



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.

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Are the Afghan Taliban Involved in International Terrorism?

By Anne Stenersen



Afghan Taliban walk through a bazaar in Quetta, Pakistan in 2005. - Photo by Robert Nickelsberg/Getty Images

IN A VIDEO AIRED on ABC News in June 2007, Afghan Taliban commander Mansour Dadullah is shown speaking to a group of around 300 masked men. The men are presented as “suicide bombers” about to go on missions in Western countries, in particular to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany.¹ The video created considerable media attention, but was soon dismissed as “jihadist bravado” rather than representing a genuine threat. Two years after it was aired, the Afghan Taliban have yet to put Dadullah’s words into action.

The Afghan Taliban movement has changed considerably since it was first formed in southern Afghanistan in 1994, and it has been described by some scholars as an integrated part of the global jihadist movement.² Afghan Taliban leaders

frequently use “al-Qa`ida-style” anti-Western rhetoric, and insurgents have endorsed suicide bombing as a tactic—a phenomenon previously unknown in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Afghan Taliban’s most immediate enemies are the United States and its allies, who they claim have occupied their country since 2001. They do not shun attacking and killing foreigners—civilian as well as military—inside Afghanistan. Is it only a matter of time before the Afghan Taliban start engaging more directly in international terrorism?³

Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 13.

³ As a starting point, it is essential to distinguish between the various layers of the Afghan insurgency. The Afghan Taliban leadership (Mullah Omar and his *shura* council, also referred to as the Quetta *shura*) gives general directions and speaks on behalf of the organization, while local commanders in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan carry out militant activities in the Taliban’s name, often with a high degree of autonomy. Foreign militant networks such as the “Pakistani Taliban” and al-Qa`ida support

¹ “Inside the Taliban Graduation,” ABC News, June 28, 2007.

² Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The*

This article assesses the likelihood of the Afghan Taliban carrying out terrorist attacks in the homelands of NATO countries that are militarily engaged in Afghanistan.⁴ It argues that while individual insurgent commanders have issued threats to attack the West, the senior leaders of the Afghan Taliban are currently uninterested in pursuing such a strategy. While this may be due to a number of factors, this article stresses that such a venture could easily jeopardize the Afghan Taliban leadership's sanctuaries in Pakistan. At the same time, it cannot be excluded that such attacks could be carried out by lower echelons of the network or by individual sympathizers, especially if the opportunity arises. The Baitullah Mehsud-led faction of the Pakistani Taliban has already shown willingness to exploit such opportunities, making them a greater immediate terrorism threat to Western countries than the Afghan Taliban.⁵

Attacks on Westerners Inside Afghanistan

The Afghan Taliban's insurgent campaign uses a mixture of guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics. Most attacks have targeted Afghan police and security forces, international

the Afghan Taliban insurgency, but they typically have wider agendas and carry out attacks in their own name. Moreover, in this article it has been assumed that the official views of the senior Afghan Taliban leadership are those that are expressed through the official websites, communiqués and spokesmen of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Mullah Omar himself stated in 2007: "The comments of the Islamic Emirate are those which are released by our official spokesmen and our al-Emarah web page." For more, see Mukhtar A. Khan, "Quetta: The Headquarters of the Afghan Taliban," *CTC Sentinel* 2:5 (2009).

4 For other studies discussing the internationalization of local conflicts, see Åshild Kjøl, Thomas Hegghammer, Annika Hansen et al., *Restoring Peace or Provoking Terrorism? Exploring the Links between Multilateral Military Interventions and International Terrorism* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2003); Brynjar Lia and Åshild Kjøl, *Islamist Insurgencies, Diasporic Support Networks, and Their Host States - The Case of the Algerian GIA in Europe 1993-2000* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2001); Matthew Levitt, "Could Hamas Target the West?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:11 (2007): pp. 925-945.

5 For more on the European plot that allegedly involved the Baitullah Mehsud-led Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, see Fernando Reinares, "A Case Study of the January 2008 Suicide Bomb Plot in Barcelona," *CTC Sentinel* 2:1 (2009).

troops, and Afghan civilians. Foreign civilians inside Afghanistan have also been subjected to attacks. This includes targeted attacks on foreign diplomats and NGO workers, but also terrorist attacks against places frequented by foreigners. The Afghan Taliban use these attacks to achieve political and propaganda aims and to support the wider insurgent effort. For example, the Afghan Taliban have claimed that diplomatic missions from NATO states are targeted because they have troops stationed in Afghanistan. After the bombing of the German Embassy in Kabul in 2008, a Taliban spokesman

"The Afghan Taliban leadership is probably reluctant to carry out actions that would increase the pressure on its sanctuaries in Pakistan."

justified it by saying, "The Germans have forces in the north of Afghanistan and they are involved in the killing of innocent Afghans." The spokesman also threatened that "the Taliban will target all those countries that have forces in Afghanistan."⁶

The Afghan Taliban have also expressed enmity toward the West for other reasons than the military "occupation" of their country. Countries that are perceived as insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, have been directly threatened.⁷ The Netherlands received several threats in 2008 after a Dutch politician, Geert Wilders, released the Islam-critical movie called *Fitna*. The Afghan Taliban leadership's statements encouraged all Muslims of the world to take revenge against the "insults."⁸ At the same time, however, the Afghan

6 "Two Dead in Explosion Near German Embassy," *Der Spiegel*, January 17, 2009.

7 In 2005, a series of 12 cartoons representing the Prophet Muhammad appeared in the Danish Newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which sparked a wave of protests across the Muslim world.

8 Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Eternal Enemies of Islam Have Committed Another Historic Crime!" April 1, 2008.

Taliban said these retaliations would be limited to attacking Dutch soldiers inside Afghanistan, and they also claimed to have carried out actual attacks to this end:

On our part we pledge revenge—Allah willing—on these Dutch soldiers with the value of their skulls, who came to our land as occupiers and where most are present in Uruzgan Province. The killing of two of them yesterday and the destruction of their tanks are a part of the series of revenge...⁹

Overall, there is little doubt that the Afghan Taliban are hostile to the West and that they do not shun attacking foreigners—civilian as well as military—inside Afghanistan. Yet, attacking Western targets outside of Afghanistan's conflict zone is a different matter.

Specific Threats and Plots to Attack in Western Countries

Mullah Dadullah and his brother Mansour Dadullah were the Afghan Taliban leaders who most explicitly threatened to take the battle outside Afghanistan's borders. Mullah Dadullah, who was a member of the Afghan Taliban's *shura* council and commander in southern Afghanistan, was killed in May 2007. He was succeeded by his brother, Mansour Dadullah, who subsequently appeared in a series of interviews and propaganda videos. Mansour Dadullah, for instance, was the leader who threatened to dispatch suicide bombers to Western countries in June 2007.¹⁰ Interestingly, Mansour Dadullah was sacked from the Taliban in December 2007, officially because he refused to obey the chain of command.¹¹

9 Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from the Shura Council on the Production of a Film Desecrating the Qur'an by a Member of Parliament in Holland," March 30, 2008; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Heavy Casualties Were Inflicted on the Dutch Forces in Uruzgan (in revenge for the film *Fitna* by Geert Wilders)," March 31, 2008; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Killing 8 Dutch Occupiers, Including the Son of the Commander of the Dutch Forces, in the Series of Revenge Operations in Retaliation for the Publishing of the Harmful Film 'Fitna,'" April 21, 2008.

10 "Inside the Taliban Graduation."

11 There was speculation that he was trying to establish an independent power base with support from his al-

The exact nature of the relationship between the Dadullah brothers and al-Qa`ida is not known.¹² Mullah Dadullah's statements, and those of his brother Mansour, have on several occasions contradicted the official statements of the Afghan Taliban leadership. The Dadullah brothers were also known to run their own media campaign (through a local "media agency" called Umar Studio), indicating a certain desire to act autonomously. Ultimately, there were few indications that Mansour Dadullah had the actual will or capabilities to follow up on his threat. In the two years after the video was issued, no firm links have been established between arrested terrorist suspects in Western countries and Dadullah or the Afghan Taliban.

Another example of threats against the West was a video aired on al-Arabiya in November 2008.¹³ The video showed a local Afghan Taliban commander nicknamed "Farouq," who claimed responsibility for killing 10 French soldiers in an ambush in Kabul Province on August 18, 2008. He warned France that they should withdraw from Afghanistan or "they will hear our response in Paris."¹⁴

The local commander's threats to carry out attacks in Paris appeared to be bravado. In December 2008, however, explosives were found in a department store in Paris, and a group calling itself the Afghan Revolutionary Front claimed responsibility. In a letter, the group stated,

Send the message to your president that he must withdraw his troops from our country before the end of February 2009 or else we will

Qa`ida allies, and it was feared that he would become a rival to Mullah Omar. See "Dadullah Sacking Highlights Taliban Rifts," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, January 16, 2008.

¹² There are few details of this relationship in open sources. It can be noted, however, that besides Shaykh Muhammed Yasir, Mullah Dadullah and his brother Mansour are the only high-ranking Taliban members who have been featured by al-Qa`ida's propaganda agency al-Sahab.

¹³ "Taliban Threatens to Carry Out Operations 'in Paris' Unless France Withdraws from Afghanistan," al-Arabiya, November 18, 2008; "Taliban Video Warning to France," Reuters, November 17, 2008.

¹⁴ "Taliban Kill 10 French Troops in Afghanistan," Reuters, August 19, 2008.

take action in your capitalist department stores and this time, without warning.¹⁵

It is not publicly known whether any members of the alleged group were arrested, but in any case there were few indications that the group had any organizational links to the Afghan Taliban or al-Qa`ida. As analysts noted, the language in the letter as well as the group's modus operandi seemed to resemble left-wing activists more than militant Islamists.¹⁶ As far as is known, neither the Afghan Taliban leadership nor Farouq's group issued any further comments in the case. The failure of the Afghan Taliban leadership to publicly refute Farouq's statement, or statements from the Dadullah brothers, is not necessarily indicative of their tacit approval; the Afghan Taliban leadership generally avoids criticizing members in public to avoid fueling rumors of splits or disagreements within the movement.¹⁷

Pakistani Taliban a Different Case

The Pakistani Taliban, which is distinct from the Afghan Taliban, has a record of involvement in international terrorism. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), led by Baitullah Mehsud until his recent death, has made explicit threats to attack the West, and it has even claimed responsibility for such attacks. While not part of the Afghan Taliban, it is useful to compare the TTP's claims with those of Afghan Taliban militants. Some of the TTP's claims have been unsubstantiated, such as in April 2009 when Baitullah Mehsud claimed responsibility for a firearms attack on a U.S. immigration center in New York State, carried out by a Vietnamese national.¹⁸ A more interesting case is the Barcelona plot, revealed in January 2008, when a dozen Pakistanis and two Indians were arrested in Spain and accused of plotting to attack Barcelona's

public transportation system.¹⁹ In a videotaped interview released in August that year, TTP spokesman Maulvi Omar took responsibility for the plot. He said that the men "were under pledge to Baitullah Mehsud" and indicated that the attacks were motivated by Spain's military presence in Afghanistan.²⁰ There were other indications of links between the arrested militants and the TTP. Notably, one of the group's members claimed to have received training in Waziristan and Afghanistan, as well as having met with the TTP's leader.²¹

The Barcelona case indicates that the TTP leadership is willing to be associated with, and possibly also directly involved in, international terrorist plots. This is in contrast to the Afghan Taliban, which have not yet been associated with any plots to launch attacks in Western countries.

Capabilities and Opportunities

An important reason why the Afghan Taliban leadership is not taking their battle to Western countries may be the lack of capability. Unlike groups such as the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) or al-Qa`ida, which have both staged a series of terrorist attacks in Europe, the Taliban do not have strong and active support networks in the West. Most of its foreign support networks are believed to be located in the Gulf region and in Pakistan.²² Nevertheless, they could theoretically coordinate with the al-Qa`ida network or other foreign militants present in Pakistan and Afghanistan to carry out attacks on their behalf; it appears, however, that they have decided against this strategy. For example, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) has attracted volunteers from Europe who have carried out operations in Afghanistan on behalf of the Haqqani network.²³ In the most publicized incident, a

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of this plot and its international links, see Reinares.

²⁰ "NEFA Exclusives: Video Interviews with Top Pakistani Taliban Spokesman Maulvi Omar," NEFA Foundation, August 29, 2008.

²¹ Reinares.

²² "Taliban's Foreign Support Vexes U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, June 1, 2009.

²³ Einar Wigen, *Islamic Jihad Union: al-Qaida's Key to the Turkic World?* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2009).

¹⁵ "Explosives Found in Paris Store," BBC, December 16, 2008.

¹⁶ "Explosives Found in Paris Department Store," *Times Online*, December 17, 2008.

¹⁷ The official sacking of Mansour Dadullah by the Taliban leadership in December 2007 was an exceptional case.

¹⁸ "Pakistani Taliban Chief Claims U.S. Shooting," Reuters, April 13, 2009; "FBI Rejects Mehsud's Claim for NY Attack," *Dawn*, April 4, 2009.

German national of Turkish origin, Cüneyt Ciftci, carried out a suicide attack against a U.S. military base in Khost.²⁴ The attack was commended by Jalaluddin Haqqani himself, illustrating the direct link between the foreign militants and the local group.²⁵ It appears that if the Haqqani network wanted to send militants to carry out attacks in Europe, it would have enough candidates. Notably, the Sauerland cell—a group of German nationals who plotted to carry out terrorist attacks in Germany in 2006—was said to have ties with the IJU and had received training in North Waziristan.²⁶ Still, there were no indications that they were acting on behalf of the Afghan Taliban or other local groups, despite the fact that the Afghan Taliban have identified Germany as one of its main enemies.

It appears that while Afghan militants may use foreign volunteers to fight in their local guerrilla war, they seem less interested in using them to carry out attacks abroad. When Sirajuddin Haqqani was asked about the foreigners he trained—in particular the militants from the IJU—he stated that “we are concerned with the war here in Afghanistan, and prefer them to carry out attacks here.”²⁷ In another interview he was even more explicit, saying:

We have asked our allies whether living in Pakistan or any other part of the world to carry out attacks against Americans only in Afghanistan and not in any other country. Our policy is that we would not interfere in the affairs of any other country whether it is an Islamic or non-Islamic country.²⁸

This also appears to be the policy of the Afghan Taliban leadership. In 2008, the official spokesman of the Afghan Taliban, Zabihullah Mujahid, stated that “the Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate are based in Afghanistan, the

leadership is in Afghanistan, and our activities are inside Afghanistan.”²⁹ Notably, the Afghan Taliban have also distanced themselves from al-Qa`ida’s global terrorist campaign. In an interview in 2009, Zabihullah Mujahid said, “Taliban is one thing and al Qaeda is another. They are global we are just in the region.”³⁰ It should be noted that the Afghan Taliban

“It appears that while Afghan militants may use foreign volunteers to fight in their local guerrilla war, they seem less interested in using them to carry out attacks abroad.”

leadership has not officially denounced al-Qa`ida or its activities, and they have stated that al-Qa`ida and other foreign Muslims are welcome to join their fight in Afghanistan.³¹ Nevertheless, it appears that the Afghan Taliban leaders themselves do not wish to be associated with al-Qa`ida’s global jihadist strategy.

One might argue that it is merely a question of “ideology” and traditions. The Afghan Taliban leadership, however, is not static and unchangeable; the endorsement of suicide bombing as a tactic after 2001 is one example of that. A more accurate answer may be found by looking at the incentives and disincentives the Afghan Taliban leadership may have for carrying out a terrorist attack in the West.

Incentives and Disincentives

A possible incentive for the Afghan Taliban to plot attacks in the West would be to create a “Madrid effect.” This refers to the terrorist attack carried out by militant Islamists in Madrid in 2004. The attack was executed shortly before the Spanish elections, and probably contributed to the opposition party’s

victory because it had promised to pull Spanish forces out of Iraq. A document was circulated on jihadist websites prior to the attack arguing in favor of such a strategy, and it is possible that the document had inspired the attackers.³²

Similarly, the Afghan Taliban leadership is fully aware of the disagreements and fault lines within NATO, and they understand that in several European countries there is low public support for the war. The Afghan Taliban have issued statements³³ to European audiences encouraging them to stop supporting their country’s politics and to stop “serving America’s interests.”³⁴ Nevertheless, one might wonder why the Taliban have not sought to better exploit NATO’s weak points.

The answer may lie in the fact that the Afghan Taliban have strong disincentives for carrying out attacks abroad. Although not stated directly, the Afghan Taliban leadership is probably reluctant to carry out activities that would increase the pressure on its sanctuaries in Pakistan. Since 2001, the Pakistani government has been allied with the United States in the “war on terrorism,” but at the same time it is widely believed that the Afghan Taliban have enjoyed unofficial support from within Pakistan’s territory. This might explain why the presence of Afghan Taliban leaders on Pakistani soil has been somewhat “tolerated” by Pakistan since 2001, while a number of al-Qa`ida members have been actively pursued and arrested. In 2004, the Pakistan Army started to crack down on

32 Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaeda Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27:5 (2004): pp. 355-375.

33 It should be noted that the Taliban’s propaganda does not resemble jihadist “strategic literature” with its quasi-neutral analyses and specific strategy recommendations. Rather, the propaganda aims at justifying the Afghan Taliban’s actions in retrospect, and it quotes sources selectively to convey the impression that a Taliban victory is inevitable.

34 The IJU and al-Qa`ida have been even more explicit, encouraging people in Germany to vote for politicians in the upcoming elections who want to pull German troops out of Afghanistan, and also threatening actual attacks. For example, the propaganda uses the low public support for the war in Germany as “proof” that NATO is about to collapse; it is not written as an explicit recommendation to its followers to carry out attacks inside Germany.

24 “Germany’s First Suicide Bomber in Afghanistan?” *Der Spiegel*, March 15, 2008.

25 “Video: Afghanistan: Veteran Mujahadeen Defies West,” Adnkronos International, undated.

26 Petter Nesser, “Lessons Learned from the September 2007 German Terrorist Plot,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:4 (2008).

27 “Interview with Taliban Commander Sirajuddin Haqqani,” NEFA Foundation, August 18, 2008.

28 “Taliban’s Siraj Haqqani Shrugs Off \$5m Bounty,” *AfPax Insider*, July 4, 2009.

29 “Interview with Taliban Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid,” NEFA Foundation, February 1, 2008.

30 “Transcript: Afghan Taliban Spokesman Discusses War,” CNN, May 5, 2009.

31 “Agha Jan Mu’tasim: The Struggle in Afghanistan and Opportunities for Dialogue,” *al-Jazira*, May 10, 2009.

Pakistani militants in the tribal areas, initially because they were suspected of hiding international terrorists but more recently because they have become a security threat to the regime itself. Today, Pakistani authorities are under increasing pressure to do more about the Afghan Taliban's sanctuaries as well, especially since these sanctuaries are seen as an impediment to the U.S. and NATO counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan.³⁵

The Afghan Taliban have consistently denied having any organizational affiliation with the Pakistani Taliban, or to have any ambition outside Afghanistan at all.³⁶ Under the current circumstances, to start engaging in international terrorism would be too risky for its overall strategy. As long as the Afghan Taliban are experiencing relative success with their present strategy, there is a lack of incentive to venture into new territory.

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The Insurgent-Narcotic Nexus in Helmand Province

By Captain Michael Erwin, U.S. Army

FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS, there has been a rising level of collusion between insurgents and narcotic powerbrokers in Afghanistan's Helmand Province. Between 2002 and 2005, the Afghan Taliban-led insurgency in southern Afghanistan focused its attention primarily in Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces.¹ Coalition forces and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) largely left the poppy fields alone in Helmand; in return, Helmand powerbrokers resisted opportunities to attack coalition forces. Militants launched sporadic attacks, but nothing similar to the level of violence in Helmand today. The violence and casualty rates in Helmand currently surpass any other province in Afghanistan.² Moreover, despite the highest international troop presence of anywhere in Afghanistan, the drug trade originating in Helmand is still a leading source of revenue for the insurgency in the southern part of the country.³ With a limited number of troops and resources, the hope for Helmand Province, and indeed the entire region, rests on the ability to break down this relationship, known as the "insurgent-narcotic nexus."

This article will briefly outline the problems caused by past efforts of poppy eradication, relay recent successful counter-nexus operations in Helmand Province, and define the challenges ahead. Furthermore, it will explain the significance of undermining the insurgent-narcotic nexus to improve the prospects for mission success in Afghanistan.

A Brief History

The first step to analyzing the current state of the insurgency in Helmand Province is to identify the province's three primary regions and their associated powerbrokers. In the north,

Rais Baghrani largely controls the course of the 100 mile-long valley starting just north of Musa Qala district.⁴ Sher Mohammed Akhundzada⁵ and his affiliates exert the most influence in the central region, where approximately 75% of the province's population resides. The historically corrupt Baluchi tribe controls a majority of the province's southern region.⁶ Together, these distinctly different regions of Helmand are responsible for growing more than half the world's poppy.⁷ These leaders and other narcotic powerbrokers in Helmand have formed a synergistic relationship with Taliban insurgents where they work together to plant, protect and harvest poppy fields and then transport the product to drug labs and out of the country; in exchange, the Taliban tax the farmers and also earn money when the drugs exchange hands in neighboring countries. Most major narcotics leaders have ties to the government, whether at the national or local level, and therefore coalition forces cannot target them effectively.

Until 2006, minimal coalition presence in Helmand clearly signaled to Helmand Afghans that their livelihood of growing poppies was secure. This changed in the summer of 2006 when coalition forces entered the province in sizeable numbers and were accompanied by a

⁴ Rais Baghrani fought against the Russians in the 1980s and was formerly a high-ranking member of the Taliban in the 1990s under Mullah Omar's leadership. In 2005, after eluding coalition forces for more than three years, Baghrani accepted amnesty and abandoned the Taliban movement. He still controls the Baghran Valley, however, which is responsible for growing a significant amount of poppy. He is clearly involved in the drug trade, but he is no longer an ideological member of the Taliban movement.

⁵ Sher Mohammed Akhundzada is married to President Hamid Karzai's sister. He was the former governor of Helmand Province but was removed from office by President Karzai under pressure from the United Kingdom for his role in narcotics; an estimated nine tons of poppy was discovered in the basement of his house in 2005. Since his departure from governorship, violence has skyrocketed in Helmand Province.

⁶ The Baluchi tribe numbers an estimated 120,000 in southern Helmand and controls the southern-most districts, most notably the area called Baram Cha, which is the gateway for drugs moving to Pakistan and weapons/ammunition moving into Afghanistan.

⁷ "U.S. Aims to Deprive Taliban of Drug Revenue by Promoting Alternate Crops to Opium," Associated Press, June 27, 2009.

³⁵ "Taliban's Sanctuary Bases in Pakistan Must be Eliminated," RAND Corporation, June 9, 2008.

³⁶ "Interview with Taliban Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid," NEFA Foundation, February 1, 2008.

¹ Personal discussion, MSG Tristan Schlientz, Kandahar, Afghanistan, August 2006.

² Paul Waugh, "1,000 Killed or Wounded in Afghan Conflict," *London Evening Standard*, August 17, 2009.

³ Karen DeYoung, "U.S. and Britain Again Target Poppy Crop," *Washington Post*, August 2009.

significantly more aggressive poppy eradication effort.⁸ The eradication program—backed by both the Afghan government and coalition forces—cultivated within the provincial population intense feelings of mistrust and disdain for the government, Afghan security forces and coalition troops.⁹ While poppy eradication achieved relative success in Nangarhar Province in 2005, Afghans who stand against the narcotics industry in Helmand are often targeted with violence that extends to their family and tribe.¹⁰ Indeed, since aggressive poppy eradication began in 2006, narco-powerbrokers have worked much closer with the Taliban than ever before.¹¹ Consequently, progress in Helmand Province will not come quickly.

Needed Departure from Eradication Efforts

The first meaningful step toward progress occurred in June 2009 when the government and coalition forces announced that they would no longer support poppy eradication.¹² As stated by the U.S. envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, “eradication is a waste of money” and has only worked to drive Afghan farmers to the Taliban.¹³ The implication of this decision means that insurgent and narcotic leaders can no longer use poppy eradication as a rallying cry to recruit more insurgents.

This does not mean, however, that the Afghan government and coalition forces have abandoned the effort to reduce the province’s poppy production. Instead, focus and resources have shifted to targeting narcotics in the consolidation

8 This information is based on the author’s personal account from his deployment in 2006 and 2007.

9 Personal discussions, Special Forces soldiers deployed to Helmand Province, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2006, 2007, 2009.

10 Poppy eradication has achieved more success in Nangarhar Province than in Helmand. One reason is that Nangarhar has a more manageable number of poppy fields located more closely together; this is not the case in Helmand. Despite this “success story,” the lack of government support and alternative crops has left many farmers frustrated in Nangarhar.

11 Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and al Qaeda* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009).

12 “U.S. Aims to Deprive Taliban of Drug Revenue by Promoting Alternate Crops to Opium.”

13 Ibid.

and transportation phases by raiding drug laboratories and interdicting narcotics convoys. This change of policy will lead to more large-scale poppy interdiction without directly affecting farmers’ livelihood.

The insurgent-narcotic nexus is the biggest obstacle to progress in Helmand. Breaking down their ability to cooperate freely is the key to success. While maintaining a significant number of troops deployed to the province is essential, sending more forces specifically to Helmand—especially at the expense of other provinces in the

“By moving away from government and international poppy eradication efforts, villagers and farmers are less likely to support the insurgency.”

southern region which are all under-resourced—is not necessary. As one Special Forces officer who served in Helmand from January-July 2009 explained,

75% of Helmand’s population lives in the central portion of the province; we need to do more with less throughout the province, but especially in this area. We can accomplish this by focusing our targeting efforts against high pay-off targets at the right time—or in other words, aggressively attacking the nexus and keeping the pressure on both components until they turn on each other.¹⁴

In his statement, the officer accurately conveyed that there is a solution, but it revolves around targeting the nexus more effectively and refraining from targeting the farmers’ crops.

Before the policy shift regarding poppy eradication was announced, coalition forces achieved enormous success in February-May 2009. This period

14 Personal discussion, Major Mark Smith, Bastion, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, February 2009.

witnessed the most effective targeting of the insurgent-narcotic nexus in Helmand to date. Amid several other significant counternarcotics operations, U.S. Special Forces conducted Operation Siege Engine during a period of five weeks in April and May that interdicted millions of dollars worth of poppy, precursor chemicals, weapons and ammunition. It was not an eradication effort, but an operation to attack the narcotics industry where it is most vulnerable: in its consolidation phases.¹⁵ The operation prevented approximately \$4.3 million from reaching the hands of insurgent commanders.¹⁶

While the amount of seized material is staggering (39,000 lbs of wet opium, 300,000 lbs of poppy seed and an estimated 120,000 lbs of precursor chemicals—ammonium nitrate, soda ash, activated charcoal and Acidic Anhydride), these operations served an equally significant role of exposing the strength and depth of the relationship between the Taliban-led insurgency and the narcotics world.¹⁷ Not only did coalition forces uncover large quantities of improvised explosive devices (IED), mortars, rockets, blasting caps and explosives on each of the counternarcotics operations, but every raid against the targets also witnessed an aggressive insurgent response where they launched attacks against coalition forces in an attempt to minimize destruction of their narcotics, weapons and ammunition.¹⁸ Several of these missions uncovered “Taliban infirmaries” and rooms where insurgent leadership met to plan future attacks against Afghan security forces and coalition forces—further proof of these targets’ significance to the insurgency.

Success has come at a price, however. Fueled by narco-powerbrokers’ funds, insurgents have fought especially fierce in Helmand during the summer of 2009 against the Afghan government, ANSF and coalition forces comprised of the British, Danish and the newly-arrived U.S. 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade. The insurgent-narcotic nexus

15 A month later, Ambassador Holbrooke announced this policy shift.

16 Personal discussions, Drug Enforcement Administration, Kandahar, Afghanistan, May 2009.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

is combining their efforts to maintain control over the most fertile province in the country because insurgents and narcotic warlords, especially those with ties to Sher Mohammed Akhundzada in central Helmand, understand that losing their grip on the province means losing money and influence—and an indication

“Focus and resources have shifted to targeting narcotics in the consolidation and transportation phases by raiding drug laboratories and interdicting narcotics convoys.”

of progress for the government and coalition forces.¹⁹ As the summer draws to a close, it is almost assured that the insurgent operational tempo will remain higher in Helmand Province than anywhere else in the country, precisely for this reason.

Corruption Remains a Block to Progress

One of the most significant obstacles to progress in Helmand Province is corruption within the government and Afghan security forces—at the national and district levels—which is directly tied to the poppy trade. As numerous interviews with Afghans reveal, the sentiment many people in Helmand feel toward the government is evident from a single sentence spoken by a businessman in Helmand’s Musa Qala district: “The Taliban were not good, but these people now—the government—they are thieves and killers.”²⁰ Lasting success in Helmand requires the government and its security forces to significantly reduce their connections (and protection) to the narcotics trade.

National and local level government and ANSF consistently accept bribes from narco-powerbrokers to facilitate instability and the booming poppy

business.²¹ There have been several instances in 2009 where IEDs have exploded on coalition patrols between two ANSF checkpoints only 600 meters apart.²² Afghan National Police (ANP) have allowed poppy shipments to pass through their checkpoints, or worse yet use their government vehicles to transport the poppy themselves.²³ Failure to curb the rampant corruption during the past three years has enabled the insurgent-narcotic nexus to expand and strengthen. In a country where corruption and bribery are widely accepted as part of day-to-day life, this task is much easier said than done. Although the current Helmand governor, Gulav Mangal, is struggling to reduce the province’s narcotics output, he continues to encounter resistance and corruption and cannot reform the province on his own.

On the heels of the elections and in conjunction with the increase of coalition forces in the province, the people of Helmand need to witness improvement in their government and security forces by early 2010; otherwise, the people of Helmand may permanently lose hope in their government’s and coalition forces’ ability to bring stability to the province.

Conclusion

The biggest overarching obstacle to stability in Afghanistan remains the volatile southern region. Enhancing security in the south requires progress in numerous areas, but reducing the insurgency’s rampant funding is an essential part of the equation. A large portion of the insurgency’s monetary backing originates in Helmand (estimates range from 40-70%²⁴). It is used to pay for weapons and ammunition and is distributed to locals who help fight Afghan government and coalition

forces. This money fuels the insurgency and helps to expand its influence.

The Taliban-led insurgency and the Afghan narcotics trade rely on each other; a weaker counterpart would significantly hinder the other’s movement. Reducing the insurgency’s links to the narcotics trade within Helmand Province during the course of the next 18 months is critical to the future success of this objective. Moreover, by moving away from government and international poppy eradication efforts, villagers and farmers are less likely to support the insurgency.

Working independently, the Afghan government, its security forces and coalition troops are not strong enough to undermine the insurgent-narcotic nexus in Helmand Province. If these entities work in concert, however, the Afghan people and the international community will achieve progress and preserve hope for Afghanistan’s future.

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21 There are numerous powerbrokers at the local level that bribe ANSF and government officials, but the most notorious is Abdul Rahman Jan (“ARJ”) who was the former Helmand provincial chief of police. He has ties to numerous leaders within ANSF and works with them to ensure the movement of drugs.

22 Personal discussions, SFC Charles Rodriguez, Kandahar, Afghanistan, February 2009.

23 Ibid.; Numerous Afghans have made these assertions to soldiers in the unit.

24 In *Seeds of Terror*, Gretchen Peters claims the number to be at 70%; recent figures claim 40% with the remaining funds originating from patrons in the Gulf states.

19 M.J. Stephey, “Stan McChrystal: The New U.S. Commander in Afghanistan,” *Time Magazine*, May 12, 2009.

20 Kathy Gannon, “The Taliban Shadow Government,” Associated Press, August 18, 2009.

The Expansion Strategy of Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula

By Gregory D. Johnsen

DURING THE PAST YEAR, the United States has grown increasingly concerned about the dangers of instability in Yemen. This fear has translated into a sharp increase in aid to the fragile state. It also helps to explain the slow but steady trickle of official U.S. visitors to the Yemeni capital, Sana`a. General David Petraeus, for example, traveled to Yemen on July 26, 2009, bringing with him both official confirmation of the uptick in aid along with the warning that the United States would expect a significant return on its money.

The extra funding is largely a result of a resurgent al-Qa`ida threat in the country. In less than four years, al-Qa`ida in Yemen has transformed itself from a fractured and fragmented group of individuals into an organization that is intent on launching attacks throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The development of al-Qa`ida into a regional organization, known as al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), has been quick but methodical as the group has articulated and then attained each goal set for itself. AQAP is increasingly establishing roots in Yemen, allowing it to plan and execute attacks across the region.

Take Two in Marib

A large part of Petraeus' visit was devoted to counterterrorism. During the meeting with President Ali Abdullah Salih, Petraeus pressed him to take the fight to al-Qa`ida. Salih dutifully responded by dispatching his nephew, `Ammar Muhammad, who is the principal deputy with the National Security Bureau, to the eastern governorate of Marib, which has been the center of al-Qa`ida activity in recent years. `Ammar negotiated the terms of the offensive with local shaykhs, but the operation four days later did not go as planned. First, a Yemeni supply truck got lost and was subsequently captured by al-Qa`ida fighters. Second, Yemeni counterterrorism forces mistakenly shelled a tribal house rather than an al-Qa`ida safe house. Their error sparked a firefight with tribesmen and a handful

of al-Qa`ida fighters opposing the military.

The "Battle of Marib," as al-Qa`ida is now calling the incident, illustrates the dangers and pitfalls of attempting to navigate the murky and multifaceted conflict that fighting al-Qa`ida in Yemen has become. Al-Qa`ida's budding alliance with some tribes in the region means that any fight that is designed to be a two-sided affair between the government and al-Qa`ida will not remain that way. The logic of these conflicts will evolve in a way that increasingly incorporates more actors, as tribesmen and other fighters are brought into the fight not out of any ideological loyalty to al-Qa`ida, but rather as a way of reacting against government action and aggression.¹

In the end, the Battle of Marib cost the military five tanks, a number of dead and wounded as well as seven soldiers captured, at least according to a statement released by AQAP.² The Yemeni government disputed the statement, but a video about the battle was subsequently released by AQAP, showing the seven captured soldiers and further confirming al-Qa`ida's claims.³ The video also backed away from the claim made in the initial statement that al-Qa`ida had shelled the Republican Palace in Marib while `Ammar Muhammad was in the building. Instead, al-Qa`ida used the video to modify its earlier statement, saying only that officers were in the palace when it was shelled.

The clarifications and running commentary throughout the video by Qasim al-Raymi,⁴ one of al-Qa`ida's

1 Tribes in this region of Yemen have often accepted money and assistance from a variety of sources, which they use as leverage against the central government in Sana`a.

2 Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, "Statement on the Battle of Marib," August 1, 2009.

3 Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, "Video on the Battle of Marib," September 8, 2009.

4 Qasim al-Raymi graduated from one of Yemen's religious institutes in the late 1990s before traveling to Afghanistan where he met Usama bin Ladin and spent time in an al-Qa`ida training camp. He comes from a family of fighters. One brother, Ali, is currently in Guantanamo Bay and another, Faris, fought in Iraq and Afghanistan before being killed in mysterious circumstances in June 2007. Al-Raymi was one of the 23 men who escaped from

military commanders, is a calculated attempt by the organization to seize the moral high ground in Yemen. In a country where many are often distrustful of government spokesmen and official statements, al-Qa`ida is attempting to show that its statements are grounded in fact. This was most forcefully illustrated in the video by footage of Yemen's minister of information, Hasan al-Lawzi, discussing the government's version of the events in Marib, which was then followed by al-Raymi's suggestion that people are beginning to turn to jihadist web forums for a more accurate accounting of events.

In addition to brand protection, al-Qa`ida also utilized the captured soldiers to its advantage, portraying them as pawns duped into obeying an un-Islamic regime. At the end of the

“Al-Qa`ida first wanted to rebuild in Yemen, and then it aimed to make itself relevant within the country. Now that it has accomplished both goals, it is taking the next step by expanding regionally.”

video, al-Qa`ida announced that it would not execute the soldiers, as this was not permitted, but that if the soldiers would not fight with the mujahidin then neither should they fight against them by assisting the "tyrants." The soldiers were eventually released as a result of tribal mediation, which `Ammar was forced to rely on after his unit's embarrassing performance.

In many ways, the Battle of Marib and the events leading up to it were eerily similar to another series of incidents eight years earlier. In that case, President George W. Bush pressured Salih to arrest three al-Qa`ida members during a November 2001 visit to Washington. The ensuing operation in Marib by Yemeni Special Forces was a disaster. The target of the attack, Abu Ali al-Harithi, escaped along with a

a Yemen Political Security prison in February 2006.

comrade, while local tribesmen took several Yemeni soldiers hostage. Tribal mediators later secured the release of the soldiers, but not before the government was warned against a heavy footprint in Marib. Al-Harithi was killed less than a year later by a U.S. unmanned aerial drone.

Yet this is not 2001, and Yemen is less inclined toward seeing U.S. priorities as its own. It has other security problems—a civil war in the north⁵ and calls for secession in the south—that it deems more pressing than the al-Qa`ida threat. Moreover, it has learned that the United States and its allies can be inconsistent when it comes to rewarding risk.

Establishing Roots

Both the statement and the video about the Battle of Marib express some surprise that the Yemeni government would even carry out an attack in the governorate. In the video, al-Raymi explained the military operation by suggesting that Salih is a “slave to Saudi riyals and American dollars.” Al-Qa`ida is increasingly viewing Marib and some of the surrounding governorates, most notably al-Jawf and parts of Shabwa, as its own sphere of influence where the government has no role.

With a few exceptions—the two suicide attacks in March 2009⁶ and the Battle of Marib—al-Qa`ida has been largely silent since its attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sana`a on Ramadan 17, 2008.⁷ Yet this silence does not equate to inactivity. Instead, al-Qa`ida has been building a durable foundation for the future. Specifically, it has been actively working

to establish links and put down roots with the tribes in Marib, al-Jawf and Shabwa governorates.⁸ Most notably, it is accomplishing this by attempting to marry into the local tribes. The personal piety of many al-Qa`ida members also resonates strongly with tribesmen as do cell phone videos of the fighting in Iraq. At the moment, al-Qa`ida is in the early stages of a budding alliance with some of the tribes in these governorates.

Despite early concerns immediately after September 11, 2001, al-Qa`ida has not traditionally had a strong alliance with the tribes in Yemen. There have

“Al-Qa`ida’s budding alliance with some tribes in the region means that any fight that is designed to be a two-sided affair between the government and al-Qa`ida will not remain that way.”

been cases of al-Qa`ida members being provided refuge by tribes, but often this was an issue of a tribesman who was also a member of al-Qa`ida playing on his tribal identity to receive refuge. What is happening now is entirely different.

Said Ali al-Shihri, the deputy commander of AQAP, recently brought his wife and children to Yemen from Saudi Arabia.⁹ Not only did this put them beyond the reach of the Saudi government so it could not exert the same sort of pressure on him as it did on Muhammad al-`Awfi,¹⁰

8 Much of the analysis in this section is based on the author’s recent trip to Yemen in July and August 2009. The author is indebted to the help and generosity of many Yemenis who shared their views and thoughts with him.

9 Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, “Statement of Congratulations,” *Sada al-Malahim*, No. 9, May 2009.

10 Muhammad al-`Awfi, a former Guantanamo detainee, was one of the four individuals featured in the video that announced the merger of the Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qa`ida into the unified al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in January 2009. One month later, al-`Awfi turned himself in to Saudi authorities. It is widely believed that Saudi Arabia used a variety of different tactics—including pressuring the women in his family—to force his surrender.

but it also indicates al-Shihri’s comfort level in the country. Al-Qa`ida is not on the run in Yemen, but rather is largely free to do what it wants in certain areas. Al-Shihri’s move is also indicative of a growing attempt by al-Qa`ida to become part of the local scene by integrating itself into the entire community in a way that a single man is unable to do.

Specific details on individuals marrying into particular tribes is difficult to acquire, but anecdotal evidence received in Yemen combined with some specific cases indicates that it is part of al-Qa`ida’s long-term strategy. In the latest issue of *Sada al-Malahim (Echo of Battles)*, for instance, al-Qa`ida congratulated one of its members, Muhammad al-`Umda, on his marriage.¹¹ It is unclear from the statement who al-`Umda married, but the belief in Yemen is that he married into one of the tribes and that his action is being replicated by other fighters from both Saudi Arabia and Yemen. This development is both new and worrying because it has the potential to turn any counterterrorism operation into a much broader war involving Yemen’s tribes.

The Perception and The Reality

Another worrying indicator for the future of counterterrorism operations in Yemen is the general apathy toward al-Qa`ida in the country. There is a culture of passivity and victimhood within the government. Nearly every sector of society has bought into this idea, arguing that the al-Qa`ida problem is really a foreign problem, an outgrowth of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹² This is not the case, and by failing to acknowledge the problem Yemen has never adequately addressed it.

There is silence from major clerics who could speak out against attacks from al-Qa`ida. The shaykhs and clerics who do preach against al-Qa`ida do not have the intellectual weight or popular following to counter al-Qa`ida’s arguments. This has essentially ceded the field of debate and discussion within Yemen to al-

11 Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, “Statement of Congratulations,” *Sada al-Malahim*, No. 10, July 2009. Al-`Umda is one of three escapees from the February 2006 prison break still at large.

12 This conclusion is based on a number of interviews and conversations the author conducted with ministers, parliamentarians, journalists and tribesmen in July and August 2009 in Yemen.

5 The sixth and most violent round of fighting to date between the government and the Huthis began on August 11, 2009. This sporadic conflict has been ongoing since 2004 and continues to be a drain on both the government’s political and military capital.

6 A suicide bomber killed four South Korean tourists and their local Yemeni guide on March 15, 2009. On March 18, a convoy of the victims’ relatives along with South Korean investigators was targeted in another suicide attack, although only the bomber was killed in the second incident.

7 The date is significant, as was pointed out in a later issue of *Sada al-Malahim*, as the anniversary of the early Islamic Battle of Badr. It corresponds to September 17, 2008. The recent attempted assassination of Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayif is the beginning of something new for al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula.

Qa`ida. The United States has been complicit in this failure by neglecting to seize opportunities to counter the organization's propaganda in any meaningful way.

The United States, for example, had a unique opportunity to go on the offensive in August 2009 when it released Muhammad al-Mu`ayyad and his assistant from U.S. custody.¹³ The case has been a contentious domestic issue in Yemen since 2003, with everyone from the president to al-

“By focusing on al-Qa`ida to the exclusion of nearly every other challenge, and by linking almost all of its aid to this single issue, the United States has ensured that the issue will never be resolved.”

Qa`ida calling for the pair's release. The United States could have easily placed an Arabic op-ed in the official daily, *al-Thawra*, explaining its rationale for the release.¹⁴ Articulating that like every country the United States makes mistakes but that it also attempts to learn from those mistakes would have went a long way toward repairing the tattered image of the United States in Yemen. Al-Qa`ida has used al-Mu`ayyad's case as a powerful piece of propaganda for years, but when he was finally released the United States was silent and did not benefit. U.S. public diplomacy in Yemen is all defense and no offense.

¹³ In January 2003, the United States lured al-Mu`ayyad and his assistant to Germany as part of a sting operation in which they were promised money for groups such as Hamas and al-Qa`ida. The men were arrested and extradited to the United States where they were convicted in 2005 of supporting Hamas but cleared of charges related to al-Qa`ida. Al-Mu`ayyad's popularity in Yemen stems not only from his role as a religious figure, but also from his charity work. He is often referred to as the “Father of orphans” in the Arabic press.

¹⁴ The author asked a Yemeni official about the difficulty of placing such an op-ed, and he assured that such an op-ed would have no problem getting printed.

Public diplomacy is not the only U.S. problem in Yemen. There is a frightening mix of ignorance and arrogance when it comes to U.S. policy toward Yemen as well as among many of those tasked with implementing this policy. The United States must learn that its insistence on seeing everything through the prism of counterterrorism has helped to induce exactly the type of results it is hoping to avoid. By focusing on al-Qa`ida to the exclusion of nearly every other challenge, and by linking almost all of its aid to this single issue, the United States has ensured that the issue will never be resolved. There is growing fear in Yemen that the country would be forgotten and neglected in the absence of the threat from al-Qa`ida; this causes the government to prolong the conflict.¹⁵

This short-sighted and narrow focus by the United States has translated over time into a lack of influence within the country. The United States is not the most important player on the domestic Yemeni scene. During the past several years, Washington has not spent nearly enough money in nearly enough different places in Yemen to have its desired diplomatic leverage. U.S. perceptions of its own importance and influence within Yemen are inflated and do not square with reality.

The Recruiting Ground

While the United States and Yemen have both been distracted by other, seemingly more pressing issues in recent years, al-Qa`ida has been working single-mindedly to create a durable infrastructure that can withstand the loss of key leaders and cells. It has done an excellent job of tailoring its narrative for a local audience.¹⁶ With the exception of suicide attacks within Yemen itself, much of the group's message is broadly popular within the country. As one Yemeni said, “I can no longer tell the difference between al-Qa`ida in the caves and al-Qa`ida in the mosques,” illustrating just how popular the group's rhetoric is on many issues.¹⁷

¹⁵ This is based on the author's interviews and conversations with government officials, as well as his own analysis of the situation in Yemen.

¹⁶ This is particularly evident from the group's videos and issues of *Sada al-Malahim*, where al-Qa`ida uses popular grievances to criticize the regime.

¹⁷ Personal interview, a Yemeni who requested anonymity, Sana`a, Yemen, August 2009.

The organization is also benefiting from other government mistakes. The overreaction of governments such as Yemen, largely as a result of U.S. pressure, of arresting nearly everyone suspected of harboring sympathy for al-Qa`ida in the aftermath of September 11 and periodically since then is not reducing radicalization; instead, it is having the opposite effect. Youngmen are leaving Yemen's security prisons more radical than when they were initially incarcerated. The country's revolving door prison policy is compounding the problem as more young men spend significant time in prison. In a sense, many of these young men have been prepared for recruitment by their time in prison. The initial groundwork is being laid not by al-Qa`ida but rather by the government's actions, which makes these men tempting recruitment targets when they are eventually released.

Yemen refuses to allow monitoring of its security prisons, which is a major cause for concern. Many of these men are being housed together, which only facilitates a sort of mutual encouragement and strengthening as more radical members are able to influence younger individuals.¹⁸ The various clerics and religious shaykhs who visit the prisons to preach also appear to be playing a role in the radicalization process.¹⁹ Al-Qa`ida's potential recruiting pool in Yemen is not drying up but is expanding.

AQAP's Growing Ambition

Since its reemergence in Yemen in 2006, al-Qa`ida has shown itself to be an ambitious but tempered organization, methodically taking the steps needed to rebuild and expand. The attempted assassination of Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayif is part of the organization's shift in priorities since the January 2009 merger of the Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qa`ida into a single regional franchise. The attack was an early attempt by AQAP to match action with rhetoric.

¹⁸ Yemen does allow monitoring of its central prisons, but these are different from the country's many security prisons.

¹⁹ Personal interviews, various Yemeni journalists and officials familiar with the security prisons in the country, Sana`a, Yemen, July and August 2009.

Following the merger, al-Qa`ida has prioritized attacks in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states²⁰ in an attempt to make itself regionally relevant. For al-Qa`ida, this is the logical extension of its development to date in Yemen. Al-Qa`ida first wanted to rebuild in Yemen, and then it aimed to make itself relevant within the country. Now that it has accomplished both goals, it is taking the next step by expanding regionally.

This process has followed a familiar pattern: each new phase of activity begins with al-Qa`ida announcing its rather ambitious goals and then working to meet those goals. The attack on Muhammad bin Nayif was an early attempt to accomplish this, but it is unlikely to be the last. AQAP currently feels little pressure in Yemen. It has both the time and space to plot and launch attacks throughout the region from its base in the country. This is not to say that the organization will no longer carry out attacks in Yemen, but rather that these attacks are no longer its top priority. Al-Qa`ida has reached the point where it is no longer satisfied with local activity. It has its sights set on something bigger.

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A Profile of Pakistan's Lashkar-i-Jhangvi

By Arif Jamal

LASHKAR-I-JHANGVI (LJ) IS one of the world's most secretive terrorist groups. Little information exists on the organization, even though it is an al-Qa`ida affiliate that is regularly blamed for terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Although the LJ was formed as the armed wing of Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), it has morphed into the collective armed wing of various Deobandi terrorist groups. Statements about the LJ from the Pakistani government and media suggest that the group is the most deadly Islamist terrorist organization in the world outside the Indian-controlled state of Jammu and Kashmir. This description, however, is not completely accurate, and it has served both the handlers of jihadist groups in the Pakistani military as well as other Islamist terrorist groups who benefit by blaming the LJ for most terrorist attacks in Pakistan outside the tribal areas.

The LJ does exist as a dangerous organization, but not in the form often portrayed by the Pakistani media and government. Most terrorist attacks blamed on the LJ were in fact carried out by several Deobandi¹ terrorist groups, of which the LJ is only one. Research into 40 terrorist incidents in Pakistan between September 11, 2001 and September 2007 show that police and other sources were quoted in various newspapers often attributing a terrorist attack to multiple Deobandi terrorist groups. During this period, it was not uncommon for the same terrorist act to be blamed on the SSP, the LJ, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam, Jundallah, or another Deobandi group.² Different authority figures blamed different

groups. Moreover, Pakistani police were unable to differentiate between the groups. In many cases, one militant had overlapping allegiances and belonged to multiple groups at one time.

This article will discuss the LJ's foundation, ideology, and organizational structure. It will also show why the LJ is blamed for a disproportionate number of terrorist incidents in Pakistan.

The Creation of the LJ

To understand the formation of the LJ, it is necessary to outline the creation and ideology of Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan. In 1984, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a firebrand and astute Deobandi cleric from the Punjabi town of Jhang and a member of Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI), founded Anjuman-i-Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (ASSP). Inspired by the Islamist and jihadist policies of

“During the mid-1990s, the SSP decided to create an underground terrorist group that would take orders from SSP leaders but operate independently. This group became Lashkar-i-Jhangvi.”

General Zia-ul-Haq, Jhangvi created the group to fight the growing influence of the Iranian revolution among both Sunni and Shi`a youth. Jhangvi dreamed of uniting all Sunni sects under one banner to oppose Shi`a Muslims and Iran; his goal was to establish a Sunni state in Pakistan and later in the rest of the world.

For almost a year, the ASSP failed to attract attention to its cause. Its members spent their time writing graffiti such as “*Kafir, kafir—Shi`a kafir*” (Shi`a are infidels), and the group largely stuck to promoting this slogan. A shrewd cleric, Jhangvi soon understood that he would not succeed unless he found supporters in Islamabad. By 1985, he had renamed the group “Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan” (Soldiers of the Companions of the Prophet) and became a regular visitor to Islamabad. In Islamabad, he frequented

²⁰ AQAP has not yet been found responsible for attacks in other Gulf states. Its statements and some circumstantial evidence, however, imply that it is plotting such operations.

¹ Deobandis are a sub-sect of the Hanafi sect, which in turn is one of the four major Sunni schools of jurisprudence in Islam. The other major sub-sect of the Hanafi sect are the Barelvis who represent more mystical Islam. Deobandis can also be described as the politicized Hanafi sub-sect as they came into being in mid-19th century British India. Their principal objective at that time was to purify Islam of the accumulated *bid`a* or religious innovation to gain freedom from the British colonial power.

² This information is based on the author's accumulation of press reports from Pakistani newspapers and media during the stated period.

Arab embassies, particularly those of Iraq and Saudi Arabia.³ He failed to convince Iraqi diplomats that his group could fight an Iraqi proxy war against Iran in Pakistan, but he did succeed in winning over the Saudis to do the same.⁴

At the time, there were not many Wahhabis among the Pakistani population, so the Saudis patronized Deobandi parties and groups as their proxies. Nevertheless, none of these groups were prepared to fight a proxy war against Iran in Pakistan. The Saudis were particularly interested in establishing Sunni terrorist infrastructure—such as military training camps—along the Pakistan-Iran border so that terrorists could carry out attacks inside Iran to incite the Sunni population against the Shi`a regime; after conducting attacks, they could flee back across the border to their sanctuaries in Pakistan. The Saudis even invited some Kashmiri commanders from Indian-controlled Kashmir to Saudi Arabia and offered them large sums of money to abandon jihad in Kashmir and establish terrorist infrastructure in Baluchistan on the Iranian border.⁵ None of these commanders, however, accepted the role as a proxy army for the Saudis.⁶

The SSP, however, did accept the role, and became one of the first terrorist groups to establish sizeable infrastructure in Baluchistan.⁷ The Saudi money gave the SSP a “shot in the arm” and allowed it to establish terrorist infrastructure.⁸ As a result,

3 Personal interviews, Arab diplomats, late 1980s.

4 One reason for this failure is that Iraqi diplomats were sensitive after the Z.A. Bhutto government raided the Iraqi Embassy in Islamabad in the mid-1970s and uncovered arms and ammunition. The weapons were allegedly for Baluch rebels. The Iraqis did not want a replay of the same incident. The Saudis, on the other hand, emerged as close allies of the Pakistani military, which was managing the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan with U.S. and Saudi money.

5 Personal interview, Kashmiri Salafi-jihadi commander who had participated in several discussions with Saudis, September 17, 2000.

6 Ibid.

7 During visits to Baluchistan since the mid-1980s, the author observed that the SSP had a visible presence in most villages along the Pakistan-Iran border. One of the SSP's favorite tactics was to write anti-Shi`a and anti-Iran graffiti on the trains that went in and out of Iran.

8 Personal interviews, Arab diplomats, Islamabad, Pak-

the SSP achieved tremendous growth in both numbers and influence during its early years. By 1990, it had plotted to assassinate Iranian diplomats along with Pakistani Shi`a Muslims. The SSP tried to kill Iranian diplomats in Lahore, Karachi and Multan.⁹ SSP members such as Riaz Basra¹⁰ and Shaykh Haq Nawaz Jhangvi (not to be confused with its founder) gained notoriety after they succeeded in killing Iranian diplomats.¹¹ Their operations did not come without resistance. For example, the SSP's founder, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, was gunned down in 1990, allegedly by Shi`a militants. Moreover, a group of Shi`a militants created their own terrorist group in the mid-1990s—known as Sipah-i-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP)—and began retaliating against Deobandi Muslims in Pakistan. The SMP assassinated various Deobandi clerics.

The SSP's killings of Iranians in Pakistan brought tremendous embarrassment and pressure on the Pakistani government. General Zia-ul-Haq had died, and an elected government was in power in Islamabad. The Benazir Bhutto-led government began to apply pressure on the SSP. The SSP at the time was also playing a role in electoral politics and wanted to use parliament to further its agenda. Yet it could not accomplish this because its involvement in terrorist operations barred it from becoming a legitimate political party.

Therefore, during the mid-1990s the SSP decided to create an underground terrorist group that would take orders from SSP leaders but operate independently. This group became Lashkar-i-Jhangvi.

LJ Splinters from the SSP

As part of the SSP's strategy, the LJ was established in the mid-1990s with the objective of executing terrorist attacks against Shi`a Muslims and Iranian nationals. Its early leaders included Riaz Basra, Akram Lahori and Malik Ishaq. The real leader of the group, however,

istan, April 1990.

9 These incidents were widely reported in the Pakistani media during the time.

10 Riaz Basra was involved in hundreds of sectarian terrorist attacks, including the murder of Iranian diplomat Sadiq Ganji in December 1990.

11 Ibid.

was Maulana Alam Tariq, the brother of Maulana Azam Tariq, the latter of whom later became the head of the SSP and an elected member of parliament.¹² The LJ was named after the SSP's martyred founder, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi.

The LJ established a training camp in Afghanistan's Sarobi district. They also trained in the Harkat-ul-Mujahidin (HuM) training camp “Khalid Bin Walid” in Afghanistan. Among the LJ's leaders, Riaz Basra¹³ emerged as one of the most ruthless terrorist operatives. He was allegedly responsible for most anti-Shi`a terrorist attacks. Basra was also responsible for making threatening phone calls to police officers charged with investigating the LJ's terrorist acts.¹⁴ The calls were effective, and police officers became reluctant to investigate the LJ's terrorist acts out of fear of reprisals. When authorities would interrogate an SSP or LJ terrorist, they concealed their identities with face masks to prevent possible LJ retaliation, a trend that continues to this day. The LJ made it a policy to assassinate police officers who investigated terrorist acts or interrogated their members. One of the most significant of these assassinations was the senior superintendent of police in Gujranwala, Ashraf Marth, who was gunned down in May 1997 after he investigated the LJ's infrastructure.¹⁵ Investigations into the SSP and LJ were halted after his death.¹⁶

The SSP continued to kill Shi`a Muslims under the name of the LJ during the second half of the 1990s.¹⁷

12 Personal interviews, SSP leaders, Jhang, Pakistan, December 2001. Maulana Alam Tariq resurfaced to take over the leadership of the SSP when his brother was assassinated outside Islamabad. He lost the power struggle, however, to Maulana Ludhianvi.

13 Riaz Basra was killed on May 14, 2002. Lahori succeeded him.

14 Many police officers told the author that they had received threatening phone calls from individuals calling from public phones and claiming to be Riaz Basra.

15 Ashraf Marth was gunned down in the city of Gujranwala as he came out of his official residence to go to his office.

16 Personal interview, senior police officer who investigated the murder, Islamabad, Pakistan, July 2003.

17 The SSP never claimed responsibility for these killings; the purpose of creating the LJ was so that the SSP could deny involvement in terrorist attacks. This information is based on the author's various interviews and investigations into the SSP and LJ.

To gain resources from the Pakistani military, the SSP/LJ also joined the jihad in Kashmir. The date of this decision is not known, but according to one interview the LJ had lost more than 100 fighters in the Kashmir conflict by the late 1990s.¹⁸ By joining the jihad in Kashmir, SSP/LJ militants received significant military training and expertise from different Deobandi terrorist groups, particularly from Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam and Jaysh-i-Muhammad. These factors raised the profile of the SSP/LJ significantly and the group curried favor with Pakistan's military establishment.¹⁹

Post-Coup Period

General Pervez Musharraf's October 1999 military coup posed one of the biggest challenges to the SSP/LJ. The organization was faced with the decision of continuing to kill Shi'a Muslims, which would have destabilized Musharraf's military regime, or remain peaceful under the new government.

The hardliners such as the LJ's Basra—even though they supported the military coup—wanted to continue their mission of killing Shi'a in Pakistan. A smaller group led by the LJ's Qari Abdul Hayye wanted to restrain their sectarian violence to achieve their larger interests of building an organization that could eventually take power in the country by cooperating with the military. These differences caused a split in the group in 2000. One faction was led by hardliner Riaz Basra. The other, more moderate faction was led by Qari Abdul Hayye (also known as Qari Asadullah, or Talha), who was the *amir* of the training camp at Sarobi.

The Basra group maintained the policy of killing Shi'a even after General Musharraf took power. Government support, however, was not forthcoming. The killings of Shi'a in the early period of General Musharraf's regime destabilized the government, and it ultimately cracked down on the LJ's activities. In what was a replay of Prime

Minister Nawaz Sharif's efforts to rein in terrorists, Musharraf's interior minister, Lt. General Moinuddin Haider, visited Afghanistan in March 2001 to extradite some LJ terrorists back to Pakistan. The Taliban refused. They also refused to sign any extradition treaty with

“The post-9/11 situation forced the SSP/LJ and other Deobandi jihadist groups to forge closer cooperation.”

Pakistan. This came as a surprise to the military; they expected the Taliban to be more compliant considering they helped install the regime to power in Kabul.

The links between the SSP and the LJ once again came into the open when the SSP ran a campaign in February 2001 to save LJ terrorist Shaykh Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was to be hanged for murdering an Iranian diplomat. Jhangvi confessed to the crime in spite of pressure by the SSP to plead “not guilty.” Jhangvi refused to lie before the court and was hanged. The SSP resorted to widespread violence across the country, with SSP workers storming the streets in several urban centers. They destroyed public and private property.

Despite this violence, relations between the Musharraf regime and the SSP remained positive. The Musharraf regime, for example, rewarded the SSP by helping to elect SSP chief Maulana Azam Tariq to the National Assembly in the 2002 elections.²⁰ Maulana Tariq returned the favor by casting

²⁰ The 2002 general elections were rigged and manipulated in several ways, before and during the electoral process, to bring in Islamists to counter the democratic political forces, particularly the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Although General Musharraf's regime had formally banned the SSP and LJ before the 2002 general elections, the group was allowed to function freely under a different name. As the democratic candidates were disqualified to run for elections, Islamists were encouraged to unite and replace them. The bulk of the Islamists were elected under the umbrella of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA). The SSP refused to join the MMA and decided to contest elections as a separate party and sent Maulana Azam Tariq to parliament.

his crucial vote in favor of General Musharraf's candidate for the office of prime minister, Mir Zafarullah Jamali, who won by one vote. Later, Maulana Tariq boasted that only his support sustained General Musharraf's prime minister in power. When Member of the National Assembly Maulana Azam Tariq was assassinated in October 2003 just outside Islamabad, the Musharraf regime refused to support another SSP candidate in the by-elections; it was exasperated with the group's blackmailing.

Post-9/11 Period

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, the LJ faced another dilemma: whether or not to support General Musharraf's decision to join the United States in its “war on terrorism.” Like most jihadist groups, the LJ hardliners led by Basra again chose to oppose General Musharraf's decision. The hardliners in other Deobandi jihadist groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam, Jaysh-i-Muhammad, and Harkat-ul-Mujahidin also opposed the Pakistani military.

The post-9/11 situation forced the SSP/LJ and other Deobandi jihadist groups to forge closer cooperation, such as in the killing of the *Wall Street Journal's* Daniel Pearl.²¹ The unity among Deobandi terrorist groups led to unprecedented violence in Pakistan. Most terrorist acts in Pakistan since 9/11 have been carried out by Deobandi or quasi-Deobandi terrorist groups, together or alone, but the LJ has almost always been blamed.

If the government were to blame jihadist groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam and Jaysh-i-Muhammad for violence in Pakistan, it would bring a bad name to the jihad in Kashmir, and eventually discredit the government's often-used policy of using jihadists as an instrument of policy. It is much easier for the Pakistani government to scapegoat the LJ for most terrorist acts in Pakistan outside of the tribal areas.

²¹ A prominent case of cooperation among Deobandi terrorist groups was the kidnapping and murder of *Wall Street Journal* journalist Daniel Pearl. Terrorists from several groups were involved in the operation. Along with Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam and Jaysh-i-Muhammad terrorists, Qari Ataur Rehman (also known as Naem Bukhari) of the LJ was implicated in Pearl's murder.

¹⁸ Personal interview, an SSP leader, Peshawar, Pakistan, April 2001.

¹⁹ Since the 1970s, the military has used various Islamist groups to achieve political goals, and in this case the military used militant Islamist parties to destabilize the democratically-elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the post-Kargil period.

From the LJ to the TTP

Today, the LJ is still involved in terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Little is known about the group's current activities, and it is not completely clear how the two factions of the LJ—the Basra group and the Qari Hayye group—have evolved. Both factions likely still exist, although different leaders are in charge. The Basra group, for example, is now part of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and contributes to its jihadist operations. LJ operatives probably help facilitate the TTP's terrorist acts in Punjab Province, where the LT/SSP has an established base.²²

In fact, a similar paradigm is now occurring with the TTP. The Pakistani government blames the TTP for nearly every terrorist attack in Pakistan, some of which likely had little to do with the organization. Yet just like the LJ, it is easy to scapegoat the TTP rather than reveal the true extent of jihadist violence in Pakistan and the many groups and actors involved.

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The Failure of Salafi-Jihadi Insurgent Movements in the Levant

By Bilal Y. Saab

IT IS REMARKABLE THAT the Levant, a sub-region plagued by internal and external crisis conditions that are generally conducive to terrorism and political violence, has been free from any insurgent¹ Islamist group with verifiable material ties to al-Qa`ida's central leadership.² The two ambitious attempts by Arab Salafi-jihadis to create insurgent forces in the Levant occurred in Lebanon in May-September 2007 when Fatah al-Islam³ violently emerged in the northern part of the country, and on August 15, 2009 in Gaza when Jund Ansar Allah⁴ declared war on Hamas. These two attempts sought to radically change the existing socio-political orders in Lebanon and Gaza through the use of religiously-inspired insurgent violence. Both attempts failed, however. Although al-Qa`ida has been tied to

terrorist plots in the Levant, it does not appear responsible or interested in the few Islamist insurgent movements that have arisen in the region.⁵

This article assesses why the Levant has been a less attractive place for global Salafi-jihadis and a more challenging environment for them to mobilize and conduct operations. It attributes these failures to the existence of well-established mainstream Islamic movements in the Levant that see the violent and extreme Salafi-jihadis as a threat to their interests; the distinct historical and socio-political circumstances in the Levant that make it less hospitable to Salafi-jihadi ideology; the relative success of the region's security and intelligence services to prevent the Salafi-jihadi threat from inflating; the subduing effect of Iran's dominant influence in the Levant; and finally the lack of material support from al-Qa`ida's central leadership to Salafi-jihadi insurgent groups in the region.

Al-Qa`ida's Lack of Allies in the Levant

Other than Jund al-Sham⁶ and Fatah al-Islam (and the now crushed Jund Ansar Allah), al-Qa`ida does not have allies in the Levant that could effectively help project its influence and ideology into the region and to serve its various strategic objectives.⁷

Jund al-Sham's lack of organizational coherence, discipline, and fighting capabilities make it an unreliable partner for al-Qa`ida in the Levant.⁸ Far from

1 The emphasis on the word "insurgent" is deliberate and used to differentiate from the word "terrorist." While there are a number of analytical and practical differences between an insurgent group (or insurgencies) and a terrorist group (or cell), this article only focuses on four: one, insurgent groups enjoy a certain level of support from a segment of society, whereas terrorist groups usually work alone and do not need indigenous support; two, insurgent groups are usually bigger and better armed than terrorist groups; three, insurgent groups work overtly, whereas terrorist groups operate most effectively in a clandestine fashion; four, insurgent groups find it essential to seize territory for the realization of their revolutionary objectives, while terrorist groups generally do not.

2 Very few comprehensive studies have been written on al-Qa`ida's presence and influence in the Levant. For a commendable paper on the subject, see Hassan Mneimneh, *The Jihadist International: Al-Qa`ida's Advance in the Levant* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, April 8, 2009).

3 Fatah al-Islam is a militant Sunni Islamist group that is inspired by al-Qa`ida's ideology. Its members are mostly Arabs from various Middle Eastern countries. It emerged in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in November 2006. Its goals are unclear but include the establishment of an Islamic state in northern Lebanon.

4 Jund Ansar Allah was founded in southern Gaza in November 2008 as an armed Sunni Islamist group with strong Salafi-jihadi credentials. Its goals include the establishment of an Islamic state in Gaza.

5 No hard evidence on direct material ties between these two groups and al-Qa`ida's central leadership has ever emerged, even though they appear to share the same ideological agenda.

6 Jund al-Sham is a title claimed by several Sunni Islamic extremist entities, all or none of which may be connected. These entities mostly operate in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and their goals include the establishment of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Levant.

7 For instance, without the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan or the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat in Algeria, al-Qa`ida would have found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to expand and operate in South Asia or the Maghreb. More examples where al-Qa`ida relied on local support to expand its influence and pursue its goals in various regions around the world include al-Shabab in Somalia, al-Qa`ida in Iraq, and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines.

8 There are three groups—Hizb al-Tahrir, Jaysh al-Islam, and Jaysh al-Umma—in the Palestinian Territories that claim to be inspired by al-Qa`ida's ideology, but they

²² Hassan Abbas, "Defining the Punjabi Taliban Network," *CTC Sentinel* 2:4 (2009).

being an al-Qa`ida “franchise” in the Levant, Jund al-Sham is a title claimed by several Sunni Islamic extremist entities, all or none of which may be connected. More like a movement, Jund al-Sham, whose alleged link to the late al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) leader Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi stems from reports that he had arranged training for the group’s fighters at al-Qa`ida camps in Afghanistan, has a presence in Lebanon’s Palestinian refugee camps

“Al-Qa`ida’s ideology does not have a strong popular following or support base in most of the Levant.”

and in Syria (possibly in Jordan too).⁹ Jund al-Sham members have been described by terrorism analysts and Arab counterterrorism officials as jihadist freelancers who are only tied together by ideology and a desire to violently defend a radical Islamic order. Many Islamic fighters tied to Jund al-Sham in Lebanon merged with Fatah al-Islam during its rise and fall, while the rest went into hiding and took refuge in the Palestinian camp of Ain al-Hilwah.¹⁰ Lebanese press reports indicate that one of the leaders of Jund al-Sham in Lebanon, Shaykh Wissam Tahbish, was arrested on August 19, 2009 by the Lebanese army as he was trying to

have no direct ties to the terrorist organization and are too small and weak to be reliable partners. For more on Fatah al-Islam and the story of its rise and fall, see Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, “Fatah al Islam: How an Ambitious Jihadist Enterprise Went Awry,” The Brookings Institution and the Swedish National Defence College, November 28, 2007. For more on al-Qa`ida in Lebanon, please see Bilal Y. Saab, “Al-Qa`ida’s Presence and Influence in Lebanon,” *CTC Sentinel* 1:12 (2008).

⁹ For more on Jund al-Sham in Syria, see Chris Zambelis, “Violence in Syria Points to Radical Islamic Unrest,” *Terrorism Focus* 3:23 (2006). On Jund al-Sham’s alleged presence in Jordan, see Alon Ben-David, “Jordanian Indictment Reveals Operations of Jund al Sham’s Terror Network,” Jane’s Information Group, June 16, 2003.

¹⁰ To learn more about the support Fatah al-Islam received from Jund al-Sham, please consult Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, “Fatah al Islam: How an Ambitious Jihadist Enterprise Went Awry,” The Brookings Institution and the Swedish National Defence College, November 28, 2007.

enter Ain al-Hilwah.¹¹ In Syria, Jund al-Sham has been accused of perpetrating a number of terrorist operations in the country and of facilitating the stream of Islamic fighters that reportedly make their way to Iraq through Syrian territory.¹²

Fatah al-Islam’s crushing defeat and ultimate transformation from a centralized insurgent group to a loose network of underground terrorist cells after the Nahr al-Bared battle with the Lebanese army in the summer of 2007 makes it an unreliable partner for al-Qa`ida.

Meanwhile, Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri could not relish the news of the birth of Jund Ansar Allah in Rafah in the Gaza Strip. As soon as the group’s leader Shaykh Abdel Latif Moussa publicly declared an Islamic emirate in Gaza, Hamas forces, who have been officially in charge of the Strip since the June 2007 coup against the Palestinian Authority, confronted the newly-born Salafi-jihadi group and killed 22 of its members in a day-long gun and artillery battle.¹³ Hamas has repeatedly fought al-Qa`ida-inspired entities in its bid to impose its influence and role over Palestinian society.

In Lebanon, mainstream Sunni Islamist groups such as Jama`a al-Islamiyya, Harkat al-Tawhid al-Islami, and Jabhat al-Amal Islami do not support al-Qa`ida and its *takfiri* ideology.¹⁴ Even

¹¹ “Army Arrests Leading Jund al-Sham Member,” Naharnet.com, August 19, 2009.

¹² Al-Qa`ida’s Syrian network is thought to have suffered a setback as the United States implemented a counterinsurgency program in Iraq in 2007 and executed a covert operation in Syria in 2008, which targeted and killed a senior member of al-Qa`ida’s facilitation network. An estimated 120 foreign fighters a month are thought to have entered Iraq from Syria at its peak in 2007. This number is now estimated to be in the single digits, but there is concern that the Syrian network is being rejuvenated. For more on Islamic fighters making their way to Iraq through Syrian territory, see Karen DeYoung, “Terrorist Traffic Via Syria Again Inching Up,” *Washington Post*, May 11, 2009.

¹³ Erin Cunningham, “Growing Threat to Hamas: Gazans Who Think it has Sold Out,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 17, 2009.

¹⁴ For profiles of these groups, see Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, “Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:10 (2007).

the Salafist groups in the north, who can be regarded as ideologically closer to al-Qa`ida than other Islamic groups, have no ties to al-Qa`ida and are largely non-militant and involved in preaching activities. These Islamic entities and others such as the Lebanese Shi`a group Hizb Allah have made it more difficult for al-Qa`ida to mobilize and create a solid base in Lebanon.

In Syria, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the biggest and most important Sunni Islamist group in the country that is opposed to al-Qa`ida’s extremism, is seen by many Syrians as a safety valve against al-Qa`ida’s attempts to establish an insurgent presence in their country.¹⁵ In Jordan, the Salafists and Jabhat al-Amal Islami (Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood) are peaceful and denounce al-Qa`ida. In the Levant, Islamic politics, like all politics, are local and are rarely connected to the global Salafi-jihadi movement.

Al-Qa`ida’s Ideology: Few Followers in the Levant

Al-Qa`ida’s ideology does not have a strong popular following or support base in most of the Levant. This is in part because of the region’s long history of communal (Christian-Muslim and Sunni-Shi`a) co-existence and rejection of *takfiriyya* (labeling a Muslim an infidel), which is a basic tenet of al-Qa`ida’s ideology.¹⁶

In Syria, while society has lately become more Islamic—as evidenced by the increased number of veiled women, skyrocketing mosque-construction, a thriving religious literature market, significant growth in Islamic charity organizations and rising attendance at informal home Qur’an classes—increasing religiosity in the country has not translated into a rise in *takfiri* ideology or Islamic militancy.¹⁷ In

¹⁵ The group, however, is banned by the Syrian regime. The only Islamist party that is able to publicly operate inside Syria today is Hizb al-Tahrir, and it is largely moderate and non-violent.

¹⁶ Another possible reason is the enduring spiritual and cultural influence by the secular colonizing powers—the Ottoman Empire in the past, and more recently France and the United Kingdom—over the Levant.

¹⁷ For example, sermons delivered in Syrian mosques have largely been moderate in tone and substance. No frequent use of *takfiri* language or sign of widespread advocacy for militant Islam has been reported in any Syrian

Lebanon, despite years of sectarian and religious conflict most recently marked by Sunni-Shi'a tensions in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War and several internal political crises, al-Qa`ida's ideology has not found a home. In the summer of 2007, the Lebanese were shocked by the images of the Lebanese army fighting Fatah al-Islam near Tripoli. Perhaps the strongest evidence of the lack of popularity of al-Qa`ida's ideology within Lebanese Sunni Muslim society was the unwillingness of all Lebanese Sunni Islamist groups to heed Fatah al-Islam's appeal and calls for help throughout its battle with the Lebanese army. Even the relatively more radical Asbat al-Ansar, the Qarun group, the Arqoub group, and the Majdal Anjar group remained fairly silent and distanced themselves from the battle.¹⁸

In Jordan, the majority of the civilian population considers al-Qa`ida a terrorist organization, as opposed to a "legitimate resistance organization," according to a study published by the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies.¹⁹ The increasingly negative perception of al-Qa`ida by Jordanians and other Arab societies alike speaks to one of al-Qa`ida's biggest weaknesses: its use of violence against innocent civilians in pursuit of its goals. In recent years, there have been mass demonstrations in Jordan against al-Qa`ida following terrorist attacks such as the November 9, 2005 Amman hotel bombings. Even Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a leading Jordanian militant ideologue, censured al-Qa`ida for its acts of indiscriminate violence.²⁰

mosques, at least those located in Damascus.

18 For profiles of these groups, please see Saab and Ransborg, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism."

19 Alia Shukri Hamzeh, "Majority of Jordanians View al-Qa`ida as Terrorist Group," *Jordan Times*, January 5, 2005.

20 Al-Maqdisi's criticism of AQI's conduct in Iraq was articulated in several articles and in an interview with al-Jazeera. See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Al-Zarqawi; munasaha wa munasara: amal wa alam," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad*, August 2004. For more details, see Anouar Boukhars, "The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan," *Strategic Insights* 5:4 (2006); Nibras Kazimi, "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 2 (2005).

Successful Hard Measures Against al-Qa`ida Security and intelligence forces in the Levant have used hard measures reasonably well to combat the threat of al-Qa`ida-inspired tactics. In Lebanon, these services and the army have been able to crush two Salafi-jihadi insurgencies during the past nine years and break a number of terrorist cells across the country. This is a result of an offensive plan that has been recently coordinated with the Internal Security Forces (ISF).²¹

In Syria, the regime's notorious intelligence services have been able to ensure security and stability in the country.²² For now, the Syrian government has largely relied on brute force to crush any al-Qa`ida-linked terrorist threat. The regime, however, seems to be investing in a longer term strategy by promoting moderate Islamic voices through regime-friendly clerics such as the moderate Grand Mufti Ahmad Badreddine Hassoun and figures such as Mohammed Habash, the director of the Islamic Studies Center and grandson-in-law of the long serving mufti of Damascus, Ahmad Kaftaro.

In Jordan, its Western-trained intelligence services and special operations unit (known as the Knights of Truth) are one of the most disciplined and effective in the region. Jordanian security forces foiled two Salafi-jihadi attacks in 2003, eight in 2004 and 10 in 2005.²³

21 For more on the Lebanese military intelligence services' efforts at combating al-Qa`ida-like entities in Lebanon, see Saab, "Al-Qa`ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon."

22 Several al-Qa`ida-style failed terrorist operations have been carried out in Syria since the outbreak of the 2003 Iraq War. The most prominent took place in April 2004, when armed assailants raided an abandoned UN building in the residential Mezzeh neighborhood of Damascus, killing a policeman and a bystander. In July 2005, a group of terrorists were apprehended after a shooting on Mount Qassioun, which overlooks the Syrian capital. Earlier that summer, Syrian authorities announced that they had arrested one man and killed another who had been planning an attack in Damascus on behalf of Jund al-Sham, an al-Qa`ida-affiliated group. In June 2006, Syrian security clashed with al-Qa`ida-linked terrorists who, according to the Syrian Ministry of Information, were planning to execute terrorist operations in Umayyad Square and other important civilian and military spots in the country. The Syrian police managed to kill four militants, wound two and arrest four.

23 Personal interview, senior member of Jordan's spe-

cial operations unit, August 21, 2009. There have been recent suspicions by the Jordanian intelligence services that Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami was forming a militant faction. The group denies the accusations and insists it is only interested in peaceful political activism.

Iran's Influence over the Levant

Iran's overall influence in the Levant is significant and dominant in some areas such as Lebanon (through Hizb Allah) and the Palestinian Territories (through Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad). This hampers al-Qa`ida's ability to mobilize in that region. Given the adversarial and often hostile

"The relative decline of al-Qa`ida in Iraq following the success of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort has presumably started a decentralization process for the group."

relationship between Iran and al-Qa`ida (al-Qa`ida considers the Iranian regime as "apostate" and Shi'a Muslims in general as *rawafidh*, or "traitors"), the latter actively works on preventing the former from expanding in its own sphere of influence.²⁴ This effort usually takes the form of projection of Shi'a values and norms onto the Levant (a process that started with the Islamic revolution) and financial and technical assistance to allies in their fight against al-Qa`ida.

24 There is no consensus among terrorism analysts over the nature of the relationship (or lack thereof) between al-Qa`ida and Iran. Some argue that the two often cooperate for the purpose of defeating common enemies (in this case the United States), while others claim that religious, political and even strategic considerations prevent the two from forming any serious partnerships.

Al-Qa`ida Unclear About the Levant

In their statements and writings, al-Qa`ida's senior leaders have often called for the destruction of Israel and the liberation of Jerusalem. Rarely, however, have Bin Ladin, al-Zawahiri, or other senior leaders addressed in detail the value of the Levant from either an operational or strategic perspective.²⁵ There are, however, some cases where Salafi-jihadi ideologues mentioned the Levant when highlighting al-Qa`ida's "global strategy." For example, Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi, allegedly one of al-Qa`ida's "strategic brains," wrote a document entitled "al-Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020," which indicated that al-Qa`ida has a master plan to pursue a long-term jihad campaign of five distinct phases to rid the *umma* (global Islamic nation) of all forms of oppression.²⁶ The strategy's third stage features the Levant where al-Qa`ida would militarily engage the United States in a long war of attrition.²⁷

Moreover, the now-detained Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, who some have labeled "the architect of the new al-Qa`ida" after the September 11, 2001 attacks, sharply disagreed with Bin Ladin and attached more significance to the Levant than the al-Qa`ida chief or his deputy.²⁸ In his lectures, al-Suri placed enormous emphasis on the strategic impact of striking Jewish, American, and Western interests in the heart of the Arab world: the Arab Peninsula and the Levant. According to one analyst who has closely studied al-Suri,

in his mind, the "new Crusader imperialism" aimed to take control of the oil resources and the holy places, both of which were

strategically located precisely in that region. Any attack here would damage the Crusaders many times more than attacks elsewhere.²⁹

Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi is also suspected of having a strategic plan that included the Levant. His organization, for example, perpetrated terrorist attacks in Amman in 2005 and sent many fighters to Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon in an effort to expand in the Levant and destabilize the "apostate" regimes there.³⁰ Finally, an allegedly leading jihadist ideologue, known as "the Spearhead of the Mujahidin," claims that al-Qa`ida is already well established in the Levant and is focused on fighting Israel.³¹

These notable cases notwithstanding, there is no evidence that al-Qa`ida's chief leader or his deputy have devoted any substantial resources to the Levant. This leads one to assume that this sub-region, while important spiritually to al-Qa`ida's leaders because of Jerusalem, is not currently as strategically or operationally critical as other regions in the Middle East or South Asia.

Conclusion

While Levantine societies have had success and luck in battling overt Salafi-jihadi insurgencies and preventing them from developing in their region, they have had to face challenges in a much more demanding category: combating the threat of underground terrorist cells, which seem to be proliferating in the Levant. The relative decline of al-Qa`ida in Iraq following the success of the U.S. counterinsurgency effort has presumably started a decentralization process for the group. Many of its members have fled Iraq to neighboring countries such as Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. In these countries, they have worked on creating terrorist cells to attack Western targets and Israel.³²

Indeed, material links between Salafi-jihadi cells and al-Qa`ida's central leadership have been reported in Lebanon. For example, in June 2009 a cell of four people (one Kuwaiti, one Syrian, one Lebanese, and one Tajik) with verifiable ties to al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan was apprehended by the Lebanese military intelligence services.³³ In July 2007, 10 men allegedly linked to al-Qa`ida were arrested and accused of using a billboard advertising agency as cover to spy on the UN peacekeeping force and the Lebanese army in preparation for an attack.³⁴

This worrying trend sheds light on the nature of al-Qa`ida's strategy toward the Levant. Instead of helping to create overt insurgent movements in that region, al-Qa`ida is likely focusing on embedding terrorist sleeper cells that are in charge, with the help of the franchise in Iraq, of planning and conducting terrorist operations against Western and Israeli targets.

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²⁵ It is worth recalling that during and after the battle of Nahr al-Bared in Lebanon in the summer of 2007, Ayman al-Zawahiri was severely criticized online by al-Qa`ida sympathizers for not publicly supporting Fatah al-Islam in its fight against the Lebanese army. Even Bin Ladin did not issue a statement praising Fatah al-Islam by name.

²⁶ Stephen Ulph, "Al-Qaeda's Strategy Until 2020," *Terrorism Focus* 2:6 (2005). It is not clear at what stage al-Qa`ida considers itself in today.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For more on al-Suri's life and influence, see Paul Cruickshank and Mohamad Hage Ali, "Abu Musab al-Suri: Architect of the New Al-Qa`ida," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:1 (2007).

²⁹ Brynjar Lia, "Dissidents in al-Qaida: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of bin Ladin and the Salafi Jihadi Current," Lecture at Princeton University, December 3, 2007.

³⁰ See Saab and Ranstorp, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism."

³¹ Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Al-Qaeda Ideologue Describes Alleged Spread of Al-Qaeda in the Levant," *Terrorism Monitor* 7:7 (2009).

³² For example, al-Qa`ida cells have attacked UNIFIL (more specifically its Spanish contingent in June 2007)

and claimed rocket attacks from southern Lebanon against Israel. See Patrick Galey, "Al-Qaeda Claims Rocket Attacks Against Israel," *Daily Star* [Beirut], July 27, 2009; Yaakoz Katz, "Al-Qaeda Suspected in Attack that Killed 5 UN Troops," *Jerusalem Post*, June 25, 2007.

³³ Hassan Oleik, "Al Iddi'a ala Mawkoufin min al-Qa`ida Mourtabitin bi Afghanistan," *al-Akhhbar*, June 30, 2009.

³⁴ "Lebanon: Ad Agency Served as Cover for Terror Plot, Reports Say," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 2009.

The Dangerous Ideas of the Neo-Zarqawist Movement

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

ON JUNE 4, 2009, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi gave his first interview since his release from a Jordanian prison in March 2008. Considered the ideological defender of the overall Salafi-jihadi movement, al-Maqdisi admitted that there are now competing views among Salafi-jihadis in Jordan.¹ His confirmation of tension within the movement came in response to an escalating dispute between al-Maqdisi and his followers on one side, and on the other a splinter movement of Salafi-jihadis known as the “neo-Zarqawists.” The neo-Zarqawists are a small group of ideological radicals who consider themselves the heirs of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi’s legacy. Although al-Maqdisi is considered the spiritual mentor of al-Zarqawi, the two grew apart in mid-2005 when al-Maqdisi criticized al-Qa`ida in Iraq’s (AQI) tactics.

The differences within the Salafi-jihadi movement are significant because it is rare for an established Salafi-jihadi authority—in this case Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi—to be criticized and challenged for his writings and ideological position within his own base. This ongoing rift among the Salafi-jihadi community threatens to draw in a younger generation of militant youth—who idolize al-Zarqawi for his aggressive tactics—intent on pursuing al-Zarqawi’s legacy of spreading Salafi-jihadi violence into the Levant region.

This article provides a brief background on the growing tension among the Salafi-jihadi community in Jordan, identifies the leaders of the neo-Zarqawist movement, and shows that al-Zarqawi’s legacy may translate into an increase of terrorist plots and violence in the Levant and greater Middle East region.

Background

Differences between Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi first appeared in mid-2005, when the latter sent an open letter to al-Zarqawi in Iraq entitled “Advocacy and Advice.” The letter asked AQI to refrain from targeting Iraqi Shi`a and Christian civilians.² Al-Maqdisi also stressed the importance of allowing Iraqis to hold the leadership reins in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi responded to the letter by highlighting that its message harmed the overall “jihad in Iraq.” Since that incident, divisions appeared between al-Maqdisi’s and al-Zarqawi’s followers, and they have resulted in a growing gap within the Salafi-jihadi movement.

Today, a portion of the Salafi-jihadi community that agrees with al-Zarqawi’s actions and tactics in Iraq continue to criticize al-Maqdisi directly, and they warn other established Salafi-jihadi leaders and clerics against continuing to follow al-Maqdisi.³ In response, al-Maqdisi and other established Salafi-jihadi leaders have warned their followers against promoting the views of the neo-Zarqawists, who they call “deviants.”

The Neo-Zarqawists

The neo-Zarqawist movement identifies itself as the heirs of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi’s legacy. This legacy can best be defined as inducing sectarian warfare and attempting to spread jihadist ideas into the Levant, rather than confining jihad to Iraq or Afghanistan. Importantly, al-Zarqawi’s “heirs” also ignore the decrees and opinions of senior Salafi-jihadi clerics and leaders, most evident through their ongoing criticisms of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Their decision to directly challenge leading Salafi-jihadi clerics shows why this movement is less predictable and potentially more violent; it marks a fragmentation of the established Salafi-jihadi order. As stated by Joas Wagemakers, “it confirms the worrying trend among jihadists to see themselves as capable of deciding what is legitimate in combat, irrespective of what their scholars

think.”⁴ The majority of neo-Zarqawist writings can be found at the Midad al-Sayouf forum.⁵

The primary leaders of the movement are al-Zarqawi’s brother-in-law, Abu Qudama, and Abu Harith al-Mihdhar. These two individuals are best described as ideological leaders because they are not involved in actual jihadist operations. Nevertheless, their ties to al-Zarqawi and criticisms of established Salafi-jihadi leaders in a public forum are threatening because they could further incite militants to resume and prolong al-Zarqawi’s legacy of spreading violence throughout the Levant. This was partially confirmed in October 2008 when Jihad al-Qashih, a militant who was active operationally in the field with al-Zarqawi, expressed support for the movement in a letter he wrote from a prison cell, presumably in Syria.⁶

Abu Qudama Salih al-Hami’s real name is Sati Qasrawi. He is a Jordanian national and worked as *Jihad Magazine’s* correspondent in Afghanistan during the jihad against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.⁷ He lost his leg there in a landmine explosion.⁸ He is married to al-Zarqawi’s sister and currently lives in Jordan.

Al-Mihdhar’s real name is Abu Abu’l-Harith al-Mihdhar al-Shazli al-Hasani al-Sharif.⁹ He is an Egyptian national who studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Umm al-Qura University in Mecca

4 Joas Wagemakers, “Invoking Zarqawi: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s Jihad Deficit,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:6 (2009).

5 See for example, www.almedad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=10859, www.almedad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=11996 and www.almedad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=12343. Supporters of al-Maqdisi, in turn, created a forum that they named Shoumoukh al-Islam (Glory of Islam).

6 It is not clear when he was arrested, but the first reference of his detention was in February 2007 in a report by the Arab Organization for Human Rights of Jordan.

7 *Jihad Magazine* was a bi-monthly magazine founded by Abdullah Azzam in 1984. It was the major media source for the Afghan mujahidin at the time.

8 See his participation in al-Jazira’s documentary about al-Zarqawi on July 1, 2004. This is available at www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/930C50BF-DF09-4597-9A24-18E23556F266.htm.

9 Iman al-Qahtani, “Sijal Bayanat bayn Islamiyye London,” al-Arabiya, February 12, 2009.

2 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “Al-Zarqawi – Munasaha wa-Munasara,” available at www.tawhed.ws/r?i=dtwiam56.

3 These leaders include Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Jarrah al-Qaddah, Abu Abdallah Riyalat, Abu Saraqa al-Faqih, among others.

1 *Al-Sabeel*, June 4, 2009.

and studied Deoband in Pakistan.¹⁰ He moved to London at an unknown point and founded the Midad al-Sayouf Forum. He also allegedly created the Thabitoun ala al-Ahd (Abiding by our Oath) site¹¹ for Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah,¹² a dissident jihadist leader who joined al-Qa`ida.¹³

Once Jihad al-Qashih joined the campaign against al-Maqdisi in 2008, it became clear that individuals with military experience are supporting the more radical neo-Zarqawist movement. Al-Qashih's real name is Ibrahim

“Their decision to directly challenge leading Salafi-jihadi clerics shows why this movement is less predictable and potentially more violent; it marks a fragmentation of the established Salafi-jihadi order.”

Muhammad Abdul-Thahir Zain al-`Abidin.¹⁴ He is often described on jihadist forums as the “hero of Falluja” due to his experience fighting with al-Zarqawi in Anbar Province in 2004. Currently, he is believed to be in a Syrian prison, from where he wrote the 2008 letter criticizing al-Maqdisi. His long letter was posted on jihadist websites, especially the sites popular among neo-Zarqawists.

Al-Qashih appears to have been instrumental to al-Zarqawi's Levantine strategy, as he allegedly attempted to

carry out terrorist attacks in Jordan, one of which was believed directed by al-Zarqawi himself. He remains wanted in Jordan, most famously for an assassination attempt against U.S. archaeologists in that country in April 2004.¹⁵ He was also tried in absentia for involvement in the “chemical cell,” which was a plot to blow up Jordan's General Intelligence building in 2004. The plot was headed by Azmi al-Jayousi and organized by al-Zarqawi, who was leading AQI at the time.¹⁶

Still a Fringe Movement

The neo-Zarqawists are not scholars or clerics. As a result, they lack the theoretical approach that characterizes the writings of al-Maqdisi and other established theorists. The neo-Zarqawist writings are almost solely based on personal criticism of al-Maqdisi. They also criticize al-Maqdisi's lack of “jihadist credentials” since, unlike al-Zarqawi, he has never been involved in actual combat.¹⁷ The neo-Zarqawists' beliefs are even more radical than al-Maqdisi and the established Salafi-jihadi theorists. For example, they oppose al-Maqdisi because he refused to declare that all Shi`a are non-believers. The neo-Zarqawists refuse to criticize suicide bombings,¹⁸ they pursue *takfiri* ideology, and charge Jordan's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs with blasphemy for its role in controlling mosques.

Although a potentially dangerous movement, it has not yet been accepted by the mainstream Salafi-jihadi movement.¹⁹ This is due to the fact that the heirs of al-Zarqawi and others that pursue his more expansive ideology lack the credentials of the established Salafi-jihadi scholars and clerics. Moreover, as recently as January 14, 2009, Usama bin Ladin praised Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's website, Manbar al-Jihad

wal-Tawhid, providing legitimacy to al-Maqdisi's agenda.²⁰ Nevertheless, the neo-Zarqawist movement remains concerning as it could attract energetic youth, who may be less prone to rigidly follow the dictates of al-Maqdisi and more attracted to al-Zarqawi's infamous legacy in Iraq.

Terrorism Spreading into the Levant

The possibility of other active militants pursuing the neo-Zarqawist ideology is concerning as it would result in more terrorist violence in the Levant. Although al-Zarqawi was killed on June 7, 2006 in a U.S. missile strike, he left an enduring mark on the region. His legacy is partly defined by his attempt to spread jihadist violence into the more stable states of the Levant—most vividly witnessed in the 2005 Amman hotel bombings. His goal was to liberate Palestine after the battle was concluded in Iraq. In December 2005, for example, al-Zarqawi claimed responsibility for launching missiles at northern Israel.²¹

From the establishment of his military training camp in Afghanistan's Herat Province in 2000 through his violent activities in Iraq until his 2006 death, al-Zarqawi influenced a number of jihadists, many of whom were from the Levant region.²² Al-Zarqawi wanted to create an “al-Qa`ida in the Levant” organization, and he sought to establish organizational and ideological links between his AQI movement and other jihadist cells in the Levant.

Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Jordan has seen a significant increase in the number of foiled terrorist plots. During the period of 1991-2003, for example, Jordanian courts ruled in 10 large cases related to Salafi-jihadis. From 2003-2008, however, that number more than doubled to 22.²³ Most of the cases were at least partly linked to either Iraq, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi or AQI. Al-Zarqawi himself was personally tried in absentia in four of the 22 cases, while six cases were linked to him by one of his operatives

10 Ibid.

11 The website is currently defunct. Its URL used to be located at www.altabetoon.eur.st.

12 Al-Hakaymah is one of Egyptian Jama`a al-Islamiyya's leaders who claimed that the group joined al-Qa`ida, creating al-Qa`ida's “Egyptian branch” in 2006. Jama`a al-Islamiyya denied his claim, however. Al-Hakaymah is supposedly based in Afghanistan.

13 Al-Qahtani.

14 “Al-Rad Ala`a al-Maqdsi fi Tholmeh Il Zarqawi,” published on several jihadist web forums in October 2008. It is still available at www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=312502.

15 In April 2004, Jordanian security foiled an attempt to attack four American anthropologists who were working in Irbid (northern Jordan). Al-Qashih was one of the ringleaders in this attempt, along with Jamil Kotkot. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 6, 2006.

16 *Al-Sabeel*, January 11, 2005.

17 For more on these compare-and-contrast criticisms, see Wagemakers.

18 Al-Hami.

19 For example, there was strong criticism from al-Faloja users, many of whom demanded the closure of Midad al-Sayouf.

20 Usama bin Ladin, audio recording, January 14, 2009.

21 *Daily Star*, December 20, 2005; *Jerusalem Post*, December 30, 2005.

22 Fouad Husain, *Al-Zarqawi: al-Jeel al-Thani Il Qaida* (Amman: Dar al-Khayal Publication, 2005).

23 These numbers were derived from the author's review of all Jordanian cases since 1991.

or relatives.²⁴ In eight cases, the major charge was “planning to travel to Iraq to fight Americans.”²⁵ Although not all of the 22 cases were connected to al-Zarqawi or AQI, they demonstrate the worrying spread of Salafi-jihadi ideals into the Levant.

Some of the Jordanian court cases established links between Jordanian jihadists and other militants in the Levant region. Shakir al-Khatib, for example, is the leader of a group on trial in Jordan charged with plotting to blow up Christian churches and attacking a Lebanese choir in July 2008.²⁶ He was not trained in Jordan, however, but instead in the Ain al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. According to the indictment, he allegedly pledged *bay`at* (oath of loyalty) to al-Qa`ida and wanted to fight in Iraq.²⁷ In 2005, the Khatab Brigades was a group seeking to fight in Iraq and to also implement terrorist attacks in Jordan.²⁸ Another example is of two leading Salafi-jihadi leaders in the Ain al-Hilwah refugee camp who were tried in absentia in Jordan: Usama al-Shihabi (Abu al-Zahra) and Haytham al-Saadi (Abu Tariq). Al-Shihabi was the leader of Jund al-Sham in Lebanon, an organization supposedly founded by al-Zarqawi himself when he was in Afghanistan’s Herat Province.²⁹ Al-Saadi is the brother of Asbat al-Ansar leader Abu Muhjin.³⁰

Another effect of al-Zarqawi’s legacy is his impact on the Palestinian diaspora in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Socio-political conditions in Palestinian refugee camps in these countries play an important role in increasing the influence of al-Zarqawi’s ideology. Jordan’s Irbid camp, for example, is close to the Syrian border and has emerged as a crossing point for Salafi-jihadis heading to Iraq or Lebanon, as seen through evidence

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 *Al-Hayat*, January 28, 2009.

27 Ibid.; Also see Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Al-Zarqawi’s Legacy Seen in Trial of Jordanian al-Qaeda Cell,” *Terrorism Focus* 6:4 (2009).

28 *Al-Ghad*, December 7, 2005; *Jordan Times*, September 14, 2006.

29 “Tantheem Jund al-Sham Bada’ ma’a al-Zarqawi fi Afghanistan w Antaqal Beza’amt Abu Yousof ila Mukhaim A’in al-Hilweh,” *Asbarq al-Awsat*, May 25, 2007.

30 “Al-Zarqawi Yoa’in Abu Muhjin al-Mutarad al-Falastini Qaedan Maydanyan,” *Elaph*, August 16, 2005.

uncovered during the ongoing trials of Salafi-jihadis in Jordan.

Jihad al-Qashih was originally from the Irbid camp, as was Suleiman Ghayyad al-Anjadi, who was killed by Jordanian authorities after an armed confrontation in 2007. Al-Anjadi was accused of attempting to help Azmi al-Jayousi—who was sent to Jordan by al-Zarqawi to lead the 2004 chemical cell—escape from prison with the help of other militants. Al-Anjadi is also accused of plotting to assassinate U.S. President George W. Bush during his visit to Jordan in 2006.

Conclusion

Despite his death in 2006, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi’s legacy lives on. His speeches and tactics have influenced militants in the Levant. Just as worrying, his so-called “heirs” continue to promote his legacy on jihadist web forums. The neo-Zarqawist movement has been able to mobilize and attract supporters despite its lack of a “legitimate” ideology when compared to Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and his followers.

Al-Zarqawi’s followers are even more radical than al-Maqdisi and the other established Salafi-jihadi theorists because they are pursuing a more unrestrained form of warfare. If his legacy gains further traction among the Salafi-jihadi community, it could mean a rise in terrorist plots in the relatively stable Levant region.

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The July 17 Jakarta Suicide Attacks and the Death of Noordin Top

By Noor Huda Ismail

ON JULY 17, 2009, two suicide bombers struck the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta, Indonesia, killing seven people. Indonesian authorities are still investigating the attacks and have not yet compiled enough evidence to know the exact parties responsible. Speculation, however, fell on Noordin Mohamed Top, a militant who led a faction of the al-Qa`ida-linked Jemaah Islamiya (JI) terrorist group.¹ The hotel bombings shocked Indonesia because conditions in the country have been relatively peaceful since the last attack by Noordin’s group in Bali in 2005. In the 2005 attack, three bombs struck two tourist areas, killing at least 26 people, among them foreign nationals.²

Since 2002, Indonesian authorities have managed to arrest most of JI’s senior members. More importantly, they have succeeded in gleaning information about the JI network and ideology from interrogations. Authorities have also confiscated a significant amount of JI’s explosives material, and they have foiled various plots, such as an attempt to blow up a café frequented by Western tourists in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra in 2008 and the planned assassination of a foreign national there.³ Most significantly, after nearly seven frustrating years of near misses and false leads, Indonesian authorities finally managed to kill Noordin Top on September 17 at the end of a bloody nine-hour siege in Central Java.⁴ Despite Noordin’s death, JI, and especially the remaining members of Noordin’s pro-bombing faction, remains a threat to Indonesian security.

1 Jemaah Islamiya is no longer a cohesive organization with a unified leadership structure. Divisions appeared in the group after the first Bali bombing in 2002. Noordin’s faction is the only group in Indonesia that has conducted suicide attacks.

2 “Bali Bomb Attacks Claim 26 Lives,” BBC, October 2, 2005.

3 International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: Radicalisation of the Palembang Group,” May 20, 2009.

4 “Indonesian Police: DNA Proves It Was Noordin,” *Jakarta Globe*, September 18, 2009.

This article will offer a profile of Noordin Mohamed Top, describe his pro-bombing faction of JI, and assess the future dangers posed by this violent faction.

Profile of Noordin Mohamed Top

Jemaah Islamiya is currently a crippled organization. It officially opposes bombings and encourages its members not to participate in attacks.⁵ JI's mainstream faction has adopted a "soft" approach to its mission of Darul Islam⁶ and has focused on preaching and conducting charity work. Yet its potential for violence remains as a result of an internal split that created a more hardcore splinter group led by Malaysian JI member Noordin Mohamed Top. Noordin has orchestrated terrorist operations in Indonesia since his first attack on the JW Marriott in 2003.

Born on August 11, 1968 in Malaysia, Noordin was charismatic and generally reserved.⁷ One of his former associates described him as a man of high discipline in carrying out *amaliyya* (the code for terrorist acts).⁸ He switched locations regularly and never used a cellular phone.⁹ He was considered an expert at avoiding security forces. According to Ali Imron,¹⁰ who was involved in the first Bali bombing, Noordin was a student of the late JI leader Ali Ghufron (also known as Mukhlis)¹¹ when he taught in Pesantren Lukmanul

Hakim¹² in the 1990s in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. When Noordin joined the JI organization, he was still a lecturer at a university in Malaysia where he taught computer science.

Noordin was not involved in the 2002 Bali bombing because he had just arrived in Indonesia. This allowed him to avoid arrest when governments in the region rounded up a number of senior JI members, especially in Malaysia. Noordin's role in JI and terrorism increased after his mentor, Ali Ghufron, was arrested in December 2002. Noordin wanted to continue his mentor's struggle by assuming leadership of all future bombing campaigns, beginning with the August 2003 JW Marriott bombing in Jakarta. It is not clear whether Noordin had actual bomb-making experience; his skill-set was as a recruiter and manager.

Over the years, Noordin grew increasingly radical and seemingly adopted some of al-Qa`ida's video propaganda tactics. After the death of his JI associate and bomb expert Azahari¹³ in 2005, for example, Noordin released a video threatening the West:

As long as you keep your troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and intimidate Muslim people, you will feel our intimidation and our terror...America, Australia, England and Italy. You will be the target of our next attack. Especially for Australia, as long as its troops are in Afghanistan and Iraq and engage in intimidation there, you will also feel our intimidation.¹⁴

The video was posed in a Zarqawi-like setting, with a masked man, believed to be Noordin, explicitly threatening the West.

Noordin Top's Faction

The number of hardcore members in Noordin's JI faction is not known, although some analysts believe it is no more than a handful. Noordin's faction is known to actively seek martyrdom operations. The group's main principle to live by is *Innal hayata la aqidatun wal jihad*

(life's purpose is to maintain faith and jihad).¹⁵ Due to the group's willingness to accept martyrdom operations, they are ready to face various challenges and risks, including the threat of prison or death. As stated by one prisoner who was implicated in the 2005 Bali bombings, "To die fighting for our faith is noble, and heaven awaits our arrival with 72 beautiful angels."¹⁶

One imprisoned militant, interviewed in June 2009, explained how Noordin recruited new martyrs: "At the moment, Noordin never goes looking for people committed to the cause, but rather young people seek him out to sacrifice themselves. If you are on the same track, you will be able to find him."¹⁷ Committed martyrs consider their actions as *istishbad* (the search to become a *shahid*, or martyr), and not suicide.

Eluding Arrest and Recruiting New Members

For the last seven years, Noordin managed to elude arrest because he enjoyed protection from hardcore members of the JI community and other individuals who shared his ideology. His sympathizers consider the Indonesian government a "secular government which has succumbed to the interests of the USA and its allies; it is therefore the enemy and may be engaged in combat."¹⁸ Although internal differences among JI members are apparent, it has not regressed to the point that group members are regularly cooperating with authorities in arrests.

Although Noordin's splinter faction is likely under 50 members,¹⁹ it has the full support of dedicated youth who share a deep commitment to the jihadist cause. This allows the faction to recruit new members. According to one member of Noordin's faction when describing its agenda, "Don't just stick to the big *jamaah* (group). We have to support jihad anywhere and everywhere including in Iraq."²⁰ For this member, jihad is

5 Personal interview, Abu Rusdan, leader of JI's mainstream faction, Central Java, Indonesia, June 2009.

6 Its mission is to reach a world of Darul Islam, or the abode of Islam in Indonesia and beyond.

7 Personal interview, Abdullah Sunata, Jakarta Police Detention, Indonesia, August 2009. Sunata met with Noordin in 2004 when Noordin sought help from Sunata. Sunata refused to help Noordin because for Sunata the use of violence is only justified in conflict zones, not in peaceful cities such as Jakarta or Bali.

8 Personal interview, Jack Harun, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, June 2009. Harun was arrested for his involvement as Noordin's courier and right-hand man. Harun was recently released from prison.

9 Ibid.

10 Personal interview, Ali Imron, Jakarta, Indonesia, June 2009. Ali Imron is one of the main actors of the first Bali bombing. He is also the younger brother of the late Ali Ghufron. Ali Imron spent some time in Johor Bahru where he met Top.

11 Ghufron planned and executed the 2002 Bali bombing and was executed by the Indonesian government in November 2008.

12 *Pesantren* are Islamic boarding schools.

13 Azahari was killed by Indonesian police in 2005. He was a bomb expert with JI.

14 BBC, November 18, 2005.

15 Personal interview, Anif Solchanudin, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, June 2009.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Personal interview, Ali Imron, Jakarta, Indonesia, June 2009.

19 There is insufficient evidence to know the size of the faction, but the author estimates around 20 hardcore members.

20 Personal interview, Urwah, Solo, Central Java, Indo-

fard`ayn (personal obligation) and it is therefore legitimate for any group or individual to carry out jihad based on their own initiatives and methods.

In this context, Noordin won fresh recruits from among hardcore members who “idolized” him and believed that the use of violence against the enemies of Islam is justified in any situation. Hardcore members also consider many senior JI members to be “NATO” (No Action, Talk Only) and no longer passionate in their commitment to the jihadist movement. This is because many JI members have matured, married and taken on family considerations.²¹

Members of Noordin’s pro-bombing faction are a fringe minority within JI. Nevertheless, it does not take a large organization to commit major terrorist attacks. The 2005 Bali bombing, for example, was committed by only three individuals who were willing to blow themselves up for the cause.²²

Future Dangers

Noordin’s death is a major government success. Yet if it is determined that Noordin’s faction was behind the July 17 Jakarta attacks, it demonstrates an advanced level of efficiency, sophistication and novelty of tactics compared to their previous operations that relied on vehicles and backpack bombs.²³ In the case of the 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings, Noordin’s key associate, Syaifudin Zuhri, allegedly recruited both of the suicide bombers and had them stay overnight in luxurious hotels.²⁴ The recruits assembled their bombs inside their hotel rooms. This allowed maximum operational security.

It is possible that Syaifudin Zuhri will succeed Noordin with the help from at least three of his followers, including

nesia, June 2009. He died together with Noordin during the police raid on September 17, 2009.

²¹ This statement is based on the author’s personal observations after a series of interviews with senior JI members.

²² In this attack, Salik Firdaus recruited two suicide bombers and he himself was the third suicide bomber.

²³ Based on evidence acquired from the attack, it is highly likely that Noordin’s faction is to blame. There are direct connections between the current suspects and Noordin. Moreover, Noordin’s faction is the only group in Indonesia that has conducted suicide bombings.

²⁴ *Gatra*, August 27, 2009.

Nur Hasbi, who is wanted in connection with the July 17 bombings. Two other possible successors are Reno (also known as Tedi) and Maruto Jati Sulistiono.

Unfortunately, there is no way to draw a profile of future JI suicide bombers. Previous profiles of suicide bombers, for example, describe young men, religiously devout, alienated from society, and social and psychological outcasts. Yet the two bombers in the 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings did not fit this profile. Dani Dwi Permana, 18-years-old, was a former high school student in Bogor, West Java. Dani’s teacher described him as not very talkative, but intelligent and diligent in his studies.²⁵ Dani sat on the executive committee of the school’s Intra-School Students Organization (OSIS) and was known by all of the school’s students.²⁶ He passed the school’s final examination in 2009, but still had to collect his SMA (high school) diploma.²⁷ In the case of the second bomber, Nana Supriyatna, 28-years-old, his neighbors describe him as “sociable” and “friendly.”²⁸ No one terrorist profile is likely to ever be drawn.

Noordin’s faction will continue to rely on the traditional tools of recruitment such as schools, kinship networks, friendships and small Islamic discussion groups.²⁹ To make matters more difficult, Noordin’s group have also embraced new technologies such as CDs, DVDs, coded SMS messages, secure e-mail, and password-protected websites to communicate and connect to new potential recruits. Until Noordin’s faction is dismantled, Indonesia will remain at risk for future terrorist attacks.

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²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “JW Marriott Hotel Bomber was Bogor High-School Student,” *Antara News*, August 10, 2009.

²⁸ *Gatra*, August 27, 2009.

²⁹ These discussions, consisting of six-to-ten people, meet regularly for a number of social and religious activities. Due to their perceived harmless nature, these groups inhibit authorities from preventing possible violent outcomes.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

August 1, 2009 (SOMALIA): Burundi’s military announced that a third battalion of 850 soldiers had been deployed to Somalia to reinforce the African Union peacekeeping force in Mogadishu. – *AFP*, August 1

August 2, 2009 (RUSSIA): Militants attacked a three-vehicle police convoy in the mountains of southern Chechnya, killing “several” officers. – *Voice of America*, August 3

August 3, 2009 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message saying that the group’s “truce” offer to the United States still stands. The conditions of the truce demand that the United States remove all troops from Muslim lands and that Western countries stop supporting “corrupt and apostate regimes in the Muslim world,” among other conditions. – *CBC News*, August 3

August 3, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb exploded near a police convoy in the western city of Herat, killing at least 10 people. The Taliban claimed responsibility, and said that the target was a local police chief. The local police chief was wounded in the attack. – *New York Times*, August 3

August 4, 2009 (AUSTRALIA): More than 400 police officers raided properties across Melbourne in a major Australian counterterrorism operation. Authorities arrested four men suspected of planning a “suicide terrorist attack on a defense establishment within Australia involving an armed assault with automatic weapons.” The men allegedly wanted to “kill as many soldiers as they could before they themselves were killed.” The four men were all between the ages of 22 to 26 and were Australian citizens of Somali or Lebanese descent. Police claim that the men are linked to al-Shabab, an insurgent group in Somalia that has ties to al-Qa`ida. – *al-Jazeera*, August 4

August 4, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb exploded under the convoy of the governor of Wardak Province. There were no injuries. – *Guardian*, August 4

August 5, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle killed or fatally injured Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan chief Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, August 20*

August 7, 2009 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. federal judge ordered the release and deportation of Shaykh Muhammad al-Mu'ayyad, who was previously convicted of supporting terrorism in a trial in New York City in 2005. His conviction, however, was overturned in October 2008. Al-Mu'ayyad, a cleric, will return to his home country of Yemen. His assistant and bodyguard, Mohamed Zayed, will also be released and deported to Yemen. – *Washington Post, August 8*

August 8, 2009 (MAURITANIA): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives outside the French Embassy in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. Two embassy guards were injured. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility. – *BBC, August 8; AFP, August 18*

August 10, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban suicide bombers armed with rockets attacked Afghan government buildings in Logar Province. The attack killed two policemen. – *AFP, August 10*

August 10, 2009 (IRAQ): Two truck bombs exploded simultaneously in the Shi`a village of Khazna, just 10 miles east of Mosul. Estimates place the dead at 30. – *UPI, August 10*

August 11, 2009 (KUWAIT): Kuwait's state-run news agency announced that security forces arrested six Kuwaitis linked to al-Qa`ida who were planning to attack Camp Arifjan, a U.S. military installation in the country, with an explosives-laden truck. It is unclear when the arrests occurred. – *CNN, August 11*

August 12, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Government troops attacked an Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) base in Basilan Province in the southern Philippines. At least 30 ASG fighters were killed, along with 23 Philippine soldiers. – *GMA News, tv, August 12*

August 13, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber rammed his motorcycle into a tribal elder's vehicle in South Waziristan Agency, killing four people. The bomber

targeted Malik Khadeen, who was killed in the attack. Khadeen was an anti-Taliban facilitator in Wana. – *AFP, August 13*

August 13, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A new Pew Research Center poll found that Pakistani views of al-Qa`ida and the Taliban have grown increasingly negative since last year. Pakistanis with an unfavorable view of al-Qa`ida and the Taliban doubled, with approximately two-thirds of those polled expressing negative views toward the groups. – *Washington Post, August 13*

August 14, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated his explosives at an Afghan National Army base in Helmand Province, killing at least one soldier. – *New York Times, August 14*

August 14-15, 2009 (ISRAEL): Hamas crushed an Islamist group called Jund Ansar Allah in the Gaza Strip. The Salafijihadi group defied Hamas by declaring an "Islamic emirate" in Gaza, sparking an intense gun battle as Hamas policemen launched an offensive on the group's positions. Jund Ansar Allah's chief, Abdel Latif Moussa, was killed in the fighting when he detonated an explosives vest. At least 22 people, including six Hamas police officers, were killed during the clashes. – *Bloomberg, August 15; Haaretz, August 17*

August 15, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed seven people outside the International Security Assistance Force headquarters in Kabul. The attack occurred in Wazir Akbar Khan district, one of the most secure districts in the capital. The Afghan Taliban claimed credit for the attack, stating: "The target was the U.S. Embassy, but we could not reach it." – *Reuters, August 15*

August 17, 2009 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber rammed an explosives-laden truck into the police headquarters in Nazran, the capital of Ingushetia, killing at least 20 people. – *Bloomberg, August 17; New York Times, August 17*

August 17, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Security forces apprehended Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) spokesman Maulvi Omar. Omar was seized in Mohmand Agency, located on the border with Afghanistan. – *AP, August 18*

August 19, 2009 (IRAQ): A bomb deployed on a lorry exploded near Iraq's Finance

Ministry in Baghdad, killing at least eight people. Minutes later, a second truck bomb exploded outside the Foreign Ministry, killing at least 59 people. In the aftermath of the attacks, Iraqi authorities detained 11 security officers for questioning about security failures. The Islamic State of Iraq claimed credit for the bombings. – *Daily Telegraph, August 20; Voice of America, August 20; AP, August 25*

August 19, 2009 (SAUDI ARABIA): Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry announced that it arrested 44 al-Qa`ida suspects across the country during the past year. Details were not provided on whether the suspects were planning specific attacks, but authorities claimed that the suspects had links to the "original al-Qa`ida organization." – *CNN, August 19; AFP, August 19*

August 19, 2009 (LEBANON): Lebanese soldiers detained Wissam Tabbish, a Palestinian militant allegedly linked to al-Qa`ida. Tabbish was arrested as he tried to enter Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camp, Ain al-Hilwah. – *Reuters, August 19*

August 20, 2009 (SCOTLAND): Scottish authorities released Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi from prison despite his life sentence for his role in the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Al-Megrahi, who is said to be dying of cancer, was allowed to return to his native Libya. – *Washington Post, August 21*

August 20, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghanistan held presidential elections, although there were widespread allegations of voter fraud. – *New York Times, September 15*

August 20, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates decided to keep 600 U.S. troops deployed to the Philippines, where they have been involved in a counterinsurgency operation known as the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines. – *New York Times, August 20*

August 21, 2009 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. federal judge ordered the release of Muhammad al-Adahi, a Yemeni who has been held at Guantanamo Bay since 2002. The judge ruled that al-Adahi's brief time at an al-Qa`ida training camp and two encounters with Usama bin Ladin was not enough to justify his continued detention. – *Washington Post, August 21*

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

August 21, 2009 (RUSSIA): Suicide bombers riding bicycles detonated their explosives in various locations in Grozny. Four police officers were killed in the attacks. - *Voice of America, August 21*

August 21, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban commander Hakimullah Mehsud was appointed as the new head of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Aides to Faqir Muhammad told reporters that Hakimullah was chosen by a 42-member Taliban *shura* (council). - *AP, August 22*

August 21, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle killed at least 13 people near Miran Shah in North Waziristan Agency. - *AFP, August 20; AP, August 22*

August 21, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine authorities arrested Khalil Pareja, the suspected leader of the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), an al-Qa`ida-linked group tied to a number of bomb attacks in the Philippines. Pareja, whose given name is Dinno Amor Rosales Pareja, was apprehended in Marawi City in the southern Philippines. His arrest is seen as a major blow to the RSM. - *GMA News.tv, August 21; AP, August 25*

August 25, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A truck bomb exploded in Kandahar, killing at least 40 civilians. The Afghan Taliban denied responsibility. - *Voice of America, August 25*

August 25, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban commanders confirmed the death of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan leader Baitullah Mehsud. The Pakistani Taliban said Baitullah died on August 23 from injuries sustained in an August 5 airstrike. - *AFP, August 28*

August 26, 2009 (SOMALIA): A French security adviser held by al-Shabab fighters in Somalia managed to escape his captors. Marc Aubriere, who was kidnapped along with a colleague from a hotel in Mogadishu on July 14, snuck past his kidnappers and weaved his way through Mogadishu to reach the safety of the presidential palace. The whereabouts of the second hostage, also a French security adviser, are not known. - *Los Angeles Times, August 27*

August 27, 2009 (SAUDI ARABIA): A suicide bomber attempted to assassinate Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayif. Nayif was slightly wounded in the attack. Al-

Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed credit for the operation, and it identified the bomber as Abdullah Hassan Taleh Asiri. The bomber traveled across the Saudi border from Yemen. - *AP, August 27; AFP, August 30*

August 27, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle strike killed eight militants in South Waziristan Agency. - *AFP, August 27*

August 27, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed 22 policemen in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The bomber blew himself up in the police barracks in the border town of Torkham. The Pakistani Taliban claimed credit for the attack, saying it was the "first response since the death of our chief Baitullah Mehsud." - *AFP, August 27; AFP, August 28*

August 27, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): The Philippines extradited Madhatta Haibe to the United States where he will face charges of "hostage-taking" in addition to other crimes. Haibe is an alleged member of the Abu Sayyaf Group, and he was reportedly involved in abducting four Americans in Mindanao on December 27, 1995. - *AFP, August 29*

August 28, 2009 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video statement accusing the United States of leading a crusade to divide Pakistan. - *ABC News, August 28*

August 30, 2009 (RUSSIA): Police stormed a home in Dagestan, killing "Doctor Muhammad," an alleged Algerian national with connections to al-Qa`ida. - *Reuters, August 31*

August 30, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted a gathering of police recruits in Mingora in the Swat Valley, killing at least 15 of them. - *Washington Post, August 31*

August 31, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): The commander of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, said that a new strategy was needed to fight the Taliban. According to General McChrystal, "The situation in Afghanistan is serious, but success is achievable and demands a revised implementation strategy, commitment and resolve, and increased unity of effort." - *AP, August 31*