

# TERRORISM FOCUS

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**IRAN, RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES VIE TO ARM THE LEBANESE ARMY**

The day before Lebanese President Michel Suleiman began his visit to Iran, a pan-Arab daily reported that Tehran was preparing to offer the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) heavy weapons, including missiles (*al-Hayat*, November 23). Tehran believes the LAF can operate in a complimentary fashion with Hezbollah in organizing the defense of the country, though many Lebanese parliamentarians insist that Hezbollah must turn over its weapons to the LAF. Reports from Tehran state that Suleiman requested only medium arms from Tehran for national defense and the fight against terrorism and was not seeking heavy weaponry like missiles or jet fighters (*Al-Nahar* [Beirut], November 26; *Tehran Times*, November 26). Suleiman is a former commander of the LAF.

The security agreement signed at the end of Suleiman's Tehran visit, calls for Iran to supply Lebanon with arms and equipment for the next five years. The exact arms to be supplied will be determined in accord with a new national defense strategy (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 27; Naharnet, November 27). Lebanon's ongoing efforts to hammer out this new strategy were discussed at the talks with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Iran has supplied the Shiite Hezbollah movement with arms since the 1980s, but previous offers to supply the LAF have been rejected on national security grounds (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, November 27 - December


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3). As part of Suleiman's visit, Supreme Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made a declaration that; "The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the power of all Lebanese groups should be at the service of the country's national unity in order to counter the danger of the Zionist regime" (*al-Bawaba*, November 25).

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak told parliament last week that Hezbollah now had 42,000 missiles, three-times the number it had at the beginning of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war (BBC, November 24). Barak warned Lebanon that integrating Hezbollah into the Lebanese state, politically or militarily, will lead to Israel targeting Lebanon's infrastructure with "in-depth attacks in the event of a new conflict" (BBC, November 24).

Hezbollah leader Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah has urged the government to equip the LAF with anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons as part of the national defense strategy. Hezbollah made good use of the latter in the 2006 war with Israel (see *Terrorism Focus*, August 15, 2006). Nasrallah added that an army without anti-tank missiles was only a body "that deals with national security," adding; "Our army must be strong, and therefore must be well-trained and well-equipped, and not only with assault rifles and grenades" (Naharnet, November 12; Ynet, November 27).

At a recent meeting of the March 14 ruling coalition, Phalange Party leader and former president Amin Gemayel called for all weapons in the hands of Hezbollah or militant groups within the Palestinian refugee camps to be turned over to the state (*Daily Star* [Beirut], November 24). Other March 14 politicians have also opposed a deal for Iranian arms, which National Liberal Party leader Dori Chamoun described as "not sophisticated" (*al-Manar*, November 25). Shaykh Nasrallah and the Hezbollah leadership reject the idea of turning their weapons over to the LAF, claiming that to do so would weaken Lebanon's ability to protect itself against attacks from Israel in the absence of a national defense strategy.

The United States has been heavily involved in reforming the LAF with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of arms supplied in the last few years. In mid-November, Lebanese authorities announced that the U.S. would supply the LAF with dozens of M60 "Patton" main battle tanks beginning in early 2009 (*al-Nahar*, November 21).

Israel operates over 700 upgraded versions of the M-60. Though Israeli officials expressed concerns that the M-60 might eventually end up in the hands of Hezbollah, it is important to note that the tanks would be easy prey for Israeli aircraft or even Israel's upgraded armor. Hezbollah has more interest in anti-tank weapons than tanks.

March 14 coalition leader Sa'ad Hariri told reporters that Moscow was willing to sell heavy weapons to Lebanon at "advantageous prices," following an early November visit to Moscow. Hariri criticized US supplies of light arms, saying that the LAF also need tanks and artillery (*Vremya Novostey*: November 9; Interfax, November 9). In turn, Lebanon will send a delegation of Lebanese businessmen to the Georgian breakaway republics of Abkhazia and North Ossetia, possibly as the first step in recognizing Russian-backed independence (Interfax, November 9).

Beirut may yet reverse its decision to accept Iranian arms supplies. Mixing arms from different sources would create many difficulties and cannot be viewed as a step forward in creating a national defense policy. If, however, Beirut proceeds, having Iran supply arms for both the LAF and Hezbollah may be an important step in their eventual integration.

#### SPANISH INTELLIGENCE TRACKS EX-SOLDIERS TURNED JIHADIS

Spain's National Intelligence Center (Centro Nacional de Inteligencia - CNI) is monitoring a group of about ten ex-Spanish servicemen who are currently undergoing training at a number of unspecified jihadi training camps (*La Razon* [Madrid], November 24). The CNI insists that the would-be jihadis did not hold positions of responsibility in the Spanish military and had no access to sensitive information.

The CNI investigation also described the role of Spain's military in integrating Muslims into Spanish society. In the modern all-volunteer Spanish armed forces, accommodation is made for dietary restrictions and Friday prayers. In units with a significant number of Muslims, "supervisors" have emerged who discreetly encourage the observance of Muslim rituals and lifestyles. CNI detected one source of dissatisfaction - the appointment

of female Muslim corporals has not been well received by Muslim troops who are not used to taking orders from women. The agency did note that this problem did not exist with women of senior NCO or officer status, but only with those female NCOs who were required to issue direct orders to Muslim servicemen. Overall, the CNI was satisfied that daily interaction with comrades of other faiths or no faith at all was contributing to the successful integration of Spain's Muslims into the greater Spanish society (*La Razon*, November 24).

The CNI handles both internal and external intelligence needs and has been headed by Alberto Saiz Cortés since 2004. Its mandate requires the CNI to provide the Spanish government "with information, analyses, studies or proposals that allow for the prevention and avoidance of any danger, threat or aggression against the independence or territorial integrity of Spain, its national interests and the stability of its institutions and the rule of law" (cni.es). Most CNI operations are in North Africa and Central and South America. The CNI is not a law enforcement agency – intelligence collected by it is submitted to governmental authorities who then decide what action should be taken, including turning the files over to Spanish law enforcement agencies for action.

780 Spanish troops are currently deployed in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Two Spanish soldiers were killed in a Herat suicide attack on November 9, bringing the total number of Spanish troops killed in Afghanistan to 25. A November 14 Taliban video warned Spain to withdraw its troops from the country.

Since ending conscription in 2000, Spain has struggled to maintain its military strength at approximately 80,000 troops. To do so, Spain has begun recruiting heavily in Spanish-speaking nations in Latin America and Africa. Beside Afghanistan, Spanish troops are currently deployed in peacekeeping missions in Lebanon, Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Troops of the Spanish Legion (formerly the Spanish Foreign Legion) are used overseas almost continually, having seen service in recent years in Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

## Iraq's Islamic Mujahideen Profiled by Jihadi Websites: Part Two

In the last issue of *Terrorism Focus*, we examined the profiles of three Iraqi jihadi groups based on information compiled by al-Haq, an Islamic news website and later distributed through a number of jihadi internet forums (haqnews.net August 7, 2008). This issue will cover four remaining major insurgent groups mentioned in al-Haq's research.

### Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia (AQM)

This group (also known as al-Qaeda in Iraq) began insurgency operations in Iraq immediately after the occupation, under the name Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad Group). In October, 2004, the late leader of the group, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda's leader Osama Bin Laden and changed the name of the group to al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Zarqawi also joined the shura council of the mujahideen in Iraq. Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia later became the core of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

The objectives of AQM are not limited to the liberation of Iraq. Similar to al-Qaeda's global stance, AQM aims to wage international jihad against the United States and its Arab allies and to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate.

- Ideology

AQM is a Salafi-Jihadi extremist group. "We believe the umma (Islamic nation) must come under one flag, especially that of the mujahideen," which is what the group tried to accomplish with the declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq (al-Furqan, October 15, 2006). The reluctance of other resistance movements to come under the umbrella of al-Qaeda leadership consequently led to confrontations between AQM and almost all other jihadi groups. The 1920 Revolutionary Brigades and al-Jaysh al-Islami fi'l Iraq (The Islamic Army in Iraq) became AQM's arch foes (see *Terrorism Focus*, November 25). AQM not only rejects the political process in Iraq,

it targets all Iraqi parties that joined the process, including the Sunni entities. Any dealing with the occupiers is deemed blasphemy and apostasy, therefore AQM attacks the Iraqi government and its military, intelligence units and police without any exception. No party or individual is spared by AQM unless they pledge allegiance to the ISI. Internationally, AQM considers Muslim countries “infidels,” stating; “We believe if infidel legislations prevails in a country and the dominance is for infidel rulers as opposed to Islamic rule, the country is infidel. All forums of secularism, such as nationalism, socialism, communism and Ba’athism are stark blasphemy” (al-Furqan, October 15, 2006).

- Military activities

In the beginning, the military activities of AQM concentrated in the western areas of Iraq such as al-Anbar. After the second battle for Fallujah in October, 2004, the group spread through the Sunni governorates, central Iraq and a few areas in southern Iraq. The group is notorious for suicide attacks using vehicles filled with explosives, assassinations and the direct engagement of enemy forces.

Among AQM’s most notorious attacks are the bombing of the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad in August 2003; the bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad on August 19, 2003; the Najaf bombings on August 29, 2003, that killed Shiite leader Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim; the bombing of the Italian military headquarters in al-Nasiria on October 12, 2003; the Amman hotel bombing of November 9, 2005; and the September, 2007 assassination of the head of al-Anbar’s Awakening council, Shaykh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha. AQM also kidnapped and killed American Nicholas Berg, four Egyptian diplomats, one Algerian diplomat and two local staff from the Moroccan Embassy in Baghdad. AQM also formed the Omar Legion to confront the Shiite Badr Brigades.

- Media activities

AQM activities enjoy extensive coverage from almost all major news channels. The video and audio messages of group leaders are monitored and broadcast all over the world. Al-Furqan, the ISI media agency, continuously releases video clips of attacks perpetrated by AQM under names such as “From the Mujahideen Harvest” and “American Intelligence in Baghdad’s Streets.” Audio lectures on religious topics by AQM leaders are also released on the internet. The group publishes regular magazines called *Tharwat Sinam al-Jihad* and *Nashrat al-Marsad*. Al-Furqan and al-Fajr are AQM’s media agencies, though they make use of many jihadi websites and forums such as al-hesbah.info, al-firdaws.info, al-ekhlaas.net, muslim.net, and m3ark.net, just to name a few.

### Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance (JAAMI) / Salah al-Din Brigades (SDB)

JAAMI (al-Jabha al-Islamiya li’l Moqawama al-Iraqiya) was proclaimed on April 28, 2004, as a political party with the Salah al-Din Brigades as its military wing. Lately the group has joined a jihadi front with Iraqi Hamas.

- Ideology

JAAMI is a moderate Islamic jihadi group affiliated with the Muslim Brothers of Iraq. Although the group doesn’t recognize the Iraqi government and rejects the political process in Iraq, it shows flexibility in dealing with political developments.

- Military activities

SDB operates mainly in the Sunni governorates and has about twenty small formations launching rocket and mortar attacks on Coalition bases. Although the group aims to expel the occupiers from Iraq by military means, the official spokesman of the group, Dr. Saif al-Din Mahmoud, renounced the use of booby-trapped

vehicles in cities, suicide bombings, abducting and killing hostages and attacks on civilians in a 2005 communiqué. SDB cooperates with all Iraqi jihadi groups except al-Qaeda. The group refused an al-Qaeda ultimatum to hand over its weapons.

- Media activities

Videotapes of the group's operations are released over the internet. Printed communiqués and political statements are distributed on the streets, in mosques and posted in public places. Electronically, the group posts its publications on its official website (jaami.info) along with jihadi forums such as hanein.info, alboraq.info and hisbah.net

## Mujahideen Army (MA)

The Mujahideen Army is an Islamist group believed to be associated with al-Jaysh al-Islami fi'l Iraq. According to official MA spokesman Abdul Rahman al-Qaisi, the group was founded before the occupation of Iraq, operating as a relief agency helping students and preaching Islam in mosques. Although the first objective of MA is to liberate Iraq by waging "defensive jihad," MA considers implementing Islamic Sharia after liberation a long term strategic goal rather than an immediate objective (like most other Iraqi groups).

Spokesman Abdul Rahman al-Qaisi has appeared in news programs and documentaries on a few Arabic news channels, but MA's video clips of insurgency operations are mostly released through the internet. The group doesn't have any regular publications other than political and military communiqués uploaded to the group's websites (al-tamkeen.com, tamkeen.iraqserve.com). MA also uses other jihadi forums for propaganda, such as al-hisbeh.info, alboraq.info and muslim.net.

## Al-Rashidin Army (RA)

The existence of this Sunni Islamist group was made public in 2005, but the RA carried out its first attack on Coalition forces in April 2003, according to RA spokesman

Adil al-Zahawi. RA operates in concordance with 1920 Revolutionary Brigades policies and objectives. The group legitimizes the killing of occupation forces, collaborators and anyone having a political or military affiliation with the occupiers. RA rejects the political process in Iraq, doesn't recognize the Iraqi constitution or government and aims to set up a just and democratic government after the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

- Military Activities

RA is composed of different battalions, such as al-Kawthar, al-Firdaws, Junud al-Rahman, al-Fajr al-Sadiq and the Muslim Bin Aqil battalion, among others. RA battalions operate in the Sunni areas of Iraq and Baghdad. The group uses rockets, mortars, roadside bombs and snipers in its attacks.

- Media Activities

The group's insurgency video clips have appeared on al-Zawra and al-Rafidayn T.V channels. Other statements and communiqués are posted in RA's websites (alrashedeenarmy.com; al-rashedeen.info).

## The United Fronts

Almost all Iraqi insurgency groups have attempted to unite under one common front against the occupation – so far the process has yielded a number of different fronts and sub-fronts, with the membership as given by al-Haq below:

### **Islamic State of Iraq**

- Mujahidin Shura Council - The council is made up of al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, al-Taifa al-Mansoura Army, Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami, al-Ahwal Brigades, Saraya Ansar al-Tawhid and Saraya al-Ghoraba.
- Jamaat Jund al-Sahaba

- Saraya Fursan al-Tawhid

**Jihad and Liberation Front**

- Saraya Milat Ibrahim

- Jaysh al- Naqshabandi

- Kurdistan Brigades

- Jaysh al-Sahaba

- Ansar al-Tawhid Wa al-Sunna Brigades

- Jaysh al-Morabitin

**The Political Council for Iraqi Resistance**

- Jaysh Hamza

- Jihad and Reform Front made up of al-Jaysh al-Islami fi'l Iraq, the Mujahideen Army, Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna, Jaysh al-Fatiheen

- Jaysh al-Risala

- Jaysh Ibn al-Waleed

- Hamas of Iraq

- United Mujahideen Leadership

- Islamic front for Iraqi Resistance

- Al-Tahrir brigades

**Jihad and Change Front**

- Jaysh Tahrir al-Iraq

- 1920 Revolutionary Brigades

- Saraya al-Shohada

- Al-Rashidin Army

- Jaysh al-Sabirin

- Jaysh al-Muslimin fi'l Iraq

- Jihad Ala Ard al-Rafidayn brigades

- Islamic movement of Iraqi Mujahideen

- Jaysh al-Faris

- Saraya Jund al-Rahman

- Saraya al-Jihad fi'l Basra

- Saraya al-Dawa wa'l-Ribat

- Saraya al-Fallujah

- Al-Tamkeen Brigades

- Popular National Front for the Liberation of Iraq

- Muhammad al-Fatah Brigades

- Saraya Altaf al-Husseinia Revolution

- Saraya Tahrir al-Janub
- Jaysh Hanein
- Saraya Diyala for Jihad and Tahrir
- Saraya al-Majd for Liberation of Iraq

There are over twenty-five more small and mostly unknown groups mentioned in al-Haq's study that have not been mentioned in the media, nor have they been known to perpetrate significant attacks on U.S. or Iraqi forces.

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## U.S. Missiles Target Suspect in Transatlantic Airliner Plot

Late in the evening of November 21, a U.S. operated Predator drone struck a house in North Waziristan owned by local warlord Khaliq Noor. Among those allegedly killed were British-Pakistani militant Rashid Rauf and senior al-Qaeda leader Abu Zubair al-Masri (*Dawn* [Karachi], November 22; BBC, November 22). It was not immediately clear whether Rauf, wanted by British and American security services for his alleged role in masterminding the August 2006 transatlantic airlines plot, was the target of the attack, though Pakistani authorities later confirmed that Rauf was the main target. His location was determined after communications between Rauf and other militants in the area were intercepted (Times, November 24).

There was some confusion whether Rauf was actually killed in the attack. One report from Pakistani intelligence claimed they overheard radio chatter that he was amongst the casualties, while his family lawyer, Hashmat Malik, claimed that they were sure he was not amongst the dead (*Observer*, November 23; BBC, November 25). At the time of writing it remained unclear whether

Rauf was alive, with British Foreign Secretary David Miliband formally asking the Pakistani government for confirmation of his death (BBC, November 26). According to one theory making the rounds in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Rauf was deported to Britain with the news of his death providing a cover for this action (*Frontier Post* [Peshawar], November 27).

Like his alleged death, Rashid Rauf's history remains something of an enigma. It appears he was born in the Mirpur region of Pakistan (where the majority of Britain's Pakistani immigrants come from) to a family that moved to the United Kingdom when he was very young, though other sources claim he was born in Birmingham (*Independent*, November 23; BBC, November 22). The family settled down in Birmingham and Abdul Rauf, Rashid's father, established a bakery for which Rashid helped make deliveries. According to Amardeep Bassey, a British investigative journalist, the family had a lineage of religious preachers and Rashid was likely being groomed to take on a similar role, while other reports claim that Abdul Rauf was a pious man who had been a religious judge back home (BBC, November 22; *Independent*, November 23). Little is known of Rashid's early life, with some reports stating that he was a "normal" young man with no particular radical tendencies (*Independent*, November 23). His family refuses to talk to the press, no doubt because of the fact that other family members have been targeted previously by the security services. Rashid's brother, Tayib Rauf, was amongst those initially arrested in connection with the airliner plot in August 2006, though he was subsequently released and cleared on all charges. Some rumors in the wake of the arrests alluded to a role played by Rashid Rauf's father in terrorist activity, but these proved unfounded and resulted in media apologies (*Birmingham Post*, February 26, 2007).

What is known, however, is that on April 24, 2002, Mohammed Saeed, Rashid Rauf's uncle, was stabbed to death in Birmingham in a "frenzied attack" (*Sunday Mercury*, November 22). The reasons behind this murder remain unclear, though it appears as though a family feud, possibly connected to an arranged marriage, may have been the cause (*Independent*, November 23). Whatever the case, West Midlands police sought Rauf and childhood friend Mohammed Gulzar for questioning (Gulzar was arrested in 2006 and charged in connection with the airliner plot, though he was subsequently cleared on all charges. He remains in custody on unrelated charges). Sensing trouble, the young Rauf

fled the UK, travelling to Pakistan and seeking refuge amongst extended family and friends in the Bahawalpur region of Pakistan. There he met and married into the family of Maulana Masood Azhar, founder of the Islamist Jaysh-e-Muhammad (Army of Muhammad – JeM). At this point he apparently came under the influence of Abu Zubair al-Masri, one of al-Qaeda's top explosives experts (*Times*, November 23). There are conflicting reports about when Rauf was radicalized, with some reports suggesting he had already become an extremist before he left Birmingham (*Independent*, November 23).

This is not an insignificant detail, as it demonstrates the root counter-terrorism problem that the UK faces when looking at the threat through the prism of its domestic British-Pakistani population. The official Pakistani line is that some Britons are radicalized in the U.K., while others arrive in Pakistan “pre-cooked” (*Observer*, November 23). The reality would seem to indicate that a more complex blend of home-grown factors and familial connections back to Pakistan is in fact closer to the correct mix. In many ways Rauf encapsulated this trend, and his strong connections with radicals in the UK and high ranking access to al-Qaeda's core in Pakistan undoubtedly made him an important connection.

Whether he was more than a crucial connection and was in fact the terrorist “mastermind” that he is often referred to in the press is unclear, but it was his arrest in 2006 that suddenly accelerated the process of closing down the cell in the UK, codenamed “Overt” by the British police. Questions remain unanswered about who pushed Pakistan to make this arrest and whether there was consensus on both sides of the Atlantic about its timing. In his controversial book, *The Way of the World*, Ron Suskind claims that the U.S. government pushed for the arrest in an attempt to accelerate Britain's shutdown of the plot to ensure that terrorism was high on the agenda during U.S. mid-term elections. U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff told the BBC's Panorama program that there was intelligence suggesting Rauf was about to go off the radar into parts of Pakistan where he would be unreachable (BBC Panorama, September 9). Whatever the case, as then head of Counter-terrorism Command Peter Clarke put it, Rauf's sudden arrest “was not good news” for the investigation and some have blamed the subsequent problems with the case against the transatlantic airline plotters on this action (*Times*, November 23; see also *Terrorism Focus*, September 18). Rauf subsequently

escaped from Pakistani custody under suspicious circumstances, something that further strengthened the mythology around him, and gave rise to further rumors about his involvement with Pakistan's security services.

It remains to be seen whether Philip Mudd, Deputy Director of the National Security Branch of the FBI, has gotten his wish to see Rauf “go down,” but what is clear is that a small cadre of individuals like Rauf remain at the core of the problems that the UK faces with terrorism from Pakistan (BBC Panorama, September 9). Their strong familial connections in Pakistan and the UK, their dual nationalities and their links to Pakistani extremist groups make them excellent facilitators for groups seeking to target the West.

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## **Has al-Qaeda Picked a Leader for Operations in China?**

Since al-Qaeda and the Taliban leadership shifted their operational bases from Afghanistan to Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), many new groups claiming to be linked to al-Qaeda have emerged. On November 16, a self-proclaimed al-Qaeda spokesman named Muhammad Uighuri claimed that Osama bin Laden has appointed a leader for a previously unknown organization called al-Qaeda in China. Uighuri said the new leader of al-Qaeda for China in general and for Xinjiang province in particular was a Chinese citizen named Abdul Haq Turkistani (Tabnak News Agency, November 16). Despite unsubstantiated claims by China's security services and Foreign Ministry, there is little proof that al-Qaeda has ever engaged in active operations within China.

Uighuri added that Abdul Haq Turkistani was appointed by Osama bin Laden in person and was already based in Xinjiang province (Pajhwak News, November 16). Al-Qaeda spokesmen say that Abdul Haq Turkistani was also appointed to lead a group called Hizb-e Islami Turkistan (Turkistan Islamic Party -TIP) (Pajhwak Afghan News, November 16).



Though some claim TIP is another name for the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), no evidence has been offered to support this claim. ETIM is a separatist Islamic radical organization that seeks to form an independent Islamic state in northwest China's Xinjiang province. After considerable diplomatic pressure from China, the U.S. State Department listed the ETIM as a terrorist organization in 2002.

The TIP first gained international attention in July 2008, when it issued a videotape taking credit for a series of attacks in China, including deadly bus explosions in Shanghai and Yunnan. The video showed a masked man identified as "Commander Seyfullah," who threatened China with chemical and biological attacks on the then upcoming Beijing Olympics. Chinese officials, however, rejected the TIP claims of responsibility and denied the existence of such a group in China. According to the deputy head of the Shanghai municipal public security bureau; "The [Shanghai] blast was deliberate but it had nothing to do with terrorism" (People's Daily Online, July 28; *China Daily*, July 21). TIP did not follow up their threats with actual attacks and little has been heard of the organization since the August Olympics proceeded without interruption.

Abu Sulieman, who introduced himself a member of the public relations office of al-Qaeda in the NWFP, confirmed the appointment of 42-year old Abdul Haq Turkistani to head al-Qaeda in China (Pajhwak News, November 16). Although Abu Sulieman claims that Abdul Haq is currently based in China, one media report suggests that Abdul Haq is still living in the frontier area of Pakistan together with hundreds of Uyghur al-Qaeda fighters (Tabnak News, November 16).

There are also claims that, under the Taliban reign in Afghanistan, some 250 Chinese radical Muslims were operating under the command of Osama Bin Laden in the Deronta area of eastern Nangarhar province and northern Kunduz province (Tabnak, November 16). The alleged leader of the Uyghur fighters under bin Laden was Hasan Mahsum, who was killed in October 2003 by Pakistani troops in the NWFP (*China Daily*, December 24, 2003). Though the Chinese government alleged that Mahsum had met with bin Laden in 1999 and obtained al-Qaeda financing for ETIM, Mahsum always denied such connections (see CACI Analyst, March 7, 2007).

While announcing the appointment of Abdul Haq Turkistani to the leadership of al-Qaeda in China, Muhammad Uighuri said that 300 Chinese Uyghur militants belonging to the TIP were based in training camps in Pakistan's northwest frontier region. According to Uighuri, a number of these fighters have returned to China (Tabnak, November 17).

The structure of TIP and the low profile of its new leader, Abdul Haq Turkistani, coupled with doubts about the identification of ETIM with the TIP have made it difficult to understand the real affiliation of this new group with al-Qaeda. As part of a propaganda initiative, the TIP has launched a new Arabic language publication, *Turkistan al-Islamia*. In its design and imagery, *Turkistan al-Islamia* has wide similarities to other jihadi publications such as al-Samood monthly, Sawt al-Jihad and high profile al-Qaeda websites like al-Furqan Productions. In the latest issue of the magazine two articles describe the operations of the TIP. The language of the magazine suggests its target audience is not Uyghur, few of whom (outside the religious community) read or speak Arabic beyond a few religious phrases.

Given the questionable record of prior claims that the mainly Sufi Muslim Uyghur separatists have aligned themselves with the Salafist al-Qaeda organization, the legitimacy of the present announcement remains uncertain. The actual existence of TIP cannot yet be verified and it is important to note that the name Abdul al-Haq Turkistani did not appear on a list of major Uyghur "terrorists" released in October by China's Ministry of Public Security (Xinhua, October 21). The statement listed Memetiming Memeti (Memtimin Memet) as the current leader of ETIM and successor to the late Hasan Mahsum.

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