



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# CTC SENTINEL

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## About the CTC Sentinel

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

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

## Al-Qa`ida's Five Aspects of Power

By The Combating Terrorism Center



**S** EVEN AND A half years after 9/11, the global community faces a resilient and dangerous al-Qa`ida. Despite immense efforts to understand al-Qa`ida, informed analysts disagree widely over its actual strength. Some consider the group a visceral and literal threat to Western civilization. Others proclaim the organization is irrelevant given the isolation of its senior leaders in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Finally, some point to al-Qa`ida's failure to prosecute meaningful attacks in the United States since 9/11, and the absence of successful large attacks in the West since the London bombings in 2005, as evidence of the organization's decline.

These metrics are important, but they are incomplete and when assessed in isolation lead to false conclusions. Any assessment of al-Qa`ida must consider al-Qa`ida's goals and a

variety of metrics that capture all aspects of the organization's power. This article examines al-Qa`ida across five factors that encompass all aspects of the group's power: 1) the power to destroy; 2) the power to inspire; 3) the power to humiliate; 4) the power to command; and 5) the power to unify. These aspects of power are not unique to al-Qa`ida, but they are particularly relevant for a terrorist organization with global ambitions and reach. Far more comprehensive than metrics based solely on capture/kill rates of enemy leaders or attack trends, this approach leverages proxy measures that provide insight to the critical relationship between the organization that is al-Qa`ida and its associated movement. This is important because it is this symbiotic—and symbolic—relationship that lends al-Qa`ida its operational durability in the face of overwhelming pressure.

From this vantage point, al-Qa`ida and its associated movement remain a significant threat that cannot be dismissed. The organization is vibrant and its movement has gained strength through an increasingly dominant Islamist narrative. Recent gains against al-Qa`ida's leadership elements in Pakistan present significant opportunities to weaken the core organization. Nevertheless, al-Qa`ida's peripheral elements are minimally dependent on its core leadership, so the gains from strikes on leadership elements may not achieve decisive effects. Finally, while the ideological divisions within the movement are important and must be better understood—and better exploited—they may not be nearly as significant as they appear.

#### The Power to Destroy

Al-Qa`ida's operational capacity varies substantially in different regions. Along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, al-Qa`ida supports increasingly assertive Taliban forces that demonstrate a dangerous ability to extend their fight into Pakistan's urban centers. In Iraq, al-Qa`ida's ability to attack across wide swaths of the country has declined. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) maintains the ability to ambush U.S. and Iraqi forces and use suicide bombers to attack innocent civilians, but its overall capacity is dramatically weaker than at its height. Al-Qa`ida's status across the greater Middle East is mixed. Since 2003, the group has been largely crushed in Saudi Arabia, but it is deepening its activities in Yemen and Lebanon, and it has aspirations to build an organization in the Palestinian Territories. In Africa, al-Qa`ida has gained a serious presence in Algeria but is still unable to threaten the viability of the state. In Egypt, al-Qa`ida is weak, hampered by effective security services and a Muslim Brotherhood that dominates the Islamist landscape. Al-Qa`ida has demonstrated a capability to establish operational cells in Europe, although since 2005 they have been unable to attack effectively. In the United States, al-Qa`ida has not organized a successful attack since 9/11. Today, al-Qa`ida's propaganda emphasizes the importance of "individualized jihad" in the West, which may mean it faces problems importing fighters from outside the country.

#### The Power to Inspire

The mechanism linking al-Qa`ida's organizational components with the broader associated movement is its strategic messaging efforts—the conduit for brand awareness and the expansion of the movement. The distributed social movement that is al-Qa`ida is multi-generational, without geographic center, transnational in nature, virtual in design and exceptionally difficult to target effectively. As such, government approaches to understanding organizational strength

**“Long-run analysis may reveal that the demise of al-Qa`ida may not prove the victory it is hoped should its ideas continue to gain traction.”**

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bifurcate tactical metrics (kill/capture rates) and operational metrics (organizational mergers and geographic expansion) from what is perceived as more ephemeral attributes such as messaging. It is imperative that these dimensions be considered in concert with one another to develop meaningful counter-terrorism strategies.

Despite serious setbacks to its messaging efforts in the past two years, al-Qa`ida reestablished its messaging infrastructure and remains well-positioned to communicate with worldwide audiences. The decline of AQI, Hizb Allah's success in its 2006 war with Israel, a temporarily effective campaign to shut down jihadist websites in the summer and fall of 2008, and a series of statements criticizing al-Qa`ida by jihadist thinkers—such as Usama bin Ladin's mentor Salman al-Awda and former Ayman al-Zawahiri EIJ collaborator Sayyid Imam al-Sharif—impeded al-Qa`ida's messaging strategy. It is Iran, Hizb Allah and Hamas, however, that present the most significant obstacles to al-Qa`ida's strategic messaging efforts. Recent activities by these three entities have provided a model for action to Shi`a and Sunni militants that has, to some degree, eclipsed al-Qa`ida's messaging efforts. In many ways, these more “mainstream”

efforts offer broader appeal to Muslims across the political spectrum and reach a far wider audience.

Al-Qa`ida's messaging acumen, however, goes far beyond message projection and brand awareness efforts. Indeed, the efforts to segment its audience have enabled a far more nuanced messaging strategy than many give it credit for. By tailoring its message, al-Qa`ida applies universal themes such as Western humiliation of the Muslim world to local contexts. As a result, al-Qa`ida continues to maintain message discipline, flexibility, and an opportunistic posture in this largely uncontested battle space. Moving forward, al-Qa`ida will continue to leverage contemporary events, increase its message distribution channels (including online blogs, rap videos and video games), and strive to ensure message discipline when communicating to the global Muslim populace.

Presently, U.S. government efforts to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE), especially the ideology espoused by al-Qa`ida, lack focus, leadership, adequate resources and clearly defined/delineated authorities needed to successfully execute this important mission. The National Implementation Plan and various National Security Strategies provide strategic-level CVE guidance; however, the United States presently does not have an operational CVE plan, resulting in a significant gap between strategy and local implementation. This inaction to counter violent extremism has ceded the ideological battlefield to al-Qa`ida. As such, it would appear irrelevant as to whether or not U.S. military actions have actually degraded al-Qa`ida's abilities; the popular perception is that the movement has gotten stronger, or at a minimum has not been affected, over this period. Recent Pew data reveal that of the individuals polled who identified themselves as supporters of al-Qa`ida, 51% felt that the war against al-Qa`ida actually strengthened the terrorist group, while 21% believed that military action had no effect on the movement. Even among self-identified non-supporters of al-Qa`ida, a full two-thirds believe that U.S. military operations have strengthened the terrorists or have had no effect. In both instances, only a quarter of respondents felt that al-

Qa`ida has been weakened during the last eight years.<sup>1</sup> Country specific data reveals even more alarming trends.

#### *Pakistan*

Nearly one-third of Pakistanis hold a favorable opinion of al-Qa`ida and Usama bin Ladin, while only 17% have a favorable view of the United States. Much of the enmity stems from the belief that the United States is responsible for the violence in their country (52%) and that the United States poses the greatest threat to their personal safety (44%). The threat from the United States is perceived as greater than that from India, whereas only eight percent of Pakistanis blame al-Qa`ida for the violence. Nearly half of respondents who support Usama bin Ladin do so because they feel that he stands up to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Usama bin Ladin*

With small exceptions, public opinion toward Usama bin Ladin has generally trended downward since 9/11. Several countries experienced significant declines. In 2003, 59% of Indonesians, 56% of Jordanians and 46% of Pakistanis had confidence in Usama bin Ladin. By 2008, however, 37% of Indonesians, 19% of Jordanians and 34% of Pakistanis professed support for Bin Ladin. The one exception to this trend is in Nigeria, which has actually experienced an increase from 44% to 58% in the number of people who supported Bin Ladin during this time period.<sup>3</sup>

There is some hope in the fact that Bin Ladin is not as popular as only a few years ago. This decline in popularity may be attributable to the increasing displeasure within the Muslim world of the Muslim-on-Muslim violence often perpetrated by al-Qa`ida. Despite this shift, the data leave much to be concerned about—namely, that even in Pakistan where support for Bin Ladin fell by 12% over five years, still more than one in three Pakistanis supported Bin Ladin's efforts. Finally, even with Bin Ladin's

declining popularity, the very real fear remains that extremist messaging is taking hold and threatening broader interests across the region.<sup>4</sup> Long-run analysis may reveal that the demise of al-Qa`ida may not prove the victory it is hoped should its ideas continue to gain traction.

#### **The Power to Humiliate**

Al-Qa`ida's primary strategy is to humiliate and delegitimize Arab governments. Although it has achieved notable successes in this effort during the last five years, current trends limit al-Qa`ida's ability to portray itself as the clear alternative to corrupt regimes. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq forced Arab governments into a terrible choice: support U.S. efforts and alienate their populations, or oppose U.S. efforts and risk alienating their primary patron. While that fundamental dynamic still holds, AQI's brutal violence against Muslims undercut al-Qa`ida's efforts to use the Iraq and Afghan wars to bolster its own legitimacy. More recently, Hizb Allah and Hamas have undermined al-Qa`ida's claim to be the vanguard of the Muslim world by achieving substantive militant victories while cooperating with Iran and participating in elections—both unacceptable to al-Qa`ida hardliners. In doing so, they—rather than al-Qa`ida—have become the primary groups shaming and humiliating Arab governments. Such setbacks are unlikely to be fatal to al-Qa`ida, but they are critically important because they constrain the group's ability to achieve its aims.

#### **The Power to Command**

Equally important to the strength of messaging is the degree to which the movement is unified. Unfortunately, internal debates between the ideologues and tacticians may present less opportunity for exploitation than previously thought. Internal disagreements about the use of violence and the best practices for mass mobilization are outweighed by the unity found on core issues such as the importance of jihad, the immutability of

the Qur'an, and the importance of mass mobilization. While these differences should not be ignored, they should also not be overstated. It should be recognized that the differences are similar to those found in any political movement—disagreements over means.

Al-Qa`ida has had to confront the uncomfortable reality that attempts at mass mobilization result in more voices, and more voices mean greater variation in opinion and interpretation. This debate or dissention creates an internal dilemma for a group that relies on a single and immutable ideology. As al-Qa`ida's message started to reach more Muslims, the group confronted debates over fundamental issues such as the concepts of *takfir* (labeling Muslims as infidels) and *al-Tatarrus* (human shields). The group has relied mainly on old *fatawa* that were issued by Ibn Taymiyya, and many believe these *fatawa* are inapplicable to modern life. The ongoing debate between Sayyid Imam al-Sharif and Ayman al-Zawahiri provide recent evidence of these tensions. While many in al-Qa`ida question Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's legitimacy, al-Zawahiri still believed it necessary to respond. Similar criticisms about al-Qa`ida and its use of violence against Muslims have also been voiced by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

Within the al-Qa`ida organization and the wider movement, there is widespread agreement that jihad is the only tool to make Shari`a prevail over man-made laws. This provides al-Qa`ida with a degree of legitimacy and uniqueness over all other Islamic movements, including organizations such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The debates occurring within the Islamist extremist community and the Arab world on these issues represent opportunities for government counter-terrorism efforts and may reflect the growing dissatisfaction and disapproval of al-Qa`ida. It is difficult at best, however, to gauge the impact of the disagreements on the broader support networks. Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's disagreement with al-Zawahiri may resonate far more in the West than in the Arab world.

<sup>1</sup> "US 'War on Terror' Has Not Weakened al Qaeda, Says Global Poll," BBC World Service, September 29, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> "Pakistanis Strongly Back Negotiations with Al Qaeda and Taliban Over Military Action; Public Support for Al Qaeda Gaining Ground," Terror Free Tomorrow, June 2008.

<sup>3</sup> "Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years (2001-2008)," Pew Global Attitudes Project, December 2008.

<sup>4</sup> There is significant concern across Lebanon (78%), Pakistan (72%), Egypt (72%), Jordan (61%), Indonesia (60%) and Nigeria (53%) about Islamic extremism within their respective countries and a similar concern about the rise of Islamic extremism outside of their respective countries within the world.

### The Power to Unify

Physical sanctuary in Pakistan has provided immense value to al-Qa`ida's efforts to regain control over the movement, and it has allowed the core group to better enable its affiliated organizations. The organization has expanded through selective mergers and affiliations in Somalia, Yemen, South Africa, West Africa, the Levant and Algeria. The al-Qa`ida affiliates that developed in these regions present a lesser, yet persistent threat strengthening the brand, further perpetuating the movement. Affiliate organizations offer greater opportunities for al-Qa`ida as well as increased risk due to loss of control of its message, brand and target selection. Despite the risks, al-Qa`ida has continued to expand.

Al-Qa`ida is more diverse today than ever before. The organization itself is only one part of a larger Salafist constellation. The relationship between al-Qa`ida, its associated movement and the broader Salafist community is one that "co-evolve(s) within specific historical contexts and complex religious belief systems."<sup>5</sup> Al-Qa`ida leverages this dynamic to search for new opportunities within the rapidly changing security environment. The reconfiguration, or adaptation, of its resources in response to environmental shifts is critical to al-Qa`ida's resiliency. Desire for long-run performance dictates that al-Qa`ida must shift its resources from mature situations to emerging growth opportunities. This "asset orchestration" is how a group seeks to maintain its position. One method of this that has proved successful for al-Qa`ida has been its mergers or alignment with other like-minded organizations. Many analysts have mistakenly viewed al-Qa`ida's mergers as a sign of weakness of the organization, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Instead, the continued interest of existing and new organizations to align with al-Qa`ida reflects the significant appeal and pervasive nature of its ideology and success of its messaging efforts. These mergers not only serve as a force multiplier for al-Qa`ida, but they also effectively lower the barriers of entry to the jihad, creating increased

opportunity and access for participation in the global jihad.

Between 2003 and 2007, al-Qa`ida aligned itself with 10 new and extant groups (excluding affiliated groups operating in Iraq). Through these gains, al-Qa`ida increased its presence in at least 19 countries, conducting operations in Europe, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and West Africa. In each of these years, one to two groups aligned with al-Qa`ida, with four groups affiliating in 2004. Al-Qa`ida's decision to merger or align with a given organization can suggest one of several, sometimes incongruent, attributes: al-Qa`ida's core has the capacity to coordinate and manage geographically distant assets; al-Qa`ida's core is successfully propagating a desirable brand; al-Qa`ida cannot or does not want to project its own power but requires entry into the local support infrastructure and attack network. A decision not to affiliate with a given organization, as was the case with Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon, demonstrates that al-Qa`ida can be selective and will protect its brand from dilution in certain circumstances.

Yet mergers are not without risk. The lack of control over target selection and the difficulty in maintaining message coherence with affiliate organizations can present significant difficulties to al-Qa`ida. For example, merging with Jama`at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad gave al-Qa`ida significant presence and influence in the Iraqi insurgency, but ultimately led to a popular backlash against al-Qa`ida because of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi's excessive tactics. Mergers and alignments also allow al-Qa`ida to diversify its interests and create opportunities for new sanctuaries. Al-Qa`ida's long-standing interest in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen—countries or areas identified in its writings as core states—have driven al-Qa`ida to establish a presence in each of these locations at different times. In addition to these areas, the periphery of the jihadist diaspora is equally important, if not more so to al-Qa`ida's long-term future. The mutually reinforcing nature of al-Qa`ida's structure (the organized and self-organized cells) presents great opportunities for the organization.

As the strength of al-Qa`ida's core grows, the group is in a better position to enable the periphery to act in a seemingly self-organized, autonomous manner. Whether examining al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or "homegrown" cells in Europe, al-Qa`ida long ago recognized the importance of establishing a presence in areas beyond the Middle East. Indeed, the last five major plots in Europe had direct ties to al-Qa`ida in FATA (London 7/7, London 7/21, the 2007 German plot, the 2006 British airliners plot and the 2004 attacks in Madrid). The symbiotic relationship between core and periphery indicates that the movement can offset losses in the core's ability to operate, acting as a force multiplier for the overall organization and the associated movement.

### The Way Forward

The success that al-Qa`ida has realized in the past seven years is not wholly attributable to its foresight, strategic planning and organizational design. In reality, many of al-Qa`ida's achievements result from the failure to challenge al-Qa`ida across the entire spectrum of conflict. The co-evolutionary dynamics of the security environment mandate a "whole of government" approach to the problems facing us today.

Analysts and policymakers alike must gain conceptual clarity of al-Qa`ida's dual nature: the organization, and its distributed social movement. Counter-terrorism efforts too often ignore the political, ideological and religious underpinnings of the movement. Unfortunately, in the current fight against al-Qa`ida, a poor understanding of the enemy's ideology has led to unproductive and sometimes counter-productive strategy and tactics that fail to link the tactical/operational fight with broader strategic goals. Ultimately, this requires a different understanding of our adversary's strengths and weaknesses. The metrics presented in this article offer insight not available from traditional kill/capture metrics often used, and they may lead to different strategic choices over time. Until that time, a true understanding of al-Qa`ida will elude us.

*This article was authored by the staff at the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point.*

<sup>5</sup> These comments were made by Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael Hayden.

## A Case Study of the January 2008 Suicide Bomb Plot in Barcelona

By Fernando Reinares

BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 00:40 and 05:00 on January 19, 2008, 12 Pakistanis and two Indians were arrested during a counter-terrorist operation in Barcelona, Spain's second largest city.<sup>1</sup> Spanish authorities accused the suspects of involvement in a plot to carry out multiple suicide bombings on the city's public transportation system. Ten of the detained men, plus an additional suspect arrested on March 14 in The Netherlands, are expected to go on trial early in 2009.

This article offers a case study of the foiled January 2008 Barcelona terrorist plot. First, the article will provide detailed information about how the security operation evolved. Second, it will analyze the exact characteristics and scope of the presumed bombing plot, in particular whether the attacks were confined solely to Barcelona. Third, it will present the known demographical and sociological profiles of the 11 individuals finally indicted in the case as well as their concrete Islamic affiliation. Fourth, it will present existing relevant evidence on the linkages that the terrorist cell might have with the current web of global terrorism, basically through a prominent collective actor such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Finally, the article will briefly assess the implications of the case on the jihadist terrorism threat to Spain and the European Union as a whole.

### The Terrorist Plot and Subsequent Counter-Terrorist Operation

The January 19 police operation was carried out by the Guardia Civil (Civil Guard, GC). It was authorized by Judge Ismael Moreno, one of six investigative magistrates of the Audiencia Nacional (National Court, AN) in Madrid, which is the special criminal jurisdiction dealing with terrorist offenses throughout Spanish territory. Judge Moreno became convinced on the basis of a report from the GC and additional information

provided by the Centro Nacional de Inteligencia (National Intelligence Center, CNI) during a meeting held on the evening of January 18 that attacks in Barcelona were imminent and that preventive action was urgent to thwart the plot. The central unit of the GC charged with preventing and fighting international terrorism was briefed by the CNI at around 13:00 hours on that same day.<sup>2</sup> The CNI most likely received its information about the plot from the French intelligence services; it is believed that a Pakistani national part of the group was acting as an informant for the French.<sup>3</sup> At the time, authorities likely suspected that the attacks would target railroad, underground or urban bus facilities.

Measures were immediately adopted to identify the suspected terrorists and locate their whereabouts to effectively neutralize the threat. Soon afterwards, CNI agents placed some of the suspected terrorists under close surveillance. On January 17 at 22:00 hours, one of the CNI agents recovered from a street garbage container a disposal bag left there shortly before by one of the suspects being followed. An initial examination of the bag's contents yielded various elements likely to be used in the manufacture of explosive devices, including clock mechanisms, batteries, electrical cables, latex gloves and pasteboard cylinders with residues of a powdery substance.<sup>4</sup> On January 18 at around 18:00 hours, eight of the suspected terrorists, carrying backpacks and handbags, were spotted moving to another quarter of Barcelona's old town, an urban space inside the city center where around 15,000 Pakistanis reside. Security services quickly confirmed that the suspects were heading toward the same address at which two other individuals also arrived carrying similar bundles. As a result of these combined developments, the terrorist threat was assessed as critical, and the

decision was made to intervene as soon as special operations personnel could deploy to the scene and formal judicial authorization could be obtained.<sup>5</sup>

The GC initiated the actual police operation at around 23:50 on January 18, entering and searching six premises located in the area, including four private homes, an industrial site turned into an Islamic worship place and a bakery shop. As indicated, the operation concluded with the detention of 14 individuals in four different but neighboring locations. Among them was the individual who collaborated with the intelligence services; he became a protected witness under specific provisions of Spanish legislation.<sup>6</sup> In

### **“It appears that the group had connections to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).”**

one of the searched locations on Maçanet Street, authorities found more materials likely to be used in the manufacture of explosive devices. Authorities analyzed 18 grams of a white substance discovered among the materials, and experts concluded it was “a mixture of nitrocellulose and potassium perchlorate,” commonly employed to manufacture certain industrial explosives.<sup>7</sup> The amount found in the bag would not have been enough to stage a major attack, but would serve for training and experimental purposes. Spanish security officials believe that large quantities of hidden explosives were not found because the counter-terrorist operation was launched prematurely, prompted by information from the protected witness who was notified by a cell ringleader that a call made to his wife on January 18 was to be his last.<sup>8</sup> An alternative hypothesis would suggest, however, that the terrorist group was waiting to receive the amount of substances necessary to

5 Ibid., p. 7.

6 In particular, article two of Ley Orgánica 19/1994.

7 Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 1, p. 8.

8 Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 3, p. 728.

1 The city of Barcelona concentrates at least one-third of Spain's South Asian immigrants.

2 Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., Sección de Investigación 7ª Zona de Cataluña, Servicio de Información, *Diligencias Previas 30/08, Juzgado Central de Instrucción no. 2, Atestado 01/08*, Tomo 1, p. 1.

3 *El País*, January 25, 2008; *El Periódico*, January 27, 2008.

4 Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 1, p. 3.

create the explosive devices.<sup>9</sup>

The protected witness declared that the metro was the preferred target in Barcelona because, as a prominent member of the group told him, “if an explosion takes place in the metro, the emergency services cannot come.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the explosive devices were to be carried in backpacks or bags—not around the body—ready for remote detonation. Different stations of the underground were to be designated by the group leader as locations for the blasts. He also declared that the terrorist plan included first a suicide mission followed by at least two other ones in that same city, and then similar attacks to take place, consecutively, in Germany, France, Portugal and even in the United Kingdom. These four countries, as well as Spain, contribute troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. According to the protected witness, the timing and sequence of the series of attacks across Western Europe would have depended on how the situation evolved since “al-Qa`ida would make some demands through the amir Baitullah Mehsud.”<sup>11</sup>

All 14 individuals arrested were subjected to incommunicado detention for five days beginning January 19—the maximum period allowed by Spanish legal provisions—and transferred to Madrid for interrogation at the GC headquarters. Two of them were released on January 22 and two others were freed without charges by Judge Ismael Moreno on January 23. Yet the magistrate, in the same decision, ordered the unconditional provisional imprisonment of the remaining 10 individuals, identified as nine Pakistanis and one Indian. On March 14, an additional suspected terrorist, who was also in Barcelona with the rest of the group but left the city shortly before the police operation, was finally detained in the Dutch city of Breda.<sup>12</sup>

9 *El Periódico*, January 27, 2008.

10 Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 3, p. 725.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 726. It is important to note that on November 29, 2007, the website al-Ekhlaas posted an audio message from Usama bin Ladin in which he called upon Europeans to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan and threatened to continue revenge attacks against them.

12 He took a flight to Frankfurt on the morning of the

Following a request from the public prosecutor, Judge Moreno decided on June 3 to formally indict 11 people in relation to the foiled plot in Barcelona. Eight of them are accused both of being members of a terrorist organization and of possessing explosives. They have been named as Maroof Ahmed Mirza, Mohammad Ayub Elahi Bibi, Mohamed Tarik, Qadeer Malik, Hafeez Ahmed, Roshan Jamal Khan, Shaib Iqbal and Imram Cheema. Three others—Mohammed Shoaib, Mehmooh Khalid and Aqueel Ur Rahmnan Abassi—were only charged with belonging to a terrorist organization. As required by the legal system in Spain, the formal indictment for all of them was again confirmed on October 9 by a tribunal dealing with serious criminal offenses and formed by three judges of the Audiencia Nacional.<sup>13</sup>

#### Group Connections and Profile of Suspects

In his decision to imprison and indict all 11 suspects, Judge Ismael Moreno concluded that they “constituted an organized group with a clear and specialized assignment of tasks, cohered ideologically by their adhesion to an extremist Islamic belief.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, all of those indicted consider themselves Sunni Muslims and either are members of or were closely related to the traditionally non-violent Tablighi Jamaat movement. Additionally, a number of books, pamphlets, compact disks and cassettes containing radical Islamist ideas—including those exalting jihad and martyrdom—were found by the GC in four of the six locations searched during the police operation.<sup>15</sup> Based on the declaration of the protected witness, Judge Moreno wrote in his June 3 indictment that all of the 11 individuals charged composed a group whose members were involved in frequent meetings and activities, both in worship places and private homes.

police operation. It is believed that this individual ended up in The Netherlands presumably because the attacks in Barcelona did not take place.

13 As already mentioned, these suspects are expected to go on trial in the early months of 2009 and the judicial verdict should be public by spring this year.

14 Audiencia Nacional, Juzgado Central de Instrucción no. 2, *Diligencias Previas 30/2008*, various *Auto* of January 23, 2008, and *Auto* of June 3, 2008.

15 Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 3, pp. 752-755.

He distinguished the suspects as two who played the roles of ideological and operational leaders—one of them was the imam of Tarik ben Ziyad mosque in Barcelona—three who had expertise in the manufacture of explosive devices, four who were prepared to act as suicide bombers and two other more relevant members. According to the magistrate, the group had achieved operational

**“The protected witness also declared that he received training on the use of weapons and explosives in the Waziristan area of Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan.”**

capability in terms of manpower and “was apparently very close to achieving full technical capability in terms of explosive devices to carry out several suicide terrorist attacks between January 18 and 20 against means of public transportation in Barcelona.”

Interestingly, five of the individuals of Pakistani origin who have been indicted for terrorist offenses as a result of the foiled plot in Barcelona were born in medium-sized or major cities of the Punjab, two others in nearby Islamabad and the not too distant Kohat, while another was from Karachi; there is no exact data on the remaining two countrymen. The Indian citizen happens to be a native of Mumbai. Unsurprisingly, all 11 are male. They were aged 25 to 63 at the time of their arrests.<sup>16</sup> Diverse in their educational background and occupational status, at least four are married, one is a widower and at least five have children. Six were legal immigrants in Spain, residents in or around Barcelona, and in most cases settled as far back as 2001. Five others, however, arrived to the country and the city in the three months prior to the police operation. Among them were two of the presumed suicide bombers who

16 Although their average age is almost 36, five of the 11 men prosecuted were between 25 and 29—including the four designated as suicide bombers—and a total of nine between 25 and 40. Only two men, aged 50 and 63 when arrested, are older.

had landed in Barcelona on flights from Pakistan via different routes with stops in Sweden and Germany, one who came directly from Portugal, and a fourth who traveled from Paris by train—the latter of whom was the informant. These were interpreted as suspicious moves in itself, even more so because the man whom the CNI and the GC consider as head of the subgroup commissioned with explosives and explosive devices—Hafeez Ahmed—had returned to Barcelona from a five-month stay in Pakistan himself, weeks before the others started to arrive in the

### **“The incident in Barcelona also calls attention to the disturbing role being played by the Tabligh movement.”**

city. This same person reacted fiercely to his detention and threatened openly the GC agent who arrested him, loudly saying, “in my country I have killed many policemen like you.”<sup>17</sup>

It appears that the group had connections to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In a video interview recorded in August 2008, Maulvi Omar, the official spokesman of TTP—itsself a conglomerate of between 30-40 militant groups operating in agencies of Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)—claimed that the organization was responsible for the foiled suicide bombing plot. When asked whether the TTP could ever carry out an attack against the West, Omar replied: “The one in Barcelona was conducted by twelve of our men. They were under pledge to Baitullah Mehsud and TTP has already claimed responsibility, because Spain’s military presence in Afghanistan.”<sup>18</sup> The TTP’s initial claim of responsibility for the Barcelona plot likely referred to a February satellite telephone conversation between Omar and a journalist, in which he acknowledged

that the TTP provided training to some of those involved in the plot. During that conversation, Omar specified that even with TTP’s assistance, the cell leaders “had their own plans” with respect to target selection and execution.<sup>19</sup> These statements seem consistent with the already mentioned allusion made by the protected witness to demands by Baitullah Mehsud expected after the first bombings were executed in Barcelona and during subsequent further incidents in Spain and other Western European states. Furthermore, the protected witness also declared that he received training on the use of weapons and explosives in the Waziristan area of Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan. In his testimonies, he refers even to personal contacts with the leader of the TTP, whom apparently designated him for suicide missions.<sup>20</sup> The fact that at least half of the Pakistanis indicted for the Barcelona plot come from Punjab and not from the tribal areas should not be a surprise, since by 2007 terrorists in the NWFP and FATA have been recruiting Punjabis.

#### **Conclusion**

In Spain and in the rest of the European Union, the primary jihadist terrorist threat comes from North African groups and networks, in particular from individuals and cells directly or indirectly related to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. The case of the alleged January 2008 Barcelona plot, however, demonstrates that South Asian groups and organizations—in particular those based in the tribal areas of Pakistan and associated with al-Qa`ida, such as TTP—are also major counter-terrorism concerns.<sup>21</sup> As to the specific nature of the threat, the thwarted plot would suggest a combination of both internal and external elements. Whereas the internal ones do not exactly correspond to a homegrown phenomenon (since those indicted who were local residents

are first generation immigrants and the incident involved only foreigners), the external component seems to be that of a notorious, well-articulated terrorist collective actor with clear leadership and strategy.

The incident in Barcelona also calls attention to the disturbing role being played by the Tabligh movement. The movement is apparently suffering from violent radicalization among its adherents, or the use of its meetings and sponsored travels between European states and South Asian countries for recruitment and training purposes by terrorist organizations; this allows the cross-border circulation of jihadists. In addition, what happened in Barcelona in January 2008 demonstrates the fundamental role of intelligence—in particular, the essential tool of informants—to disrupt terrorist conspiracies and dismantle terrorist groups. It also, however, reveals the difficulties of indicting suspects when preventive approaches are applied, as the usual police procedures to collect incriminatory evidence are limited, and relevant information emanating from intelligence cannot be fully incorporated into the judicial process. Finally, the case highlights how cooperation among the intelligence agencies of European states is critical to preventing and thwarting terrorist attacks.

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<sup>19</sup> *El Periódico*, February 11, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 3, p. 725.

<sup>21</sup> In September 2004, there was already a previous counter-terrorist operation in Barcelona, this time conducted by the Mossos d’Esquadra—the Catalan autonomous police force—in which 11 other Pakistanis—again, 10 of them Punjabis—were arrested, although only five received final condemnatory sentences, dated May 2007, at the Audiencia Nacional.

<sup>17</sup> Dirección General de la Policía y de la Guardia Civil, Jefatura de Información U.C.E. 2 / G.I.E., op. cit., Tomo 3, p. 759.

<sup>18</sup> The video interview with top Pakistani Taliban spokesman Maulvi Omar is available at [www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html](http://www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html).

## A Holistic Critique of Singapore's Counter-Ideological Program

By Kumar Ramakrishna

SINGAPORE FACES AN ongoing terrorist threat from the al-Qa`ida-linked Muslim militant group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). JI's original campaign aimed to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, but it developed a more global jihadist orientation after some of its fighters participated in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s. During that conflict, JI's fighters came into contact with militants who would later form al-Qa`ida. Senior JI leaders, especially after splitting from the old Darul Islam movement in January 1993, began to harbor larger ambitions. They sought to create a Southeast Asian caliphate through armed jihad as part of the wider al-Qa`ida vision of restoring the old global Islamic caliphate running from Morocco to Mindanao.<sup>1</sup>

Since December 2001, the Singaporean Internal Security Department (ISD) has foiled a number of JI-linked terrorist plots targeting Singapore. The October 2002 JI terrorist attack on two popular nightspots on the Indonesian island of Bali—which killed 202 people—was not lost on Singaporean authorities and Muslim community leaders. By 2002, they had already understood the need to find ways to neutralize JI's dangerous ideology that seemed so seductive to some Muslims in Singapore and the region. The Singapore government's vigilance has resulted in a number of arrests of JI militants who are now detained in the country. This article attempts three tasks: identify the wider historical, geopolitical and socio-cultural milieu within which Singapore's Muslim community—from which the JI detainees have emerged—is embedded; analyze the origins and evolution of Singapore's counter-ideological program; and attempt to provide a holistic critique of the entire program to date.

1 *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2003), p. 6, henceforth to be cited as Singapore JI White Paper. Also see Andrew Hammond, "Islamic Caliphate a Dream, Not Reality, Say Experts," Reuters, December 13, 2006.

### The Singapore Muslim Community in Perspective

The former British colony of Singapore is home to a population of 4.6 million people, one million of whom are expatriates. Ethnic Chinese form more than 75% of the population; ethnic Indians comprise about 8.4%; ethnic Malays, who are virtually all Muslims, comprise approximately 15%. The practical necessity from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward of expediting commercial transactions within and beyond the bustling cosmopolitan Malay trading world helped ensure that Southeast Asian Islam developed a moderate and highly tolerant hue over the centuries.<sup>2</sup> The powerful appeal of the mystical Sufism of south Indian Muslim traders also contributed to this development. Although the waves of Islamic revivalism that swept through Southeast Asia from the 1980s onward resulted in noticeably increased religiosity among Muslims throughout the region,<sup>3</sup> significant numbers of Singaporean Muslims, even if more religiously observant, have remained politically and socially moderate, willing to practice their faith within the multicultural, secular democratic political framework in Singapore.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this moderation, Singaporean Muslims have struggled with a sense of generalized angst long before the emergence of the JI threat. The basic reason is the structural tension between their Singaporean identity and their transnational linkages with the wider Malay and Islamic world.<sup>5</sup> Compounding matters further is the perception that a lingering official distrust of the Muslim community explains a number of policies

2 Robert Day McAmis, *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 41-50, 63-64.

3 Azyumardi Azra, "Bali and Southeast Asian Islam: Debunking the Myths," in Kumar Ramakrishna and See Seng Tan, *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: World Scientific/Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2003), pp. 40-41.

4 In Singapore, as in the rest of the Malay world in Southeast Asia, to be ethnic Malay is largely to be of the Muslim faith as well. In addition, while most ethnic Indians in Singapore are Hindus, a significant minority are Muslims. For more, see McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, p. 47.

5 Joel S. Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), p. 82.

that have appeared to discriminate against the community through the years. Contentious issues among this community include the perceived lack of representation of proportionate numbers of Muslims in sensitive appointments in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF);<sup>6</sup> the decision by the government to introduce compulsory national education for all children of primary school age, thereby impacting the ability of Muslim parents to send their children to a religious school (*madrassa*);<sup>7</sup> the recent ban on wearing headscarves or *tudung* by Muslim schoolgirls attending national schools;<sup>8</sup> and the penchant of a number of employers to require Mandarin proficiency as a job requirement, a prerequisite many Muslims consider a form of economic discrimination.<sup>9</sup> Reinforcing this latent resentment are geopolitical factors. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, Singaporean Muslims have long harbored misgivings about Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories and U.S. support for Israel.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Bush administration's "war on terrorism" and the 2003 Iraq invasion intensified local Muslim unhappiness with U.S. foreign policy. This generated a more acute awareness on the part of the average Singaporean Muslim of a wider, transnational Islamic identity.

These factors taken together help explain why the emergence of JI at the end of 2001 was initially met with a sense of skepticism within the Muslim community. There were murmurings in some quarters of a Singapore government "conspiracy" to undermine the image of Islam in the country.<sup>11</sup> Government

6 For a good summary of this issue, see Kamal Mamat, "Beyond Tokenism, Malays, Integration and the SAF," *The Online Citizen*, November 6, 2007.

7 "Singapore's Muslim Schools Under Threat," BBC News, April 28, 1998.

8 "Singapore: International Religious Freedom Report 2004," U.S. State Department, September 15, 2004.

9 Personal interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, October 25, 2007. Ustaz Haniff is a trained Islamic scholar who is engaged in counter-ideological work in Singapore and is the author of *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justification for the Bali Bombing* (Singapore: Peace Matters, 2006). The comments made were in his personal capacity.

10 Ibid.

11 Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007. Ali, a trained Islamic scholar, has been personally involved in counseling JI detainees as part of the Reli-



ministers had to meet Muslim community leaders behind closed doors to assure them that the Singapore JI “arrests were not targeted against the Singapore Muslim community or Islam.”<sup>12</sup> Notions of an official conspiracy were quickly dispelled, however, when two respected independent Muslim religious leaders, Ustaz Haji Ali Haji Mohamed, the chairman of the influential Khadijah Mosque, and Ustaz Haji Muhammad Hasbi Hassan, the president of Pergas,<sup>13</sup> were invited by the ISD to speak to the JI detainees face-to-face in 2002. After talking to the detainees, both *asatizah* (religious teachers) came away persuaded that not only was JI a real entity and not a government invention, but they became concerned about the dangerous ideology that had been sketched out for them firsthand by the detainees themselves.<sup>14</sup>

#### The Singapore Counter-Ideological Program: Origins and Evolution

Ustaz Ali and Ustaz Hasbi gathered together other Muslim scholars to discuss ways to “correct” the thinking of the JI detainees through a counter-ideological approach. There was no blueprint at that point.<sup>15</sup> By April 2003, the two *asatizah* had quietly formed the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), an unpaid, all-volunteer grouping of Islamic scholars and teachers serving in their personal capacities. RRG counselors possessed formal Islamic educational credentials from both local *madrasas* as well as respected foreign institutions such as al-Azhar University in Cairo, the Islamic University of Medina and the International Islamic

gious Rehabilitation Group. The comments made were in his personal capacity.

<sup>12</sup> Goh Chok Tong, “Beyond Madrid: Winning against Terrorism,” speech at the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, May 6, 2004. Goh is the former prime minister of Singapore.

<sup>13</sup> Pergas is the Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association, which is a well-respected Muslim body.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007. Also see Religious Rehabilitation Group, “An Understanding of Islam,” presentation at the Religious Harmony Gathering, organized by Geyland Serai Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle (IRCC) and Masjid Khalid (Khalid Mosque), Singapore, September 17, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

University in Malaysia.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the RRG counselors, who were a mix of younger and older scholars and clerics, were put through a diploma course in counseling skills to supplement their religious knowledge.<sup>17</sup> By January 2004, the RRG boasted 16 male and five female counselors.<sup>18</sup> By April 2004, a full year after the formation of the RRG, and armed with a religious rehabilitation or “Jihad Manual” to alert each RRG counselor to JI ideological distortions, the actual counseling sessions with the JI detainees began. Typically, one RRG

**“One potentially important approach in this regard could be to deploy ex-JI detainees to support RRG efforts in convincing the more stubborn elements of the wider Muslim community that the JI threat is real and no government conspiracy is involved.”**

counselor worked with an ISD case officer and a government psychologist on a particular detainee. The RRG counselor confined himself solely to religious matters, although he was kept informed by the case officer of other issues pertaining to the detainee’s state of mind and relevant personal circumstances.<sup>19</sup>

Initially, the JI detainees viewed the RRG counselors with great suspicion. They abused the counselors, calling them *munafiq* (hypocrites) and “puppets of the government.”<sup>20</sup> Over time, the

<sup>16</sup> Ustaz Mohamed Feisal bin Mohamed Hassan, “The Roles of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in Singapore,” in Abdul Halim bin Kader, *Fighting Terrorism: The Singapore Perspective* (Singapore: Taman Bacaan, 2007), p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Hassan, “The Roles of the RRG,” in Kader, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.; Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25,

RRG counselors developed a good understanding of their charges. Several detainees had been incensed by issues such as the government ban on wearing the *tudung* by Muslim schoolgirls in national schools and the compulsory national education policy.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the detainees possessed a “feeling of hatred toward America” much more than the average Singaporean Muslim, and they had been upset with the Singapore government for allying too closely with the United States.<sup>22</sup> These issues, however, were not decisive but rather “cumulative” and “links in a chain” of factors leading to eventual radicalization.<sup>23</sup> What did seem common to most of them was a desire for “spiritual revival.” Not particularly well-versed in the fundamentals of Islam, the majority were seeking to atone for past sins and wished to turn over a new leaf, which led them to seek out religious teachers to guide them on the right path. This is how they came into contact with the Singapore JI leaders who “presented an extremist interpretation of Islam imbibed from Afghanistan that included a strong, anti-American, jihadist streak.”<sup>24</sup>

It became clear that a number of overly literal JI ideological themes needed “extricating” and “negating” from detainee minds, as phrased by the RRG.<sup>25</sup> These were the notions that Muslims must hate and disassociate themselves from non-Muslims and Westerners; that jihad only means perpetual warfare against infidels; that the *bay`a*, or oath, to the JI leadership was inviolable; that martyrdom through suicide operations was to be sought and celestial virgins awaited them in the afterlife; and that Muslims could practice an authentic faith only within an Islamic state.<sup>26</sup>

2007; Mohamed bin Ali, “Rehabilitation of Extremists: The Singapore Experience,” undated.

<sup>21</sup> Personal interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, October 25, 2007; Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, October 25, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna, “Jemaah Islamiah: Aims, Motivations and Possible Counter-Strategies,” Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, October 2, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Bin Ali, “Rehabilitation of Extremists.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Hassan, “The Roles of the RRG,” in Kader, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 154.

Between April 2004 and September 2006, the RRG conducted more than 500 counseling sessions with the JI detainees.<sup>27</sup> Although the “hard core”<sup>28</sup> detainees—such as Singapore JI spiritual leader Ibrahim Maidin and others “deeply involved in the movement for more than a decade”—apparently remain unmoved by RRG counseling efforts, other detainees evinced discernible changes in beliefs and behavior between six months to a year after the RRG sessions began.<sup>29</sup> These were typically the less committed members who had decided to take the *bay`a*, or oath of allegiance, to the JI leaders primarily to satisfy their friends’ requests. They eventually showed remorse for their involvement with JI, were “receptive” to RRG efforts to instill in them more balanced Islamic teachings and were appreciative of government efforts to rehabilitate rather than prosecute them outright. Some of these detainees were later released on restriction orders,<sup>30</sup> but were still required to attend mandatory counseling with the RRG to prevent ideological backsliding.<sup>31</sup> The Singapore government made the existence of the RRG public in October 2005.<sup>32</sup>

By 2005, RRG counselors had begun talking to the families of the detainees as well. It was understood that the spouse of a detainee was likely either radicalized due to exposure to her husband’s ideas, or confused and vulnerable to radicalization. The RRG dispatched female counselors to speak with detainee spouses who were willing to voluntarily subject themselves to counseling.<sup>33</sup> RRG family counseling efforts were greatly aided by the formation of the Interagency-After Care

Group (ACG), which focused “on the welfare of the families of detainees.”<sup>34</sup> The ACG gradually overcame the understandable initial suspicions of detainee spouses in practical ways; for example, they provided financial assistance, as the “detainees were all sole breadwinners and the families” needed “financial support to stay on their feet.”<sup>35</sup> The ACG helped the wives find work as “clerks, cleaners and other blue-collar jobs,” and even taught them to read “utility bills or pay property taxes.”<sup>36</sup> Importantly, the ACG ensured that the education of the detainees’ children continued uninterrupted through various means such as enrolling them in tuition programs, securing school fee waivers and providing pocket money. The RRG also expanded its efforts to mitigate religious extremism in the wider Muslim community through public talks, forums, publications and establishing a website. The RRG website serves as a useful tool for public education as it provides readers access to a wide range of publications, news articles and media interviews that focus on effective responses to extremism.<sup>37</sup> The ultimate aim of the RRG website is to help “immunize” the minds of Singaporean Muslims against JI or similarly violent radical Islamist ideologies.<sup>38</sup>

#### A Holistic Critique

How should counter-ideological work in Singapore in general and the efforts of the RRG in particular be evaluated? Those involved with the program argue strongly that the RRG is essential. They state that there is a pressing need for an organized counter-ideological capability to attack al-Qa`ida’s dangerous ideology that seduced the JI detainees and now threatens to do the same to their families, along with the wider Singaporean Muslim community.<sup>39</sup> There is also some tentative empirical

evidence of the effectiveness of the RRG approach. Some sources indicate that in the six years since 2002, 73 individuals have been detained for terrorism-related activity.<sup>40</sup> As of September 2008, however, only 23 detainees remained incarcerated while 41 have been released, albeit on restriction orders.<sup>41</sup> Other observers point to the lack of “JI activity” in Singapore since the major ISD swoops in 2001 and 2002.<sup>42</sup> Terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna has declared that Singapore’s detainee rehabilitation program is “working” and that the rate of recidivism has been exceptionally low.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, some caution is warranted. To date, the RRG and its government partners have yet to come up with a set of objective, standardized metrics to determine with scientific rigor the extent to which an individual detainee has been genuinely rehabilitated. The process is still largely subjective, depending on a joint risk assessment by the RRG counselor, ISD case officer and the psychologist in attendance.<sup>44</sup>

There is also the complex issue of assessing the extent to which the RRG’s counter-ideology work is effective in “immunizing” detainee families and the wider Singaporean Muslim community against the virulent ideological narratives of al-Qa`ida and JI. The government has tried to foster closer ties between Muslims and non-Muslims so as to ensure that a sufficiently robust social resilience exists to weather the fallout of an actual terrorist strike. It has done so through such instruments as the Community Engagement Program (CEP)<sup>45</sup> and Inter-Racial Confidence Circles and Harmony Circles in neighborhoods, the workplace and schools.<sup>46</sup> Despite these commendable

27 Religious Rehabilitation Group, “An Understanding of Islam.”

28 Ibid.

29 Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

30 These refer to legal instruments that place restrictions on the general movements of released detainees.

31 Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

32 Hassan, “The Roles of the RRG,” in Kader, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 153.

33 Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007; Bin Ali, “Rehabilitation of Extremists.” While detainees themselves were generally required by the authorities to submit themselves to counseling, it was not required of their spouses, although they could seek counseling if they wished.

34 Jeremy Au Yong, “The Straits Times – Care Group for Families of JI Detainees Lauded,” *Straits Times*, November 14, 2007.

35 M. Nirmala, “JI Detainees: Taking Care of Family Matters,” in Kader, *Fighting Terrorism*, pp. 161-65.

36 Ibid.

37 Hassan, “The Roles of the RRG,” in Kader, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 156. Also see the RRG website at [www.rrg.sg](http://www.rrg.sg).

38 Personal interview, Mohamed bin Ali, October 25, 2007.

39 Ibid.

40 Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Ellie B. Hearne, “Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism,” International Peace Institute, October 2008, p. 9.

41 Zakir Husain, “5 JI Terror Members Released,” *Straits Times*, September 15, 2008.

42 Personal interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, November 27, 2008.

43 Husain, “5 JI Terror Members Released.”

44 Personal interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, November 27, 2008.

45 For details on the post-terrorist incident rationale of the CEP, see [www.singaporeunited.sg/cep/index.php/web/about\\_cep/what\\_is\\_cep](http://www.singaporeunited.sg/cep/index.php/web/about_cep/what_is_cep).

46 Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan and Kenneth George

efforts, however, a conspiracy mindset still afflicts segments of the Muslim community in Singapore, much like in neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>47</sup> Despite the genuinely innovative work of the RRG, the underlying, generalized angst of the Singaporean Muslim community—the product of both historic grievances and contemporary resentment at U.S. foreign policy and the Singapore government's pro-U.S. stance—still remains, forming a restrictive existential envelope within which RRG counter-ideology efforts must operate. Moreover, while some local observers laud the attempts by government-linked Muslim community leaders to develop a uniquely “Singapore Muslim identity” as one possible antidote to foreign extremist ideological appeals,<sup>48</sup> others severely criticize the move. These critics warn that “Singapore Muslims and Islam in Singapore are inextricable from the wider Islamic world”; moreover, if Singapore's Muslim leaders go overboard in redefining local Islam to expedite greater Muslim integration into mainstream Singapore society, “Singapore would likely isolate herself, and the flock, bewildered, might seek an overseas shepherd,” including foreign “terrorists.”<sup>49</sup> Dealing with the underlying generalized angst of the Singaporean Muslim community requires nothing less than generational change, and must involve attitudinal adjustments on the part of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, Singapore authorities and businesses. Furthermore, given how Singapore is thoroughly wired to the outside world through the internet, a more politically calibrated U.S. foreign policy toward the Muslim world would have to be part of the mix as well.<sup>50</sup>

While the RRG itself is obviously quite powerless to do anything about the

Pereire, “An Ideological Response to Combating Terrorism – The Singapore Perspective,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17:4 (2006): p. 464.

47 Personal interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, October 25, 2007.

48 Haniff and Pereire, “An Ideological Response,” p. 465. For details of the “10 Desired Attributes of the Singapore Muslim Community of Excellence,” see *NADI* magazine (Singapore), January 2006.

49 Syed Alwi, “Islam in Singapore: Where To From Here?” *The Online Citizen*, May 1, 2008.

50 Haniff and Pereire, “An Ideological Response,” pp. 469-470.

structural problem of the Singaporean Muslim community's generalized angst, there are steps forward. Within these constraints, creative ways can be explored to further enhance its impact. One potentially important approach in this regard could be to deploy ex-JI detainees to support RRG efforts in convincing the more stubborn elements of the wider Muslim community that the JI threat is real and no government conspiracy is involved. Put bluntly, the “power to convince the public of the danger of JI ideology is greater if it comes from former JI members.” Their participation would “greatly enhance the credibility of the RRG's substantive argument.”<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that the Indonesian police have been making active use of captured Indonesian JI militants—such as Nasir Abbas—to undercut the network's recruitment efforts, with some results.<sup>52</sup>

In sum, until fresh and innovative tactics—such as making better use of ex-JI detainees in counter-ideological work—are countenanced, the program as a whole should best be adjudged at this juncture as a qualified success, with its full potential still to be realized.

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51 *Ibid.*, p. 474.

52 Seth Mydans, “Nasir Abas, Terrorist Defector, Aids Indonesian Police,” *New York Times*, February 29, 2008. See also Nick O'Brien, “Interview with a Former Terrorist: Nasir Abbas' Deradicalization Work in Indonesia,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:12 (2008).

## Shifting Trends in Suicide Attacks

By Assaf Moghadam

SUICIDE ATTACKS HAVE existed for centuries, and have been carried out by a diverse multitude of individuals, groups and communities.<sup>1</sup> Historical examples ranging from the biblical Samson to the medieval Ismaili Shi'a Assassins, and from the anarchist Narodnaya Volya to the Japanese kamikaze, demonstrate that suicide attacks are carried out by a variety of religious traditions and secular groups, and by state and non-state actors alike.<sup>2</sup> The inception of the modern phenomenon of suicide “terrorism”—the deliberate use of this modus operandi by sub-state actors in pursuit of political goals—is usually dated at the early 1980s. It was then, in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps successfully instilled the notion of martyrdom for the sake of God into the self-awareness of individuals who formed or joined Hizb Allah, an umbrella organization of Shi'a groups that became the first modern organization to utilize this tactic systematically. Hizb Allah's successful use of the tactic was soon copied, first by other militant Lebanese groups, and subsequently by Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and several Palestinian groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). These select groups were the most prominent perpetrators of suicide attacks in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to the final two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, most suicide attacks in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been employed by al-Qa`ida and associated movements that have adopted a Salafi-jihadi ideology.

This article presents findings from a recently updated database of 1,944

1 The terms “suicide missions,” “suicide attacks,” and “suicide operations” are used interchangeably. The term “suicide missions” is drawn from Diego Gambetta, *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2 For a historical overview of suicide attacks and their precursors, see Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 7-26.

suicide attacks carried out between 1981 and June 2008, some of which support the above arguments.<sup>3</sup> Three particularly important findings stand out. First, Salafi-jihadi groups continue to be the most active perpetrators of suicide attacks, underscoring the intimate relationship between Salafi-jihadi ideology and suicide attacks. Second, the last three years have witnessed a steady shift in the number of suicide attacks away from Iraq and toward Pakistan and Afghanistan, suggesting that the Afghan-Pakistani region is becoming the new epicenter of suicide attacks. Third, the data suggest that if current trends continue, the overall number of suicide attacks in 2008 will decrease. This latter finding is all the more important since this would be the first decline in the number of suicide attacks in more than a decade.

#### General Trends in Suicide Attacks: 1981-June 2008

According to the data set, 51 organizations were responsible for the 1,944 suicide attacks conducted worldwide from 1981 to June 2008. These attacks claimed 70,884 casualties. Of these, 21,167 individuals were killed, and 49,717 were injured. The average suicide attack in that period killed close to 11 people and injured between 25 and 26.

The present decade has witnessed a dramatic increase in suicide attacks. More than 10 times as many suicide attacks (1,779) took place from 2000 to June 2008 than the 165 that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s combined. As shown in Figure 1, after the millennium there has been a substantial increase in suicide attacks, from 37 in 2000 to 535 in 2007. In that time period, every year produced more suicide attacks than the previous year. Interestingly, trends for 2008 suggest a decrease in the number of attacks.

<sup>3</sup> The data set combines data from the Suicide Terrorism Database collected by the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, Israel, and the National Counterterrorism Center's (NCTC) Worldwide Incidents Tracking System. Although the resulting data set is among the most extensive databases on suicide attacks, no claims are made about its completion. Indeed, it is a certainty that the actual number of suicide attacks in the period from 1981 to June 2008 is higher than the number presented here. Copies of the data set are available upon request. For inquiries, please contact the author at [assaf.moghadam@usma.edu](mailto:assaf.moghadam@usma.edu).

During the first half of 2008, there were 198 suicide attacks, suggesting less than a total of 400 attacks for the year if current trends continue. Indeed, if these trends persist, it will be the first time in a decade that the number of suicide attacks in a given year will decline relative to the year prior.

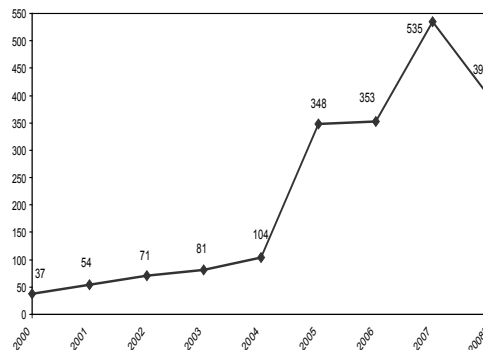


Figure 1. Number of suicide missions worldwide (1998-2008). The number of attacks for 2008 assumes trends as of June 2008 will continue.

In terms of countries targeted by this modus operandi, Iraq is on top of the list. According to the present data set, Iraq accounts for 1,067 suicide attacks in the period under review—a number that accounts for more than half (54.8%) of all suicide attacks since 1981. The sheer volume in which this tactic has struck Iraq is even more impressive since no suicide attacks were recorded in Iraq prior to the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003.

Afghanistan is the second most frequently targeted country, with 264 attacks, accounting for 13.6% of all incidents. It has recently overtaken Israel, the target of 188 (9.7%) suicide missions. Sri Lanka (110/5.7%), Pakistan (94/4.8%), and Russia (37/1.9%) are the next most prominently targeted countries.<sup>4</sup> Together, these seven most frequently targeted states account for more than 90% of targets of all suicide attacks in the last 27 years.

As a result of the large number of suicide attacks in Iraq and Israel, the Middle East is the region that has

<sup>4</sup> Although the present data set lists only 110 suicide attacks in Sri Lanka, the actual number of attacks that have taken place in the country is likely far higher. Part of the reason for this mismatch appears to be that many suicide attacks that have taken place in Sri Lanka during the late 1990s have not been reported in the Western press, and have thus eluded inclusion in the publicly available databases on suicide attacks.

witnessed most suicide attacks (1,316) to date, accounting for more than two-thirds of all incidents from 1981 to June 2008. It is followed by Asia (exclusive of the Middle East), with 551 (28.3%) attacks, most of them in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Africa (38/1.9%) and Europe (31/1.6%) are next, followed by North America and Latin America, which suffered four suicide attacks (0.2%) each.

By far, the most dramatic trend related to the location of suicide attacks is the gradual shift of incidents from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Between July 2007 and June 2008, the last one-year period for which data on suicide attacks are available, 58.2% of suicide attacks struck Iraq, and 36.6% struck Afghanistan and Pakistan. This compares to a much wider gap between suicide attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan in the preceding year (July 2006 to June 2007), when 69.3% of attacks took place in Iraq, and 25.1% in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A still greater discrepancy was evident between July 2005 and June 2006, with 72.1% of all suicide attacks in that year occurring in Iraq, and only 13.5% in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is in Pakistan where the steepest increase in suicide attacks is visible: they increased from 3.14% of the global total in the period between July 2006 and June 2007 to 12.9% in the following year.

#### Salafi-Jihadi Ideology and Suicide Attacks

Since 1981, 91.5% (1,779) of all suicide attacks have been executed in the current decade. Of these, the identity of the perpetrators is known in 674 cases. A coding of the groups responsible based on their ideological orientation suggests that the most dominant perpetrators of this tactic in the present decade are groups that have adopted a Salafi-jihadi ideology.<sup>5</sup> Thus, of the 674 suicide attacks in which the identity of the responsible group has been ascertained, 305 (45.4%) were conducted by Salafi-

<sup>5</sup> For details on the coding of groups in the data set, see the Appendix in Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom," *International Security* 33:3 (2008). For a discussion of the Salafi-jihad, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29:3 (2006): pp. 207-239. For a discussion of the nature of the Salafi-jihad as an ideology, see Assaf Moghadam, "The Salafi Jihad as a Religious Ideology," *CTC Sentinel* 1:3 (2008): pp. 14-16.

jihadi groups, 109 (16.2%) by groups with a combined mainstream Islamist/nationalist-separatist orientation,<sup>6</sup> and 84 (12.5%) by groups with a strictly nationalist-separatist orientation. In addition, 163 (24.2%) attacks were conducted by “Hybrid” groups that appear to have adopted elements of Salafi-jihadi ideology in addition to other, especially ethno-nationalist and separatist reasons. Chechen groups and the Taliban are examples of groups coded in this way.<sup>7</sup> Surprisingly, groups adhering to Shi’ism—the Muslim sect most directly identified with the notion of martyrdom—are responsible for less than one percent of suicide attacks in the present decade.<sup>8</sup>

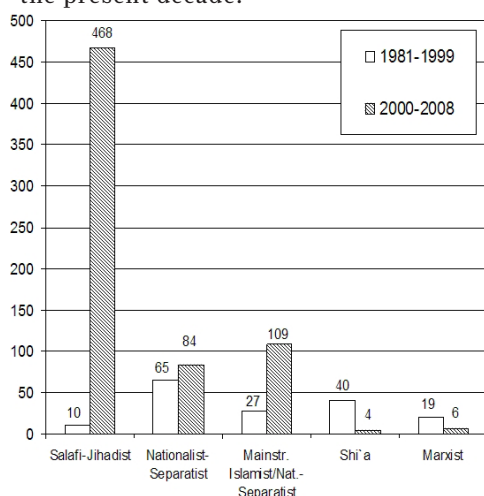


Figure 2. Suicide missions by ideological orientation of the responsible groups. The “Salafi-Jihadist” bar includes “Hybrid” groups.

According to the above analysis, Salafi-jihadi and “Hybrid” groups account for nearly 70% (468) of all suicide attacks in the present decade. By comparison, Salafi-jihadi groups were responsible for less than six percent (nine attacks) of suicide attacks during the previous two decades combined. As shown in Figure 2, during the 1980s and 1990s nationalist-separatist groups (65/39.3%), Shi’a groups (40/24.2%), mainstream Islamist/nationalist-separatist groups (27/16.3%), and even Marxist groups (19/11.5%) were far more active than Salafi-jihadi

groups in staging suicide attacks.

The dominance of Salafi-jihadi groups among contemporary terrorist groups employing suicide attacks matters for a critical reason: Salafi-jihadis are far more lethal than other groups conducting suicide attacks. In the present decade, for example, suicide attacks by Salafi-jihadi and “Hybrid” groups have killed 7.5 times as many people, and have wounded 2.5 times as many individuals as have attacks by all other ideological groups combined. On average, each suicide attack by a Salafi-jihadi group kills almost 23 people and injures more than 46 people—more than attacks by any other ideological group. Whereas Salafi-jihadi groups are responsible for about 16% of all suicide attacks between 1981 and June 2008, they are the cause of a third of all individuals killed by this tactic in that timeframe, and 29% of those wounded.

### Conclusion

The phenomenon of suicide attacks has undergone a number of fundamental shifts in the last decade of its modern history, which began in the early 1980s. Suicide attacks during the 1980s and 1990s were carried out mostly by groups that adhered to a nationalist-separatist, mainstream Islamist, Shi’a, or Marxist agenda. The past decade, however, has witnessed not only a dramatic increase in the number of suicide attacks, but also the advent and dominance of Salafi-jihadi suicide operations. The inescapable conclusion of these findings is that whereas the Salafi-jihad may not explain the emergence of suicide attacks in the first place, it is fundamental to the recent globalization of this tactic and must be part of any serious attempt to explain its spread across nearly every region of the world. The findings also suggest that attempts to counter the scourge of suicide attacks must include counter-ideological measures to be successful.

Although recent figures for 2008 indicating a possible decline in the number of suicide attacks are encouraging, it is far too early for the United States and its allies to become complacent about this potential trend. While it is true that the occurrence of suicide attacks—especially in Iraq—has decreased, the United States and its friends should be wary of a further

increase in the use of this tactic in places where Salafi-jihadis are establishing a new foothold or are maintaining a viable presence. Given the symbiotic relationship between Salafi-jihadi ideology and suicide attacks, it is not surprising that in recent years suicide attacks have emerged in the same areas that have witnessed a growing presence of Salafi-jihadis, such as in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, or where established Salafi-jihadi cells have adopted the al-Qa`ida brand, as in Algeria.<sup>9</sup> The case of Algeria is particularly instructive because eight out of the 10 suicide attacks in the country from 1995 to June 2008 have taken place after the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) officially joined al-Qa`ida and renamed itself al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb.

It is important for the United States and other real or potential victims of suicide missions to keep a watchful eye on the current and future development of Salafi-jihadi cells. Adherents of this ideology are sworn enemies of the United States, its allies, and indeed the vast majority of Muslims in the world who refuse to adopt the tenets guiding al-Qa`ida. Additionally, monitoring the migration of Salafi-jihadi cells is imperative to predict future hotspots for suicide attacks.

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6 Mainstream Islamist groups include those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Hamas. These groups differ from Salafi-jihadi groups in that they participate in the political process.

7 For more information, see Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom.”

8 Shi’a groups were responsible for a much higher percentage of suicide attacks (24%) during the 1980s and 1990s.

9 For more on the relationship between Salafi-jihadi ideology and suicide attacks, see Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*.

## The Future of Moqtada al-Sadr's New Jaysh al-Mahdi

By Babak Rahimi

ON NOVEMBER 27, 2008, the Iraqi parliament approved a new security pact that requires the United States to withdraw its forces by the end of 2011. The passage of the pact marked the Sadrists' greatest political defeat since their rise to power in 2003. With the failure to convince other Iraqi lawmakers to reject the security deal, which would have bolstered Moqtada al-Sadr's political influence in the legislative branch, al-Sadr's uncompromising anti-occupation stance has left his movement without a pragmatic position to gain popular support ahead of provincial elections in January 2009.<sup>1</sup> As al-Sadr and his blackshirt Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia—once hailed as the most formidable Shi'a military force in post-Ba'athist Iraq—confront a stronger Nuri al-Maliki government, the political wing of the movement faces increasing challenges with the changing political landscape of Iraqi politics.

Yet, al-Sadr's greatest mishap in recent months has been his inability to prevent the decline of his influence in Iraqi politics. A gradual marginalization process began in 2007 when conflict over the U.S. presence in the country erupted between him and the al-Maliki government. This marginalization should not, however, be seen in terms of an eventual annihilation of the movement or its total irrelevance; rather, it should be viewed as causing the possible transformation of the movement into something new in the course of a transitional phase, through which al-Sadr could reemerge as a more powerful force with a stronger militant presence on the Iraqi scene.

### The Mumahidun and al-Sadr's Challenge to Baghdad

Since late summer 2008, al-Sadr's political-military movement has undergone numerous changes in its activities. Major reforms can be traced back to the August 2007 freeze on the activities of JAM due to the outbreak of violence in Karbala that led to the

deaths of several pilgrims. The most significant of these reforms has been the transformation of the Mahdi militia into a new cultural-political force. On August 28, al-Sadr ordered JAM to suspend its armed operations and undergo a major shakeup, with considerable changes in its organizational apparatus.<sup>2</sup> The call came as the name of the armed force was also changed to "Mumahidun" ("those who pave the path"), coined in reference to the devout followers of the Hidden Imam, who prepare the way for the Mahdi's return.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of the Mumahidun signals a notable transition from a grassroots paramilitary unit, with a decentralized political and social presence on the street level, to a private "special force," with specific military and political tasks. The former Mahdi Army represented a "citizen militia" with a grassroots base, best suited to carry out local security problems with retaliatory actions on perceived foreign threats.<sup>4</sup> Akin to groups such as the Badr Organization or the Pasdaran of Iran, the new elite force is now restructuring into becoming a centralized armed force, largely divided into two operational units: one elite unit of combatants and another unit of cultural activists, providing public services to the community.<sup>5</sup>

Although the precise socio-cultural program of the Mumahidun is still unknown, the new emphasis on soft power could signify a self-promotional strategy designed to create a restored military force operating on par with the Badr Organization, although mainly modeled after Hizb Allah of Lebanon.<sup>6</sup> The new strategy also suggests how

2 "Shiite Cleric Al-Sadr Suspends Mahdi Militia Operations," *Voices of Iraq*, August 28, 2008. Al-Sadr's August call followed an earlier call on June 13, 2008, when he announced new plans to reorganize JAM into a "cultural and religious force," charged with the responsibility of leading an intellectual jihad. See "Sadr Reorganizes Mahdi Army," *Herald Tribune*, June 13, 2008 and "Al-Sadr: New Force to Fight U.S. in Iraq," CNN, June 13, 2008.

3 "Faalyat-e Artesh-e Al-Mahdi be Halat-e Taliq Dar Amad," Fars News Agency, August 29, 2008.

4 Karim Porzabid, "Moqtada-ie Javan be Donbale Marjaeyat: Goftego ba Shaikh Youssef Naseri az Azay-e Jaryan-e Sadr," *Shabrvand Emrooz*, December 30, 2007.

5 Amit R. Paley and Saad Sarahan, "Powerful Iraq Cleric Recalibrates Strategy," *Washington Post*, June 15, 2008.

6 Bill Roggio and Daveed Gartenstein, "Sadr's Special Groups," *The Long War Journal*, June 10, 2008.

in recent months al-Sadr has made considerable effort to extricate himself from unruly elements within his movement, a problem ever since the escalation of sectarian violence in early 2006. Although the tactical reasons for the recalibration of JAM are several, one major force behind the recent changes has been Tehran, particularly

### "The May 2008 detention of al-Sadr in Qom by the IRGC is indicative of Tehran's growing control over the young cleric, with the aim to bring the Sadrist movement under direct Iranian control."

the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), that has lately worked hard to tame and remold JAM into a more organized military force under Iranian supervision.

In many ways, Iran has played a major role in al-Sadr's new militia politics. The May 10, 2008 cease-fire between al-Sadr and Baghdad was brokered by Iranians who saw a major danger in intra-Shi'a conflict, with its apogee in the summer of 2007, and sought ways to micromanage Shi'a politics inside Iraq in a way to resist U.S. occupation.<sup>7</sup> Tehran's new role as peacemaker has been largely led by pragmatic hardliners such as Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi Shahrudi, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the IRGC's Mohsen Rezaei and Qasem Soleimani, who saw the political significance of limiting the activities of the Mahdi Army from inside Iran, where al-Sadr has been residing since 2007 in order to become an ayatollah.<sup>8</sup> The May 2008

7 The March 30 cease-fire, when al-Sadr ordered his militia to lay down their arms, was also brokered in Iran by the head of the IRGC's Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani. For more, see Marisa Cochrane, "The Battle for Basra," Institute for the Study of War, June 23, 2008, p. 9.

8 Kenneth R. Timmerman, "Iran Leans on Shiite Leader Muqtada Sadr," *Newsmax.com*, April 15, 2008. It is also important to recognize the role of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Shi'a Iraq's leading cleric based in Najaf, who has successfully brought al-Sadr under his wings since

1 Tina Susman, "Iraqi Accord Shows Muqtada Sadr's Diminished Clout," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 2008.

detention of al-Sadr in Qom by the IRGC is indicative of Tehran's growing control over the young cleric, with the aim to bring the Sadrism movement under direct Iranian control.<sup>9</sup> While al-Sadr's current political activities in Qom remain unknown, Tehran has also shown signs of curtailing its military support for the Shi'a militia, most likely due to the election of Barack Obama, who has said he favors a diplomatic approach with Iran.<sup>10</sup>

#### Al-Maliki Versus al-Sadr

With the March 2008 Knights Assault Campaign in Basra, al-Maliki's Iraqi security forces were able to claim a major victory against al-Sadr's militia rule in the most strategically significant port city in the country. With the help of Tehran's new al-Sadr strategy, al-Maliki was able to flex his muscles and take over Basra from militia rule and, accordingly, focus his attention on Baghdad's Sadr City, al-Sadr's stronghold in the capital. Accordingly, the Basra campaign created a conflict between al-Sadr and al-Maliki, an alliance of convenience which began to deteriorate since early 2007 and continues to be a source of major political tension to this day.<sup>11</sup>

The current state of antagonism between al-Maliki and al-Sadr was hardly predictable in 2006, when the two Shi'a leaders formed a loose political alliance, primarily motivated for political gain in parliament. In fact, it was in 2006 when the 30-member Sadrism bloc in parliament provided the boost needed to help al-Maliki become prime minister. Although on the ideological level both al-Maliki and al-Sadr shared a similar sense of Iraqi nationalism, backed by a vision of a strong centralized state, they differed significantly on how to deal with U.S.

a 2004 agreement with the Paul Bremer government, which later led to the consolidation of the Sadrists as a legitimate political force in Iraq's electoral process in 2005. For a study of al-Sadr's rise to power, see Nicolas Pelham, *A New Muslim Order: The Shia and The Middle East Sectarian Crisis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 147-156.

9 "Edea-ie Bazdasht-e Khaneghi Moqtada dar Qom tava-sot-e Sepah!" *Tabnak*, May 17, 2008.

10 For Iran's decline of military activity in Iraq, see Anne Gearan, "US General: Iran Backs Off Worst Bombs in Iraq," Associated Press, December 12, 2008.

11 Mark Kukis, "A Maliki-Sadr Breakup?" *Time*, January 11, 2007.

troops stationed in the country. Due to their different policies (and ideological stances) toward Washington, in spring 2007 the Sadrists broke away from al-Maliki's government and formed an anti-establishment Shi'a bloc in parliament.

As Baghdad's campaign against militia activities achieved major military success with Operation Peace in Sadr City and Messenger of Peace, which considerably eliminated armed operations in Maysan Province, the Sadrists took significant losses. Maysan Province, for example, was a key passage point for Mahdi Army supplies coming from Iran. Al-Maliki's success in getting the security pact passed by the parliament marked the final stage in an orchestrated effort to marginalize al-Sadr. This effort has left the two Shi'a politicians of two diverse political backgrounds—one an exile leader (al-Maliki) and another a native dissident (al-Sadr) during the Ba`athist era—at the verge of a new Shi'a power struggle.

#### The Decline of al-Sadr?

With the ascendance of al-Maliki, al-Sadr's political and military clout has diminished considerably, especially in provincial towns where he was earlier expected to sweep into power in the 2009 elections. In Basra, for instance, where JAM suffered a major defeat in the spring, Sadrism politicians have yet to declare their intention to run for the provincial elections. This is mainly due to a sense of unease many Sadrists feel, largely due to a sharp decline in their leader's popularity since the outbreak of violence in spring and, possibly, because of al-Sadr's staunch opposition to federalism, a relatively popular concept among Shi'a in Basra.<sup>12</sup>

There are four major causes for the Sadrists' decline in recent months: corruption, enhanced security in the country, Washington's change of strategy with the Sadrists and Tehran's

12 Saleem al-Wazzan, "Basra's Dominant Parties Expect to Maintain Power," *Niqash*, December 16, 2008. For now, as analyst Reidar Visser argues, Sadrists appear to adopt multiple strategies, as many Sadrism candidates are running under different names for the Basra governorates. For more, see Reidar Visser, "The Candidate Lists Are Out: Basra More Fragmented, Sadrists Pursuing Several Strategies?" [www.historiae.org](http://www.historiae.org), December 22, 2008.

influence over Moqtada al-Sadr. First, in cities such as Basra, Karbala and southern towns like Diwaniyya, al-Sadr's public support has deteriorated significantly because of his failure "to appoint qualified people to important positions in the province and Baghdad."<sup>13</sup> Al-Maliki's push into Basra and public works efforts to rebuild the slums of Sadr City has been the second contributing factor to the decline of al-Sadr's influence in JAM's main stronghold.<sup>14</sup>

The third cause of decline can be attributed to U.S. efforts to incite further fragmentation within JAM by reaching out to the "moderates" in the al-Sadr camp, and hence isolating

**"There are four major causes for the Sadrists' decline in recent months: corruption, enhanced security in the country, Washington's change of strategy with the Sadrists and Tehran's influence over Moqtada al-Sadr."**

the "radicals." This strategy has also led to a decrease in the armed groups' organizational capabilities.<sup>15</sup> The split in Sadrism leadership, accordingly, matches Iran's success in bringing the movement under the supervision of the IRGC. While remaining under the influence of Tehran, al-Sadr has not only seen his popularity fade away and his status as a nationalist leader of an indigenous Iraqi movement jeopardized, but he has also lost direct control of his followers inside the country.

13 Riyadh Sari, "Al-Qadisiyah Gears Up for Elections," *Niqash*, December 11, 2008.

14 Howard Lafranchi, "U.S. Hopes to Counter Mahdi Army's Clout in Baghdad: American Forces in Iraq Announced Monday Ambitious Public-Works Plans to Win Support in Sadr City," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 15, 2008.

15 Gareth Porter, "Unable to Defeat Mahdi Army, U.S. Hopes to Divide It," International Press Service News Agency, December 11, 2008.

### Future Perils and Promises

Al-Sadr is now playing a waiting game. As the leader of a major socio-political movement, the young cleric understands that both militarily and politically he is vulnerable to political forces in the Shi'a bloc backed by Iran and the United States. Yet, he also knows that neither Baghdad nor Tehran nor Washington can defeat his movement, primarily because of the passionate support he still enjoys, at times even cult-like devotion, among the Shi'a population in Baghdad's disadvantaged neighborhoods and provincial towns in the southern regions. The street is his base, and populism is his ideological marker.

Al-Sadr also realizes, however, that his support could rapidly corrode away if he is unable to prove himself and his military-political organization as a viable alternative to the Maliki-Hakim Shi'a faction in power. For now, the primary predicament al-Sadr faces is the ability to reinvent himself as an anti-occupation notable. While facing the prospect of a U.S. withdrawal in 2011, al-Sadr would need to redefine his political leadership in a post-occupation period. Since much of his success in recent years has evolved around the rhetoric of nationalist resistance, however, the question remains as to what will happen to al-Sadr's political power when U.S. troops actually leave Iraq in 2011.

The answer to this question is two-fold. First, al-Sadr's future success will largely be shaped by how successfully he restructures his fractured militia and expands his popular support on the street level into a thriving political movement, participating (and succeeding) in the electoral process (independent from Tehran). It is important to note that such a scenario is highly unpredictable in light of al-Sadr's apparent diminishing political popularity ahead of provincial elections in January 2009.

Second, the future of al-Sadr as a political leader will also depend on Baghdad's capability to implement the U.S.-Iraq "status of forces" agreement on both legal and perceptual levels. If al-Maliki shows Iraq's competing factions that he is able to carry through the agreement (i.e., the withdrawal of U.S. troops in

2011) without the outbreak of violence, and continues to appear as the head of a sovereign nation independent from the United States, al-Sadr's popularity could diminish further. If, however, an Iraq-U.S. security deal is undermined by numerous amendments to the treaty made by al-Maliki or by various Shi'a factions in power pressuring him to do so, then al-Sadr could make the case that the approved security pact has been merely a Washington ploy to make its stay in Iraq permanent. This would further legitimize his movement as an anti-establishment force. There is certainly a likelihood for this scenario, as the threat of breakaway Sunni insurgent groups and al-Qa`ida could force Baghdad to seek out the support of U.S. troops beyond 2011. This would prolong a U.S. stay in Iraq for an unforeseeable future and, in return, increase al-Sadr's position as a legitimate anti-occupation politician.

In many ways, therefore, al-Sadr is still a major player on the Iraqi political scene. As a shrewd student of politics, the yet-to-be ayatollah could still break away from the Tehran-Qom nexus, reconstitute his militia into a more organized force in southern regions and, under the right circumstances, emerge as a prevailing national figure. Through the "cultural" wing of his new organization, al-Sadr can also exert power on the street and neighborhood levels. Like Hizb Allah or Hamas, he could muster considerable support from the disfranchised and unruly youth, vying with Shi'a factions such as Dawa and the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI) for territorial and political control over the southern regions.

An alternative to the intra-Shi'a power struggle is the unlikely alliance between al-Sadr and al-Maliki's Dawa Party or Sunni anti-federalist factions. This would allow al-Sadr to gain momentum in the provincial or national elections and, while forming coalitions with smaller parties and militias (such as Fadila), stir political or even military conflicts with Kurdish or certain Shi'a federalist factions (such as the ISCI).<sup>16</sup> There is also the possible coalition between al-Sadr and the anti-Maliki Dawa faction,

led by former Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari, in a way to counter-balance the Maliki-Hakim hegemony and forming a new (anti-American) Shi'a nationalist front.<sup>17</sup>

The above scenarios, however, largely depend on how Baghdad maintains the fledgling political process, local security and economic prospects, which have been slowly achieved since the surge. There is also the implementation of transparent elections, the July referendum over the security deal and successful constitutional negotiations, especially over the Kirkuk question. If Baghdad prevails, al-Maliki can claim a decisive victory over the militias (Sadrist or otherwise) and look beyond ethnic and sectarian politics as a way of managing politics.

The resurrection of JAM also depends on how the new U.S. administration deals with Tehran and its controversial nuclear program before the agreed withdrawal date of 2011, and whether it can find a diplomatic way, especially with the pragmatic conservatives close to Ayatollah Khomeini, to convince Iran to curb al-Sadr's military activities for years to come.

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<sup>16</sup> For a possible Sadr-Maliki alliance, see Saleem al-Wazzan, "Basra's Dominant Parties Expect to Maintain Power," *Niqash*, December 16, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Sari, "Al-Qadisiyah Gears Up for Elections."



## Reconsidering the Role of Militias in Iraq

By Major James J. Smith, U.S. Army

MANY DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS have resisted coalition forces passively and actively since the beginning of the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003. Some of these organizations, such as al-Qa`ida and Ansar al-Sunna, have an unwavering commitment to the destruction of the Iraqi government and the U.S.-led coalition. Other militias have much more complex strategies. Sometimes they cooperate with the Iraqi government and coalition forces, at other times challenge them politically, and at still other times resist them violently. Moreover, political factions supported by militias are currently participating in the Iraqi government. These unclear and mixed signals have left coalition forces in a quandary about how to respond effectively.

Coalition policy on Shi`a militias has varied from kinetic military action to voluntary disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, to indirect support for Iraqi government policies to abolish them legally. Since post-invasion operations began in Iraq, the United States has emphasized a strategy of non-engagement toward militias with the ultimate hope of eliminating them in favor of the newly formed Iraqi security forces. This article will argue that while military defeat of militias is tactically feasible, it is unlikely to lead to strategic success because militias have established popular legitimacy, and military attacks by an occupying power are only likely to increase their domestic support. Militias have demonstrated an ability to protect their neighborhoods and provide basic services; this mutual dependence is unlikely to be overcome in the short-term. Therefore, a U.S. policy of accommodation is likely to increase the likelihood of military success and political stability.<sup>1</sup>

This article uses two case studies to investigate good policies for security, stability, transition and reconstruction

<sup>1</sup> This is not a fundamental shift in U.S. policy. Strategies of engagement are used with the Kurdish peshmerga in northern Iraq and with Sunni Arab militias in western Iraq.

operations in Iraq. The first case study analyzes U.S. engagement strategies vis-à-vis the Kurdish peshmerga in northern Iraq since 2003, the defeat and engagement strategies vis-à-vis the Sunni militias in western and central Iraq, and the defeat strategies vis-à-vis the Shi`a militias in Baghdad and southern Iraq. The second case study analyzes British strategies of passive acceptance (engagement and defeat) vis-à-vis Jewish militias in Palestine.

### Diverging Engagement Strategies

Closer examination of the U.S. relationship with Kurdish, Sunni and Shi`a militias reveals a biased approach toward engagement. The United States employed a strategy of engagement with the Kurdish peshmerga even prior to the invasion in 2003. This led to stability and the transformation of the militia into an effective security force. U.S. strategy vis-à-vis Sunni militias in Anbar Province suddenly changed from defeat to engagement in 2006. Sunni

**“The evidence presented suggests that a military strategy of engagement with Shi`a militias is likely to be an efficacious option for maintaining stability while reducing U.S. troop levels in Iraq.”**

Arab militias now perform local security responsibilities alongside U.S. and Iraqi security forces. These two engagements led to an improved police force due to an increase in recruits whom the locals trusted.

The United States, however, remains committed to a non-engagement strategy with respective Shi`a militias, often failing to distinguish Shi`a militias from insurgents. This suggests that isolation of Shi`a militias will continue to create greater instability for two reasons. First, during the last three years, U.S. military tactics aimed at defeating Shi`a militias through targeted raids against militia commanders have caused the unintended consequence of creating a power vacuum. This has been filled by

criminals intent upon making a personal profit regardless of whether it will impact the community negatively. Local communities suffer the consequences of reduced security because the nascent Iraqi security forces are still in the developmental stage and have yet to assume an independent role as a trusted security provider. Therefore, U.S. forces have been required to fill this role. This strategy has the potential to create another power vacuum if Iraqi security forces have not demonstrated the ability to assume an independent role as sole security provider before the United States draws down its troops.

The second problem is the lack of oversight of the militias. This has allowed an uninterrupted line of communication with external actors. Iran gladly accepted the oversight role, co-opting as many Shi`a militias as possible and providing them with training, funding, and equipment, which has been used to lethally disrupt U.S. military operations in Iraq. The likelihood of Shi`a militias turning to Iran and then attacking U.S. forces would have been lower if U.S. policymakers adopted a much more aggressive strategy toward engaging moderate militia members and including them into the overall security plan after the cease-fire in October 2004. Recent experience in Anbar Province, however, suggests that it is still not too late to change course. Moqtada al-Sadr's efforts to rehabilitate the Mahdi militia during a six month cessation of attacks beginning in August 2007 and General Petraeus' encouraging response in December 2007 to al-Sadr's decision also suggests that Shi`a militias would be willing to cooperate with the United States. The likelihood of Shi`a militias turning away from their Iranian sponsors will be greater if the incentives offered by the U.S. and Iraqi governments were right for an alliance of convenience.

### Lessons from the British Experience in Palestine

The U.S. strategy toward militias in Iraq has been similar to the British strategy toward Jewish militias in Palestine from 1920-1947. Similar to the current approach in Iraq, the British government and military also disagreed regarding the best strategy for dealing with militias in Palestine. The British government recognized the futility of

employing a violent military solution to a political problem, whereas the military felt the use of overwhelming firepower was justified and necessary to defeat intransigent Jewish militias conducting guerrilla style attacks. Furthermore, an Arab insurgency that began to foment in 1936 led military officials to pursue a strategy of engagement with militias through the establishment of constabulary forces known as the Jewish Settlement Police. Serving alongside British security

**“This suggests that a 28-year occupation dissolved within two years of the British adoption of a political position that alienated the Jewish population, and a military policy of non-engagement with the Jewish militias.”**

forces, the Jewish Settlement Police were critical to the restoration of order by 1939 without the need for additional British military forces. Although the White Paper of 1939—which limited Jewish immigration, land ownership and the right to call Palestine a national homeland—could have destroyed their symbiotic relationship, the onslaught of World War II that same year led moderate Jewish militia leaders to continue to support British military forces. This greatly benefited the British less than a year later when Palestine was faced with the threat of invasion by Axis powers. They turned to the Haganah militia.<sup>2</sup> The British were subsequently able to acquire Haganah cooperation and assistance in a joint-campaign against more radical militias. During these periods of engagement with the British, the Haganah developed professionally, which was imperative

2 The Haganah created a special commando unit known as the Palmach. The Palmach were involved in a multitude of operations ranging from sabotage of enemy infrastructure, serving as navigators for allied forces in neighboring Syria and Lebanon, to repelling invading forces long enough to allow British security forces to retreat from Palestine safely while leaving the Jewish militias there to fend for themselves.

for their transition from a militia to a professionally recognized force after the British departed.

The Labour Party’s 1945 decision to uphold the MacDonald White Paper of 1939, however, mortally wounded the British relationship with the Haganah, ultimately requiring a major influx of British troops to maintain order.<sup>3</sup> Not only did the Haganah finally reject the British engagement strategy, but it formed an alliance with the radical militias that had been hunted only months earlier. As a result, the security situation became so untenable that the British government was forced to turn the Palestine Mandate back over to the United Nations. This suggests that a 28-year occupation dissolved within two years of the British adoption of a political position that alienated the Jewish population, and a military policy of non-engagement with the Jewish militias.

Furthermore, a stable Israeli state was ultimately built upon the foundation of the militias anyway. Following the unexpected handover of the Palestine Mandate by the British, the United Nations adopted a policy of engagement that would encourage the use of militias by both Arabs and Jews. The United Nations did not possess the capability to provide administration, governance and security, which was desperately needed in the transition period. Therefore, it engaged the Haganah. Within six months the state of Israel was born, and the Haganah were transformed from an unofficial local militia to a professional standing army, which remains a formidable defense force 60 years later. The Haganah could serve as a potential model in Iraq of how the United States could employ militias as a provincial defense force that could play a greater role in maintaining stability while reducing the current unsustainable troop levels. Although Jewish militias were geographically concentrated, the method can still apply to Iraqi militias through a local and regional integration process with police and military forces

3 As the security situation deteriorated, the British continually increased troop levels until they reached 100,000, one-tenth of their military. This was unsustainable, and the British were never able to reopen lines of communication with the Haganah or any other Jewish militia.

in Iraq’s three concentrated regions. If the U.S. strategy should involve the transition of security to a militia force, then engagement needs to include different types of joint operations to evaluate and assess training, equipment and discipline standards—a process that took a decade in Palestine.

Unlike Iraq, however, Palestine was not invaded by a foreign military to change its government. Palestine was recognized as a British Trusteeship by the League of Nations after World War I, and British policy supported the World Zionist Organization’s goal of a Jewish state in Palestine. Moreover, the occupation forces initially faced a more permissive environment in Palestine. Nevertheless, after 1936 the situation in Palestine came to resemble the current situation in Iraq. The Arab-Palestinian insurgency against the politically dominant Jewish community and the British occupation force presented many of the same challenges the United States has faced in Iraq. For the Jewish community of Palestine, as for the Shi`a community of Iraq, local security became an overriding concern, and that security came quickly to depend upon local Jewish militia forces as it became clear that the occupying military force was unable to provide security in the face of a growing Arab insurgency. While the failure to provide a political solution that served the interests of the Palestinians as well as the Jews created a situation of permanent conflict in the greater Middle East region, the British occupation nevertheless left a strong state in its wake.

#### **Conclusion**

The evidence presented suggests that a military strategy of engagement with Shi`a militias is likely to be an efficacious option for maintaining stability while reducing U.S. troop levels in Iraq. The British military strategy of engaging local militia forces to work in conjunction with the occupying military between 1936 and 1945 ultimately produced security forces to which British forces could hand responsibility for local and national security. This allowed the occupying military to reduce its footprint as the local militia forces gained in strength and responsibility.

In Iraq, engagement with the Kurdish peshmerga led to stability and the transformation of the militias into an effective security force. In Anbar Province, which senior military officials previously considered the most contentious area of Iraq, U.S. military forces adopted a similar strategy that by 2007 made the province one of the safest areas in the country. Militias are likely to continue to play a political and security role. Iraqi politics has long been based on central government negotiation with local strongmen, which results in a greater emphasis on services rendered at the local level by organized groups such as militias.

Although defeating conventional military forces in a traditional combat scenario is impossible for militias, they can, however, switch back and forth between conducting military operations and assuming the role of victim to gain popular political support. As Bradley Tatar notes, whereas “armed civilians are people without long-term political goals who seek only to free themselves from a foreign oppressor...militias like al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army [are] operated by militants who are committed to the political goals of the group.”<sup>4</sup> This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, and therefore working with moderate elements of Shi’a militias is key to maintaining security reflective of the region’s environment while reducing the U.S. military presence.

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4 Bradley Tatar, “Emergence of Nationalist Identity in Armed Insurrections: A Comparison of Iraq and Nicaragua,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 78:1 (2005): p. 183.

## The Pakistan Army and its Role in FATA

By Shuja Nawaz

FOR THE FIRST TIME since independence in 1947, Pakistan has sent its army into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the largely ungoverned region that lies between its North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Afghanistan. Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the United States and its NATO allies have been pressing Pakistan to do more to stop the Afghan Taliban and al-Qa`ida from seeking sanctuary in FATA and the northern reaches of the NWFP. Furthermore, since 2001 the United States has provided more than \$10 billion in financial assistance to Pakistan to offset the costs of moving troops into the region. Out of this sum, approximately \$7 billion has been in the form of Coalition Support Funds.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the lack of a uniform vision on the part of both the United States and Pakistan on what constitutes adequate counter-insurgency measures has been the source of some discord.

Despite Pakistan’s complaints that the United States has not provided adequate equipment and weapons support, a key factor hindering Pakistan’s ability to fight insurgents has been its own forces’ lack of training and indoctrination necessary for fighting an insurgency within its own borders. Still clinging to its self image as a conventional army, Pakistan’s military has not fully nor speedily accepted the need to change to Counter-Insurgency (COIN) doctrine. This article will provide a better understanding of why the Pakistani government was forced to send its military into the tribal regions, the changing tactics used in the fight against the insurgents, and what steps are necessary to create a lasting solution.

### An Escalating Problem

The United States offered to help Pakistan retrain and re-equip the Frontier Corps (FC) and the regular army. Pakistan, not wanting to be perceived as too closely tied to the

1 “Increased Oversight and Accountability Needed over Pakistan Reimbursement Claims for Coalition Support Funds,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Combating Terrorism* GAO-08-806, June 2008.

U.S. military, chose to first train the FC. As for its regular forces, Pakistan decided to provide battle inoculation in what it calls Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), rather than in COIN operations.<sup>2</sup> According to the former director general of military operations of the Pakistan Army, the difference between the two is that LIC demands no more than a “well trained infantry soldier,” whereas COIN operations require indoctrination of both soldiers and officers—in addition to civil-military collaboration—to win over the general population and isolate the insurgents.<sup>3</sup>

The situation on the border area has grown more precarious over time. Following escalating attacks by Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan, the United States sent in aerial drones to attack selected Taliban and other militant targets inside FATA. The U.S. strikes have grown in intensity. On September 3, 2008, the United States also launched an incursion with Special Operations Forces near Angoor Adda in South Waziristan Agency and attacked a suspected militant hideout inside Pakistani territory. Although Pakistan has protested each incursion, the drone attacks have continued, and the first ever attack inside the settled areas of Pakistan occurred on November 19, 2008 near Bannu in the NWFP.<sup>4</sup> Although agreement was reached between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United States to set up coordination mechanisms in the border region, the United States alleges that Pakistan has not done enough to counter militancy.<sup>5</sup>

Initially, a perception emerged inside Pakistan that it was being forced to fight America’s war solely to aid U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, however, the level of militancy inside Pakistan itself has increased significantly. The 2001 invasion and its aftermath caused the

2 Personal interview, Major General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, Director General Military Operations, Pakistan Army, August 2008.

3 Ibid.

4 “First US Drone Attack Outside FATA: Major Qaeda Man Among 6 Killed in Missile Strike,” *Daily Times*, November 20, 2008.

5 Such accusations generally state that elements of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence continue to ignore the activities of the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan, if not actually assist militants in their missions inside Afghanistan.

rise of Talibanization inside Pakistan. It has escalated to the point where today Islamist militants are taking the battle to the heart of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, and even targeting the army's soft targets in different "cantonments" or military reservations. Pakistan measures its costs not only in the movement of troops and loss of public support for its actions, but also in the deaths of more than 1,300 soldiers since the army moved into FATA and the adjoining areas in the NWFP; moreover, since 2001 tens of thousands of civilians have been killed or wounded due to the Afghanistan-spawned militancy.

### A Military Solution

In Pakistan, there is no national consensus over how to proceed in FATA, or on what type of society the country should accept as a whole. As a result, once Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) began organizing itself and linked up with malcontents across FATA and in the adjoining frontier regions—as well as in Swat, Dir and Chitral—the Pakistan government's only possible response was to send in the army. For the first time since independence, the army moved into FATA in force.<sup>6</sup> The equivalent of six infantry divisions were deployed over time to FATA and Swat, some having moved from their positions along the Indo-Pakistan border where they represented Pakistan's strike force against any Indian attack. Largely a conventional army, it was trained and equipped for regular warfare against other similar forces, not against insurgent guerrilla units.

The locally deployed Frontier Corps—a largely peacetime militia that had lost its efficacy over the years through neglect, lack of training, and failure to upgrade arms and systems—was not able to aggressively patrol or fight the well-armed and trained militants. Moreover, the FC was composed of local tribes and commanded by officers from the Pakistan Army, the latter of whom had little knowledge of the people and the terrain. The courses in mountain warfare geared to fighting in the border region with Afghanistan that were once a regular part of training for British Indian Army officers and even in post-independence Pakistan are no longer key

<sup>6</sup> In 1960, the army went into Bajaur briefly to repel an alleged Afghan incursion.

training elements in today's Pakistan Army. Moreover, many officers were assigned to the FC from the regular army rather than volunteering for it, as had been the practice in the past. Therefore, in effect, the FC received the dregs of the officer corps. Unlike in the Pakistan Army, the commanders of the individual wings of the FC were only majors, not lieutenant-colonels.<sup>7</sup> There was little incentive for officers to excel during their short rotation to the FC, and no locals could hope to rise to the officer ranks in the Corps because they had to enlist in the regular army to become officers. Nevertheless, the number of officers commissioned into the Pakistan Army from FATA rose from 63 in the 18-year period of 1970-1989 to 147 in the 15-year period of 1990-2005. Even the number of soldiers recruited by the Pakistan Army from FATA has grown, with some 2,255 recruited in the decade of 1996-2006, compared with only 75 in 1991-1995.<sup>8</sup> Although the numbers are still small, there has been a steady increase in recruits.

The poor training and morale of the FC showed in its encounters with the militants. The troops proved unable or unwilling to fight their fellow tribesmen. The regular army, appearing for the first time inside FATA, was seen as an "alien" force. Even today, many of its officers still consider it as such. Largely Punjabi (60% or more), the army lacked the ability to converse with the locals and had to rely on interpreters.

### Changing Tactics

The fight against the militants forced the army to change its tactics, using religious symbolism to garner local support and to encourage local tribesmen to rise against the militants and thus isolate them. Gradually, it adjusted to the fight by using classic counter-insurgency tactics by cordoning, clearing and holding areas, while trying to limit civilian collateral damage. Two major operations illustrate these changes.

In Swat District of the NWFP, the first operation by the regular army was named

<sup>7</sup> This has now changed. All Frontier Corps wings are now commanded by lieutenant-colonels.

<sup>8</sup> Data obtained by the author from General Headquarters, Pakistan Army for the book Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Operation Mountain Viper, a name that failed to inspire participants or locals in a fight against Islamist militants. As a result, the new commander of troops in Swat, Major General Nasser Janjua, commanding the 17th Infantry Division from Kharian near the Kashmir border, launched a fresh operation on November 13, 2007 named Rah-e-Haq. The purpose of the operation was to wrest the Islamic ground from the insurgents by claiming to act in the name of the true faith. The operation ended in mid-January 2008. Recognizing the need to "reduce civilian casualties, since we are operating inside our own territory against our own people,"<sup>9</sup> Janjua attempted to isolate the insurgents and to cordon and search areas repeatedly to draw them out for elimination. At the same time, medical aid and food supplies were delivered to the people in the affected areas. Initially, Janjua maintains that he allowed the insurgents to "escape" into the northernmost Piochar Valley, giving them a false sense of security and letting them establish fixed positions for training. Whether this is an *ex post* rationalization for the army's shortcoming at that stage is hard to prove. Nevertheless, by the end of August and early September 2008, he had identified and attacked the new targets, causing heavy damage and forcing the militants to seek help from others in Dir District and Bajaur Agency.

Meanwhile, the FC in Bajaur mounted an intensive campaign in August 2008 against the militants in that area and found significant support from local tribes, including the Salarzai tribe, the dominant tribe in Bajaur that wanted to reassert their status against the Taliban. Their leader, Malik Zeb Salarzai, promised to bring their own armed militia, known as a *lashkar*,<sup>10</sup> in

<sup>9</sup> Personal interview, Major General Nasser Janjua, August 2008.

<sup>10</sup> The use of *lashkars* is not new in FATA. Such groups have always been used to assist the administration in ensuring peace and order. In the current war against militants, *lashkars* have taken on special importance since they represent the spontaneous upwelling of unhappiness with the activities of the militants, primed to some extent with official financial incentives. Nevertheless, there is a latent danger in training and arming local warlords, who may well become future challengers of the government's writ or a conduit of arms or information for the militants.

support of the FC for patrolling and fighting the “foreigners.” The militants were told to leave the area or risk being killed and their property destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Following a major principle of COIN, the authorities tried to isolate the militants from the general population in Bajaur. Rather than accomplishing this by providing security to the general population in the towns, authorities asked locals to evacuate the Bajaur areas where militants were suspected to be hiding, creating a huge flow of refugees. Ground troops and aircraft then proceeded to heavily bombard the area to destroy suspected areas where the militants took shelter.<sup>12</sup>

Although there has been some initial success in the military operations, by themselves they are not likely to take hold. Civilian efforts, especially on the political and economic fronts, will be needed to make civil-military collaboration effective in the long run.

#### Producing a Lasting Solution

Both the FC and the army operated in FATA and the Swat and Malakand sectors with severe handicaps. They were poorly trained for counter-insurgency warfare and did not have the proper equipment for the highly mobile war against militants who engage in surprise attacks and disappear before troops can reach the affected areas or military posts. The lack of attack and troop-lifting helicopters limited the ability of the Pakistani forces to react with alacrity to seemingly random and widely distant insurgent attacks. Although the United States promised Cobra helicopters, not all of the helicopters had been delivered by the end of the summer of 2008. The Pakistan Army’s smaller and unarmored Bell helicopters cannot operate at the altitude required in the mountains of Malakand and Swat, especially during hot days. Moreover, the solitary heli-lift squadron supplied and supported by the United States at Tarbela cannot adequately cover the wide arc of militancy in the region from South Waziristan to Dir and Swat.

The Pakistan Army, for its part, has begun some preparatory training of

units being deployed to FATA and Swat with a three-phase program that gradually indoctrinates, acclimatizes, and trains troops under live fire before sending them into battle against the insurgents. In general, however, the army has been “learning by doing,” and standard operational procedures change with changes in commanders at all levels.

Most critically, an underlying issue that affects military operations is the importance over the mid- and long-term to create political context and structures in FATA that create more space for the military and the paramilitary to act legitimately. In other words, the government, by setting national policy publicly, must give the military the legitimacy to act on its behalf in the context of the strategic interests of the country.<sup>13</sup> Without clarity on those strategic interests, the military solution can only be temporary and perhaps even counter-productive. Troops, training, and equipment are one part of a two-part approach to counter-insurgency. The other, more important part is political governance, without which military actions will fail to gain traction or produce a lasting solution.

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## Iraq’s Border Security: Key to an Iraqi Endstate

By Lieutenant-Colonel Steven Oluic, U.S. Army

AS IRAQ ENTERS what appears to be a period of relative stability and recovery, more attention is being given to the country’s international boundaries and Ports of Entry (POEs). Iraqi and coalition forces have been able to progressively improve Iraq’s internal security environment and successfully counter al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), insurgents and militia organizations in the cities and provinces. The Iraqi government and coalition forces are now shifting efforts to stopping the cross-border flow of foreign fighters, war materiel and contraband from Iraq’s neighbors. The success of the Iraqi security forces in halting the violence and maintaining a secure and stable environment is critical to the U.S. goal of drawing down forces starting in 2009. In addition to providing background information on Iraq’s border and security institutions, this article argues that improving Iraq’s border security should be a primary goal as the United States approaches an Iraqi endstate.

#### Iraq’s Border and Security Institutions

Iraq shares approximately 2,260 miles of land border with Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey, and a 36-mile coastline. Comparatively, Iraq is approximately twice the size of the state of Idaho. Both Iran and Syria continue to be the greatest source of smuggling, including AQI operatives, foreign fighters, and munitions. Although Iraq still has difficulty halting these illegal cross-border flows, it has been able to progressively hinder these malign actors along the Syrian border in tandem with its coalition partners. The cross-border flows from Iran and Syria, however, have yet to be effectively halted. In most cases, the Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and suicide bombers can be traced back to these two countries.

The Directorate of Border Enforcement (DBE) is a paramilitary organization consisting of approximately 40,000 border police and officers organized into five geographic regions of 13 brigades and 41 battalions, which are outlined in Figure 1. The DBE’s mission is to secure Iraq’s land and water

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Anwarullah Khan, “Crackdown on Militants by Tribal Volunteers,” *Dawn*, October 6, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> The danger of such practices is that they could alienate the evacuees.

<sup>13</sup> Personal interview, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, August 2008.

borders. The battalions are stationed along the international boundaries and operate from a network of border forts and annexes from which guards conduct border patrols and smuggling interdiction operations. The Coastal Border Guards (CBG) is integral to the DBE, and it has the mission to safeguard Iraq's water boundary between Basra and the Persian Gulf along the Shatt al-Arab with Iran. The DBE's current three-year border strategy infrastructure plan calls for a border fort or annex along every five to seven kilometers of Iraq's borders.<sup>1</sup> Once complete by the end of 2010, Iraq will be ringed by 712 border forts and annexes.

The DBE has the additional responsibility for the Customs Police present at air, land and sea POEs and also located throughout the country at customs stations. Lastly, the immigration officers working at all POEs are also assigned to the DBE and responsible for screening travelers entering Iraq. The DBE is a relatively new organization established in 2003 and has assumed duties performed by the pre-war Iraqi Army. The DBE is plagued in many cases by a lack of qualified border guards and suffers from all manners of equipment and infrastructure shortages.

Iraq has 17 land, six air, and five sea POEs. The land POEs are managed by port directors that report to the Port of Entry Directorate (POED) in Baghdad. The POED was originally organized within the DBE, but on September 13, 2008 the directorate was removed from DBE authority by ministerial order and now reports directly to the prime minister's office. This has exacerbated an already weak unity of effort in controlling the country's borders. The separation of the POED and DBE has also led to a rivalry, and low-level tensions are mounting between these two organizations at the borders.<sup>2</sup> The presence of corrupt officials, poorly paid guards and historical smuggling routes complicates Iraq's border security efforts. Furthermore, the DBE-POED

1 In April 2008, the DBE released the "Iraq's Directorate of Border Enforcement Three Year Border Strategy." The plan is an outline presenting the DBE's construction and equipment requirements.

2 Shortly after these organizations were separated, the al-Waleed and Shalamsha POE directors have moved to remove the DBE organizations from the POE grounds.

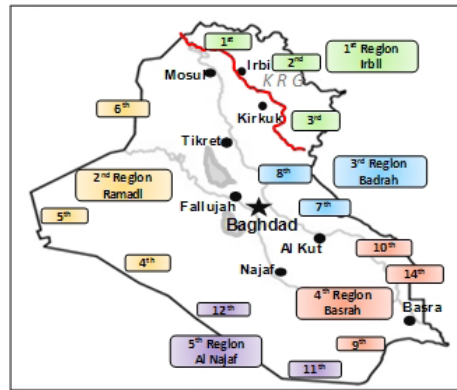


Figure 1. Map of Iraq displaying the relative locations of DBE regions and brigades.

fracturing of border security forces will predictably lead to poor synchronization in border control and anti-smuggling operations. This is a primary coalition force concern as it turns its attention to halting the flow of AQI operatives, foreign fighters, and munitions from Iran and Syria into an increasingly stable Iraqi state.

#### The Transnational Boundary Threats

Iraq's border security is vital to the ability of the state to exercise its sovereignty and to prevent violence from destabilizing and terrorizing its population. Iraq's boundaries have numerous border regions that are porous, both on the Iraq-Iran and the Iraq-Syria borders. In the south along the Shatt al-Arab, illegal land and waterway crossing points provide access to smugglers bringing lethal aid into Basra Province. The lack of armored patrol craft has hindered the CBG in countering rocket smuggling from Iran into the Basra region. The intermittent rocket attacks on British forces in the Basra region are a result of the lack of Iraqi capacity to interdict waterborne smuggling routes.

Farther north, multiple illegal crossing points in Maysan and Wasit provinces facilitate the flow of lethal aid into Baghdad. Illegal crossing points in Diyala represent the shortest route into Baghdad. Smuggling and the flow of explosives and munitions is a further challenge due to the willing actions of tribal members seeking profit. The porous western border with Syria provides multiple routes for foreign terrorists and facilitators to bring fighters into Iraq. Ninawa Province provides a permissive environment for the entrance, transfer, and movement

of terrorists. Farther south and west in Anbar Province, the long border with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia provides easy access for extremists and allows them to support Sunni insurgents in Iraq. Long earthen berms several feet wide and high normally mark the border in these vast open desert regions; however, the inability of the DBE to repair the numerous breaks and washouts makes this obstacle ineffective.

On the Iraq-Syria border, foreign terrorists and facilitators continue to infiltrate the porous border and move to safe houses and transit points in the Jazira Desert and west of Mosul before reaching operational cells. Any disruption to the flow of terrorists has been followed by AQI-paid disenfranchised Iraqis conducting suicide attacks or emplacing IEDs. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF), the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence Service (MOIS), the Badr Organization and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militias smuggle both foreign trained fighters and lethal aid through the borders. Corrupt officials and border guards make counter-smuggling efforts even more difficult. Reporting from U.S. forces identifies POEs along the Iranian border "reopening" after normal hours of operations and allowing busloads of travelers and trucks into the country without screening and inspections.<sup>3</sup> Presumably, bribes are being paid to the POE staff.

Intricate networks of safe houses and transit points in Iraq mask the movement of indigenous and foreign fighters and lethal aid amidst the Iraqi populace. Interdiction of smuggling routes and sponsors leads to the Iranians shifting to secondary routes to limit disruption and more ISF and coalition force interdiction. These facilitation networks, some of which are affiliated with cross-border tribal activities, use multiple means at varying times to move people and contraband across Iraq's boundaries. While Iraq and Turkey have agreed to counter terrorists along the borders, the mountainous terrain

3 Observations made by the Department of Homeland Security and border officials at Zurbatiya POE and mentioned during meetings with the author in September 2008.

along their boundaries makes border security operations much more difficult. In addition, the presence and operations of Kurdistan Workers' Party guerrillas in the Iraqi borderlands neighboring Turkey all but annuls Iraq's authority in the region.

To facilitate Iraq's border service, coalition forces have established Border Training Teams (BTTs) and POE Training Teams (POETTs), small units usually of less than 20 soldiers and civilian experts (contractors or U.S. government), which are normally co-located with DBE units and/or POEs. These training teams are found from the region headquarters down to battalion level, and at land Ports of Entry. These BTTs and POETTs play an increasingly important role in U.S. efforts to professionalize, advise, and train the DBE and POED organizations. Interestingly enough, the greatest challenge faced by Iraqi border forces is the continual lack of fuel.<sup>4</sup> Without proper resourcing, the DBE cannot conduct border patrols or power border fort generators. Without electricity, the border forts and POEs cannot provide lighting, air conditioning, refrigeration for food stocks or effective communications. This situation is aggravated by corrupt officers selling the fuel on the black market, the tendency of those in charge to "hoard" and underreport inventory levels, and the immature logistics systems. The DBE is currently pursuing an aggressive infrastructure program constructing regional fuel distribution and storage centers, maintenance facilities, and brigade and battalion headquarters buildings throughout Iraq.

#### U.S. Goals and the Iraqi Endstate

The porous boundaries and continued smuggling of foreign fighters, AQI operatives and war materiel into Iraq continue to hamper U.S. efforts in establishing a sustainable, violence free security environment in the country. This impedes U.S. efforts of planning to gradually decrease the troop presence and withdraw from Iraq. The at times unfettered flow of terrorists and contraband across Iraq's borders continues to prevent the growth of a more robust Department of State

presence in leading nation-building efforts. Coalition forces recognize the transnational threat to the precarious security gains in provinces across Iraq. By buttressing the Iraqi border forces with an expanding training team presence, coalition forces in tandem with its Iraqi partners have directly challenged Iraq's terror-sponsoring neighbors. This considerable and effective training team method used in the development of the Iraqi Army is being transitioned to Ministry of Interior forces, which currently lag behind the Iraqi Army but are responsible for maintaining internal and border security. In addition, the minister of interior has swapped out entire POE staffs to combat the corruption and the cozy relationships that developed between POE directors and smugglers. This act alone has signaled the Ministry of Interior's institutional resolve to break the cycle of corruption and harden Iraq's porous boundaries.

The uncertainty of Iraq's future has continued to allow Iran to grow into the regional powerbroker, which is anathema to U.S. strategic interests. By assisting the Iraqi government in enhancing their border security operations, the United States and Iraq can focus on establishing a secure and stable environment that will attract investment, develop the economy, and allow the Iraqi leadership to accommodate sectarian and national differences with the promise of a successful state. A strong and secure Iraq will bolster U.S. interests by becoming the natural counter-weight to, or even displacing, an increasingly dangerous Iran. By focusing on Iraq's nascent border security institutions—the DBE and POED—coalition forces are ensuring that Iraq becomes capable in halting transborder smuggling that continues to support AQI, the insurgency and Iranian-backed militias. As long as Iraq's international frontiers remain porous, external malign actors, such as AQI and Iran, will continue to threaten Iraq's security, economy and future.

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## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

November 16, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber exploded near a NATO-led International Security Assistance Force convoy in Baghlan Province, killing two Afghan civilians. – *Sydney Morning Herald, November 16*

November 16, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani government temporarily cut off NATO's main supply route into Afghanistan due to intensified military activity by Taliban and al-Qa`ida militants in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *The Australian, November 17*

November 17, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants rejected Afghan President Hamid Karzai's offer to hold peace talks. The militants said no peace talks could be held as long as foreign troops were in the country. – *Voice of America, November 17*

November 17, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber struck an army checkpoint in Swat District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing four soldiers. – *Voice of America, November 17*

November 17, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants ambushed a convoy of pro-government Mamoun tribal elders in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. During the firefight, the tribesmen killed three of the militants including their commander. The elders, however, then took refuge in a house, which was besieged by militants. Approximately four of the elders were killed, while others were abducted. – *AFP, November 18*

<sup>4</sup> David Botti, "Frustration and Hope on the Syrian Border," *Newsweek*, August 22, 2008.

November 18, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine Marines apprehended Almid Jundam, a suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militant, in Sulu Province. Authorities claim that Jundam is a follower of ASG mid-level leader Gafur Jumdal, an explosives expert. - *The Nation, November 21*

November 19, 2008 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new videotape in which he chastised President-elect Barack Obama for representing "the direct opposite of honorable black Americans like Malik al-Shabazz, or Malcolm X." During the 11-minute video, al-Zawahiri said, "You were born to a Muslim father, but you chose to stand in the ranks of the enemies of the Muslims, and pray the prayer of the Jews, although you claim to be Christian, in order to climb the rungs of leadership in America." - *Minneapolis Star Tribune, November 19*

November 19, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO soldiers killed Taliban commander Mullah Asad in Garmsir district, Helmand Province. - *Reuters, November 23*

November 19, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected U.S. aerial drones killed a "senior" al-Qa`ida commander, in addition to five other militants, in Bannu District of the North-West Frontier Province. The senior leader was identified as Abdullah Azam al-Saudi, an Arab who "was the man coordinating between Al-Qaeda and Taliban commanders on this side of the border, and also involved in recruiting and training fighters." - *AFP, November 18*

November 19, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Major General Amir Faisal Alvi, a former head of Pakistan's leading anti-terrorist strike force—the Special Services Group—was killed when gunmen on a motorbike and in an SUV opened fire on his vehicle just outside Islamabad. He retired two years ago and was one of Pakistan's most high-profile former military leaders. - *The Australian, November 20*

November 19, 2008 (YEMEN): According to a security official, a clash between police forces and al-Qa`ida "sympathizers" left four policemen, two militants and a civilian dead. The incident occurred

in the southern Yemeni town of Joaar. - *AFP, November 20*

November 20, 2008 (IRAQ): U.S. General David Perkins told reporters that U.S. troops killed Haji Hammadi, a leader of al-Qa`ida in Iraq, on November 11 in Baghdad. According to press reports, "Hammadi was accused of planning suicide bombings, killings and kidnappings, including the abduction and murder of a U.S. sergeant in 2004." - *Voice of America, November 20*

November 20, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a government compound in Khost Province, killing nine people. Two U.S. soldiers were wounded. - *Reuters, November 20*

November 20, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a mosque in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing at least nine people, including the leader of an anti-government tribal militia. The leader was identified as Malik Rehmatullah. - *Voice of America, November 21; Dawn, November 21*

November 21, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded at a funeral for a Shi`a Muslim leader in Dera Ismail Khan in the North-West Frontier Province, killing at least 10 people. - *Voice of America, November 21*

November 21, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Authorities arrested two suspected members of the Abu Sayyaf Group. The men were allegedly planning to attack malls, bus stations and other civilian targets in the metropolitan area of Manila, the country's capital city. - *GMA News.tv, November 24*

November 22, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Rashid Rauf, a dual British-Pakistani citizen, was killed by an alleged U.S. unmanned Predator aerial drone in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Rauf was wanted for involvement in the 2006 terrorist plot to blow up commercial jetliners flying from Britain to North America. Rauf's death cannot be officially confirmed until the results of DNA tests are known. At least four other militants were killed in the strike. - *Washington Post, November 23; ABC News, November 22*

November 24, 2008 (GLOBAL): Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, the former head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad who worked extensively with Ayman al-Zawahiri, released a new treatise in which he said that al-Zawahiri and Usama bin Ladin are "bloodthirsty and remain determined to commit mass killings." According to Sayyid Imam, "Zawahiri finds it legitimate to kill anybody whose country fights Muslims." Al-Sharif refuted the logic of *fatawa* supporting al-Qa`ida's actions: "The killing of civilians in blocks, trains, markets, mosques or elsewhere is a declaration of impotence to face armies of enemy states and cowardice. Their impotence drew them to kill civilians who Islamic Shari`a said should not be killed." Al-Sharif is currently serving a 25-year sentence in an Egyptian prison. - *Los Angeles Times, November 23*

November 24, 2008 (IRAQ): A sticky bomb attached to a bus killed at least 13 female government employees working for the Trade Ministry. - *AP, November 24*

November 24, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber detonated her explosives just outside the Green Zone in Baghdad, killing five people. - *AP, November 24*

November 24, 2008 (MALAYSIA): Authorities released from jail a suspected Islamist terrorist who has been held in detention since January 2002. The man, identified as Yazid Sufaat, allegedly allowed his home to be used by al-Qa`ida operatives to plan the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Yazid is a former military officer and a U.S.-trained biochemist. According to authorities, "We released him as he had shown remorse and repentance after almost seven years of rehabilitation. He was released on several conditions. He has to report to the police regularly and cannot leave (the state) without police permission." - *Asia Pacific News, December 10*

November 24, 2008 (MAURITANIA): Three men have been sentenced to 10 years in prison for being members of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. A fourth suspect, who is already serving a three-year sentence for similar charges, was sentenced to five years for recruiting and financing terrorist activities. - *BBC, November 24*



November 26, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The FBI warned U.S. law enforcement officials of a possible al-Qa`ida plot to attack New York City's subway and transportation system. Although the FBI said the threat was unsubstantiated, extra police have deployed to major hubs around the city to increase vigilance. - *AFP, November 26*

November 26, 2008 (YEMEN): Various press agencies reported that Salim Hamdan, Usama bin Ladin's former driver, was released from Guantanamo Bay and has arrived in his native Yemen to serve out the rest of his sentence. His sentence is scheduled to end December 28, 2008. - *BBC, November 26*

November 26, 2008 (INDIA): More than 150 people were killed when Islamist militants laid siege to multiple luxury hotels, hospitals, a train station and an upscale restaurant in Mumbai, among other targets. A previously unknown group calling itself the Deccan Mujahidin claimed responsibility, but authorities believe that the name is simply an alias. Authorities suspect that Lashkar-i-Tayyiba may have a role in the plot. - *Los Angeles Times, November 27*

November 27, 2008 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message in which he argued that the United States "is doomed to failure in Afghanistan and the tribal regions of Pakistan." Al-Zawahiri also attacked the Cairo-based al-Azhar Islamic schools "as having been corrupted and not following true Islam." He also offered his views on the weakening U.S. financial sector. - *AFP, November 27*

November 27, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber exploded as a military convoy passed by outside the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. Four people were killed. - *Reuters, November 27*

November 27, 2008 (TURKEY): Court officials in Turkey announced that 11 suspected al-Qa`ida-linked individuals will go on trial next month over an alleged bombing plot in western Turkey. The men, who were arrested in August, apparently set up a group called the Muslim Vengeance Brigade and were planning attacks in the country. The indictment states that the men received training in Afghanistan before traveling

to Turkey. - *AFP, November 27*

November 28, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a mosque frequented by followers of Shi`a leader Moqtada al-Sadr. At least nine people were killed in the blast, which occurred in the town of Musayyib, about 50 miles south of Baghdad. - *Voice of America, November 28*

November 28, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a police car in Bannu District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing at least seven people. - *Daily Times, November 29*

November 28, 2008 (INDIA): Indian commandos stormed a Jewish center in Mumbai to free hostages. The militants inside the facility were part of the terrorist strike team that besieged Mumbai beginning on November 26. - *BBC, November 28*

November 30, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a German diplomatic convoy in Kabul, killing three Afghan civilians. - *AFP, November 30*

December 1, 2008 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio message praising the three bombers who were recently executed in Indonesia due to their involvement in the 2002 Bali nightclub terrorist attack. The men were executed by firing squad on November 9. - *AP, December 1*

December 1, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at the back gate of a police academy in eastern Baghdad. Within minutes of the suicide blast, a car bomb exploded at the main entrance of a nearby government building. The two coordinated blasts killed approximately 15 policemen. - *Washington Post, December 1*

December 1, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber attacked a U.S. military patrol in Mosul, Ninawa Province, killing approximately 15 people. Initial reports stated that no U.S. soldiers were injured. - *Washington Post, December 1*

December 1, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Abdul Rahim Desiwal, the governor of Andar district in Ghazni Province, was assassinated by two men on a

motorcycle. The Taliban claimed credit for the attack. - *AFP, November 30*

December 1, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a police car in Helmand Province, killing at least seven people. - *New York Times, December 1*

December 1, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Dozens of Taliban militants attacked a shipping terminal in Peshawar and killed two truck drivers transporting supplies for NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan. They also set on fire a number of transport vehicles. - *Voice of America, December 1*

December 1, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber exploded at a security checkpoint in Swat District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing at least nine people. - *Voice of America, December 1*

December 2, 2008 (UNITED KINGDOM): A British court ordered radical cleric Abu Qatada back behind bars after he allegedly breached his bail terms. Qatada, who was once described as Usama bin Ladin's "right-hand man" in Europe, reportedly plotted to leave Britain. According to Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, "He poses a significant threat to our national security and I am pleased that he will be detained pending his deportation, which I'm working hard to secure." - *AFP, December 2*

December 2, 2008 (ITALY): Italian officials announced the arrests of two Moroccan men accused of planning an al-Qa`ida terrorist attack in the northern Italian province of Monza. The men, who were arrested in Milan, were charged with planning attacks on a supermarket and nightclub parking lot, and on two police stations. Through the use of wiretaps, authorities found that the men researched explosive devices. - *UPI, December 2*

December 3, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Ahmed Ressay, who was convicted of plotting to blow up Los Angeles International Airport, was resentenced to 22 years in prison. - *Seattle PI, December 30*

December 3, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani jets and helicopter gunships bombed Taliban positions in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered

Tribal Areas. Authorities suspect that at least 30 militants were killed in the strikes. The offensive was just the latest in a series of operations launched by Pakistan's military in the country's tribal regions. – *AFP, December 3*

December 4, 2008 (IRAQ): Two suicide truck bombers targeted police stations in Falluja, Anbar Province, killing at least 16 people. – *Los Angeles Times, December 5; Reuters, December 4*

December 4, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber attacked a U.S. military patrol in Mosul, Ninawa Province, killing two soldiers. – *Los Angeles Times, December 5*

December 4, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Two suicide bombers attacked two government offices in the town of Khost, killing at least four people. One bomber targeted the department for counter-narcotics, while the other detonated his explosives inside the main intelligence headquarters. The latter bomber wore the uniform of an intelligence officer. – *Reuters, December 4*

December 5, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A bomb ripped through a crowded bazaar in Peshawar, killing at least 27 people. – *International Herald Tribune, December 5; New York Times, December 5*

December 5, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suicide car bomber killed at least six people in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. It is suspected that the bombing was aimed at a Shi'a tribal gathering, although the bomber apparently detonated his explosives early when stopped at a police checkpoint. – *Reuters, December 5*

December 5, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. aerial drone strike killed at least three militants outside the town of Mir Ali in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, December 5*

December 6, 2008 (IRAQ): The leader of an anti-al-Qa`ida Sons of Iraq group was killed when a bomb attached to his vehicle exploded in Baghdad's Dora district. – *CNN, December 6*

December 6, 2008 (IRAQ): A bomb exploded in a cafe near Ba`quba, Diyala Province, killing one person. Twenty-seven others, eight of whom members of

a local Awakening Council, were injured in the blast. – *Reuters, December 6*

December 7, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected Taliban fighters burned more than 100 trucks at a supply depot used to transfer equipment to NATO forces in neighboring Afghanistan. Security guards were apparently outnumbered by the more than 200 militants who attacked the two depots in Peshawar. According to one report, about 70 humvees, which were loaded onto the trucks, were destroyed. – *Guardian, December 8*

December 7, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) fighters and Philippine Marines clashed on the outskirts of Basilan in the southern Philippines. During the encounter, five Marines and at least 50 ASG fighters were killed. One authority figure said of the incident, "This is part of our punitive operations against the Abu Sayyaf kidnapers in Basilan." – *Sun Star, December 9*

December 8, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Al-Qa`ida operative Khalid Shaykh Muhammad and four other men accused of plotting the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States appeared in a war crimes court at Guantanamo Bay. According to one press report, the men offered "a tribute to Osama bin Laden" and called "on fellow holy warriors to strike the United States with weapons of mass destruction." – *Chicago Tribune, December 9*

December 9, 2008 (IRAQ): Iraqi authorities announced the arrests of 10 al-Qa`ida suspects charged with organizing the December 4 truck bombings in Falluja. Five of the men were arrested on December 7, while the other five were arrested on December 8. – *AFP, December 9*

December 9, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and NATO forces killed Muhammed Bobi—a Taliban commander allegedly responsible for suicide bombings, kidnappings and torture—in Logar Province. – *CNN, December 9*

December 10, 2008 (GLOBAL): According to a new press report that quotes a statement posted on a jihadist website, the leader of the al-Qa`ida-inspired Fatah al-Islam group may

have been killed in Syria. Shaker al-Absi, the head of the Lebanese group, appears to have disappeared during a mission to link up with jihadists in Iraq. The militant statement reads, "Three days after the loss of the sheikh and his companions, the shura council of the organization appointed the brother, Shaykh Abu Muhammad Awad as successor to Sheikh Shaker al-Absi. With the absence of Sheikh Shaker al-Absi, the new period starts. The organization started regaining its strength and spreading in all of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine." – *Reuters, December 10*

December 10, 2008 (SOMALIA): Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad, one of Somalia's main Islamist leaders, returned to Mogadishu approximately two years after being forced out of power by Ethiopian forces. Shaykh Ahmad is viewed as one of the more moderate leaders in the Islamic courts movement. – *BBC, December 10*

December 11, 2008 (BELGIUM): Belgian police arrested 14 suspected al-Qa`ida members, including one man who may have been plotting a suicide attack. The alleged suicide bomber had recorded a farewell video and appears to have been in the final stages of the plot. According to the federal prosecutor, "It could have been an operation in Pakistan or Afghanistan, but it can't be ruled out that Belgium or Europe could have been the target." The suspects, which include men and women, had links back to Afghanistan and Pakistan. No weapons or explosives were found during 17 house searches in Brussels and Liege. – *AFP, December 11; Bloomberg, December 11*

December 11, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed at least 55 people in a crowded restaurant near Kirkuk. According to the Associated Press, "It appeared, however, that the target was a reconciliation meeting between Arab tribal leaders and officials of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Kurdish party of President Jalal Talabani, on ways to defuse tension among Arabs, Kurds and Turkomen in the Kirkuk area." – *Reuters, December 11*

December 12, 2008 (BELGIUM): Authorities charged six suspected al-Qa`ida operatives with membership in a terrorist group. The suspects were

arrested on December 11 in Brussels and Liege. Eight other suspects arrested with the charged group were released due to insufficient evidence. – *AP, December 12*

December 12, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): The Taliban deployed a 13-year-old suicide bomber in Helmand Province, in an attack that killed three British Marines. According to reports, the boy was pushing a wheelbarrow laden with explosives when it detonated. – *Bloomberg, December 15*

December 13, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected Taliban militants attacked and destroyed transport vehicles used to bring equipment to NATO in neighboring Afghanistan. The attack occurred outside Peshawar. – *CNN, December 13*

December 14, 2008 (NETHERLANDS): Tjibbe Joustra, the Netherlands' counter-terrorism head, told reporters that al-Qa`ida does not have a presence or network in the country. He did say, however, that the risk of a terrorist attack in the country remained "substantial." – *DutchNews.nl, December 15*

December 14, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives in front of the Chinese hospital in Kandahar, killing at least four policemen. – *Reuters, December 14*

December 14, 2008 (SOMALIA): Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf fired his prime minister, Nur Hassan Hussein, citing "corruption, inefficiency and treason." Hours after the announcement, a spokesman for the Islamic al-Shabab insurgent group held a news conference in Mogadishu stating, "We will never talk to the government and will never accept any political power sharing. Our aim is only to see Islamic law running this country." – *AP, December 14*

December 15, 2008 (IRAQ): A suicide car bomber attacked a police checkpoint on the western outskirts of Baghdad, killing nine policemen. – *Reuters, December 15*

December 15, 2008 (IRAQ): A female suicide bomber killed the leader of a U.S.-backed neighborhood patrol unit in the Tarmiyya area, north of Baghdad. – *Reuters, December 15*

December 15, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. missile strike killed two people in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AP, December 15*

December 15, 2008 (YEMEN): Three Germans were kidnapped by Bani Dhabyan tribesmen in Dhamar Province. The Germans consist of an aid worker and her visiting mother and father. – *AP, December 18*

December 17, 2008 (TURKEY): Turkish authorities detained 15 suspected al-Qa`ida members during an operation in Istanbul. – *Reuters, December 17*

December 17, 2008 (TURKEY): Authorities in Turkey charged two suspected al-Qa`ida militants with having ties to a July terrorist attack outside the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul. Six people were killed during the July attack. – *Voice of America, December 17*

December 17, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): A Philippine court convicted four Abu Sayyaf Group members for the killing of two people during a 2001 attack on a resort in Davao del Norte Province. – *AP, December 17*

December 17, 2008 (ALGERIA): A court convicted and jailed an Algerian man for traveling to Iraq to fight against U.S. forces there. The man, identified as Raked Brahim, apparently joined the Islamic State of Iraq. He left Iraq, however, after being asked to execute a suicide attack. He was later apprehended in Syria and deported back to Algeria. – *AP, December 17*

December 18, 2008 (YEMEN): Bani Dhabyan tribesmen in Yemen who kidnapped three Germans on December 15 are demanding the release of Shaykh Mohammed Ali Hassan al-Moayad, a cleric currently imprisoned in the United States. Al-Moayad was sentenced in 2005 to 75 years for conspiring to support al-Qa`ida and Hamas. – *AP, December 18*

December 19, 2008 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. military announced that it would put on trial Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, the alleged planner of the 2000 attack on the USS *Cole*. Al-Nashiri is a Saudi citizen of Yemeni descent, and he has been held at Guantanamo Bay since

2006. – *Washington Post, December 20*

December 19, 2008 (UNITED KINGDOM): The United Kingdom convicted Rangzieb Ahmed of being a member of al-Qa`ida and of directing a terrorist organization in Britain. His co-defendant, Habib Ahmed, was also found guilty of belonging to al-Qa`ida. On December 20, Rangzieb Ahmed was sentenced to life in prison while Habib Ahmed received 10 years. – *Reuters, December 19*

December 19, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Three people were killed when suspected Taliban militants opened fire on an oil tanker used to supply international forces in Afghanistan. The incident occurred in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, December 19*

December 19, 2008 (YEMEN): Three German citizens being held by tribesmen in Yemen were released to authorities. According to an Agence France-Presse report, "Unconfirmed reports on a Yemeni Internet site, Marebnews, said the mediator had promised a ransom of 100,000 dollars and an assurance that the kidnapper would not face prosecution." – *AFP, December 20*

December 19, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): A top military official announced that there is a high probability that Abu Sayyaf Group leader Sahiron was killed during a December 7 clash with Philippine troops. – *PNA, December 19*

December 20, 2008 (SOMALIA): Ethiopia announced that it has begun preparations to withdraw troops from Somalia. – *AFP, December 20*

December 21, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani fighter jets killed four militants in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, December 21*

December 22, 2008 (UNITED STATES): Five Muslim immigrants were convicted of conspiring to kill U.S. soldiers at Fort Dix, New Jersey. The men, who will be sentenced in April, could get life in prison. – *AP, December 22*

December 22, 2008 (PAKISTAN): Suspected U.S. missile strikes killed eight people in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered

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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.

Tribal Areas. – *AP, December 22*

December 23, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): A grenade exploded amid a crowd attending a concert on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. At least 16 people were injured. The Abu Sayyaf Group was suspected as being responsible for the blast. – *AP, December 23*

December 24, 2008 (PHILIPPINES): Seven inmates, including two accused of membership with the Abu Sayyaf Group, escaped from a Philippine jail in Basilan Province in the southern Philippines. Three of the seven were immediately recaptured, but the others evaded authorities. – *PNA, December 24*

December 26, 2008 (IRAQ): Prisoners in an Iraqi prison in Ramadi mounted an escape bid, causing a shootout in which six policemen and seven detained militants were killed. Three of al-Qa`ida's local "amirs" escaped, including Imad Ahmed Farhan. Iraqi authorities have launched a manhunt in order to recapture the escapees. – *AFP, December 26*

December 27, 2008 (IRAQ): A car bomb ripped through a Shi'a area of Baghdad, killing at least 22 people. – *AP, December 27; Los Angeles Times, December 28*

December 27, 2008 (IRAQ): Imad Ahmed Farhan, who escaped from prison with a group of inmates on December 26, was killed by policemen in Ramadi. – *AP, December 27*

December 27, 2008 (ISRAEL): The Israeli military began a large offensive in the Gaza Strip against the Palestinian militant organization Hamas. Israeli officials state that one of the offensive's main goals is to reduce militant rocket fire into Israeli towns. – *AP, January 13*

December 28, 2008 (IRAQ): Two al-Qa`ida prisoners who escaped from jail on December 26 were captured in Ramadi. – *AFP, December 27*

December 28, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed 16 people, 14 of whom were children, in Khost Province. The Taliban claimed credit for the attack. – *Reuters, December 28*

December 28, 2008 (PAKISTAN): A car bomb ripped through Buner District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing at least 41 people. The bomber targeted voters at a polling station. – *Voice of America, December 28*

December 29, 2008 (IRAQ): A sniper shot and killed a tribal leader in Jalawla district of Diyala Province. – *Reuters, December 30*

December 29, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide car bomber attacked a governor's compound in Parwan Province, killing two Afghan civilians and wounding two U.S. soldiers. – *AP, December 28*

December 29, 2008 (SOMALIA): Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf resigned from power. He immediately returned to his native Puntland region. – *Los Angeles Times, December 30*

December 30, 2008 (UNITED STATES): A federal judge declined to release two detainees from Guantanamo Bay, agreeing with the U.S. government that the men are enemy combatants. – *Washington Post, December 31*

December 30, 2008 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani military launched a major offensive against Taliban-linked militants in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The offensive, however, temporarily closed a major supply route for international forces in neighboring Afghanistan. – *Washington Post, December 30*

December 31, 2008 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters ambushed the Musa Qala governor's convoy and killed 20 of his bodyguards. The governor was not with the convoy at the time of the attack. – *Reuters, January 1*

December 31, 2008 (SOMALIA): Shaykh Muktar Robow, the leader of Somalia's al-Shabab Islamist insurgent group, vowed to "not stop fighting even if the Ethiopian troops withdraw because our aim is to implement Islamic law across Somalia." Ethiopian troops plan on withdrawing from Somalia in the near future, but have not set a concrete date. – *AP, December 31*