

## Contents

### FEATURE ARTICLE

- 1 The Sakinah Campaign and Internet Counter-Radicalization in Saudi Arabia**  
By Christopher Boucek

### REPORTS

- 4 Pursuing Al-Qa`ida into Diyala Province**  
By Michael Knights
- 7 Jama`at al-Fuqara': A Domestic Terrorist Threat to the United States?**  
By Christopher Heffelfinger
- 9 Key Factors for the Recent Growth of the Afghan Insurgency**  
By Captain Michael Erwin, U.S. Army
- 12 A Preliminary Assessment of Counter-Radicalization in the Netherlands**  
By Lorenzo Vidino
- 14 Curtailing Illicit and Terrorist Activity in Algeria's Tamanrasset**  
By Geoff D. Porter
- 17 Countering Terrorism in an Unstable Democracy: Mauritania's Political Crisis**  
By Dafna Hochman
- 19 Saudi Arabia's Sectarian Ambivalence**  
By Toby Craig Jones
- 21 After Action Report: Assessing Acceptable Corruption in Iraq**  
By Captain Justin Gorkowski, U.S. Army
- 23 Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity**
- 28 CTC Sentinel Staff & Contacts**

## About the CTC Sentinel

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

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# The Sakinah Campaign and Internet Counter-Radicalization in Saudi Arabia

By Christopher Boucek



A Saudi rehabilitation class discussing the rules of jihad, just one part of the country's counter-radicalization efforts.

**T**HE PROMINENT ROLE of the internet in propagating and perpetuating violent Islamist ideology is well known. The speed, anonymity and connectivity of the web have contributed to its emergence as a powerful source of knowledge and inspiration; it is an unrivaled medium to facilitate propaganda, fundraising and recruitment efforts. The vast scope of information available, coupled with the absence of national boundaries, facilitates ideological cohesion and camaraderie between disparate and geographically separated networks.<sup>1</sup> A broad spectrum of individuals turn to the internet to seek spiritual knowledge, search for Islamist perspectives and attempt to participate in the global jihad. As such, identifying methods to short-circuit internet radicalization has

become an urgent goal for numerous governments.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has quietly supported initiatives to combat internet radicalization. One of the most developed programs is the Sakinah Campaign, which began several years ago to fight online radicalization and recruitment. Named after the Arabic word for religiously inspired tranquility, the Sakinah Campaign operates as an independent, non-governmental organization, supported by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Similar to other counter-radicalization and demobilization strategies in the kingdom, the Sakinah Campaign uses Islamic scholars to interact online with individuals looking for religious knowledge, with the aim of steering them away from extremist sources.

<sup>1</sup> Hanna Rogan, *Jihadism Online: A Study of How al-Qaida and Radical Islamist Groups Use the Internet for Terrorist Purposes* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2006), p. 8.

### The Internet in Saudi Arabia

Internet access first arrived in Saudi Arabia in January 1999.<sup>2</sup> In 2000, there were an estimated 500,000 internet users in the kingdom; by the following year those numbers doubled. They doubled again in 2004 to 2.325 million users, and by 2007 the number of users increased to an estimated 4.7 million.<sup>3</sup> Internet access in the kingdom is routed through the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), which is also home to a sophisticated national internet filtering and monitoring system, located in Riyadh. At KACST, the Internet Services Unit is responsible for administering web filtering, based upon the directives of a security committee led by the Ministry of Interior. By far, the vast majority of blocked sites relate to illicit, illegal, or immoral content, including sites featuring pornography, gambling and drug and alcohol use.<sup>4</sup> Security officials estimate that less than five percent of blocked sites relate to terrorism and extremism.

According to Saudi officials, extremist websites have multiplied in recent years, from only 15 sites in 1998 to more than several thousand today.<sup>5</sup> Sites often appear faster than they can be identified and blocked. The introduction of the internet in Saudi Arabia greatly expanded the distribution of jihadist literature and propaganda in the kingdom, a development which set the stage for the onset of the al-Qa`ida campaign in 2003.<sup>6</sup> Saudi authorities

assert that many extremist sites are hosted by servers located overseas in such locations as Europe, the United States, China and Southeast Asia. Moreover, they add that obtaining cooperation to shut them down is extremely difficult.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that many of these Internet Service Providers are often unaware of either their clients or the content of their clients' sites; some data is hidden clandestinely on unrelated sites, further complicating matters.<sup>8</sup>

### Extremist Use of Internet in Saudi Arabia

Before the recent counter-terrorism crackdown, extremist materials were often obtained from bookstores and record shops. Saudi authorities now monitor these outlets closely. As a result, many texts, videos and audio recordings were uploaded to the internet. This contributed to the establishment of the internet as both a source of information and inspiration. Despite the publication of many jihadist journals focused on strategy and tactics, such as *Mu`askar al-Battar*, one of the internet's greatest strengths arises not from providing training guidance, but as a source of inspiration. Despite popular analysis, "the internet does not function as a 'virtual training camp' organized from above, but rather as a resource bank maintained and accessed largely by self-radicalized sympathizers."<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of more comprehensive security measures has driven many dedicated extremists to avoid the internet and other potentially compromising technologies altogether. Dedicated militants in the kingdom now often avoid using the internet to transmit sensitive information, and instead meet in person to exchange data on CDs and increasingly on USB flash drives.<sup>10</sup> While some sources have cited the internet's role in recruitment, it is believed that few hardcore jihadists are recruited online. Much of the face-

to-face recruitment is now allegedly conducted in coffee shops and clubs, avoiding conspicuous locations such as mosques.<sup>11</sup>

### Sakinah Campaign<sup>12</sup>

The Sakinah Campaign is an independent, non-governmental organization that was created to engage in dialogue online as a way to combat internet radicalization. It targets individuals who use the internet to seek out religious knowledge, and aims to prevent them from accepting extremist beliefs. It seeks to refute so-called deviant interpretations of Islam and rebut extremist arguments, including the ideology of *takfir*. While the campaign is supported and encouraged in its work by the Ministry of Islamic

**“In addition to collecting and cataloguing material and engaging in dialogue, another aspect of the campaign involves infiltrating known extremist and al-Qa`ida-affiliated or inspired websites.”**

Affairs, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Interior, it is officially a non-governmental project. There are in fact other governmental internet-based efforts to combat internet radicalization, although many of these programs are kept from public view in order to be effective. The independence of the Sakinah Campaign helps contribute to its relative legitimacy and results in more people being willing to work with them in their efforts to combat extremism online.

The Sakinah Campaign is the combination of what were originally two separate programs. One program was designed to collect, catalogue and

2 While the internet has been available since 1994, it was restricted to official institutional users; in 1999, local service providers were permitted. See Human Rights Watch, "The Internet in the Middle East and North Africa: Free Expression and Censorship," July 1999.

3 Internet usage data is based on personal interviews in Riyadh in May and June 2008 and on official Saudi government figures available at [www.internet.gov.sa](http://www.internet.gov.sa).

4 Based on Saudi Ministry of Interior data, it is estimated that approximately 35% of all websites are blocked in Saudi Arabia.

5 This data is based in part on personal discussions with Ministry of Interior officials. At the Information Technology and National Security conference organized by Saudi intelligence in December 2007, it was stated that there are 17,000 sites that "fuel al-Qaeda ideology." See Raid Qusti, "Experts Recommend Special Laws to Combat Terror," *Arab News*, December 5, 2007.

6 Thomas Hegghammer, "Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia," *International Affairs* 84:4 (2008): p. 707.

7 Some reluctance comes from the desire of authorities in other countries to keep a particular site open so that they can monitor user traffic.

8 Hanna Rogan and Anne Stenersen, "Jihadism Online: Al-Qaida's Use of the Internet," *FFI Focus*, May 2008, p. 7; Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

9 Rogan and Stenersen, "Jihadism Online: Al-Qaida's Use of the Internet."

10 Personal interviews, Ministry of Interior officials, Riyadh, March 2007.

11 Huda al-Saleh, "Saudi Arabia: Internet Most Popular Terrorist Recruitment Method-Official," *Asharq Alawsat*, May 2, 2007.

12 Data in this section is based on personal interviews with Shaykh Majid al-Mursal, Ph.D., head of the Islamic science section at the Sakinah Campaign, and Umar Issa, Sakinah worker, Riyadh, November 2007.

analyze extremist material found online. This effort resulted in the creation of a large database of books, pamphlets and magazines, as well as a number of video and audio recordings. Not all of the materials included in the collection were available in the public domain. Some documents, such as letters and other private communications, were collected for the insights they offered into the thinking within the movement. The database featured materials used to justify and support the ideology of extremism, as well as the reactions of others to this material. Political events and important dates were also assessed for their importance to the extremist community. All of this material was being collected—and still is by campaign workers—to document and better understand the thinking of extremists and terrorists. According to the campaign, such information is critical to its success. They must be able to speak in a language that those familiar with the material will understand and accept. This effort was joined with another program that focused on using the internet to dialogue with those who have questions about Islam. Together they form what is known today as the Sakinah Campaign.

As of November 2007, there were approximately 45 people formally working with the Sakinah Campaign, including a separate women's section comprised of 10 volunteer workers.<sup>13</sup> Of this total, approximately 15 workers focus on online discussion, while a separate 15 surf the internet to collect the documentary materials. The Sakinah workers who dialogue online are *ulama* and other religious scholars proficient with modern computer technology, all with highly developed understandings of extremist ideologies, including the religious interpretations used to justify violence and terrorism. Also working with the campaign are some volunteers who have renounced their former extremist beliefs. While currently only a few such volunteers work with the campaign, according to Sakinah workers it is hoped that eventually others will join their efforts. Most of these individuals were not hardcore

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. For more on the organization of the campaign, see Abdullah F. Ansary, "Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach," *Middle East Policy* 15:2 (2008): p. 121.

extremists, but rather people with questions about what was permissible in Islam and eager to have their questions answered by knowledgeable scholars. This demonstrates in part the potential of the program to expand. Workers also acknowledge, however, that some individuals will never work with the Sakinah Campaign.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Sakinah in Practice**

Once online, after initially chatting with an individual, a Sakinah worker will usually suggest that they move into a private chat room.<sup>15</sup> Although some individuals have no problems dialoguing in public, others prefer to initially engage in private. These online conversations take place in both real time and in the form of a series of back-and-forth posts. In the latter case, typically the person with whom they are chatting will post a question, and

### **“The Sakinah Campaign strives to demonstrate fallacies and help internet surfers renounce ‘corrupted’ understandings of Islam.”**

then the Sakinah worker will respond. These chats can take place over the span of a few hours, but they have also been known to continue for months. The transcript of the dialogue is then posted online for others to read, multiplying the program's reach.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to collecting and cataloguing material and engaging in dialogue, another aspect of the campaign involves infiltrating known extremist and al-

<sup>14</sup> The campaign has been attacked by extremists, and those involved have been accused of "betraying the Sunnis and of [being involved in] deception and greed." See OSC, "Jihadist Forum Participant Criticizes Saudi 'al-Sakinah' Youth Initiative," February 29, 2008. See also Ansary, "Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach," p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interviews, Shaykh Majid al-Mursal and Umar Issa, November 2007, and Dr. Abdulrahman al-Hadlaq, Riyadh, March 2007 and May 2008.

<sup>16</sup> For an example transcript, see Y. Yehoshua, "Reeducation of Extremists in Saudi Arabia," Middle East Media Research Institute, January 18, 2006.

Qa`ida-affiliated or inspired websites. This is done to both collect new information, as well as to sow dissent within the websites and internet forums used by extremists.

Similar to how the country's counseling program seeks to help detainees abandon extremist beliefs through face-to-face discussions, the Sakinah Campaign works to erode the intellectual support for extremism online. By entering chat rooms and engaging people in discussions about their beliefs, the Sakinah Campaign strives to demonstrate fallacies and help internet surfers renounce "corrupted" understandings of Islam.

#### **Sakinah Web Launch**

In October 2006, the campaign announced the creation of its website to complement its activities.<sup>17</sup> According to reports at the time, the website was intended to serve the global online Muslim community with both Arabic and English sections. To date, however, much of the material is available only in Arabic. Plans called for the site to develop into a clearinghouse for information about extremism, radicalization and counter-radicalization and to serve as a central location for people to turn to online with questions about Islam. Khalid al-Mushawwah, one of the campaign's founders, stated at the website's launch that the intention was not to target extremists, but rather those individuals using the internet to learn more about Islam.<sup>18</sup> It was also planned that the site would serve as a learning resource for imams, shaykhs, and other *da`wa* activists. Their education in current trends in extremist thinking was perceived by the site's organizers as an essential step in the effort to combat internet radicalization.

The site serves as a repository for a wide range of material, including a large number of studies and reports focusing on the work of the campaign, information about other initiatives combating extremism, numerous audio and video files (including clips of extremist recantations), as well as media coverage of the Sakinah Campaign's efforts. Other sections of the site are

<sup>17</sup> The campaign's website can be accessed at [www.as-skeen.com](http://www.as-skeen.com).

<sup>18</sup> *Ar-Riyad*, October 8, 2006.

focused solely on *fatawa* issued by leading clerics on a number of relevant topics. There will also be a section devoted to interviews with individuals who have renounced violence and extremism. Most important, the website will host the transcripts from the campaign's online dialogues so that others can read them and thereby spread the campaign's efforts.

#### Criminalization and Other Recent Efforts

A new information security law enacted in 2008 established severe penalties for anyone involved in spreading extremist or radical material online. Those found who have created a terrorist website, or who have used the internet to communicate with terrorist leaders, raise funds, spread extremism, or distribute tactical information useful for terrorists will be subject to a maximum of 10 years in prison and/or a fine of up to five million SAR (approximately \$1.3 million). This is 10 times the punishment for other non-terrorism related internet offenses; crimes such as hacking are punishable by a one year sentence and a 500,000 SAR fine.

Other recent steps have been taken to curb the issuance of unsanctioned *fatawa*. Presently, only clerics associated with the state-sponsored Council of Senior Islamic Scholars may issue *fatawa*.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in October 2007 the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta created an official *fatawa* website to serve as the only source online for legitimate and authentic—and importantly, legal—*fatawa*.<sup>20</sup> These were both important steps to codify the process of issuing religious rulings and combat the spread of extremist *fatawa*, such as those advocating participation in unsanctioned jihad. It will remain to be seen whether such steps will have the desired impact of preventing the spread of independent and “unauthorized” religious opinions.

#### Conclusion

The popularity of the internet and its central role in spreading violent Islamist ideologies has led to international interest in Saudi Arabia's Sakinah Campaign. One of the program's greatest assets is its ability to interact with people not only residing in the kingdom; Sakinah workers, for example, interact with an increasing number of non-Saudis. Since word of the campaign has spread, it has been approached by several other countries asking for assistance in creating similar programs to combat internet radicalization. The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait both have sought to work with the Saudis to create national versions of the Sakinah Campaign. A number of other nations—including Algeria, the United Kingdom and the United States—have also expressed interest in creating web-based counter-radicalization platforms.

The importance of the internet will only increase in the future, and programs such as the Sakinah Campaign are similarly bound to multiply. Any strategy to combat the spread of extremism must also offer viable options for the religiously observant. Engaging with that segment of the population and offering alternatives to violent extremism is a critical necessity in the war of ideas. Encouraging local partners to take up this approach is vital, and the Saudi experience will be useful for others to study as they consider strategies to curb internet radicalization.

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## Pursuing Al-Qa`ida into Diyala Province

By Michael Knights

REPORTED VIOLENT INCIDENTS across Iraq are a third of their pre-surge levels. Diyala Province, however, has proven to be particularly difficult to pacify. Whereas reported incident levels in places such as Baghdad, Anbar and Babil provinces are now a sixth of what they were pre-surge, Diyala has witnessed the slowest reduction of violence in Iraq. Statistics derived from Olive Group's database of more than 100,000 geo-located incidents suggest that reported incidents have decreased from 539 in January 2007 to 252 in July 2008,<sup>1</sup> and even this reduction might not have been possible without the commitment of substantial U.S. forces since 2007. As the first phase of the Diyala security operation concludes, what is it that makes Diyala Province so troublesome?

#### Sectarian Conflict

With mountains to the north, farmlands in the center and deserts to the east, Diyala is described by some as “little Iraq.” Geography aside, Diyala is also a microcosm of the ethnic and sectarian make-up of Iraq. The majority are Sunni Arabs, possibly as much as 60-70% of the population. The remainder is split between Feyli (Shi`a Kurds), Shi`a Arabs and Turkmen, and their numbers may be gauged from the fact that 114,658 votes were cast in the 2005 local election for Shi`a and Kurdish candidates at a time when the Sunnis boycotted the election.<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of years of settled cultivation have resulted in a complex tribal fabric with large numbers of densely interconnected smaller tribal groupings. The Saddam regime “Arabized” the *qada'a* (district) of Khanaqin in northern Diyala, removing Feyli and other Kurds in favor of Sunni Arabs. The Kurdistan Regional

19 For more information, see Nawaf Obaid and Anthony Cordesman, “Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom's Response,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 19, 2005, p. 15.

20 Available at [www.alifta.com](http://www.alifta.com). See also Habib Shaikh, “Fatwas Will Be Made Available on Internet,” *Khaleej Times*, November 2, 2007; Andrew Hammond, “Fatwas on Rise but Believers Don't Always Listen,” Reuters, December 10, 2007.

1 The database is maintained by private security company Olive Group and represents information gained through more than 1,800 days of consecutive on-the-ground operations in Iraq.

2 See annex five on 2005 provincial election results in Michael Knights and Eamon McCarthy, *Provincial Politics in Iraq: Fragmentation or New Awakening?* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2008).

Government (KRG) has made claims on lands in the Khanaqin area and as far south as Mandali, citing the need to effect “reverse-Arabization” in such areas. Kurdish claimants have already begun to return and establish mud and cinder block villages in claimed areas, sometimes with a degree of protection from peshmerga militiamen.<sup>3</sup>

Sunni communities are also threatened by the minority Shi`a community in Diyala, which was gifted with a disproportionate role in provincial politics by the Sunni Arab boycott of the January 2005 local elections. This resulted in a Shi`a-led provincial council, a Shi`a governor and a Shi`a-led and largely Shi`a-manned police force. Diyala was also significantly affected by the sectarian fighting that followed the February 22, 2006 bombing of the Askariyya Shrine in Samarra. Intense sectarian cleansing by Shi`a police forces and Sunni insurgent groups took place in 2006 and 2007. The Shi`a-led provincial council failed to administer more than one or two percent of its budget in 2006 and abandoned both fuel and Public Distribution System (PDS) food rations in October 2006.<sup>4</sup> In many areas in late 2006, al-Qa`ida in Iraq and related movements successfully evicted the Shi`a police forces, who were undermanned and not locally recruited.

### The Geography of Threat in Diyala

With complex physical and human terrain, the difficulty of operating in Diyala Province can be readily appreciated. To complicate matters further, different zones of insurgent activity in Diyala present distinct operational challenges. Setting aside Khalis, an important operational area of its own, there are four main zones.

#### *Ba`quba City*

Some western Ba`quba residential neighborhoods such as Ghatun and Mufrik have periodically become al-Qa`ida in Iraq<sup>5</sup> and Ansar al-Sunna

strongholds, with roadside Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) used to deter coalition and Iraqi patrols. Although such attacks have dropped to around five per month, some indicators suggest an effort to ramp up offensive operations. Thirteen IEDs were used against Iraqi

## **“The threat to the lower Diyala River Valley is likely linked to the recurrent establishment of insurgent training and basing areas among the canals and marshlands of southern Diyala.”**

Army patrols during July 2008. Since April, three high-profile suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attacks occurred in central and eastern Ba`quba, including strikes on the provincial courthouse and the Popular Committee headquarters (the “Sons of Iraq” equivalent in Ba`quba). Four other suicide vest attacks targeted Popular Committee headquarters in pedestrian areas of the city during the same months.

#### *The Lower Diyala River Valley*

On the west bank of the river, Route 5 links Ba`quba and Baghdad. As recently as January 2008, a battalion-size operation removed 70 IEDs from the 19-mile road. Buhriz and the east bank farming communities between Ba`quba and Baghdad have proven similarly hostile due to the presence of large numbers of former regime elements. Despite the integration of some elements of the nationalist 1920 Revolution Brigades in local *Sabwa* (Awakening) initiatives, the road systems along the east bank have grown noticeably more dangerous in 2008 than they were even in the spring of 2007. For example, by analyzing one six mile stretch of the east bank between Jarimat and Umm al-Khuways and counting all reported IEDs within three miles of the river,

the *takfiri* terrorist group that has been allied with and subordinate to al-Qa`ida since 2004. It is led by Abu Ayyub al-Masri (an Egyptian also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir).

the total for January-June 2007 is four IEDs compared with 56 in January-June 2008.<sup>6</sup> Increased patrolling by the two Iraqi Army battalions based south of Ba`quba is one cause of the increase.

#### *Balad Ruz District*

The threat to the lower Diyala River Valley is likely linked to the recurrent establishment of insurgent training and basing areas among the canals and marshlands of southern Diyala. Indeed, the start of security operations in this area in July saw IEDs in the lower Diyala River Valley halve in that month. Just 12 miles east of the river, villages such as Turki have been cleared every three to six months since late 2006 to break up insurgent bases, which have often numbered 30-100 fighters and held large explosives and ammunition caches.<sup>7</sup> The areas south of Balad Ruz present a major logistical challenge for police, and Iraqi security forces based in Balad Ruz (a city of 80,000) are targeted by an average of 15 IEDs per month.<sup>8</sup> Although tribal reconciliation between Sunni and Shi`a clans is promising, the relatively small number of Popular Committee militiamen cannot secure large swathes of land. Operations launched in late July 2008 will extend permanently-manned battle positions into the farmlands for the first time.

#### *The Upper Diyala River Valley*

The predominately Sunni Arab towns of Qaryat Zaghiniyat, Qubbah, Mukhisa, Abu Tinah and Abu Sadah are 6-12 miles north of Ba`quba positioned on either side of Route 5. These areas witness sporadic IED use to dissuade coalition and Iraqi patrolling, but their role as an offensive base for operations into Ba`quba or Khalis has been greatly constrained. In July 2008, insurgents fought particularly hard against Iraqi

<sup>6</sup> All statistics derived from Olive Group's incident databases.

<sup>7</sup> These impressions were gained from numerous open source articles by *Stars and Stripes*, *DefenseLink* and syndicated press reporters in 2006-2008. For a useful reference, see the following articles: “Sheiks Continue Discussions of Security, Stability for Diyala,” Multi-National Division-North PAO, December 10, 2006; “Sheiks Sign Peace Agreement,” Multi-National Division-North PAO, May 3, 2007. Also see interview material with Colonel David Sutherland, commander of the Greywolf Brigade Combat Team, in Kagan, “Securing Diyala.”

<sup>8</sup> All statistics derived from Olive Group's incident databases.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview, senior KRG official, Ministry of Extraregional Affairs, March 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Kimberly Kagan, “Securing Diyala,” *Weekly Standard*, December 6, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> AQI is sometimes used as a catch-all phrase to describe any Sunni Arab diehard militant who has not integrated into the Awakening (*Sabwa*) movements or their associated police auxiliary units, the so-called “Sons of Iraq.” For the purposes of this article, however, AQI refers to

forces in areas east of Route 5, using 16 IEDs in areas that normally see three to five per month. Further along Route 5, Muqdadiyya had long been one of the last true bastions of AQI and related movements, but even this stronghold has been reduced by joint U.S.-Iraqi operations. At the start of the surge in January 2007, 55 reported incidents took place in central Muqdadiyya itself with only five incidents reported in the surrounding countryside, reflecting the ability of AQI and other movements to operate at will in the city. During this period, AQI fighters paraded through urban streets and evicted Shi`a from entire villages, razing all buildings and destroying all cattle. By January 2008, the picture had changed; no attacks were undertaken in the secured urban area, while 48 IED attacks were attempted in the areas north of Muqdadiyya, reflecting AQI's effort to keep coalition forces out of its rural staging areas. By the summer of 2008, AQI could only hold public rallies in rural villages, and its reaction to the Diyala security operation has been muted in Muqdadiyya.<sup>9</sup>

#### Operations and Tactics

Intimidation remains the key operational goal of AQI and similar movements. When faced with coalition and Iraqi government cooption of segments of the insurgent community into *Sabwa*-type movements, the reaction of AQI has been to seek to instill fear in potential collaborators, either to swing them back over to active support for AQI or at least to neutralize them as potential opponents. The most tactically successful action of this kind was the September 24, 2007 suicide vest attack on a post-Ramadan reconciliation meeting involving notables from both Sunni and Shi`a communities at a Shi`a mosque in Ba`quba. The attack killed 28 people, including the two senior-most police officials and Sayyid Ahmad al-Tamimi, the head of the Shi'ite Endowment and the architect of many reconciliation meetings. Yet, as with similar attacks in Anbar in early 2006, such outrages tend to reinforce local determination to stamp out *takfiri*<sup>10</sup> groups.

9 Ibid.

10 The term *takfiri* in this article refers to Sunni insurgent groups that justify violence against some Muslims and all non-Muslims because their religious beliefs are not compatible with the group. *Takfiri* groups in Iraq include al-Qa`ida in Iraq and its affiliates, plus Ansar al-

Suicide operations are relatively rare in Diyala and target selection is commensurately selective. A high proportion of the suicide attacks in 2008 have targeted *Sabwa* and Popular Committee leaders and headquarters, with a small minority targeted at Shi`a communities or coalition forces. This is an encouraging sign, marking a shift from sectarian targeting to the battle for control of the Sunni community. In the first six months of 2008, there were nine reported VBIED attacks and 14 reported suicide vest attacks. This equates to around one suicide operation per week somewhere in the governorate. The widely publicized use of Iraqi women in 11 of the suicide vest attacks in Diyala (plus another nine in Baghdad) is indicative of a range of features of AQI and related movements, notably the relative scarcity of foreign martyrdom-seekers, the increasingly Iraqi membership of *takfiri* movements in Iraq, and the switch toward suicide vest operations to reach well-protected targets in pedestrian enclosures. Women are well-suited for the latter role, being harder to screen at checkpoints manned by Iraqi Army or coalition personnel.<sup>11</sup> The Iraqis are slowly adding women to the security forces and are creating "Daughters of Iraq" to counter female suicide bombers.

A second operational objective of *takfiri* movements in Diyala is the desperate struggle to preserve and build safe havens in which fighters can rest, resupply and plan operations. The preponderance of roadside IED attacks sponsored or undertaken by *takfiri* groups as a defensive reaction to increased Iraqi Army presence is very apparent in many parts of Diyala. Thus, increased incident levels—and even increased friendly casualties—do not necessarily indicate that the insurgents have the initiative; in fact, increased insurgent activity often indicates the opposite.

Sunna/Ansar al-Islam.

11 The subject of the 20-plus suicide bombings undertaken by women in Iraq in 2008 has been covered in a number of focused articles, notably: Alissa Rubin, "Despair Drives Suicide Attacks by Iraqi Women," *New York Times*, July 5, 2008; Bobby Ghosh, "Female Suicide Bombers: The Latest Weapon," *Time*, June 26, 2008; Amit Paley, "Female Suicide Bomber Attacks in Diyala," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2008.

A denser pattern of roadside IEDs, ambushes and VBIED attacks on battle positions have occurred during the Diyala security operation, which has seen reinforcements of Iraqi Army and Iraqi National Police forces almost double the usual 10-battalion Iraqi Army garrison of Diyala, joining elements of three U.S. brigades in the province. The two remaining areas with sufficient

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operational space for *takfiri* groups are the farmlands of Balad Ruz district and the Hamrin mountain foothills. The latter represents a critical line of retreat and reinforcement, linking extremists in Diyala with others in key areas such as Hamrin Lake, Tuz Khurmatu, Hawija, Bayji, Makhmur, Mosul and the Iraqi-Syrian border areas. Dispersal of personnel and regular movement of arms caches along this line will remain the *modus operandi*.

#### Military Operations to Win Political Space

Although plenty of AQI High Value Targets were captured during the opening week of the offensive (including the regional *amir* and his military and media deputies), only economic and political movement can finish off AQI in Diyala. The security operation will allow near simultaneous clearance of more areas than ever before, and the maintenance of the assembled force for some weeks will increase the chances of moving into the hold and build phase. Quick impact projects undertaken by the coalition and Iraqi Army have done much to meet near-term needs for fuel products and PDS rations, but Diyala has been denied true economic development since 2006 and has three years of provincial budget to disburse, let alone an additional \$100 million of government funding allocated to Diyala as a political symbol during the

security operation. Only a functioning provincial government can deliver structured economic development, with an emphasis on job creation.

Provincial elections due in late 2008 or early 2009 are badly needed to correct the sectarian and ethnic imbalance on the provincial council. Regardless of what system is used, the participation of the Sunni Arab majority should increase the number of Sunnis on the council, and thus make more likely the appointment of a governor and police chief amenable to Sunni needs. The integration of Popular Committee fighters into the Iraqi Police Service in Diyala and the recruitment of Sunni Arabs in the new locally formed brigade of the Iraqi Army 5<sup>th</sup> Division could further reassure Sunnis. Some vetting of the Popular Committees is necessary as AQI sympathizers are seeded throughout the movements, but the federal government, dominated by Shi`a and Kurdish factions, will also seek to undermine the Popular Committees in advance of the provincial elections, stirring Sunni fears.

The final issue that may affect AQI prospects in Diyala is the treatment of Kurdish claims on areas such as Mandali and Khanaqin. Thus far, the United Nations has recommended gradual steps in establishing the rights of return for evicted Kurds, and it is important that the process does not evolve too suddenly. AQI and other Sunni extremist movements were strengthened considerably by the deep sectarian and ethnic cleavages present in Diyala Province in 2006. Until they are addressed, these deep-rooted problems will allow *takfiri* groups to maintain a residual support network in local communities, requiring repeated clearance actions and complicating the hold and build phases of counter-insurgency operations.

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## Jama`at al-Fuqara': A Domestic Terrorist Threat to the United States?

By Christopher Heffelfinger

ORGANIZED ON COMMUNAL compounds in the United States and Canada, surprisingly little is known about Jama`at al-Fuqara' (Community of the Impoverished)<sup>1</sup> and its current operations. The secretive organization—it publicly operates under the name Muslims of the Americas (MOA)—has been known to law enforcement since the 1980s for dozens of violent and white collar crimes in North America. It has been described by prosecutors as advocating “the purification of the Islamic religion by means of force and violence.” Yet, the group’s nature and organization as a terrorist entity seems as unclear today as at any point in its history.

The current Jama`at al-Fuqara' is obscured by a vague public ideology, careful to avoid any reference to Islamist ambitions or armed struggle. MOA and its subsidiary, the International Qur'anic Open University (IQOU),<sup>2</sup> carries out a number of public events and hosts videos and news of its activities online.<sup>3</sup> Its Pakistan-based leader, Shaykh Mubarak Ali Gilani, and other U.S.-based leaders have done much to present a devout but always law abiding image, even organizing a Muslims Scouts wing for boys that helps the needy in their various communities. Fears persist, however, due to the group’s origins as al-Fuqara', and whether the militancy present at some of its compounds could turn anti-American.

Jama`at al-Fuqara' was designated a terrorist organization by the State Department in 1999 for its earlier offenses in the United States, including a range of firearms and explosives charges and a series of violent crimes.<sup>4</sup> Yet its founder, Pakistani cleric Shaykh Gilani, continues to deny that such an

organization called Jama`at al-Fuqara' has ever existed. Gilani expressed in interviews to the Pakistani press his fears that the U.S. government seeks to brand him as a terrorist and thus jeopardize the security of his thousands of followers in the United States, the majority of whom are African-Americans living in compounds largely isolated from the rest of American society.<sup>5</sup> That fear may be true; the group’s past ties to militancy and Gilani’s own record are correctly a cause for concern for U.S. law enforcement and counter-terrorism officials.

### Al-Fuqara's History of Violence

There is no mention of outright militancy anywhere on IQOU-MOA’s website or in its public literature, but some members have had alleged ties to Salafi-jihadi militancy. Clement Rodney Hampton-El, the only American to be charged in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, was reported to be a member of Jama`at al-Fuqara', although the information was not used at his trial.<sup>6</sup> He was sentenced to 35 years in prison for his role in the attacks, and al-Fuqara' was mentioned as a target in the investigation of the bombing by officials in 1993.

Members of the group were also alleged to have cooperated with Wadih El-Hage (Wadih al-Hajj), an al-Qa`ida member who participated in the U.S. Embassy attacks in East Africa in 1998.<sup>7</sup> In 1990, Dr. Rashad Khalifa, considered an unorthodox imam, was murdered in Tucson, Arizona. James D. Williams and a co-defendant were charged with conspiracy to commit the murder; both were identified by the Colorado Attorney General’s office as members of Jama`at al-Fuqara' and charged under the state’s organized crime act.<sup>8</sup> El-Hage was then living and working in Tucson, and around that time hosted an unknown individual from New York

5 Arshad Sharif, “Gillani Threatens to Sue Minister on Allegations of Links with India,” *Dawn*, February 23, 2002.

6 Francis X. Clines, “U.S.-Born Suspect in Bombing Plots: Zealous Causes and Civic Roles,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1993.

7 Martin A. Lee, “Strange Bedfellows,” Southern Poverty Law Center, Spring 2002.

8 “Attorney General Salazar Announces 69 Year Sentence for ‘Fuqra’ Defendant Convicted of Racketeering and Conspiracy to Commit Murder,” Colorado Attorney General’s Office, March 16, 2001.

1 Jama`at al-Fuqara' is frequently transliterated as Jamaat al-Fuqra.

2 It officially operates as IQOU-MOA.

3 The IQOU-MOA website can be accessed at [www.iqou-moa.org](http://www.iqou-moa.org).

4 “1999 Patterns of Global Terrorism,” U.S. Department of State, 1999.

who had come “to check” on Imam Khalifa.<sup>9</sup>

Although al-Fuqara’ members may have cooperated with Salafi-jihadi activists seeking mass casualty soft targets, their typical attacks have been smaller and more targeted, often directed against individuals. One of the first investigations of al-Fuqara’ was initiated by the FBI in 1983, involving a murder and firebombing directed against the Ahmadiyya<sup>10</sup> community in Detroit.<sup>11</sup> During the next two decades, al-Fuqara’ members participated in several bombings against the worship centers of those they considered to be unbelievers—both Muslims and non-Muslims—across the United States.

Colorado police began investigating the group following the discovery of a storage locker in Colorado Springs containing an array of explosives, firearms, manuals for guerrilla warfare and bomb-making, and “Fuqra-related publications.”<sup>12</sup> That investigation—and the successful prosecution of several members in the late 1980s and early 1990s—revealed that the organization was comprised of at least 30 different closed communities in the United States, alongside “covert paramilitary training compounds.”<sup>13</sup> The raids also discovered the existence of units called Muhammad Commandos divided into at least five different sections across the country. These units were designed to train Fuqara’ members covertly, and based on the documents recovered by Colorado police, looked intent on hitting further targets in Colorado—such as the U.S. Air Force Academy—and other targets in the western United States. They also appeared to focus on intelligence gathering and reconnaissance. In addition, the *jama`at*, or community, in Colorado ran security

firms, one that laundered \$350,000 in fraudulent workers’ compensation claims for the al-Fuqara’ organization and MOA.<sup>14</sup> The creation of the security firm also allowed group members to obtain licenses for automatic weapons.

Al-Fuqara’s leader, Gilani, was seen in a recruitment video from the early 1990s speaking of the “highly specialized training in guerrilla warfare” he offered his followers.<sup>15</sup> The video, entitled “Soldiers of Allah,” also showed guerrilla fighters using firearms and explosives, designed to bring potential combatants to Pakistan for paramilitary and religious training. As part of that effort, Muhammed Haseeb Abdul-Haqq—an American convert and member of MOA—helped set up “jihad councils” across the United States that sent 12 members to Pakistan in the early 1980s to fight in Afghanistan before they were stopped by U.S. and Pakistani officials.<sup>16</sup>

After 9/11, a few members from the group’s Red House, Virginia compound were arrested and charged with firearms violations, including the property’s owners, Vincente Pierre and Traci Upshur. In the arrests, investigators detailed Pierre’s extensive ties to the al-Fuqara’ organization; both he and his wife were convicted on multiple felony firearms charges.<sup>17</sup> Investigators also said that one of the members from the Red House compound received training in Afghanistan.

Aside from the community in Buena Vista, CO, investigators discovered that *Jama`at al-Fuqara`* maintained around 30 different compounds that were “somewhat mobile in nature.”<sup>18</sup> While the Colorado compound was shut down in 1993, others—including those in Oklahoma, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, California and Michigan—continued to operate. The California *jama`at*, known as Baladullah, or “Land of God,” was home to around 300 followers situated on 1,000

acres in Tulare County until it ran into legal challenges and apparently closed.<sup>19</sup> As at other compounds, armed guards secured the entrance. Yet, Fuqara’s largest enclaves are located at Holy Islamville in York County, South Carolina, and its headquarters, Islamberg, in Hancock, NY,

## “Yet, this cloak of quietist Sufism may well be an ideological cover for Gilani’s violent activism, and that of his followers in the United States.”

where the property is registered under Muslims of the Americas Inc., according to county property records. Each of those communities also maintain their own websites. Their press releases and online publications have also listed addresses in Canada, Venezuela and Trinidad.

### The Public Image

Mubarak Ali Gilani’s image as guerrilla leader sharply contrasts with that of his persona as a peaceful Sufi spiritual leader. The website of IQOU-MOA’s headquarters in Islamberg, New York, for example, describes Gilani’s miracles in healing the sick, and the leader as a positive force for change among the numerous converts who have come to follow him.<sup>20</sup> Gilani even published a refutation of an investigative reporter who reported on militancy at MOA compounds in the United States.

In a statement refuting al-Fuqara’s ties to terrorism, Gilani argued that their charitable activities with Muslim youth demonstrate that the group is not a threat:

On September 11th, about 100 MOA Boy Scouts belonging to MOA/IQOU were assisting the rescue and relief effort, on site, at Ground Zero, World Trade Center.<sup>21</sup>

9 Oriana Zill, “A Portrait of Wadiah El-Hage, Accused Terrorist,” PBS Frontline, September 12, 2001.

10 The Ahmadiyya are an Islamic movement that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in present-day Pakistan. Fuqara’ members considered them unorthodox. The Ahmadiyya claim to have 60 chapters in the United States.

11 John Kane and April Wall, “Identifying the Links between White-Collar Crime and Terrorism,” National White Collar Crime Center, September 2004.

12 “Information Regarding Colorado’s Investigation and Prosecution of Members of Jamaat Ul Fuqra,” Colorado Attorney General’s Office, December 10, 2001.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 David E. Kaplan, “Made in the U.S.A.: Hundreds of Americans Have Followed the Path to Jihad,” *U.S. News & World Report*, June 2, 2002.

16 Ibid.

17 “South: Virginia: Link To Terrorist Ring,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2002.

18 “Information Regarding Colorado’s Investigation and Prosecution of Members of Jamaat Ul Fuqra.”

19 Jerry Seper and Steve Miller, “Militant Muslims Seek Virginia Base,” *Washington Times*, July 1, 2002.

20 The group also hosts videos at [www.youtube.com/islamberg](http://www.youtube.com/islamberg).

21 Shaykh Mubarak Ali Gilani, “Exposing Roots of Terrorism in USA,” IQOU-MOA, undated.



IQOU-MOA's literature describes the group's leader as a *murshid* (a spiritual guide, a term specific to Sufi Islam, particularly in the subcontinent), his full title being Sultan Muhyidden Syed Mubarik Ali Shah Gilani Hashimi, Al-Hasani wa'l-Husaini.<sup>22</sup> The "al-Hasani wa'l-Husaini" indicates that he is *Abl al-Bayt*, or a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad's family. He is also a direct descendant of `Abd al-Qadir Gilani, one of the most famous mystics in Sufi Islam.

The general Islamic information site, ummah.net, has a page dedicated to Gilani outlining his writings, contributions to Islamic sciences, miracles, and his efforts to "invigorate and refine" Islam in America.<sup>23</sup> It adds that

the majority of Sheikh Jilani's followers purchased land in areas away from the urban metropolis and developed small villages where they could raise their children in a wholesome environment and live a life of pure Islam, free from the decadence of a godless society.

Gilani went on to set up campuses for his Qur'anic Open University throughout the United States, Canada, West Indies, South America and Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> The group sent "aspiring believers" to Pakistan for intensive courses in Islamic studies, who then returned home to teach others. He also authored a number of works covering Islamic sciences and psychiatry, as well as traditional works of Hanafi *fiqh*, one of the Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence. One of his most impressive works is an English translation and "revision" of Khavendesh bin Mahmoud's *Rauzat-us-Safa*, a detailed biography of the Prophet Muhammad originally written in Persian.

#### Where Does al-Fuqara' Fit?

Jama`at al-Fuqara' is by no means a traditional Salafi-jihadi organization; clearly, Gilani's authority as an Islamic leader rests on his Sufi credentials, and

his teachings support that assessment. IQOU-MOA celebrates the Prophet's birthday, performs songs in his honor, believes in saints and their power to heal through the Qur'an—in short, a list of grievous innovations (*bid`a*) to the Salafist school. Even Gilani's translation of a work of Islamic scholarship from Persian (as opposed to Arabic sources) is a deviation from Salafist norms.

A dossier from the Manhattan's Institute Center for Policing Terrorism—one of the few comprehensive open source documents available on Jama`at al-Fuqara—states that "Gilani preaches a Wahhabist, anti-Western worldview that ordains violence as the only means of purifying Islam."<sup>25</sup> Gilani's beliefs, however, and the doctrine he formulates for his followers is in fact expressly anti-Wahhabi. Wahhabis, or the Salafis of Saudi Arabia, have depicted him as a deviant for his beliefs in Sufism and many of the practices associated with it. Yet, this cloak of quietist Sufism may well be an ideological cover for Gilani's violent activism, and that of his followers in the United States.

Jama`at al-Fuqara' is a unique organization in the world of Islamist militancy, and its leader claims a distinct legitimacy in Islam, counterpoint to Salafist currents. While members have cooperated with Salafi-jihadis at times, that is not the public ideology presented by its leadership—it purports to be Hanafi Sunni and Sufi. In that sense, Gilani can be considered more of a rival to Usama bin Ladin and other Salafi-jihadis, previously training his own mujahidin to serve in the fight against the Soviets, and allegedly sponsoring the paramilitary training of American Muslims since the early 1990s. Given the adaptability of its leadership and public message, its past criminal activities and the high degree of military training among al-Fuqara's members—in combination with potentially militant instruction from Gilani in Lahore—the organization remains a high risk for U.S. security.

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## Key Factors for the Recent Growth of the Afghan Insurgency

By Captain Michael Erwin, U.S. Army

BEGINNING AT 4:30 AM on July 13, 2008, more than 100 insurgents launched a direct fire assault against Combat Outpost Wanat in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. Taliban fighters fired machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars from homes and a mosque while another 100 insurgents attacked an observation post from farmland to the east. The attack lasted throughout the day and the enemy continued to attack in the face of coalition machine guns, grenades, artillery, AH-64s, F-15Es, A-10 Warthogs and B-1B bombers. Coalition soldiers managed to repulse the attack, but not until they suffered nine killed in action and 15 more wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the Taliban are as strong as they have been since September 10th, 2001. Senior U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, Major General Jeffrey J. Schloesser, acknowledged this in late June when he revealed that the country has witnessed a 40% increase in attacks thus far in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Despite the insurgency's significant leadership losses in 2007, violent events have transpired with increasing regularity this year throughout the entire country—a poignant indicator that reveals the insurgency's organization and strength. The enemy has sought out new and bold avenues to demonstrate to the world, and more importantly to the people of Afghanistan, that the Taliban will eventually return to power in the country it once ruled.

The growth of the insurgency in Afghanistan can be attributed to a series of external and internal factors, including better trained and equipped fighters traveling in from Pakistan, Iranian support for militant activities, the role of the poppy trade and the strength of insurgent Information Operations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Information on Gilani can be accessed on the Islamberg website, located at [www.islamberg.org](http://www.islamberg.org).

<sup>23</sup> This page can be currently accessed at [www.ummah.net/Al\\_adaab/sheikh/sheikhji.html](http://www.ummah.net/Al_adaab/sheikh/sheikhji.html).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Zachary Crowley, "Jamaat al-Fuqra Dossier," Center for Policing Terrorism, March 16, 2005.

<sup>1</sup> Tim Coghlan, "US Forces Abandon Wanat Outpost in Afghanistan after Fierce Taleban Attack," *TimesOnline*, July 17, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Julian E. Barnes and Peter Spiegel, "Afghanistan Attacks Rise, U.S. Says," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The assessments in this report are based upon the au-

### The Federally Administered Tribal Areas

Ethnic Pashtun Taliban militants and al-Qa`ida sympathizers have enjoyed sanctuary in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) since 2002; therefore, blaming the insurgency's increasing virulence on this factor alone is an oversimplification of the problem. Rather, Afghanistan's devolving security situation may be attributed to the combination of a significant increase in well-trained foreign fighters traveling to FATA to train future fighters, and the on-again-off-again peace agreements between FATA's militant tribes and the government of Pakistan—with the latter issue enabling the former.

As Pakistan's elections neared in early 2008, the country's militants in FATA showcased their power through dozens of suicide bomb attacks deep inside Pakistan's interior, contributing to the election of a moderate parliament that opposed Pakistani military activity inside FATA. Consequently, the country's new leadership engaged in peace talks with the militants during the past six months. Although the Pakistani military has been largely ineffective at conducting operations within FATA since 2002, their mere presence forced militants to be cautious when training fighters. These peace negotiations have enabled foreign fighters with formal military experience from countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Chechnya to enjoy unimpeded freedom of movement within FATA.<sup>4</sup> This allows these seasoned fighters to arrive at *madrasas* and focus on their mission to convert untrained Pashtun Muslims into organized, lethal and survivable fighters; these fighters then cross the border into Afghanistan and assault firebases, attack logistical convoys and overrun district centers at an alarmingly effective rate.<sup>5</sup>

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thor's rotation to Operation Enduring Freedom, August 2006 to April 2007. His unit participated in Operations Medusa and Baaz Tsuka where the insurgency had experienced new levels of influence and capacity to leverage violence.

4 Tom Coghlan, "Afghanistan's 'Pristine Jihad' Draws in Outsiders Trained in Pakistan," *TimesOnline*, July 21, 2008.

5 The calculation of the size of FATA in square miles is determined to be similar to the state of California.

### Iranian Influence

While Pakistan's influence on Afghanistan is significant, it is by no means the only external factor facilitating the insurgency's growth in 2008. Despite being implicated several times in 2007 for assisting the Taliban, Iranian support continues to filter into the country through the western provinces and through Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the support is not coming in the form of high-profile weapons such as Explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) IEDs or Man Portable Air Defense Systems, but rather AK-47s, Rocket-Propelled Grenades, explosives and ammunition that the insurgents use on a daily basis to conduct attacks. As outlined in a U.S. military report to Congress in June 2008, Iranian support has come in two forms: providing overt monetary and reconstruction aid to the government and populace, while simultaneously providing training, weapons and other support to the insurgency to undermine NATO influence in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

Since weapons factories do not exist inside Afghanistan and caches from the Soviet War era are dried up, Iran's logistical support has matured into an enabler to facilitate insurgent ability to conduct attacks at the highest rate in the history of the war. When assessing the insurgency's strength, it is critical to understand that Iranian influence is not limited to the western portion of Afghanistan, but rather is dispersed across the entire country. Their efforts to supply fighters with weapons and ammunition have impacted the insurgency because they have bolstered its capacity to carry out violent attacks against coalition forces, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and government officials. Research by journalists has led U.S. officials to publicly acknowledge that weapons from Iran—AK-47s, C4 plastic explosives and mortars—have been found in Afghanistan and consistently used by Taliban-led insurgents since 2006.<sup>8</sup>

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6 "Report on Progress Toward Stability in Afghanistan," Report to Congress, June 2008.

7 Ibid.

8 One example can be found in the report by Muhammad Tahir, "Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan," *Terrorism Monitor* 5:1 (2007).

### The Poppy Business

While Islam is the typical Afghan's form of spiritual livelihood, poppy is the leading form of economic livelihood. A large portion of the populace, especially in the southern part of the country where the insurgency is the strongest and the violence the most notorious, is entrenched in growing, cultivating or transporting the poppy crop.<sup>9</sup> Tens of thousands of farmers grow it to earn a living and hundreds of powerful tribal leaders facilitate its movement to maintain status and wealth. The stated problem is noteworthy because starting in the spring of 2006 coalition forces and the Afghan government began the

**“The decision to destroy poppies has turned thousands of Afghans from citizens disinterested in coalition force activity to men willing to take up arms to attack anyone they associate with eradication.”**

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practice of formal eradication. The decision to destroy poppies has turned thousands of Afghans from citizens disinterested in coalition force activity to men willing to take up arms to attack anyone they associate with eradication—coalition troops, members of ANSF or the Afghan government.<sup>10</sup>

The influence of poppy cultivation extends far beyond deterring the populace from supporting the Afghan government. The massive profits derived from the poppy trade generate more than \$100 million per year that the Taliban use to pay fighters, arm them and gain influence over local leaders.<sup>11</sup> UN research revealed that the Taliban earned this massive amount of money through a 10% tax on harvests, complemented by transit fees that they often garnered by transporting

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9 Personal observations based upon last deployment to Afghanistan as Special Operations Task Force 31 senior intelligence officer.

10 Ibid.

11 Kate Clark, "Taleban's '\$100m Opium Takings,'" BBC, June 24, 2008.

the drug outside of Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> An examination of the amount of poppy grown in 2003 compared to 2007 reveals an enormous increase in just four years: 80,000 hectares cultivated in 2003 yielded an estimated 3,600 metric tons of opium, while 2007 saw more than 193,000 hectares tended by Afghan farmers, resulting in the production of 8,300 metric tons of the illicit drug.<sup>13</sup> In short, poppy growth has surged in the face of eradication. The Taliban's role in this prospering business has directly translated into well-funded leaders who have taken this money to fuel the insurgency in a country with a weak economy and few opportunities to earn a consistent wage.

Without profits from the poppy trade, the Taliban leadership could not afford to continue recruiting, arming and paying thousands of fighters at the current rate.<sup>14</sup> Since the poppy crop will remain a critical component of Afghanistan's economy for years to come, unless eradication efforts are improved to achieve a significantly higher success rate of destroyed poppies, the insurgency will continue to rely heavily on profits generated from this business.

#### **Mastery of Information Operations**

The final and perhaps most overlooked factor that has contributed to the insurgency's growth in recent years is its influence on the populace's minds, which has increased the Taliban's control over the country's tribes and villages. Commonly referred to as Information Operations (IO), no one in Afghanistan does it better than the insurgents.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan -- Search for Alternatives," United Nations Information Service, February 4, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Assessment based upon intelligence reporting in October 2006 stating that the insurgents were leveraging profits garnered from the poppy trade to pay more than 1,000 new fighters to replace the estimated 900 fighters that were killed by SOTF-31, ANSF and NATO in Operation Medusa. This reporting was corroborated by the numbers of insurgents who returned to the Panjawayi area of Kandahar Province to continue to fight in October and December 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Assessment based upon personal observations during rotation to Operation Enduring Freedom where Task Force 31 consistently witnessed the Taliban's effective use of Information Operations to target the populace, including a significant reliance upon spreading lies to

Ranging from intimidation to spreading blatant lies of coalition atrocities, the insurgents have mastered the ability to influence the masses through word of mouth, technology and the media. They gain support of the populace through coercion by disseminating CDs depicting the beheading of ANSF and government officials "as their punishment for supporting the infidels." They exploit any attack that results in collateral damage by blaming the coalition for deaths, injuries and destruction—whether or not they actually occurred.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the insurgents' use of lies and deception, their story is typically the first to reach the people of Afghanistan, so it is what a majority of them believe

**“Ranging from intimidation to spreading blatant lies of coalition atrocities, the insurgents have mastered the ability to influence the masses through word of mouth, technology and the media.”**

to be the truth. The cumulative effect of the insurgents' IO campaign during the past four years has taken hold with a majority of the populace, leading them to believe that the Taliban will outlast the coalition and return to power.

Beyond the dishonesty that the insurgents employ, there are also the consistent IO victories that they have won on a weekly basis since 2006—powerful suicide bomb attacks and the temporary takeover of Afghan government district centers. Each time a suicide bomber strikes a convoy or symbolic building, it is a loud and convincing reminder to the populace that the coalition, ANSF and the Afghan government are unable to provide security. Insurgents have also successfully employed the practice of massing armed fighters at district centers throughout the country and

disseminate the message that they wanted the people to hear.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

forcing the outnumbered ANSF units to flee. During these incidents, the Taliban quickly take down the Afghan government flag, raise their own, call a press agent and within hours the media reports that the Taliban are in control of a district. To the people of that district and to the rest of the world reading that news story, they believe that the Taliban (and not NATO or the Afghan government) is in control. It does not matter if the insurgents often flee 30 minutes later when NATO troops and ANSF respond; by that time, the Taliban will have already achieved the IO victory.

#### **Conclusion**

A myriad of external and internal factors have enabled the insurgency in Afghanistan to reach its strongest point. While the insurgents' sanctuary in FATA is certainly the leading source of its growth, other issues outlined in this article reveal that the current situation in Afghanistan is much more convoluted than it appears at first glance. Iranian influence, the poppy trade, and the insurgents' dominance in the realm of Information Operations all pose significant obstacles to NATO and the Afghan government in the years ahead. If one aspect is clear, it is that there is no simple solution to the challenges facing Afghanistan in its pursuit of stability, democracy and prosperity.

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## A Preliminary Assessment of Counter-Radicalization in the Netherlands

By Lorenzo Vidino

DURING THE LAST few years, several Western countries, realizing that segments of their Muslim populations embraced extremist views and joined more or less organized Salafi-jihadi networks, have developed programs to fight radicalization. Among the most sophisticated counter-radicalization plans is that devised by the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> Dutch authorities were among the first in Europe to be faced with the threat of homegrown terrorism, as radicalized clusters of mostly Dutch-born young Muslims belonging to the so-called Hofstad network spread their radical ideology and planned attacks as early as 2002.<sup>2</sup> Today, after the peak of tension that took place with the assassination of Theo van Gogh in 2004, Dutch authorities believe that the most violent forms of radical Islam receive only limited support among Dutch Muslims and that individuals who want to carry out terrorist attacks in the Netherlands are only an isolated minority.

Nevertheless, Dutch officials have monitored the growth of a different streak of radical Islam in the country, which they refer to as “political Salafism” or “radical *da'wa*.”<sup>3</sup> While not using violent means to achieve their goals, political Salafists are actively working for the establishment of small Muslim societies within mainstream Dutch society. Rejecting most Western values and any idea of integration, political Salafists are using sophisticated methods to turn Muslims “away, physically as well as mentally, from their surrounding societies.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Dutch authorities see radicalization not just as a threat to

security, but also to the democratic legal order, as it can lead to social unrest and increasing polarization.<sup>5</sup> Mindful of this scenario, Dutch authorities have devised a comprehensive plan to target radicalization in all its aspects.

### Countering Radicalization

Designed primarily for Islamic fundamentalism (but applied also in part to right-wing militancy), the plan was conceived by the Dutch government in 2004 and has evolved significantly since then. Two key characteristics of the plan are its local focus and the high number of parts involved.<sup>6</sup> As for the former, the Dutch government believes that local authorities are in a better position to detect problems and implement solutions. While central authorities provide general guidelines, training, and part of the funding, local authorities have virtually complete independence on how to act. As a consequence, each large Dutch city has created its own program with unique characteristics, even though most are shaped after Amsterdam’s program (called *Wij Amsterdammers*). As for the latter, all aspects of the plan, from its conception to its practical implementation, are characterized by the cooperation of an intricate web of ministries, governmental agencies, local authorities, social services, educational facilities, think-tanks, religious institutions and freelance consultants. Openness, information sharing and constant inputs from all possible sources seem to be the guiding principles.

A key characteristic of all the programs is their flexibility, as authorities possess a remarkable range of measures and approaches to apply according to their targets and goals. Repressive measures are, of course, available when authorities have to deal with “doers,” individuals who are on the brink of using violence. Yet, if an individual is deemed to be radicalized yet still “savable,” authorities might use the curative approach, applying targeted deradicalization measures that should ideally bind him or her to society.

“Searchers,” individuals faced by an identity crisis and who are still looking for their place in society, are targeted with a series of different measures designed to lead them to find answers to their questions in democratic values rather than in Salafism. Finally, authorities have created a whole range of activities targeting more generally the sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream society felt by many young Muslims, the so-called “breeding ground.” According to Dutch authorities, such breeding grounds can be generated by several factors, but mostly by a perception of injustice and discrimination that can lead disenchanted young Muslims to break contact with mainstream society and find an alternative in Salafism. In order to address the breeding ground, all programs provide for large numbers of preventive measures that emphasize mutual tolerance and acceptance and should increase young Muslims’ resilience to radical messages.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the programs seem to focus on the concept of empowering the individual and making him or her feel part of society. Authorities have organized countless meetings, conferences, training sessions, art projects and neighborhood festivals focusing on these principles. Several initiatives are also designed to combat the negative image of Islam among the Dutch population, a fact that is considered a barrier to integration. Therefore, many cities have organized events to bring together ethnic Dutch and Muslims, such as interfaith dialogues, and culinary and neighborhood festivals; the city of Amsterdam even organized a Ramadan festival designed to attract all Amsterdammers (the event had the subtitle “Will you have dinner in my home?”). Some programs are designed for women, the emancipation of whom is considered a key step in the advancement of social cohesion, while others target specific age groups. Some are designed to provide public officials and social workers with skills to recognize, prevent, and fight radicalization.

While Dutch authorities clearly state that radicalization is not simply the by-product of poor economic conditions, they also acknowledge that improving life conditions and work opportunities

1 Most of the information used for this article comes from interviews conducted by the author in May and June 2008 with Dutch government officials and experts. Among the latter, the author wishes to thank Edwin Bakker, Froukje Demant, Fiore Geelhoed, Amy-Jane Gielen and Colin Mellis.

2 Lorenzo Vidino, “The Hofstad Group: The New Face of Terrorist Networks in Europe,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:7 (2007): pp. 579-590.

3 “The Radical Dawa in Transition,” General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), 2007.

4 Ibid.

5 “Amsterdam Against Radicalisation,” Municipality of Amsterdam, November 15, 2007.

6 “Counterterrorism at Local Level: A Guide,” Netherlands National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism, October 2007.

7 Ibid.

among some of the country's most economically deprived communities can increase social cohesion.<sup>8</sup> Several programs provide professional skills and are designed to facilitate the entrance of minority youths in the job market, while the Ministry of Housing's efforts to improve living conditions in some disadvantaged neighborhoods are closely coordinated with counter-radicalization programs.

### The Relationship with Islamists

The focus on self-empowerment makes Dutch programs resemble some of the gang prevention programs implemented in the United States rather than some of the counter-radicalization programs recently introduced in Saudi Arabia or Indonesia, which focus heavily on re-interpreting Islamic texts.<sup>9</sup> Various reasons explain why Dutch authorities have decided to limit their focus on religion. One is the presence of constitutional norms on separation of church and state that make it difficult for Dutch authorities to intervene in religious affairs. Another is the consideration that a religious-based approach might be more useful in deradicalization efforts rather than in radicalization prevention. While countries that have engaged in such religious-based approaches have scores of committed jihadists, the Dutch believe to have only a few dozen hardened radicals and therefore focus more on a preventive approach based on self-empowerment and the creation of a positive view of Dutch society.

Finally, practical considerations on the challenges posed by selecting partners among the Muslim community have also prevented the Dutch from establishing more religious-based programs. Various programs have reached out to key figures in the community, from businessmen to soccer players, attempting to use them as models or mentors. More problematic is the choice of partners among religious figures. While it is clear that the participation of religious organizations is crucial for the programs' success, authorities are aware that there is not one Muslim

community with a unified leadership, and, therefore, the decision of whom to engage is a difficult one. Moreover, while most of the Muslim organizations and individuals that participate in the programs and receive public funding are moderate and apolitical, some of those who have offered to help embrace a form of Islamism.

Dutch authorities are faced with the same dilemma haunting most of their Western counterparts: can non-violent Islamists be engaged and used as partners against violent radicalization?<sup>10</sup> Can Western offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood or political Salafists such as those active in

**“Such breeding grounds can be generated by several factors, but mostly by a perception of injustice and discrimination that can lead disenchanting young Muslims to break contact with mainstream society and find an alternative in Salafism.”**

the Netherlands become partners against the appeal of jihadists? The Dutch seem to address these questions by drawing a clear line between engaging and empowering. Various voices, as long as they do not advocate violence, should be engaged, since pushing non-violent Islamists at the margins could have negative repercussions. Nevertheless, authorities feel that they cannot consider them as permanent partners, as there is a clear understanding that these forces espouse a message that clashes with the Dutch government's ideas of democracy, integration and cohesive society.

This assessment leads to a case-by-case approach in which authorities engage non-violent Islamists when they need to and when common ground can be found. This policy was implemented, for example, during the months preceding the release of the controversial movie

*Fitna* by Dutch MP Geert Wilders. Security services held several meetings with some of the most radical Salafist imams in the country, explaining that the Dutch government did not support Wilders and obtaining from the imams a promise, later kept, that they would urge their followers not to react to the movie violently. Nevertheless, the security services do not consider political Salafists as reliable partners and advise local authorities against doing so. The security services' advice is particularly important since political Salafists have been regularly approaching municipalities and provinces with offers of partnership in counter-radicalization and integration programs.

Dutch authorities and political Salafists seem to be playing a complicated game, with the latter displaying moderation to participate in the system and the former partially opening to them while being wary of their real aims. The Dutch seem to handle this situation quite well when dealing with Salafists, but their task becomes more challenging when they have to assess the aims of other more ambiguous figures.

One such figure is Mohammed Cheppih, a Moroccan Dutch who is well known to authorities for his dubious connections. Cheppih was the Dutch representative of the Saudi-based Muslim World League and the Belgian-based Arab European League, an organization that Dutch domestic intelligence has described as “polarizing and opposed to integration.”<sup>11</sup> During the last few years, Cheppih has made a dramatic change of his rhetoric, publicly condemning some of his past ties and maintaining a vigorous pro-integration approach, which he claims has been inspired by Tariq Ramadan. Today, Cheppih is actively involved in several government-sponsored counter-radicalization activities and heads the Poldermoskee, a mosque based in Amsterdam's critical Slotervaart district created specifically to address the needs of second generation Dutch Muslims and where Dutch is the only language spoken. It is not clear if Cheppih has had a genuine change of heart, or if his newfound moderation is simply opportunistic. Regardless, authorities have decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

8 “Policies of Integration and Prevention of Radicalisation in the Netherlands: A Progress Report,” Netherlands Ministry of Immigration and Integration, July 2006.

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

10 Peter Mandaville, “Engaging Islamists in the West,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:7 (2008).

11 “2002 Annual Report,” General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), p. 26.

### Assessing the Programs

Having begun only a couple of years ago, most programs are still in their infancy and it is therefore too early to assess their efficacy. The challenges are unquestionably many. Some programs have experienced difficulties in getting participants to their courses, as radicals target young Muslims from the neighborhood who want to attend. Some schools, which should be key components of the programs, have also been reluctant to participate, often refusing to acknowledge that some of their students embrace radical ideas.

Despite these predictable difficulties, the Dutch seem to have started with the right foot and with admirable determination. Most programs are well-financed (*Wij Amsterdammers* alone could count on an eight million euro budget in 2007), well-designed, and constantly adapting according to the results and the feedback from the field. As most Western countries are only now thinking about establishing counter-radicalization plans (the United Kingdom is the only other Western country that has put together a comparably comprehensive and well-financed plan), the Dutch initiative deserves to be looked at with attention.

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## Curtailing Illicit and Terrorist Activity in Algeria's Tamanrasset

By Geoff D. Porter

ALTHOUGH ALGERIAN TERRORIST groups mostly undertake attacks against the government in the north of the country, it is widely recognized that they have exploited southern Algeria's vast desert to train and raise money.<sup>1</sup> Apart from several opportunistic kidnappings and murders during the last several years, there has been little terrorism proper in southern Algeria. Instead, there is ample illicit activity. Some of these activities—gun-running, drug smuggling and human trafficking—circumvent the state because they are illegal.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as contraband, sidestep the state because taxes, tariffs, and kickbacks erode profits. Because Islamist terrorist groups in the north of the country, such as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), have historically profited from the south's illicit activities, curtailing them is a top priority of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's government. Increasingly easy access to the Sahara and navigation through it, however, makes Bouteflika's goal of expanding state control and choking the flow of illicit funds to the north especially challenging.

### Algiers in Tamanrasset

Some have observed that Algiers is closer to London than it is to Tamanrasset. Although technically untrue, it clearly conveys the sense of how far Tamanrasset is from Algiers and how different the two cities are, not just geographically, demographically, or economically, but in makeup and outlook. While Algiers is oriented toward Europe and the Middle East, Tamanrasset is geared toward the south. Algiers clings to its Arab and Mediterranean identity, but Tamanrasset is Taoureg and Saharan.

<sup>1</sup> Information in this article is drawn from the author's discussions with current and retired members of the Algerian administration in Tamanrasset in May 2008 as well as informal conversations with Tamanrasset residents.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Marret, "Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:6 (2008): pp. 541-552.

Nevertheless (or maybe because of this), Algiers' presence in Tamanrasset is very palpable. In some ways, Tamanrasset has always been tied to the state. Unlike Timbuktu or Kano, Tamanrasset is not a historic desert city. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a small but critical bastion in France's attempts to pacify the Algerian

**“Algiers is willing to devote significant resources to ensure that the south's Taoureg population remains loyal to the Algerian state and does not seek common cause with Taoureg groups in Niger and Mali that have been problematic for those countries.”**

desert. Following the pacification that lasted through the early 1920s, Tamanrasset was a trans-Saharan trade waypoint. Even then, it was more of a large village than a small town. It still had only between 4,000-5,000 residents in the 1960s. Today, the town has grown to more than 100,000 people and it has become an important regional commercial hub, an entrepot for people and goods transiting from sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean coast and from the coast to south of the Sahara. For many sub-Saharanans, it has even become a destination in its own right.

The most obvious indication of the state presence in current-day Tamanrasset is the military. The 6<sup>th</sup> Division, which is responsible for patrolling the country's deep south and policing Algeria's borders with Niger, Mali and Libya, is based there. Troops are not conspicuous off the base and throughout town, but the barracks on both sides of the riverbed that cuts through town make the military almost omnipresent. Its presence is amplified (and enshrouded in mystery) by the half-finished military base next to Tamanrasset's airport.

Algiers augments its projection of hard power with a comprehensive soft power campaign. In particular, it is building a

large mosque complex on Tamanrasset's highest point. The mosque succinctly conveys the state's intention to exercise influence, if not outright control, over Islamic activity in the city. Beyond the mosque, the state also promotes the activities of Sufi religious orders. These orders have historically been politically powerful in the region and the Tijaniyya in particular has proven to be a valuable supporter of Bouteflika's National Liberation Front (FLN). Near the center of town, the state built a new headquarters for the Association of Religious Orders (*Jami`at al-Zawaya*).

Outside the religious sphere, the state is invested in the city's secular life, having recently finished a sprawling public university on the airport road where it is a visible symbol of the state. It has also recently opened a youth center in the middle of town. Brand new housing blocks that now ring the town are destined for current residents of the unregulated shantytowns that have been built during the last several decades. Two-family units with small gardens in front, the projects are laid out on street grids with asphalt roads and electric street lights.

Even more basic infrastructure is further reminder of Algiers' hand in (and over) Tamanrasset's affairs. The state recently finished repaving the highway that connects Tamanrasset to the cities to the north and Mali and Niger to the south. The soon to be completed water pipeline from In Salah will bring Tamanrasset's most fundamental commodity into the state's remit and displace the private water sellers. Recently, the state even manifested itself in person. In January 2008, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his powerful interior minister, Nourredine Zerhouni, paid an official visit to Tamanrasset.

#### **Tamanrasset's Importance to the State**

There are a lot of possible explanations why the state is so heavily invested in Tamanrasset. The state's rationale is that it is simply ensuring its citizens' welfare and well-being. With record hard currency reserves (estimated at more than \$150 billion, by far the most in Africa, surpassing Egypt and South Africa combined), there is no shortage of money to build new infrastructure

and expand public institutions.<sup>3</sup> There are also more political explanations. Algiers is willing to devote significant resources to ensure that the south's Taoureg population remains loyal to the Algerian state and does not seek common cause with Taoureg groups in Niger and Mali that have been problematic for

**“Since the 1990s, the state has sought to counter indications of increasing Islamist influence, such as the wider prevalence of Islamist dress in Tamanrasset and closer adherence to Islamic rituals.”**

those countries. Tamanrasset has also historically been an FLN stronghold. With Bouteflika trying to position himself for a third presidential term (or an extended second term) and the National Democratic Rally making a resurgence, Bouteflika's government wants to guarantee continued support for his party. Additionally, ever since the 1990s the state has sought to counter indications of increasing Islamist influence, such as the wider prevalence of Islamist dress in Tamanrasset and closer adherence to Islamic rituals. Lastly, the state is clearly concerned with illicit activities in and around Tamanrasset and their potential link to AQIM.

#### **Illicit Activities**

Even with the state's multilayered presence in town, the state does not exert complete control over Tamanrasset's activities. Trans-Saharan truckers camp out under their trailers in the dry riverbed in the center of town until they get a full load of goods to take back south across the Sahara to Niger and Mali. Contraband often gets mixed in with legitimate freight. Nigerien and Malian teenagers ranging around the streets in the evening testify to the south's fluid borders. One security representative said that many entered Algeria illegally,

<sup>3</sup> Statistic compiled from Banque d'Algérie, IMF and EFG-Hermes.

but are largely left alone as long as they only stay for six or seven months and do not try to head further north—after all, Tamanrasset's state-fueled construction boom far outpaces the locally available labor and “the Africans” are valued as hard workers. Informal banking also points to the limitations of state control. Most Tamanrasset residents turn to storekeepers for their banking needs rather than the state banks. In particular, storekeepers change euros at better rates than the state banks.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Government Influence Disappears Outside Tamanrasset**

Outside Tamanrasset, the state presence disappears dramatically. The city is encircled by police checkpoints on the paved roads that lead in and out of it, but beyond these there is little state presence in terms of security services, social services or infrastructure.

There are several reasons why state presence tails off so dramatically once beyond the city's immediate periphery. The most obvious is that with only 7,000 troops, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division is severely undermanned. Tamanrasset *wilaya* (province) and France are roughly the same geographic size, but between the military and the gendarmerie France has more than 450,000 personnel at its disposal. The fact that most personnel assigned to Tamanrasset are from the north of the country and are generally rotated out of the region after only short service periods complicates the problems of personnel shortages. Troops at military checkpoints around the city do not speak Tamahak (the local language), are unfamiliar with local practices, and are intimidated by the surrounding terrain.

Others have put forward more insidious explanations for the lack of state presence outside Tamanrasset, suggesting that the local government is in cahoots with smuggling mafias, or worse still with Islamist terrorists themselves.<sup>5</sup> The state steers clear of the desert to give smugglers and terrorist supporters room to operate. Allegations of this

<sup>4</sup> Unlike money changers around Port Said in Algiers, Tamanrasset money changers only deal in euros and will not change U.S. dollars, sterling or Swiss francs.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Keenan, “Americans and ‘Bad People’ in the Sahara-Sahel,” *Review of African Political Economy* 31:99 (2004): pp. 130-139.

sort are impossible to corroborate, and the military's shortcomings seem to be adequate explanation in their own right.

In addition to the military's absence in the desert, the tools of soft power—schools, electricity and health care—are also missing, if only because the region is so sparsely populated that the costs of projecting soft power become impractically expensive.

#### Desert Mobility Becomes Easier

Although the desert is sparsely populated, it is not empty and it is not inaccessible. Displaying somewhat convoluted logic, one Tamanrasset resident said that there are seven or eight roads out of town but hundreds back in. At any point, one can veer off one of Tamanrasset's paved roads and head for the hills and at any point one can come bumping back to Tamanrasset. Another resident said that the gauge of local knowledge is never having to use the same route into town as the one used to leave it.

In the hinterland, the land is carved with innumerable tracks. The more prominent ones have been leveled with a grader, others run up and down dry riverbeds, and still others are no more than camel paths. In riverbeds, drivers can reach 100 kilometers per hour, while on the camel paths speeds slow to less than 15 km/hr. On average, an experienced driver can make 40 km/hr in an unmodified diesel 4x4. Some routes are well-traveled, crisscrossed with dozens of tire tracks. Others are not as well-used. At one point, a driver said a faint set of tracks in a riverbed were from his own truck when he last passed that way more than two months before.

During the last decade, GPS and satellite phones have made desert travel easier, but cell phone service has lowered the bar even further. A signal from the privately-owned cell phone service Djezzy picked up 75 miles outside of Tamanrasset was steady enough to send and receive text messages from London, Washington D.C. and New York. Even those not intimately familiar with the region can now navigate across it and communicate around the world. The number of routes and ease of communication means it is possible

to drive from Kidal in northern Mali to Ouargla in northeastern Algeria in three days without ever traveling on a marked road.

#### The Paradox of the Desert

The paradox of the desert around Tamanrasset makes Bouteflika's job of curtailing illicit activities somewhat easier. The desert is indeed sparsely populated, but it is not at all empty. There are not enough people moving through the region for interlopers to blend in, but there are not so few people that strangers go unnoticed.

There are few true nomads left in the Algerian Sahara, but pastoralists still move their herds throughout the province.<sup>6</sup> Shepherds watch their animals and any traffic passing by. Trucks carry men to the market and back. Tourists and their guides irregularly pass through. Some trucks run through the night, skirting close to hamlets and camps, and even if their contents and purpose are unknown, they too are noticed and noted. While the state's presence may be minimal outside Tamanrasset proper, little happens in the desert without someone knowing about it.

Exemplifying this paradox is Yahia Djouadi, AQIM's new *amir* in Algeria's southern provinces. AQIM continues to operate in the south, harassed by the government but unstoppable. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of information about the group's leadership. The 38-year-old Djouadi is a former member of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and took over the region in March 2008 from Mokhtar Belmokhtar.<sup>7</sup> Belmokhtar decamped to Mali after Abdelmalek Droukdel changed the GSPC's name to AQIM, and he has largely shifted his focus to strictly for-profit activities. Formerly known as Zone IX under Belmokhtar's leadership, the southern region is now recognized as Zone III following a spring 2008 restructuring.<sup>8</sup> Given the GIA's history of brutal

violence, Djouadi's association with that group is a worrying development for the south. In contrast to Belmokhtar—who began his career as a local smuggler, formed a marriage of convenience with

**“While the state's presence may be minimal outside Tamanrasset proper, little happens in the desert without someone knowing about it.”**

the GSPC, and has now gone his own way—Djouadi is ideologically motivated and quite capable of violence. Also unlike Belmokhtar, however, Djouadi is not from the region, which means that he will likely struggle to form a functioning network in the south.

Adopting the proper stance vis-à-vis the local population has allowed the government in Algiers to tap into this local wellspring of information about the flows of people and goods across the Sahara's vast stretches. The ongoing challenge is to continue to expand the state's soft power in the region, building infrastructure, providing services, growing an economy and preventing AQIM infiltration.

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6 Jeremy Keenan, “The Father's Friend: Returning to the Tuareg as an ‘Elder,’” *Anthropology Today* 16:4 (2000): pp. 7-11.

7 Anne Giudicelli, “Al-Qaïda: OPA réussie sur le GSPC,” *Bakchich*, March 18, 2008.

8 Ikram Ghioua, “Révélations sur la Nouvelle Cartographie du GSPC,” *L'Expression*, May 18, 2008.



## Countering Terrorism in an Unstable Democracy: Mauritania's Political Crisis

By Dafna Hochman

ON AUGUST 6, 2008, a military coup in Mauritania ousted the 15-month old administration of President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. Soldiers seized Abdallahi (known popularly as Sidi) and Prime Minister Yahya Ould Ahmed Waghf, took control of the state television and radio stations, and announced that Mauritania would be ruled by an 11-man military junta. Since winning its independence from France in 1960, there have been more than 12 coup attempts in Mauritania, a country of three million that straddles Arab and black West Africa and the Sahara and Sahel regions. Sidi's decision to fire the army chief of staff, the general who headed the presidential guard, and two other top military officials immediately precipitated the coup. Yet the coup is also the culmination of a three-month political crisis marked by bitter disagreements between Sidi and the opposition groups in parliament.<sup>1</sup>

This article argues that in addition to the series of specific concerns with Sidi's administration, the main source of instability in Mauritania is structural. Building an inclusive democracy while countering terrorism—against the backdrop of a strong military presence—eventually brought down Sidi's government. This challenge could confront any civilian president in a democratizing weak state with a strong military. Sidi and his prime ministers were so determined to foster a pluralistic democratic environment that they even brought a newly-formed moderate Islamist party into the government. Simultaneously, the Sidi government's inept approach to counter-terrorism unnerved the cadre of military officers upon whom Sidi depended for credibility. In attempting to appeal to everyone, Sidi satisfied no one.

1 Contentious issues included the president's ties to allies of the reviled former dictator Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya and the president and his wife's alleged corruption and misuse of public funds.

### 2007: Mauritania's Fateful Year

In the beginning of 2007, Mauritians were celebrating their country's successful democratic transition, but by the year's end they were shaken by a series of deadly attacks. Two years after a bloodless coup overthrew President Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, who had ruled for 21 years, a lively presidential campaign led to the first democratically-elected civilian president since independence. In accordance with a new constitution that had been approved by a popular referendum in 2006, new governors and legislators were elected from most of the 21 Mauritanian political parties. All of these peaceful and fair elections had been promised by the transitional military government, a group of generals who had overthrown Taya and were nicknamed by some "the good soldiers." Many observers accustomed to Mauritania's history of power struggles were shocked that the transitional government stayed true to its 2005 promise: within two years, it peacefully restored the government to civilian rule. Members of the transitional military regime did not participate in the 2007 presidential elections.

At Sidi's April 2007 inauguration, the soldiers quietly took their leave—at least overtly. Sidi appointed many of the transitional government military officials to key posts within his new administration; General Abdelaziz headed the presidential guard, and another transitional official, General Ghazouani, became the army chief of staff. Although there were hints of military involvement in the new administration, civil, political and press freedoms reached an unprecedented zenith. By 2007, Reporters Without Borders ranked Mauritania 50th (out of 169 countries) on its global press freedom index, up from 139th in the year before the coup. A model Arab-African democracy was in the making.

On Christmas Eve 2007, only months after the new president and legislators assumed office, four French tourists were brutally killed in Aleg, a mountain town southeast of the capital Nouakchott. Shortly after, on December 26, an attack at the El-Ghallawiya military base in northern Mauritania left three soldiers dead.<sup>2</sup> Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic

2 "Mauritania Arrests Three for Helping Alleged Killers

Maghreb (AQIM) subsequently issued a statement threatening the Dakar Rally, the annual off-road car race that crosses the Mauritanian desert. On January 5, 2008, the organizers of the rally decided to cancel the race for the first time in 30 years, following the recommendations of the French government. On February 1, Nouakchott's biggest nightclub, the "VIP," and the adjacent Israeli Embassy were targeted by six gunmen. Once again, AQIM claimed responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

The timing suggested a link between the democratic experiment and the sudden spate of AQIM attacks. Yet, these attacks had more to do with changing AQIM strategy rather than with Sidi's government. Many believed that following the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat's (GSPC) merger

**"The Sidi government's inept approach to counter-terrorism unnerved the cadre of military officers upon whom Sidi depended for credibility."**

with al-Qa`ida in September 2006, the new organization—AQIM—would continue focusing its attacks within Algeria. Moreover, there were rumors of instability within AQIM ranks, as well as internal disputes about the merger and disagreement over the use of suicide bombs. Yet AQIM's attacks in 2007-2008 suggested the organization's continued potency and its deliberate choice to project force outside of Algeria, distancing itself from its former nationalist character. In 2007, AQIM also perpetrated a series of attacks within Tunisia, calling into question any purported link between democracy and the group's target selection; Tunisia under President Ben

of Four French Tourists," Associated Press, December 30, 2007; "Mauritania Probes 'al-Qaeda Link,'" BBC, December 25, 2007. The latter attack was reminiscent of the Lemgheity military barracks attacks of 2005, for which AQIM's predecessor organization, the GSPC, claimed credit.

3 "Al Qaida North Africa Branch Takes Credit for Israel Embassy Attack in Mauritania," *International Herald Tribune*, February 3, 2008.

Ali, for example, has become a deeply authoritarian state. Moreover, AQIM's selection of targets since the merger (such as Western tourists and the Israeli Embassy in Nouakchott) indicated the organization's overall ideological shift away from nationalist symbols of Algerian resistance and toward targets with greater pan-Arab and pan-Islamic resonance.

### **The True Link Between Mauritanian Democracy and Terrorism**

Despite the uncanny timing, it is therefore unlikely that Mauritania's brief democratic experiment caused the recent flurry in terrorist activity. Rather than democratization contributing to terrorism, the causal link goes the other way: confronting the heightened terrorist threat while allowing for moderate Islamist political participation ultimately undermined Sidi's governments and created enough instability to enable the coup.

Some have accused the newly legalized moderate Islamist parties in Mauritania of providing a fertile ideological ground for the attacks. In 2005, the new transitional military government that assumed power after the coup encouraged the growth of political and civil society and distanced itself from the repressive treatment of Islamists that had characterized the Taya regime. Two main Islamist political groups quickly emerged. The National Congress for Reform and Development (RNRD-Tawassoul), led by the charismatic Jemil Mansour, participated in the 2007 elections, winning five seats in the 95-seat parliament and two seats in the senate. The most recent prime minister, Sidi-ally Waghf, brought ministers from the RNRD and another Islamist group, El Vadhila, into his first cabinet in May 2008.<sup>4</sup> The last few years have also witnessed a resurgence of Islamic traditionalism in Mauritania; Sidi reestablished the Muslim weekend (Friday and Saturday), constructed a mosque at the presidential palace, and sanctioned raids on Nouakchott bars suspected of selling alcohol.

Yet, both the popularity of moderate Islamist parties and the increasingly religious nature of the state do not

directly translate into popular support for AQIM. The RNRD is interested in working within the political system. It condemned the terrorist attacks of 2007 and 2008.<sup>5</sup> Most Mauritians, even if they embrace a religious revival, adhere to a tolerant form of Islam and oppose the loss of life associated with AQIM attacks. Mauritians, for instance, denounced the attack on the Israeli Embassy even though they are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. This target was carefully chosen to underscore Sidi's decision to maintain controversial diplomatic ties with Israel, which were established by the Taya regime in 1999. Mauritians reacted with disappointment to the cancellation of the Dakar Rally, puzzled

### **“Confronting the heightened terrorist threat while allowing for moderate Islamist political participation ultimately undermined Sidi's governments and created enough instability to enable the coup.”**

at how their once peaceful country had transformed overnight into a destination threatening to Western tourists.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the perpetrators of the Christmas Eve attack immediately fled the country to seek refuge in Mali and Senegal—underscoring the absence of a Mauritanian rear guard to protect them.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the pluralistic democratization under Sidi that enabled the growth of moderate Islamist parties did not bolster AQIM. More worrisome is the infiltration by Salafists of Mauritania's moderate Maliki school of Islam, which will likely contribute to AQIM's recruiting goals. According to anthropologist Yahya Ould

al-Bara, due to a flood of Saudi funding in the 1990s the number of mosques in Nouakchott mushroomed from around 50 in 1989 to more than 900 by 2002.<sup>8</sup> Since the fall of the Taya regime, which strictly prohibited Islamist political and religious organizing, Mauritania has been inundated with publications, sermons, and organizations funded by Saudi Arabian clerics.<sup>9</sup>

### **Military Restraint: Letting the Democrats Counter Terror**

While the flourishing Islamist political parties did not contribute to the terrorist activity, these parties' political participation ultimately became a key point of contention that contributed to the political crisis in May 2008. After giving Sidi an early grace period, by 2008 the opposition groups had amassed a litany of concerns regarding his administration. They were critical of the perceived corruption surrounding the presidential family and his inability to staunch the rising fuel and food prices or economic crises. In addition to these critiques, however, two deeper concerns with Sidi's administration most directly led to the military coup of August 2008.

First, many of the military strongmen who initiated the 2005 coup were wary of Sidi and his government's inept counter-terrorism policies. Sidi was forced to fire his first prime minister, former Central Bank governor Zeine Ould Zeidane, in May 2008 after a series of failed attempts to arrest and convict AQIM members.<sup>10</sup> The military officers were particularly horrified by a series of acquittals of terrorist suspects in 2007, including the exoneration—on the grounds of insufficient evidence—of a suspect who had traveled with and tutored Usama bin Ladin. Sidi Ould Sidna, one of the individuals acquitted in 2007, would go on to perpetrate the Christmas Eve attack on the French tourists. After evading capture for months, Sidna was finally arrested in March 2008, only to escape from

8 Flynn, “Mauritania Killings May be a New al-Qaeda Chapter.”

9 “Mauritanie: La montée de l'extrémisme religieux, une menace pour un régime islamique tolérant,” IRIN Service Français, February 5, 2008; Choplin, “La Mauritanie à l'épreuve de l'islamisme et des menaces terroristes.”

10 Vincent Fertey, “Mauritania PM to Form New Cabinet after Resignation,” Reuters, July 3, 2008.

4 “New Mauritanian Cabinet to Include Opposition Members,” Agence France-Presse, May 11, 2008.

5 Daniel Flynn, “Mauritania Killings May be a New al-Qaeda Chapter,” Reuters, February 12, 2008.

6 Armelle Choplin, “La Mauritanie à l'épreuve de l'islamisme et des menaces terroristes,” April 29, 2008.

7 Lydia Polgreen, “Hunt for Suspects in Mauritania Killing,” *New York Times*, December 27, 2007.

a Nouakchott prison on April 2. This high-profile escape prompted several security service raids on AQIM hideouts. By late April 2008, Sidna and 20 others had been re-apprehended. Yet, a series of bungled shootouts that month killed a policeman and accidentally injured a French private security guard.<sup>11</sup>

Second, even when the Sidi administration improved its counter-terrorism abilities, by July 2008 the military elites were increasingly uncomfortable with the participation of both Islamists and Taya-era officials in the Waghf government. The July 2008 crisis that ultimately led to the dissolution of Waghf's government arose because no one was satisfied. The

**“More worrisome is the infiltration by Salafists of Mauritania’s moderate Maliki school of Islam, which will likely contribute to AQIM’s recruiting goals.”**

military elite who had believed that they could still maintain a degree of control over Sidi's policies were dismayed by the diversity of parties included in the Waghf government, while the opposition demanded from Sidi and Waghf that an even greater share of government posts be reserved for Islamist and center-left parties.

Can a multiethnic democracy embrace moderate Islamists and rule through diverse coalitions while fighting terrorism and placating the army? This challenge is not unique to Mauritania, and it has ultimately been the demise of weak civilian governments in democratizing and heterogeneous societies from Pakistan to Algeria. There is a structural problem inherent to weak democracies with strong militaries. The stakes of the normal process of trade-offs, deliberations and bargaining common to parliamentary systems rise when conducted in the shadow of a possible military intervention.

<sup>11</sup> “Mauritania Captures Eight al Qaeda Suspects,” Reuters, April 30, 2008.

The coup in Mauritania is a symbolic defeat. To those in the West who have encouraged struggling developing countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia to fight terrorism with impunity while building civilian democratic institutions, it is a reminder of the often inherent conflict between these two endeavors. The combustible combination of free elections, Islamist political success, and military intervention is a well-known theme in the politics of the Maghreb region. Images of the bloody Algerian civil war are still seared into the historical memory of the people. Neighboring regimes, whether civilian or military, will use the recent Mauritanian coup to underscore the instability and ineffectiveness of free-wheeling parliamentary democracies, particularly given the growth of AQIM in the region. Mauritians, who took great pride in their position at the vanguard—having elected the first non-incumbent, freely-elected head of state in the Arab world—now find themselves in a familiar political predicament with an uncertain future.

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## Saudi Arabia’s Sectarian Ambivalence

By Toby Craig Jones

IN THE MIDST of a highly publicized campaign by Saudi Arabia to promote religious tolerance as a means to counter religious extremism around the world, Riyadh has once again been confronted with the uncomfortable reality that the most pressing challenge in this regard remains at home. On the eve of 2008’s major conferences on religious tolerance in Mecca and Madrid, several of the kingdom’s most visible religious figures made clear that they are not only opposed to religious dialogue, but are openly fomenting divisiveness, most notably by further inciting the sectarian enmity that has gripped the region in recent years.

Unlike in the 1980s when Saudi leaders openly embraced sectarian antipathy as a means of rolling back the challenge posed by Iran’s revolutionary regime, today the kingdom is not openly pursuing a sectarian agenda. Since 2003, the government has taken several quiet although mostly ineffective steps to defuse sectarian prejudices domestically, including inviting prominent Shi`a to participate in the Saudi National Dialogue meetings and encouraging Sunni clerics to visit Shi`a communities.<sup>1</sup> King Abdullah even invited the Shi`a Iranian political figure and one-time bitter rival Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to participate in the Mecca conference on religious tolerance held in June.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in spite of the king’s declarations, the symbolic gestures, and the argument that tolerance is a priority, Saudi leaders have been far from bold in attempting to stamp out the specter of sectarian conflict. This has been most notable inside the kingdom itself.

In the worst case, Riyadh appears not only willing to allow sectarian acrimony to linger beneath the surface, but it also appears to be condoning anti-Shi`ism

<sup>1</sup> Toby Jones, “The Iraq Effect in Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Report* Winter (2005); Toby Jones, “Saudi Arabia’s Not So New Anti-Shi`ism,” *Middle East Report* Spring (2007).

<sup>2</sup> For more on this conference, see Alex Vatanka, “Iran’s Shi`a Reach Out to Mainstream Salafists,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:7 (2008).

in spite of its official policy to respect “the other.” From the state’s handling of some of the sectarian fulmination pouring out of the kingdom, it seems that Saudi Arabia is more interested in harnessing intolerance than eliminating it. Yet, even if Saudi Arabia’s leaders do not truly support the escalation of sectarianism, their current management of such sentiment seems only to be producing precisely this result.

#### Regional and Domestic Challenges to Unity

Saudi Arabia’s uncertain position on sectarianism is the result of several regional and domestic challenges. The most important regional challenges have been the ascendance of Shi`a Iran and the rise to power of the Shi`is in Iraq, both of which are alarming trends for Riyadh. Iran’s influence stretches well beyond the Gulf, from Iraq to Lebanon, where Hizb Allah not only remains a powerful obstacle to Saudi Arabia’s interests, but also attracts widespread

**“While the Saudis have not openly played the sectarian card, they understand that the passions invoked by sectarian prejudices are a potentially powerful political tool.”**

support for its confrontational stance against Israel. While the Saudis have not openly played the sectarian card, they understand that the passions invoked by sectarian prejudices are a potentially powerful political tool. There are also key domestic factors involved in Saudi Arabia’s sectarian posture. In fact, it is the convergence of the kingdom’s regional interests and domestic vulnerabilities that will likely ensure that sectarianism remains a powerful force on the regional stage for the foreseeable future.

While the Saudi government has been quick to arrest and imprison human rights and political reform activists—such as Abdullah al-Hamid and Matruk al-Falah—it has done little to publicly check the excesses of some of its most intolerant religious figures. With the recent performances on religious

tolerance at Mecca and Madrid, this paradox is startling. Just days before Saudi Arabia convened the Mecca conference in early June 2008, a group of 22 Saudi religious scholars signed a vicious anti-Shi`a declaration warning Sunnis to “know them and be aware of them” and accusing the Shi`a of destabilizing Muslim countries and humiliating Sunnis.<sup>3</sup> The letter was published on the personal website of Nasir al-Umar, a controversial and prominent Saudi scholar with a long history of purveying anti-Shi`a hatred.<sup>4</sup> Other signatories included Abd al-Rahman bin Nasir al-Barak and Abdullah bin Abd al-Rahman bin Jibreel, the latter having served on the official Higher Council of Ulama in Saudi Arabia as well as being an advocate of violence against the Shi`a.

The June 2008 letter was only the most recent missive circulated by the devotees of sectarianism inside Saudi Arabia. In Istanbul in December 2006, 38 Saudi scholars joined up with prominent Iraqis—including Adnan al-Dulaymi, Harith al-Dari, and the Islamic Army in Iraq—in expressing their support for the anti-occupation and anti-Shi`a jihad in Iraq. It appears that while the sectarian war in Iraq has quelled for the time being, and that the Sunni support expressed in 2006 for the jihad has ebbed, the June 2008 declaration signals that there continues to be significant support for an escalation of sectarian tensions inside Saudi Arabia.

The tone and timing of the June letter indicate that the signatories were directly challenging and seeking to embarrass King Abdullah on the eve of his initiative to promote religious tolerance. In spite of this, the official Saudi response has been muted. An unnamed Saudi official cited by the Associated Press stated simply that the clerics did not represent the government, hardly a serious rebuke.<sup>5</sup>

**Shi`a Rhetoric Fits into Saudi Foreign Policy**  
Why the muted response? While the declaration ran counter to the messages being promoted in Mecca and Medina, it was entirely supportive of Saudi Arabia’s Middle East foreign policy more generally. In addition to outlining the general heresy of Shi`ism historically, the letter also warned specifically that “many learned Muslims have

**“Although the official Saudi line has been to avoid inflammatory sectarian language, it has not moved to check those who do so with its interests in mind.”**

been fooled by the Rafidah’s [Shi`is] claims to be championing Islam and confronting the Jews and Americans as is happening with the deceptions of Hizb Allah in Lebanon.” During the last several years, Nasir al-Umar has tirelessly warned against the existential threat posed by Iran in the region and by Shi`a in Iraq and Lebanon. Since the 2006 war between Hizb Allah and Israel, Saudi leaders have made clear their displeasure with the Lebanese Shi`a militia. Saudi frustration with Hizb Allah stems partly from its opposition to Riyadh’s support for Lebanese Sunnis, but also because Hizb Allah’s success in confronting Israel in 2006 undermined Saudi claims that the kingdom remained most committed to the cause of the Palestinians and Israeli aggression in the region.

Although the official Saudi line has been to avoid inflammatory sectarian language, it has not moved to check those who do so with its interests in mind. Furthermore, while al-Umar’s sectarianism does not match up rhetorically with the official Saudi line, it does reflect a similar set of concerns, namely that Iran and Hizb Allah threaten Saudi interests and prominence in the region. It is entirely plausible that the convergence of al-Umar’s sectarian agenda with Saudi regional foreign policy interests is coincidental. What is troubling, however, is that Riyadh has exerted little or no effort to restrain such invective.

<sup>3</sup> A copy of the statement can be accessed at [www.almoslim.net/node/94296](http://www.almoslim.net/node/94296).

<sup>4</sup> Al-Umar wrote a long anti-Shi`a treatise in the early 1990s entitled, “The Rafida in the Land of Tawhid.” For more, see Jones, “The Iraq Effect in Saudi Arabia.”

<sup>5</sup> “Shias Destabilizing Muslim Countries, say Saudi Clerics,” Associated Press, June 2, 2008.

### The Domestic Shi`a Response

It is difficult to measure the impact of al-Umar and the other signatories' anti-Shi`ism on Sunni sentiment inside and outside the kingdom. Among Shi`a inside Saudi Arabia, the response has been an anxious one. On July 2, one month after the Sunni declaration, a group of Saudi Shi`a issued a statement condemning

## “Saudi Arabia’s unwillingness to silence the likes of Nasir al-Umar does not bode well for Shi`a-Sunni relations.”

the escalation of sectarian rhetoric. Eighty-five clerics and activists signed on to a statement that warned, “it is this voice that is responsible for the bloody scenes and incidents that have shaken this country,” referring to the bloody campaign of terror waged by al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. The statement also read, “we ask our brothers who have wronged us with their fatwas branding Muslims as infidels to reconsider and re-read the contemporary Shi`ite reality in a responsible manner.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the diplomatic response by the 85 activists, there has also been a surge of hostility in some circles. The Shi`a cleric Nimr al-Nimr, who has long rejected the willingness of figures such as Hassan al-Saffar and Jaafar al-Shayib to work within the political system for the amelioration of Shi`a grievances, recently stated publicly that “we stand with Iran, heart and soul, and with all our resources.”<sup>7</sup> While al-Nimr’s harangue was directed at the United States and American hostility toward Iran, it should also be read as a response to the unwillingness of the Saudi regime to address the endemic sectarianism inside the kingdom as well as a signal that the moderation that has dominated Saudi Shi`a politics since the early 1990s is under fire from within the community. Al-Nimr declared that “we

fear no one, be they regimes, arrogant powers, or mercenary pens.”

Considering the lingering tension from Iraq’s civil war, and the potential that it may re-erupt, alongside the struggle between Riyadh and Tehran, Saudi Arabia’s unwillingness to silence the likes of Nasir al-Umar does not bode well for Shi`a-Sunni relations. There remain ominous signs that sectarian violence will continue to be a serious threat in Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan—all places where Saudi Arabia has an interest. In spite of its claims to be a champion of religious tolerance and dedicated to drying up support for radicalism, the effect of Saudi Arabia’s management of sectarianism on the ground is to encourage exactly the opposite. Radicals in the region who are already inclined to use violence to play upon sectarian trepidations will only take succor from Saudi Arabia’s sectarian ambivalence.

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## After Action Report: Assessing Acceptable Corruption in Iraq

By Captain Justin Gorkowski, U.S. Army

MOST COALITION FORCE personnel are skeptical of the phrase “acceptable corruption.” In the early months as an advisor to the Iraqi Army in 2006-2007, I would not have been able to find two more incongruous terms. In Iraq, corruption is clearly one of the biggest obstructions holding back progress. There are countless reasons why Iraq is in a state of mass corruption, but the main reason is because there are a myriad of opportunities for corrupt activities and the act itself is met with little or no consequence. This article will discuss further some of the details of widespread Iraqi corruption, but more importantly it will argue that there is a sustainable level of corruption that coalition force personnel must recognize and understand. The sustainable level will vary by province, organization and position in an organization. Leaders and soldiers alike must be agile enough to first realize that corruption exists and will always exist to some degree, then adapt to determine where the nebulous line sits between sustainable and unsustainable corruption. This determination is vitally important in today’s fight as vast responsibility is decentralized to the soldier level.

### Roots of Iraqi Corruption

Corruption today in Iraq occurs at an astonishing rate. Since late 2003, it has rapidly taken over the economy. Tiered contracting, bribery and theft are some of the most common types that occur in all areas, from the central and local government, to security forces, businesses and NGOs. Many factors contribute to corruption. Iraq’s dozens of newly-formed political parties are engaging in the public discourse for the first time without history or laws concerning what forms of influences are permissible. The recent history of Iraq and the incredible instability through which the Iraqi people have lived has cast them into a situation where they have learned to take what they can while they can before the situation becomes worse. For many, corruption is the lesser of two evils, and it becomes a necessity. There are obviously also

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Hammond, “Saudi Shi`ites Hit Back at Sunni Critics,” Reuters, July 2, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> “A Saudi Shiite Cleric: We Stand with Iran; Iran has a Right to Strike US Interests and Destroy Israel,” United Press International, July 15, 2008.

those corrupt individuals in powerful positions who continue their actions simply to line their pockets. Chiefly, there are few repercussions for those who conduct corrupt activities. There is a legal system, and there are laws, but most of those caught bribe officials or simply acquire release due to the pettiness of their crime when compared to the bomb-maker or sniper sitting in the next holding cell.

In developing societies such as Iraq, it is impossible to move forward in the reconstruction process without some level of corruption. Recognition, public awareness and swift, firm action by the government from the start will dictate the long-term success of the corruptors.

**The Role of Corruption in the Iraqi Insurgency**  
In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Iraq ranks two from the bottom at 178.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that a portion of the corrupt activity in Iraq contributes either directly or indirectly to the insurgency.

One example of how corruption can impact the insurgency occurred in 2007. In northern Iraq, there is a constant battle between the Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs over real estate because they all want rights to the Kirkuk oil fields. Police stations throughout

**“Zero tolerance of corruption is not realistic; the sooner soldiers understand this fact, the more successful maneuver units will be.”**

the region are “owned” somewhat strategically by the ethnic or religious powerhouse in that area. On July 7, 2007, a devastating Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device detonated in an area predominately occupied by Turkmen Shi'a. Following the attack, members of a Turkmen Shi'a police station located a short distance to the north pursued what they considered the

obvious perpetrators: the Sunni Arabs. They set up illegal checkpoints, stealing from and killing passerby Sunni Arabs. The police station chief had the backing of an Iraqi police general in the nearby large city. The general in turn had the support of coalition forces.

As tension escalated one evening, a full-out battle developed between a Turkmen Shi'a village and a Sunni Arab village. As bullets flew, the police chief made a call to the general, who subsequently made a call to coalition forces. Within minutes, coalition force helicopters had a Sunni Arab neighborhood in their sights. The Arabs' only aggressive actions were to defend themselves against Turkmen oppression. Fortunately, coalition forces did not observe hostile actions or threats from the Arabs and the helicopters were called off. Had they fired on the Arab village, however, the negative effects and subsequent further potential contributions to the insurgency would have been significant.

This one minor example illustrates how twisted corruption can be in the rebuilding process as positions of power are used for personal gain. There are hundreds of other examples with direct contributions to the insurgency, many of them in the realm of financing insurgent activity. The sale of black market fuel in Ninawa Province alone is believed to generate \$1 million to the insurgency a month.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, coalition force reconstruction dollars have made their way into the hands of insurgents as well.

#### Where to Draw the Line

Leaders must rely on the “human factor” to adapt and draw the line separating acceptable from unacceptable. Unacceptable corruption for the coalition military can broadly be stated as corruption that is directly or indirectly contributing to the failure of coalition force operations. Direct contributions should be dealt with much differently than indirect. An individual indirectly contributing to the insurgency may not even know he is doing so, thus methods of dealing with the perpetrator should be tailored to maximize positive effects, thereby benefiting the counter-insurgency rather than the opposite.

Figure 1 attempts to depict the spectrum of corruption in Iraq.

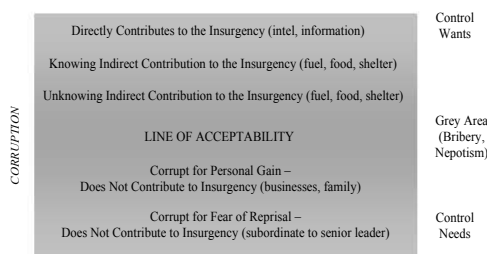


Figure 1. Spectrum of Corruption in Iraq.

One example demonstrating the difficulty in where to draw the line on corruption occurred in 2007, just before the significant publicity of the Concerned Local Citizens or Sons of Iraq. During that incident, the corruption of an undermanned Iraqi Army battalion commander was brought to my attention by one of the Iraqi officers I advised. There were rumors that several tribes in the southern part of the region had joined forces to stand up against insurgent activity in the area. Apparently, the Iraqi commander had been appointed to the position of executive officer of the tribal alliance. It quickly became apparent that the commander was in the position because he supported the alliance with military supplies. The tribal alliance was in possession of Iraqi Army AK-47s, large caliber machine guns and they drove Iraqi Army vehicles. During mission briefings, the commander would brief his soldiers, and then bring in leaders of the tribal alliance to explain the plan, as well as issue radios, ammunition and trucks. The Iraqi Army battalion and the tribal alliance were conducting simultaneous operations, and the battalion commander was not even in charge.

I was initially upset, mostly because the battalion commander was no longer in charge of his area of operations. I called the battalion commander on the phone and requested that he report to the brigade headquarters immediately following his operation. The following day, the Iraqi lieutenant-colonel reported with 18 detainees, many of whom were wanted by coalition forces, the rest directly connected to insurgent activities. My attitude quickly shifted, and I ended up giving the commander my compliments rather than condemnations.<sup>3</sup>

1 “Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2007,” Transparency International, 2007.

2 Alexandra Zavis, “Iraqi Militants Feed on Corruption,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 2007.

3 We did, however, talk about his responsibility in hav-

This example illustrates the gray area that Iraqi advisors must adapt to understand. It is not all that dissimilar to the first anecdote mentioned. This battalion commander was severely undermanned, but consistently had a reputation of being one of the best. He used his power to provide security in his region. The battalion commander's analysis of the situation and subsequent actions in aiding the formation and equipping of the tribal alliance was outside of my Western, institutionalized logic—even after living on an Iraqi base for 13 months. Our units later adapted and were able to work with this tribal alliance as a means to the same end. The resulting positive effects were astounding. The local citizens now play a direct role in maintaining their own security, in coordination with and under the control of local security forces.

Today, soldiers have to be prepared to be greeted with a “handshake or a hand grenade,” and as a result leaders must be particularly aware of the potential consequences of their soldiers' actions or inactions.<sup>4</sup> The most important aspect that soldiers can take away from this is the knowledge that there are many forms of corruption and many factors and reasons why individuals may be corrupt. Zero tolerance of corruption is not realistic; the sooner soldiers understand this fact, the more successful maneuver units will be. Coalition forces cannot afford to prejudge unless they have firm evidence that the situation is contributing to the insurgency. The direct relationship between the counter-insurgency and the population makes this extremely important. With corruption trending upward, meddling unnecessarily easily affects the Iraqi people's livelihood, which could in turn cause them to resent coalition forces even more.

### Conclusion

The corruption and behavior of Iraqi security forces is a part of Iraqi public dissatisfaction. Broad abuse of power in the local area, mistreatment of subordinates and abuse of detainees are all examples of potential corruption that could contribute to the insurgency.

Nevertheless, soldiers must be nimble enough to intelligently draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable.

Advisors to Iraqi security forces must realize that Iraqis often ensure security differently than coalition forces.<sup>5</sup> This realization is one of the biggest roadblocks that transition teams will face.<sup>6</sup> The coalition force methods are not always the best, and in some cases with host nation forces they can be some of the worst. Soldiers must be flexible, and leaders must be agile and intelligently adapt.

FM 3-24 states that “the decisive battle is for the people's minds.”<sup>7</sup> Dealing with corruption at any level plays a large part. Meddle with an individual's money and it will surely affect their way of thinking. In some cases it will be necessary; in many cases it will not. It is important not to lose focus of the end state. Acquisition and maintenance of popular support will ultimately determine the security situation and counter-insurgency operations in Iraq as a whole.

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ing overall control of his area of operations.

4 John Nagl, David Petraeus, James Amos, *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. xlvi.

5 This includes MiTTs, PTTs, BTTs and partner companies/battalions.

6 Nagl et al., *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24*, p. 202.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

July 16, 2008 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded near a market in Tal Afar, Ninawa Province, killing at least 15 people. – *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 17

July 16, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): The Canadian military announced that they killed the Taliban's “deputy governor of Kandahar” during airstrikes the previous week. – *The Canadian Press*, July 17

July 16, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Two employees of Globe Telecom Inc. were kidnapped by armed men near Tuburan town on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. It was not immediately clear whether the Abu Sayyaf Group was responsible for the kidnapping, as there are a number of kidnap-for-ransom groups now operating in the region. – *Philippine Inquirer*, July 16; *AFP*, July 17

July 16, 2008 (THAILAND): A series of bombs exploded outside two of the largest police stations in southern Thailand. The bombs exploded in Pattani and Yala provinces and wounded seven people. – *AFP*, July 16

July 17, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department placed sanctions on four suspected leaders of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. According to an Agence France-Presse report, “Those named included Salah Gasmî, identified as the head of the group's information committee; Yahia Djouadi, based in northern Mali and leader of a cell that includes southern Algeria; Ahmed Deghdegh, identified as the group's finance chief and designated negotiator; and Abid Hammadou, a deputy leader [of] a battalion based in northern Mali.” – *AFP*, July 18

July 17, 2008 (IRAQ): In a series of raids, U.S. and Iraqi forces apprehended nine individuals suspected of financing terrorist activity and bringing foreign fighters into Iraq. – *UPI*, July 17

July 17, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and international forces killed two Taliban leaders in Shindand district of Herat Province. The leaders, Haji Dawlat Khan and Haji Nasrullah Khan, were killed along with a “significant number of other insurgents.” – *CNN*, July 17

July 17, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud demanded that the Pakistani government cease its sporadic operations against Taliban groups in the tribal regions and that the provincial government resign from their posts. Tehrik-i-Taliban spokesman Maulvi Omar warned that if the government refused to comply with the demands, then Taliban forces “will attack the provincial government and the ANP leaders after five days...” A spokesman for the North-West Frontier Province government responded to the demands, saying, “We will not step down [based] on a threat from some individual. They are threatening to follow the path of violence, while we believe in peace.” – *Globe and Mail, July 18*

July 17, 2008 (THAILAND): Two men claiming to be behind the separatist insurgency that has roiled southern Thailand announced that their group, identified as Tai Ruam Pak Tai Khong Prathet Thai (Thailand’s United Southern Underground group), had called an immediate cease-fire. Analysts believe that the recent announcement may be a “hoax” and were skeptical of the claims. After four years of violence, little is still known about the identities of the insurgent leadership in southern Thailand since they rarely claim responsibility for attacks and operations. – *Financial Times, July 17; AFP, July 16*

July 18, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Taliban in Pakistan threatened to begin executing hostages unless the Pakistani government released from jail four of their fellow operatives. The Taliban is holding dozens of hostages, including government employees, police officers and paramilitary soldiers. One of the militants that the Taliban is demanding the government release is known as Rafiuddin, who was arrested on July 9 in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *New York Times, July 19*

July 18, 2008 (ISRAEL): The Israeli government accused six Arabs of attempting to establish an al-Qa`ida cell in Israel. According to authorities, one of the suspects had posted inquiries on Islamist websites on how to shoot down helicopters; it is believed that he wanted to possibly shoot down a helicopter carrying U.S. President George W.

Bush when he visited Israel. Four of the suspects were Palestinian residents of Arab East Jerusalem, while the other two were Israeli Arabs. – *Reuters, July 18*

July 18, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Militants released two Globe Telecom Inc. employees who were kidnapped on July 16. Authorities suspect that an Abu Sayyaf-linked group was responsible for the kidnapping. It is not clear whether a ransom was paid for their release. – *GMA News.tv, July 18*

July 19, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): In an interview with the Associated Press, General David Petraeus said that although al-Qa`ida will not “abandon Iraq what they certainly may do is start to provide some of those resources that would have come to Iraq to Pakistan, possibly Afghanistan.” – *AP, July 19*

July 19, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb in Maywand district of Kandahar Province killed four policemen. – *AP, July 19*

July 19, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a police checkpoint in Kandahar Province. A policeman and child were wounded. – *AP, July 19*

July 19, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Mullah Rahim, identified as the senior-most Taliban leader in Afghanistan’s Helmand Province, surrendered to Pakistani officials in Quetta, according to a spokesman at the British Defense Ministry. – *AP, July 22; Reuters, July 23*

July 19, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Authorities apprehended two Abu Sayyaf Group members who are linked to the June 8 kidnapping of journalist Ces Drilon. The men were arrested at a checkpoint in Sulu Province. – *Mindanao Examiner, July 20*

July 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): According to the UK Defense Ministry, an airstrike by British planes killed Abdul Razaq, identified as a Taliban leader who led fighters in Musa Qala in Helmand Province. – *AP, July 22*

July 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO announced that its forces killed Mullah Sheikh, identified as a high-level Taliban commander, and two of his followers near Musa Qala, Helmand

Province. – *Voice of America, July 21*

July 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Two Turkish engineers who were kidnapped on July 14 were released, apparently after a ransom was paid. – *AFP, July 21*

July 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Suspected Taliban militants killed Ghamai Khan Mohammadyar, the spokesman for the governor of Paktika Province, in his home, which is located in Paktia Province. His family members were wounded during the attack, and his brother was kidnapped. – *AFP, July 21*

July 20, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Suspected Abu Sayyaf militants kidnapped three Catholics on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. – *GMA News.tv, July 20*

July 20, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): In response to the rise in kidnappings on Basilan Island, additional police forces were deployed to the province. The heightened security measures will mean more mobile checkpoints and foot patrols. – *GMA News.tv, July 20*

July 21, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The military trial of al-Qa`ida operative Salim Hamdan began at Guantanamo Bay. Hamdan, who was a driver for Usama bin Ladin, is accused of transporting weapons for al-Qa`ida, among other charges. – *UPI, July 21*

July 21, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan officials announced that Taliban militants captured the remote Ajiristan district in Ghazni Province. The Taliban captured the same district in October 2007, but security forces retook the district the following day. – *Voice of America, July 21; AFP, July 22*

July 21, 2008 (PAKISTAN): During an interview between Geo News and al-Qa`ida leader Shaykh Sa`id Mustafa Abu`l-Yazid, an Egyptian who is head of al-Qa`ida operations in Afghanistan, al-Yazid said that the suicide bomber in the June 2 attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad was from Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. It is not clear, however, whether the bomber was of Saudi descent himself. Al-Yazid explained that the operative traveled to Pakistan to fight in Indian Kashmir or in Afghanistan, but was angered over the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in Danish newspapers in 2005. During



the rare interview, al-Yazid also called for the destruction of the Pakistani government. – *Reuters, July 22*

July 21, 2008 (THAILAND): A remotely-detonated bomb exploded in Yala Province, wounding six policemen and one civilian. – *AP, July 21*

July 22, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives near Babur's Gardens in Kabul, wounding three civilians. The intended target was a police control post. The Taliban claimed responsibility. – *AP, July 22; AFP, July 21*

July 22, 2008 (PAKISTAN): According to an Indian press report, Pakistan's Tehrik-i-Taliban threatened to launch "severe attacks" against the Pakistani government unless military operations in the tribal regions were halted. – *Press Trust of India, July 23*

July 22, 2008 (THAILAND): Separatist militants attacked a troop convoy in Narathiwat Province, killing one soldier and wounding five more. The attack began with a roadside bomb and finished in a firefight. – *Reuters, July 22*

July 23, 2008 (IRAQ): In a new statement, Iraq's ambassador to the United States announced that "many of the foreign fighters that were in Iraq have left, either back to their homeland or going to fight in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is now seeming to be more suitable for al-Qaida fighters." The ambassador warned, however, that "if things break down in Iraq, they are capable of coming back." – *AP, July 23*

July 23, 2008 (ALGERIA): A suicide bomber on a motorbike detonated his explosives in Lakhdaria, Bouïra Province, wounding 13 soldiers. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility. – *AFP, August 10*

July 24, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber detonated her explosives near a group of Awakening Council fighters in Ba`quba, Diyala Province, killing at least eight of them, including the group's chief, Na`im al-Duliami. – *AP, July 24*

July 24, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A grand jirga, representing the Taliban, and a government official signed a cease-

fire agreement in Hangu District of the North-West Frontier Province. The agreement came after Pakistani forces ended a military operation in the district. – *RTTNews, July 25*

July 25, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): During an offensive in Ghazni Province, which began on July 23, Afghan and NATO forces killed 40 Taliban fighters in airstrikes. The purpose of the offensive was to retake the district of Ajiristan, which the Taliban seized control of on July 21. – *AFP, July 25*

July 25, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants released eight hostages in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The release of the hostages—who were government employees and security personnel, abducted in Hangu District—came one day after a cease-fire agreement was reached between Taliban militants and the Pakistani government in Hangu District of the North-West Frontier Province. – *RTTNews, July 25*

July 25, 2008 (YEMEN): A suicide car bomber attempted to ram his vehicle into a police station in Hadramawt Province, but was unable to breach the outer gates. One police guard was killed in the explosion. According to a government official, "All evidence gathered by the investigation team shows the involvement of [the] al-Qa`ida organization." Furthermore, the al-Qa`ida-linked Jund al-Yaman Brigades posted a statement claiming credit for the operation, saying that it was in retaliation for the killing of al-Qa`ida militants in Yemen. – *Reuters, July 25; Reuters, July 26; DPA, July 26*

July 26, 2008 (THAILAND): Approximately 10 gunmen dressed in camouflage uniforms attacked the Sai Buri police station in Pattani Province. Although there was heavy damage to the building, there were no casualties. The assailants withdrew five minutes into the gunfight. – *TNA, July 26; Bangkok Post, July 26*

July 27, 2008 (TURKEY): Two bomb blasts struck a pedestrian square in Istanbul, killing at least 17 people. Authorities have blamed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for the attack, although the PKK has denied involvement. – *Guardian, July 28; Reuters, July 30*

July 28, 2008 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Abu Yahya al-Libi released a new video statement calling on jihadists to kill Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah due to his decision to lead an interfaith conference in Madrid in July. During the tape, al-Libi said that "equating Islam with other religions is a betrayal of Islam." – *AP, July 28*

July 28, 2008 (IRAQ): Three women suicide bombers attacked a crowd of Shi`a pilgrims in Karrada district of Baghdad, killing at least 25 people. – *AFP, July 28*

July 28, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber attacked a crowd of protestors in Kirkuk Province, which then caused a stampede, prompting guards to open fire. As a result of the incident, 27 people died. – *AFP, July 28*

July 28, 2008 (IRAQ): U.S.-led coalition forces apprehended two suspected al-Qa`ida terrorists near Abu Ghurayb in Baghdad Province. – *UPI, July 28*

July 28, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Top al-Qa`ida operative Abu Khabab al-Masri, also known as Midhat Mursi al-Sayyid `Umar, was believed killed in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. His death occurred after missiles, believed fired from U.S. aircraft, struck a building of which he was inside. An al-Qa`ida statement later confirmed the death, saying that he left behind "a generation of faithful students who will make you suffer the worst torture and avenge him and his brothers." Al-Masri was involved in training operatives in the use of poisons and explosives. – *AP, July 28; AFP, July 27; AP, August 3*

July 29, 2008 (IRAQ): Approximately 50,000 Iraqi soldiers and police launched an offensive against al-Qa`ida and other insurgents in Diyala Province. – *AFP, August 12*

July 29, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): U.S.-led coalition forces killed 22 Taliban militants in an airstrike in Giro district of Ghazni Province. – *AFP, July 29*

July 29, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan government forces killed 10 Taliban fighters in Ghazni Province. – *AFP, July 29*

July 29, 2008 (INDONESIA): Security officials announced that two alleged Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah leaders—Abu Husna and Agus Purwantoro—were planning to travel to Iraq via Syria to ask al-Qa`ida for financial assistance so that they could “pay for explosives and operating expenses.” The information, according to the official, was found on a laptop that was seized after the two men were arrested before they could embark on their trip; they were detained in March 2008 in Malaysia. – *AP, July 29*

July 29, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine Marines killed two Abu Sayyaf Group militants near Tipo-Tipo town on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. – *Straits Times, July 30*

July 31, 2008 (GLOBAL): According to a statement posted on Islamist websites, an al-Qa`ida military leader who escaped from Bagram prison in 2005 was killed during a U.S. airstrike. The leader, Abu Abdallah al-Shami, escaped from the Bagram jail with Abu Yahya al-Libi, a prominent al-Qa`ida operative who is still active in the region. The web statement did not explain when or where al-Shami was killed. – *CNN, July 31*

July 31, 2008 (GLOBAL): A *Washington Post* report claimed that al-Qa`ida in Iraq leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri (also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), along with several of his top lieutenants, may have left Iraq for Afghanistan. – *Washington Post, July 31*

July 31, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber rammed his vehicle into a police station near Mosul, Ninawa Province. Three policemen were killed. – *Voice of America, July 31*

July 31, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Two women were kidnapped by suspected Abu Sayyaf Group militants in Parang on Jolo Island, in the southern Philippines. – *AFP, August 1*

August 1, 2008 (GLOBAL): CBS News reported that al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri may have been injured or killed during a missile strike in Pakistan. The veracity of the report, however, was denied by U.S. intelligence officials and also by Taliban spokesmen. – *AP, August 2*

August 1, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): A police counter-terrorism unit apprehended Hadji Ahmad Edris, identified as a member of the Abu Sayyaf Group who had a bounty on his head. He was arrested after he disembarked from a ferry near Zamboanga City. – *ABS-CBN, August 1*

August 1, 2008 (SOMALIA): An African Union peacekeeper from Uganda was killed by a roadside bomb in Mogadishu. – *AFP, August 1*

August 2, 2008 (IRAQ): Iraqi officials arrested al-Qa`ida’s “governor” for Diyala Province, along with other key leaders, in Ba`quba. – *UPI, August 3*

August 2, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A roadside bomb killed at least eight Pakistani police officers in Swat District of the North-West Frontier Province. – *Reuters, August 2*

August 2, 2008 (KENYA): Fazul Abdullah Muhammad, an al-Qa`ida operative with a \$5 million bounty on his head, narrowly escaped arrest after Kenyan police raided his hideout in the coastal resort town of Malindi. Two of his aides were apprehended. Fazul is wanted for involvement in the simultaneous al-Qa`ida attacks in Mombasa in 2002. According to one press report, “Fazul, who is in his mid-30s, speaks five languages and is considered a master of disguise, is reported to have crossed into Kenya from Somalia a few days ago to seek treatment for a kidney condition.” – *guardian.co.uk, August 4*

August 2, 2008 (THAILAND): Seven small bombs exploded in the southern Thailand tourist towns of Hat Yai and Songkhla in Songkhla Province. The bombs were planted at restaurants and shops; two people were injured. – *AFP, August 3*

August 3, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb struck a U.S.-led military convoy on the eastern outskirts of Kabul, killing one soldier. – *Reuters, August 3*

August 3, 2008 (ALGERIA): A suicide car bomber attacked security forces in Tizi Ouzou in the Kabylie region, wounding 25 people including four policemen. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb later took responsibility,

claiming that the suicide bomber “drove a truck laden with 600 kilograms of explosives and hit two important targets: the headquarters of the secret services and local police.” The statement also explained that the bomber, identified as “Abu Mariam,” was “the son of one of the tribes in the area, and was very careful to avoid spilling the blood of even one Muslim.” – *AFP, August 3; AKI, August 6*

August 4, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine Marines arrested suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) member Usman Asari Aldani while he was buying provisions at a market in Isabela, Basilan Province. A military official said that Aldani is a known accomplice of ASG leaders Khadaffi Janjalani (who is now deceased) and Isnilon Hapilon. – *Philippine Inquirer, August 7*

August 5, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Aafia Siddiqui, a former resident of Boston and an MIT-trained scientist from Pakistan, appeared before a judge in the Southern District of New York on two counts of assault on U.S. officers. Siddiqui was allegedly arrested in Afghanistan’s Ghazni Province on July 17, after planning to conduct a martyrdom operation against Ghazni’s provincial governor. According to an affidavit, when FBI agents and U.S. military personnel attempted to take custody of her from Afghan officials, Siddiqui managed to arm herself and fire at the U.S. personnel; she was wounded during the altercation. According to a *Boston Globe* report, Siddiqui’s “family members say they have not seen or heard from her or her three young children since March of 2003, when FBI officials posted her photo on their web site hoping to question her.” Siddiqui claims that she has been in U.S. custody for years and was tortured during this time. – *Boston Globe, August 6; MailOnline, August 6; Guardian, August 8*

August 5, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan spokesman Maulvi Omar warned the Pakistani government that the Taliban would launch suicide attacks in Pakistan unless it immediately ceased a military operation in the Swat Valley of the North-West Frontier Province. – *Voice of America, August 6*

August 5, 2008 (YEMEN): An al-Qa`ida in Yemen operative released

an audiotape threatening “bigger” operations in Yemen unless its jailed fellow militants were released from prison. The operative, Hamza al-Q’uyati, also threatened the head of Yemen’s Political Security Organization (PSO), Ghalib al-Qamesh. Al-Q’uyati was one of the 23 al-Qa`ida-associated operatives who escaped from a PSO prison in February 2006. – *NewsYemen, August 6*

August 6, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Salim Hamdan, Usama bin Ladin’s former driver, was convicted of providing material support for terrorism at a U.S. military court in Guantanamo Bay. Hamdan was found not guilty, however, of conspiracy. Although faced with the possibility of a life sentence, the military jury only gave him five-and-a-half years, of which he already completed 61 months, meaning that he will only serve a five month sentence. Even after his sentence is up, however, Hamdan can still be held as an “enemy combatant.” – *NPR, August 6; NBC News, August 7*

August 6, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Security forces killed prominent Taliban leader Ali Bakht during clashes in the Swat Valley of the North-West Frontier Province. A Taliban spokesman confirmed the death. According to Pakistan’s *Daily Times*, “Bakht was head of the Taliban committee holding negotiations with the NWFP government and a key aide of rebel cleric Mullah Fazlullah.” – *Daily Times, August 7*

August 7, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO announced that “hundreds” of French troops have been deployed to train and advise Afghan security forces in Uruzgan Province, a region of frequent clashes between Taliban and coalition forces. – *AP, August 7*

August 8, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber struck Tal Afar, Ninawa Province, killing 25 people. The detonation occurred near a fruit and vegetable market. The United States blamed al-Qa`ida in Iraq for the attack. – *AP, August 9*

August 8, 2008 (IRAQ): Iraqi police announced the arrest of Mahmud Kraydi, who is “considered to be the leader of al-Qa`ida in Ramadi.” – *AFP, August 8*

August 8, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani Army announced that intense clashes were taking place between Taliban and government forces in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Since the clashes began on August 6, at least seven soldiers and 30 militants have been killed. The clashes began after hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked a security checkpoint in the Loizam area of Bajaur. – *AFP, August 7*

August 8, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants beheaded two men and executed a third by gunfire after accusing them of spying on Taliban activities. The incident occurred in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Daily Times, August 9*

August 8, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants kidnapped 14 security personnel after attacking their checkpoint in the Buner area of Swat District in the North-West Frontier Province. – *Daily Times, August 9*

August 9, 2008 (ALGERIA): A suicide car bomber attacked a coast guard barracks and gendarmerie post in Zemmouriel Bahri, Boumerdes Province, killing at least six civilians. According to witnesses, the blast destroyed the gendarmerie post, but the barracks was only slightly damaged. It is suspected that al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb was behind the attack. – *Reuters, August 10*

August 10, 2008 (GLOBAL): A new audiotape purportedly of al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was partially broadcast on Pakistan’s ARY One television network. During the recording, al-Zawahiri said that Pakistan is “virtually ruled from the American Embassy...Pervez has insulted and compromised Pakistan’s sovereignty by allowing the CIA and FBI to operate freely in Pakistan and arrest, interrogate, torture, deport and detain any person, whether Pakistani or not, for as long as they like, thus turning the Pakistani army and security agencies into hunting dogs in the contemporary crusade.” The tape attempts to convince Pakistani soldiers to “disobey any order to kill Muslims or aid their killers.” Furthermore, on the tape, al-Zawahiri spoke in English, which is not typical of previous releases. – *AP, August 10*

August 10, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber targeted U.S. and Iraqi forces in Tarmiyah, near Baghdad, killing one U.S. soldier and four Iraqi civilians. – *AP, August 10*

August 10, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): An Australian military official announced that soldiers recently apprehended Mullah Bari Ghul, the Taliban’s “shadow governor” for Uruzgan Province. – *Bloomberg, August 11*

August 10, 2008 (ALGERIA): A bomb exploded near a police station in Tighzirt, Tizi Ouzou Province. Three police officers were wounded in the blast. – *AFP, August 10*

August 11, 2008 (IRAQ): The Iraqi military temporarily halted its offensive in Diyala Province to give insurgents time to surrender. – *AP, August 11*

August 11, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber attacked a market checkpoint in Ba`quba, Diyala Province, killing at least one policeman and wounding 14 people. – *AP, August 11*

August 11, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber targeted a convoy of foreign troops on the outskirts of Kabul, resulting in the deaths of three civilians. – *Reuters, August 11*

August 11, 2008 (YEMEN): During a gun battle in Tarim in Hadramawt Province, security forces killed five suspected al-Qa`ida militants. One of those killed was identified as Hamza al-Q’uyati, who escaped from a Political Security Organization prison in 2006; on August 5, 2008, al-Q’uyati threatened “bigger” operations in Yemen. Two security officers were killed during the incident. – *AP, August 12*

August 12, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives outside the front gate of the Ba`quba police headquarters, killing three people. It is possible that the Diyala provincial governor was the target. – *AFP, August 12*

August 12, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters attacked the convoy of Ghazni’s provincial governor in Wardak Province. Although the governor was unharmed in the attack, two security guards were wounded. – *AP, August 12*

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

August 12, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Authorities believe that top al-Qa`ida operative Shaykh Sa`id Mustafa Abu'l-Yazid was recently killed by Pakistani airstrikes in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Al-Yazid was in charge of al-Qa`ida's overall operations in Afghanistan. His death, however, has not yet been confirmed. - *Los Angeles Times*, August 13; *Daily Times*, August 13

August 12, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A roadside bomb destroyed an air force truck in Peshawar, killing approximately 14 people. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was part of an "open war" against the government due to its ongoing military operations in the region. - *AP*, August 12

August 13, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber rammed his vehicle into a military patrol in Mosul, Ninawa Province, killing two Iraqis. - *AFP*, August 14

August 13, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Three female Western aid workers were shot to death in Logar Province as they traveled toward Kabul. One of their Afghan drivers was also killed. - *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 13

August 13, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives outside a police station in Lahore, Punjab Province, killing at least seven people, five of whom were policemen. - *AFP*, August 14

August 13, 2008 (LEBANON): A roadside bomb exploded in Tripoli, killing 10 soldiers and eight civilians. Officials suspect that Fatah al-Islam, an al-Qa`ida-inspired terrorist group, was behind the blast. - *AP*, August 14

August 13, 2008 (MAURITANIA): According to the BBC, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb released an internet statement urging Mauritians to take up arms against the country's new government, which recently seized power in a coup. - *BBC News*, August 13

August 14, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber targeted a group of Shi`a pilgrims in Iskandariyya, Babil Province, killing at least 20 of them. - *Los Angeles Times*, August 15

August 14, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and international troops killed seven Taliban militants in Paktia Province, according to Afghanistan's Defense Ministry. The statement said that one of those killed is Mohammad Zaman, identified as an associate of pro-Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani. - *AP*, August 17

August 15, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghanistan's Interior Ministry claimed that 23 Taliban militants were killed in Helmand Province after they attacked a police checkpoint. - *AP*, August 17

August 15, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban forces captured Nawa district in Ghazni Province. - *Voice of America*, August 15

August 15, 2008 (YEMEN): Authorities arrested several al-Qa`ida suspects in Hadramawt Province. - *AP*, August 15

August 15, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Authorities apprehended Abu Sayyaf Group operative Aseng Sahidul on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. - *Mindanao Examiner*, August 16