive AQIM's southern and northern factions as being divided,²⁸ the separation of north and south is not necessarily absolute.

AQIM's southern units, led most prominently by Abdelhamid Abu Zeid, Yahya Djouadi, and Mokhtar Belmokhtar, as well as a host of other small unit commanders, are known most often for their criminal enterprises, including various trafficking activities and high-profile kidnappings of Westerners for ransom. Yet Abu Zeid and Djouadi are both regarded as being close to Droukdel, and as one specialist told the author, northern and southern AQIM "may not get along and they may be on different or personal agendas, however they all have proven that they can work together." He added, "Belmokhtar and others continue to contribute to the northern commanders. That is indisputable."²⁹

Moreover, an ebb and flow of violence in the north combined with increased activity in the east and south fits a historical pattern that began with the GSPC. As the GSPC struggled in the north after the turn of the century, it was the mass kidnapping and ransoming of more than 30 European tourists in 2003 that helped breathe new life into the group.³⁰ The same pattern emerged in 2008 and 2009 when increasingly geographically and financially isolated

northern AQIM commanders reached out and "demanded a growing contribution from their Saharan affiliates," according to AQIM expert and scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu.³¹ This has occurred in a period when AQIM in the south was becoming more involved in kidnappings and enmeshed in criminal networks.³²

In short, whether the increase in violence in northern Algeria is due to an influx of weapons from the south, or a regeneration in capabilities based on reduced pressure from security forces and more freedom of movement, it is likely that AQIM's units in the Sahel have played a contributing role in the north's resurgence as a supplier of arms and other assistance. At this stage, however, it is difficult to say whether the increase in violence is due to a sudden flow of aid from the south, or if it is simply another cyclical violent outburst in the north after a period of rebuilding, again potentially with Sahelian assistance. As with much pertaining to the Sahel and the internal dynamics of individual AQIM units and leaders, however, the information at hand does not allow for a definitive judgment.

Terrorism within Algeria's Political Context

For many in the north, the surge in bloodshed has brought back bad memories not just of the last decade, but also the civil war. Indeed, the violence and the outspoken positions against Abdelaziz Bouteflika's security policies by some former officers brought whispers about the possible return of the "éradicateurs," members of the security services who argued against any type of amnesty or reconciliation agreement with terrorists.³³ This nervousness is compounded by the tenuous and limited reform process being pursued by Algeria's aging (and rumored to be ailing) leader at a time when Algeria's nascent protest movement has been suppressed by a number of factors, including a lingering memory of the instability of the civil war.³⁴

Yet the same factors that create apprehension also limit the possible reach and opportunism of members of Algeria's politico-military elite that may want to capitalize on the violence for other gain. The military and other forces have already come under harsh criticism for being unable to contain the violence despite already having a strong security presence in Kabylie, while suspicions and accusations of the manipulation of militant groups dating back to the civil war—rumors that, though unverifiable, persist to this day—have also caused opposition political members and others to question a possible military role in the violence, despite a lack of evidence to support the claims.³⁵ Memories of what happened the last time the country was under military rule make it unlikely that senior officers would be able to make much headway, at least publicly, in wresting greater authority away from the civilian government.³⁶

Regardless of what emerges from the infighting and tension in Algeria's ruling classes, it seems likely that AQIM's violence will continue to increase in the north. While the organization's new activity does not approach its influence during its prime years, this new push may nonetheless force the Algerian government to reconsider how it confronts the group, and cause the wider community of observers to rethink how they view an organization long thought to be on the ropes in Algeria's mountainous north.

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26 "Tunisie: 2 membres présumés d'Aqmi arrêtés avec une ceinture d'explosives," Agence France-Presse, May 15, 2011.

27 "Niger: Aqmi traquée, succès pour les nouvelles autorités," Radio France Internationale, June 18, 2011.

28 Rogan.

29 Personal interview, Andrew Black, September 2011.

30 Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "The Many Faces of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," Geneva Centre for Security Policy, May 2011.

31 Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb: A Case Study in the Opportunism of Global Jihad," *CTC Sentinel* 3:4 (2010).

32 Ibid.

33 Mohamed Tahar Bensaada, "Algérie: La recrudescence des attentats terroristes annonce-t-elle le retour des 'éradicateurs'?" *Le Quotidien d'Algérie*, August 29, 2011.

34 Anthony Faiola, "In Algeria, a Chill in the Arab

Spring," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2011.

35 Bensaada; Claire Spencer, "Algeria: North Africa's Exception?" Chatham House Expert Comment, August 30, 2011.

36 The Algerian political system is of course more complicated than this, and should be thought of more as competing influence networks or "clans" rather than a specific civilian/military divide. Yet historically one can speak of periods of "civilian" and "military" rule.

Violence Escalates in China's Xinjiang Province

By Jacob Zenn

IN JULY 2011, two violent incidents in Hotan and Kashgar of China's Xinjiang Province highlighted the combustible relationship between Uighurs¹ and Han Chinese. A comparison of the two incidents also shows why assessing terrorist acts in Xinjiang requires a nuanced understanding of the security threat in the province. A number of violent incidents in Xinjiang are homegrown and related to Uighur grievances about the Chinese government's policies, while other acts of violence show a stronger relationship between the attackers and jihadist ideology and operational tactics from abroad.

The Chinese government almost always attributes attacks in Xinjiang to jihadist ideology and foreign-linked terrorist groups, while pro-Uighur organizations almost always explain violence in Xinjiang as a local byproduct of the government's policies. For example, the Chinese government called the Hotan incident a "severe terrorist attack,"² while the World Uighur Congress³

blamed the violence on Chinese authorities forcefully breaking up a "peaceful demonstration."⁴

As for the Kashgar attack, both sides disagreed over whether it was terrorism. China alleged that Pakistani-trained Uighur terrorists from the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)⁵ were responsible, while the World Uighur Congress argued that if the attacks were conducted by Uighurs, then it was only because they were brought to despair by "years of repression by the Chinese government" and without any other peaceful way to oppose the government.⁶

The two incidents, which show no relationship to each other besides the fact that they took place in the same month, are significant for two reasons. First, they represent the first extended outbreak of violence in Xinjiang since the Urumqi riots in July 2009.⁷ The

only other terrorist attack in Xinjiang between July 2009 and July 2011 was in August 2010 when three Uighur men drove an explosive-laden tricycle into a patrol of police officers in Aksu, killing seven.⁸ Second, China's naming of Pakistan is the first time it has cited a specific country as a source of terrorism in Xinjiang.⁹ In the past, China blamed Xinjiang's violence on ETIM, Hizb al-Tahrir (HT), and World Uighur Congress leader Rebia Kadeer, but China never implicated other countries, and especially not its "all weather friend."¹⁰

Most violent incidents involving Uighurs attacking Han Chinese or Chinese institutions reflect varying degrees of both the government's and pro-Uighur groups' claims and often fall somewhere in the middle. As China develops Xinjiang as a Central Asian economic, trade and transportation hub while maintaining travel restrictions on Uighurs and assimilatory in-migration, language and cultural policies, local and external factors—including influences from Pakistan and Afghanistan, which border Xinjiang—will play a part in Uighur militancy.

Hotan: A Protest Gone Wrong

If what happened in Hotan on July 18 was an act of terrorism, the attackers chose a new target and strategy. In contrast to the Kashgar attacks on July 30-31, which involved multiple explosions and coordinated attacks on pedestrians at dining areas frequented by Han Chinese, the Hotan incident took place at a police station¹¹—although some sources suggest it was at a local neighborhood affairs office.¹²

and China responded with a heavy crackdown on Uighurs involved in the riots, detaining hundreds, issuing long-term prison sentences, and sentencing more than 10 Uighurs to death. China also cut off internet access, mobile phone messaging services, and international phone calls in Urumqi for nearly one year after the riots.

8 "Xinjiang Continues to Face Threats of Terrorism," *China Daily*, September 11, 2010.

9 "China Blames 'Friend' Pak for Terror Attack," *Times of India*, August 2, 2011.

10 Ibid.

11 "Hotan and Kashgar Terrorist Attacks," Sina.com, August 16, 2011.

12 In fact, in a city like Hotan, a police office generally contains a *banshichu*, which is responsible for registration of identity cards, residence permits, and passports. See "Understanding the Khotan Incident in Local Con-

1 The Uighurs are a Sunni Muslim and ethnic Turkic people whose language is similar to Uzbek. Since 1949, the unprecedented rate of Han Chinese migration to the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region has altered the demographic balance of the province in favor of the Han, such that any future independent Uighur state in Xinjiang will be virtually impossible to achieve. Despite the province's economic boom since the 1990s, the loss of the Uighur and Sunni Muslim character of the region and the relative prosperity of the province's Han compared to the less wealthy Uighurs has caused some Uighurs—perhaps influenced by the Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), al-Qai'da, and other jihadist groups—to embrace terrorism as a means to expel the Chinese from Xinjiang.

2 Shao Wei, "Attack on Police Station was Long-Planned," *China Daily*, July 21, 2011.

3 The Munich-based World Uighur Congress (WUC) was formed in 2004 from a collection of various Uighur groups in exile, including the Uighur American Association (UAA). Its leader since 2006 has been Rebia Kadeer, a prominent businesswoman from Xinjiang. China labels the organization as "splittist" and accuses it of being linked to terrorist groups with aims in Xinjiang, while the WUC maintains it is dedicated to promoting peaceful, non-violent, and democratic means to determine the political future of East Turkistan.

4 "Uighurs to Stage Demonstration in Vienna to Protest Hotan Incident," press release, World Uighur Congress, July 28, 2011.

5 The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was founded in 1993 by ethnic Uighurs, and its earliest members are believed to have received protection and training with the Taliban and al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan. The ETIM is also believed to have been responsible for several small-scale attacks within China in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the bombing of a bus in Beijing in 1997. The ETIM was designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State in 2002 for plotting an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. After its leader Abdul Haq al-Turkistani was killed by a suspected CIA drone strike in Miranshah of Waziristan in Pakistan in 2003, the ETIM may have faded into extinction since no terrorist has claimed an attack under the name of ETIM since al-Turkistani's death. The ETIM, however, may have reemerged in 2008 under the new banner of the Turkistan Islamic Party, a group which has the same goals for the "liberation" of Xinjiang from Chinese control and has claimed attacks in China and issued propaganda videos starting in 2008.

6 "Uighur Leader: Hotan Incident Was Not a Terrorist Attack," World Uighur Congress, July 21, 2011.

7 On July 5, 2009, hundreds of Uighurs protested at the Grand Bazaar in Urumqi against the beating to death of two Uighur laborers in Guangdong by Han Chinese co-workers. The incident was recorded on an attacker's mobile phone and later disseminated among Xinjiang's Uighurs. The protestors clashed with Chinese riot police, who the Uighurs accused of using excessive force, and for nearly a week violence spread to Han and Uighur civilians in Urumqi who took up arms against each other. Approximately 200 people died as a result of the fighting

While police stations are generally considered terrorist targets anywhere, this would be the first time terrorists in Xinjiang have made a police station the main target in an attack. In the past, attacks have only targeted police in the field, such as in Aksu in 2010 and Kashgar in 2008. The attack is also unusual because—as both the Chinese government and pro-Uighur groups agree—it began as a protest, with the World Uighur Congress alleging that the protestors were calling for the release of Uighurs who were already detained at the police station.¹³ The protest then evolved into a drawn-out hostage crisis in which as many as 14 of the Uighur protestors and two Han Chinese hostages, one security officer, and one policeman were killed.¹⁴

Rarely does a protest spiral into a hostage-taking incident without some prior planning and coordination. The presence of an alleged group of 14 protestors, however, does not match a typical terrorist operation considering the chief of the police station's account

“In fact, targeting civilians—instead of police—for the first time may be the result of more extreme elements from Pakistan influencing terrorist operations in China.”

of the incident. He said that he “shouted in Uighur, asking the rioters to stop... and to settle their dispute peacefully... But they kept throwing home-made Molotov cocktails and rocks at us.”¹⁵ This implies that there was indeed a dispute before the attack, after which the situation became violent. In normal terrorist attacks, the terrorists would not have engaged the police in a dispute before the attack, and would have

stormed the police station immediately to gain the element of surprise.

Regardless of the identity and goals of the Uighur protestors, who are believed to have been from out of town based on their accents,¹⁶ the choice to protest at or attack the police station hints of local concerns, rather than an attack orchestrated in the name of Uighur independence or with backing from foreign jihadist organizations. This incident also resembles the two-day demonstrations in Hotan on March 23-24, 2008 that China blamed on the “Three Evil Forces (terrorism, separatism, and extremism)”¹⁷ and Hizb al-Tahrir (HT),¹⁸ but that were largely about local concerns, such as government campaigns to abolish the wearing of headscarves and the arrest and killing of a prominent Uighur man.¹⁹

The Hotan incident should be viewed in perspective. While the protestors may have been influenced or even inspired by foreign jihadist organizations, any associations were probably indirect. This incident is best seen as somewhere between criminal violence stemming from a protest over rational concerns and “an organized and planned violent terrorist attack aimed at a police station,” as Xinjiang's chairperson asserted in the media.²⁰

Kashgar: “Crying Wolf” No More

The attacks in Kashgar on July 30-31, 2011 have the signature of previous terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, notably in Kashgar in 2008 and Aksu in 2010. While the details of the latest attack in Kashgar are hard to corroborate, what is clear is that the attackers chose a purely civilian target: Han Chinese diners and pedestrians.

16 “14 Rioters Shot Dead in Hotan Attack,” *China Daily*, July 20, 2011.

17 “Official Confirms a Separatist Disturbance Incident in March in Hotan, Xinjiang,” *China News*, April 4, 2008.

18 “According to the Law Hotan City To Stop ‘Hizb al-Tahrir’s’ Planned Illegal Demonstrations,” *Tianshan.net*, April 4, 2008.

19 “Muslim ‘Extremists’ Attempt Uprising in Western China: Govt,” *Sinodaily.com*, April 2, 2008.

20 “Details of the Incident in Hotan, Xinjiang: Violent Demonstrators Held Up the Flag of Separation,” July 19, 2011, available at <http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2011-07/1830770.html>.

The attack began on the evening of July 30 when a car bomb detonated on a street lined with pedestrians and food stalls frequented by Han Chinese. Shortly after, two Uighur men hijacked a truck, killed its driver, and then steered the truck onto the sidewalk and into the food stalls and then stabbed people at random.

On July 31, another attack occurred on a popular dining and shopping street for Han Chinese. After two blasts at one restaurant, as many as 10 Uighur men shot and stabbed people indiscriminately, including the firefighters who came to the rescue. Overall, more than 10 civilians and eight attackers were killed and more than 40 others wounded in the two days.

The attacks coincided with the two days prior to the start of Ramadan and are strikingly similar to an attack in Kashgar in August 2008. In that attack, two Uighur men from Kashgar armed with explosives, machetes, and a gun rammed a dump truck into a line of 70 Chinese police officers jogging near a police compound and then attacked the officers with machetes.²¹ The two men were arrested during the fight after killing 16 officers.²²

In the 2008 attack, China did not lay blame on anyone but the two men from Kashgar and only mentioned that it had received intelligence reports about potential ETIM attacks in the lead up to the Olympics.²³ After the July 2011 attack, however, China stated clearly that terrorists trained in ETIM camps in Pakistan were responsible²⁴ and that the attackers adhered to “extremist ideology” and advocated “jihad.”²⁵

Based on China's prior allegations of HT's connections to Hotan protests in 2008 and that Rebia Kadeer masterminded the July 2009 riots in

21 “Xinjiang Police Informed About the Latest Violent Attacks in Kashgar, Xinjiang,” *Xinhua*, August 5, 2008.

22 Andrew Jacobs, “Ambush in China Raises Concerns as Olympics Near,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2008.

23 “16 Police Killed in China Border Attack,” *CBS News*, February 11, 2009.

24 “Tensions High After Unrest in China,” *Dawn*, August 2, 2011; “Terrorist Plot Suspected in Violent Attack on Police in West China's Xinjiang,” *Xinhua*, August 4, 2008.

25 “China Blames Deadly Xinjiang Attack on Separatists,” *BBC*, August 1, 2011.

text,” *Xinjiang Review*, July 25, 2011.

13 “Four Dead in Police Station Clash in China's Xinjiang,” *Agence France-Presse*, July 18, 2011.

14 Xi Tianran and Liu Linlin, “14 Uighur Terrorists Killed in Hotan,” *Global Times*, July 21, 2011.

15 Ibid.

Urumqi—which were actually sparked by a mobile phone video that showed two Uighur men being beaten to death by Han Chinese men in a Guangdong toy factory—China’s claims about training camps in Pakistan cannot be taken at face value.²⁶ Yet this time the benefit of the doubt swings in China’s favor. The timing of the attacks on the eve of Ramadan; the “ramming” method, which is typical of attacks in Xinjiang; the civilian targets; and especially a corroborative post-attack video from the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)²⁷ point to a terrorist attack and the likelihood of a connection to Pakistan-based militants. In fact, targeting civilians—instead of police—for the first time may be the result of more extreme elements from Pakistan influencing terrorist operations in China.

The video, which was released by the TIP in late August, shows one of the Kashgar attackers, Memteli Tiliwaldi, in a Pakistani training camp wrestling with other fighters. Tiliwaldi was killed by Xinjiang police in a corn field days after the attack.²⁸ This is the most concrete evidence ever introduced that links attacks in Xinjiang to the ETIM or TIP in Pakistan.

In the past, TIP videos were largely an attempt to establish a pedigree for the group, which may have been incapable of actually carrying out attacks in China. In 2008, a TIP commander, Seyfullah, claimed in a video that the TIP carried

out a spate of bombings in China in the run up to the Olympics, including on buses in Kunming and Shanghai and a building in Wenzhou.²⁹ A Chinese man, however, confessed to the Kunming bombings,³⁰ the Shanghai bombings were reportedly caused by a passenger’s inflammable goods,³¹ and the Wenzhou attack was reported to have taken place at the site of a gambling ring and carried out by a man angry over his gambling debt.³² While the previous TIP claims may have been true and the Chinese cover-up brilliant, the TIP still provided no concrete evidence of it carrying out the attacks. The video with Tiliwaldi, however, provides a high level of certainty of TIP involvement that is unmatched by prior videos.

There is further evidence that ETIM or the TIP is actively plotting attacks like the one in Kashgar. A string of plots uncovered in 2010 include: a three-person ETIM cell with one Uighur man that was broken up in Norway; two Uighurs who were sentenced to 10-years imprisonment in the United Arab Emirates for plotting to blow up a dragon statue outside of a Chinese-owned retail shopping complex in Dubai in 2008;³³ and Chinese authorities reported that they arrested 10 members of an ETIM cell in Xinjiang that was responsible for the 2008 Kashgar attack, as well as attacks in Aksu, Kucha, and Hotan.³⁴

Conclusion

The similarities between the terrorist attacks in Kashgar in 2008, Aksu in 2010, and Kashgar in July 2011 show that the attacks were probably not isolated incidents, and the TIP video suggests that the most recent attack was likely connected to TIP or ETIM cells in Pakistan. While China’s claims

about terrorism and foreign links are probably correct with regards to the July 2011 Kashgar attacks, not all acts of violence by Uighurs should be considered terrorism or linked to the TIP, ETIM, and other Pakistan-based groups. As the July 2011 Hotan protest-turned-hostage-taking and the earlier March 2008 Hotan protest show, Uighurs frustrated by China’s policies will organize and protest, sometimes peacefully and sometimes violently.

It may be impossible to know whether in Hotan the protestors were provoked by authorities to violence, intent on the hostage-taking from the start of the protest, or whether they were affiliated with domestic or foreign-based terrorist groups, but one way to assess violent incidents in Xinjiang is to look at the target location and victims, the method of attack, the timing, the attackers’ identities, and whether any group issued a credible statement claiming responsibility. In Hotan, the evidence is not definitive that the protestors were intent on a terrorist hostage-taking. The Kashgar attack, however, has all the hallmarks of a terrorist act.

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26 “Urumqi Riots Force Hu Jintao to Cancel G-8 Trip,” Rediff.com, July 8, 2009.

27 Although there are no direct links between the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the TIP seems to have formed as a successor group to the now defunct ETIM, or the TIP has at least taken up the cause that the now defunct ETIM has given up. While China and international media still commonly refer to the TIP as the ETIM, since 2008 only the TIP has issued propaganda videos and claims of attacks. The TIP has produced nine editions of an elaborate magazine, *Islamic Turkistan*, as well as numerous propaganda videos alleging its role in attacks leading up to the Beijing Olympics, condemnations of Chinese policy in Xinjiang, and threats of future attacks in China. The TIP is believed to be based in Pakistan’s tribal areas and to maintain links with the other jihadist groups active along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, particularly the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and al-Qa`ida.

28 “Video Shows Terrorists in China Got Training in Pak Bases,” *Times of India*, September 8, 2011.

29 “Turkistan Islamic Party Releases Olympic Threat Video,” LiveLeak.com, August 7, 2008.

30 “Young Man Dies in Suicide Bombing, Claims to Have Been Responsible for the Kunming Bus Explosion,” Sohu.com, December 25, 2008.

31 “Young Man Who Set Off a Coffee Shop Explosion Admits He Caused the Kunming Bus Explosion,” Sohu.com, December 25, 2008.

32 “Fatal Explosion Linked to Gambling Debt in Southern China,” *China Daily*, May 18, 2008.

33 Raffaello Pantucci, “Uighurs Convicted in East Turkestan Islamic Movement Plot in Dubai,” *Terrorism Monitor* 8:29 (2010).

34 “Police Dismantling Terror Group in Xinjiang: Ministry,” *People’s Daily*, June 25, 2010.

The UK's Efforts to Disrupt Jihadist Activity Online

By Raffaello Pantucci

THE DESIRE TO find ways to moderate the internet as a tool for the spread of violence and radical ideas is not new or unique to the United Kingdom. This fight, however, is becoming more important as networks involved in terrorist activity increasingly turn to the internet as a vehicle through which to conduct planning, operations and radicalization.¹

This article maps out this fight within a British context to shed light on how the problematic nexus of the internet and radical ideas is evolving, as well as how its importance has grown as traditional al-Qa`ida networks find themselves under even heavier pressure.

Historical Roots

The United Kingdom has long been a hub of online jihadist activity.² One of the earliest networks was the www.azzam.com family of sites that from 1994 to early 2002 provided interested people with a way of reaching out to jihadist groups fighting in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya.³ Its beloved webmaster, a British Pakistani named Babar Ahmad who has admitted to engaging in militant activities in Bosnia, is currently in a British prison fighting extradition to the United States.⁴

A couple of years after Ahmad was arrested, police in London disrupted a group of three young men who appeared to be involved with a cell of Bosnian extremists planning an attack on a

NATO base in the former Yugoslavia. The men were in fact part of a much wider network that stretched across the United Kingdom, and had links in Canada, Denmark, Sweden and the United States. Key cells in the United Kingdom were using the internet to draw in recruits and provide connections to extremist camps in Pakistan, while also acting as an online media center for al-Qa`ida in Iraq.⁵ This network particularly alarmed British security planners who had never seen anything like it before, with then-Metropolitan Police counterterrorism head Peter Clarke saying "it was the first virtual conspiracy to murder that we had seen."⁶

Yet the larger menace seems to be the way that the internet is able to act as a catalyst for information dissemination to extremists who have then gone on to conduct terrorist attacks. Two specific cases stand out as particularly worrying. First, Roshonara Choudhry, the seemingly well-integrated East London woman who self-radicalized online listening to Anwar al-`Awlaqi and then tried to kill a Member of Parliament for voting in support of the Iraq war. Second, Nicky Reilly, the mentally challenged young man who was persuaded by extremists he encountered online to attempt a suicide attack in an Exeter chain restaurant; diners were only saved by the fact that the bomb blew up in his face as he attempted to assemble it in the restaurant's toilet.

The United Kingdom's Reaction

In the face of this threat, the United Kingdom has launched a string of counter operations that seek to address the problem of terrorists using the internet from upstream disruption, to downstream arrests and trying to develop a strategy that is able to focus on this problem in a new way. In the recently refreshed Contest counterterrorism strategy, the British government identified that terrorists used the internet for "propaganda," "radicalization and recruitment," "communication," "attack planning"

and "cyber attack."⁷ The last of these, "cyber attack," was identified as being of "low" probability, with the document identifying an incident in 2010 as the "first recorded incident of a terrorist 'cyber' attack on corporate computer systems."⁸ In that incident, a computer worm called "here you have" spread a virus that crashed computers and provided its creators with backdoor access to infected systems.⁹ While security planners continue to watch this threat and expect it to grow "as the tools and techniques needed for cyber attack become more widely available," it is largely the other ideological and operational aspects of support that the internet provides that British planners are targeting.¹⁰

According to the annual report by the parliamentary committee with oversight of Britain's intelligence agencies, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ, the United Kingdom's version of the American National Security Agency) spent a third of its efforts during the past two cycles on counterterrorism. The "bulk of this effort" was spent in "Pursue... namely, to stop terrorist attacks." As with much of the British intelligence community, the focus shifted from solely "British Pakistani operations" to growing threats in Yemen and East Africa. The report also mentions that GCHQ's work helped disrupt al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) plans in the previous year as well as specific "hostage-taking plans" by an anonymous group.¹¹

In a particularly notable incident from mid-2010, British government-supported hackers penetrated AQAP systems and were able to insert a garbled code into the first edition of *Inspire* magazine, delaying its release by a few weeks.¹² In the operation, which was apparently separately considered

1 "Contest: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism," HM Government, July 2011, available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/counter-terrorism-strategy/contest-summary?view=Binary.

2 For an excellent early primer on British Muslim identity online that includes a discussion on the more extreme elements, see Gary R. Bunt, "Islam@britain.net: 'British Muslim' Identities in Cyberspace," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10:3 (1999).

3 For information on [azzam.com](http://www.azzam.com)'s illegal activities, see *U.S.A. v. Babar Ahmad*, "Affadavit in Support of Request for Extradition of Babar Ahmad," District Court of Connecticut, 2004.

4 "Terror Suspect Babar Ahmad is 'No al Qaeda Rambo,'" BBC, May 9, 2011.

5 Raffaello Pantucci, "Operation Praline: The Realization of al-Suri's Nizam, la Tanzim?" *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2:12 (2008).

6 "The World's Most Wanted Cyber-Jihadist," BBC, January 16, 2008.

7 "Contest: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism," p. 73.

8 Ibid., p. 34.

9 "Cyber Jihad Group Linked to 'Here You Have' Worm," IDG News Service, September 10, 2010.

10 "Contest: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism," p. 74.

11 "Annual Report 2010-2011," UK Intelligence and Security Committee, July 2011.

12 "MI6 Attacks al Qaeda in 'Operation Cupcake,'" *Telegraph*, June 2, 2011.

by Pentagon planners but rejected by the Central Intelligence Agency,¹³ British intelligence operatives inserted a code later revealed to be a list of cupcake recipes.¹⁴ In a separate AQAP linked operation earlier in the year, British officers had arrested a Bangladeshi national named Rajib Karim who was working in information technology at British Airways while in direct contact with AQAP ideologue Anwar al-`Awlaqi. It is unclear how Karim was first picked up, but his electronic communications with al-`Awlaqi were one of the main planks of the prosecution's case against him—showing as they did his intent to help the group launch attacks against aviation.¹⁵

In January 2008, British officers launched a more traditional operation in the wake of a posting on the al-ekhlaas.com forum proclaiming the creation of an al-Qa`ida branch in the United Kingdom.¹⁶ After investigation, MI5 identified the source as a Blackburn native named Ishaq Kanmi, who local officers were able to video as he openly downloaded information off extremist forums at the local library.¹⁷ Connected to Kanmi was a pair of local brothers convicted on other charges and Krenar Lusha, an Albanian immigrant who was identified from online chats he had been having with Kanmi. The conversations were enough to alarm officers who investigated further. When they burst into his home in August 2008, they found large amounts of radical material (including documents about how to build bombs and detonators), 71 liters of petrol, two kilograms of potassium nitrate and 14 mobile telephones.¹⁸

While police and prosecutors were unable to ascertain exactly what Lusha was planning, they concluded that he was likely a “lone wolf” that they had happened to catch early.¹⁹ His only connections to extremists came from his online contacts—similar in many ways to Nicky Reilly, the young man who attempted to detonate a bomb in an Exeter restaurant in May 2008.

This sort of approach was again seen in November 2010, when about a week after Roshonara Choudhry was convicted of attempting to kill a Member of Parliament, police in Wolverhampton arrested Bilal Zaheer Ahmad for posting inflammatory comments on a variety of English-language forums praising

“The United Kingdom has also created a number of organizations that try to help counter the spread of radical ideas online by either providing a counternarrative through the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), or through trying to get the public to help alert them to extremist material they find online.”

Choudhry and calling for others to emulate her. A long-time extremist, Ahmad went so far as to post lists of other MPs who had voted for the war, as well as providing their contact information and a link to buying knives at Tesco (a British retailer). He pled guilty and was jailed for 12 years.²⁰

More significant in many ways, however, was the case against Mohammed Gul, a London-based student who was active on extremist forums and created videos that he published on YouTube celebrating the deaths of U.S. soldiers, highlighting

the plight in Gaza and demonstrating how to make IEDs. While it took two attempts to convict him (the first jury was unable to reach a verdict), he was in the end jailed for five years in a case that was described by a senior officer as being “one of the first successful prosecutions relating to disseminating terrorist publications via the internet.”²¹ Unlike many of the cases listed in this article that involved the internet as the main plank of the prosecution's case to show the individual's involvement in terrorism, Gul did not plead guilty. His successful conviction is likely to be followed by a further set of cases as police and prosecutors now see it is possible to convict individuals on such charges.

On the other end of the scale, there has been an effort by British security services to find ways of countering the spread of radical ideas using the internet. This has been met with mixed success. In one instance, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) sponsored the production of a short film that was to be released online that was intended to provide a dissuading narrative for young people drawn toward jihadist ideas. Called *Wish You Waziristan*, the film told the story of two young British-Pakistanis who end up in a training camp in Waziristan.²² Independently produced with £33,000 of government funds, clips from the animated short were released onto YouTube in April-May 2011 with endings telling people to come back on May 29 to see the entire story. When a British Sunday newspaper discovered the provenance of the film's funding, however, the FCO suddenly became concerned and instead put the film's release on hiatus.²³ In a separate case, the FCO funded British online activists to go into jihadist forums such as al-Shamouk and challenge radical messages.²⁴

13 “List of Cyber-Weapons Developed by Pentagon to Streamline Computer Warfare,” *Washington Post*, June 1, 2011.

14 “Al Qaeda Magazine is a Cupcake Recipe Book,” *PublicIntelligence.net*, July 12, 2010.

15 “Rajib Karim: The Terrorist Inside British Airways,” BBC, February 28, 2011. For more on what Karim was actually plotting, it is instructive to read his e-mails with al-`Awlaqi, available at www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/8880903.Excerpts_from_Rajib_Karim_terror_plot_messages/?ref=rss.

16 “Skepticism Greeted ‘Al Qaeda in Britain’ Founding,” Reuters, January 16, 2008.

17 “Man Jailed for Urging Blair and Brown Assassinations,” Press Association, June 24, 2010.

18 “Would-be Terrorist who had Positively Reveled in Violence, Death and Destruction,” *Derby Evening Telegraph*, December 16, 2009.

19 Ibid.

20 “Blogger Who Encouraged Murder of MPs Jailed,” BBC, July 29, 2011.

21 “Man Jailed for Creating Extremist Videos and Uploading Them to the Internet,” Metropolitan Police Press Release, February 25, 2011.

22 The film's website is available at www.wishyouwaziristan.com, although it remains devoid of much content.

23 “Foreign Office Faces Flak over Axed Counter-Terrorism Video,” *Guardian*, May 30, 2011.

24 Personal interview, British activist, London, September 2011.

The United Kingdom has also created a number of organizations that try to help counter the spread of radical ideas online by either providing a counternarrative through the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), or through trying to get the public to help alert them to extremist material they find online through the Counterterrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU), a specialist police unit. Success, however, has been mixed, with Contest branding the four year old RICU's work "not...as successful as we want."²⁵ Only created in 2010, CTIRU remains a young organization, although it has removed unidentified material from the internet on 165 occasions between July 2010-July 2011.²⁶

Conclusion

Britain's cyber-spooks and cyber-cops are highly adaptive and active in trying to counter the threat from Islamist radicalization online.²⁷ In doing so, they have conducted disruption operations, helped U.S. authorities (most notably with the case of Najibullah Zazi where it is understood that British intelligence agencies provided the key first hint of danger to New York authorities), and have now started to arrest some of the many online extremists that live in the United Kingdom. The successful prosecution of Mohammed Gul is instructive in this regard as it carves a path that British authorities are likely to increasingly use in the future to counter this threat.

The larger significance of this increasing focus on the online threat is two-fold. On the one hand, it demonstrates the growing level of concern about online extremists. As President Barack Obama and others have said, it is increasingly the threat of "lone wolf" extremists that concern them most—individuals who tend to be spurred to violence by material they find online rather than by traditional terrorist recruitment networks. Yet this is taking place as the general assessment about the capacity of traditional violent Islamist terrorist groups is going down. The open

question that remains is whether these two trends are linked—and whether al-Qa`ida and affiliated groups are trying to increasingly turn to an online jihad as they see their efforts offline continuing to be disrupted.

Supporting the notion of the shift online being the product of increasing entropy among al-Qa`ida and affiliated groups is the fact that the British government is increasingly willing to expend its scarce counterterrorism resources on individuals like Mohammed Gul. While it was later revealed that Gul was in contact with more dangerous extremists in Germany, his case would unlikely have received any particular attention if security forces had large-scale plots to focus on instead. Consequently, while it would be unwise to conclude that Britain's jihad has been wrapped up (and recent arrests in Birmingham indicate it remains a live concern), it does seem clear that it has moved into a new phase that is going to be characterized by plots with a strong online presence like many of those listed in this article. It is safe to conclude that Britain's jihad is increasingly shifting online.

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Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

August 1, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. aerial drone killed at least four alleged militants near Wana in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to Voice of America, the drone strike "was the first reported in Pakistan's tribal region since July 12." – *Voice of America, August 1*

August 2, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated his explosives outside a small residential hotel popular with foreigners in Kunduz city. Two other militants then entered the hotel and fought Afghan police in a gunfight that lasted two hours. Four Afghan building guards were killed in the initial suicide blast. – *AP, August 2*

August 2, 2011 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded outside a Christian church in Kirkuk, wounding at least 23 people. – *Voice of America, August 2*

August 3, 2011 (NIGERIA): A British man and an Italian who were kidnapped in May in northern Nigeria's Kebbi State appeared in a hostage video, saying that their captors are from al-Qa`ida. According to Agence France-Presse, "The engineers work for the B. Stabilini construction company, founded by Italians but based in Nigeria. They were kidnapped on May 12 by gunmen who stormed their apartment in Birnin Kebbi, capital of Kebbi state. Police said at the time that a German colleague managed to escape by scaling a fence, while a Nigerian engineer was shot and wounded." – *AFP, August 3*

August 4, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A Taliban bomb attack killed an Afghan intelligence agent in Kunduz. – *AFP, August 3*

August 4, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Three Pakistani naval officers are facing a court martial on charges of negligence related to an attack on a naval base in Karachi on May 22. According to the *New York Times*, "The court martial, a highly unusual disciplinary action for any Pakistan military officer, appeared to reflect the sense of outrage and embarrassment in the Pakistani armed forces over the attack, which

²⁵ "Contest: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism," p. 64.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁷ Additionally, this article does not touch on the United Kingdom's ongoing fight against online right-wing extremists.

revealed incompetence and possibly complicity with the insurgents by naval personnel inside the base.” – *New York Times*, August 4

August 6, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban insurgents shot down a U.S. helicopter in the Tangi Valley of Wardak Province, killing 30 U.S. troops. More than 20 Navy SEALs were among the dead. Seven Afghan special forces and an interpreter were also reported to have been killed. The soldiers were reportedly on a mission to target a Taliban leader. – *McClatchy Newspapers*, August 6; *Telegraph*, August 7; *AP*, August 8

August 6, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed 10 police in Kandahar Province. – *AFP*, August 7

August 6, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The bomber was the blast's only casualty. – *The Nation*, August 7

August 6, 2011 (SOMALIA): Press reports claimed that the al-Shabab insurgent and terrorist group abandoned its bases in Mogadishu after a series of clashes with pro-government forces. Al-Shabab's fighters retreated to Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions. – *Daily Nation*, August 6; *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, August 8

August 8, 2011 (GLOBAL): A new audio message from al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri appeared on Islamist web forums. In the message, al-Zawahiri accused the United States of hijacking the Egyptian revolution to preserve U.S. interests in the Middle East. He urged Egyptians to establish an Islamic state in their country. – *AP*, August 9

August 8, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A remotely-detonated bomb wounded at least 10 Pakistani soldiers in a military vehicle in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP*, August 8

August 10, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): The U.S. military released a statement claiming that the insurgents responsible for downing a U.S. helicopter on August 6 have been killed in an airstrike. “The strike killed Taliban leader Mullah Mohibullah and the insurgent who fired the shot associated with the Aug. 6 downing of the CH-47 helicopter, which resulted in the deaths of 38 Afghan and coalition service members,” the statement read. The insurgent leader who was the target of the original August 6 operation, however, remains at large. – *Fox News*, August 10; *AFP*, August 10

August 10, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone strike killed at least 23 suspected Taliban and al-Qa`ida fighters in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Arab and Uzbek nationals were reportedly among the dead. – *al-Jazeera*, August 10

August 11, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A female suicide bomber and a separate handcart bomb targeted Pakistani police in Peshawar, killing seven people. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility. – *AFP*, August 10; *Dawn*, August 11

August 11, 2011 (INDONESIA): Umar Patek, an al-Qa`ida-linked Indonesian militant wanted in connection with the 2002 Bali bombings, was extradited from Pakistan to Indonesia where he will stand trial. Pakistani authorities captured Patek in Abbottabad on January 25, 2011. He is a senior member of Jemaah Islamiya. – *AP*, August 11

August 12, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters killed eight Afghan security officials who were kidnapped the previous day. According to the *National Post*, “The five police and three officials from the National Directorate of Security (NDS) were kidnapped in Maidan Wardak.” – *National Post*, August 13

August 12, 2011 (EGYPT): Egyptian security officials said that they are preparing an operation against al-Qa`ida cells that have recently established a presence in the Sinai Peninsula. According to CNN, “The focus of their concern is the coastal area between el-Arish, a resort town of about 80,000

people on the Mediterranean, and Rafah on the border with Gaza.” – *CNN*, August 12

August 13, 2011 (LEBANON): Four Lebanese prisoners, reportedly members of Fatah al-Islam, escaped from the Roumieh prison east of Beirut. – *AP*, August 13

August 13, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Armed men kidnapped an American development worker in Lahore. – *Voice of America*, August 13

August 14, 2011 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message, calling on his followers to continue the fight against the United States despite the death of Usama bin Ladin. “Chase America, which killed the leader of the mujahidin [Bin Ladin] and threw his body into the sea,” al-Zawahiri said. “Go after it so that history will say that God enabled his worshippers to attack a criminal country which has spread corruption in the world.” He also said that the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt have provided opportunities for al-Qa`ida to spread its message. – *CBS News*, August 15

August 14, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): Six suicide bombers attacked the governor's compound in Parwan Province, killing 22 people. – *AFP*, August 14

August 14, 2011 (ALGERIA): A suicide bomber in a pick-up truck attacked a police station in Tizi Ouzou Province, injuring 30 people. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb later claimed responsibility. – *AFP*, August 14; *Voice of America*, August 14; *Reuters*, August 18

August 14, 2011 (YEMEN): Fighting between Yemeni security forces and militants in and around Zinjibar in Abyan Province left at least 11 militants and two soldiers dead. – *Voice of America*, August 14

August 14, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded in a two-story hotel in Baluchistan Province, killing at least 11 people. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. – *Voice of America*, August 14

August 14-15, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants attacked government offices overnight in Ghazni Province, killing a policeman. Four insurgents were killed. – *AFP, August 15*

August 15, 2011 (IRAQ): A series of coordinated nationwide bomb blasts ripped through Iraq, killing at least 66 people. – *Telegraph, August 15*

August 15, 2011 (IRAQ): Gunmen wearing Iraqi Army uniforms killed four members of the government-backed Sunni *sabwa* militia in Sayafiya near Baghdad. Authorities blamed the attack on the Islamic State of Iraq. – *Guardian, August 16*

August 15, 2011 (NIGERIA): Nigerian police said they shot to death a would-be suicide bomber as he attempted to crash an explosives-laden vehicle into a police headquarters in Maiduguri, Borno State. Authorities blamed the attack on Boko Haram. – *AAP, August 16; Vanguard, August 16*

August 16, 2011 (UNITED STATES): According to Voice of America, “U.S. President Barack Obama says a ‘lone wolf’ terrorist, such as the gunman who killed 77 people in Norway last month, is a bigger concern than a large-scale terror attack.” – *Voice of America, August 16*

August 16, 2011 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department placed sanctions on three senior members of Jemaah Islamiya in Southeast Asia. The members were identified as Umar Patek, Abdul Rahim Ba’asyir and Muhammad Jibril Abdul Rahman. – *Reuters, August 16*

August 16, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A motorcycle bomb tore through a market in Uruzgan Province, killing seven civilians. – *AFP, August 16*

August 17, 2011 (SPAIN): Spanish police arrested a 37-year-old Moroccan man, Abdellatif Aoulad Chiba, on suspicion of being a member of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. Authorities charge that he ran an internet website that aimed to recruit members to conduct terrorist attacks. He also allegedly sought information on how to poison the water supply at campsites and tourist resorts. – *Voice of America, August 17; Voice of America, August 20*

August 17, 2011 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber blew himself up in the home of Tarmiya police chief Brigadier General Tawfeeq Ahmed, killing two people. The police chief was not home at the time of the attack. – *AFP, August 17*

August 18, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed 22 people, many of them women and children, in Herat Province. – *Los Angeles Times, August 19*

August 18, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber tried to detonate a truck bomb near the entrance of a U.S.-operated base in Gardez, Paktia Province, but did not make it through the front gates. Two Afghan guards were killed. – *Fox News, August 18*

August 19, 2011 (EGYPT): A suicide bomber killed a number of Egyptian soldiers on the Egyptian side of the border with Israel. – *Jerusalem Post, August 19*

August 19, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): Two suicide bombers attacked a British compound in Kabul, killing at least three people. – *AP, August 19*

August 19, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A suspected suicide bomber killed at least 40 people at a mosque in Ghundi village of Khyber Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *BBC, August 19*

August 20, 2011 (IRAQ): According to the *New York Times*, al-Qa`ida in Iraq warned “that it had launched a 100-attack campaign to exact revenge for the United States’ killing of Osama bin Laden.” – *New York Times, August 20*

August 21, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): Villagers stoned to death a local Taliban commander and his bodyguard in Helmand Province. The villagers were angry at the militants for killing a 60-year-old man accused of aiding the Afghan government. – *New York Times, August 22*

August 22, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A CIA-operated drone killed Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, identified as al-Qa`ida’s second-in-command. According to the *New York Times*, “American officials described Mr. Rahman’s death as particularly significant as compared with other high-ranking Qaeda

operatives who have been killed, because he was one of a new generation of leaders that the network hoped would assume greater control after Bin Laden’s death. Thousands of electronic files recovered at Bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, revealed that Bin Laden communicated frequently with Mr. Rahman. They also showed that Bin Laden relied on Mr. Rahman to get messages to other Qaeda leaders and to ensure that Bin Laden’s recorded communications were broadcast widely.” – *New York Times, August 27*

August 24, 2011 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a police checkpoint in Anbar Province, killing seven people. – *New York Times, August 24*

August 25, 2011 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded at the Karma district police station near Falluja, killing five police officers. – *Washington Post, August 25*

August 26, 2011 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle rammed through the gates of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. At least 18 people were killed in the blast. Boko Haram claimed responsibility. – *Los Angeles Times, August 26*

August 26, 2011 (ALGERIA): A suicide bomb attack on the Cherchell military academy in Algeria killed 18 people. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility. – *BBC, August 28; AFP, August 27*

August 27, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated his explosives near a bank in Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province, killing four people. Three children were among the dead. – *AFP, August 27*

August 27, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle targeted a police checkpoint in Kandahar, killing three civilians. – *AFP, August 27*

August 27, 2011 (YEMEN): According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Yemen’s Defense Ministry has said the country’s navy sank a speed boat suspected of carrying explosives as the small vessel approached a Yemeni warship. Yemeni Naval Commander General Ruwais Mujawar said on the Defense Ministry website that the boat

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ignored several warning shots late on August 27 and that 'naval forces then fired at the craft, which sank along with it occupants.'" – *RFE/RL, August 28*

August 28, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A group of suicide bombers attacked a NATO reconstruction base in Qalat, Zabul Province, but failed to breach the facility's perimeters. – *Voice of America, August 28*

August 28, 2011 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber disguised as an injured beggar killed 29 people at Baghdad's largest Sunni mosque. The bomber reportedly hid the explosives in fake casts on his leg and arm. – *AP, August 28; Washington Post, August 28*

August 30, 2011 (RUSSIA): Twin suicide bomb attacks killed eight people in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. – *Reuters, August 30; New York Times, August 30*

August 31, 2011 (PAKISTAN): An explosion tore through a crowd in a parking lot near a Shi'a mosque in Quetta, killing at least 10 people. Authorities believe that the explosion was from a suicide bomber in a vehicle. – *New York Times, August 31*