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Peru's Sendero Luminoso: From Maoism to Narco-Terrorism

By Frank Hyland

One of the most brutal and destructive terrorist groups worldwide since its emergence in 1980—Peru's "Shining Path" (Sendero Luminoso - SL) — continues to carry out attacks on Peruvian military, police, and civilian targets in 2008. Almost ten years after the group splintered during a "no-holds barred" offensive by Peruvian security forces, government officials and citizens alike express concern that a return to the past, when almost 70,000 Peruvians and others died, may be in the offing (see *Terrorism Focus*, September 11, 2007).

After joining the rolls of the worldwide Leftist-Communist revolutionary movement in 1980, SL proceeded to conduct a campaign against not only the government of Peru, but all elements of Peruvian society in general. An outgrowth of the pre-existing Communist Party of Peru, SL's oft-stated objective was the total reordering of Peruvian society along the lines of the People's Republic of China under Mao Tse Tung.

What should be a primary source of concern to a number of neighboring nations, including an incoming U.S. administration, is that SL's apparent resurgence may be viewed fairly as an integral part of a burgeoning wave of leftist ideology in Latin America. Other nations such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, as well as sub-state groups such as Colombia's Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC) constitute potential allies in SL's renewed campaign. Peruvian prosecutors are currently involved in seeking a 20-year sentence for the former leader of the Peruvian chapter of the Continental Bolivarian Committee (CCB), which took its inspiration from the



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“Bolivarian” socialism of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez (IPS, November 27). Even at present, SL’s geographical reach and the military force it commands make it a competing and increasingly threatening “state within a state” in Peru.

From Maoism to Narco-Terrorism

Concern over an SL comeback is well founded. In the period of time since the end of SL’s last, larger and more widespread terrorist campaign in 1999, the group has added another “weapon” of sorts to its already formidable arsenal: abundant revenues derived from the trafficking of cocaine. In neighboring Colombia, FARC has also been nurtured handsomely by the trafficking of cocaine. FARC, a self-professed Marxist-Leninist group, has grown since its birth in the 1960s from a guerrilla band into a multi-billion-dollar international enterprise, with perhaps as many as 18,000 guerrillas under its command. Initially, FARC, like the Shining Path, was treated as merely another of the numerous Latin American guerrilla groups extant at the time. Now, of course, FARC maintains a presence in perhaps as much as 20 percent of Colombia and, although estimates vary, generates annual revenues estimated at over a quarter of a billion dollars as a result of having reinvented itself through its criminal activities. Unless contested vigorously and successfully by the Government of Peru, the geography and climate of Peru, very favorable for the growing of coca plants, holds promise for the same kind of growth of SL military power.

The Shining Path leadership has been under constant pressure from Peru’s security services over the last year. A leader from the top tier of SL, Epifanio Espiritu Acosta (alias JL), was killed by Peruvian authorities on November 27, 2007, during an operation in which eight other SL guerrillas were captured (LivingInPeru.com, March 19).

Following that incident, Peruvian officials announced on March 18 (LivingInPeru.com, March 19) that Felix Mejia Asencio (a.k.a. Comrade Mono), another of the top leaders of SL, was captured. Asencio headed one of the two SL columns, the Komite Regional del Huallaga (CRH), and was closely associated with “Comrade Artemio” (Filomeno Cerrón), the current leader of the SL insurgency. Comrade Artemio is the sole top-level SL leader who has not yet been killed or captured.

Peruvian security forces have been on the offensive against the Shining Path since last August, focusing their activities on the jungle-covered VRAE (Valley of

the Rivers Apurimac and Ene) region, a prime coca producing region close to the original home of the Shining Path movement.

Sendero Luminoso Strikes Back

Though government sources have estimated only 150 SL fighters remain in the bush, this small force still continues to mount deadly attacks on Peruvian security forces. In what was described by Peruvian Government sources as the bloodiest SL attack in ten years, Shining Path guerrillas killed approximately 14 Peruvian soldiers and perhaps as many as seven civilians in a carefully planned ambush of a counter-terrorism patrol in Peru’s Huancavelica province on October 9 (AFP, October 10). The Shining Path announced the attack was intended to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Peruvian Communist Party (EFE, November 19).

Ominously, an October 22 report stated that SL members had stolen dynamite from the mining camp of the US-based firm Doe Run, likely presaging the form of future attacks by SL in the area. Indicative of the isolated character of the area and the nature of SL’s existing and planned activities, the guerrillas also took medical supplies, food and radios (Reuters, October 22).

November marked yet another upsurge in SL attacks. On November 12, two Peruvian soldiers were wounded when gunmen believed to be SL fighters targeted a helicopter responding to an earlier attack that wounded two other Peruvian soldiers (*Latin American Herald Tribune*, November 15). Another ambush in the Huallaga Valley on November 27 killed five police officers, including two members of the Special Operations unit. At least 40 guerrillas using hand grenades, shotguns and automatic weapons were involved in the attack (*Peruvian Times*, November 28). The ambush was remarkably similar to one carried out in nearly the same place in 2005 by 30 guerrillas under the command of “Comrade Artemio.” The latest attack came days after a sweep of the Huallaga Valley by security agents of the “Huallaga Front” failed to locate the SL commander but did find correspondence indicating Artemio was in touch with imprisoned SL leader Abimael Guzmán Reynoso. Besides Artemio’s personal belongings, security forces recovered explosives, detonators and green military uniforms bearing the hammer and sickle (Elcomercio.com.pe, November 17; EFE, November 17). Over 60 people have been killed in ambushes on roads in the region since 2001, with the annual rate on the increase (*Con Nuestro Peru*, November 29).

Reflecting the group's long-term ambitions, the Shining Path is reported by Peruvian Police sources to have been planning attacks in Peru's capital, Lima, during the recently concluded summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting. The APEC Summit meeting, in what must have been a very inviting terrorist target, brought together the heads of state of 21 nations, including U.S. President George Bush and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. Actual SL documents captured from one of the group's camps, and reportedly authored by Shining Path leader "Artemio," characterized the APEC Summit meeting as being attractive to the group because of the media coverage that an attack would garner (Peru.com, November 18).

Conclusion

It is the Peruvian peasantry that finds itself caught in the middle of the conflict between guerrillas and responding police and military units (ipsnews.net, November 6). There are concerns in the Peruvian government that many of these people may begin evacuating the Huallaga region to avoid a resurgence of the brutal warfare that characterized the area in the 1980s and 1990s, when more than 70,000 Peruvians were killed. President Alberto Fujimori's "dirty war" effectively destroyed the SL, leaving only several hundred fighters left in the bush. Despite a widespread impression the movement was finished, the Shining Path's transformation into a group providing security for narcotics traffickers while pursuing its goal of a Maoist state seems to have refueled the conflict.

What should concern the Government of Peru, its neighbors, and the United States most is that Colombia's FARC traveled a very similar path to its present position of being a state within a state because it was not opposed in its nascent phase. Like the FARC in Colombia, Sendero Luminoso has and will continue to have the money to fund its revolutionary aims in Peru through involvement in narcotics production.

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Turkey's PKK Responds to AKP Flirtation with the Kurdistan Regional Government

By Nihat Ali Ozcan and Saban Kardas

Turkey had high hopes its cross-border operations in the winter of 2007-8 would eliminate the threat posed by the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan – PKK). The ability of the PKK to strike back in the spring and summer of 2008 through staggering attacks raised questions about the effectiveness of Turkey's strategy. The PKK survived the Turkish winter offensive and endured heavy weather conditions without losing its operational capability, thanks to its safe havens in northern Iraq. This situation led to a reevaluation of Turkey's policies. Boosting the dialogue between Turkey and northern Iraqi authorities has emerged as the new approach to the solution of the PKK problem.

The center of gravity for the PKK problem has shifted to the political and diplomatic realm, and will remain so in the coming months. Unlike the relative calm in the area of military operations in rural southeastern Turkey, the political debates continue unabated and will intensify further as municipal elections approach. The PKK also has been a subject of Turkey's international and regional diplomatic initiatives (see *Terrorism Focus*, November 19). We will analyze the AKP government's new openings in domestic and foreign policy and the PKK's response to the new political setting.

Preparing for the Winter

PKK activity in Southeastern Turkey has declined considerably with the approach of winter. Most PKK militants are getting prepared to cope with the harsh winter conditions; some have withdrawn to their safe havens in northern Iraq, while others are moving to higher elevations where they have traditionally sought shelter in hidden caves. The PKK militants will need to survive through the winter with minimum mobility, living on the limited amount of food they were able to store during the summer. The Turkish Armed Forces (Turk Silahlı Kuvvetleri - TSK) has also called back most of the commando units from the region; most will be stationed in their barracks, preparing for new offensives in the spring. The TSK will most probably continue to use high-tech winter equipment to carry out its special

operations. The level of armed activity in the region may remain low over the next few months as the PKK shifts to attacks in urban areas, like its December 1 attack on the Istanbul offices of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) (*Milliyet*, December 3). The key question is whether Turkey will be able to quell the PKK threat through political openings and prevent new attacks next spring and summer.

Turkey's Dialogue with the Northern Iraqi Regional Administration

The PKK has taken advantage of the mountainous terrain of northern Iraq and used the region as one of its encampment areas since 1983. This situation has had direct implications for Turkey's relations with northern Iraq's majority Kurdish population. The main determinant of the nature of this relationship has been the changing balance of power in the region. Despite the historic importance attached to Turkey's recent dialogue with the Kurdish authorities in Iraq, such cooperation is not a political taboo. Turkey worked closely with Kurdish peshmerga forces and conducted joint operations against the PKK throughout the 1990s. However, the dynamics of regional politics over the last couple of years changed this picture drastically. Growing American influence in the region following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 resulted in the severance of ties between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds. The Iraqi Kurds' newfound partnership with the United States heightened the Kurds' perception of their relative power in the region, resulting in a rather daring and at times confrontational attitude toward Turkey. Kurdish authorities in Northern Iraq did not refrain from increasing tensions with Turkey when Turkey protested the Iraqi Kurds' lenient attitude toward the activities of PKK guerillas in northern Iraq (*Radikal*, October 22, 2007).

Within Turkey, the image of northern Iraq's Kurds as the sponsor of the PKK has created a domestic constituency against any sort of dialogue with the Kurdish authorities, thus contributing to the hostile environment. Relations between Turkey and Iraq's Kurds are nevertheless going through a new period of optimism lately, after hitting several low points over the last year. The Turkish media abandoned its policy of bashing Jalal Talabani (President of Iraq and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan – PUK) and Massoud Barzani (President of the Kurdistan Regional Government – KRG – and leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party – KDP). Barzani has since adopted a softer language toward Turkey. There are signs the pragmatism of the 1990s might be returning.

Developments on both sides of the Turkish-Iraqi border lay behind these changes. On the one hand, the anticipated changes in America's Iraq policies in the wake of the U.S. presidential elections and new developments in Iraqi domestic politics have forced the Kurdish groups to re-evaluate their uncooperative attitude vis-à-vis Turkey's demands. On the other hand, the growing consensus within the Turkish security establishment on the need to cooperate with the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq has facilitated changes in Turkey's policies.

The Impact of the US-Iraqi Security Accord

The U.S.-Iraqi security accord requiring the United States to pull out from Iraq by 2011 has important implications for the PKK and the Kurdish administration in northern Iraq. The KRG is uneasy about the growing power of Shiite and Sunni Arabs in Iraq. In a post-American Iraq, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership will not only lose the political leverage they obtained through alliance with the United States, but will also have to calculate the possible risks of a civil war scenario. To hedge their bets against these future uncertainties, Iraqi Kurds have reasons to be on good terms with Turkey.¹ The Kurdish leadership has come to realize that the key to normalization with Turkey is abandoning their tolerance of the PKK by limiting the group's freedom of movement in areas controlled by the KRG. Recent developments indicate a consensus between the Turkish government and the Barzani administration to increase their grip on the PKK. The question may no longer be whether to fight the PKK together, but how.

The Trilateral Permanent Security Commission

Although the first signs of a possible Turkish-Iraqi Kurdish rapprochement emerged during Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Washington in October 2007, the AKP government took concrete steps toward normalization only recently. Here one has to note the crucial role played by the TSK's decision to support establishing relations with the Kurdish administration.

The AKP government made its initial overtures last spring. Most significantly, following the decision of the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu

¹ Turkish analysts believe that a common understanding between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds about the future of Iraq is emerging. Some claim that in case of a civil war, Turkey might throw its support behind the Kurds. See Mete Cubukcu, "Turkiye'nin Irak'taki B Planında Kurtler Var," Referans, November 27.

– MGK) to enhance relations with “all Iraqi groups” in its meeting on April 24, a Turkish delegation led by Ahmet Davutoglu, Erdogan’s chief foreign policy advisor, met a team of Iraqi officials, including Nechirvan Barzani, the KRG Prime Minister and nephew of Masoud Barzani (*Zaman*, May 2).² The real impetus came with the second phase in early October. An official Turkish delegation composed of high-level representatives including Davutoglu and Murat Ozelik (Turkey’s Special Envoy to Iraq), met Masoud Barzani in Baghdad (NTV, October 15). In the ensuing days, diplomatic relations improved significantly and areas of cooperation diversified. Turkish Interior Minister Besir Atalay visited Baghdad and held a tripartite meeting with representatives of the Iraqi central government and the United States on November 19, only a few days after the Iraqi-American security accord was agreed upon. The parties decided to establish a permanent commission to streamline Turkish, American and Iraqi efforts in fighting the PKK and to regulate Turkey’s access to Iraqi airspace and territory to carry out cross-border operations in northern Iraq (NTV, November 20). KRG representatives were included as part of the Iraqi delegation. By sending the interior minister, the Turkish government signaled its determination to recognize the Kurdish administration, but only as part of the central government (*Radikal*, November 23).

PKK to Kurdistan Regional Government: Don’t spoil Kurdish Gains

PKK sources have been observing the KRG’s attempts to reorient its policies closely and with growing anxiety. They view this development as the main threat to the gains of the Kurdish nationalist movement. The collaboration of the Kurdish administration with the trilateral permanent commission is seen as a shortsighted move that is extremely damaging to the national cause. For the PKK, the only novelty of this new arrangement is its pitting the southern Kurds against the PKK, for the United States and Baghdad government have already worked with Turkey to eliminate the PKK (see *Terrorism Focus*, November 26). Therefore, the PKK criticizes the shift in Barzani and Talabani’s positions, as this will inevitably undermine the Kurds’ position in the region and in Iraq. From the PKK’s perspective, Turkey’s decision to initiate dialogue with the Barzani

administration marks Turkey’s return to its old strategy of the 1990s, which in the PKK’s opinion is bound to fail (Gundem Online, November 30).

More specifically, PKK sources are critical of the operations carried out by Barzani’s peshmerga militias. The PKK accuses Barzani’s peshmerga of limiting civilian movement in PKK-controlled areas and confiscating villagers’ excess food. The PKK militants depend on local food and the continuation of their freedom of movement in northern Iraq to maintain their logistical infrastructure. Tactically, the PKK seeks to settle civilians in proximity to its camping grounds in order to blend into the local population. Moreover, in case of Turkish airstrikes against these camps, the PKK might use civilian casualties to mobilize international public opinion against Turkey. Another PKK criticism takes aim at the KRG’s failure to protest TSK airstrikes against PKK positions (Gundem Online, November 30).

PKK to Turkey: Put Your Own House in Order

The representatives of Turkey’s Kurdish Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi – DTP) have started to criticize Turkey’s rapprochement with Barzani. For instance, Selahattin Demirtas, deputy chairman of the DTP, criticized the AKP government’s willingness to speak with Barzani while at the same time refusing to talk to the DTP. For Demirtas, Barzani “is a party to the problem. He is an outside power,” whereas the DTP is a native force represented in Turkey’s Parliament. Demirtas also distanced the DTP ideologically from the KRG by labeling it a “feudal, conservative, rightist movement,” while the DTP represents a “democratic, pro-human rights and leftist movement” (*Zaman*, November 30-December 1).

As the municipal elections approach, the competition between the governing AKP and DTP over winning Kurdish votes has heightened. In the midst of growing tensions caused by the exchange of fighting words between the representatives of the two parties, as well as violent demonstrations in streets, Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin suggested that if imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan called on the PKK militants to lay down their arms, the government might consider easing his conditions in the prison.

For Ocalan, the real solution is contingent on dialogue. Domestically, he called for the establishment of a “truth and reconciliation commission,” similar to those established in other post-civil war societies. Only a

2 National Security Council Press Briefing, April 24, 2008. <http://www.mgk.gov.tr/Turkce/basinbildiri2008/24nisan2008.htm>.

democratic project at home could save the state and solve the Kurdish question and make Turkey a true regional power. Ocalan seeks to reach out to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani by asking him to get involved by using his status in the Socialist International to promote a democratic solution by mobilizing international actors. Ocalan, however, did not give up covert threats to Turkey; “Right now there is a condition of uprising. It might turn into a hurricane in spring” (Gundem Online, November 28).

PKK commander Murat Karayilan noted the movement is in favor of a peaceful solution through dialogue but ruled out a unilateral ceasefire; “If the Turkish state comes out and says that it seeks dialogue, and ceases its operations, no bullet will be fired. We are not the attacking side, we are in defense ... How can we lay down our arms? We survive thanks to our arms” (Gunderm Online, December 2). Karayilan criticized Erdogan for failing to live up to his promise to find a democratic solution to Kurdish problem by reverting back to the military option. Karayilan underlined that the PKK is prepared for a political solution but also remains vigilant to meet military challenges. He also paralleled Ocalan’s threats, by maintaining that if Turkey continues its military operations and fails to develop a settlement that recognized the role of the PKK, the group would abandon its defensive strategy of “low-intensity warfare” and elevate its armed campaign to offensive “medium-intensity warfare.”

Karayilan, however, recognizes that the PKK is being pressed hard militarily. The mounting Iranian offensive on Kurdish positions along the Iranian-Iraqi border, conducted in coordination with Turkey’s airstrikes, has caused worries for the PKK. Karayilan has criticized Iran for supporting Turkey, citing the economic and energy cooperation between the two countries. He called on Iran to give up futile military measures, and embrace the Kurdish people’s demands for peace and dialogue (Gundem Online, December 2).

Conclusion

Through its diplomatic initiatives, the Turkish government may be hoping to worsen the conditions for the PKK during the winter, curbing its operational ability in the spring. In their rapprochement with Turkey, the Iraqi Kurds are driven by a concern to readjust to the new strategic reality of Iraq after an American withdrawal and the development of Iraqi domestic politics.

The PKK leadership and the DTP are worried about the implications of Turkey’s diplomatic opening to Kurdish groups in northern Iraq. On the military front, the PKK claims to possess the military capability needed to resume its armed activities in Turkey. Through its sabotage attack against the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline on November 22, the PKK might have been sending a warning to both the Iraqi central government and the KRG about their decision to support Turkey.

The PKK has sought to bring to the fore the argument that a real solution to the Kurdish problem requires the Turkish government to deliver political reforms, meaning it should recognize the PKK as a legitimate actor. In regards to electoral competition, the DTP and the PKK have started to invoke speculation that the Turkish government could use fraudulent techniques to manipulate the local elections. DTP deputies have emphasized this point as part of their election campaign.

The AKP government came under criticism from pro-reform forces and international observers for abandoning domestic reforms and prioritizing a military solution to the Kurdish issue. It has sought since to use diplomacy and limited political openings to further curb the PKK’s military strength. The DTP, however, consistently calls for “true democratic openings” at home, without relinquishing PKK violence. The AKP is forced to engage in a delicate balancing act—on the one hand, it has to assume political responsibility for the armed struggle against the PKK’s terror campaign; on the other hand, it has to compete with the DTP in the democratic field. While the AKP realizes that tightening the military grip on the PKK may harm its electoral chances in southeastern Turkey, letting up on the PKK now risks more attacks in the spring and may harm the party’s prestige in the West.

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Somaliland Charges al-Shabaab Extremists with Suicide Bombings

By Andrew McGregor

With the completion of a month-long police investigation, Somaliland's Interior Minister, Abdullahi "Irro" Ismail, has announced al-Shabaab extremists are responsible for the suicide bombings that killed more than 20 people in Somaliland's capital of Hargeisa in late October. Al-Shabaab, originally the youth wing of Somalia's Islamic Courts Union (ICU) movement, has emerged as the most militant faction of the Islamist resistance. According to the Interior Minister, the three suicide bombings that targeted the presidential palace, the Ethiopian trade office and the regional UN offices were organized by al-Shabaab leaders Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur" and Ahmad Abdi Godane "Abu Zubayr," the latter a Somaliland native who trained with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Among those killed by the car-bombs were the President's personal secretary and senior anti-terrorism official Ibrahim Hutu. The actual operation was supervised by a man known as Abdulfatah Abdullahi Guutaale. Ismail added; "Somaliland's enemy, from day one to today, has always been al Shabaab" (Garowe Online, November 27; AFP, November 27). A noted Somaliland Muslim leader, Shaykh Ali Warsame, condemned the attacks as outrageous and un-Islamic (*Somaliland Times*, November 1). The bombings may have been designed to interfere with upcoming elections next March.

The investigation revealed that of the six suicide bombers involved in the October 29 attacks, only one was from Somaliland, while the other five hailed from Somalia proper. Somaliland, roughly corresponding to the borders of colonial-era British Somaliland, split from Somalia in 1991 following the fall of the Siad Barre regime. As the rest of the country plunged into violence and political chaos, Somaliland created a stable state with democratic elections, but has failed completely in gaining international recognition. Somaliland's security services are in admitted need of international assistance and training, but Somaliland's non-sovereign status prevents any such efforts.

At the same time as the Hargeisa explosions, other suicide bombings occurred in neighboring Puntland, a semi-autonomous district of Somalia. A pair of suicide car bombs struck two anti-terrorism offices of

the Puntland Intelligence Service (PIS) in Bosasso, the economic capital of Puntland. The huge blasts, which Puntland also blamed on al-Shabaab, killed six PIS agents (AFP, October 30).

A Planned Attack

A document from the ICU's Shura Council dated September 28, 2006 and signed by Shaykh Dahir Aweys, called for the ICU "to send 30 young martyrs to carry out explosions and killing of the Jewish and American collaborators in the northern regions" (Awdal News Network, October 17, 2006). The Arabic language document included a list of thirteen prominent Somaliland politicians targeted for assassination (including President Dahir Riyale Kahin), all of whom are accused of apostasy by abandoning Islam to work with Americans and Jews. The decision came after ICU leaders viewed a video purporting to show the torture of Shaykh Muhammad Ismail by Somaliland security officials. Somaliland officials described the tape as a fake. The Shaykh was charged earlier with involvement in an attempt to disrupt the September 2005 elections with bombings.

Some of Somalia's Islamists are intent on integrating Somaliland into a "Greater Somalia" that would also include Ethiopia's Ogaden region, semi-autonomous Puntland, Djibouti and north-eastern Kenya.

Determining Responsibility

The day after the bombings, al-Shabaab posted a videotape to jihadi websites showing the last testament of one of the suicide bombers, though al-Shabaab did not explicitly claim credit for the attacks. The young man pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri and called for the expulsion of all foreigners in Somalia, especially Ethiopian troops and African Union peacekeepers. Two of the suicide bombers were identified by name; Abul Salam Hersi and Abdul-Aziz Saad, both of whom were members of the Hawiye/Habr Gidir Ayr sub-clan, which supplies many of the Islamist fighters engaged in the struggle for Mogadishu (al-Jazeera, October 30; *Somaliland Times*, November 1).

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Jendayi Frazer suggested al-Qaeda was the responsible party; "Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but they have the markings of al-Qaeda ... We believe

that these senseless attacks highlight the determination of violent extremists to undermine peace and stability throughout Somalia and the Horn of Africa” (AFP, October 29).

Frazer, however, failed to mention the American connection to the suicide attacks. It’s believed that one of the suicide bombers was 26-year old Shirwa Ahmed, a naturalized U.S. citizen and resident of Minneapolis, home to a substantial Somali émigré population. Ahmed moved to Minnesota in 1996 and graduated high school there before becoming one of over a dozen young Somali men to disappear from the area in recent months. All are believed to have returned to Somalia to join the fighting, possibly as suicide bombers. FBI officials will not confirm whether an investigation is under way (*Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, November 25; KSTP-TV [St. Paul], November 29; WCCO-TV [Minneapolis-St. Paul], November 26; AP, November 26). Abdulfatah Abdullahi Guutaale, the local organizer of the Hargeisa bombings, once lived in the Minneapolis area and may have a U.S. green card, according to the Somaliland Interior Ministry investigation (AFP, November 27).

Accusations that Somaliland officials were harassing refugees from Somalia following the blasts were denied by the government (Shabelle, November 17). Interior Minister Abdullahi Ismail Irro issued a statement urging Somalilanders to take possible suspects to the nearest police station instead of taking the law into their own hands (IRIN, November 10). Another victim of the bombings was Somaliland’s voter registration campaign, which has now been suspended.

Prior al-Shabaab Activities in Somaliland

In December 2006, a major trial ended in Somaliland in which 15 suspects were charged (six *in absentia*) with conspiracy to commit terror, illegal importation of arms and explosives and the wounding of three policemen in September/October 2005. Most of the suspects were convicted and sentenced to 20 - 25 years in prison. Among those sentenced to 25 years was Shaykh Muhammad Ismail, a leading Islamist radical. Two of the others sentenced in absentia were Ahmad Abdi Godane “Abu Zubayr” (a suspect in the latest Hargeisa attacks) and Ibrahim Jama Afghani, another veteran of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (*Somaliland Times*, December 9, 2006).

Surprisingly, both Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Aden Hashi Farah “Ayrow,” an Afghanistan veteran and military commander of al-Shabaab, were acquitted

due to a lack of evidence. The two were tried in absentia. Aden Hashi was killed in a U.S. airstrike on his home last May. Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys is a former colonel in the Somali army and the leader of what might be termed the “rejectionist” faction of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), taking a hard-line on peace efforts while calling for the destruction of Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the expulsion of all foreign troops. Aweys is an inflexible opponent of Somaliland’s struggle for independence; “People in Somaliland worship a deity called “Peace” and this deity is mirrored on Western ideology...” (*Somaliland Times*, December 9, 2006).

The al-Shabaab threat has been used for political purposes within Somaliland. A wave of bombings struck Hargeisa in April, including a grenade attack on the home of a cabinet minister and a large bomb that caused heavy damage to one of Somaliland’s houses of parliament, the House of Guurti (elders). The government blamed the opposition Kulmiye party (Garowe Online, April 10). In August, Interior Minister Irro accused a leading member of the opposition Kulmiye party of being a member of al-Shabaab. The arrest of Hersi Ali Haji Hassan followed his criticism of an exclusive livestock export deal made by the Somaliland president with a Saudi Arabian company. The Kulmiye party responded by accusing the President of damaging the region’s peaceful image (Garowe Online, August 12). Raising livestock is a major industry in Somaliland and the President’s grant of a monopoly on exports to a Saudi firm brought charges from the opposition of violating the constitution and even “high treason,” an impeachable offense (Garowe Online, July 29).

A Low Level War with Puntland

Somaliland is also engaged in a bitter dispute with Puntland over the Sool and Sanaag regions, which both territories claim. A local insurgent group fighting to end Somaliland’s “occupation” of the Sool region, the Somali Unity Defense Alliance (SUDA), appears to be a thinly veiled Puntland proxy. Such accusations are denied by the group’s leader, Colonel Abdiaziz “Garamgaram” Muhammad, who is best known as a former commander in the militia of notorious warlord and accused war criminal Muhammad Said Hersi Morgan while the latter was fighting the Juba Valley Alliance for control of the port of Kismayo (now in the hands of al-Shabaab) (Garowe Online, September 10). Colonel Muhammad’s predecessor, Colonel Deyr Abdi, was captured by Somaliland security forces when

they raided a gathering of pro-Puntland militias at the regional capital of Las Anod last January. Colonel Abdi had been appointed military commander of the region by Puntland's ruler, General Adde Musa. A column of Somaliland troops in 20 armored trucks under Colonel Hashi Yare seized the coastal town of Las Qorey last July after Puntland troops withdrew to the east (Garowe Online, July 9).

Conclusion

Somali insurgents, including al-Shabaab, regard the Hargeisa government as being U.S. and Ethiopian backed. Somaliland authorities again became hopeful international recognition might at last be on the way when U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer met with the Somaliland president for security talks last February. The meeting followed a visit by President Dahir Rayale to Washington the previous month. The October 29 blasts will undermine Somaliland's projection of an image of security and damage its prospects for recognition. The consequent withdrawal of United Nations personnel leaves Somaliland more isolated than ever. There are fears that Islamist extremism may gain ground in Somaliland if recognition of Somaliland's independence continues to be withheld. Italy and a handful of African countries pose the main opposition to Somaliland's independence.

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