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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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The War of Jihadists Against Jihadists in Syria

By Nelly Lahoud and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi



Rebel fighters after seizing the Aleppo headquarters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on January 8, 2014. - AFP/Getty Images

ON FEBRUARY 2, 2014, al-Qa`ida released a statement declaring that “it has no connection” with the “group” called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).¹ The statement further highlighted that al-Qa`ida was not responsible for founding the ISIL and was not privy to the deliberations that led to its establishment. That is why, the statement continued, “The ISIL is not a branch of al-Qa`ida, the latter is not

bound by organizational ties to it and is not responsible for the ISIL’s actions.”²

This article discusses the context of the statement, its significance, its impact on the jihadist landscape and concludes by assessing its potential consequences on Ayman al-Zawahiri’s leadership. It finds that al-Zawahiri’s once symbolic leadership over various jihadist groups is now undermined, and the ISIL has clearly emerged as a rival of al-Qa`ida. The article also finds that the Syrian arena, and potentially the Iraqi landscape, will serve as the war of jihadists against jihadists as a result of the public schism between the ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). This is not about “near enemy” or “far enemy,” but is equivalent to suicide or, in jihadist parlance, martyrdom in concert.

1 Tanzim Qa`idat al-Jihad – al-Qiyada al-`amma, “Bayan bi-Sha’ni `Alaqaat Jama`at Qa`idat al-Jihad bi-Jama`at al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-`Iraq wa-al-Sham, Markaz al-Fajr li-al-`I`lam,” Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, February 2, 2014. For consistency, this article uses “al-Qa`ida” instead of “Qa`idat al-Jihad.” For the possible nuance between the two names, see Nelly Lahoud, “The Merger of Al-Shabab and Qa`idat al-Jihad,” *CTC Sentinel* 5:2 (2012), footnote #6. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by Nelly Lahoud.

2 Ibid.

The Context of the Statement

The ISIL is not a new group that recently emerged on the scene. It is the same group that until April 2013 called itself the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which Ayman al-Zawahiri had considered to be a branch of al-Qa`ida and had publicly praised on numerous occasions.³ Yet a public dispute emerged in April 2013, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the ISI, unilaterally proclaimed the founding of the ISIL by declaring a merger between his group and that of JN in Syria. The merger came as a surprise to the leader of JN, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, who quickly rejected it, publicly

“The statement marked the first time that al-Qa`ida publicly disowned a jihadist group.”

explaining that “we were not consulted” about the merger.⁴ Before long, in June 2013, al-Zawahiri intervened, annulling the merger and therefore the very concept of the ISIL, and appointed Abu Khalid al-Suri, a member of the Syrian militant group Harakat Ahrar al-Sham, to serve as an arbitrator between the two groups.⁵

Al-Zawahiri’s intervention was in the form of a private communiqué to the leaders of the ISI and JN, but it was leaked to al-Jazira as a typed letter. When the ISI continued to operate under its new name, the ISIL, and debates among jihadists surrounding the authenticity of the letter ensued, an audio statement of the same letter, with the unmistakable voice of al-Zawahiri, was leaked to al-Jazira in November 2013, leaving no doubt as to its authorship. While it is not clear whether al-Zawahiri intentionally

3 Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Tawhid al-Kalima hawla Kalimat al-Tawhid,” Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, April 2013.

4 Abu Muhammad al-Julani, “Hawla Sahati al-Sham,” Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, April 2013.

5 “Al-Zawahiri Yulghi Damj ‘Jihadiyyi’ Suriya wa-al-‘Iraq,” al-Jazira, June 9, 2013. It should be noted that Ahrar al-Sham is part of the Islamic Front (al-Jabha al-Islamiyya), one of the largest coalitions of militant groups operating in Syria under the banner of Islam. Ahrar al-Sham was a signatory to the charter that the Islamic Front released in November 2013.

leaked the letter in June, one cannot help but wonder whether he lent a helping hand to al-Jazira when the audio of the letter was leaked in November.

The Significance of the Statement

The statement marked the first time that al-Qa`ida publicly disowned a jihadist group. To be sure, the leadership of al-Qa`ida has on numerous occasions dissociated itself from attacks characterized by indiscriminate killings, particularly those that targeted Muslim civilians.⁶ Yet at no point did al-Qa`ida publicly rebuke a jihadist group by name.

The ISIL’s defiance of al-Qa`ida is not new, however, and although it was not made public, captured internal communiqués authored by al-Qa`ida leaders demonstrated the rift that the Iraq-based group has caused in the jihadist world. Disagreements began as early as 2005 when the group was still called “al-Qa`ida in Mesopotamia” and under the leadership of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. The latter’s relentless attacks against Shi`a in Iraq alarmed al-Qa`ida’s central leadership, prompting al-Zawahiri and `Atiyya al-Libi⁷ to send al-Zarqawi gentle reminders that it was not the general public, but the Americans and their Iraqi collaborators, who should be the target of his attacks.⁸ The situation took a turn for the worse when in late 2006 al-Zarqawi’s successor, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, pledged allegiance to Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi’s newly formed group, the “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI), thereby submitting the “army of al-Qa`ida,” as Abu Hamza put

6 See, among others, Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Tawjih al-`amma li-al-`Amal al-Jihadi,” Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, September 13, 2013.

7 In addition to being one of the public faces of global jihad until he was killed in August 2011, the declassified Abbottabad documents show that many of Bin Ladin’s communications were done through `Atiyya. His real name is Jamal Ibrahim Ishtiwi al-Misrati and is also known by two aliases: Abu `Abd al-Rahman and `Atiyyatullah (`Atiyya is short for the latter). He was born in 1970 in Misrata, Libya, pursued Islamic religious studies in Mauritania, then joined jihad in Algeria. He went to Afghanistan in the late 1990s and was killed in a drone strike in Pakistan on August 22, 2011.

8 See the captured letters authored by Ayman al-Zawahiri and `Atiyatullah al-Libi to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. These are available at www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original and www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/atiyahs-letter-to-zarqawi-original.

it, to the authority of the ISI.⁹ U.S. and Iraqi forces killed Abu `Umar and Abu Hamza in April 2010, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed the leadership of the ISI as Abu `Umar’s successor.

Two serious implications, however, resulted as a consequence of this pledge. The first concerns the very notion of declaring an “Islamic state”: this entails elaborate conditions, including providing security to the populace residing in the territory of the “state” and making jihadists accountable to good governance, an accountability that the ISI could hardly deliver, not least given the occupation of Iraq by U.S. forces at the time. That is why internal communiqués showed that some religious scholars considered the ISI to be unlawful,¹⁰ and some jihadist leaders considered Abu Hamza and Abu `Umar to be “extremists,” “repulsive,” and “lack[ing] wisdom.”¹¹ For the same reason, Usama bin Ladin mocked al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) for wanting to declare an Islamic state in Yemen,¹² and urged Somalia’s al-Shabab not to go that route.¹³ Indeed, al-Qa`ida’s recent statement disowning the ISIL does not admit that it represents a “state”; instead, it refers to it as the “group” that calls itself a “state.” The criticism is made more apparent when the statement derisively remarks that “we do not hasten to declare emirates and states...that we impose on people, then declare whoever disapproves of such entities to be a rebel (*kharij*) [against whom it is lawful to fight].”¹⁴

The second serious and related implication pertains to Abu Hamza’s oath to Abu `Umar when he pledged that “I hereby enlist under your direct leadership 12,000 fighters who

9 Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, “Inna al-Hukma illa li-Allah,” November 10, 2006. The ISI was announced on October 15, 2006.

10 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000014. All Harmony documents can be accessed at the following URL: www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program. A document can be queried by entering the identification code into the search field.

11 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000011, p. 1.

12 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, pp. 19, 23.

13 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000005.

14 “Bayan bi-Sha`ni `Alaqqat Jama`at al-Qa`idat al-Jihad bi-Jama`at al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-‘Iraq wa-al-Sham, Markaz al-Fajr li-al-‘I`lam.”

constitute the army of al-Qa`ida.” Did the ISI cease to be under the leadership of al-Qa`ida in 2006, and, indeed, did the pledge by Abu Hamza effectively submit Bin Ladin’s authority to al-Baghdadi? Bin Ladin had admitted al-Zarqawi’s group into the fold of al-Qa`ida in December 2004, and because the leader of the “Islamic state” is meant to be *amir al-mu`minin* (Leader of the Faithful) to whose political authority all Muslims must submit, the argument can be made that al-Qa`ida transferred leadership to the ISI—at least technically. Put simply, a “state” (like the ISI) is meant to have authority over an organization (like al-Qa`ida), not the other way around.

Of course, Bin Ladin never pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi, but because Bin Ladin did not go public and discredit the declared state, it became a *fait accompli* since the gravity of declaring a state was swept under the carpet. Now that Bin Ladin’s successor, al-Zawahiri, went public, disowning the “group” that calls itself a “state,” zealous members loyal to the ISIL are reminding jihadist leaders of the (technical) landmines that they had managed not to step on since 2006. One such member posted that when Abu Hamza made his pledge, he effectively subordinated the authority of Bin Ladin to the leadership of the ISI. In other words, as the successor of Bin Ladin, al-Zawahiri is in no position to be giving orders to “*amir al-mu`minin* al-Baghdadi”; instead, he should be taking them. The posting was removed three times by forum administrators, which led the author to post it on JustPaste.It.¹⁵

Why did it take so long for al-Qa`ida to disown the ISI/ISIL publicly if the problems began in 2005 and worsened in 2006? To put this in a broader context, it is useful to remember that some jihadist groups, such as al-Qa`ida, are driven by strategic considerations, while others, such as the ISI/ISIL, are driven by sectarian differences and pedestrian disputes.¹⁶ To project

15 Abu Mustafa al-Anbari, “Khadhaltum al-Dawla al-Islamiyya,” Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, accessed January 22, 2014.

16 See Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis’ Path to Self-Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 140-143; Nelly Lahoud, *Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa`ida through the Lens of its Confidential Secretary* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012), pp. 41-54; Brynjar Lia, “Jihadi Strategists and Doctrinarians,” in Assaf Mogha-

a strong presence in the eyes of their enemies, strategically-driven groups are willing to present a unified front and avoid airing the dirty laundry of other groups in public. Those driven by sectarian or pedestrian differences are willing to sacrifice strategic objectives and rush to air their grievances with other groups for the sake of purifying the creed or upstaging their competitors. Yet it is evident that the ISI had long been testing the limits of al-Qa`ida’s leaders. In an internal communiqué dated early 2011, the American jihadist Adam Gadahn advised the leadership that “it is necessary that al-Qa`ida publicly announces that it severs its organizational ties with the Islamic State of Iraq, and [to make known] that the relationship between its leadership and that of the State [i.e., ISI/AQI] have not existed for several years, and that the decision to declare a State was taken without consultation with the leadership, and this [ill-considered] innovation (*qarar ijtibadi*) led to divisions among jihadis and their supporters inside and outside Iraq.”¹⁷ It is as if Gadahn’s 2011 letter served as a draft for al-Qa`ida’s recent statement.

Impact on the Jihadist Landscape

The broader jihadist reaction to the public dispute between al-Qa`ida and the ISIL initially translated into fierce debates and quarrels on jihadist forums, the likes of which have never been observed. Some, but not all,¹⁸ pundits adopted a diplomatic approach.¹⁹ Some called on both sides to unite, but their language betrayed the group with which they sided;²⁰ others attributed

dam and Brian Fishman eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions Within Al-Qa`ida and its Periphery* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010), pp. 100-131.

17 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004, p. 8.

18 Abu Shadia, “Da`wa Muwajjaha li-Abi al-Fadl Madi ila Munazara Maftuha,” Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 10, 2014.

19 Nasir al-Qa`ida, “Ham wa-`Ajil li-Ansar al-Mujahidin,” Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 13, 2014. Pundits are not ordinary forum members who contribute their reactions to events; instead, they are established writers who contribute analytical essays and are referred to on jihadist websites as great writers or contributors (*Kibar al-Kuttab*).

20 See, for instance, the interventions by Abu al-Fadl Madi that were designed to be neutral, yet it was clear that he supported JN: Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 9, 2014.

the schism to years of scheming by “the RAND Corporation” and similar think-tanks to create a “good” al-Qa`ida and a “bad” al-Qa`ida, a plot which time has now come to divide jihadists.²¹ At times, the forum contributions reached a certain level of vulgarity that saw al-Julani getting cursed,²² and numerous references gently criticizing al-Zawahiri and calling on him to renege on his decision.²³

The online divide among members put those overseeing the forums in an unenviable position. Of the three websites considered to be reliable by jihadists, Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya bore the brunt of the dispute and has been accused of siding with JN.²⁴ The other two forums (Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam and Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahidin) had been experiencing technical difficulties, and were suffering from intermittent shut downs.²⁵ Rarely in the history of jihadist websites did forum administrators intervene to remove contributions by members; yet since the beginning of the public divide between the ISIL and JN, not only have they removed postings by members, but they have also removed articles by pundits whose analyses and contributions in support of jihad had for years animated discussions on the forums.²⁶

21 Yaman Mukhaddab, “al-Qa`ida al-Tayyiba wa-al-Khida`bi-al-Iiham,” Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 10, 2014; Yaman Mukhaddab, “Harbu al-Fi`at wa-al-Jama`at,” Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 15, 2014. Also see his article in support of the ISIL: Yaman Mukhaddab, “Fa-Ya-Layta Qawmi Yaqra’un ... `An Dawlatu al-Amali Atahaddath,” January 9, 2014.

22 Abu Shadia, “Ikhsa’ fa-lan Ta`duwa Qadraka,” Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, January 9, 2014. This essay was quickly removed by the forum administrator.

23 This is from a letter addressed to Ayman al-Zawahiri and authored by Muhammad al-Zuhayri, who is described as the poet of al-Qa`ida, on Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, February 10, 2014. The letter was removed.

24 See the numerous postings on Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, including the ones posted on March 9, 2014, many of which have been removed by forum administrators.

25 It is possible that they actually shut themselves down to avoid serving as the broadcasters of jihadist disputes.

26 In addition to the examples listed in the previous footnotes, see for instance what is a fairly neutral contribution by Husayn bin Mahmud, “Kashf al-Litham`amma Yajri fi al-Sham,” Shabakat al-Fida’ al-Islamiyya, January 9, 2014.

Before long, what began as a public dispute in April 2013 has since developed into a bloody conflict that is tearing apart the ISIL and JN and their respective supporters.²⁷ It is not clear which side initiated the transgression: although the ISIL has received the lion's share of criticisms in the mainstream media,²⁸ it is also the case that statements by the ISIL in early January 2014 suggested that members of the group were being harassed, imprisoned and constrained in their movements by other militant groups in Syria.²⁹ Regardless of which side transgressed first, the public statements by JN and the ISIL leaders (released in February and March 2014) suggest that the differences between the two groups are no longer reconcilable. The audio statement by Abu `Abdallah al-Shami, a member of JN's consultative council,³⁰ and the response by the ISIL's spokesperson, Abu Muhammad al-`Adnani al-Shami, released in early March left no room for mediation.³¹ The language of "brotherhood" and "unity" that both groups initially strived to maintain is now replaced by accusatory vocabulary littered with terms such as "liars," "betrayers," and "enemies."³²

From the perspective of JN and its allies, two key events seem to have detonated their anger. The first is the kidnapping and killing of Abu Sa`d al-Hadrami, the leader of JN in the province of al-

Raqqah. The geographical importance of al-Raqqah cannot be exaggerated: its proximity to the border with Turkey makes it critical for the flow of foreign fighters; its economic prospects are assured given that it holds oil reserves and the Euphrates River runs through it; and it is also in the middle of five strategic provinces (Aleppo, Hasaka, Dayr al-Zur, Hums and Hama), hence serving as a focal point for military expansion. The ISIL has admitted that it was behind al-Hadrami's killing, justifying it on account of his apostasy (*radda*). The ISIL's statement did not provide supporting details.³³ JN claims that al-Hadrami had been duped into pledging allegiance to the ISIL, but when al-Zawahiri made his judgment in favor of JN and when "he saw for himself the crimes and torture of the innocents [ordered] by the [ISIL] governor of al-Raqqah [as a form of punishment] for even the most minor and dubious errors and pettiest causes, he returned to JN dissociating himself from ISIL."³⁴ The ISIL now controls al-Raqqah.

The second key event that further unleashed JN's wrath was the killing of one of the leaders of Ahrar al-Sham, Abu Khalid al-Suri, in February 2014. Al-Zawahiri nominated al-Suri to serve as arbitrator in the disputes between the ISIL and JN. In January 2014, al-Suri released a public statement in which he accused the ISIL of "crimes and erroneous practices in the name of jihad."³⁵ He further decried the way in which he believed the ISIL was degrading those who have "liberated the country," behaving as if it was a real state while other groups were mere "platoons."³⁶ Soon thereafter, a suicide bomber assassinated al-Suri.³⁷

The Saudi cleric `Abdallah al-Mhisni claimed on his Twitter account that, prior to his death, al-Suri had told him that the ISIL had threatened to send five suicide bombers to kill him,³⁸ although the ISIL denied any responsibility.³⁹

The assassination of al-Suri created shock waves in the jihadist world. In his eulogy, JN leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani remarked that al-Suri fought the Syrian regime some 30 years ago, which suggests that he may have been a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood that bore the wrath of Hafiz al-Assad's regime in the 1980s, particularly in Hama.⁴⁰ Al-Julani also reported that al-Suri knew Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri well, in addition to "his jihad companion Shaykh Abu Mus`ab al-Suri," the renown jihadist strategist.⁴¹ In a phone conversation from prison in Jordan, the Palestinian-born ideologue Abu Qatada al-Filastini almost choked from distress as he described the importance of al-Suri and the respect he commanded in the jihadist world, believing that his death was the worst "that has devastated us since [the killing] of Bin Ladin."⁴²

It is perhaps because of al-Suri's jihadist pedigree that al-Julani thought he would receive the support of jihadist leaders when he gave the ISIL an ultimatum, threatening that if the group refused to respond within five days of his statement and "did not cease to burden the *umma* [Islamic community] with this ignorant and belligerent mindset and eradicate it even from Iraq, you know too well that hundreds of virtuous brothers in Iraq await a signal to [remove you]."⁴³ Al-

27 The protagonists on the battlefield are many, but the main ones consist of the ISIL (supported by Katibat al-Muhajirin led by Abu `Umar al-Shihani) on the one hand, and JN and its seeming allies (the Islamic Front coalition, particularly the group Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Mujahidin, and smaller militant groups).

28 Muhammad al-Najjar, "Abu Qatada Yuhajim Tanzim al-Dawla wa-Yu'ayyid Muhlat al-Nusra," al-Jazira, February 27, 2014. See also Abu Qatada al-Filastini, "Ma ba`da al-Muqaraba {Rabi' al-Mujahidin} ... Waqi' wa-Amal," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, February 2014.

29 See, for example, "Nida' mina al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-'Iraq wa-al-Sham," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, January 4, 2014.

30 Abu `Abdallah al-Shami, "La-Tubayyinnannahu li-al-Nas wa-la Taktumunahu," March 3, 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=njlyCHa-q7Y.

31 Abu Muhammad al-`Adnani al-Shami, "Thumma Nabtahilu fa-Naj`alu La`natu Allahi `ala al-Khadhibin," March 7, 2014, available at http://ia801306.us.archive.org/35/items/al_adnani/nabtahil.mp3.

32 Such terminology is used by both al-Shami and al-`Adnani.

33 The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, "Bayan al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-'Iraq wa-al-Sham - Wilayat al-Raqqah Hawla ma Tashhaduhu al-Madina min Ahdath," Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 13, 2014.

34 See the statement by the ISIL, posted January 13, 2014, and the statement by Jabhat al-Nusra, "Raddan `ala l' tiraf Jama`at al-Dawla bi-Qatli al-Sheikh Abi Sa`d al-Hadrami," January 15, 2014.

35 Abu Khalid al-Suri, "Risalat Munasaha min al-Sheikh Abu Khalid al-Suri," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, January 16, 2014.

36 Ibid.

37 The ISIL reportedly sent three suicide bombers on the mission. For details, see Abu Yazan al-Shami, "Qissat Istishhad al-Sheikh Abi Khalid al-Suri," February 2014, available at www.justpaste.it/eiv5.

38 `Abdallah al-Mhisni, February 23, 2014, available at www.twitter.com/mhesne.

39 The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, "Bayan Mawqif al-Dawla al-Islamiyya min Maqalat al-Muftarin," March 1, 2014, available at www.justpaste.it/elax.

40 Abu Muhammad al-Julani, "Laytaka Rathaytani," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, February 24, 2014.

41 On the importance of Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, see Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: the Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). One tweet by a certain Abu al-Bara' al-Zahrani reported that Abu Khalid was in fact the brother of Abu Mus`ab al-Suri. See Abu al-Bara' al-Zahrani, February 24, 2014, available at www.twitter.com/Braa73.

42 Abu Qatada al-Filastini, February 27, 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gem3m2bgGAA.

43 Abu Muhammad al-Julani, "Laytaka Rathaytani,"

Julani miscalculated: the ISIL did not come begging, and days later a member of JN's Consultative Council, Abu `Abdallah al-Shami, reneged on the threat, complying with the urging of "scholars such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filastini," who called for an end to the jihadist in-fighting in the Levant. Al-Shami announced that JN would limit its actions to reclaiming the territory the ISIL usurped from JN and "to repelling the aggression of the ISIL."⁴⁴

From the perspective of the ISIL, it sees itself as the only credible jihadist group in Syria. Notwithstanding the jihadist credentials of JN, the alliances it has formed with Ahrar al-Sham of the Islamic Front has cast doubt on its commitment to global jihad. In fairness to the ISIL, while the charter of the Islamic Front is keen to emphasize the Islamic character of its program, it is committed to a nationalist agenda, focusing specifically on Syria as the "nation" and precluding any commitment to global jihad.⁴⁵ More disturbing from a jihadist perspective are leaked documents that are said to detail the internal organization of Ahrar al-Sham. These documents reveal that Ahrar al-Sham seeks to establish "communication with external parties" that include states and "liaise with foreign embassies" and even work "with the security intelligence of neighboring countries."⁴⁶

If these documents are authentic, it would be understandable for a jihadist group to question whether the banner of jihad under which JN is said to be fighting has been compromised by its alliance with groups espousing a nationalist agenda. The ISIL's concern is further supported by the many accounts that suggest that JN and other Syrian militant groups are not as welcoming of *muhajirun* (foreign fighters) in their midst and are keen to preserve an *ansar* (local/Syrian) membership. Indeed, most of

Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, February 25, 2014.

44 "La-Tubayyinannahu li-al-Nas wa-la Taktumunahu."

45 See, for example, the Charter of the Islamic Front, "Mithaq al-Jabhat al-Islamiyya al-Suriyya," Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahidin, November 2013.

46 Qisam, "al-Adilla wa-al-Barahin `ala ma Hadatha fi al-Sham laysa Fitna," Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, January 23, 2014.

the foreign fighters in Syria appear to be siding with the ISIL.⁴⁷

Ayman al-Zawahiri's Dilemma

It is not clear if al-Zawahiri's statement on February 10, 2014, and addressed to "our people in the Levant" amounts to a mea culpa. In it, he is at pains reaching out that "we were addressing all of you as brothers...and that the brotherhood we share through Islam is stronger than all the organizational bonds that are transient and subject to change."⁴⁸ Regardless, al-Zawahiri's inability to exert decisive authority over the dispute between the ISIL and JN has led to an unprecedented level of public criticism against him on jihadist forums. One forum member questioned if al-Zawahiri can exert authority of any kind, lamenting: "Jihad was orphaned after you departed [Bin Ladin], and we [the jihadists have all become] orphans!!"⁴⁹ Others accused al-Zawahiri of having "admitted the legitimacy of Sykes-Picot,"⁵⁰ one of the worst charges of which a jihadist leader could be accused. Sykes-Picot represents the 1916 agreement between the United Kingdom and France in which they carved out their respective spheres of influence in the Middle East in anticipation of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, eventually leading to its division into nation-states.

To be fair to al-Zawahiri, the declassified Abbottabad documents revealed that Bin Ladin did not have much authority over the actions of regional jihadist groups either.⁵¹ The main difference is that Bin Ladin was able to keep the jihadists' dirty secrets in hiding and therefore maintain an aura of dignity to his leadership in the jihadist world, however symbolic

47 See, for example, the account by Abu Mujahid al-Shishani, "Hawla al-Mu'amara didda al-Dawla al-Islamiyya," three parts, March 2014. The first two parts can be accessed at www.justpaste.it/fursan-t-sha and www.justpaste.it/fursan-t-sha2.

48 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Nida' `Ajil li-Ahlina fi al-Sham," Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, February 10, 2014.

49 Ibn al-Dira, Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, January 10, 2014.

50 Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, available at www.al-fidaa.org/vb/showthread.php?t=94883.

51 See Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sideline?* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012).

it was. Al-Zawahiri seems to have overestimated the degree of his influence.

Jihadist groups around the world are starting to take a position vis-à-vis the Syrian jihadist scene, and every group that does not condemn the ISIL is seen as undermining al-Zawahiri's position, at least indirectly: AQAP has taken a neutral stance; two Sinai-based groups, Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin: Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, declared their support to the ISIL;⁵² from his prison cell in Jordan and in an audio recording posted on YouTube, the Palestinian jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi initially criticized, somewhat diplomatically, the ISIL for having "rejected the order/judgment (*amr*) of our brother Ayman,"⁵³ but later the jihadist website Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad released a statement "at his [al-Maqdisi's] urging" asserting that only those statements released on al-Minbar should be considered reliable;⁵⁴ Abu `Iyad al-Tunisi, the leader of Ansar al-Shari`a in Tunisia, released a statement supporting both groups;⁵⁵ Abu Bakar Ba`aysir, the leader of Indonesia's Jama`at Ansar al-Tawhid, released a statement from prison calling on all jihadists to unite in Syria;⁵⁶ a statement signed by 20 scholars, including Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti,⁵⁷ has endorsed the ISIL;⁵⁸ a group of jihadists in Khorasan,

52 Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin: Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, "Bayan min Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin hawla ma Yahduth fi Syria," February 2, 2014. The support of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis was given in an audio statement by Abu Usama al-Misri, posted January 23, 2014, at Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya.

53 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, March 2, 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAJX4Z445eo.

54 Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, March 12, 2014. Several jihadist websites, including Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam and Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, reposted the announcement.

55 Abu `Iyad al-Tunisi, "Bayan Nusra wa-Ta'yid li-Ikhwana al-Mujahidin bi-al-Sham," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, January 15, 2014.

56 Abu Bakar Ba`aysir, "Risala min Amir Tanzim Ansar al-Tawhid fi Indonesia," March 10, 2014, available at www.ansharuttauhidi.com/read/publikasi/404/#sthash.OJULQLP7.dpuf.

57 Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti is a legal scholar whose writings are posted on the renowned jihadist website Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, which is devoted to jihadist ideological materials.

58 "Bayan al-Ukhwa al-Imaniyya fi Nusrat al-Dawla al-

supposedly in al-Zawahiri's backyard, has endorsed the ISIL,⁵⁹ and the jihadist website Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam released a statement in support of the ISIL and counseled JN, whose current stance "does not please God," to change its ways.⁶⁰ Abu Muhammad al-Qawqazi, the leader of the Caucasus Emirate, released a video statement appealing to all jihadists from the Caucasus fighting in Syria to avoid getting involved in this *fitna* (sedition) and not be misled by those who claim to be on the right path.⁶¹ He addressed the leaders of both JN and the ISIL and called on them to compromise through dialogue to end this *fitna* and accept the judgment of either the "general leadership or a Shari'a court."⁶² AQIM and al-Shabab have not yet weighed in on the dispute.

A coup is not what one would envisage happening in the jihadist world, but this is a new era for jihadism.

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The viewpoints expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.

Islamiyya," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, January 24, 2014.

⁵⁹ Jam` min Mujahidi Khurasan, "al-Munasara al-Khurasaniyya li-al-Dawla al-Islamiyya," Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya, March 3, 2014. This statement is signed by several jihadists whose identities are not well known (at least to these authors); however, the media wing that released this statement, Mu'assasat al-battar al-I'lamiyya, was founded by a group of members of the jihadist website Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam and later merged with al-Ma'sada Foundation, the media production group for the same website.

⁶⁰ "Bayan Ham: al-I'lan`an Mawqif Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam min al-Ahdath al-Jariya fi al-Sham," Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam, March 10, 2014.

⁶¹ Abu Muhammad al-Qawqazi, "Risalatun Nush li-Mujahidi al-Sham," March 19, 2014, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8V5ITAQ9JE.

⁶² Ibid.

The Finnish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria

By Juha Saarinen

THE HISTORIC MOBILIZATION of foreign fighters¹ joining the civil war in Syria has affected many countries with little to no previous history of Muslim foreign fighting, including Finland. In March 2014, the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (FSIS) stated that over 30 individuals had traveled to Syria, approximately half of whom left to take part in the conflict as combatants.² The majority of Finnish foreign fighters have sought to join "radical Islamic" groups,³ and they have reportedly joined factions loyal to Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as well as Kataib al-Muhajirin.⁴ The FSIS is concerned about this unprecedented mobilization, as well as the prospect of radicalized and battle-hardened jihadists returning to Finland from Syria.⁵

This article examines the factors that may have contributed to Finnish Muslim participation in the Syrian war. Additionally, it compiles publicly available data on the Finnish foreign fighter contingent, focusing on four publicly known fighters. Lastly, it

1 For Thomas Hegghammer's definition of a foreign fighter as an agent "who 1) has joined, and operates within the confines of, an insurgency, 2) lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, 3) lacks affiliation to an official military organization, and 4) is unpaid," see Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35:3 (2010/11), pp. 53-94, 57-58.

2 Paula Ropponen, "Supo: Syyrian taistelut vetävät joitakin puoleensa magneetin lailla," *Aamulehti*, March 5, 2014; Tuomas Portaankorva (@TPSupo), "Matkustaneita yhteensä yli 30, aseelliseen toimintaan pyrkijöitä n. puolet," Twitter, March 12, 2014.

3 "Violent Extremism in Finland - Situation Overview 2/2013," Finland Ministry of the Interior, August 26, 2013. The reports do not clarify whether Finnish foreign fighters only joined Kataib al-Muhajirin before it merged with two other groups in Spring 2013 and changed its name to Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa-al-Ansar or whether the group's older name was used erroneously.

4 Jarkko Sipilä, "Supo: Syyrian suomalaisjihadisteissa muhii terrorismimongelma," MTV, March 5, 2014.

5 "Violent Extremism in Finland - Situation Overview 2/2013"; "Security Police Eyeball Fighters Returning from Syrian Conflict," YLE, January 10, 2014.

examines the potential impact of returning militants on the domestic radical Islamist scene in Finland. The article finds that approximately 15 foreign fighters from Finland have joined the conflict in Syria as combatants, and that the broad appeal of the Syrian conflict, the growth of the radical Islamist scene in Finland and the relative ease of traveling to Syria are the main factors behind this mobilization. The majority of the Finnish fighters have reportedly joined jihadist groups, increasing the possibility that returning fighters will have a domestic impact. While the terrorist threat level in Finland may increase in the future as a result of the mobilization, a more immediate concern is that returning foreign fighters—and perhaps those still abroad—will seek to further expand the radical Islamist scene, strengthen the jihadist strand within it, and increase the connections between Finland's own radical community and more developed ones abroad.

Explaining the Mobilization

The Syrian civil war is the first conflict with a notable involvement of Finnish Muslim foreign fighters. Prior to the war in Syria, there were few cases of Finnish Muslim foreign fighters,⁶ although it is difficult to analyze this trend—or lack thereof—because little public attention was paid to it prior to 2012.⁷ In addition to Syria, a small number of Finnish fighters have traveled to Somalia,⁸ while other parts of the Horn of Africa region⁹ and Yemen¹⁰ are also rumored destinations. One potential foreign fighter was detained by Georgian authorities en route to Chechnya.¹¹

6 In September 2011, FSIS director Antti Pelttari stated that the overall number of Finnish foreign fighters was "relatively small, not in the dozens." See "Supo: Terrorist Fighters Have Tried to Enter Finland," *Helsingin Sanomat International Edition*, September 22, 2011.

7 Juha Saarinen, "The History of Jihadism in Finland and an Early Assessment of Finnish Foreign Fighters in Syria," *Jihadology*, November 21, 2013.

8 "Finnish Security and Intelligence Service Annual Report 2012," Finnish Security Intelligence Service, March 1, 2013.

9 Kristiina Markkanen, "Suomalainenkin separatisti saattaa taistella Somaliassa," *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 6, 2010.

10 Heidi Vaalisto, "Kaksi suomalaista kuollut Syyriassa," *Ilta-Sanomat*, August 2, 2013.

11 Mika Parkkonen, "Finn Arrested in Georgia Wanted to Join War in Chechnya," *Helsingin Sanomat International*

No Finnish Muslim foreign fighters have been publicly reported in either Afghanistan or Iraq.¹²

Why have so many Finnish fighters traveled to Syria?¹³ First, the humanitarian crisis in Syria and acts of violence by the regime, including the alleged use of chemical weapons, have caused widespread outrage among the global Sunni Muslim community. The widespread online dissemination of propaganda highlighting the suffering

“The majority of Finnish fighters are young Sunni Muslim men who were either born in Finland or moved there at a very young age.”

of Syrian civilians encourages Finnish Muslims to travel to Syria.¹⁴ The appeal of the Syrian conflict has crossed ethnic boundaries and attracted non-radicalized Muslims, greatly widening the pool of potential foreign fighters.¹⁵

Second, the conflict in Syria has resonated particularly strongly among the radical Islamist community in Finland.¹⁶ In August 2013, the Finnish Interior Ministry reported that out of the 20 or more Finnish individuals in Syria, a majority are “jihadist travelers” who intended to join “radical Islamic

al Edition, September 19, 2006.

¹² Saarinen.

¹³ This question is all the more pertinent since, according to government reports and recent comments by Finnish security officials, there is no organized recruitment organization or network in Finland. See “Violent Extremism in Finland – Situation Overview 2/2013”; Antti Honkamaa, “Supo: Yli 30 lähti Suomesta sotimaan Syyriaan – mukana kantasuomalaisia,” *Iltä-Sanomat*, March 5, 2014.

¹⁴ “Suomesta lähtenyt nuoria taistelijoiksi Syyriaan: ‘Kun aamulla lähtee, illalla on jo ase kädessä,’” *Iltä-Sanomat*, March 1, 2013.

¹⁵ It is not known, however, whether any Finnish Shi’a Muslims, who comprise approximately 10-15% of the Finnish Muslim population, are fighting in Syria.

¹⁶ “Finnish Security Intelligence Service Annual Report 2013,” Finnish Security Intelligence Service, March 5, 2014.

organizations” in Syria.¹⁷ Similarly, the recently published FSIS annual report for 2013 stated that there is an “increased willingness of persons residing in Finland to take part in the radical organizations’ armed activity in the region.”¹⁸

While this does not necessarily mean that all or even most of the Finnish fighters are jihadists,¹⁹ or even Muslims,²⁰ the significant growth of the Finnish radical Islamist scene in the past few years is a key prerequisite for the mobilization to Syria. During previous mobilizations of European Muslim foreign fighters to Afghanistan and Iraq, Finland’s radical Muslim community was virtually non-existent.²¹ By 2013, however, the number of radicalized individuals residing in Finland numbered in the hundreds, according to Finnish security officials,²² increasing the probability that radicalized individuals will travel abroad for foreign fighting or encourage others to do so. The scale of the mobilization to Syria suggests the jihadist strand has grown in par with the wider radical Islamist community.

Lastly, traveling to Syria from Finland is relatively quick and inexpensive.²³

¹⁷ “Violent Extremism in Finland – Situation Overview 2/2013,” p. 9.

¹⁸ “Finnish Security Intelligence Service Annual Report 2013,” p. 6.

¹⁹ It is currently not known exactly how many Finnish Muslims were radicalized before traveling to Syria. The strong presence of various Islamist groups in Syria may have allowed the jihadist faction to attract individuals who do not share their views.

²⁰ There are reports of Finnish mercenaries—i.e., individuals with military training and/or experience who travel to Syria to become soldiers of fortune. Although they differ from foreign fighters as they are paid for their services, it is not entirely clear whether these individuals are included in the Finnish authorities’ estimate on Finnish combatants in Syria.

²¹ In 2010, there were reportedly only a handful of radicalized individuals in Finland with connections to international terrorist organizations. See “Supo: Terroristiskulla ei yhteyksiä Suomeen - tarkkailussa kourallinen henkilöitä,” YLE, December 12, 2010.

²² “Supo: Suomesta lähdetty Syyrian taisteluihin, sadoilla epäilyttäviä yhteyksiä,” *Aamulehti*, March 1, 2013.

²³ According to the FSIS, there have been rumors of individuals taking instant loans to finance their journey and arriving in Syria within 24 hours. See Tommi Nieminen, “Espoolainen nuori mies lähti salaa Syyrian sotaan,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, June 9, 2013.

Notably, Finnish authorities cannot legally prevent individuals from traveling abroad, as foreign fighting and joining a terrorist group are not criminalized under Finnish terrorism legislation.²⁴ This loophole leaves the

“Finnish authorities cannot legally prevent individuals from traveling abroad, as foreign fighting and joining a terrorist group are not criminalized under Finnish terrorism legislation.”

Finnish authorities with limited means to stop or limit the flow of foreign fighters out of Finland and into Syria.²⁵ Additionally, Turkey has functioned as a convenient logistical hub for Finnish and other European fighters.²⁶ Thus far, Ankara has largely been either unwilling or unable to prevent European foreign fighters from entering Syria, and rebel groups and criminal entrepreneurs operating near the Syrian-Turkish border facilitate foreign fighters’ entry to Syria.²⁷

The Finnish Contingent and Individual Fighters in Syria

According to various publicly available statements and reports, the majority of Finnish fighters are young Sunni Muslim men who were either born in Finland or moved there at a very young age. Although the Finnish contingent includes ethnic Finns who have converted to Islam,²⁸ most of them come from various ethnic backgrounds.²⁹

Little is known about why individual fighters have decided to travel to Syria, but the FSIS has stated the motives of

²⁴ “Security Police Eyeball Fighters Returning from Syrian Conflict.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Most Finnish fighters reportedly traveled to Syria via Turkey. See Sipilä.

²⁷ Thomas Hegghammer, “Syria’s Foreign Fighters,” *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2013.

²⁸ Husein Muhammed, “Suomalaisia Syyrian sodassa,” *Maailman Kuvalehti*, February 2013; Jukka Huusko, “Islamistit väittävät suomalaisen kuolleen Syyrian taistelussa,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, February 22, 2014.

²⁹ Nieminen; Honkamaa.

Finnish foreign fighters vary between nationalist,³⁰ jihadist and humanitarian causes.³¹ Some of the fighters radicalized before leaving,³² and some may have received prior training in terrorist camps or during previous fighting abroad.³³ Despite rumors of Finnish fighters traveling to Syria in groups,³⁴ the FSIS insists most fighters have either traveled to Syria alone or with a friend.³⁵ In one case, however, a fighter brought his family.³⁶

Not much is known about the Finnish fighters' activities in Syria, or how many are currently active. Finnish fighters have been reported or rumored in and around Raqqa,³⁷ Idlib and Aleppo.³⁸ It was recently reported that Jabhat al-Nusra, the ISIL and Kataib al-Muhajirin have all attracted Finnish foreign fighters.³⁹

At least two Finnish citizens have been killed in Syria,⁴⁰ and the FSIS believes there may be more Finnish casualties.⁴¹ Some fighters have

reportedly returned home to Finland already,⁴² with combat experience,⁴³ while others travel between Finland and Syria repeatedly.⁴⁴

Only four fighters have been identified by Finnish media to date, although none by their legal name.⁴⁵ In addition to these reports, the author has collected data from social media on a few Finnish fighters in order to build more detailed profiles. This should not be viewed as a comprehensive sample of the entire contingent.

One of these individuals has been identified by the media as "Muhammad."⁴⁶ He moved to Finland from Somalia with his family in 1993 when he was two-years-old.⁴⁷ He grew up in Finland, where he received his education.⁴⁸ He lived in Espoo before traveling to Syria via Turkey in December 2012, where he joined a radical Islamist group in the north,⁴⁹ and later identified himself on social media as a member of the ISIL operating near the Syrian-Turkish border. "Muhammad" is still active in Syria, but it is not known if he has combat experience. Since November 2012, he has occasionally shared ISIL and other jihadist propaganda on his social media accounts.⁵⁰ He is allegedly not interested in returning to Finland.⁵¹

In December 2013, the Middle East Media Research Institute reported on a Finnish jihadist, "Abu Mansour," who answered questions about his decision

to travel to Syria in a public meeting in the Raqqa area.⁵² He stated in the video that he decided to travel to Syria after witnessing Muslims being killed around the world, especially in Syria by the Bashar al-Assad regime.⁵³ His goal for arriving in Syria was to bring back the caliphate.⁵⁴ It appears likely that "Abu Mansour" is "Muhammad," since they share similar appearances and motivations for fighting in Syria, and both profiles identify with the ISIL.

"Marwan" was a young convert to Islam, born around 1993, from Turku. His mother was Finnish and his father was from Namibia.⁵⁵ Before leaving for Syria, he had recently finished his compulsory military service in Finland and expressed a desire to study Islam

"The most recent Finnish casualty is 'Abu Anas al-Finlandi,' who reportedly fought for the ISIL. He was killed in a battle between the Free Syrian Army and the ISIL in February 2014."

abroad.⁵⁶ He traveled to Syria via Turkey with his wife during the summer of 2012, when he joined an unidentified rebel unit in northern Aleppo—allegedly with other Finns.⁵⁷ He was reportedly killed in a clash between Syrian rebels and Syrian government forces in Aleppo in June 2013.⁵⁸ It is likely that the Facebook profile of a man from Turku, who had been fighting in the Idlib area in March-April 2013, belongs to "Marwan." No information is available about his background, age, when he traveled and what group with which he fought, although he is Facebook "friends" with at least two

30 Although individuals with a pre-existing connection to the conflict area—either in the form of citizenship in the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions—should be considered as rebels rather than foreign fighters, it is not entirely clear whether such individuals have traveled to Syria or if they are included in the Finnish authorities' estimate of Finnish combatants in Syria.

31 "Violent Extremism in Finland – Situation Overview 2/2013."

32 Aishi Zidan, "Rami tyhjensi huoneensa ja taistelee nyt ehkä Syyriassa," *Helsingin Sanomat*, October 27, 2013.

33 Nieminen.

34 "Huoli heräsi: Militantti anti-fasistinen liike kasvavassa Suomessa," *Talouselämä*, January 13, 2014; "Suomesta lähti taistelijoita Syyriaan," *Turun Sanomat*, August 30, 2012.

35 Tuomas Portaankorva (@TPSupo), "Ei nyt suoraan. Meidän muutamasta kymmenestä ei isoja ryhmiä saa. Yksin ja kaverin kanssa useimmiten," Twitter, January 13, 2014.

36 Heikki Kauhanen, "Suomalainen kaatui Syyriassa – uusia lähtijöitä kymmenittäin," *Turun Sanomat*, August 1, 2013.

37 "Finnish National Fighting with Al-Qaeda in Syria: I Have Come to Establish the Caliphate in the Levant," Middle East Media Research Institute, December 11, 2013.

38 Sipilä; Kauhanen; Nieminen.

39 Sipilä.

40 Tatu Airo, "Supo: Ainakin kaksi Suomen kansalaista kuollut Syyrian sodassa," *Aamulehti*, March 5, 2014.

41 No fighters, however, have returned to receive medical care for injuries sustained in Syria. See "Syyriassa haavoittuneita taistelijoita ei ole vielä hoidettu Suomessa," YLE, January 10, 2014.

42 Rydman.

43 "Supo: Syyriasta palaavien jihadistiveteraanien määrä kasvaa," *Savon Sanomat*, March 5, 2014; Ropponen; Honkamaa.

44 Nieminen; "Security Police Eyeball Fighters Returning from Syrian Conflict."

45 This article purposely provides pseudonyms for individual fighters. Being a member of a terrorist organization or traveling abroad to take part in a civil war are not considered crimes in Finland.

46 Nieminen.

47 Ibid.

48 He studied at a vocational school, but it is not clear if he graduated.

49 His family believes there were other Finnish fighters in the group. See Nieminen.

50 His behavior on social media suggests he had at least partly adopted a jihadist worldview prior to his departure to Syria. On a phone call with his sister, he stated he wanted to help Muslims who were being killed by the al-Assad regime. See *ibid.*

51 Ibid.

52 "Finnish National Fighting with Al-Qaeda in Syria: I Have Come to Establish the Caliphate in the Levant."

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 "TS: Finnish Volunteer Killed in Syrian Conflict," YLE, August 1, 2013.

56 Ibid.

57 His wife had a baby two weeks before the man's death. See *ibid.*

58 He was the first reported Finnish casualty in the Syrian conflict. See Kauhanen.

Finnish foreign fighters: ISIL-linked jihadists “Abu Anas al-Finlandi” and “Muhammad.” His account has been inactive since April 2013.

“Rami,” born around 1992 to a Finnish mother and a father from an unidentified Arab country, lived in Helsinki before traveling to southern Turkey in July 2013.⁵⁹ Although he has reportedly denied being in Syria, his mother believes he has traveled there.⁶⁰ He grew up and was educated in Finland, converting to Islam as a teenager.⁶¹ Prior to his conversion, he had problems at school, suffered from alcohol abuse, and had exhibited criminal behavior.⁶² Before traveling abroad, he had asked the imam at his local mosque about traveling to Syria.⁶³

The most recent Finnish casualty is “Abu Anas al-Finlandi” (who was most likely born around 1993),⁶⁴ who reportedly fought for the ISIL. He was killed in a battle between the Free Syrian Army and the ISIL in February 2014, according to a Twitter account linked to the ISIL.⁶⁵ There are few details about his profile, but reportedly he is a Finnish convert to Islam from the Helsinki area.⁶⁶ According to his Facebook page, he resided in Espoo and traveled to Aleppo in late 2013, reportedly via Turkey.⁶⁷

The Potential Domestic Impact of Returning Foreign Fighters

The lack of information about the Finnish fighters’ motivations for traveling to Syria and their activities in the country make it difficult to estimate the impact they may have on

59 He cleaned out his room, meticulously deleted the electronic trail of his travel arrangements, and disappeared to Turkey. See Zidan.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 After his conversion, he became a devout Muslim, turned away from Western culture and social mores, and started meticulously studying Islamic dietary laws. See *ibid.*

63 The imam opposed the idea of traveling to Syria, leading Rami to change mosques before his departure. See *ibid.*

64 Huusko.

65 Doula News English (@Doula_news2), “Abu Anas finlandi killed by the fsa, may Allah swt accept them,” Twitter, February 19, 2014.

66 Huusko.

67 Ibid.

Finland’s radical Islamist scene. There are several ways, however, that Finnish foreign fighters may pose a threat domestically.

First, returning fighters—particularly those who fought for jihadist groups—may seek to participate in domestic terrorist plots. While only a small minority of returning foreign fighters generally participate in domestic attacks, they tend to be more capable than those without foreign fighting experience.⁶⁸ To date, there have been

“The threat is made all the more acute by evidence that jihadist groups in Syria have trained their fighters to undertake domestic plots when they return to their home country.”

no jihadist attacks or plots in Finland.⁶⁹ The current Finnish government threat assessment states that “Finland is not a primary target for violent radical Islamist or other terrorist organizations” and the terrorist threat is considered low.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the domestic terrorist threat in Finland is gradually changing,⁷¹ and the Syrian conflict will undoubtedly accelerate its evolution. Although the FSIS argues that returning foreign fighters do not pose an imminent threat,⁷² the threat of returning foreign fighters is reflected in the current threat assessment, which states that “it is difficult to predict the threat posed by radicalized individuals or small groups.”⁷³

68 Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,” *American Political Science Review* 107:1 (2013).

69 Two incidents were erroneously attributed to al-Qa`ida in the summer of 2011. See Saarinen.

70 “Finnish Security Intelligence Service Annual Report 2013.”

71 Ibid.

72 Ropponen.

73 “Finnish Security Intelligence Service Annual Report 2013.”

The threat is made all the more acute by reports that jihadist groups in Syria have trained fighters to undertake domestic plots when they return to their home country.⁷⁴ Even if they choose not to attack Finland, they could attempt to attack targets in other Scandinavian countries or in Europe.

Second, returning fighters may seek to expand the Finnish radical Islamist scene. While the domestic radical Islamist community in Finland continues to grow regardless of the Syrian conflict,⁷⁵ the returning foreign fighters are likely to further increase its size: past evidence suggests that jihadist veterans will enjoy an elevated status among more radical Muslims⁷⁶ and they may seek to promote their adopted ideologies and agendas within it by radicalizing others.⁷⁷ Returning foreign fighters will also likely strengthen the jihadist strand within the radical Islamist scene. According to recent reports, there are indications of an emerging multi-ethnic jihadist network in Finland,⁷⁸ which has connections to jihadist groups operating in conflict areas abroad.⁷⁹

Additionally, returning fighters may attempt to recruit radical or more moderate Muslims residing in Finland for foreign fighting or domestic operations.⁸⁰ There have already been reported cases of returning fighters recruiting others in Finland to fight in Syria.⁸¹ Moreover, Finnish jihadist fighters do not necessarily need to return to constitute a threat through radicalization and recruitment efforts. Those foreign fighters-cum-jihadists who opt to continue fighting for jihadist groups may try to promote

74 For example, see Michael Schmidt and Eric Schmitt, “Syria Militants Said to Recruit Visiting Americans to Attack U.S.,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2014; Ruth Sherlock and Tom Whitehead, “Al-Qaeda Training British and European ‘Jihadists’ in Syria to Set Up Terror Cells at Home,” *Telegraph*, January 19, 2014.

75 Honkamaa.

76 Nieminen.

77 Particularly those among the disenfranchised and alienated second and third generation Finnish Muslims who neither identify with their parents’ culture nor with Finnish society.

78 Sipilä.

79 Honkamaa.

80 Rydman.

81 Nieminen.

radicalization, inspire domestic plots, and recruit foreign fighters among Muslims residing in Finland from abroad.

Lastly, the sizeable Finnish contingent in Syria may also transform Finland into a more visible and appealing target for foreign recruiters and groups.⁸² Foreign terrorist organizations have tried to recruit within Finland in the past,⁸³ and there have been unsubstantiated rumors of foreign recruiting of Finnish Muslims to participate in the Syrian civil war.⁸⁴ For example, two figures associated with the UK-based al-Muhajiroun have been publicly linked to the radical Islamist scene in Finland recently. Omar Bakri Mohammad was reported to know Finnish fighters in Syria and Somalia,⁸⁵ and Anjem Choudary's visit to Helsinki in March 2013⁸⁶ raised concerns about the potential formation of Sharia4Finland.⁸⁷ There is no data, however, to suggest that either has played any role in the mobilization of Finnish foreign fighters, or in facilitating their entry into Syria.

82 Particularly as radicalized Finnish foreign fighters bring with them information on the radical Islamist scene in Finland, and can act as nodes between the Finnish radical Islamist scene and foreign individuals or groups. See *ibid*.

83 Hizb Allah, al-Shabab, Hizb ul-Islam, al-Qa`ida and Ansar al-Islam are known to have had supporters and supporting activity in Finland. Al-Shabab supporters have been particularly active in Finland in recent years. See Saarinen.

84 A member of the Muslim community in Turku stated in an interview that there are individuals in Finland who are recruiting people to fight in conflicts taking place abroad. He stated he knew at least four people in Turku who had recently left to become foreign fighters in Syria and Yemen. See Vaalisto.

85 Kari Ahlberg, "Radikaali muslimisaarnaaja Libanonissa Yle uutisille: Syyriassa kymmenittäin suomalaisistaistelijöita," YLE, October 29, 2013.

86 Laura Halminen, "Radikaali muslimisaarnaaja esiintyi Helsingissä," *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 28, 2013.

87 The "Sharia4" are anti-Western, radical Islamist groups promoting the implementation of Shari'a law. While they do not openly encourage violent forms of Islamist activism among their supporters, they are often linked with radicalization, violent extremism and foreign fighting. There are Sharia4 groups operating at least in Belgium and the Netherlands, where they are linked with foreign fighter mobilizations. See Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "Belgium's Syria Fighters - An Overview of 2012 and 2013 (II)," *Jihadology*, January 25, 2014; Samar Bawtrawi, "The Dutch Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 6:10 (2013).

Conclusion

Finland has seen an unprecedented mobilization of Muslim foreign fighters as a result of Syria's descent into civil war. While there is some information on the composition of the Finnish foreign fighter contingent, it is often too generic and vague—since not enough data on individual fighters is available—to provide a thorough analysis of the causes of the mobilization or the domestic impact of returning fighters. A deeper analysis would require further information on what groups the fighters have joined, what originally motivated them to travel to Syria, and how the fighters perceive themselves in relation to the conflict in Syria.

Naturally, the most serious threat to Finland is from returning fighters who may have the intent to commit domestic terrorist attacks, although Finnish authorities do not find that likely. The extent of this threat, however, may increase when fighters return from Syria, so it should not be discounted. A more likely outcome, however, is the further expansion of the radical Islamist scene in Finland and increasing jihadist activity within it. Returning fighters may seek to radicalize, inspire and recruit vulnerable Finnish Muslims. Finland may also increasingly become a target for foreign jihadist recruiters. Consequently, Finnish authorities should continue to closely monitor Finnish fighters who have returned and those still abroad—particularly if they identify with jihadist groups operating in Syria—and also adopt more stringent measures to respond to the foreign fighting trend among Finnish Muslims.

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The Narco of Narcos: A Profile of Fugitive Mexican Druglord Rafael Caro-Quintero

By Malcolm Beith

THE RELEASE OF Rafael Caro-Quintero from a Mexican prison in August 2013 was a blow to U.S.-Mexico relations, the reputation of the Mexican justice system, and the drug war. Caro-Quintero had been imprisoned since 1989 for drug trafficking, murder, and perhaps most importantly the abduction, torture and killing of Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, an agent for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).¹ When Caro-Quintero was freed in August 2013—a federal court overturned his sentence because he had been tried in a state court rather than a federal one—the U.S. State Department offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest, while the Mexican Attorney General's Office also issued a new warrant for his apprehension.²

Whether Rafael Caro-Quintero still has clout in the Mexican cartel underworld is uncertain. Born in La Noria, Sinaloa, on October 3, 1952,³ he is widely considered to be one of the godfathers of the Mexican drug trade; upon his release from prison, one Mexican newspaper referred to him as the "narco of narcos."⁴ Yet he is 61-years-old, and the Mexican drug trafficking landscape has changed immensely since the days when he was in charge. Rather than one or two cartels controlling operations, the situation is far more fluid today, with numerous groups and upstart organizations controlling production and distribution.

This article reviews Caro-Quintero's rapid rise in Mexico's drug underworld, reveals his significant ties to the Sinaloa Federation, and attempts to dissect his activities since his release

1 Catherine Sholchet, "U.S. Puts New Bounty on Mexican Drug Lord Caro Quintero," CNN, November 6, 2013.

2 "Narcotics Rewards Program: Rafael Caro-Quintero," U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, undated.

3 "Quien es Rafael Caro Quintero?" *Milenio*, September 8, 2013.

4 "Quien es Rafael Caro Quintero?" *Terra Mexico*, August 9, 2013.

from prison in August 2013. It finds that Caro-Quintero's importance today is likely mostly symbolic given his age and apparent lack of influence in drug trafficking operations in recent years. It is possible, however, that Caro-Quintero still has clout when it comes to the money laundering side of cartel operations.

A Rapid Rise

In the 1980s, Caro-Quintero was considered a pioneer. He allegedly oversaw operations for the Guadalajara Cartel at Rancho Bufalo, a vast marijuana plantation in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua with an annual production value of roughly \$8 billion.⁵ In its prime, the Guadalajara Cartel was the only drug trafficking organization in Mexico, with a corruption network that spanned the

“Caro-Quintero’s residence was named as the location where DEA agent Camarena was tortured and killed.”

country. Headed by Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, the Guadalajara Cartel was responsible for forging the ties to Colombian drug trafficking networks that exist to this day. By the age of 29, Caro-Quintero had reportedly amassed a fortune of \$500 million, 36 houses and some 300 companies in the Guadalajara area.⁶

An indictment issued in the Central District of California in June 1989 named Caro-Quintero as a member of the now defunct Guadalajara Cartel.⁷ Caro-Quintero's residence was identified as the location where DEA agent Camarena was tortured and killed.⁸ The U.S. Treasury Department identified him as the “mastermind” behind Camarena's abduction and

5 “El gran decomiso en el rancho El Bufalo, de Caro Quintero,” *El Universal*, August 9, 2013.

6 “Quien es Rafael Caro Quintero?” *Terra Mexico*, August 9, 2013.

7 *U.S.A. v. Rafael Caro-Quintero*, Central District of California, 1989.

8 *Ibid.*

murder.⁹ He was also accused of distributing tens of thousands of tons of marijuana throughout Mexico and into the United States.¹⁰ Upon his arrest in 1985, shortly after the killing of Camarena, Caro-Quintero was charged with murder and sentenced to 40-years in a Mexican prison.

Significant Ties

In recent years, in part due to his imprisonment but also as a result of the Guadalajara Cartel's apparent demise, Caro-Quintero has remained off the radar. In June 2013, shortly before Caro-Quintero's release from prison, the U.S. Treasury Department released information on him and his primary associates, which linked Caro-Quintero closely to Juan Jose Esparragoza Moreno (also known as “El Azul”), an alleged high-ranking member of the Sinaloa Federation.¹¹

The link is significant since it alleges that Caro-Quintero still has criminal ties to one of the men widely believed to be a likely successor to the throne of the Sinaloa Federation. Throughout his life, Esparragoza Moreno has kept a low profile and moved horizontally and vertically between both the Juarez and Sinaloa cartels, effectively utilizing his role as an adviser to “stay in the background,” as one U.S. official explained.¹² Indeed, in many press releases issued by the Mexican government that list the country's most-wanted drug traffickers, Esparragoza Moreno is often left out.¹³ At one point in the late 1990s he was thought to be both a high-ranking member of the Juarez Cartel and a high-ranking adviser in the Sinaloa cartel. The cartels' relationship at the time was considered to be fluid and disorganized, allowing Esparragoza Moreno to utilize his diplomatic and strategic skills to position himself in both organizations

9 “Treasury Sanctions the Network of Drug Lord Rafael Caro Quintero,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, June 12, 2013.

10 *U.S.A. v. Rafael Caro-Quintero*.

11 “Treasury Sanctions the Network of Drug Lord Rafael Caro Quintero.”

12 Personal interview, U.S. official, September 2013.

13 This is based on the author's observations of Mexican government press releases regarding organized crime between the years of 2007-2012. It is not clear why Caro-Quintero is often left off these lists.

at the same time.¹⁴ It is a feat that has not been duplicated by any other major cartel figure.¹⁵

Of all the Sinaloa Federation's senior leaders, Esparragoza Moreno is the one who appears to have suffered the least pressure from the recent years of law enforcement operations. Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada's son, Vicente, is currently on trial in Chicago, and dozens of Sinaloa cartel lieutenants have been arrested or captured.¹⁶ Drug capo Ignacio “Nacho” Coronel Villareal was killed in a 2010 shootout with the Mexican military,¹⁷ while Arturo Beltran Leyva (also known as “El Barbas”) was killed in a bloody raid on a Cuernavaca apartment complex in December 2009;¹⁸ his brother Alfredo (also known as Mochomo) is in prison.¹⁹ Edgar Valdez Villareal (also known as “La Barbie”) is in a Mexico City prison awaiting extradition.²⁰ “El Mayo” is still free, but Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman Loera, the most-wanted trafficker in the world, was captured on February 22, 2014, countering conspiracy theories that the Sinaloa Federation was being protected by the Mexican authorities.²¹

The U.S. Treasury Department considers top Sinaloa figure Esparragoza Moreno and Caro-Quintero to be “long-time trafficking partners.”²²

14 Olga R. Rodriguez, “Juarez Drug Gang Forms Alliances to Control Border,” Associated Press, February 13, 2005.

15 *Ibid.*

16 “Consolida al Chapo Guzmán la muerte de Nacho Coronel, señalan datos oficiales,” *La Jornada*, August 15, 2010.

17 “Muere Arturo Beltrán Leyva en Morelos al enfrentar a elementos de la Armada,” *La Jornada*, December 17, 2009.

18 “Detienen a El Mochomo, brazo derecho del Chapo Guzmán,” *La Jornada*, March 22, 2008.

19 “Muere Arturo Beltrán Leyva en Morelos al enfrentar a elementos de la Armada.”

20 “Dos testigos protegidos, La Barbie y un militar implicaron a los tres generales,” *La Jornada*, May 19, 2012.

21 See “U.S., Mexico Hunt Elusive ‘El Chapo,’” *Washington Times*, January 14, 2010; Michael Martinez and Catherine Shoichet, “3 Reasons Why ‘El Chapo’ Arrest Matters,” CNN, February 22, 2014; Malcolm Beith and Jan-Albert Hootsen, “The Rise and Fall of El Chapo,” *Vocativ*, February 24, 2014.

22 “Caro Quintero Organization,” U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, June 2013, available at www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanc-

It also named several companies, all located in the vicinity of Guadalajara in central Mexico, as belonging to Caro-Quintero as fronts for illicit activity.²³ This is significant in that it indicates he may still be involved in the drug trafficking business in some way, even if only with respect to financial ties. Regardless, the financial networks of

“The U.S. Treasury Department considers top Sinaloa figure Esparragoza Moreno and Caro-Quintero to be ‘long-time trafficking partners.’”

Mexico’s drug traffickers are perhaps the most important element of their illicit activity. As the drug trafficking patterns shift and products change, and focus moves from marijuana production to heroin, for example, the money continues to flow and needs to be laundered.

Money laundering is likely Caro-Quintero’s relevance in the Mexican drug trade today. It is unlikely, given his many years of imprisonment, that he has any influence in the business of drug trafficking itself—in spite of dated reports that he retained clout while imprisoned.²⁴

The Caro-Quintero-affiliated companies named by the U.S. Treasury Department include real estate ventures, gasoline retailers and agricultural businesses, indicating that money laundered by Caro-Quintero is not small in quantity (in some instances regarding the Mexican drug cartels, the U.S. Treasury Department has named smaller businesses, even daycare centers, as money laundering fronts, and these quite clearly can only sustain smaller

tions/Programs/Documents/20130612_caro_quintero.pdf.

23 Ibid.

24 In 1989, the *Washington Post* reported that the drug kingpin had taken over entire cellblocks and remodeled them to his satisfaction; he reputedly also directed family members to redistribute his assets while incarcerated. For more details, see Dolia Estevez, “U.S. Treasury Tracks Secret Bank Accounts of Top Mexican Kingpin,” *Forbes*, December 5, 2013.

quantities of illicit cash; agricultural enterprises and real estate tend to provide cover for much larger quantities of illicit funds).²⁵

Also notable is the number of companies designated as connected to Caro-Quintero by the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Sanctions have been placed on some 20 companies, suggesting that Caro-Quintero still maintains a network through which to launder his money, rather than simply having a few outlets through which to keep movable cash.²⁶

Whereabouts Unknown

Where exactly Caro-Quintero is located may be the clue to deciphering how much influence he still has in the drug business.²⁷ Shortly after his release from prison, and following the U.S. announcement regarding information leading to his capture, the Mexican Attorney General’s Office (PGR)—which disagreed with the court decision to set him free—released a so-called red notice, alerting Interpol to his status and officially designating him as an international fugitive.²⁸ The Mexican authorities admit they do not know his whereabouts. “We had him and then he escaped [our grasp],” Mexican Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam said shortly after Caro-Quintero’s release.²⁹

Caro-Quintero, however, has reached out to the authorities himself. In late 2013, he sent a letter to Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto asking that Mexican authorities not bow to U.S. pressure. He has already served his time, he claimed, saying that his family does not deserve more “persecution.”³⁰

25 “Caro Quintero Organization.”

26 Ibid.

27 If he is located in a large cartel-ridden city like Guadalajara or Culiacan, it is likely he remains connected to the drug world and its leadership. If he is in the hills of Sinaloa, however, then he probably has little influence.

28 “Emite Alerta a Interpol Para Buscar a Caro Quintero,” *Terra Mexico*, October 1, 2013; Jan-Albert Hootsen, “Where in the World is Rafael Caro Quintero?” *Vocativo*, October 4, 2013.

29 “A Caro Quintero ‘lo teníamos y se nos fue’: Murillo Karam,” *Proceso*, September 7, 2013.

30 “Caro Quintero envía carta a Peña Nieto,” *Milenio*, December 3, 2013.

Still in Pursuit

Caro-Quintero’s brother, Miguel Angel, was extradited to the United States in 2009 and charged a year later for conspiring to import marijuana and racketeering. He was sentenced to 17 years in prison in Denver in 2010.³¹ As a result, it is not likely that the authorities will feel the need to apprehend Rafael Caro-Quintero to break down a family network. However, given that the Mexican Supreme Court has overturned the lower court’s decision to set him free, not to mention the fact that Sinaloa leader Guzman claimed to have recently spoken with him,³² it is likely that Mexican authorities will continue to assist the United States in seeking his capture.³³

It is also quite likely that in light of Sinaloa leader Guzman’s declarations, U.S. authorities may decide that Caro-Quintero still has clout in the drug trafficking world and put pressure on Mexico to re-arrest him. One former DEA official recently told the *El Paso Times* that ruling out Caro-Quintero as the “*jefe de jefes*” (boss of bosses) was impossible given the influence he had in the past.³⁴ This indicates that at least some in the U.S. intelligence community continue to view Caro-Quintero as a serious threat. With that in mind, it is highly unlikely that Caro-Quintero will spend the rest of his days living quietly in the hills of his home region of Sinaloa.

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31 “Miguel Angel Caro-Quintero Pleads Guilty to Trafficking Massive Amounts of Marijuana from Mexico to the United States,” U.S. District Attorney’s Office in the District of Colorado, October 23, 2009.

32 “Controversia por las supuestas confesiones de el Chapo en el helicóptero,” Univision, February 25, 2014.

33 “Mexican Supreme Court Overturns Decision that Freed Drug Lord,” CNN, November 7, 2013.

34 Diana Washington Valdez, “‘Chapo’ Guzman Likely Had Financial Help from Older Drug Lords, Ex-Investigator Says,” *El Paso Times*, March 10, 2014.

The Caucasus Emirate: From Anti-Colonialist Roots to Salafi-Jihad

By Derek Henry Flood

ON OCTOBER 21, 2013, a lone suicide bomber from Dagestan boarded a bus in Volgograd, Russia, and detonated an explosive device that killed six people.¹ Media outlets quickly noted that the attack occurred both outside the restive North Caucasus and before the Winter Olympic Games in February 2014. Less than two months later, on December 29, 2013, a suicide bomber entered Volgograd's principal railway terminal and blew himself up, and the following day another suicide bomber in Volgograd detonated explosives on a trolleybus. The consecutive bombings killed a total of 34 people and created further apprehension regarding security in not just Sochi, but across southern Russia.²

Notably, none of the suspected attackers were ethnic Chechens.³ On January 18, 2014, Vilayat Dagestan, a constituent militant group of the Salafist-oriented Caucasus Emirate,⁴ released a 49-minute video claiming responsibility for December's double bombings in Volgograd.⁵ The statement by Vilayat Dagestan,⁶ which was

believed to have been nominally under the control of Doku Umarov at the time of its release, concerned itself with global jihadist grievances rather than narrower local issues traditionally emphasized by Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus. Dagestan today is arguably much more of a hotbed of insurgency than Chechnya itself, and the ascendancy of Dagestani Salafist fighters may indicate a play for primacy within the Caucasus rebel umbrella faction.

On July 2, 2013, Doku Umarov, the Caucasus Emirate's late *amir*, issued a video statement threatening the Sochi Olympics, adding that he approved of attacks on civilians.⁷ Although the 2014 Winter Olympic Games came and went without incident, they were under threat throughout their duration. Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged that the most expensive Olympics the world had ever seen—taking place on the fringe of a war zone—would be thoroughly protected by an impenetrable “ring of steel” comprised of Sochi's inherent physical geography combined with an estimated 60,000-man security force and majority Orthodox Christian populace.⁸

This article examines the causal factors that led to the rise of the Caucasus Emirate, how the fight for an independent, post-Soviet Chechnya morphed into a much wider struggle for an Islamic emirate governed by Shari`a across the North Caucasus, and how the conflict in the Caucasus has awkwardly intersected with the ongoing internecine jihadist battles in Syria in ways that its original leadership never intended. The article finds that while for many years militancy in the North Caucasus was centered on an anti-colonial rebellion rejecting Russian rule with varying degrees of Islamist characteristics, Caucasian Salafism has supplanted any one particular brand of ethnic nationalism as the chief ideological current among fighters. With Caucasian

ticular attacks. See Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Formation of Khasavyurt Jammats Reflects Influx of New Funds and Recruits,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, January 17, 2014.

7 “Caucasus Emirate Leader Calls On Insurgents To Thwart Sochi Winter Olympics,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 3, 2013.

8 James Brooke, “Can Terrorists Penetrate Ring of Steel Around Sochi Olympics?” *Voice of America*, January 31, 2014.

fighters from Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa-al-Ansar displaying the Caucasus Emirate logo in Syria,⁹ geography no longer entirely defines pan-Caucasian Salafi-jihadism, nor are those of Chechen origin necessarily driving this movement.

How Separatism Turned to Emirate Building

The Caucasus Emirate is an ideologically Salafist outfit inhabiting what has been historically a haven of Sufi orders in the North Caucasus.¹⁰ It emerged from the failed insurrections that Chechens launched against Russian federal forces in two distinct conflicts beginning in late 1994.

Chechen separatism gained momentum in the immediate aftermath of the chaotic Soviet collapse. In March 1992, the Republic of Chechnya refused to sign the proposed federative treaty put forth by then-President Boris Yeltsin.¹¹ Chechen rebel leaders subsequently declared independence from Moscow—the only one of Russia's 89 republics and regions to make a genuine attempt at formal secession.

The Chechen forces during the first Russo-Chechen war in 1994 were led by former Soviet Air Force General Dzhokhar Dudayev, who was initially a secular nationalist. The second war in 1999 was principally helmed by President Aslan Maskhadov, a moderate Sufi who fought under a primarily ethno-nationalist hue somewhat reluctantly imbued with localized Islamism as a way to frame Chechen separatism in part to satisfy his Islamist peers.¹² Maskhadov had to contend with the very real ascendancy of Salafism (often

9 For an example of branding in Syria, in a Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa-al-Ansar video of Salah al-Din al-Shishani posted on the Shaminfo.tv channel on YouTube, al-Shishani can be clearly seen wearing an “Imarat Kavkaz” shirt beginning at 0:33. See “Appeal to the Muslims of Syria [from the] Mujahideen of the Caucasus Emirate,” July 30, 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoZDxCw5bvk.

10 John Russell, *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 176-177.

11 Chechnya was initially joined by Tatarstan in refusing to sign the federative treaty, but the quietist Muslim Tatars did not wage war over the idea and reached a compromise with Moscow. See Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2002), p. 96.

12 John Russell, *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 180-181.

1 “At Least 6 Killed in Attack by Female Suicide Bomber in Russia - Official,” RIA Novosti, October 21, 2013.

2 “Islamic Group Claims Volgograd Attack, Threatens Sochi Olympics,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 20, 2014.

3 Post-Soviet militancy in the North Caucasus began with the Chechen war for secession from the Russian Federation starting in December 1994. For many years, the war in the North Caucasus was focused almost solely on Chechnya and ethnic Chechens. As the ideology of political violence in the region shifted from ethno-nationalist to religio-political, the conflict gradually metastasized to envelop many of the neighboring republics and their attendant myriad ethnic groups.

4 The self-declared Caucasus Emirate is referred to alternately by its endonym “Imarat Kavkaz” when transliterated into Latin script. It was led by Doku Umarov until his death, which was announced on March 18, 2014, although the date of when he died is not known.

5 “Islamic Group Claims Volgograd Attacks and Threatens Sochi Visitors,” Associated Press, January 19, 2014.

6 Vilayat Dagestan is a “province” of the Caucasus Emirate which is then subdivided among communal militant groupings known as *jama`ats*. The larger *jama`ats* are then further divided in small cells who carry out par-

referred to as “Wahhabism”) because the schism between nationalists and Salafists had grown ever wider in the wake of Russia’s killing of Dudayev on April 21, 1996.¹³

As Russian forces successively eliminated these original nationalist leaders, the insurgency began to take on a distinctly Salafist tone embodied by increasingly erratic men like Shamil Basaev. Basaev was much more apt to work alongside transnational Arab jihadists like the notorious Saudi commander Umar ibn al-Khattab who led foreign fighters in Chechnya in ambushes against Russian military columns and their local proxies.¹⁴

As hopes for a separate Chechen state began to fade, the nationalist movement wilted away in all but name with many of its most prominent surviving members fleeing for the safety of the West and swapping fatigues for suits and ties.¹⁵

Although the conflict was relatively obscure to Western audiences in the 1990s, Chechnya was a key node of global jihad in the pre-9/11 era. Before eventually ending up in Afghanistan, several of the 9/11 hijackers and plotters were drawn into the operational side of violent global jihad in hopes of joining the battle for Chechnya, which was portrayed as a righteous fight between oppressed Muslim believers and infidel Russian troops.¹⁶ Vitriolic audio sermons and video propaganda tailored for Arabic-speaking audiences portraying the war against Russian forces in Chechnya as analogous to the 1980s jihad in Afghanistan circulated in the Persian Gulf region in late 1999 and the early 2000s.¹⁷ As early as

mid-1996, Usama bin Ladin cited the war in Chechnya three times in a list of grievances of the global Islamic community. Although the first war was largely nationalist in tone, it began to attract roving Arab Salafist fighters such as Ibn al-Khattab. Al-Khattab’s infamy gained from fighting Russian troops in Chechnya helped to establish links between the jihad in the North Caucasus and Saudi Arabia. As Russian forces killed both nationalist and Islamist rebel actors throughout the early 2000s, the Islamists—who were far less likely than the nationalists to negotiate with the Kremlin—would come to helm the rebellion and eventually steer it away from Chechen nationalism and toward Islamism.¹⁸

When Doku Umarov—a nationalist who later cloaked himself in Salafism—took control of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) in June 2006, the fight for Chechnya was gradually subsumed into a broader struggle. Umarov began reaching out to militant groups in other parts of the North Caucasus. In October 2007, he declared the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate¹⁹ comprised of six “*vilayats*” (provinces) which were subdivided into “*jama`ats*” (communities) representing insurgents from the republics spanning across the bulk of what is now the North Caucasus Federal District²⁰ from the shores of the Caspian Sea in coastal Dagestan to Sochi on the Black Sea. Umarov was an adept survivor, transforming himself from a

gia, August 18, 2002.

18 Umar ibn al-Khattab was killed on March 20, 2002. See “Obituary: Chechen Rebel Khattab,” BBC, April 26, 2002. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was killed in Doha, Qatar, on February 13, 2004. See “Russia ‘Behind Chechen Murder,’” BBC, June 30, 2004. Ruslan “Hamzat” Gelayev was killed in Dagestan on February 28, 2004. See “Chechen Rebel Field Commander Ruslan Gelayev Killed in Dagestan Mountains,” RIA Novosti, March 1, 2004. Aslan Maskhadov was killed in Tolstoy-Yurt, Chechnya, on March 8, 2005. See Musa Muradov and Sergey Mashkin, “Aslan Maskhadov Killed,” *Kommersant*, March 9, 2005. Shamil Basaev was killed in Ingushetia on July 10, 2006. See “Mastermind of Russian School Siege Killed,” CNN, July 11, 2006.

19 “The Official Version of Amir Dokka’s Statement of Declaration of the Caucasian Emirate,” Kavkaz Center, November 22, 2007.

20 “Medvedev Creates New North Caucasus Federal District,” Free Radio Europe/Radio Liberty, January 20, 2010.

member of the nationalist camp to a longstanding *amir* of the Islamist one.

During the evolution of the Caucasus Emirate, the locus of jihad, however, moved from Chechnya to Dagestan²¹ and somewhat lesser so to the republics of Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. During the second war in Chechnya, Moscow escalated its “Chechenization” policy by co-opting former Chechen nationalist rebels—chief among them Akhmad Kadyrov, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov’s late father—which exploited fissures within the insurgency in an effort to regain control of Chechnya through local clients, in lieu of directly negotiating with rebel leaders.²² The Putin government later infused large sums of capital to help rebuild Grozny, which was shattered by well over a decade of war.²³ Chechnya, under the repressive grip of the Kremlin-appointed President Kadyrov, has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, particularly evident in the once Stalingrad-like republican capital of Grozny, which now maintains the architectural air of a nouveau riche oil center. As Ramzan Kadyrov consolidated his rule over Grozny and its environs, and as Salafism spread on the Chechen republic’s eastern and western flanks, militancy in the North Caucasus became far less concentrated, with a host of different militant actors asserting their credentials.

Moreover, the struggle for the North Caucasus long predates the largely nationalist-hued Chechen wars of the 1990s. Chechens, Avars, Circassians and other ethno-linguistic groups firmly resisted Russian expansionism during the czarist period until at least 1864 when the Russians declared victory in the Caucasian wars.²⁴ Led most notably

21 Zakir Magomedov, “Dagestan: Russia’s Hottest Spot,” Open Democracy, March 8, 2014.

22 James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Past to Future* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), pp. 283-284.

23 Maria Golovkina, “Tsarnaev Homeland Chechnya: Rebuilt from War, Ruled by Fear,” Reuters, May 1, 2013.

24 Russia’s victory in the 19th century Caucasian wars can be said to have begun with the capture of Imam Shamil by czarist forces in 1859. See Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 12, 74. The conflict was largely concluded five years later with the surrender and expulsion of the Circassians to the Ottoman Empire in May 1864. See Walter

13 Lawrence Scott Sheets, *Eight Pieces of Empire: A 20-Year Journey Through the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Random House, 2011), p. 172.

14 Brian Glynn Williams, *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 163-166.

15 For example, Akhmed Zakayev, who served as President Maskhadov’s prime minister, sought exile in London. See Sam Jones, “MI5 Warns of Plot to Assassinate Chechen Refugee in UK,” *Guardian*, April 1, 2012. Ilyas Akhmadov, Maskhadov’s foreign minister, sought exile in Washington, D.C. See Matthew Brzezinski, “Surreal-polik,” *Washington Post Magazine*, March 20, 2005.

16 *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004).

17 Personal observation, Saburtalo district, Tbilisi, Geor-

by Imam Shamil, a dynamic Avar from the village of Gimry in present-day central Dagestan,²⁵ North Caucasian Sufis waged a 25-year-long holy war against Russian forces that is still invoked to the present day.²⁶ In the 19th century rebellion against the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, the perception of religious difference between invading Orthodox Russians and indigenous Muslim Caucasian groups was a rallying cry among different ethnic groups who shared Islam as a binding factor across mountains and valleys. Today, the symbolically significant Gimry is an area of Salafist influence in Dagestan located at a strategic crossroads between Makhachkala and the mountainous border with Chechnya where Russian federal forces began a crackdown in the lead up to the Olympics.²⁷

Non-Chechens, such as Vilayat Dagestan, have had the most dire effect on Russian security as of late. By executing the Volgograd bombings, Dagestani jihadists threatened events in Sochi asymmetrically by attacking civilian targets outside their historical areas of operation. The bulk of North Caucasian militants' attacks in recent history have occurred in the republics adjacent to Chechnya or the occasional mass casualty attack on symbolic locales in Moscow.

Part of what the Volgograd incidents indicate is that although a Chechen had remained at least the titular head of this increasingly decentralized insurgency, militants from other disenfranchised republics and regions are increasingly the ones carrying out attacks. The 2010 Moscow metro attacks were carried out by a pair of Dagestani women,²⁸ and the Domodedovo attack

was executed by a young Ingush man.²⁹ Chechens are no longer necessarily the key players in a conflict that arose from the ashes of their own national liberation struggle. The October 21, 2013, attack in Volgograd was allegedly carried out by Naida Asiyalova from Gunib, Dagestan, whose husband was an ethnic Russian convert to Islam,³⁰ while the December 29 and 30 attacks were launched by a pair of young Dagestani men named Asker Samedov and Suleiman Magomedov.³¹ Moreover, after acknowledging Umarov's death on March 18, 2014,³² the Caucasus Emirate announced his successor as Aliaskhab Kebekov (also known as Ali Abu Muhammad), an ethnic Avar from Dagestan.³³ Kebekov became the first non-Chechen rebel to lead the widening insurgency in the North Caucasus.

From Chechnya to Dagestan and Beyond

While the Caucasus Emirate has steeped itself in the language of transnational Salafi-jihadism for several years, the appearance of the "Imarat Kavkaz"—as the endonym of the Caucasus Emirate is known among jihadists—brand in Syria may mean that rhetoric has become reality among the freelance diaspora militants. The presence of ethnic Chechen fighters and commanders along with other Caucasian militants in Syria was probably not the result of a top-down hierarchical decision-making process made in the mountains of southern Chechnya or western Dagestan, but of jihadists who went to Syria partly out of its free-for-all opportunistic jihadist environment.³⁴

For the first time in the post-9/11 period, there is incontrovertible evidence that Chechens and other

Caucasian ethnicities are joining and even heading foreign fighter contingents in a non-contiguous war theater far from their contested homeland.³⁵ Until recently, Chechen violence was focused almost exclusively on symbols of the Russian state and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Russian civilians. Despite Umarov's infusion of boilerplate jihadist rhetoric into some of his public statements

“The presence of Chechen and other Caucasian fighters in Syria has been ideologically problematic for their peers in the North Caucasus and led to division among emigrant jihadists on the ground in Syria.”

since the formation of the Caucasus Emirate in 2007, the liberation of Chechnya remained one of his central aims, rather than fighting conflicts outside the region. Yet Syria has been a sea change for the Caucasus Emirate, which has belatedly endorsed freelance participation of fighters in the war.³⁶

Several prominent “Chechen” Salafi-jihadis fighting in northern Syria—most notably Omar al-Shishani,³⁷ a military leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) northern sector—are in fact Georgian nationals known as Kists. Georgia's small community of Kists migrated south from Chechnya

Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 87.

25 Imam Shamil's birthplace, then part of the Avar Khanate—then a tributary to the Ottoman suzerain in Istanbul—was subsumed into the Russian Empire in the Caucasian wars of the mid-19th century.

26 Maria Antonova, “Top Russian Islamist Calls for Attacks on Sochi Games,” Agence France-Press, July 3, 2013; Henry Ridgwell, “150 Years After Defeat, Sochi Olympics Divide Native Circassians,” Voice of America, February 19, 2014.

27 Emil Souleimanov, “Mopping up Gimry, ‘Zachistkas’ Reach Dagestan,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, April 16, 2013.

28 “Three Moscow Metro Bombing ‘Organisers’ Killed,”

BBC, May 13, 2010.

29 “Russia Jails Four Over 2011 Domodedovo Airport Bombing,” BBC, November 13, 2013.

30 “Russians Hunt for Husband of Suicide Bomber,” Associated Press, October 22, 2013.

31 “Suicide Bombers in Southern Russia's Volgograd Terrorist Attacks Identified,” Itar-Tass, January 30, 2014.

32 “Caucasus Emirate's Emir Dokku Abu Usman Martyred, Insha'Allah. Obituary,” Kavkaz Center, March 18, 2014.

33 “Ali Abu-Muhammad (Kebekov Aliaskhab Alibulatovich),” Kavkaz-Uzel, March 18, 2014.

34 Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Chechen Insurgency Leader Doku Umarov Tells Chechens Not to Fight in Syria,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 29, 2013.

35 Personal interviews, wounded foreign fighters, Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, November 2001; personal observations, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan, March 2007; Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: The Battle for Chechnya* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co LTD, 2006), p. XXXIV; Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Chechens Fighting in Syria Complicate a Complex Conflict,” *The National*, May 3, 2013.

36 Vatchagaev, “Chechen Insurgency Leader Doku Umarov Tells Chechens Not to Fight in Syria”; Vatchagaev, “Caucasus Emirate Leader Discusses Chechens in Syria in New Video.”

37 Personal interview, Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs analyst, Tbilisi, Georgia, October 30, 2013; Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Syria Crisis: Omar Shishani, Chechen Jihadist Leader,” BBC, December 3, 2013.

and Ingushetia and settled along the Alazani River in northeastern Georgia's Pankisi Gorge beginning in the 1830s.³⁸ Starting in late 1999, the Kists began to host Chechen refugees fleeing the war in southern Chechnya's Itum-Kale district.

Indeed, the presence of Chechen and other Caucasian fighters in Syria has been ideologically problematic for their peers in the North Caucasus and led to division among emigrant jihadists on the ground in Syria. Omar al-Shishani pledged *bay`a* (loyalty) to the ISIL, which is led by the Iraqi jihadist commander Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in November 2013.³⁹ Another Georgian Kist jihadist leader named Salah al-Din al-Shishani disagreed with Omar al-Shishani. Salah al-Din had pledged *bay`a* to the Caucasus Emirate under the leadership of Umarov in order to keep the Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa-al-Ansar faction operating financially and politically independent within Syria, while also trying to avoid *fitna* (sedition).⁴⁰ Omar al-Shishani has taken up a highly visible role that has won him adulation within the ISIL while it has been battling both regime forces and comparatively less extreme Salafist and other rebel groups in northern Syria.⁴¹

Although a minute figure in absolute numbers estimated to be in the hundreds, Chechens and other Caucasians from across the diaspora as well as the Russian Federation continue to trickle into Syria via

38 Personal observations, Birkiani, Georgia, October 30, 2009; George Sanikidze, *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia* (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2007), pp. 264-266.

39 A Russian-language website promoting foreign fighters in Syria claimed Omar al-Shishani pledged an oath to al-Baghdadi based on the latter's religious legitimacy as an ascribed descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. See "Omar al-Shishani Swears [allegiance to] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," Fisyria.com, November 21, 2013.

40 Somewhat similarly to Omar al-Shishani, Salah al-Din al-Shishani said his decision was based not out of a clash of personalities but rather on the grounds of Salafist ethics and that he and his fighters will pledge a new *bay`a* only when there is a sole *amir* for all of Syria once jihadist groups are united under a single banner. See "Amir Salahuddin Shishani's Appeal Following the Meeting of Commanders of the Mujahideen Jaish al-Muhajireen wa'Ansar," Shamtv.info, December 25, 2013.

41 "Joy at the Arrival of the Brothers Sheikh Omar al-Shishani," Abu Ubayda al-Tunisi YouTube channel, February 16, 2014.

the porous borderlands of Turkey's southern provinces.⁴² Chechen and other Caucasian participation in the Syrian jihad represents a major shift in the Islamist currents in the North Caucasus itself. Chechens from outside the North Caucasus can opportunistically slip across the Turkish-Syrian border to wage jihad and gain valuable battlefield experience. Russia has tightened its grip on Chechnya, and the Kadyrov regime has consolidated its rule on Grozny and its environs, making Syria an attractive destination for now.⁴³

Doku Umarov wavered on his position vis-à-vis Syria, which created space for an influx of fighters into the northern Levant. Perhaps out of sheer pragmatism, Umarov came around to endorsing Chechen fighters flowing into Syria in a bid to remain relevant among his followers.⁴⁴ Although Umarov and his aides never altogether abandoned their evolved form of Chechen nationalism now branded in Salafist speak, as militancy has ramped up in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria the localized jihad in the North Caucasus is far less Chechen-centric and increasingly globalized Islamist in tone, although this is not evident in terms of operational capacity thus far.

The Russian president has publicly raised his concern about the possibility of veteran jihadists returning to the southern tier of the Russian Federation from Syria's front lines, stating: "they will not vanish into thin air."⁴⁵ The Syria effect is one that worries a host of governments aside from just Moscow. The scenario of fighters returning from the Syrian battlefield is a concern not only for the Russian Federation, but also for the South Caucasus region and EU states that host Chechen refugee diasporas with direct connections to the 1990s anti-Russian insurgency. Georgia

42 "7 Chechens Detained on Turkey's Syria Border," *Today's Zaman*, February 18, 2014.

43 Personal interviews, Duisi and Tbilisi, Georgia, October 27, 2013 and October 30, 2013.

44 Vatchagaev, "Chechen Insurgency Leader Doku Umarov Tells Chechens Not to Fight in Syria"; Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Caucasus Emirate Leader Discusses Chechens in Syria in New Video," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 15, 2013.

45 Alissa de Carbonnel, "Russia Fears Return of Fighters Waging Jihad in Syria," Reuters, September 23, 2013.

in particular has a two-fold problem—its own Kist population has had a few commanders depart its territory to wage jihad in Syria while it still hosts refugees who trekked to Georgia in late 1999 and who may be vulnerable to radicalization.⁴⁶

In addition, a small number of Sunni Azeris from Azerbaijan have also been traveling to northern Syria via Georgia and Turkey—both of which have visa-free regimes for Azerbaijani nationals.⁴⁷ On a recent visit to Azerbaijan, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated that Ankara is struggling to control its 566-mile border with Syria and will not be monitoring Azeris unless intelligence on specific suspects is provided in advance by the Azeri government.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Although Russian and local authorities have made gains in securing Chechnya after years of all out war, religio-political violence has not only continued unabated in neighboring republics, but has in fact escalated in recent years. Russian counterinsurgency strategy lacks a significant hearts-and-minds component aimed at deradicalization. The Russian leadership relies instead on relentless hard power kinetics paired with some economic incentives parceled out to local power brokers. This has made Grozny relatively safe but has done nothing to resolve the longstanding question of who or what power should rightfully rule the North Caucasus in the minds of its diverse, indigenous peoples.

While militants from the Caucasus Emirate did not manage to breach the heavy security detail surrounding the Sochi Olympic Games, that does not mean that the threat to overall Russian security is diminished, as evinced by the attacks in Volgograd. The cycle

46 Personal interview, Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs analyst, Tbilisi, Georgia, October 30, 2013.

47 "Davudoglu Suriyaya geden azerbaycanlilardan damısdı," Azerbaijan News Service Press, February 19, 2014.

48 Abu Yahya al-Azeri, a well-known Azeri *amir* who was a confidant of Omar al-Shishani's in Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa-al-Ansar, was killed fighting in Hama on September 13, 2013. See "Azerbaijani Citizen aka Abu Yahya Killed While Fighting Against Government Forces in Syria," Azerbaijan Press Agency, September 16, 2013.

of violence emanating from the North Caucasus is likely to continue as Salafism rises in popularity coupled with the heavy-handed tactics of the Kremlin's security apparatus. The Caucasus as a whole, along with the wider Russian Federation, will still have to contend with the likelihood of jihadists returning from Syria and perhaps Iraq.

Unexpectedly, Umarov's initial hesitation notwithstanding, the Caucasus Emirate is currently officially present in Syria at least in terms of a visual brand, although its fighters are more so functionally under the banner of Jaysh al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar. In his final years as the *amir* of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov was increasingly viewed as a figurehead,⁴⁹ devoid of much charisma, or a spokesman, rather than a genuinely effective operational leader. The *vilayets* that comprise the Caucasus Emirate appear to be increasingly autonomous in nature. In this context, it is conceivable that the fight for the violence-plagued republics of the North Caucasus will no longer necessarily be dominated by Chechen leadership nor Chechen aims.

Umarov had proclaimed that the Caucasus Emirate is but one part of a larger worldwide jihadist realm. At present, the center of gravity for many aspiring Caucasian jihadists has shifted to northern Syria. Within the North Caucasus, the epicenter of jihad has long since shifted away from war-weary Chechnya, with more aggressive Dagestani *jama'ats* now taking the lead. The appointment of Aliaskhab Kebekov as the new *amir* of the Caucasus jihad—to replace the late Umarov—demonstrates the final transition from a once Chechen-centered rebellion to genuine Salafijihad in the North Caucasus.

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49 "Deaths, Blast in Russia's South Trigger Terrorism Sweep," RIA Novosti, January 9, 2014.

The Evolution of the Ethnic Baluch Insurgency in Iran

By Chris Zambelis

IRAN TOUTED THE FEBRUARY 2010 capture of Jundallah (Soldiers of God)¹ leader Abdelmalek Rigi as the death knell for the ethnic Baluch insurgency plaguing its southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan (also known as Iranian Baluchistan). Since emerging in 2003, the Jundallah-led insurgency primarily targeted members of the Iranian security services and other symbols of Iranian authority. It eventually widened its targets to include civilians. Attacks by Jundallah claimed hundreds of lives. The group's violent campaign was derived from its self-declared objective of defending ethnic Baluch and Iranian Sunni Muslims from state repression. The dramatic events surrounding Rigi's capture continue to be shrouded with intrigue.² Rigi was executed in June 2010, following a trial in which he pleaded guilty to all of the charges leveled against him.³

A spate of terrorist attacks and other incidents of violent militancy in Iran in 2012, attributed to ethnic Baluch rebels, recast a light on the situation in Sistan-Baluchistan. Jundallah's seeming demise has given way to a new wave of ethnic Baluch insurgents. In contrast to the height of Jundallah's campaign,

1 Iran forced down a Kyrgyzstan Airways flight reported to be en route from Dubai to the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek when they learned that Rigi was on board. Iranian officials claimed that Rigi's itinerary included a meeting with U.S. officials at Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan. See "High-Profile U.S. Official Was Waiting for Rigi in Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan," AhlulBayt News Agency, February 28, 2010.

2 There is a great deal of speculation surrounding the events leading up to Rigi's capture. For more background, see Meir Javedanfar, "Was Rigi's Arrest by Iran Staged?" PBS Frontline, February 24, 2010. Also see Chris Zambelis, "Political Theater or Counterterrorism? Assessing Iran's Capture of Jundallah Leader Abdelmalek Rigi," *Terrorism Monitor* 8:13 (2010).

3 Rigi was found guilty of 79 criminal charges, including founding and leading a terrorist organization, murder and attempted murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, narcotics smuggling, and collusion with hostile foreign forces such as the intelligence services of the United States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Israel. See Nazili Fatahi, "Iran Executes Sunni Rebel Leader," *New York Times*, June 20, 2010.

the landscape of violent resistance in Sistan-Baluchistan today is obscured by the presence of numerous, albeit seemingly overlapping, factions. These include Harakat Ansar Iran (Movement of the Partisans of Iran, HAI)⁴ and Jaish al-Adl Iran (Army of Justice, JAA)—the two most active insurgent detachments to emerge in the post-Jundallah milieu—among others.

This article will examine the latest trends in ethnic Baluch militancy in Sistan-Baluchistan and the impact of extremist Salafist ideologies on shaping ethnic Baluch resistance to Iranian rule. It finds that the specter of the late Rigi continues to weigh heavily on ethnic Baluch militancy in Iran. A reading of the discourse, symbolism, and iconography that appear on the social media platforms operated by these factions and their devotees reflects a deep reverence for the late Rigi and Jundallah. There is also evidence to suggest a significant degree of operational connectivity between the now-defunct Jundallah and the new generation of ethnic Baluch insurgents. This connectivity is evident in terms of the composition of the aforementioned organizations and the tactics and targeting philosophy employed by the current cohort of fighters.

Festering Grievances

A consideration of the place of ethnic Baluch in Iranian society is essential in understanding the roots of violent unrest in Sistan-Baluchistan Province. Iran's ethnic Baluch population endures widespread poverty and underdevelopment. Sistan-Baluchistan, where the majority of ethnic Baluch reside, is one of Iran's poorest and least developed regions.⁵ The Sunni faith

4 Harakat Ansar Iran has since announced a merger with another obscure ethnic Baluch militant organization known as Hizb al-Furqan to form Ansar al-Furqan. See "Important Announcement: Merger of Hizbul-Furqan and Harakat Ansar Iran," Harakat al-Ansar, December 7, 2013.

5 Notable communities of ethnic Baluch and other Sunni minorities, including ethnic Baluch, ethnic Persians, and others, inhabit Iran's eastern provinces of North Khorasan, South Khorasan, and Razavi Khorasan, in addition to other locations across Iran. See Ali Mamouri, "Iranian Government Builds Bridges to Sunni Minority," *al-Monitor*, December 1, 2013. Significantly, ethnic Baluch militants and other Sunni-centric Islamist extremists often reference the plight of Iranian Sunni believers across the

of most Iranian Baluch places them at odds with the Islamic Republic's Shi'a identity. The localized ethnic and tribal identities of ethnic Baluch, who share cultural and kinship ties with fellow ethnic Baluch minority populations in neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan, are also a source of contention.⁶ Iranian Baluch are also subjected to widespread repression by the Iranian security forces and local institutions. Sistan-Baluchistan is located along one of the world's busiest narcotics trafficking corridors⁷ and adjacent to Pakistan's own southwestern Baluchistan Province—a region simmering in a decades-long nationalist insurgency led by Pakistani Baluch—and Afghanistan's southwestern Nimroz Province.⁸ Consequently, the Iranian government tends to treat the region as a security threat.

Baluch Militancy Reborn

Despite successfully executing a series of attacks to avenge its leader's execution, Jundallah's violent campaign weakened by the end of 2011.⁹ The capture and subsequent execution of Rigi in 2010 struck a major blow to Jundallah. The arrest and killing of scores of other Jundallah fighters, including members of Rigi's immediate family and the Rigi tribe,¹⁰ helped deplete the group's rank-

country. For example, see Sons of Sunnah Iran, located at www.sonsofsunnah.com.

6 Karlos Zurutuza, "Inside Iran's Most Secretive Region," *Diplomat* [Tokyo], May 16, 2011.

7 Amin Ahmed, "New Routes of Heroin Smuggling Emerging, Says INCB," *Dawn*, March 5, 2014.

8 Umar Farooq, "The Battle for Sistan Baluchistan," *Wall Street Journal*, December 5, 2013.

9 For example, Jundallah claimed that its July 15, 2010, twin suicide bombings against Zahedan's Grand Mosque, which left upwards of 30 dead, was revenge for Rigi's capture and execution. See "Iran to Mete Out Justice in Zahedan Blast," Press TV [Tehran], July 17, 2010.

10 The Rigi tribe is considered one of Sistan-Baluchistan's largest tribes. There are indications, however, that the late Jundallah leader failed to earn much support among the wider tribe. Nevertheless, Iran has frequently singled out the role of Rigi's immediate family and clan members, along with members of the broader Rigi tribe, in Jundallah's activities. For example, Abdel Ghafoor Rigi, one of the late Jundallah leader's brothers, executed the group's first suicide attack—the first such attack in Iran's history—in December 2008. For more background, see Aminah Soghdi, "Baluch Celebrate Rebel's Arrest," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 10, 2010; Sonia Ghaffari, "Baluchistan's Rising Militancy," *Middle East Report* 39:250 (2009). Consequently, Iran frequently

and-file. Iran's repressive approach toward its ethnic Baluch minority also undermined Jundallah's capacity to operate.

After a brief respite, Rigi loyalists and other ethnic Baluch militants appeared to marshal their ranks.¹¹ Indications that a resurgence of organized and sustained ethnic Baluch-led militancy was on the rise began to manifest in late 2011. For example, HAI reportedly formed around December 2011, although its exact date of creation is unclear.¹² JAA reportedly organized sometime in mid-2012.¹³ Both groups claimed responsibility for a multitude of attacks across Sistan-Baluchistan against members of the Iranian security services, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its elite Quds Force, Basij militias, police and border guards, as well as symbols of the Iranian state, political and clerical leaders, and soft civilian targets such as Shi'a mosques. In most respects, the tactical and operational character of HAI and JAA activities bore Jundallah's signature.

HAI claimed responsibility for an October 19, 2012, suicide bombing in the port city of Chabahar in Sistan-Baluchistan. The assailant, who was reportedly targeting the Imam Hussein Mosque, detonated his explosives-laden vest outside the mosque after he was denied entry into the premises by Iranian security forces.¹⁴ The attack left

refers to the former Jundallah (and many of its successor factions) as the "Rigi Clan" or "Rigi Group." See "Jundallah, Iran's Sunni Rebels," Reuters, July 16, 2010; "Rigi Group Sets Up Den Near Iran Border," Press TV, March 3, 2011.

11 Muhammad Dhahir Baluch was announced as Rigi's replacement to head Jundallah. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that Jundallah remains functional in any substantive form. See "Iranian Rebels Pick New Leader," *al-Jazeera*, February 28, 2010.

12 Hussein Kirmani, "Harakat Ansar Iran 'Responsible for Suicide Bombings in Chabahar?'" *Deutsche Welle Persian*, October 20, 2012.

13 Sajid Hussain, "The Other Jihad," *The News International*, December 11, 2013. Also see Nima Abdelkhal, "The Army of Justice and the Threat of Sunni Islamist Militancy in the Sistan-Baluchistan Province of Iran," *Terrorism Monitor* 11:23 (2013).

14 "Suicide Bomber Kills Two at South Iran Mosque," Reuters, October 19, 2012. The attack was part of what HAI called its "Operation Ra'ad (Thunder) 1" campaign. See "Announcement: The Beginning of Operation Ra'ad," Harakat al-Ansar, November 13, 2012.

two Basij officers dead and a number of civilians injured.¹⁵ The attack represented the first suicide bombing since a December 2010 attack claimed by Jundallah at the same mosque, which claimed at least 40 lives.¹⁶ HAI has since

"There is little ambiguity about the centrality of radical Salafism within the latest current of ethnic Baluch militancy."

claimed responsibility for a string of attacks, including small unit ambushes and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attacks against Iranian security forces.

HAI was reportedly co-founded and led by an obscure Baluch militant referred to as Abu Yasir Muskootani until his death.¹⁷ Notably, the group refers to the late Rigi as its spiritual *amir* (commander).¹⁸ HAI's spokesman, Abu Hafs al-Baluchi, is described as a friend of the late Jundallah leader but not a previous member of Jundallah, as well as a co-founder of HAI.¹⁹

Despite their shared goal of fighting the Islamic Republic and mutual reverence for Jundallah, the presence of numerous ethnic Baluch militant factions in the wake of Jundallah's demise apparently encouraged rivalry and dissension. These cleavages may have stemmed from possible regional and tribal disputes. This is not without precedent, as there are indications that regional and tribal dynamics

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 "HAI Council Announcement: Martyrdom of Abu Yasir Muskootani and Selection of New Emir," Harakat al-Ansar, May 7, 2013.

18 The late Rigi is lionized by Harakat Ansar Iran and its successor faction Ansar al-Furqan. In a public message posted on its network of official websites and social media outlets, Abu Yasir Muskootani boasted that the "students of our emir Abdel Malek Baluch are still alive." See "Speech by Emir Abu Yasir Muskootani on the Eve of Our First Successful Operation," Harakat al-Ansar, April 16, 2013.

19 "Abu Hafs al-Baluchi and His Role in the Jihad in Baluchistan," Harakat al-Ansar, May 19, 2013.

and ideological disagreements also impacted Jundallah on multiple levels.²⁰ HAI addressed this issue in an announcement declaring solidarity with another shadowy fellow militant organization, Sepah-e-Sahaba Iran (Soldiers of the Companions Iran, SSI).²¹ HAI also refuted reports of discord among the numerous insurgent factions as a ploy by the Iranian intelligence services to discredit their cause.²² In a further attempt to unify the rank-and-file, in December 2013 HAI announced its formal merger with another murky militant group known as Hizb al-Furqan²³ (Party of the Criterion,²⁴ HAF) to form Ansar al-Furqan (Partisans of the Criterion, AF).²⁵ Since its merger with HAF, HAI operates under the banner of AF.

Much like HAI, JAA has been implicated in a series of terrorist and insurgent-style attacks. In February 2014, JAA abducted five Iranian soldiers outside the village of Jakigur along the Iran-Pakistan border in Sistan-Baluchistan.²⁶ JAA killed 14 Iranian border guards and injured five others in an October 2013 ambush against a border checkpoint in the town of Rustak near the city of Saravan located along the Iran-Pakistan border in Sistan-Baluchistan.²⁷ In retaliation, Iranian authorities executed 16 ethnic Baluch men on charges ranging from terrorism to narcotics trafficking.²⁸ JAA would later claim responsibility

for the November 2013 assassination of a public prosecutor in the city of Zabol located in the northeastern part of Sistan-Baluchistan near Iran's border with Afghanistan.²⁹ The group called the attack an act of retaliation for the execution of the aforementioned prisoners.³⁰

JAA reportedly formed after Rigi's capture and the subsequent fragmentation of Jundallah. It is led by Abdulrahim Mulazadeh, who uses the pseudonym Salah al-Din al-Farouqi. JAA is also alleged to include former members of Jundallah within its ranks.³¹ Some observers have claimed that former Jundallah fighters simply renamed their group JAA.³² Iran stated that JAA represented "remnants" of Jundallah,³³ and that it exploits the Iran-Pakistan frontier to enter Pakistan's Baluchistan Province as a sanctuary. Iran believes that JAA is holding the five Iranian soldiers abducted in February 2014 on Pakistani soil.³⁴ JAA's purported use of Pakistani territory as a safe haven provoked a sharp response from Iranian authorities, who threatened to deploy troops inside Pakistan and Afghanistan to free the abducted soldiers and to root out other threats affecting its frontier territories.³⁵

29 "Armed Group Claims Iran Prosecutor's Killing," *al-Jazira*, November 7, 2013.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Mehdi Jahantighi, "Iran News Agency Claims Border Attack Rebels Backed by USA, Israel," *Fars News Agency* [Teheran], October 27, 2013.

32 Hussain.

33 "Judiciary: Saturday Terrorist Attack Done by Remnants of Rigi Group," *Fars News Agency*, October 27, 2013.

34 "Iran, Pakistan Form Committee to Free Abducted Guards," *Press TV*, February 23, 2014.

35 Katharine Houreld, "Pakistan Warns Iran Not to Send in Troops After Guards Kidnapped," *Reuters*, February 18, 2014. Iran's threats come despite its participation in numerous bilateral exchanges designed to foster enhanced security cooperation with Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan concluded a bilateral cooperation agreement toward preventing and combating organized crime, terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other threats confronting both countries. In light of recent events, Iran and Pakistan established a joint working body to secure the release of the abducted Iranian soldiers under the auspices of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Border Commission. See "Iran, Pakistan Form Committee to Free Abducted Guards," *Press TV*, February 22, 2014.

There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that HAI and JAA coordinate operations. Significantly, despite HAI's announced mergers with fellow ethnic Baluch militant organizations, they have yet to reference JAA. Both groups seem to operate in overlapping spaces in Sistan-Baluchistan, and both attracted members of the former Jundallah to their ranks. HAI's penchant for suicide bombings in urban areas set it apart from other militant organizations.³⁶ The austere geographic characteristics of Sistan-Baluchistan, coupled with the prevalence of local tribal identities and rivalries, may explain the lack of broader cooperation between HAI and JAA and other ethnic Baluch insurgent factions.

Along with conducting attacks, the new generation of ethnic Baluch militants places a greater emphasis on advancing its campaign in the virtual domain. In contrast to the new generation of ethnic Baluch militants, Jundallah's online presence was fairly limited.³⁷ The most significant extremist organizations maintain an assortment of online social media platforms, including officially managed websites, blogs, along with YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Google+ pages.³⁸

In an effort to reach a wider audience, many of these platforms contain material in Persian, Arabic, and English. In addition to broadcasting official statements and related commentary, ethnic Baluch insurgents exploit social media's force-multiplier potential by showcasing videotaped

36 Based on their history of attacks, some observers suggest a clear tactical and operational distinction between HAI and JAA. See Galen Wright, "Tracking Insurgent Activity in Southeast Iran," *Open Source IMINT*, December 14, 2013.

37 For a sampling of the former Jundallah's video and online presence, see www.youtube.com/user/taftaanbaloch.

38 For the official Ansar al-Furqan (formerly known as Harakat Ansar Iran) blog, see www.ansariran1.blogspot.com. For the official Ansar al-Furqan YouTube page, see www.youtube.com/user/ansariran1. For the official Ansar al-Furqan Twitter page, see www.twitter.com/AnsarIran_eng. For the official Jaish al-Adl Iran blog, see www.jashuladl.blogspot.jp. For the official Jaish al-Adl Iran Twitter page, see www.twitter.com/jaishuladl. Jaish al-Adl Iran also operates Edalaat News, located at edaalatnews.blogspot.co.uk. For the official Hizb al-Furqan blog, see www.hezbulfurqan.blogspot.com.

20 Audun Kolstad Wiig, "Islamist Opposition in the Islamic Republic: Jundallah and the Spread of Extremist Deobandism in Iran," *Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI)*, July 2, 2009, pp. 30-34.

21 "Harakat Ansar Iran Announce Cooperation with Sipah-e-Sahaba," *Harakat al-Ansar*, April 16, 2013.

22 *Ibid.*

23 See the official website of Hizb al-Furqan at www.hezbulfurqan.blogspot.com. Also see Hizb al-Furqan's official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/hezbulfurqan1.

24 In general terms, the reference to al-Furqan (the Criterion) refers to the belief of the Qur'an as the standard upon which to judge right and wrong.

25 "Important Announcement: Merger of Hizbul-Furqan and Harakat Ansar Iran," *Harakat al-Ansar*, December 7, 2013.

26 "Iran, Pakistan Form Committee to Free Abducted Guards," *Press TV*, February, 23, 2014.

27 "Iran Pursuing Saravan Terrorist Attack: Deputy FM," *Press TV*, January 3, 2014.

28 Golnaz Esfandiari, "Violence Returns to Sistan-Baluchistan Province," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 7, 2013.

footage of alleged attacks. While it is difficult to determine the precise number of organized insurgents operating in Sistan-Baluchistan, the ability to air videotaped footage of alleged battlefield successes and other forms of propaganda can serve to amplify the strength and resolve of the insurgency in the eyes of its sympathizers, as well as in the eyes of Iranian and international public opinion.

Salafist Discourse and Dogma

Notwithstanding its Islamist-themed namesake and its Sunni rank-and-file, Jundallah rejected any association with radical Islamist and particularly Salafist extremism.³⁹ The late Rigi at one point framed Jundallah's struggle as a fight for freedom and human rights for a people under siege by a repressive regime.⁴⁰ Ultimately, Jundallah began to frame its mission in the context of a struggle to defend Sunni Muslims in Iran. Yet it was Jundallah's incremental resort to sectarian-imbued rhetoric against Shi'a Islam and its use of suicide bombings that raised questions about the creeping influence of radical Islamist ideologies within Jundallah. These trends appeared to lend credence to Iran's claims associating Jundallah with groups such as al-Qa`ida and the Taliban despite doubts to the contrary. Iran also accused a combination of foreign powers—including its rivals the United States, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United Kingdom—of supporting ethnic Baluch militancy.⁴¹

39 Jundallah also referred to itself as the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI) in an apparent effort to create distance from reports alleging that it harbored an extremist sectarian agenda.

40 The late Rigi went as far as to pen open letters to U.S. President Barack Obama, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in November 2009. In each of the individually tailored letters, Rigi made a plea on the behalf of a besieged Iranian Baluch population he claims to be defending. The letters are available at www.ostomaan.org/articles/news-and-views/4462.

41 William Yong and Robert F. Worth, "Toll Rises From Twin Suicide Bombings at Iranian Mosque," *New York Times*, July 16, 2010. Curiously, Iran sometimes blames Pakistan for encouraging unrest in Sistan-Baluchistan Province even though both countries share a history of actively collaborating to suppress Baluch nationalism in the region. See "U.S., Pakistan Spy Agencies Lead Jaish ul-Adl," Press TV, November 5, 2013.

In contrast, there is little ambiguity about the centrality of radical Salafism within the latest current of ethnic Baluch militancy. The rhetoric and discourse of groups such as HAI and JAA are replete with anti-Shi'a polemics and hardline Salafist tones.⁴² HAI and JAA often refer to the Islamic Republic as the Safavid regime, in reference to the Safavid dynasty that ushered in Iran's turn to Shi'ism. They also frequently refer to Shi'a believers as *rawafidh* (rejectionists), a pejorative label frequently used by Salafist extremists against Shi'a Muslims.⁴³ Yet it is the global focus of the commentary, especially in regard to events in places such as Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, that illustrates the hardline Salafist undercurrents driving ethnic Baluch militancy in Iran today.⁴⁴ In this regard, Iran's support for the Ba`athist regime in Syria, Hizb Allah in Lebanon, and the Shi'a-led government of Nuri al-Maliki in Iraq serves to vindicate the claims of ethnic Baluch militants that Iran and its regional Shi'a allies are waging a campaign to destroy what they believe to be true Islam.

Conclusion

The influence of radical Islamist and, in particular, hardline Salafist ideologies among ethnic Baluch militants is likely to remain an important driver of events in Sistan-Baluchistan in the foreseeable future. The heightened sectarian tensions that crystallized around the greater Middle East in recent years provide a fertile ground

42 This point is illustrated by a statement attributed to purported Harakat Ansar Iran member Nasser Baluchi: "If you think our jihad has anything to do with nationalism, you are wrong. Our Jihad is for Islam. And we will hit the Shi'a wherever they are, whether in Iran, Syria, or Iraq, it makes no difference to us. Our umma has no borders." See "Why We Fight?" Harakat al-Ansar, April 16, 2013.

43 Hardline Salafists tend to consider Shi'a Muslims (and adherents of other Muslim denominations) as heretics or apostates.

44 The importance of global events to the new generation of ethnic Baluch militants is demonstrated in the following statement published by Harakat Ansar Iran: "What is Harakat Ansar Iran?? We are mujahidin of the Ahlus Sunnah of Iran, our aims are to: 1. Protect the oppressed Sunni minorities of Iran against their Shi'a government. 2. Strike at the head and heart of Shi'ism, Tehran and Qum so as to stem the destruction they spread amongst Ahlus Sunnah worldwide (like in Syria and Iraq). 3. Establish Shari'a in our lands. 4. Regain Iran for the Muslims, with the help of Allah [God]."

for the expansion of these ideas. The geopolitical implications of this trend should not be understated, especially in the context of Iran's resilient alliance with the Bashar al-Assad regime, the ongoing conflict in Syria, and the expanding regional proxy war featuring rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the return of violent militancy to Sistan-Baluchistan in its current form may signal the start of a new and increasingly dangerous front in an expanding war of regional proxies.

The deteriorating security situation in neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan, especially in the context of the impending withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2014, further complicates an already difficult set of dynamics affecting Sistan-Baluchistan and potentially other locations along Iran's eastern frontier. The further destabilization of Iran's eastern neighbors is sure to transcend borders in the form of accelerated refugee flows, arms, narcotics, and human trafficking, and the spread of violent political and religious militancy. Iran's oppressive posture toward Sistan-Baluchistan over the years has been largely attributed to its security-centric treatment of the region. Growing unrest along its frontier will almost certainly compel Iran to maintain its hardline methods of control. Yet it is precisely this strategy that has helped to feed the grievances fueling armed rebellion in the region. Barring a major turn of events, Sistan-Baluchistan will continue to fester in the months and years ahead.

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A Profile of the Informal Anarchist Federation in Italy

By Francesco Marone

IN THE LAST 25 YEARS, Italian insurrectionary anarchists have been responsible for dozens of attacks in the country and abroad.¹ This trend was long underestimated by Italian authorities and analysts,² partly because the attacks were not lethal. Nevertheless, insurrectionary anarchism is recognized as a current security concern in Italy. It has become the most dangerous form of domestic non-jihadist terrorism in the country.³ Furthermore, in many respects, Italy represents the birthplace of a new threat that has spread to other countries.

Contemporary insurrectionary anarchism is an extremist tendency within the anarchist movement. It emphasizes the practice of revolutionary insurrection through illegal and violent “direct action.” In Italy, the insurrectionary anarchist movement has combined different radical causes and interests, including: anti-authoritarianism, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-militarism, anti-clericalism, the struggle against the judicial and prison system, radical environmentalism and Sardinian separatism.⁴

One of the most influential ideologues of contemporary insurrectionary anarchism is the Italian activist Alfredo Maria Bonanno (born 1937). Bonanno is best known for his essay *Armed Joy (Laggioia armata)*, an incendiary pamphlet written in Italy in 1977 (and later banned) during the so-called “Years of Lead” marked by left-wing and right-wing terrorism. In the early 1990s, Bonanno proposed coordination between Mediterranean insurrectionary anarchists, especially from Italy, Greece and Spain. Bonanno

was convicted three times for various crimes, including bank robberies.⁵

The view of insurrectionary anarchism inspired by Bonanno’s work has spread from Italy and has been developing in the transnational anarchist movement since the 1980s, partly due to translations of Bonanno’s writings.⁶ Overall, the connection of this contemporary movement with the main intellectual currents of classical anarchism is rather weak. In general, anarchism emphasizes practice over theory. Insurrectionary anarchism, however, has taken this position to the extreme. Violent “direct action” here and now is considered essential. Contemporary insurrectionary anarchists have been critical of other anarchists. On the one hand, they have rejected the struggle for reforms and mass organizations and have opposed issue-based activism. They have expressed a profound critique of any other movements that fail to take immediate direct action. On the other hand, insurrectionary anarchists direct their critique at any “formal organization.”⁷

This article examines the rise of the most important network within this movement, the Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI), and its escalation of violence culminating in the attack on an Italian nuclear executive in May 2012.⁸ In the last decade, the FAI has been able to sustain an intense campaign of violence. In particular, a series of bombs and letter bombs, often directed against high-profile targets, have caused concern and alarm. The network has yet to cause any deaths, but some of their attacks were potentially lethal.⁹

5 Corrado Barbacini, “L’anarchico Bonanno arrestato dopo una rapina,” *Il Piccolo*, October 7, 2009.

6 In general terms, the Italian anarchist movement historically had a relevant transnational dimension, especially in the United States. See, for example, Davide Turcato, “Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885-1915,” *International Review of Social History* 52.3 (2007).

7 Leonard Williams and Brad Thomson, “The Allure of Insurrection,” *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 1 (2011).

8 The perpetrators of this crime were apprehended in September 2012 and convicted in November 2013.

9 In 2007, the FAI released the “transcription” of a clandestine meeting held among eight anonymous members of the network in December 2006. This discussion

Furthermore, the FAI has established ties with foreign groups, especially in Greece, and has become a model of inspiration for extremist groups and individuals around the world.

The Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI)

The Informal Anarchist Federation (Federazione Anarchica Informale, FAI)¹⁰ is a loose network of individuals and small temporary “affinity groups” (*gruppi di affinità*) based on personal relationships. There is still little public information about the network. The FAI officially appeared in December 2003 when it claimed responsibility for two rudimentary bombs placed outside Romani Prodi’s private residence in Bologna, in north-central Italy.¹¹ Prodi twice served as prime minister of Italy (1996-1998, 2006-2008), and he was president of the European Commission at the time of the attempted attack. In December 2003-January 2004, a letter bomb campaign called “Operation Santa Claus” was carried out against several European Union representatives, senior officials and institutions. The targets included the president of the European Commission for the second time,¹² the

presented different opinions on the degree and extent of violence. Some of these militants, however, were in favor of killing “the guilty,” while sparing the life of “innocent people.” The document was called “Four Years” (“Quattro anni”), a reference to the network’s first four years of life. English translations of the text are available on the internet. See also Marco Imarisio, “Nomi in codice Qui-Quo-Qua. ‘Giusto ferire una segretaria se serve a uccidere il padrone,’” *Corriere della Sera*, December 18, 2009.

10 The Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI) is not to be confused with the historic Italian Anarchist Federation (also FAI), associated with the International of Anarchist Federations (IAF/IFA). In December 2003, the Italian Anarchist Federation promptly denounced “the serious and infamous nature of attributing this kind of facts [the first acts of violence] to initials alluding to the monogram of FAI.” See FAI Press release, December 28, 2003.

11 Vittorio Monti, “Bologna, esplosioni sotto casa Prodi,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 22, 2003. See the FAI communiqué, “Open Letter to the Anarchist and Anti-Authoritarian Movement” (“Lettera aperta al movimento anarchico ed anti-autoritario”), December 21, 2003. English translations are available on the internet.

12 The letter bomb exploded in the hands of Prodi at his home in Bologna. The bomb, however, was a small, amateurish device and was not capable of causing significant damage. Prodi was not hurt. See Vittorio Monti, “Una gran fiammata. Ma io resto sereno,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 28, 2003; Sergio Stimolo, “La moglie: ha spento tutto e mi ha tranquillizzata. Il Professore: non avevano intenzione di uccidere,” *Corriere della Sera*, De-

1 Such attacks include sabotage, arson, bombings, and assaults, among others.

2 See Marco Boschi, *Criminologia del terrorismo anarco-insurrezionalista* (Rome: Aracne, 2005).

3 “2012 Report to Parliament on the Activities of the Police Forces, the State of Public Order and Security, and Organized Crime,” Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2013, p. 10.

4 Boschi.

president of the European Central Bank,¹³ Europol,¹⁴ Eurojust,¹⁵ the president¹⁶ and the vice-president¹⁷ of the European People's Party, and a British member of the European Parliament.¹⁸ The FAI claimed responsibility for these attacks. All of the letter bombs were sent from Bologna in the space of a few days.¹⁹

In December 2003, the FAI released an important "open letter" in which the new group introduced itself.²⁰ The FAI aimed to be "a center-less, chaotic and horizontal organization," in this way "reflecting the view of the anarchist society [they] struggle for."²¹ According to these militants, "to conciliate organization and theoretical/practical debate with the anonymity of groups/individuals is possible through a widespread dialogue based on actions."²²

In their view, the FAI is first a "federation" because of "its widespread horizontal structure": "relationships inside the federation are stable and

flexible at the same time."²³ The group is explicitly "not democratic."²⁴

Second, the FAI is "anarchist" because it wants the "destruction of capital and the state."²⁵ It radically opposes "any Marxist cancer" since "it crushes the possibility of a free society and just substitutes one dominion with another."²⁶

Third, the FAI is "informal" because it intends to adopt a kind of organization that is "capable of preventing the creation of authoritarian and bureaucratizing mechanisms."²⁷ The authors of the open letter pragmatically observed that classic clandestine structures, typical of Italian left-wing terrorism (in particular, the notorious Red Brigades), can be undermined by infiltrators and informants: "on the contrary, the informal organization is formed of groups and individuals that do not know one another."²⁸ Moreover, unlike full-time terrorists, "whoever takes part in the FAI is a militant only when preparing and carrying out an action."²⁹ Therefore, the adoption of a horizontal structure seems to be based on both ideological and pragmatic reasons.

The FAI members accept a "pact of mutual support" based on three key points: "revolutionary solidarity" with arrested or fugitive comrades; self-organized "revolutionary campaigns"; and "communication between groups and individuals" through actions and through the channels of the movement.³⁰ In this sense, the internet represents an important opportunity for communication and propaganda.

In its early years, the FAI was composed of four known groups, expressly mentioned in the 2003 open letter: Cooperative of Hand-Made Fire and Related Items (Cooperativa Artigiana Fuoco e Affini), July 20 Brigade (Brigata 20 Luglio), Five C's (Cellule contro il Capitale, il Carcere, i suoi Carcerieri e le sue Celle) and International Solidarity

(Solidarietà internazionale). These were already existing groups, operating at the local level in the cities of Bologna, Genoa, Rome and Milan, respectively. As a whole, these four groups were responsible for at least 16 rudimentary bombs and letter bombs in the years 1999-2003.³¹ Over time, other Italian groups and cells have joined the FAI. At present, the actual number of FAI militants in Italy is unknown,³² but recent estimates range from 50 to 250 people.³³

The Italian FAI has ideological and solidarity ties with Greek anarchist groups,³⁴ particularly with the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (CCF),³⁵ a revolutionary anarcho-individualist group that emerged in 2008.³⁶ In particular, these ties were confirmed in June 2012 when an important Italian police operation against insurrectionary anarchists occurred. Eight people were arrested and 24 suspected militants, including six Greek CCF members, were investigated. On that occasion, Italian investigators stated that there was a "proven connection" with "Greek anarchist movements."³⁷ Around 2011, the FAI also promoted the development of an International Revolutionary Front (Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale, FRI), apparently an effort of coordination between like-minded militant groups.

December 28, 2003.

13 The letter bomb sent to Jean-Claude Trichet was intercepted and defused in Frankfurt, Germany. See Giuliana Ferraino, "Due libri bomba a Trichet e all' Europol," *Corriere della Sera*, December 30, 2003.

14 The letter bomb was intercepted and defused in The Hague, Netherlands. See *ibid.*

15 The letter bomb was intercepted and defused in The Hague, Netherlands. See Giusi Fasano, "Eurojust: nuovo pacco bomba, stesso volantino," *Corriere della Sera*, December 31, 2003.

16 The letter bomb sent to Hans-Gert Pöttering was opened by an assistant at his European Parliament office, and the letter caught fire. No one was hurt, however. See Giuseppe Sorcina, "Un pacco bomba contro il capogruppo del Ppe," *Corriere della Sera*, January 6, 2004.

17 The letter bomb sent to José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra was intercepted at his European Parliament office and defused. See *ibid.*

18 The letter bomb sent to Gary Titley was opened by his wife at his Manchester office and caught fire. It did not cause significant damage. See *ibid.*; Ian Black, John Hooper and David Ward, "Manchester MEP Among Letter Bomb Targets," *Guardian*, January 6, 2004.

19 Giusi Fasano, "C'è una cellula che agisce in città," *Corriere della Sera*, December 30, 2003; Giusi Fasano, "Una ventina di sospettati ma non c'è un 'registra,'" *Corriere della Sera*, January 6, 2004.

20 "Open Letter to the Anarchist and Anti-Authoritarian Movement."

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 Boschi, pp. 33-40, 112-113.

32 See Maurizio Piccirilli, "Terrorismo, l'allarme degli O07: 'Anarchici pronti a nuovi attacchi,'" *Il Tempo*, May 24, 2012.

33 "Federazione anarchica informale (Fai). 10 anni di vita e 40 azioni rivendicate," *La Stampa*, May 11, 2012; Flavio Haver, "Pronti ad azioni da jihad. Il rapporto sugli anarchici," *Corriere della Sera*, June 5, 2012.

34 Giusi Fasano, "Genova, quella pista sul terrorismo che porta in Grecia," *Corriere della Sera*, May 14, 2012; Ilaria Giupponi, "Anarchici, l'asse italo-greco," *Lettera 43*, May 13, 2012.

35 George Kassimeris, "Greece's New Generation of Terrorists, Part 2: The Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (CCF)," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35:9 (2012).

36 For example, in the 2011 FAI statement entitled "Do Not Say That We Are Few" ("Non dite che siamo pochi"), the references to "the sisters and brothers of the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire" are frequent and extremely favorable. English translations of the text are available on the internet.

37 "Anarchici informali, arresti in tutta Italia. 'Vicini al gruppo che sparò ad Adinolfi,'" *Corriere della Sera*, June 13, 2012; "Terrorismo, operazione del Ros contro gli anarchici. Arresti in tutta Italia," *La Repubblica*, June 13, 2012.

In recent years, several groups have used the FAI brand name to claim responsibility for their own attacks in Spain, Greece, the United Kingdom, Russia, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Indonesia and other countries.³⁸ In May 2012, two months before the start of the Olympic Games in London, insurrectionary anarchists under the banner of the FAI claimed credit for two sabotage attacks on railway signals near Bristol which caused severe delays and the cancellation of services.³⁹ On that occasion, the FAI in the United Kingdom announced their intention to “use guerrilla activity to hurt the national image and paralyze the economy” during the Olympics.⁴⁰ Other sabotage and arson attacks were claimed in the name of the FAI in southwest England.⁴¹

In Italy, after the 2003-2004 “Operation Santa Claus” letter bomb campaign, anarchist militants associated with the FAI were responsible for several threatening actions, bombs and letter bombs against political and economic institutions, diplomatic offices, military bases, police stations, corporations, temporary staffing agencies, banks, tax collection agencies, newspaper offices, universities, immigration detention centers and other targets.

In particular, in December 2009 a rudimentary bomb partially exploded at night at Bocconi University, a prestigious private university in Milan,⁴² while a letter bomb was sent to an immigration detention center in the northeastern town of Gradisca d’Isonzo, on the border with Slovenia.⁴³

38 The 2011 FAI statement “Do Not Say That We Are Few” presented a list of 37 cells and nuclei in Greece, Mexico, Chile, Russia, Peru, the Netherlands, England and Italy.

39 Shiv Malik, “Anarchists Claim Responsibility for Railway Signalling Sabotage in Bristol,” *Guardian*, May 25, 2012.

40 Ibid.

41 Shiv Malik, “Anarchist Group Claims it Started Blaze at Police Firearms Training Centre,” *Guardian*, August 28, 2013; Brian Whelan, “Bristol Arson Attack Linked to Anarchist Terror Network,” Channel 4 News, August 28, 2013.

42 Andrea Galli, “Dynamite alla Bocconi. ‘Azione degli anarchici,’” *Corriere della Sera*, December 17, 2009; “Pacco bomba, paura alla Bocconi. Rivendicazione anarchica,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 16, 2009.

43 Grazia Maria Mottola, “Nel mirino il centro immigrati delle coop rosse,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 17, 2009.

No one was hurt in the attacks. In March 2010, a letter bomb sent to the Northern League (Lega Nord) party headquarters injured a mailman.⁴⁴ In December 2010, letter bombs exploded in the Swiss and Chilean Embassies in Rome and two people were seriously hurt; a third letter bomb sent to the Greek Embassy was defused.⁴⁵ In March 2011, a mail bomb seriously injured an officer at the barracks of the Folgore parachute brigade in the Tuscan city of Livorno⁴⁶ and another device exploded at the headquarters of Swissnuclear, the Swiss nuclear industry association, wounding two employees.⁴⁷ In December 2011, a letter bomb sent to the Deutsche Bank chief executive was intercepted in Frankfurt,⁴⁸ while another letter bomb seriously injured the director of Equitalia, the state tax-collection agency, in Rome.⁴⁹ All these actions were explicitly claimed by “cells” and “nuclei” associated with the FAI. The 2010-2011 letter bombs revealed an improvement in bomb-making skills, at least compared with the amateurish devices of the 2003-2004 campaign.

The 2012 Attack on Nuclear Executive Roberto Adinolfi

In 2012, there was a qualitative leap in this campaign of violence. For the first time, anarchist militants under the banner of the FAI shot a person. On the morning of May 7, 2012, in the northwestern port city of Genoa, two masked men “kneecapped” Roberto Adinolfi, the chief executive of Ansaldo Nucleare, an Italian nuclear

44 Michele Focarete and Gianni Santucci, “Esplode pacco per la Lega. Busta con proiettile al premier,” *Corriere della Sera*, March 28, 2010.

45 Rinaldo Frignani, “Pacchi bomba alle ambasciate. Rivendicazione degli anarchici,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 24, 2010; Rinaldo Frignani, “Bomba all’ambasciata, non è esplosa per un caso,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 28, 2010.

46 Michele Bocci, “Pacco bomba ai parà della Folgore. Grave un ufficiale, firma anarchica,” *La Repubblica*, April 1, 2011; Michele Bocci and Franca Selvatici, “Bomba alla Folgore, firma anarchica,” *La Repubblica*, April 2, 2011.

47 Christian Hartmann, “Two Hurt in Parcel Bomb at Swiss Nuclear Lobby,” Reuters, March 31, 2011.

48 Nicholas Kulish, “Letter Bomb Sent to German Bank Chief,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2011; Fiorenza Sarzanini, “Bomba alla Deutsche Bank spedita da anarchici italiani,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 9, 2011.

49 Massimo Lugli, “Pacco bomba a Equitalia, ferito il direttore generale. Gli anarchici: siamo stati noi,” *La Repubblica*, December 10, 2011.

power company controlled by the aerospace and defense conglomerate Finmeccanica. He was shot in the knee by a man who was waiting for him outside his home, as an accomplice stood ready with a motorbike on which the two then made their escape. Adinolfi was hospitalized after the attack and required surgery to his leg. Fortunately, his condition was not serious.⁵⁰

The attack sparked fears of terrorism in the country, especially in the climate of an economic recession and social tension. “Kneecappings” (*gambizzazioni*) were a trademark practice of the Red Brigades,⁵¹ the left-wing terrorist group that carried out a campaign of violence aimed at destabilizing Italy in the 1970s and the early 1980s, culminating in the kidnapping and killing of former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978.

On May 11, 2012, a four-page letter claiming responsibility for the assault was delivered to Italy’s *Corriere della Sera* newspaper.⁵² “We have crippled Adinolfi,” said the note, which accused the Ansaldo Nucleare executive of being one of “those most responsible, along with [former conservative minister Claudio] Scajola, for the return of nuclear energy to Italy.”⁵³ Adinolfi was called “one of the many sorcerers of the atom” and a “grey assassin.”⁵⁴ In the anonymous authors’ view, “State and science, capitalism and technology are only one thing, one single Moloch.”⁵⁵ The attack was claimed by the previously unknown “Olga Nucleus” of the FAI/

50 Giusi Fasano, “Spari al manager. ‘Come le Br’ Un gruppo minacciò: colpiremo,” *Corriere della Sera*, May 8, 2012; Erika Dellacasa, “La moglie: non è grave. Siamo stati fortunati,” *Corriere della Sera*, May 8, 2012.

51 See, for example, James Lutz and Brenda J. Lutz, “Kneecapping,” in C. Gus Martin ed., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011), pp. 329-330. For an overview, see Donatella della Porta, *Il terrorismo di sinistra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990).

52 “The Mark of Life. Toward an Imaginative Way to Destroy the Existent” (“Il marchio della vita. Cercando una via immaginifica alla distruzione dell’esistente”), May 11, 2012, available at http://media2.corriere.it/corriere/pdf/2012/olga_110512.pdf.

53 Ibid. In June 2011, however, Italians rejected the return of nuclear power in a popular referendum.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid. The name of Moloch, an ancient deity, is likely used figuratively to designate a system that requires terrible sacrifices.

FRI. “Olga” is an explicit reference to Olga Ikonomidou, an imprisoned member of the CCF.⁵⁶

The leaflet expressed a striking craving for violence:

Despite not liking violent-style rhetoric, it has been with a certain pleasantness that we armed ourselves, with pleasure that we loaded the magazine. Grasping the pistol, choosing and following the target, coordinating mind and hand were necessary steps, the logical consequence of an idea of justice, the risk of a choice and at the same time a confluence of enjoyable sensations.⁵⁷

On September 14, 2012, Italian security forces detained two known anarchists, Alfredo Cospito and Nicola Gai, and charged them with the May 7 attack. Both men were from the northwestern city of Turin.⁵⁸ They were kept in custody based on evidence from surveillance cameras, wiretaps and from analysis of the leaflet claiming responsibility for the attack.⁵⁹

A fast-track trial (*giudizio abbreviato*) against Cospito and Gai began in Genoa on October 30, 2013. More than 100 radical anarchists gathered in front of the courthouse to show solidarity with the two suspects.⁶⁰ Both Cospito and Gai presented—and tried to read—a hand-written declaration to the court. In particular, in his declaration Alfredo Cospito, the gunman and leader of the “Nucleus,” claimed responsibility for the attack, displaying from the very beginning a personal feeling of

⁵⁶ They said, “We have taken the name of a CCF [Conspiracy of Cells of Fire] sister of ours, Olga Ikonomidou, because the heart of the FAI/FRI lies in the consistency and strength of the ‘Imprisoned Members’ Cell of the CCF.” See “The Mark of Life. Toward an Imaginative Way to Destroy the Existent.”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Erika Dellacasa, “Adinolfi, arrestati due anarchici,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 15, 2012; “Two Men Held for Attack on Ansaldo Executive,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 14, 2012.

⁵⁹ Public Prosecutor’s Office of Genoa, Provisional Detention Order (*Procura della Repubblica presso il Tribunale di Genova, Fermo di indiziato di delitto*), September 13, 2012.

⁶⁰ Matteo Indice, “Anarchici in aula, Genova si blinda,” *Il Secolo XIX*, October 30, 2012.

merciless satisfaction for the shooting: “In a wonderful morning in May I acted, and in the space of a few hours I fully enjoyed my life. For once I left fear and self-justification behind and defied the unknown.”⁶¹

Cospito, as an “anti-organization anarchist,”⁶² denied the involvement of other people in the assault: “I want to be absolutely clear: the FAI/FRI Olga Nucleus is only Nicola [Gai] and I. No one else took part in this action or helped

“Cospito exhorted other individuals to strike without the ‘need for clandestine infrastructures,’ suggesting that small groups or even lone individuals should conduct attacks on their own initiative and independently.”

or planned it. Nobody knew about our project.”⁶³ Gai confirmed this point.⁶⁴ In their communiqués, both men described in detail how they planned and carried out the attack against Adinolfi in Genoa. In all probability, this public description served propaganda purposes: the two insurrectionary anarchists wanted to show how “easy” it was to conduct attacks.⁶⁵

The general mission of the two anarchist militants was to “knock down” the “order of civilization” characterized by the “differentiation between the

⁶¹ See Alfredo Cospito’s written declaration, October 30, 2013, available at www.ilsecoloxix.it/rw/IISecoloXIX-WEB/genova/allegati/20131013_rivendicazioneecospito.pdf.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Nicola Gai’s written declaration, October 30, 2013, available at www.ilsecoloxix.it/rw/IISecoloXIX-WEB/genova/allegati/20131013_rivendicazionegai.pdf.

⁶⁵ In Cospito’s words, “There’s no need for a military structure, a subversive association or an armed gang in order to strike. Anyone armed with a strong will can think the unthinkable and act consequently.” See Cospito.

dominant and the dominated” and to oppose the “techno-industrial system.”⁶⁶ In particular, the aim of the 2012 attack on Adinolfi was to “throw sand in the clogs of this megamachine in the space of a second.”⁶⁷ The nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, triggered their actions.⁶⁸ In the end, Cospito exhorted other individuals to strike without the “need for clandestine infrastructures,”⁶⁹ suggesting that small groups or even lone individuals should conduct attacks on their own initiative and independently. This is in line with the “open letter” published by the FAI in December 2003.

On November 12, 2013, the court jailed Cospito and Gai for a total of 20 years for shooting the nuclear power chief. Cospito was sentenced to 10 years and eight months in prison, and Gai to nine years and four months. Prosecutors had requested jail terms of 12 years and 10 years, respectively. The court added the aggravating circumstance of the “purpose of terrorism” (*finalità di terrorismo*). In other words, the judge recognized that the attack on Adinolfi was part of a political project that “advocates the armed struggle as a means to subvert the basic structures of the State.”⁷⁰

According to many reports, however, investigators do not believe in Cospito’s and Gai’s solitary claim of responsibility and are searching for other accomplices and supporters in northern Italy.⁷¹ In particular, investigators suspect that the two anarchists from Turin were helped by a partner in Genoa.⁷²

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Motivation report of the sentence pronounced against Cospito and Gai (filed on February 19, 2014), quoted in Marco Preve, “L’agguato ad Adinolfi atto sovversivo,” *La Repubblica*, February 20, 2014.

⁷¹ Massimo Numa, “Attentato ad Adinolfi, al via il processo. Gli imputati: ‘Abbiamo agito da soli,’” *La Stampa*, October 30, 2013.

⁷² Katia Bonchi, “Attentato Adinolfi, condanna per Cospito e Gai. Il giudice: ‘Non due fanatici ma segmento di progetto sovversivo,’” *Genova24*, February 19, 2014; Marco Numa, “Adinolfi, c’era un basista. E ora è caccia ai complici,” *La Stampa*, September 16, 2012; Marco Preve, “Si stringe il cerchio sul basista. Sei nomi nel mirino degli inquirenti,” *La Repubblica*, September 18, 2012.

Conclusion

In 2012-2013, Italian authorities arrested a number of insurrectionary anarchists.⁷³ After this wave of arrests, Italy's intelligence agencies subsequently declared that the FAI was now in "operational stasis."⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the threat posed by this network remains "potentially extended and multiform."⁷⁵ In fact, in April 2013 FAI militants claimed responsibility for two letter bombs sent to the *La Stampa* newspaper in Turin and a private investigation agency in Brescia, near Milan.⁷⁶ While the attacks did not result in any casualties, they demonstrate that the network is still active.⁷⁷

Insurrectionary anarchism remains a dangerous threat to Italy. These militants have a proven record of using homemade bombs against civilian, government and military targets. Their tactics are relatively simple and inexpensive, involve less risk, and can cause significant damage. Insurrectionary anarchist groups have also encouraged their followers to conduct decentralized attacks, which can limit law enforcement's effectiveness. It is just a matter of coincidence that all of these acts of violence have not caused fatalities thus far.⁷⁸

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⁷³ See, in particular, Fiorenza Sarzanini, "Dieci arresti per gli attentati degli anarchici," *Corriere della Sera*, June 14, 2012.

⁷⁴ "2012 Report on Security Intelligence Policy," Italy's Intelligence System for the Security of the Republic, February 2013, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Simone Traverso, "Bombe anarchiche, rivendicazione al Secolo XIX," *Secolo XIX*, April 12, 2013; Meo Ponte, "Pacchi bomba, la firma degli anarchici Fai. 'Giornalisti, nostro primo obiettivo,'" *La Repubblica*, April 13, 2013.

⁷⁷ "2013 Report on Security Intelligence Policy," Italy's Intelligence System for the Security of the Republic, February 2014, p. 43.

⁷⁸ See "Gli anarchici? Solo per caso non hanno ucciso," *Corriere della Sera*, February 22, 2012.

Recent Highlights in Political Violence

February 1, 2014 (LEBANON): A car bomb killed four people in Hizb Allah's stronghold of Hermel, located in eastern Lebanon. Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qa`ida affiliate, claimed responsibility. - *The National*, February 1; *al-Jazeera*, February 1

February 2, 2014 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida released a statement declaring that it has "no connection" with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), effectively disowning the group that used to be known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). According to the statement, "al-Qa`ida announces it is not linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, as it was not informed of its creation...[and] did not accept it." It further said that the ISIL is "not a branch of al-Qa`ida, has no links to it, and [al-Qa`ida] is not responsible for its acts." The statement comes after al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri ordered the ISIL to disband and return to Iraq in November 2013. In the November message, al-Zawahiri said that Jabhat al-Nusra is al-Qa`ida's representative in Syria. The ISIL, however, continues to operate in Syria in defiance of al-Zawahiri's orders. - *AFP*, February 3; *RFE/RL*, November 8

February 3, 2014 (LEBANON): A suicide bomber wounded at least two people while traveling in a passenger van in Choueifat, south of Beirut. The target of the attack was not immediately clear. - *Los Angeles Times*, February 3

February 4, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least nine people near a restaurant in Peshawar. - *The News International*, February 4

February 5, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Unidentified gunmen opened fire on a vehicle carrying a local Taliban commander in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The commander and his three bodyguards were killed. - *Dawn*, February 6

February 6, 2014 (SYRIA): A Jabhat al-Nusra suicide bomber in an explosives-laden truck attacked the gates of a Syrian prison in Aleppo, allowing rebels to enter the facility. The rebels then freed hundreds of prisoners. The suicide bomber was later identified as Abdul Waheed Majeed, a British citizen of Pakistani descent. - *AP*, February 7; *Telegraph*, February 7; *Telegraph*, February 12

February 8, 2014 (SYRIA): The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) chief for Dayr al-Zur, Abu Dajana, was killed during clashes with Jabhat al-Nusra. Abu Dajana, a Libyan, was considered a top military commander. - *al-Arabiya*, February 8

February 9, 2014 (YEMEN): A car bomb exploded outside the Yemeni Oil Ministry in Sana`a, killing at least three people. - *CNN*, February 9

February 10, 2014 (IRAQ): The Islamic State of the Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) killed 15 soldiers part of an army unit in Mosul, Ninawa Province. The unit was providing security for an oil pipeline that runs from Iraq into Turkey. According to Iraqi officials cited in the *New York Times*, the ISIL militants drove up to the army unit "in more than a dozen sport utility vehicles...They beheaded five soldiers, shot nine dead and hanged one on a wall, torturing him to death." The *New York Times* further pointed out that the attack revealed that the ISIL "has moved beyond Anbar Province, west of Baghdad, where it controls Falluja and parts of Ramadi, and extended its reach into territory throughout the country." - *New York Times*, February 11; *AP*, February 11

February 10, 2014 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb struck the convoy of Iraqi parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, Iraq's most senior Sunni Arab politician, in Mosul, Ninawa Province. Al-Nujaifi was not injured in the attack. - *AFP*, February 10

February 10, 2014 (IRAQ): An instructor training other militants on suicide bombings accidentally detonated an explosives belt at a militant camp north of Baghdad, killing himself and 21 other militants. The militants all belonged to the

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.
- *New York Times, February 10*

February 10, 2014 (SOMALIA): A car bomb injured Ahmed Omar Mudane, the deputy security commander of Lower Shabelle region, in Mogadishu.
- *Daily Star, February 10*

February 11, 2014 (GLOBAL): U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lieutenant General Michael Flynn told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "the current instability in Syria presents a perfect opportunity for al-Qa`ida and associated groups to acquire these weapons [of mass destruction] or their components. While Syria's stockpiles are currently under the control of the regime, the movement of these weapons from their current locations, for disposal or other reasons, drastically increases the risk of these weapons or their components falling into the wrong hands. There is also the very real possibility that extremists in the Syrian opposition could overrun and exploit chemical and biological weapons storage facilities before all of these materials are removed." - *National Journal, February 12; Defense Intelligence Agency, February 11*

February 11, 2014 (GLOBAL): U.S. National Intelligence Director James Clapper told the Senate Armed Services Committee that there are an estimated 7,500 foreign fighters from 50 different countries currently in Syria. According to Clapper, among these foreign fighters are "a small group of al-Qa`ida veterans who have aspirations for external attacks in Europe, if not the [U.S.] homeland itself." - *National Journal, February 12*

February 11, 2014 (MALI): The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) said that they kidnapped a team of Red Cross workers who were reported missing in Mali on February 8. They were reportedly kidnapped on the road between Kidal and Gao. - *al-Jazira, February 11*

February 11, 2014 (EGYPT): Militants detonated explosives at a gas pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula, causing pipeline technicians to halt the flow of gas while they extinguished the resulting fire. - *AP, February 11*

February 12, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Unidentified militants executed nine members of an anti-Taliban militia on the outskirts of Peshawar. - *Los Angeles Times, February 12*

February 13, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A bomb killed 12 Pakistani policemen on a bus in Karachi. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility. - *Wall Street Journal, February 13; Dawn, February 14*

February 13, 2014 (YEMEN): A car bomb exploded outside Sana`a Central Prison in the Yemeni capital. After the explosion, heavily armed militants attacked the prison, killing seven people and freeing 29 inmates. The escapees include 19 convicted al-Qa`ida prisoners. According to the Associated Press, "Yemen has witnessed major jailbreaks in the past that have fueled militancy, including one in February 2006 when 21 al-Qa`ida militants dug a tunnel and fled the intelligence prison in Sana`a. Many of those who fled at that time are now the group's most wanted and dangerous men..." - *AP, February 13*

February 13, 2014 (SOMALIA): A remotely-detonated bomb struck a United Nations convoy just outside Mogadishu's international airport. The blast killed at least seven Somalis. The United Nations said that none of its staff were injured. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. - *Reuters, February 13*

February 14, 2014 (SYRIA): A car bomb exploded outside a mosque in the southern Syrian village of Yadouda, killing dozens of people. - *AP, February 14*

February 14, 2014 (SOMALIA): A United Nations report warned that "systematic abuses" by the Somali government have allowed weapons to be diverted into the hands of al-Shabab militants and warlords. The report even alleged that one key adviser to the Somali president had planned weapons deliveries to al-Shabab. - *BBC, February 14*

February 15, 2014 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram militants dressed in military uniforms attacked the Christian farming village of Izghe in Borno State, killing at least 106 people. The militants specifically

singled out male residents. According to CNN, "The gunmen, who arrived in the village riding in trucks and on several motorcycles, opened fire and hacked male residents they had assembled in the village square. They moved door to door in search of male residents who were hiding." - *CNN, February 18*

February 16, 2014 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani Taliban's Mohmand wing announced that they executed 23 Pakistani paramilitary soldiers held captive since 2010. The faction said that they decided to execute the soldiers in retaliation for continued security operations against Islamist militants in Pakistan. - *Washington Post, February 16*

February 16, 2014 (EGYPT): A bomb ripped through a bus carrying South Korean tourists in the Sinai Peninsula, killing three tourists and their Egyptian bus driver. - *AP, February 16*

February 16, 2014 (TUNISIA): Militants at a fake checkpoint killed four people in northwest Tunisia, 30 miles from the Algerian border. - *AP, February 16*

February 18, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan fighters attacked an army vehicle near Peshawar, killing a senior officer. - *Reuters, February 18*

February 19, 2014 (YEMEN): Suspected al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants gunned down a well-known ultraconservative Islamist in Hadramawt Province. The Islamist had previously called on AQAP to leave his town due to an increase in drone strikes as a result of their presence, which endangered civilian lives. - *AP, February 19*

February 19, 2014 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram militants launched a major attack on the northern Nigerian border town of Bama. During the attack, the militants reportedly used bombs and attacked a Nigerian army tank. At least 60 people were killed. - *BBC, February 19; AFP, February 20*

February 19, 2014 (LEBANON): Two suicide bombers detonated explosives-laden vehicles near the Iranian cultural center in Beirut, killing at least four people. One of the bombers was a Palestinian. – *Reuters, February 20*

February 20, 2014 (GLOBAL): A United Nations report found that the leadership of some al-Qa`ida affiliates is seeing a generational shift from older members to men in their 30s and 40s. According to the report, “younger commanders and fighters have a different perspective on international affairs, have the potential to generate propaganda that chimes with their generation more easily, and can also challenge their own leadership on tactics and targets.” The report also found that while al-Qa`ida has lost “its former strength...the ideas, inspiration and networks generated by al-Qa`ida continue to reverberate.” – *BBC, February 20*

February 20, 2014 (UNITED STATES): Ahmad al-Darbi, a long-held Saudi captive at Guantanamo Bay, pleaded guilty to terrorism charges. As part of the plea deal, his sentence may be limited to 15 years, although he is expected to testify against Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, who is charged with orchestrating the attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000. – *Miami Herald, February 20; AP, February 20*

February 20, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a security guard at a hospital in Kabul. – *AP, February 20*

February 20, 2014 (LEBANON): Gunmen killed Abdel Rahman Youssef, a military commander from the Alawite minority, in Tripoli. – *Reuters, February 20*

February 21, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): Three militants planning a suicide bombing in Kandahar Province were killed when the bomb exploded prematurely. A child was also killed in the blast. – *UPI, February 22*

February 21, 2014 (SOMALIA): A group of al-Shabab militants wearing military fatigues attacked the presidential palace in Mogadishu, killing at least two government officials. The attack involved two car

bombs. A total of nine militants died in the assault. – *AP, February 21*

February 22, 2014 (LEBANON): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed at least three people at a military checkpoint in Hermel, located near the Syrian border. The area is a stronghold of Lebanese Hizb Allah. Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Syria, claimed responsibility. – *CNN, February 22*

February 23, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A large number of Taliban insurgents killed at least 21 Afghan soldiers at an army outpost in Kunar Province. – *Wall Street Journal, February 23*

February 23, 2014 (IRAQ): A bomb exploded on a highway between Baghdad and Mosul, killing three police and four detainees who had been captured during a raid. – *AFP, February 23*

February 23, 2014 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber killed Abu Khalid al-Suri, a rebel leader with ties to al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, in Aleppo. Although no one claimed responsibility, suspicion fell on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). According to the BBC, “Al-Suri was reportedly sent to Syria by al-Qa`ida to end the infighting between the ISIL and other rebel groups.” Eyewitness accounts suggest that five men entered the headquarters for Ahrar al-Sham in Aleppo and opened fire, with one of the assailants detonating a suicide bomb. The attack killed six other fighters from Ahrar al-Sham, in addition to al-Suri. – *BBC, February 24*

February 24, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives outside the Iranian Consulate in Peshawar, killing two Pakistani paramilitary soldiers. The attack was claimed by Mast Gul, who, according to *Dawn*, was “once acclaimed in Pakistan for his role fighting Indian rule in Kashmir.” Gul's spokesman told Reuters that they will “continue to target Iranian installations and the Shi`a community everywhere.” – *Dawn, February 24*

February 24, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Unidentified gunmen killed a top commander in Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The commander, identified as Asmatullah Shaheen, was gunned down as his car passed through Dargah Mandi, three miles northwest of Miranshah. – *Reuters, February 24*

February 25, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed nine people at a hotel in Uruzgan Province. – *BBC, February 25*

February 25, 2014 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded in Baghdad's Karrada district, killing at least 15 people. – *al-Jazeera, February 25*

February 25, 2014 (SYRIA): Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the head of Jabhat al-Nusra, warned the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that it would be driven from Syria if it did not accept mediation by clerics. The ISIL is suspected of assassinating Abu Khalid al-Suri, a prominent al-Qa`ida emissary who was killed by a suicide bomber on February 23. Jabhat al-Nusra is al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Syria, while al-Qa`ida has disowned the ISIL. – *BBC, February 25*

February 26, 2014 (UNITED KINGDOM): A court in the United Kingdom sentenced Michael Adebolajo to life in prison without parole for killing off-duty British soldier Lee Rigby on a London street in May 2013. Adebolajo admitted that he was inspired by al-Qa`ida. His accomplice, Michael Adebowale, was sentenced to life with a minimum of 45 years in prison because of his younger age and lesser role in the attack. – *AP, February 26*

February 26, 2014 (SYRIA): The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) said that Christians in the city of Raqqa, which it controls, will have to pay taxes and hold religious rituals indoors. – *AFP, February 26*

February 27, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden vehicle into the guesthouse of a prominent pro-government tribal shaykh in Haditha, Anbar Province.

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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.

The chief, Shaykh Saeed Fleih al-Osman, was killed in the attack, along with six of his militiamen. – *AP, February 28*

February 27, 2014 (SOMALIA): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden vehicle into a café popular with members of the Somali security forces in Mogadishu, killing at least 12 people. Most of the dead were Somali soldiers. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. – *CNN, February 27; Reuters, February 27*

February 28, 2014 (SYRIA): Fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) retreated from the key Syrian town of Azaz in the face of growing tension with rival rebel factions. The ISIL had controlled Azaz, a strategic town near the Turkish border, for five months. According to the *Washington Post*, “The exit came a day ahead of a deadline issued by Jabhat al-Nusra, the official al-Qa`ida affiliate in Syria, for ISIL to cease confronting rival rebels or face a new war. Commanders speculated that the ISIL fighters, who have resisted previous attempts at mediation, chose to pull out from Azaz to reinforce strongholds elsewhere in preparation for further conflict.” – *Washington Post, February 28*