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Contents

FEATURE ARTICLE

- 1 Saudi Arabia Moves to Maintain Regime Stability**
By Toby Craig Jones

REPORTS

- 4 Ayman al-Zawahiri's Reaction to Revolution in the Middle East**
By Nelly Lahoud
- 7 How the Arab Spring Could Embolden Extremists**
By Philip Mudd
- 9 Are Islamist Extremists Fighting Among Libya's Rebels?**
By Alison Pargeter
- 13 Bahrain: Crushing a Challenge to the Royal Family**
By Caryle Murphy
- 16 JI Operative Umar Patek Arrested in Pakistan**
By Zachary Abuza
- 18 The Implications of Colonel Imam's Murder in Pakistan**
By Rahimullah Yusufzai

- 20 Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity**
24 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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Saudi Arabia Moves to Maintain Regime Stability

By Toby Craig Jones



Saudi King Abdullah has taken a number of steps to maintain regime stability in the kingdom. - Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

SAUDI ARABIA HAS not come through the recent unrest sweeping the Middle East unchanged. The kingdom has yet to see the kind of popular uprisings that brought down regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and that are threatening autocrats in Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. Yet leaders in Riyadh are deeply concerned about regional political developments and what it might mean for stability at home. In an effort to preempt and counter any potential challenges to their power, Saudi Arabia's rulers are taking a number of measures to head off a possible demonstration effect. It is likely that these measures, a combination of inducement and coercion, will hold off domestic critics for now. The regime may also, however, be delaying the inevitable, a moment when the kingdom's rigid leadership will have to engage seriously with its own people on matters of governance, participation, and political opportunity.

Although it has been beset with the threat of militancy and terrorism, most notably from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Saudi Arabia's political order has not been imperiled seriously in recent years. Where dissidents elsewhere have been calling for the overthrow of authoritarian governments, those calling for change in Saudi Arabia are more interested in accommodation than revolution. Many of the kingdom's subjects have long called for political reform, but what most seem to prefer is a top-down reform process in which the al-Saud ruling family open the political system to more participation, but remain in place. Few desire to see the potential chaos that would result from a political vacuum, which might threaten the country's ability to generate oil wealth. As of now, there are no indications that Saudi Arabia is set to face the kind of youth-driven popular mobilization that has rocked regimes elsewhere. This does not mean

the possibility should be dismissed altogether. Saudi Arabia shares similar social and demographic characteristics of its vulnerable neighbors. The ranks of the unemployed youth—many of whom are bored, angry or both—are large and might become restive. The potential for their mobilization is hard to gauge, but it is more than a theoretical possibility.

With the world's largest crude oil reserves, developments in Saudi Arabia that threaten oil output could adversely affect the global economic recovery. This article reviews the calls for reform in Saudi Arabia, assesses the regime's response, and identifies the special circumstances in the Shi'a-populated Eastern Province.

Calls for Reform

Even though there is a reservoir of frustration with the country's ruling elites, especially among the youth, what most Saudis aspire to see is the creation of a more even-handed system in which citizens have a greater share in decision-making and in which oil wealth is distributed more equitably. Calls abound for an end to princely corruption and excessive royal family privilege, greater transparency in the management of the economy, and a real commitment to governance. Other demands are even more basic, such as the call for greater rights for women, an end to restrictions on free speech, and for the government to stamp out discrimination and intolerance. Calls for change have also been driven by frustrations with the state of the kingdom's economy. Unemployment is officially at 10%, although estimates range as high as 25%, figures that do not include women. While women can work in the kingdom, there are severe restrictions on their ability to do so.

There is little that is radical about the reform movement in Saudi Arabia. It consists primarily of intellectuals, academics, religious scholars and elite activists who have, for the most part, carefully avoided direct criticism of the royal family and have not called for their ouster. Support for reform also cuts across religious and class divides, including Sunni Islamists, national secularists (although they avoid the label), Shi'a and women. Support for the reform position is spread geographically. Yet there is no centrally coordinated

organization or party dedicated to reform, mostly because formal political organizations are banned in Saudi Arabia; reformers are forced into loose alliances and mostly rely on letter writing and petitions to press their cause. With the exception of key figures such as Abdullah al-Hamad, who has gone further than most in calling for the creation of a constitutional monarchy, reformers have preferred to keep a low public profile. Since their numbers are hard to measure and because the most prominent reformers have advanced their agenda quietly, it is difficult to determine how much support they command in the kingdom. A wide range of Saudi citizens claim to support the idea of reform generally, but this does not necessarily equate to support for any particular figure or platform.

The Regime Response

Even though the reformers have carefully calculated their tone and limited their demands, the country's rulers have not only avoided dealing seriously with the substance of their position, but have responded as though they are more sinister. Recent measures undertaken by the al-Saud monarchy in response to renewed calls for reform underscore the regime's anxiety and demonstrate its unwillingness to share power, its disinterest in engaging in political introspection or dealing seriously with thoughtful critics. By closing off the possibility of change altogether, the government might ultimately exaggerate the appeal of more confrontational options for those alienated with the present order. Indeed, by imposing obstacles to political transformation and by punishing advocates for change, the kingdom's rulers are running the longer term risk of turning reformers, and those who support the calls for reform, into revolutionaries.

Riyadh's current anxieties stem directly from the dramatic events that have shaken the region in recent months. The monarchy's unease manifested most clearly in mid-March 2011. In response to calls by Saudi activists on Facebook and other social media outlets for a "Day of Rage" in Saudi Arabia on March 11, authorities intensified the presence of police and security across the country to foreclose the possibility of protests. The massive show of force, along with

threatening statements by regime officials, produced the desired effect. With the exception of small protests in predominantly Shi'a communities in the Eastern Province, would-be protesters stayed home in Riyadh and elsewhere, and the Day of Rage ended without major incident.

The depth of Saudi disquiet was further demonstrated when it sent at least 1,000 of its military personnel into neighboring Bahrain to help crush

“Given the importance of the oil-rich Eastern Province to both Saudi Arabia and the global economy, the regime is playing a risky game. Greater levels of mobilization or efforts to coordinate militancy against the regime would almost certainly include efforts to upend oil production.”

the pro-democracy movement there. The kingdom has consistently claimed Iranian involvement in Bahrain and used the specter of sectarian politics as its justification for intervention. Equally important, however, were worries that Saudis—Shi'a and Sunni alike—might be inspired by events so close to the kingdom's shores.

At home, the only political concession offered to those calling for reform is an empty one. In late March, the government announced that it would hold elections for mostly powerless municipal councils in September 2011. The elections were originally scheduled to be held in 2009, but were postponed indefinitely for unclear reasons. The announcement that they will go forward now (although women will still not be allowed to vote) is a cynical gesture on the part of a regime deeply disinterested in meaningful change.

In addition to projection of force and the explicit threat of violence, the regime also promised a series of economic measures aimed to address the social roots of frustration. On March 18, Saudi King Abdullah promised an ambitious multibillion dollar package of reforms, including a loan program, housing subsidies, assistance for the unemployed, a jobs creation initiative, and assorted other forms of material support.

Economic inducements have long been the “bread and butter” of Saudi politics and a significant source of the ruling al-Saud family’s legitimacy. Since the middle of the 20th century, the political order has been based on an implicit understanding between rulers and ruled that oil wealth would be widely redistributed.¹ The recently announced multibillion dollar aid program represents more of the same. Yet it is far from clear that the calculations that have driven the redistribution

“The resort to religion and clerics to enforce both an austere moral order and political authoritarianism is fraught with uncertainty.”

of oil wealth in the past will satisfy the demands of Saudi reformers in the future. Historically, the terms of Saudi Arabia’s political contract have been that in exchange for a share in the energy spoils, the country’s citizens are expected to remain politically quiescent. Riyadh’s attempt to buy off reformers and challenges to the existing order with more of the same may help ease the burdens of economic duress for many Saudis, but it does little to address the specifically political appeals made by many citizens.

In fact, it appears that not even the kingdom’s leaders believe the massive financial reform program will be sufficient in deflecting calls for change. Instead, Riyadh is dusting off an old playbook to ensure docility. Along with a renewed commitment to security and the threat of violence, Saudi leaders have sought to strengthen ties with religious elites and institutions. In the March 18 aid package, the government announced billions of dollars in support for the religious police, Islamic schools, and the clergy more generally. While the clergy have always been important to the ruling family, they have also often been kept at some distance and only allowed influence when convenient. The move to empower them now is designed to undercut the potential appeal of reformers, to strengthen the country’s most conservative social and political elements, and to use them to lend religious legitimacy to the government’s position.²

The resort to religion and clerics to enforce both an austere moral order and political authoritarianism is fraught with uncertainty. It is a strategy the Saudis have attempted before and one that has generated troubling political consequences in the past. In response to challenges to their power in the late 1970s, leaders in Riyadh also turned to the clergy to help them shore up power, a decision that led in part to the generation and institutionalization of Islamic radicalism. In the decades that followed, religious dissent and radicalism spread globally, the specter of which remains threatening today.

It might be tempting to interpret Saudi Arabia’s current political gambit—its steps to buy off dissent as well as measures to turn back the clock and avoid dealing earnestly with the challenge of reform—as indications of strength. Thus far, the strategy has succeeded in keeping widespread public protest at bay. Yet this is only a measure of short-term success and stability. It is far from clear that Saudis will be satisfied with palliative and compulsive measures on offer from Riyadh.

The Troubles in the Eastern Province

One area of the country where the national strategy has so far failed to compel quiescence is in the oil-rich Eastern Province. Flush with oil, the Eastern Province is also home to large Shi`a communities. In early March, Shi`a citizens took to the streets in relatively small numbers (hundreds rather than thousands) demanding redress of mostly local issues, including

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the release of political prisoners. More recently, the Shi`a demonstrations have continued and their aims have broadened, including demands for reform and demonstrations of support for Bahrain’s opposition, which is largely Shi`a.

Saudi Shi`a have a history of political activism and confrontational politics. Long oppressed and discriminated against, tens of thousands took to the streets in November 1979 demanding the overthrow of the al-Saud ruling family. Yet the era of revolutionary Shi`a radicalism has long since passed. Even the militant network Hizb Allah in the Hijaz, which enjoyed small support in Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s and 1990s, has remained quiet in recent years. Instead, as has been the case with other reform-minded communities, Saudi Shi`a have preferred to call for top-down reform as a means to deal with the specific issues facing them.

It is unlikely that large numbers of Shi`a will radicalize any time soon. Much depends, however, on how the Saudi regime deals with the larger issue of reform and how it responds to ongoing protests in the Eastern Province. The regime has responded to some Shi`a demands by releasing local political prisoners. Yet the government

¹ Wealth is redistributed through a combination of jobs, social services, and other welfare programs.

² For one example, see the following article: “Saudi Prints 1.5 Million Copies of Anti-Demo Edict,” Reuters, March 29, 2011.

has also become increasingly sectarian at home and in the region, accusing Shi`a generally of maintaining loyalties to Iran. The saber-rattling with Iran and the charges of disloyalty threaten to alienate Saudi Shi`a and could drive them to embrace radicalism. That possibility remains a distant one for now. Nevertheless, given the importance of the oil-rich Eastern Province to both Saudi Arabia and the global economy, the regime is playing a risky game. Greater levels of mobilization or efforts to coordinate militancy against the regime would almost certainly include efforts to upend oil production.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's rulers have demonstrated that they feel a sense of urgency, but their political instincts are taking them in the wrong direction. The reformers are right that the existing system is deeply dysfunctional, anachronistic, and no longer in touch with the interests and desires of the vast majority of Saudi citizens. It is hard to see how resorting to a well-worn political strategy will restore confidence in an ailing system or ensure that there will not be future and perhaps more confrontational challenges to regime power. The kingdom's leaders have yet to learn the most important lesson coming from Cairo, Tunis, Sana`a and Manama: although Arab authoritarian regimes have proven durable in the past, they are no longer invulnerable to the demands and pressures of their own people.

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Ayman al-Zawahiri's Reaction to Revolution in the Middle East

By Nelly Lahoud

SINCE PROTESTS ERUPTED in the Middle East and North Africa, al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri has released a series of five statements, four in the form of audio recordings and the fifth as a video.¹ All five share the same title: "Missive of Hope and Joy to our People in Egypt."² Only the last three, however, responded to the protests that have thus far toppled the leaders of Tunisia and Egypt. To date, al-Zawahiri's "Missive" is the most comprehensive response to the events in the Middle East by a leading jihadist figure.

This article presents analytical observations of the five statements, arguing that al-Zawahiri's discourse is evolving to meet the challenges of the unfolding events in the Middle East. His discourse, however, suffers from profound tensions pertaining to jihadist identity and specifically to the role the jihadists can play in the changing political landscape.

Statements 1-2

Ayman al-Zawahiri's first two statements did not respond to the mass protests in Tunisia and Egypt. The jihadist websites that released them did al-Zawahiri a disservice by not withholding the first two until the third became available. Although the title is generic—the "hope and joy" presumably referred to his optimism that the jihadists are on their destined path to victory—the title nevertheless gave the impression that the first two statements were in response to the events in Egypt. Accordingly, initial media reports unfairly criticized him as being out of touch with Egyptian reality.

The first statement was most likely taped before protestors took to the streets of Tunisia. It was a routine discussion of what al-Zawahiri believed to be the secular and oppressive regime in Egypt. This oppression, he asserted, is a result of the historical events that saw Western encroachments on Egypt, beginning in the 18th century with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, then with the British occupation in the 19th and early 20th centuries and in recent times the United States' indirect rule through its agents the "pharaohs" who have oppressed the Egyptians to advance their interests and those of the United States.

The subjects tackled in the second statement are more specific and provide evidence of the time period when al-Zawahiri is likely to have taped it. Since he discussed the New Year's Eve bombing of a church in Alexandria, Egypt, and also remarked on the protests that ensued, it is likely that it was taped in the first half of January 2011. In addition to the church bombing, the events that most preoccupied him are attacks that resulted in Muslim casualties carried out by groups espousing jihadist ideology and the possibility of the secession of southern Sudan. His discussion of Sudan is largely historical; he did not discuss the referendum that was scheduled to start on January 9 and last until January 15.

Concerning attacks against Muslims, al-Zawahiri echoed other jihadist leaders by highlighting the sanctity of Muslim lives, and proceeded to dissociate al-Qa`ida from attacks that involve shedding Muslim blood.³ He must have been responding to a series of attacks targeting mosques and public places in Pakistan, the latest a suicide bombing that killed more than 55 worshippers in the Dara Adam Khel area. It coincided with another attack on a mosque in Peshawar, which resulted in additional Muslim casualties.⁴ Al-Zawahiri stressed that al-Qa`ida has no involvement in such attacks and therefore reflects the lack of control the

1 This article is the outcome of conversations with Abdullah Wariis and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi. The author is grateful for their input and for assisting in gathering some of the article's sources.

2 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Missive of Hope and Joy to our People in Egypt," statements 1-5, 2011, available at www.jihadology.net.

3 `Atiyyat Allah, to whom he refers, had written a treatise in response to the attacks in the marketplace in Peshawar in 2009. His treatise can be accessed on Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad at www.tawhed.ws/c?i=166.

4 "Attack on Mosque in North-West Pakistan 'Kills 55,'" BBC, November 5, 2010.

jihadist leadership can exercise over the broader jihadist theater:

Notwithstanding the truth or falsehood of attributing these operations to the mujahidin, my brethren and I in Qa`idat al-Jihad declare to God our innocence from having any involvement in these operations. Indeed we disapprove of such attacks whether they are carried out by jihadists or others.

A considerable portion of the second statement is devoted to protests in Egypt, yet to the demonstrations that erupted in the first half of January following the bombing of the church in Alexandria. Al-Zawahiri is categorical that al-Qa`ida was not behind the bombing. He did, however, justify the resentment that he believes many Muslims in Egypt feel as a result of the Coptic Church's numerous transgressions. Among the transgressions he highlighted are the Coptic Pope Shenouda's support of the now-deposed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the previous presidential election and of the Coptic

“Ironically, the jihadist narrative enjoyed greater credibility under the autocratic regimes that they have devoted their lives to oust through jihad.”

Bishop Bishoy's remarks in which he questioned the authenticity of certain Qur'anic verses. Bishoy is quoted in the media to have said that Muslims are guests in Egypt, a report that al-Zawahiri is keen to record in the minds of his listeners.⁵ He further blamed Mubarak, the regime apparatus, al-Azhar University and U.S. support of the Coptic Church, which together, he believes, fueled resentment among Muslims and ultimately led some to act on their inflamed feelings.

⁵ “Egypt Pope Apologizes over Bishop's Anti-Islam Remarks,” Associated Press, September 26, 2010.

Although he justified the resentment, he did not condone the bombing of the church. Instead, he warned fellow Muslims that not all Christians are collaborators. Some Christians, he reminded them, “reject the Crusader-Jewish occupation of the Arab and Muslim world...[they] are proud of their Arab origin and of the Prophet of Islam, believing him to be one of the greatest figures in Arab and human history.”

It is noteworthy that al-Zawahiri ignored the protests in Tunisia. Even if al-Zawahiri had taped his second statement before January 14 when the Tunisian president resigned, protestors had already taken to the streets on December 19, 2010. Did he, like some analysts, consider events in Tunisia to be an exceptional aberration and not worthy of his attention? It seems likely. Indeed, while he applauded the people's uprisings in statements 3-5, in the second statement he was in full jihadist mode. For example, he remarked that the technological gap between the West and the Muslim world is insurmountable and the solution he proposed is not through revolutions, but through 9/11-style attacks. “While we cannot produce weapons that match [the sophistication] of those produced by the Crusader-West, we are capable of disrupting its complex industrial and economic system,” he explained. “That is why it is necessary for the jihadists to come up with new ways [to disrupt the West's progress]. Among such innovative ways is the courageous utilization of airplanes as a weapon, like the blessed raids in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.”

Statements 3-5

A different texture emerges in statements 3-5. The mujahidun no longer hold a virtual monopoly on being the Muslim world's drivers of genuine change and salvation. Al-Zawahiri saluted different actors: the “free and the noble people” who have made their presence felt on the Arab world stage.⁶ He recognized that these actors are not one and the same with the jihadists, but

⁶ Al-Zawahiri has used these terms before to designate jihadists or people to whom he was appealing to rise up against the political order, but in the statements under review these terms designate actors distinct from the jihadists. See al-Zawahiri, statement 3.

he was keen to convince his listeners that they are all fighting the same enemy: “your jihadi brethren are confronting alongside you the same enemy, America and its Western allies, those who set up [tyrants] like Husni Mubarak, Zein al-Abidin b. Ali, Ali Abdallah Saleh, Abdallah b. Hussein and their ilk to rule over you.”⁷

The strength of al-Zawahiri's statements 3-5 is the way in which he clearly articulated what one may describe as the “original sin” that some Western powers have committed and which have resulted in some of the

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dramas that inflict the modern Middle East. In making his case, al-Zawahiri was not short of examples. Focusing on the U.S. legacy in Egypt, he cautioned the people of Egypt not to be deceived by the current U.S. support of their cause. He reminded them that:

[America] that is [now] weeping over the safety of journalists in Egypt [is the same America] that bombed the offices of al-Jazira in Kabul and Baghdad...America that is [now] weeping over the victims of torture in Egypt is [the same America] that resorts to torture in the prisons of Guantanamo, Bagram and Abu Ghurayb and in its secret prisons in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Poland and on board of its ships and airplanes...this is the truth of the international legal system...it is the law that

⁷ Al-Zawahiri, statement 4.

[enshrines] the domination of the arrogant (*mustakbirin*) [of the earth] over the disinherited (*mustad`afin*). America that weeps over the [deficit] of democracy [in the Middle East] is [the same America] that refuses to recognize the [elected] government of Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. America is the last [entity] that is allowed to speak of [the virtues of] democracy and human rights.⁸

Beyond highlighting what he deemed to be the hypocrisy of the United States and its allies, al-Zawahiri warned the people of Egypt of the likelihood that the fruits of their revolution may be squandered if they do not institute an Islamic government premised on the principle of consultation (*nizam islami shuri*). Perhaps sensing that the United States is not alarmed by the possibility that the Muslim Brotherhood could potentially win an election in Egypt, he

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warned Egyptians that the United States does not care as to whether the regime is democratic, despotic or even Islamic (similar to Saudi Arabia) so long as the regime serves U.S. interests. What the United States will never accept, he asserted, is an Islamic government that serves the interests of the *umma*, rejects the occupation of Muslim lands, counters the ambitions of Israel and in which its rulers are accountable before God and their people.⁹ More specifically, he called for the abrogation of the constitution and establishing in its place an Islamic system of government free of

positive law. It is noteworthy that al-Zawahiri was keen to stress that his call for an Islamic government should not be misconstrued as a call for his supporters to resort to violent confrontations to achieve their ends. For now, jihad is not on his agenda for Egypt or Tunisia, but he is hoping or betting that the “original sin” of the United States and its allies is *min al-kaba`ir*, or much too grievous, to be forgiven by the people of Egypt and the rest of the Arab world.

Al-Zawahiri is also pleading with the Arab people not to turn inward following the revolutions—to lend support, including military support, to the Libyans who are currently enduring Mu`ammar Qadhafi’s bombing campaign. He chastised the Arab armies for not defending the Libyans, asking whether “their role is limited to oppressing the people.” In the event that NATO forces enter Libya, al-Zawahiri called on Muslims of the region to rise up and fight against “Qadhafi mercenaries and those of the Crusader-NATO.”¹⁰

Al-Zawahiri: Evolution and Confusion?

Just as the international community has been caught by surprise by the events in the Middle East and is struggling to come to terms with a clear and consistent strategy to address the new reality, it is not surprising that the jihadists have also been caught off-guard. Ironically, the jihadist narrative enjoyed greater credibility under the autocratic regimes that they have devoted their lives to oust through jihad. Al-Zawahiri’s response reveals a combination of evolution and confusion: his discourse is evolving in the sense that his typical jihadist rhetoric is vague at best, but confused in that he does not have a clear vision of the role the jihadists will play in the changing climate. He calls on the imprisoned and recently released jihadist leaders who recanted their jihadist principles under duress by the Mubarak regime to recant their recantations, but it is not clear what he wants them to call for. How are they expected to define the role of the jihadists in the Middle East? Can they cooperate with the secularists and therefore violate the terms of *wala`* and *bara`* they espouse?¹¹ More precisely,

what is to become of the self-professed jihadists if, to use their parlance, God’s Word does not reign supreme and yet they are not called upon to take up jihad to establish His Law? It will no doubt pain al-Zawahiri to learn that `Abboud

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al-Zumar of the Egyptian Islamic Group (al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya) and a former military intelligence colonel in the Egyptian army implicated in the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat—whom al-Zawahiri congratulated on his release from prison—has embraced the electoral process.¹² In an interview with the *New York Times*, al-Zumar declared that “the ballot boxes will decide who will win at the end of the day.”¹³

This is not to suggest that there is no longer a role for the jihadists in al-Zawahiri’s mind. The jihadists are still present in his discourse, but they do not feature as the drivers of the revolutions. Instead, they continue to achieve their virtual victories in Afghanistan now that the United States declared that it will withdraw its troops.¹⁴ This is also not to suggest that some jihadists may not act on their own against the guidance of al-Zawahiri; just as he and other jihadist leaders cannot stop the indiscriminate killings of Muslims in Pakistan and elsewhere, it is not certain that their nuanced and confused guidance is going to be observed by jihadist enthusiasts.

terms, see Nelly Lahoud, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Jihadist Ideology,” *CTC Sentinel* 3:10 (2010).

¹² Al-Zawahiri, statement 5.

¹³ Neil MacFarquhar, “Religious Radicals’ Turn to Democracy Alarms Egypt,” *New York Times*, April 1, 2011.

¹⁴ Al-Zawahiri, statement 5.

⁸ Ibid., statement 5.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Wala`* is to associate with God’s friends and *bara`* is to dissociate from God’s enemies. For a discussion of these

What al-Zawahiri is failing to realize is that the new era is one of contestation and compromises—not of steadfastness and principled rigid positions onto which he wants to hold. Thus, the actors who play by the rules of compromises are more likely to advance their agenda through creating new, even if challenging, possibilities. What is perhaps ironic about al-Zawahiri's "Missive" series is that some of the political points he raised would make for a powerful election speech that would resonate with some Arabs who are reluctantly accepting the current U.S. support. One has to ponder whether al-Zawahiri has any regrets that he has ruled his role out of the *nouveau regime* by his own outright dismissal of positive law, a principled rejection that prevents him from running for office.

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How the Arab Spring Could Embolden Extremists

By Philip Mudd

TURMOIL IN NORTH AFRICA and the broader Middle East has raised questions about what sparked spontaneous mass uprisings of people who, after years of autocrats, now suddenly demand a voice in their own countries. Months into the unrest, other questions are also emerging, such as whether transitions will progress smoothly and which players might emerge as the political leadership in these new democracies. Meanwhile, another concern lingers in the background: after a decade of fighting a global counterterrorism campaign, do these transitions, and the disarray they bring, mean setbacks in the slow progress against violent extremists? The answers are different across the region. Commentary on these questions too often mixes governments that lack legitimacy and have lower-than-average economies (Yemen, Syria, Egypt, among others) with Gulf monarchies, where traditional leaders benefit from greater legitimacy and, of course, oil wealth.

In North Africa, during the short-term, the renaissance of politics probably is confounding an al-Qa`ida leadership that depended on corrupt presidents-for-life to recruit disaffected youth. Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri's recent statement about Libya reflects this discomfort; while al-Zawahiri supports the revolutionaries, at the same time he exhorts Libyans to attack the very NATO forces who intervened at the request of the same oppositionists. Al-Qa`ida's struggle to find a clear voice and present a distinct future for these youth is losing ground as a result of the twin prongs of local Islamists' participation in these revolutions and the likelihood that youth who might have pursued the al-Qa`ida route before are now seeing the prospect that their voice will be heard through elections, not terrorism. Furthermore, the fight at home—coupled with the prospect of participating in elections—probably seems like a far more achievable objective for youth than signing up for a distant jihadist fight in Afghanistan, Iraq, or elsewhere. Recent statements by al-Qa`ida and its

affiliates in Yemen and North Africa lauding the revolutionaries almost certainly represent the defense of al-Qa`idists who see no other option: despite their animosity toward the Muslim Brotherhood and their disdain for elections, they have little choice but to support popular uprisings.

These revolutions might defang the message of violent extremism in the short-term. Over the long-term, however, ensuring that these youth do not again live with political leadership that is weak or, worse, kleptocratic may turn out to be the factor in whether al-Qa`ida loses ground in what has been the key recruiting area of North Africa and the Arabian Gulf. The currents of unrest that could revivify a pool of violent extremism in North Africa run deep, starting with the returnees from Afghanistan who helped fuel the war in Algeria in the 1990s and the rise of Egyptian Islamic Jihad through the same decade. The relatively high representation of North Africans who went to fight in Iraq a decade later suggests that these pools can still be tapped.

The Paradox of Increased Political Debate

The euphoria over the toppling of reviled leaders masks the reality that prospective jihadist recruits are part of societies that probably are too optimistic that these democratic and economic transitions will occur quickly. Looking at some of the indicators in key North African countries, the economic malaise that forms the backdrop to the communities that might again become recruiting grounds cannot be cured by any quick political fix. The jumbled view that political revolutions and openness will somehow result in a better economic life could lead to disillusion in a few years if these pools of youth suffer from a hangover effect after revolution, growing convinced that democracy still means they face little prospect of good jobs or vibrant growth; worse, that the parties and leaders who replaced despots are themselves corrupt. Instability in the region, coupled with the disarray among security services that have resulted in increased crime, further adds to the likelihood that these countries will face an uncertain economic future. Economic performance this year will no doubt suffer as a result of the revolutions, and potential investors will look not only

for what new governments say about foreign investment, but also for whether more criminality worsens country risk. To be sure, predicting whether disaffected youth will turn violent against domestic parties or instead resuscitate international jihadists is guesswork, but the environment in which violent extremists could recruit would certainly be more attractive for them than it is today.

Increased political debate, seen by many in the West as a long-term stabilizer, might also fuel violence. The blooming of political parties could serve as another factor that opens ethnic and religious fissures that turn violent. Sectarian attacks stemming from confessional politics in some countries might also provide an opening for extremist groups such as al-Qa`ida. Sunni states with relatively open democratic processes—Lebanon and Iraq, for example—elect candidates from parties that define themselves by religion and campaign on sectarianism. Polling data shows that public support is high for a prominent role for religion in politics elsewhere in the region; religion is guaranteed to play a role in North African politics as well.

The West will have a clear opportunity to influence these potential recruiting grounds in North Africa and the Middle East. The United States will face decisions about whether to acknowledge the staying power of Islamist parties by providing the same, or even more, aid to Egypt, along with trade benefits that no doubt will be on the new government's wish list. With the overly high expectations that revolution will go hand-in-hand with economic improvements, emerging parties will be looking for any opportunity to win investment and expand export markets. Yet domestic politics in the United States will spark questions about whether Egypt's aid package and more trade are acceptable if the new government has a significant Islamist presence.

Lack of Opportunities Can Fuel Extremism

Economic improvements and job opportunities are critical for limiting extremism. Early in the decade of the expanded fight against al-Qa`ida, many of the violent extremists in the fight were motivated primarily by ideology. Often middle class, they might have spent

years absorbing the message that attacks against the "far enemy"—the United States and its allies—were theologically defensible. More recently, some security service experts are growing convinced that today's cases more involve individuals from poorer economic backgrounds: their motivations might relate to their perception that they will never see success in their societies, and jihadism gives them a framework within which they can justify violence. Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, in other words, is a jihadist most motivated by ideology; youth involved in major plots in Britain, however, are more likely to be angry youth from poorer ethnic neighborhoods who persuade each other, over short periods of time, that the simple jihadism they understand justifies terrorist bombings.

Gaps in GDP per capita between the Gulf states and North Africa, Syria, and Yemen highlight this point: per capita numbers in Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia far outstrip the figures for North Africa, although Libya is midway between the poorest and the Gulf. Morocco, meanwhile, is near the bottom, once again underscoring the role of a respected king who has some legitimacy in the population and who responded to unrest in his country with careful restraint. Weak economic indicators in monarchies are uncertain indicators of the potential for unrest, but autocratic leadership that has lost legitimacy, such as in Syria, has proven a better indicator of which regimes might be at risk. Yemen, the hotbed of extremism and violence on the Arabian Peninsula, provides a clear example of the economic problem across the region. Almost half the Yemeni population is under the age of 15. Moreover, a recent article in the *Yemen Times* prior to the recent unrest identifies the future to which those under 15 can look forward: fully 49% of the population above them, aged 15-29, are neither students nor in the workforce. Although the catalyst for protests might have been fueled by economics, tribal rivalries, and a harsh security response, the broader environment was created by President Ali Abdullah Salih.

This economic problem—the likelihood that new leaders who are seen as the embodiment of revolution face greater obstacles to economic growth than

their dictatorial predecessors—might drive more extremism in coming years, when young revolutionaries come to realize that democracy is no panacea. Paradoxically, the likely unease in the United States and elsewhere about Islamists in government might undercut the chance to improve the prospects of governments that have taken the wind

“This economic problem—the likelihood that new leaders who are seen as the embodiment of revolution face greater obstacles to economic growth than their dictatorial predecessors—might drive more extremism in coming years, when young revolutionaries come to realize that democracy is no panacea.”

out of the sails of violent jihadists who might side with al-Qa`ida. Recruitment opportunities for al-Qa`ida and its affiliates are likely to decline in the near-term without the excuses of secular, non-representative regimes as recruiting bait. Yet in a few years, poor economic performance might lead again to questions among youth about whether democracy is offering an attractive option.

This is not to suggest that these conditions are universal across the Arab world. Western media are too quickly equating developments in Yemen and Libya with developments in Bahrain and elsewhere in the Gulf. Whether the parallel movements pressing for change in Gulf shaykhdoms will grow more frustrated is unclear, but the disparities between North Africa and the wealthier countries of the Arabian Peninsula might offer some explanation for why the street protests are less revolutionary than what Egypt, Tunisia, and now Yemen and Libya are experiencing. Bahrain's obvious demographic differences—its Shi`a majority—along with a leadership that lacks some of the decades-long

authority of some of its neighbors helps explain why it has witnessed more significant unrest. Presidents-for-life lack the legitimacy of the Gulf states, and they are rightly critiqued for corruption: they all rank low on ratings from Transparency International, and the Gulf countries typically fare better.

Beyond this clear distinction between legitimacy and the economics of the Gulf monarchies as opposed to the presidents-for-life autocracies is the divide between what protesters are asking for: revolution in autocracies, reform in monarchies. The “Arab spring” is not at all monolithic, with revolutionary demands across the non-monarchies (calls for the ouster of leadership) contrasting with demands for reform elsewhere, including in Bahrain. Radical change and overthrow is seen as the solution in the former, but not in the latter. Again, the language of those pressing for reform reflects the greater legitimacy of governments in the Gulf, who depend more on tribal connections and respect from subjects and less on simple control by the pervasive security forces. Omani Sultan Qaboos might have been in power for 40 years, longer than Qadhafi, Mubarak, Assad, or Salih, but no one would say that the length of his tenure has undermined his legitimacy, even after the protests in Oman turned violent.¹

If unrest does surge quickly, the greater penetration of the internet—with Twitter and Facebook—across the Gulf might offer organizers a platform to mobilize, but it also offers security services an opportunity to follow mass movements and position police preemptively, particularly when demonstrations are small and scattered. Internet access around the Gulf is high, often higher than in North Africa, and internet usage is dramatically increasing year by year. The internet is viewed as a new engine for unrest; forgotten is the fact that it is also an easily accessible opportunity for security services to watch not only broad mood shifts, but also tactical planning among otherwise disorganized movements that lack clear leadership. The rapidity of the Egyptian uprising

might have surprised security forces, and the breadth of the movement, coupled with the sympathies for its participants from within the military, might have canceled out the opportunity to preempt opposition activity.

There are also lessons learned for those countries still watching the revolutionary movements from the outside. Morocco’s king rules in a country that lacks the economic benefits of the Gulf but benefits from his standing. He played this to his advantage in the recent unrest, careful with deploying force and judicious when confronted with requests for reform. His approach might work, offering another explanation for how monarchies might prevail.

Conclusion

Al-Qa`ida’s decline in recent years has been striking, with the group facing devastating strikes against leadership in its Pakistani heartland and declining support among populations that increasingly question its tactics and killings of innocent Muslims. The series of Arab revolutions offer yet another check for the al-Qa`ida ideologues who must be uncomfortable with the potential influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the likelihood of elections that will be steps toward democratic processes that al-Qa`ida opposes. Yet there are more chapters in this campaign against terrorism, and the future holds potential that the very revolutions that brought democracy might also lead to instability. If economic performance slumps or corruption reigns, al-Qa`ida and other extremists, including political demagogues, might again win favor. Al-Qa`ida has benefited from a long view of history; the West typically does not.

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Are Islamist Extremists Fighting Among Libya’s Rebels?

By Alison Pargeter

AS THE CRISIS in Libya continues, the international media and some Western policymakers have speculated about the dangers of an al-Qa`ida presence in the country. Stark warnings have been issued about the West’s support for opposition forces that include some militants who fought against Western forces in Iraq. No less forceful on this topic has been the Mu`ammar Qadhafi regime itself, which since the crisis started has been at pains to dismiss the uprising as the work of al-Qa`ida. The regime went as far as to claim that an Islamic emirate had been established in the eastern city of Derna that was run by former associates of Usama bin Ladin.

Such allegations on the part of the regime are clearly propaganda efforts aimed at scaring not only the international community, but also those in western Libya about what might come next if Qadhafi is overthrown.¹ Indeed, the uprisings in the east were non-ideological in nature. Like the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, they drew a broad cross-section of the population united by a shared desire to oust a dictator who has ruled them with an iron fist for the past four decades.² Moreover, the rebels’ Interim Transitional National Council’s (ITNC) “Vision for the Future of Libya” that was issued on March 29 promotes a civil liberal democratic state.³

1 There has always been a distinct sense of regional identity in Libya. It was only united as a single country at the time of independence in 1951. The division has traditionally been between the main population centers in the west (Tripolitania) and the east (Cyrenaica). The west has a reputation of being more cosmopolitan and open than its eastern counterpart, while the east is known as a bastion of conservatism. The east has also tended to look eastwards to Egypt, not least because many of the tribes there spread across into Egypt’s western deserts.

2 The protests comprised a cross-section of the Libyan public and included professionals and ordinary Libyans, particularly drawn from the youth.

3 For more details, see the ITNC website at <http://nt-clibya.org/english/libya/>.

1 To see some of the steps taken by Sultan Qaboos in response to unrest, see Sara Hamdan, “Oman Offers Some Lessons to a Region Embroiled in Protest,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2011.

Nevertheless, this concern should not be disregarded completely. Eastern Libya has traditionally been the primary center of the country's Islamist opposition currents and where cells of young Islamist militants are located. It is also where scores of young Libyan men left to join the jihad in Iraq. Given that the regime is still struggling for survival and that Libya looks unlikely to return to any sort of normality soon, the issue of Islamism in a future Libyan scenario cannot be dismissed. A more sober and nuanced look at the various Islamist forces operating in the east, however, demonstrates that the picture is far less black and white than it first might appear.

The Militants

Libya's Islamist scene currently comprises a mixed group of actors. Given the Qadhafi regime's complete intolerance to any form of political activity outside of that sanctioned by the state, the country's Islamists have been in no position in recent years to organize themselves into structured movements or groups.⁴ The bulk of those associated with Islamic extremism in Libya are former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a movement that was established in the camps of Afghanistan in 1990 that sought to overthrow the "Pharaoh Qadhafi." The group was discovered by the regime in 1995 and was subsequently crushed, forcing those members who escaped capture to flee, turning the LIFG primarily into a movement in exile. In 2007, however, Qadhafi's son Saif al-Islam entered into a regime-supported dialogue with the leadership of the LIFG who were in prison in Tripoli. After protracted negotiations, the LIFG agreed to renounce violence, and in August 2009 they issued a set of revisions in which they declared that it was not legitimate to take up arms against the state. In return, they were freed from prison in a series of mass clemencies, the last of which occurred just two days before the current uprising and included some key figures such as the LIFG's first *amir*, Muftah Mabrouk al-Wadi as well as the brother of senior al-Qa`ida operative Abu Yahya al-Libi, Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad Qaid. Most

of these freed prisoners, who numbered more than 400, returned to their homes in the east.

This deradicalization initiative was in part a publicity stunt, aimed at bolstering Saif al-Islam's credibility in the West, as well as in eastern Libya. The prisoners, for example, were not simply released once they agreed to renounce violence, but instead the regime insisted the group issue a high-profile set of doctrinal revisions that were widely

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publicized in the region and beyond. The regime put enormous pressure on the prisoners to agree to the revisions. It brought the families of some LIFG members into the prison as a means of persuading them, and the government also used bribery, offering to provide their families with cars and other perks if they signed up to the revisions.⁵ Saif al-Islam made the most of the publicity opportunities after the releases, inviting foreign journalists to Libya to cover the issue and more importantly bringing Salafist shaykhs, such as Shaykh Salman al-Awda, to Libya where they, along with the LIFG leadership, publicly lauded the revisions. Despite the publicity aspect, it does appear that the majority of prisoners were convinced about the ideological shift

taken by the LIFG's leadership.⁶ Many had spent long harsh years in prison; having had time to mature, they came to the conclusion that violence was not the way forward. As such, the regime successfully neutralized what was left of the movement.

It is not yet clear whether these former LIFG prisoners are once again operating as a group on the side of the rebels. There is little evidence to suggest that this is the case. Some LIFG elements have, however, established their own new movement. Two days before the Libyan protests began, a group of former LIFG members based mainly in the United Kingdom announced that they had established the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change. The group, whose politburo remains in London, has made it abundantly clear that it wishes to participate in the political process and there is every possibility that it will do so once the situation inside the country develops. The degree to which this group has shifted its ideological agenda was demonstrated by a statement issued in February where it called for foreign intervention to help remove Qadhafi from power, despite the fact that it was "aware of the sensitivity of this call and the desire of our people not to see any foreign interference on Libyan soil."⁷ It is not yet clear whether the group has any following inside Libya itself. If it does, it is clear that those involved are seeking to assert themselves politically rather than militarily.

On an individual basis, it is a certainty that some former LIFG members are fighting with the rebels. One former LIFG fighter, Khalid al-Tagdi, was killed on March 2 in Brega while fighting against regime forces.⁸ Similarly, in mid-April, another senior LIFG military commander, Abdelmonem Mukhtar, known as Ourwa, was killed after he was ambushed by Qadhafi forces on the road between Ajdabiya and Brega. Mukhtar had been imprisoned in Iran until the end of 2010 and returned to Libya when the uprisings began where he was made

4 This is particularly true following the crackdowns at the end of the mid-1990s when the regime crushed an Islamist rebellion.

5 Personal interview, Libyan human rights activist, Tripoli, Libya, June 2010.

6 Personal interview, senior LIFG member released from prison, Tripoli, Libya, June 2010.

7 "Libya: Islamists Call on Air Force to Bomb Gaddafi," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 23, 2011.

8 Noman Benotman and James Brandon, "Briefing Paper: The Jihadist Threat in Libya," Quilliam Foundation, March 24, 2011.

commander of the 160-strong Omar al-Mukhtar rebel battalion.

Given the dearth of well-trained personnel and the amateur nature of the rebel forces, individuals with combat experience are clearly a precious asset to the opposition. These former LIFG elements are fighting alongside other rebels and have shown no indication to separate themselves or to try to claim the revolution as their own. As Anis Sharif, a member of the Libyan Islamic

“It is true that Libyans, predominantly from the east, have been willing to sacrifice themselves in Iraq. This should not be confused, however, with membership of or even support for the transnational aims and aspirations of al-Qa`ida.”

Movement for Change’s politburo, rightly observed, “it is the revolution of the Libyan people. It is not the revolution of political parties, or organisations, or Islamists or fundamentalists.”⁹ It seems that these former militants are aware that what they had dreamed of for so many years, namely rising up against the regime, was ultimately achieved by ordinary Libyans who, like their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, had no ideological affiliation.¹⁰

There is also the concern that released LIFG members could be planning to resume extremist militancy in the future. Certain elements within the Libyan security services who were largely hostile to the deradicalization initiative were anxious that some of those released would create trouble.¹¹

9 “Libyan Islamist to Al-Sharq al-Awsat: The Libyan People’s Revolution is not that of political parties or organisations or fundamentalists,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 21, 2011.

10 This was evidenced by the slogans of those demonstrating, which simply called for an end to the Qadhafi regime.

11 Personal interview, Libyan human rights activist,

In fact, according to sources in Tripoli, there were indications that a handful had resorted to their old ways following their release.¹² While the revision process was led by the LIFG, there were elements from other militant groups, such as the Islamic Martyrs Brigade, making it impossible to ascertain how many released militants truly believed in renouncing violence. Were they simply coerced into agreeing with the revisions to secure their release from prison? Moreover, as late as June 2010 there were still hardcore elements in the Abu Slim prison who rejected the revisions. The regime was still trying to convince them, using a carrot and stick approach and regularly bringing released LIFG leaders back into the prison, to continue the dialogue.¹³ It is not clear whether any of these individuals were freed in the regime’s final tranche of releases that it sanctioned just prior to the uprising in a desperate attempt to placate the east. It seems, however, that these more militant elements are not yet acting as any organized group and as such their influence remains limited for the time being.

Jihad in Iraq and Jihad in Libya

Many observers have correctly pointed to the fact that young Libyans have made up a disproportionately high number of recruits to the Iraqi jihad.¹⁴ It is true that Libyans, predominantly from the east, have been willing to sacrifice themselves in Iraq. This should not be confused, however, with membership of or even support for the transnational aims and aspirations of al-Qa`ida. Going to fight against an occupying force in a Muslim land is very different from supporting Bin Ladin’s global ambitions or even taking up arms against one’s own government. Even more “moderate” Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood are also explicit that fighting to defend a Muslim land when it is under attack from foreign forces is a religious duty. In fact, there is widespread feeling across the Arab world that fighting

Tripoli, Libya, June 2010.

12 Ibid.

13 Personal interview, senior LIFG member released from prison, Tripoli, Libya, June 2010.

14 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qaida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008)

against occupying troops in a Muslim country is a legitimate cause. It is for this reason that the Libyan state media always described the insurgency in Iraq as the “resistance” and regularly lauded U.S. military casualties. One cannot conclude that all the young men in Libya who fought in Iraq were motivated by al-Qa`ida or shared its desire to target the “far enemy.” Indeed, some may simply have ended up being recruited by al-Qa`ida once in Iraq.

It is also true that elements with links to al-Qa`ida may have helped facilitate networks sending young men to Iraq. The current rebel military coordinator in Derna, Abdelkarim al-Hasadi, for example, has openly admitted that he recruited 25 young men in Derna to join the Iraqi jihad, some of whom are now fighting on the front lines in Ajdabiya.¹⁵ Al-Hasadi, a history teacher, had fought in Afghanistan but was captured by U.S. forces in 2002 and handed over to Libya where he continued to be monitored by the security services. He was imprisoned twice, once following a shoot-out with the regime where he was detained from 2004-2007 and again in 2008 for 45 days for “conspiring to overthrow the regime.” Nevertheless, al-Hasadi, who was a senior member of the LIFG, maintains that he was always against the attacks of 9/11 and, like so many militants in Afghanistan at the time, rejected the attack. He declared, “I am with fighting people on the battlefield, not with killing civilians in any place.”¹⁶ This approach is entirely consistent with that taken by the LIFG.

In fact, it should be remembered that the LIFG always had a specifically nationalist agenda. Aside from a small rump group in the tribal areas of Pakistan led by Abu Laith al-Libi (who was killed in January 2008) that allied itself with al-Qa`ida when the rest of the group entered into dialogue with the regime, the LIFG was never comfortable with Bin Ladin’s more globalized agenda and always focused its efforts on toppling Qadhafi. During a series of meetings in April and May 2000, the LIFG asked Bin Ladin to stop using Afghanistan as a base from which to

15 “Noi ribelli, islamici e tolleranti,” *Il Sole 24 Ore*, March 22, 2011.

16 See www.al-watan.com/viewnews.aspx?d=20110321&cat-report2&pg=3.

launch attacks against the United States and tried to convince him that he should not violate the laws or policies of the Taliban, under whose protection they were all living, by launching attacks that risked bringing retribution.¹⁷ Despite assertions by Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2007 that the LIFG had joined al-Qa`ida's ranks, the group never joined Bin Ladin's organization, preferring to give loyalty to Mullah Omar of the Taliban.¹⁸ As former LIFG veteran Noman Benotman declared, "We refused right from the beginning to be absorbed into this group because that would make us lose our ability to move freely and independently in Libya."¹⁹ As such, the LIFG has always clung to its independence and nationalist agenda.

A Role for Al-Qa`ida?

Of course, there are likely to be individual militant elements or small groups of militants in Libya who are open to the terrorist ideology of al-Qa`ida. The regime was anxious about the presence of such elements. Sources

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in Tripoli argue that one reason why the Qadhafi regime was so keen to enter into dialogue with the LIFG was because it was becoming increasingly concerned about the younger generation in the east in particular, some of whom appeared to be adopting more militant ideas (although not necessarily those of al-Qa`ida).²⁰ While it was engaging in dialogue with the LIFG, the regime

continued to arrest and imprison young Libyans suspected of militancy.²¹

There have also been reports during the past few years of a handful of Libyans who have traveled to Algeria to train with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), although these reports are unconfirmed. AQIM has sought to capitalize on the situation in Libya. If websites purporting to be AQIM are to be believed, its leader Abu Mus`ab `Abd al-Wadud has called for jihad in Libya not only against Qadhafi, but also against the West, especially the United States “as the foreign military intervention is a new crusader war.”²² Yet at this stage in the battle such comments are clearly out of tune with the feeling inside Libya and are more likely to alienate rather than attract young Libyans, including those of a militant bent. Similarly, other jihadist elements have misread the situation and the degree to which Libyans of all persuasions are united in the fight against Qadhafi. One jihadist forum declared this month that Libyan jihadists should choose an *amir* and distinguish themselves from the “people of al-Jahiliya (pre-Islamic ignorance) and the worshippers of democracy” by fighting under a clear Islamic banner.²³ It advised them to “acquire and store weapons in safe places that are only known to people you trust and who are on the straight path. Never hand over your weapons to anyone from the People’s Committees or Military Committees or Civilians Committees (bodies set up by the opposition).”²⁴ Given the desperate situation of those on the front lines, such advice is likely unwelcome. So far, there has been no indication of any desire by Libyan Islamist militants to separate themselves from the other rebel forces, and they are subsumed in the greater struggle against the Qadhafi regime.

Future Challenges

It is difficult to predict whether more militant elements will assert themselves in Libya in the longer term. Much will depend on how the situation develops on the ground. This is particularly true in relation to the international community’s role. Islamist elements in Libya are uneasy about foreign military intervention although they seem to accept it, viewing it as a necessary

“It is difficult to predict whether more militant elements will assert themselves in Libya in the longer term. Much will depend on how the situation develops on the ground.”

evil. This would change, however, if foreign ground troops are deployed. The presence of foreign forces on Libyan soil would give those with a more militant agenda a focus, and they may try to turn their attention to fighting against a foreign presence. As Abdelkarim al-Hasadi declared, “We don’t want the West to come to us. We need weapons and to impose a no-fly zone so military forces will be balanced. If there are foreign forces on Libyan soil we will fight them before we will fight Qadhafi.”²⁵ Although the LIFG was explicit in the revisions that it was wrong to take up arms against the state, there was no condemnation of fighting jihad against a foreign invader on Muslim soil. A Western presence would likely create sufficient discontent among the population into which these elements could tap. Moreover, it would likely attract militants from other parts of the world who would see it as their duty to protect Libyans from “crusader forces.”

17 Camille Tawille, *Al-Qa`ida wa Akhawatia* (London: Saqi Books, 2007).

18 For details on this dispute, see Alison Pargeter, “LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:10 (2009).

19 Tawille.

20 Personal interview, Libyan human rights activist, Tripoli, Libya, June 2010.

21 Ibid.

22 For details, see www.benbadis.org/vb/showthread.php?s=b3cc5692c833943cc3c2fc3b634cb2f0&p=18976#post18976.

23 For details, see www.bahrainarabia.com/showthread.php?p=186585.

24 Ibid.

25 For details, see www.al-watan.com/viewnews.aspx?id=20110321&cat=report2&page=3.

Furthermore, if the current stalemate drags on, which looks increasingly likely, or if the transition process post-Qadhafi results in chaos, then it is possible that militant forces could try to organize and assert themselves in their own local areas. These forces would have a popular base of support given that they have some sympathy in the east. They will, however, be up against far more influential players such as tribal shaykhs who carry more weight, particularly in the east, which has remained far more tribal in nature than the west. The danger could be if certain tribes, feeling that they have not been properly compensated in the post-Qadhafi era, choose to ally themselves with militant elements, although this appears to be an unlikely prospect.

These militants would also have to compete with other Islamist players. Non-violent Salafist currents have been quietly growing in Libya, especially among the youth, as they have elsewhere in the region. It is likely that free from the restrictions of the Qadhafi regime, such currents will expand and flourish. In addition, there is another group that has emerged in the east that is likely to be far more significant than the jihadist elements. This group comprises a handful of Islamic scholars led by Dr. Ali al-Salabi, who was brought in by Saif al-Islam to negotiate the LIFG prisoner dialogue. Other members include Shaykh Salim Abdelsalam al-Sheikhi, who returned to Libya from the United Kingdom during the uprisings, and Shaykh Ismail Mohamed al-Kraetly as well as other members of the traditional religious establishment in Libya who have been getting bolder in their challenges to the regime in recent months. This group broadly follows the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, although the exact nature of its links to the movement is not clear.

While this group initially declared that supporting the Western military intervention was “tantamount to treason,” it has publicly given its support to the ITNC and its political vision for a civil state. It has, however, been overtly critical of the council in the Arab media and more importantly it has issued its own alternative political vision that is more explicit than that of the ITNC about the role of Islam in the state. The document, the National Charter

Project, declares, “People are the source of authority. The state’s religion is Islam and the principle of Islamic Sharia is the source of its legislation.”²⁶ Crucially, the document also calls for a decentralized Libya. While this group currently has a limited following, these scholars are already well respected and as such they have the potential to become a stronger force in the east in particular. The shaykhs’ more explicit call for a state based upon Islamic law is likely to go down well with some parts of the population.

Nevertheless, the power of these Islamist forces should not be exaggerated. Despite the conservative and religious nature of the east, the revolution is non-ideological in nature. While there may be some public sympathy for these Islamist figures, there appears to be limited public appetite for an Islamist alternative. As such, although militant groups may try to make their presence felt and may find space in which to operate, particularly if the international military intervention escalates, their role should not be overstated.

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Bahrain: Crushing a Challenge to the Royal Family

By Caryle Murphy

ON FEBRUARY 14, 2011, protestors in Bahrain marched in the streets with the goal of obtaining greater political freedoms. The protest movement came in the wake of similar demonstrations throughout the Middle East and North Africa, which brought down the governments in Tunisia and Egypt. In Bahrain, however, the ruling al-Khalifa family greeted the protesters with force. In mid-March, Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa called in Saudi troops, declared emergency law and launched a fierce crackdown on pro-reform protestors. With these steps, the “Falcons,” as royal family hardliners are known in Bahrain, are firmly in control.

Since the crackdown began, approximately 20 people have been killed and more than 400 arrested, including doctors, nurses and journalists.¹ Hundreds more, some of them teachers, have been fired from their jobs for supporting the protest movement.² The editor of the main opposition paper was removed, while the home of a female opposition figure was firebombed twice.³ Military trials, on which the press is forbidden to report, are underway or starting soon. The emergency law’s ban on public gatherings and imprisonment of many opposition leaders also means that party politics are moribund—a major change for a small island of around 570,000 citizens that had a remarkably diverse and vibrant political scene.

Besides Sunni religiously-oriented parties that supported the ruling al-Khalifa family, there was a wide range of opposition groups representing

1 “Bahrain: State of Fear Prevails With Arbitrary Detentions, Pre-Dawn Raids,” Human Rights Watch, April 7, 2011; “Two Shiite Activists Die in Bahraini Custody,” Agence France-Presse, April 10, 2011; Kristen Chick, “Amid Unrest Bahrain Companies Fire Hundreds of Shiites,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 7, 2011. Some of this information was also based on personal interviews with the fired editor and victim of firebombing, April 2011.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

26 For details, see www.libya-alyoum.com/news/index.php?id=21&textid=3654.

secular liberals, former communists, pro-democracy Islamists and revolutionaries seeking the monarchy's overthrow. Unfortunately, this political scene reflected Bahrain's sectarian divide. The al-Khalifa dynasty, which dominates all top government jobs and the island's finances, is Sunni, yet 60-70% of Bahrain's population is Shi'a.

In addition to their exclusion from the halls of power, the Shi'a complain of discrimination when seeking government jobs, particularly in the security forces. They deeply resent the government's long-time policy of recruiting foreign Sunnis—many of whom do not speak Arabic—to fill positions in the police and military. Often these foreign recruits are given citizenship to swell the Sunni portion of the population. As a result of these grievances, Shi'a Bahrainis have always been more politicized than their Sunni peers, and opposition parties are mostly Shi'a.⁴

For the United States, Bahrain has strategic importance far beyond its tiny size. It is home to the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a vital force ensuring that the Gulf's oil shipping lanes are not compromised. The fleet also reminds Iran that the United States is standing with its Arab Gulf allies. For Washington, any political crisis or long-term unrest in Bahrain that adversely impacts the fleet's operations would be a threat to U.S. interests in the region.

The Protests

Bahrain's youth-led protest movement began on February 14—four days after a similar movement forced Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak from power. The first rallies were in response to calls for demonstrations on Facebook. Some Bahrainis believe that the Facebook page, where initial demands had an Islamist flavor such as a ban on alcohol, was created by militant Islamist Bahrainis living outside the country. These demands later disappeared from the page after the daily protests began attracting huge crowds of people from across the political spectrum.⁵

4 Personal interview, Bahraini university professor, Manama, Bahrain, March 25, 2011.

5 Personal interview, Bahraini novelist Fareed Ramadan, Manama, Bahrain, March 25, 2011.

In the beginning, the protests had no visible leadership, although one of the first politicians to arrive on the scene was Abdul Wahab Hussain, the leader of the radical Shi'a Wafa' Islamic Society.⁶ Youth activists soon formed the "February 14 Youth Group" to provide some direction to the protesters, who were asking for a greater voice in the political system, the release of political prisoners and an end to discrimination

“For Saudi Arabia, Bahrain is a red line. It believes that concessions to the Shi'a opposition would put the island on the road to having a Shi'a-majority government.”

against the Shi'a. According to Jane Kinninmont, an expert on Bahrain at Chatham House, "February 14" was "a loose coalition of groups [with] different agendas and objectives."⁷ At one point, the protesters' central staging ground at Manama's Pearl Roundabout had about 35 different groups, some of them in tents, proselytizing to the crowds, according to one visitor to the site.⁸

The single largest political party in Bahrain, the moderate Wafaq Islamic National Society,⁹ had no role organizing

6 Ibid. The Wafa' Islamic Society is one of three radical Shi'a organizations that want to overturn the monarchy and refuse to participate in electoral politics. None of them are officially registered as "societies," the official term for political parties in Bahrain, and operate semi-clandestinely. In addition to Wafa', they include the Bahrain Freedom Movement, headed by London-based exile Said al-Shehabi, and the al-Haq Movement for Liberties and Democracy, led by Hasan Mushaima.

7 Personal interview, Jane Kinninmont, April 7, 2011.

8 Personal interview, Abdulnabi Salman, Manama, Bahrain, March 27, 2011.

9 Formed in 2001 and led by Shaykh Ali Salman, Wafaq is the most popular party among the Shi'a underclass. Mainstream and moderate, it would like to see Bahrain become a genuine constitutional monarchy, rather than the "pretend" one it is now. After initially rejecting electoral politics because it views the current system as unfair, Wafaq participated in the 2006 elections. In the last election of 2010, it became the largest parliamentary bloc, winning 18 of the lower house's 40 seats. Wafaq works closely with several smaller opposition parties. Among

the first protests, but obviously wanted to take advantage of the enthusiasm they were generating, especially after government security forces stormed sleeping protesters in Pearl Roundabout on February 17, leaving four dead. This action only increased the number of demonstrators. Protesting the night-time raid and deaths (three other protesters were killed in separate incidents), Wafaq's 18 delegates quit parliament.¹⁰ The government then withdrew its forces, allowing the protesters to reoccupy Pearl Roundabout. Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, regarded as head of the ruling family's tiny, dovish faction known to Bahrainis as "Pigeons," offered dialogue with the opposition.¹¹

Wafaq responded ambivalently to the offer. Although willing to dialogue, it was mindful that, given street anger about the seven deaths, radical Shi'a parties would batter Wafaq's image if it agreed to talk before it received significant concessions.¹² In alliance with other smaller parties, Wafaq set tough conditions for a dialogue: an elected constituent assembly should write a new constitution and the long-time prime minister should resign.¹³

Meanwhile, as part of its new conciliatory approach, the government pardoned the leader of the more radical al-Haq Movement,¹⁴ Hasan Mushaima,

the most notable are Wa'ad (National Democratic Action Society), a party of mainly middle-class, secular liberal professionals, who are both Sunni and Shi'a; the party is led by Ibrahim Sharif, a Sunni Muslim. Another Wafaq partner is the Democratic Progressive Tribune, comprised mainly of former communists and trade unionists. For details, see the following article, which relied on U.S. Embassy cables published by Wikileaks: *Guardian*, February 15, 2011.

10 "Major Shia Party Withdraws from Bahrain Government," *Irish Times*, February 18, 2011.

11 "Bahrain's Crown Prince Calls for 'Dialogue' After Bloody Protests," *USA Today*, February 18, 2011.

12 Personal interview, Abdulnabi Salman, Manama, Bahrain, March 26, 2011.

13 These were the demands of the radical al-Haq Movement for years. For details, see *Guardian*, February 15, 2011.

14 The al-Haq Movement for Liberties and Democracy is the largest and most influential of the three radical Shi'a organizations that want to overturn the monarchy and refuse to participate in electoral politics. Its leader Hasan Mushaima broke away from Wafaq, which he helped found, in 2005. Al-Haq has demanded a new constitu-

opening the way for his return from exile to Bahrain where he was acclaimed in Pearl Roundabout on February 26.¹⁵

On March 8, the three hard line Shi`a groups announced they had formed the “Coalition for a Bahraini Republic” to oust the monarchy and, as al-Haq leader Mushaima told reporters, establish “a democratic republican system.”¹⁶ This marked a turning point in the protest movement because it raised Sunni fears to new heights. Since the government had long maintained that al-Haq has ties to Iran, most Bahraini Sunnis believed that Mushaima was advocating an Islamic republic.¹⁷ The radical parties also encouraged the youth camped out at Pearl Roundabout not to dialogue with the government, and organized provocative street actions, including a march on a royal palace. Wafaq and moderate allied parties denounced that march, fearing it would incite government retaliation. Some in the “February 14” youth group urged protesters not to join the march; another faction allied to the radical Shi`a parties told reporters they supported it.¹⁸

The government’s patience finally cracked on March 13 when, in a pre-dawn move, protesting youths erected barricades on the access road into Manama’s financial district. One source said that the barricades were deployed by 350 men organized by Wafa’ party

tion written by an elected assembly and the resignation of Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, who is widely seen as head of the “Falcons,” and has been in his job for 40 years. In 2008, U.S. officials reported that many Bahrainis believed that al-Haq was responsible for “inspiring many of the small gangs of Shi`a youth who throw stones and Molotov cocktails at police almost every weekend.” In 2010, Mushaima, who was then living in Britain, was among 25 people charged with belonging to a terrorist network. Although al-Haq has fewer supporters than Wafaq, its followers are generally considered more vocal and more active on the street. Much of this information is based on personal interview, Bahraini university professor, Manama, Bahrain, March 24, 2011. Also see *Guardian*, February 15, 2011.

15 “Bahrain’s Protesters Struggle to Define Goals,” Associated Press, March 2, 2011.

16 “Hardline Shi’ite Groups Demand Republic in Bahrain,” Reuters, March 8, 2011.

17 Personal interview, university professor, Manama, Bahrain, March 24, 2011.

18 “Bahrain’s Youth Movement Not to Join March,” Reuters, March 10, 2011.

leader Abdul Wahab Hussain.¹⁹ This was a direct challenge to the government’s burnished self-image as a safe business and investment hub for the Gulf. Nevertheless, the crown prince made a last ditch effort to draw Wafaq and other opposition groups into dialogue without pre-conditions on March 13. He listed seven topics for discussion, including the naturalization of foreigners, and agreed to put any agreement to a referendum.²⁰

The game, however, was already over. His father, the king, was on the phone with Saudi Arabia, asking Riyadh for a demonstration of support for Bahrain’s ruling family. The Saudi government was eager to oblige, and 1,200 members of the Saudi National Guard crossed the causeway the next day on March 14, along with 500 policemen from the United Arab Emirates—a force described in Bahraini and Saudi media as sent by the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Emergency law was declared on March 15, and Bahraini security forces raided Pearl Roundabout the next day.

Riyadh and Tehran Compete for Influence in Bahrain

As has been its practice for years, the Bahraini government accused Iran and the Lebanese movement Hizb Allah of fomenting the country’s unrest and having ties to militant Shi`a parties in Bahrain. King Hamad clearly had Iran in mind when he told Saudi and Bahraini military officers on March 20 that “an external plot has been fomented for 20 to 30 years until the ground was ripe for subversive designs.”²¹ He added, “I here announce the failure of the fomented subversive plot.”²²

Yet journalists covering the protests and experts on Bahrain did not see evidence of Iranian instigation. Asked if he had seen Iranian or Hizb Allah involvement with the Shi`a opposition, Christopher M. Davidson, a scholar of the Gulf at Durham University, wrote, “None

19 Personal interview, Bahraini journalist, Manama, Bahrain, March 23, 2011.

20 The other topics were: a parliament with full powers; a representative government; fair constituencies; combating financial and administrative corruption; public properties; and addressing sectarian tensions.

21 “HM Visits Peninsula Shield Command,” Bahrain News Agency, March 20, 2011.

22 Ibid.

whatsoever. Lots of fake reports and planted stories in GCC state-controlled media, but nothing of substance.”²³

Although a minority of Bahraini Shi`a have Iranian ancestry, most are of Arab descent. They look not to Persian Iran, but to Arab Iraq for religious leadership, particularly to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf.²⁴ That did not stop Iran, which sees itself as leader of the world’s Shi`a, from using the Bahraini government crackdown and Saudi troop arrival in its propaganda war against Sunni regimes, portraying these events as evidence of Sunni perfidy against Shi`a. Although the Saudis were camped for the most part on Bahraini military bases and rarely interacted with the public, the Iranian press carried exaggerated reports of alleged crimes by Saudi troops against civilians. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on Riyadh to withdraw its forces, adding that “the Saudis did an ugly thing to deploy troops” and “the Bahraini government also did an ugly work to kill its own people.”²⁵ A day later, 200 Iranian parliamentarians condemned the “frightening crimes” of “un-Islamic” Saudi troops in Bahrain. Iran’s hypocrisy, given the brutal suppression of its own anti-government protesters, was not lost on the Gulf’s Sunni Muslim leaders.²⁶ The GCC, incited as well by Kuwait’s discovery of what it called an Iranian spy ring, expressed deep concern “over the continuing Iranian intervention in the internal matters of GCC countries by conspiring against their national security.”²⁷

Elsewhere in the Arab world, Shi`a nerves were set on edge. In Shi`a-majority Iraq, marches were organized in support of Shi`a in Bahrain, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki warned that the Saudi and Emirati “intervention” raised sectarian tensions. “It has become a Shiite-

23 Personal correspondence, Christopher M. Davidson, April 7, 2011.

24 Personal interview, Bahraini novelist Fareed Ramadan, Manama, Bahrain, March 25, 2011. Also see Laurence Louër, “The Limits of Iranian Influence Among Gulf Shi`a,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:5 (2009).

25 “Iran Wants Saudi Troops Out of Bahrain,” Associated Press, April 5, 2011.

26 “Iran MPs Condemn Saudi ‘Crimes’ in Bahrain,” Agence France-Presse, April 6, 2011.

27 “Iran Wants Saudi Troops Out of Bahrain.”

Sunni issue with the entrance of forces from Sunni Arab countries,” al-Maliki said. “This has become like a Sunni mobilisation against the Shiites,” which “may have a snowball effect,” he added. “The region could be drawn into a sectarian war.”²⁸

For Saudi Arabia, Bahrain is a red line. It believes that concessions to the Shi`a opposition would put the island on the road to having a Shi`a-majority government. From the Saudi perspective, not only would that open the door to Iranian influence in Bahrain as it has done in Iraq, but it also might embolden the kingdom’s Shi`a minority to more aggressively seek redress for its grievances. For several weeks, Shi`a youth in the Saudi town of Qatif and surrounding villages held brief, peaceful marches every Friday demanding that Saudi troops withdraw from Bahrain.

Unfortunately for Bahrain, it has become prime turf in the increasingly razor-sharp competition between Riyadh and Tehran, as well as between Sunni and Shi`a in the wider Arab world. “This is what we are trying to prevent,” said Wafaq party leader Shaykh Salman. “And this is one main reason for rejecting the engagement of the Saudi troops—so there will be no excuse for Iran or others to engage in this situation because we are against any interference, especially military, in Bahrain by any regional powers.”²⁹ Yet given the Riyadh-Tehran rivalry, Saudi troops are unlikely to depart soon. As Bahrain’s defense force chief of staff said, they “will remain in Bahrain as long as there is a constant external threat against the security and stability of the Arabian GCC member states.”³⁰

More significant for the people of Bahrain will be the repercussions of the government’s harsh and unrelenting repression of its Shi`a majority. “With the window on dialogue now closed and no support from the international community, the opposition will become increasingly militant and a campaign

of civil disobedience will intensify, possibly backed by some guerilla warfare,” wrote Davidson. This will not be good news for Wafaq. “As violence spreads, Wafaq’s support may decline as increasing numbers of young men turn to more militant groups and parties, including al-Wafa, that are seen as offering a more concrete solution,” Davidson predicted.³¹

Indeed, during a recent interview at Wafaq’s headquarters in Manama, Shaykh Salman called for an outside party to mediate between the government and the opposition to get past what he called the “very deep distrust between government and people.” Despite the crackdown, he added, the party is striving to stick to its peaceful policies and “prevent confrontation of our people with security people.” Yet “as the crisis is sustained,” he said, “doors open that nobody can control.”³²

For now, the long-term outlook seems bleak in Bahrain. The government has shut down the moderate Wa`ad Party and is threatening to take legal action against, and possibly ban, Wafaq. This would leave the government with virtually no credible interlocutor in opposition ranks. While the current crackdown has brought quiet to Bahrain’s streets and given the government a greater sense of security, without popular support from the majority of its people, that security may ultimately prove ephemeral.

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JI Operative Umar Patek Arrested in Pakistan

By Zachary Abuza

ON JANUARY 25, 2011, Pakistani authorities arrested Umar Patek, a senior member of the Indonesia-based terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Patek has been the target of an international manhunt for nearly 10 years and carried a \$1 million bounty for his role in the October 2002 Bali bombings that left 202 people dead.¹ He was wounded in a firefight before his capture in a town north of Rawalpindi.

His arrest in Pakistan should shed light on the state of JI and provide insights into the group’s future orientation, strategy and tactics, as well as offer further clues about the relationship between Southeast Asian and South Asian terrorist organizations.

Profile of Umar Patek

Umar Patek, who also went by the aliases Umar Arab and Umar Kecil, is like many senior JI leaders, a Javanese of Yemeni-extraction. He was born in Central Java in 1970. Patek, along with Dulmatin (also known as Joko Pitoyo), trained in al-Qa`ida camps in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s before returning to Indonesia. In addition to being close friends, they were brothers-in-law as Dulmatin married Patek’s sister. According to Nasir bin Abbas, the former head of JI’s Mantiqi III region, Umar Patek was dispatched to Mindanao in 1995 to succeed him in running JI’s training with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).² By 1998, a full-scale training facility for JI members, known as Camp Hudaibiyah, had opened.

Patek is thought to have returned to Indonesia around 1999-2000 following the fall of President Suharto when many JI leaders, including Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar, returned from exile. It is not known the degree of Patek’s involvement in the sectarian conflicts that erupted in 1998-2001. Patek and Dulmatin were the deputy

28 “Iraq: Bahrain Tensions Could Ignite Sectarian War,” Agence France-Presse, March 26, 2011.

29 Personal interview, Shaykh Ali Salman, Manama, Bahrain, March 25, 2011.

30 BDF Chief of Staff Shaykh Daij bin Salman al-Khalifa, interview with Muqbil al-Saeri, *Asharq al-Awsat*, April 6, 2011.

31 Personal correspondence, Christopher M. Davidson, April 7, 2011.

32 Personal interview, Shaykh Ali Salman, Manama, Bahrain, March 25, 2011.

1 “Pakistan Nabs Bali Bombing Mastermind,” *Daily Times*, March 31, 2011.

2 “Interrogation of Mohammad Nasir bin Abbas,” Indonesian National Police, April 18, 2003.

field commanders for the 2002 Bali bombing, and played key roles in the planning of the operation and the actual construction of the bombs.

He and his compatriot Dulmatin fled to the southern Philippines in early 2003 following the Bali bombing.³ According to Dulmatin's wife, they were given sanctuary with the MILF until sometime in 2004 when their presence

“His capture is also a blow for JI in that there are few first generation leaders still at large.”

jeopardized the MILF's peace talks with the government.⁴ The two were forced out of the MILF's territory and sought refuge with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu in early 2005, where they remained until sometime in 2008-2009.⁵ In the Philippines, the two were implicated in a string of bombings.

Despite their physical isolation, Patek maintained active communications in 2003-2005 with Abdullah Sunata, a leader of a Central Javanese cell and a former head of the Ambon branch of the JI-linked civil society organization KOMPAK. On Patek's orders, Sunata dispatched Indonesian militants to Mindanao for training.⁶ Indonesian counterterrorism officials broke up Sunata's cell in June and July 2005, arresting 17 people in total. Sunata admitted that he “was tasked by Patek to solicit funds for terror attacks in the Philippines and recruit suicide bombers in Indonesia to be sent to central Mindanao.”⁷ Through Sunata's cell, Patek had a limited role in organizing the September 9, 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta.

3 Eva C. Komandjaja, “Police Search for Two JI Members in Philippines,” *Jakarta Post*, August 16, 2005.

4 “Interrogation of Istiada Bte Oemar Sovie,” Philippine National Police, November 7-9, 2006.

5 Ibid.

6 A three-man cell was arrested in the Philippines in December 2004 and a two-man cell was arrested in Malaysia in June 2005. For details, see Associated Press, September 9, 2005.

7 Ibid.

Yet JI was hobbled by the arrests of some 450 of its members and deep divisions in the organization over tactics. The year 2006 marked the first time since 2002 that JI could not launch any attacks. One group under the leadership of Noordin Mohamed Top rebranded themselves as al-Qa`ida in the Malay Archipelago (AQMA) and tried to perpetrate attacks against Western targets in 2007-2008.⁸ Another wing—what is often referred to as “mainstream JI”—under the leadership of Abu Rusdan believed that attacking Western venues and soft targets had been counterproductive and resulted in mass arrests, and thus articulated a strategy based on sectarian attacks in Indonesia's outer islands, Sulawesi and the Maluku in particular, creating pure Islamist communities and emanating outward. The problem was that Noordin was killed in September 2009, while Abu Rusdan was never able to rekindle large-scale sectarian conflicts.

At some point in the 2008-2009 period, Dulmatin slipped back into Indonesia.⁹ In part, it was to fill a leadership void, but more importantly it was to reorient the group's tactics and to re-unify the two wings. Umar Patek followed soon afterwards in early 2010.¹⁰ Clearly, the leaders of the camp were out to discredit Abu Rusdan and released a vicious online video attack about his lack of leadership.¹¹

In February 2010, elite counterterrorism police raided a training camp in a remote region of Aceh. The camp was run by al-Qa`ida in Aceh under the leadership of Abdullah Sunata and Dulmatin, who sought to train members for Mumbai-style paramilitary attacks rather than occasional bombings of public venues. The raid on the camp and follow-up operations led to the arrests of more than 100 individuals and the killings of 13 more, including Dulmatin in Jakarta in March 2010.

8 Niniek Karmini and Chris Brummitt, “Indonesian Militants Recruit Fighters in Video,” Associated Press, March 16, 2010.

9 Sara Schonhardt, “Indonesia Says Killed Leading Militant Dulmatin,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2010.

10 “Police Detect Terrorist Suspects Umar Patek, Heru Kuncoro,” *Jakarta Post*, March 27, 2010.

11 Karmini and Brummitt.

At some point, Umar Patek left Indonesia with a real passport in someone else's name and traveled to Pakistan via Thailand.¹² It has not been revealed whether it was before or after the February 2010 raid, but he most likely fled as a result of the Indonesian police's follow-up operations.

The Implications of Patek's Arrest

It is premature to analyze what Patek's arrest will mean for JI, but it is clearly another setback for the terrorist group. Indonesian interrogators, who still have not met with Patek, are most concerned with any attacks that are still in the planning stages. Yet there is a low likelihood of any imminent attacks by JI. Its last major terrorist attack came in July 2009, with the twin suicide bombings of two five-star hotels in Jakarta. The raid on the Acehese training camp in February 2010 and the subsequent arrests clearly set the organization back. Nearly 120

“Until JI is able to regroup around a single figure with a clearly espoused strategy, low level attacks by small splinter groups and autonomous cells will become the norm.”

militants were arrested or killed in that counterterrorism operation. While the actual size of JI is unknown, it has never been a large organization operationally, although its support network is thought to be several thousand people. The neutralization of 120 individuals, as well as the arrest of Abu Bakar Bashir whose organization Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) was an important source of funding, was a devastating loss for the group as it was actively trying to rebuild.

While Pakistani authorities have not officially stated where or with whom he was arrested, local media reports have shed some light on these questions. Police found Patek after following a known al-Qa`ida operative, Tahir Shezad, to the

12 Bagus B. T. Saragih, “Umar Patek Allegedly Left via Jakarta, Bangkok: Police,” *Jakarta Post*, March 30, 2011.

town of Abbottabad, roughly 50 miles north of the administrative capital of Rawalpindi where Patek and his wife had been provided shelter.¹³ Shezad was arrested in late January with two French nationals, one of Moroccan descent, the other of Pakistani. The group was en route to North Waziristan Agency where they were seeking refuge and hoped to join with the Taliban.¹⁴

It is unclear whether Patek's motivations were simply to seek refuge in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), or whether he sought to set up a new training facility for JI, as attempts to train in Southeast Asia—in MILF camps and in remote camps in Indonesia—have not panned out. Moreover, beyond the need to regroup and train a new generation of militants, JI always wanted to be linked to the broader Salafi-jihadist movement, rather than being simply a parochial Indonesian organization. JI, in its various incarnations and re-brandings, has always turned outward to develop its own capabilities. If so, Patek is the natural person for this task as he has experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan and has been in charge of JI's training in the past.

His capture is also a blow for JI in that there are few first generation leaders still at large. The most important would be another Javanese of Yemeni descent, Zulkarnaen, but it is not even clear whether he is in Indonesia.

Indonesia sent a team to Pakistan to conduct forensic and DNA testing and to arrange Patek's extradition, although they still have been unable to interrogate him.¹⁵ While Pakistan has said that it would eventually return him to Indonesia, other Pakistani authorities announced their preliminary intention to indict and try him there first. There is no bilateral extradition treaty between the two countries, although Pakistan has rendered Indonesian citizens in the past. Indonesian authorities have expressed concern about the strength of the legal case against him. The

current Indonesian anti-terrorism law was enacted in 2003, following the Bali bombing, and cannot be applied retroactively. Indonesian commentators are already sounding the alarm over a long drawn-out legal case against him.¹⁶ Pakistan has made it clear that it would rather not turn Patek over to the Central Intelligence Agency, part of the broader fallout between the ISI and their American counterpart following the incarceration of a CIA contractor.

Until JI is able to regroup around a single figure with a clearly espoused strategy, low level attacks by small splinter groups and autonomous cells will become the norm. While this is good for Indonesian security in that it is unlikely that any of these groups will have the capabilities or resources to perpetrate large-scale attacks, it also means that they will continue undetected for longer. This may already be occurring. In March 2011, four letter bombs were sent to legislators, NGO activists and a musician who were outspoken in their defense of Indonesia's secular traditions and constitutional framework.¹⁷ On April 21, Indonesian police defused a large, 150-kilogram bomb that was placed near a gas line in front of a church in Jakarta; 20 people were quickly arrested.

As seen with these latest attacks, terrorism in the near future will likely be perpetrated by smaller, more diffuse groups, without any real centralized command and control.

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The Implications of Colonel Imam's Murder in Pakistan

By Rahimullah Yusufzai

ON FEBRUARY 19, 2011, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) released a videotaped execution of Colonel Imam, a retired Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operative.¹ Colonel Imam, whose real name was Sultan Amir Tarar, wielded significant influence over Islamist fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. He trained large numbers of Afghan fighters battling Soviet forces, and befriended scores of mujahidin leaders and commanders, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmad Shah Massoud and Maulvi Jalaluddin Haqqani, as well as the founder of the Afghan Taliban movement, Mullah Omar. During the 1980s, Colonel Imam escorted several U.S. and Western leaders—including the then-deputy director of the CIA, Robert Gates, and Congressman Charlie Wilson—during their visits to the Afghan mujahidin. Yet despite his legendary status in Pakistan, Colonel Imam was shot in the face by a Taliban gunman as TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud supervised the execution.

The kidnapping and subsequent murder of Colonel Imam is indication of the generational gap among Islamist militants in South Asia. In the previous decade, Colonel Imam would have been welcomed and honored by Islamist militants in the border region. Today, however, TTP militants considered him an enemy, and saw his status merely as a tool to bargain for a ransom and the release of imprisoned TTP fighters.

This article identifies the sequence of events that led to the murder of Colonel Imam, while also explaining what his death reveals about the evolution of the TTP.

¹³ "Militant's Road Ends in Pakistan," *Dawn*, April 15, 2011.

¹⁴ "French Pair Seized by Pakistan Police on Bali Trail," *Dawn*, April 15, 2011.

¹⁵ "Intelligence Agency Yet to Meet Umar Patek in Pakistan," *Jakarta Post*, April 14, 2011.

¹⁶ "Editorial: Agonizing Over Umar Patek," *Jakarta Post*, April 8, 2011.

¹⁷ "Bomb Explodes in Indonesia, No Injuries Reported," *Deutsche Press Agency*, March 18, 2011.

¹ "Taliban Release Video of Killing of Col Imam," *Express Tribune*, February 19, 2011; "Pakistani Taliban Claim Shooting Colonel Imam Dead," *Associated Press*, February 19, 2011.

The Kidnapping

In March 2010, Colonel Imam, former ISI operative Khalid Khwaja, British documentary maker Asad Qureshi, and their local driver Rustam Khan were kidnapped in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).² Colonel Imam and Khwaja accompanied Qureshi to help the filmmaker create a documentary on the impact of drone strikes on civilians. The two former ISI operatives hoped to use their old contacts and goodwill in the region to gain access to North Waziristan, the stronghold of local and foreign militants.³ Their decision to travel to North Waziristan seems ill-advised, as both former operatives had publicly criticized the Pakistani Taliban in media statements—claiming that the Pakistani Taliban were working as part of a foreign agenda to destabilize Pakistan. Indeed, after the kidnapping,

“The kidnapping and subsequent murder of Colonel Imam is indication of the generational gap among Islamist militants in South Asia.”

one of the kidnappers defended the action by saying that Colonel Imam and Khwaja had called the Pakistani Taliban terrorists: “It is wrong of them to describe us as terrorists. We too are fighting jihad.”⁴

Others, however, argued that Colonel Imam and Khwaja went to North Waziristan on a peace mission to reconcile the militants with Pakistan’s security establishment.⁵ These analysts reported that the former ISI operatives were trying to alert the TTP leadership about the presence of pro-India elements in their ranks and wanted to open a line of communication between

the Taliban and the United States. None of these assertions can be confirmed, and the dominant view, which is shared by this author, is that the former ISI operatives were in the region to assist in the documentary, and that they miscalculated their standing among the militants.⁶ They also likely thought that their plans to make a documentary on drone strikes with the help of Pakistan-born, British journalist Asad Qureshi would endear them to the militants, who have been arguing that the missiles kill a disproportionate number of civilians.

Regardless of their true intentions, the mission did not go according to plan. A previously unknown group called the Asian Tigers took credit for the kidnappings, but it later became clear that the group’s name was simply an alias to conceal the cell members’ identities. It eventually emerged that the Punjabi Taliban—jihadists who left Kashmir-focused militant groups and joined the TTP—were involved in the kidnapping operation. Usman Punjabi, or Mohammad Omar as he identified himself when contacting the media, became the link between the militants holding the four men and the outside world.⁷ Usman Punjabi was also reportedly the man who invited the unsuspecting former ISI operatives to North Waziristan. The group actually holding the four men was led by Abdullah Mansoor, who had split from the anti-Shi’a militant group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and aligned with the splinter faction, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi al-Alami.⁸

Khalid Khwaja was the first to be executed. On April 30, 2010, a month after the kidnapping, his body was found dumped in a stream in Karamkot village near Mir Ali in North Waziristan. A note was attached to his body, stating that Khwaja was an agent of the ISI and CIA.⁹ After the killing of Khwaja, the militants received a hefty ransom for the release of Asad Qureshi and

his driver, Rustam Khan. The “Asian Tigers” initially demanded \$10 million for Qureshi’s release, although the ransom amount was reportedly less than that.¹⁰

With Khwaja dead and Qureshi and his driver released, differences emerged among the militants—who were still holding Colonel Imam. The differences led to violence when another militant leader, Sabir Mehsud, killed Usman Punjabi and five of his men. Although

“The execution may have placed a wedge between the TTP and other Islamist militants, particularly the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network.”

it is likely that TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud was aware of the kidnapping operation, Usman’s murder angered Hakimullah, who sent his men to kidnap and execute Sabir Mehsud and members of his militia, taking custody of Colonel Imam.¹¹ Hakimullah appeared to have intervened once the situation deteriorated after the two militant leaders, who were partners, turned on each other over disputes.

Once Hakimullah gained custody of Colonel Imam, it became clear that conditions for his release only became more stringent. Hakimullah wanted the release of a number of his men from Pakistani jails, in addition to the payment of a massive ransom. Although the demands were never made public, the media reported that the TTP demanded Rs 50 million (\$590,000) and the release of an unidentified number of jailed militants.¹²

2 “Former ISI Operatives Kidnapped in North Waziristan,” *The Nation*, March 27, 2010; Syed Saleem Shahzad, “Colonel Imam Abducted in North Waziristan,” *Asia Times Online*, April 28, 2010.

3 Personal interview, Khalid Khwaja, March 2010.

4 Personal interview, Usman Punjabi, Winter 2010.

5 Hamid Mir, “What Was the Last Mission of Khalid Khwaja?” *The News International*, May 2, 2010; Shahzad.

6 Asad Munir, “The Death of Colonel Imam,” *Express Tribune*, January 26, 2011; Rahimullah Yusufzai, “The Kidnapped,” *The News International*, April 27, 2010.

7 Personal interview, Usman Punjabi, Winter 2010; Shahzad; Amir Mir, “Kashmiri Behind Khwaja’s Murder,” *The News International*, May 1, 2010.

8 Amir Mir, “Imam was Killed Last Month for Spying,” *The News International*, February 21, 2011.

9 Zahir Shah, “Hakimullah in TTP Video of Colonel Imam’s Killing,” *Dawn*, February 19, 2011.

10 Mir; “Col Imam is Still in Taliban Custody,” *Express Tribune*, February 15, 2011.

11 Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Kidnapped Ex-ISI Official, British Journalist Likely to be Released Soon,” *The News International*, May 7, 2010.

12 “Taliban Release Video of Killing of Col Imam,” *Express Tribune*, February 19, 2011.

Colonel Imam's family tried to pool money to pay the ransom. At one point, hopes for a deal emerged.¹³ For that reason, his execution was sudden and shocking for all those trying to negotiate; the talks with the TTP had not yet broken down at the time of the execution. Even Afghan Taliban commander Sirajuddin Haqqani, other Afghan mujahidin leaders as well as Pakistani religious scholars failed to convince Hakimullah to release the former ISI operative.¹⁴ In the filmed execution, which appears to have occurred in late January, Hakimullah is clearly visible, supervising the murder. Hakimullah's presence in the video also dispelled rumors of his own death.¹⁵

In the videotape, Hakimullah accused Colonel Imam of a litany of offenses. Hakimullah appeared convinced that Colonel Imam had specifically traveled to North Waziristan to spy on the TTP and provide intelligence for Pakistan Army strikes as well as U.S. drone attacks. In the eyes of Hakimullah and the TTP, both Khalid Khwaja and Colonel Imam were spies, and their punishment was death. Their role as spies does not seem likely, as both retired military officers were critical of Pakistan's alliance with the United States and unhappy at Islamabad's decision to break with the Afghan Taliban after 9/11. Additionally, if they truly were spies, one would suspect that the military would have made more of an effort to save them. The TTP also seemed to have miscalculated the importance of the two former ISI operatives, and as a result drafted demands that Pakistan's government and military were unwilling to meet.¹⁶

Implications

The killings of Khalid Khwaja and Colonel Imam reveal the evolution of jihadist groups in Pakistan. While in the past these groups had ties to the Pakistani state, the government and security apparatus have lost control over many of the Islamist fighters operating in the border region. Pakistani Taliban militants remain committed

to attacking government interests, and Islamabad is still struggling to respond.

Nevertheless, there has been some fallout for the overall Taliban movement in the wake of Colonel Imam's death. The execution may have placed a wedge between the TTP and other Islamist militants, particularly the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. Jihadist leaders who used to operate with Colonel Imam during the anti-Soviet jihad were clearly unhappy with the TTP and Hakimullah Mehsud, privately criticizing him for executing the former ISI operative.¹⁷ In fact, some significant doubts have arisen about Hakimullah's agenda after the incident. Although the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network have refrained from publicly condemning Hakimullah for killing the former operative, they are unlikely to trust him in the future.

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Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

March 1, 2011 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida operative Ibrahim al-Rubaysh, a Saudi national and former detainee at Guantanamo Bay, released a 10-minute audio message offering his views on the fall of the Tunisian government in January 2011. Al-Rubaysh said that he was "happy" with the fall from power of Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, but he warned another "tyrant" would take his place if Tunisians do not create a state based on Shari`a (Islamic law). Al-Rubaysh is believed to be based in Yemen. – *ABC News, March 1*

March 1, 2011 (UNITED STATES): U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt "are an extraordinary setback for al Qaeda." The revolutions show "the lie to al Qaeda's claims that the only way to get rid of authoritarian governments is through extremist violence," Gates said. According to CBS News, "Gates said that the revolutions were also 'a major setback for Iran' because the restraint of the Egyptian and other militaries 'contrasts vividly' with Iran's typically violent response to anti-government protests." – *CBS News, March 1*

March 1, 2011 (YEMEN): Prominent Yemeni cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani joined protestors in Yemen calling for the removal of President Ali Abdullah Salih. Al-Zindani, a radical cleric who was once a mentor to Usama bin Ladin, told demonstrators that "an Islamic state is coming [to Yemen]." He said that Salih "came to power by force, and stayed in power by force, and the only way to get rid of him is through the force of the people." – *New York Times, March 1*

March 1, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban militants killed four local tribesmen in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The militants accused the tribesmen of spying for the United States. – *AFP, March 1*

¹³ Yusufzai, "Kidnapped Ex-ISI Official, British Journalist Likely to be Released Soon."

¹⁴ This information is based on the author's confidential sources.

¹⁵ Shah.

¹⁶ Munir.

¹⁷ Although Taliban leaders will not go on the record criticizing Hakimullah Mehsud, many prominent Taliban leaders told this author that the TTP is hurting their cause. They argue that Pakistani citizens are less likely to support the mujahidin due to the brutality of the TTP.

March 1, 2011 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine authorities arrested a suspected Abu Sayyaf Group member who was involved in the kidnapping of ABS-CBN reporter Ces Drilon. The suspect, Sali Said, was apprehended in Sulu Province. – *ABS-CBN, March 2*

March 2, 2011 (GERMANY): A gunman opened fire on U.S. airmen in Frankfurt, killing two American soldiers. The suspect, Arid Uka, is a Muslim, Kosovo Albanian. As reported by CBS News and the Associated Press, “Uka, a devout Muslim nicknamed Abu Reyann, reportedly yelled ‘God is great’ in Arabic as he boarded and opened fire on a bus loaded with U.S. airmen Wednesday on their way from their base in England to serve in Afghanistan.” – *CBS News, March 3*

March 2, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen assassinated the only Christian member of Pakistan’s cabinet, Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, in Islamabad. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, “Bhatti, a Roman Catholic, was an outspoken critic of Pakistan’s blasphemy law, which makes it a crime to utter any derogatory remarks or insult in any way the prophet Muhammad, the Koran or Islam.” – *Los Angeles Times, March 3*

March 3, 2011 (UNITED STATES): Two New Jersey men pleaded guilty to conspiring to link up with the al-Shabab terrorist group in Somalia. The men, Mohamed Hamoud Alessa and Carlos Eduardo Almonte, admitted that “they had engaged in combat simulation in New Jersey by using paintball guns and computer software,” according to the *New Jersey Star-Ledger*. “They also said they purchased hydration systems and tactical clothing and other equipment in preparation for joining the militant group.” The men, however, did not have actual contacts with anyone in Somalia and were infiltrated by an undercover U.S. law enforcement agent. – *Star-Ledger, March 4*

March 3, 2011 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber blew himself up in a bank in Haditha, Anbar Province, killing nine people. Three policemen were among the dead. – *AFP, March 3*

March 3, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded in Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing three police officers and four civilians. The bomb was targeted at a police vehicle. – *AP, March 3*

March 4, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A bomb destroyed two oil tankers near the Torkham border crossing in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The oil tankers were bound for NATO forces in neighboring Afghanistan. – *Dawn, March 4*

March 4, 2011 (GAZA STRIP): Hamas security forces arrested a commander of an al-Qa`ida-linked group in Gaza on February 28. The commander, Hesham al-Sa`eedni, is believed to be an Egyptian citizen and a member of the group Tawhid and Jihad. According to Reuters, “Hamas, which has in the past denied any al Qaeda presence in Gaza, has been trying to keep other Islamist groups in check following a devastating Israeli military offensive in 2009.” – *Reuters, March 4*

March 6, 2011 (YEMEN): Suspected al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) gunmen killed four Yemeni soldiers in Marib Province. The soldiers, members of the elite Republican Guard, were ambushed, and the militants managed to escape after the attack. – *Christian Science Monitor, March 6*

March 7, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told reporters that the United States is “well positioned” to begin withdrawing some U.S. troops from Afghanistan in July. He also said, however, that a substantial U.S. military force would remain in the country. “As I have said time and again, we are not leaving Afghanistan this summer,” Gates said. – *New York Times, March 7*

March 7, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): The U.S. military announced that 900 Taliban leaders have been captured or killed in the past 10 months in Afghanistan. – *USA Today, March 7*

March 8, 2011 (SCOTLAND): Police arrested Ezedden Khalid Ahmed al-Khaledi, a 30-year-old foreign national of Kuwaiti origin, in Glasgow on

suspicion of having links to Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, who blew himself up in Stockholm on December 11, 2010. Al-Khaledi was arrested in the Whiteinch area of Glasgow under the Terrorism Act. – *Sky News, March 8; Telegraph, March 8; The Local, March 11; Guardian, March 14*

March 8, 2011 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani Taliban detonated a car bomb at a fuel station in Faisalabad, Punjab Province, killing at least 24 people. The attack appeared to target the regional offices of Pakistan’s main intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate. The militants may have hoped to create an explosion large enough to destroy surrounding government buildings. – *Denver Post, March 8; Los Angeles Times, March 9; CNN, March 8*

March 9, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a funeral near Peshawar, killing at least 36 people. The funeral was for a relative of a pro-government, ethnic Pashtun tribal elder. The elder, Hakeem Khan, had raised a tribal militia (*Jashkar*) to fight the Taliban. It was not clear whether the elder was killed in the explosion. – *Reuters, March 9*

March 10, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle assassinated the police chief for Kunduz Province. Four other people were also killed in the attack. – *Daily Times, March 12*

March 11, 2011 (YEMEN): A Yemeni security official said that suspected gunmen from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula killed four Yemeni security personnel in Hadramawt Province. – *AFP, March 11*

March 12, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed four civilians in Kandahar Province. – *AFP, March 13*

March 12, 2011 (IRAQ): Militants ambushed and killed seven Iraqi soldiers in Mosul, Ninawa Province. According to the *New York Times*, “The soldiers, unarmed and wearing civilian clothes, were riding in a Kia minibus when two sedans pulled up and blocked their path. Four gunmen carrying automatic rifles jumped out

of the cars, opened fire and then sped off down a dirt road.” – *New York Times*, March 12

March 12, 2011 (SOMALIA): Burundi announced that it is sending 1,000 more troops to the African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia. – *Reuters*, March 12

March 13, 2011 (IRAQ): A sticky bomb attached to a car killed an off-duty policeman near Mosul, Ninawa Province. – *Reuters*, March 13

March 13, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. aerial drone fired missiles on a vehicle carrying militants near Wana in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The militants, however, reportedly escaped the strike. – *AFP*, March 12

March 13, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. aerial drone killed at least six suspected militants near Miran Shah in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Voice of America*, March 13

March 13, 2011 (SOMALIA): According to the *Washington Post*, “About 50 African Union peacekeepers based in Somalia have died in clashes with militants linked to al-Qaeda over the past two weeks, suggesting a dramatic escalation in the fight for the Somali capital of Mogadishu.” Analysts believe that the 8,000-member peacekeeping force is the main factor preventing the al-Shabab terrorist and insurgent group from defeating Somalia’s transitional government. – *Washington Post*, March 13

March 14, 2011 (GERMANY): German prosecutors formally charged Rami Makanesi with membership in a terrorist organization. Makanesi, a 25-year-old German-Syrian, was arrested by Pakistani security services in June 2010 and extradited to Germany in August 2010. Authorities allege that he trained and fought with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Prosecutors believe that Makanesi planned to return to Germany to raise money for al-Qaeda, as well as be available for other terrorist operations. – *AP*, March 14

March 14, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A Taliban suicide bomber dressed as an army recruit detonated explosives among a crowd of people outside an Afghan military recruiting center in Kunduz. At least 36 people, including five children, were killed by the explosion. – *New York Times*, March 14

March 14, 2011 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked an Iraqi Army base in Diyala Province, killing at least nine soldiers. – *BBC*, March 14

March 15, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb ripped through the office of a school headmaster on the outskirts of Jalalabad city in Nangarhar Province, killing the man. The Taliban denied responsibility. – *AFP*, March 15

March 17, 2011 (EGYPT): Egypt’s governing military council released Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the brother of al-Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri, from prison. Muhammad had been in prison for a decade on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the government. He was extradited to Egypt in 2000 from the United Arab Emirates. As stated by the *New York Times*, Muhammad al-Zawahiri “is the latest high-profile Islamist to be freed. Last Friday, the government released Abboud and Tareq al-Zomor, two Islamic Jihad leaders imprisoned in connection with the 1981 assassination of President Anwar el-Sadat.” On March 19, just two days later, authorities re-arrested Muhammad al-Zawahiri. – *New York Times*, March 17

March 17, 2011 (LIBYA): The United Nations Security Council agreed to establish a “no-fly zone” over Libya. – *New York Times*, March 17

March 18, 2011 (UNITED KINGDOM): A British judge sentenced Rajib Karim to 30 years in jail for plotting to kill hundreds of people by blowing up an airplane bound for the United States. Karim, a 31-year-old from Bangladesh, worked for British Airways and was in contact with Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-`Awlaqi. – *AP*, March 18

March 20, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Taliban commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur warned Pakistani authorities that if U.S. drone strikes in North Waziristan Agency did not come to a halt, he would end his peace deal with the government. – *Dawn*, March 20

March 21, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): A Taliban representative ordered cell phone companies in Helmand Province to turn off their networks “from tonight and until further notice.” According to Agence France-Presse, “He gave no reason for the move, but Taliban militants regularly demand that mobile phone companies switch off their networks, threatening to destroy antennae if they fail to comply. The insurgents fear that NATO-led forces can track them through phone signals and the order often comes at nightfall, when coalition operations against the Taliban are most common.” By March 23, all mobile telephone networks in Helmand were switched off. – *AFP*, March 21; *BBC*, March 23

March 21, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants killed four tribesmen after accusing them of spying for the United States in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Dawn*, March 21

March 21, 2011 (MALI): Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is demanding at least 90 million euros for the release of four French hostages held since September 2010. AQIM also reportedly wants a number of AQIM prisoners released, including some held in France. – *AFP*, March 21

March 22, 2011 (SPAIN): A Spanish court cleared Mohamed Omar Dehbi, a U.S. citizen of Algerian origin, of charges that he transferred funds to an al-Qaeda cell. The judge said that there was no evidence linking Dehbi to terrorism funding. – *Wall Street Journal*, March 22

March 22, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): German, French, British and U.S. diplomats cited evidence of Iran supplying rockets to the Taliban in Afghanistan. A British official said, “Detailed technical analysis together with the circumstances of the seizure leave us in no doubt that the

weaponry recovered [in Afghanistan] came from Iran, despite the fact that they were crudely doctored to make it look as though they originated in a country represented on this council.” - *Bloomberg, March 22*

March 23, 2011 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb wounded two policemen in Ramadi, Anbar Province. - *Reuters, March 23*

March 23, 2011 (IRAQ): A bomb attached to a car killed a driver working for the Iraqi Electricity Ministry in Baghdad's Hurriya district. - *Reuters, March 23*

March 23, 2011 (ISRAEL): A bomb exploded near two buses in Jerusalem, wounding at least 20 people. - *Haaretz, March 23*

March 23, 2011 (SYRIA): Syrian police shot and killed at least 15 anti-government protestors in Daraa. - *AP, March 23*

March 24, 2011 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. State Department designated Ibrahim Hassan Tali al-Asiri as a terrorist with links to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Al-Asiri has been identified as AQAP's chief bomb-maker, and he is suspected of creating the explosive device that Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to use on a U.S.-bound airliner in December 2009. - *Fox News, March 24*

March 25, 2011 (PAKISTAN): Militants attacked a convoy of vehicles carrying members of an anti-Taliban Shi`a tribe in Kurram Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing eight people. - *Reuters, March 25*

March 26, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters kidnapped 40 men, who may have been either police officers or police job applicants, in Kunar Province. - *New York Times, March 28*

March 26, 2011 (IRAQ): Gunmen using silencers killed a police colonel in Ramadi, Anbar Province. - *Reuters, March 27*

March 26, 2011 (IRAQ): Gunmen killed an off-duty Iraqi Army lieutenant near his home in Mosul, Ninawa Province. - *Reuters, March 26*

March 27, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): At least one Taliban suicide bomber killed more than 20 people at a road construction base in Paktika Province. - *New York Times, March 28*

March 28, 2011 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb wounded a police captain in Mosul, Ninawa Province. - *Reuters, March 29*

March 28, 2011 (IRAQ): Gunmen killed four people at a goldsmith shop in Baghdad. - *Reuters, March 28*

March 28, 2011 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb targeted Mohammed al-Shemari, one of Baghdad's deputy governors. He was not injured, although three civilians were wounded. - *Reuters, March 28*

March 29, 2011 (CANADA): Canadian authorities arrested Mohamed Hassan Hersi just before he was to board an airplane in Toronto bound for North Africa. Police allege that Hersi, a Canadian citizen, was headed to Somalia to join the terrorist group al-Shabab. - *Reuters, March 31*

March 29, 2011 (AFGHANISTAN): The Taliban took control of Waygal district in Nuristan Province. Afghan authorities “confirmed the police had fled their barracks and district government buildings in town of Waygal...leaving the Taliban in what he [police commander] said was temporary control of the district.” - *New York Times, March 30*

March 29, 2011 (IRAQ): Approximately eight militants attacked a local government building in Tikrit, Salah al-Din Province, killing 58 people. According to the BBC, “Gunmen wearing military uniforms over explosives belts blew up a car outside the council headquarters to create a diversion. Then they charged into the building and shot more than a dozen people, including three lawmakers who were killed by a single gunshot to the head. The standoff ended only when the attackers blew themselves up

in what was one of the bloodiest days in Iraq this year.” The whole incident lasted more than four hours. On April 2, the Islamic State of Iraq took credit for the operation. - *BBC, March 30; AFP, March 30; Reuters, April 2*

March 29, 2011 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb targeted a police patrol in the northwestern Baghdad district of Kadhimiya, wounding five people. - *Reuters, March 30*

March 29, 2011 (LIBYA): U.S. Admiral James Stavridis, the NATO supreme allied commander in Europe, said that intelligence reports on the leaders of the Libyan opposition show “flickers” of al-Qa`ida, but not enough to indicate a serious terrorist presence. - *Wall Street Journal, March 29*

March 30, 2011 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) released the fifth issue of its English-language online magazine *Inspire*. In an article titled “The Tsunami of Change,” Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-`Awlaqi rejected suggestions that the revolutions sweeping across the Arab world will weaken al-Qa`ida: “The outcome doesn't have to be an Islamic government for us to consider what is occurring to be a step in the right direction. Whatever the outcome is, our mujahideen brothers in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and the rest of the Muslim world will get a chance to breathe again after three decades of suffocation.” He offered a series of rebuttals to statements made by Western analysts, such as: “Peter Bergen believes that Al Qaeda is viewing the events with glee and despair. Glee yes, but not despair. The mujahideen around the world are going through a moment of elation and I wonder whether the West is aware of the upsurge of mujahideen activity.” - *Christian Science Monitor, March 30*

March 30, 2011 (PAKISTAN/INDONESIA): Pakistani authorities announced the arrest of Umar Patek, one of Indonesia's top terrorism suspects. Patek, a member of Jemaah Islamiya, is wanted for his role in the 2002 Bali bombing. Although Patek was captured in Pakistan earlier in 2011, this was the first announcement that he was in custody. - *BBC, March 30*

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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.

March 30, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle killed six people by a police checkpoint near Swabi town east of Peshawar. The explosion occurred just minutes before the arrival of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the leader of Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam-Fazlur. Rehman is considered a hard line Islamist leader and an outspoken critic of the United States. – *AFP, March 30*

March 31, 2011 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a police van in Charsadda, killing at least 12 people. It appears that it was an attempted assassination of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the leader of Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam-Fazlur. It was the second suspected assassination attempt against Rehman in two days. After the attack, Rehman's political party blamed the Central Intelligence Agency and "Blackwater" for the assassination attempt. – *Los Angeles Times, April 1; Christian Science Monitor, March 31*