

TERRORISM FOCUS

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BANGLADESHI JIHAD MOVEMENT SENDS THREATS OF A NEW BOMBING CAMPAIGN BY REGISTERED MAIL

The Media Department of the Jamiat-ul-Mojahedin Bangladesh (JMB) has sent a package of threats and propaganda materials to Dhaka newspapers and Bangladeshi politicians by fax and registered mail. Together with threats of a bombing campaign during the December 29 parliamentary elections (the first since the military enforced emergency rule in 2007), the JMB sent CDs containing video footage of JMB leaders, including footage of their arrests and court appearances following the nearly simultaneous explosion of roughly 400 bombs nationwide on August 17, 2005. JMB leaders also urge jihad against the Bangladeshi secular judicial system, condemn the media and describe democracy as “a system of evil.” Bangladesh’s judicial system is a frequent target of the JMB, which regards it as a colonial holdover in need of being replaced by Islamic law. The CDs featured a statement by the movement’s late leader, Shaykh Abdur Rahman, who was executed for his role in the murder of two judges, and a Bengali translation of a statement by Osama bin Laden (*Prothom Alo* [Dhaka], December 3; *New Nation* [Dhaka], December 5). The movement is expected to seek revenge for the execution of Shaykh Abdur Rahman and five other top JMB leaders in March 2007. During emergency rule the JMB is believed to have regrouped and actually expanded its membership.

The JMB has the capability of following up on its threats. Recent seizures of JMB arms caches have revealed the group has developed the ability to manufacture sophisticated explosive devices made entirely from locally

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available materials (Indo-Asian News Service, November 18; *Daily Star* [Dhaka], November 18). The JMB's explosives expert, "Boma" Mizan, was recently sentenced to 20 years in prison (bdnews24.com, November 25; *Daily Star*, November 26).

Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite counterterrorist unit, is currently engaged in operations against the JMB in northern Bangladesh designed to capture the group's current Amir, Saidur Rahman (*New Nation*, December 5). Human rights organizations have accused RAB of torture, the death of innocent civilians and arbitrary violence. RAB is drawn from members of the nation's army, air force, navy and police.

PAKISTAN'S "ANTI-TERRORIST" TALIBAN VOW TO FIGHT INDIA IF NECESSARY

Recent statements from Pakistani Taliban leaders suggest an Indian attack on Pakistan in response to alleged Pakistani responsibility for the Mumbai terrorist assault could do what the Pakistani military and politicians have been unable to do so far – bring the Pashtun militants of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) onside with the Pakistani government in a common cause.

Taliban spokesman Saifullah Akhtar announced the Taliban was ready to "annihilate" the 8,500 Indian troops it claims are operating in Afghanistan. Akhtar pledged the Taliban would stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the Pakistani army if India "committed aggression" against Pakistan; "We'll put all the differences aside at this juncture and unite... We'll stand by the army against external powers... The Taliban are like lions before whom all the powerful have to bow down." The Taliban spokesman added that Indians rather than the Taliban were responsible for the Mumbai attacks. According to Akhtar, the Taliban condemn the killing of innocent civilians and are "opposed to terrorism across the world" (*Nawa-i-Waqt* [Rawalpindi], December 3).

Though India is not part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Pakistan has recently complained about an un-mandated Indian military presence in Afghanistan (ANI, November 25). In 2006, India announced it would send 3,000 members of the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan Border Police to Afghanistan to

guard Indians working on a new road between Kandahar and the Iranian port of Chabahar (*Daily Times* [Karachi], February 8, 2006). Great Britain has asked India in the past to commit troops to the ISAF mission (*The Tribune* [Chandigarh], May 2, 2006).

Maulvi Omar, another Taliban spokesman, was also quoted as saying the Taliban would defend the Line of Control (the unofficial military border between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir) in the same way they defend the Durand Line (the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan). Since the Taliban basically ignore the Durand Line, the meaning of Omar's statement is somewhat elusive. Maulvi Omar added, "in the event of an Indian attack, we'll make it clear to the Pakistani people whether we are defenders of this country or militants" (*Nawa-i-Waqt* [Rawalpindi], December 3).

The Taliban's newfound nationalism and opposition to terrorist attacks will come as a revelation to many. Pakistan's regular forces are unlikely to accept Taliban assistance in any but the most extreme circumstances, though the option may be preferable to leaving the NWFP in Taliban hands in order to move Pakistani military assets currently deployed there up to the border with India. A major military withdrawal from the NWFP and tribal agencies would effectively leave Taliban and al-Qaeda elements free to operate in the area just as Pakistani forces have taken the initiative in a large regional offensive. It would also disturb the United States, which is encouraging Pakistan to intensify its campaign against the militants. The Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, was in Pakistan earlier this month to urge Pakistan to take "more concerted action against militant extremists elsewhere in the country," according to a U.S. embassy statement (Reuters, December 3).

Jihadis React to Mumbai Attacks

Jihadi forum members have been eager to learn anything about the Mumbai terror attacks, hoping for clues that al-Qaeda has perpetrated, in a jihadi perspective, these "great and admirable attacks." In response to this interest, the jihadi forums have circulated an analytical article about the Mumbai attacks by the Kuwaiti Salafi cleric Hamid al-Ali (h-alali.org, December 1). Al-Ali is on

the U.S. list of terrorism supporters and financiers and is best known for his early 2001 fatwa (religious ruling) approving the use of suicide attacks, including flying an aircraft into a building (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 26, 2007). Al-Ali's article received over fifteen hundred hits in on day and was reposted in major jihadi forums and websites (muslm.net, December 2; alboraq.info, December 2; hanein.info, December 2).

In an article entitled, "The Secret Behind India's Joy over the Mumbai Incident," Hamid al-Ali alleges that the attacks came right after a training exercise for U.S. officials in which a map of Pakistan was included in the training scenario showing Pakistan dismantled into smaller states. The Mumbai attacks followed this conspiracy by the United States and India, says al-Ali, claiming that the end objective is to dismantle the only Islamic country armed with nuclear weapons.

The map in question was first published to accompany an article by retired Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters in the June 2006 issue of *Armed Forces Journal*, but copies are only now being circulated in Pakistan as proof of America's intention to dismember Pakistan by joining the North-West Frontier Province to Afghanistan and severing Baluchistan as part of a new "Free Baluchistan," leaving the remainder of "natural" Pakistan as a much reduced nation lying almost entirely east of the Indus River. Al-Ali's "training exercise for U.S. officials" is just part of the mythology that has grown around this document as it circulates in Pakistan.

An Islamabad daily mocked the importance ascribed to this map by Pakistan's elites:

The debacle of 1971 taught us that it is dangerous for a country to be cocooned in an artificial sense of immortality. But it is also disempowering and futile for a nation to live with the paranoia of imminent death. Not a day goes by without our prophets of doom (who incidentally are often proponents of non-representative power elites in Pakistan) bellowing that a US-led global plot to divide Pakistan into pieces is close to fruition. Their smoking gun is a redrawn map of Pakistan (now widely redistributed over the Internet) that was published by the *Armed Forces Journal* in 2006. There are thousands of such journals

in the US that publish all kinds of crazy ideas produced by analysts and think tanks. But our conspiracy-mongers are convinced that this lone article is irrefutable proof that "America" wishes Pakistan's dismemberment (*The News* [Islamabad], November 29).

According to al-Ali, India sides with the Zionists, occupies Pakistani Kashmir against the well of its Muslim majority and commits heinous crimes against Kashmiris. Al-Ali reminds his readers that India also backed Bangladesh against Pakistan in the 1971 war of Bengali secession. India's Hindus were alarmed when the Taliban began to exert power and influence in nuclear-armed Pakistan and began supporting Kashmiri Muslims' aspirations for independence. Therefore, the hidden agenda of India aims to penetrate Afghanistan under the U.S. umbrella, with Israeli cooperation, to eliminate jihad and the Islamic movements.

Secondly, India is endeavoring to dismantle Pakistan under the pretext that Pakistan is the springboard for all global jihadi movements. Al-Ali reiterates India's role in instigating the West against Pakistan. India's argument, says al-Ali, is that the "Taliban movement sprung from Pakistan, where the most dangerous terrorists reside in Pakistan's Waziristan. Pakistan is overloaded with religious schools filling Muslims' minds with Takfiri ideology. Pakistan is the only Islamic nuclear state vehemently interacting with Islamic issues." Al-Ali goes on to elucidate the many services and favors India rendered to Israel to win the support of the West against Pakistan. Finally, al-Ali predicts Indian escalation and possible all out war, backed by the United States, against the mujahideen in Kashmir with the collusion of the corrupt president of Pakistan, Asif Zardari.

Al-Ali's analysis received many comments from jihadi forum members. Although corroborating al-Ali's conspiracy theory in general, some jihadi forum chatters raised three main arguments on the Mumbai attacks. One forum member disagreed with al-Ali's insinuation that the Indian intelligence services were behind the attacks with the intent of undermining Pakistan, saying "It's insane to think that such young men would pay with their lives for India's possible political conspiracy against Pakistan." Other critics, working on the assumption that the Pakistani Taliban was responsible, rebuffed the

premise that the group had made a strategic mistake by attacking India. On the contrary, the Taliban would force Pakistan to redeploy its military from the border with Afghanistan to the border with India, consequently relieving pressure on the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Another forum member posted a summary of what he claimed was a Rand Corporation study predicting the partition of Pakistan into small emirates as a result of religious, ethnic and sectarian rivalry. Small political entities would emerge from the dismantling of Pakistan in Baluchistan, Sindh, and Punjab.

Some forum members believe that the Mumbai perpetrators are Muslims from Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. Without consideration to the repercussions on Pakistani-Indian political affairs, the attackers struck Mumbai to seek revenge Hindu violations of Muslim honor. A link to a free file-hosting website was posted in muslim.net showing instances of Hindu aggression against Indian Muslims; thereafter even moderate Islamic forum members were convinced the Mumbai attacks were justified.

The majority of forum members are convinced that al-Qaeda was involved in the attacks one way or another, pointing to a video by al-Qaeda delivered to news agencies in the Indian city of Sringar last year. In the alleged al-Qaeda video a man calling himself Abu Abdulrahman al-Ansari claimed to be a high ranking member of al-Qaeda and threatened to wage holy war against India (abrar.org June 8, 2007). Whether the Pakistani army decides to track down Islamic movements in Kashmir or is forced into a confrontation with the Indian army, it will ease Pakistani pressure on the tribal areas where the Pakistani Taliban operates.

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Mumbai Terror Investigation Leads to Pakistan's "Epicenter of Terrorism"

Two weeks after the deadly Mumbai terrorist incidents which claimed 164 lives, including security forces personnel and foreign nationals, Indian investigating agencies have been struggling to unearth a terror trail that appears to point directly towards neighboring Pakistan.

In one of the most prolonged and deadly terrorist attacks the country has ever seen, at least ten Muslim terrorists entered Mumbai on November 26 using sea routes to perpetrate mindless carnage at several places, including the main railway station, a hospital and two luxury hotels. The terrorists holed up in three South Mumbai buildings – the Taj Mahal hotel, the Oberoi-Trident hotel and the Nariman House (a Jewish center), taking guests and inmates as hostage. After a fierce 60 hour long operation, India's elite security forces rescued most of the hostages while killing nine terrorists and capturing one. The sole prisoner was identified as Muhammad Ajmal Amir Kasab, a resident of Okara, Pakistan and presently in the custody of the Mumbai Police.

An unknown militant group, the Deccan Mujahideen, claimed responsibility for the Mumbai attacks. The same group also issued a threat to blow up major airports across the country a week after the Mumbai events (*Financial Express* [Mumbai], December 4). However, for some time now this name-game has been a part of an attempt by Pakistan-based terror groups to give a homegrown Indian flavor to the ongoing jihadi terrorism in the region. In the last few years, names like Lashkar-e-Qahar, Indian Mujahideen, Tehriq-e-Qasas and Inquilabi Mahaz have been floated, perhaps to divert attention from the Pakistan-based terror groups.

Interrogations and circumstantial evidence suggest the complicity of a Pakistan-based and Kashmir-centric Islamist group, the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Meanwhile, Mumbai police have released photos of the terrorists and traced their place of origin to Pakistan's Punjab province, based on the evidence gathered and the confession of Kasab, the sole surviving terrorist (*Times of India*, December 9). Three of the ten terrorists were from Okara, three were from Multan, two were from Faisalabad, and one each from Sialkot and Dera Ismail Khan.

The probe so far has pointed to four LeT operatives. The “masterminds” are identified as Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, who was seized by Pakistani police after a raid on a LeT camp in Kashmir, and Yusuf Muzammil, whose current whereabouts are unknown. Based on the results of police interrogations, two individuals identified as Abu Hamza and Khafa have been named as trainers who provided maritime lessons and training in the handling of explosives and weapons (*Times of India*, December 6; *Daily Times* [Lahore], December 12). According to Rakesh Maria, the Joint Commissioner of Police and a lead investigator in the Mumbai attacks, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD, a charity and front organization for LeT) chief Hafiz Muhammad Saeed was also involved with Lakhvi, Hamza and Kahfa in the Mumbai plot, from planning to execution (Press Trust of India, December 10). Earlier, government sources claimed that the investigators had “incontrovertible proof” of the names of the ISI handlers and trainers and the locations in Pakistan where the terrorist training was carried out. Police also claimed to have recovered some of terrorists’ communications through Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) (*The Hindu*, December 5). With the help of foreign investigating agencies, especially the FBI, Mumbai police tracked the VoIP number brought from Orlando, Florida, which was used by the terrorists to talk to Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, who is currently under detention in Pakistan along with 20 other LeT and Jaysh-e-Mohammed operatives (*Indian Express*, December 10).

The fishing trawler in which the terrorists reached the Mumbai coast, the MV Kuber, had an inventory of items that established a Pakistani hand in the attacks, including wheat flour, dental gel and shaving cream all bearing “Made in Pakistan” tags. The Thuraya satellite phone recovered from the abandoned trawler contained records of a conversation between LeT chief Yusuf Muzammil, based in the Kashmiri city of Muzafarabad, and an individual known as Yahya, believed to be a point man for the LeT and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) in Bangladesh. Yahya reportedly arranged SIM (subscriber identity module) cards and fake ID cards, primarily from countries like Mauritius, the UK, the United States and Australia. The satellite phone also has records of calls traced to Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi in Jalalabad in Afghanistan (*Times of India*, November 30).

Interrogation of the lone surviving terrorist has revealed details of LeT training camps in Danna, Abdul-Bin-Masud, Mangla Dam, Akas, Um-Al-Qura, Badli and Muzafarabad in

Pakistan-Administered Kashmir. Mumbai’s Crime Branch denied the involvement of more than ten terrorists in these multiple attacks, adding that the terrorists behind the Mumbai attacks were trained at four places inside Pakistan: Manshera, Muridke, Muzafarabad and Karachi (*Daily News and Analysis* [Mumbai], December 7).

Tausif Rehman and Mukhtar Ahmed (the latter a constable and former police informant) were two suspects apprehended in Kolkata and New Delhi, respectively, for their alleged role in supplying mobile SIM cards to the terrorists involved in the Mumbai attacks (*The Hindu*, December 6). Investigating agencies have also tied two Indian men, Fahim Ansari and his close associate Sabahuddin Ahmed, to the Mumbai attacks. Ansari allegedly carried out reconnaissance missions in Mumbai and was arrested last February with a number of maps highlighting Mumbai landmarks in his possession. Both Ansari and Sabahuddin Ahmed have been in detention in Uttar Pradesh since their arrest in February in connection with a LeT attack on a police post in the Rampur district (*Times of India*, December 12).

There was certainly a massive intelligence failure that allowed terrorists to hit Mumbai while evading all security points. Officials at India’s external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), claim to have sent relevant intelligence inputs to other security agencies, including the Mumbai Police, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and the Coast Guard prior to the attack. In return, Indian Coast Guard sources pointed fingers at the spy agency while describing how terrorists spread false information and managed to divert Coast Guard and Naval ships in the wrong direction to enter Indian territory by sea. Mumbai police and the IB also have refuted RAW’s claims of prior warning (CNN-IBN, December 3; Press Trust of India, December 3; for the Indian intelligence agencies, see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 24).

However, the ensuing blame game among security and intelligence agencies over “actionable inputs” notwithstanding, the newly appointed Home Minister, Palaniappan Chidambaram, has admitted that there were intelligence and security lapses and has vowed to bring in a stringent anti-terror law, establish a federal investigating agency, and provide modernization packages for police and intelligence agencies to prevent

future attacks by terrorists. He also vowed to introduce bills to strengthen the legal provisions relating to the prevention, investigation, prosecution and punishment of terrorist acts (Sify.com. December 11).

Meanwhile the United Nations Security Council's Al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee imposed sanctions on Jamaat-ud-Dawa as well as Hafiz Muhammad Saeed and three others individuals, including Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, Haji Muhammad Ashraf (the Jamaat's chief of finance) and Mahmoud Ahmed Bahaziq (*Times of India*, December 11). Under international pressure, Pakistan has initiated a crackdown against JuD's establishments in Punjab province and its central office in Lahore (Geo TV News, December 12).

With the wealth of evidence available, the federal government and the investigating agencies, including the Anti-Terrorist Squad and the Crime Branch of the Mumbai Police, are confident in making a strong case against the Pakistan-based terrorist groups and their patrons in order to expose to the international community what Indian politicians have taken to describing as Pakistan's "epicenter of terror."

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Is the PKK Sabotaging Strategic Energy Infrastructure in a Search for a Superpower Partner?

A recent trend has emerged of attacks by the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan – PKK) on the energy infrastructure that carries oil and natural gas to markets in the West. As early as 2006, PKK leader Murat Karayilan rejected the idea of attacking the international energy infrastructure unless the situation on the ground changed significantly and the Turkish state increased its attacks on Kurds (gundemonline.net, July 17, 2006; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, August 11). Since last August, however, the PKK not only sabotaged the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which carries Azeri crude to

Western markets, but also attacked the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which carries Iraqi crude to the West (see *Terrorism Focus*, November 26).

When closely analyzed, the timing of PKK attacks on energy infrastructure coincides with developments that are of interest to the superpowers, Russia and the United States. For instance, on August 21, 2006, the PKK claimed to sabotage the Iranian natural gas pipeline in the Turkish region of Agri, saying, "the sabotage was a warning message to Turkish and Iranian authorities who conduct joint military operations against the PKK" (*Yeni Ozgur Politika*, August 22, 2006). However, just four days before the attack, it was announced that Turkey and Iran had agreed on a project to enlarge the capacity of the natural gas pipeline which carries Iranian gas to Turkey in order to sell Iranian gas to Europe (*Anadolu Ajansi*, August 18, 2006). It is well known that the United States does not want Turkey to sign energy-related contracts with Iran. Despite the fact that Murat Karayilan announced a month before the attack that the PKK would not want to target international energy infrastructure, the PKK nevertheless sabotaged the Iranian gas pipeline.

In fact, a year later, the PKK once again claimed to have sabotaged the Iranian-Turkish natural gas pipeline in the Agri town of Dogubeyazit (*Yeni Ozgur Politika*, September 11, 2007). Two weeks before this attack, Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on investing in Iranian-Turkish natural gas projects (NTV, August 19, 2007). Once again, the PKK sabotage came right after Turkey agreed to invest in Iranian energy projects.

The imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, stated in May 2007 that "the existence of the U.S is a reality. We should not be a satellite of the U.S., but it does not mean that we should get in a confrontation with the U.S either. It is OK to build relations with the United States to find a possible solution" (sol.org.tr, May 19 2007). The strategic thinking behind the attack could be to send a signal to America that the PKK is an influential player in this region and is ready to serve the interests of the United States.

A similar trend has continued in 2008. The PKK claimed their militants sabotaged the Iranian-Turkish natural gas pipeline in Agri province on May 25 (*Yeni Ozgur Politika*, May 27). Perhaps not coincidentally, ten days before

the attack a Turkish delegate went to Iran to finalize the details of the memorandum of understanding signed a year ago (NTV, May, 15).

On August 5, the PKK targeted the BTC oil pipeline in the town of Refahiye in Erzincan province (Firat News Agency, August 7). Although the official Turkish statement described the eruption as a “technical problem,” it is widely believed that it was PKK sabotage (*Milliyet*, August 9). It is interesting to note that the sabotage operation on the BTC pipeline came just two days before the Russian-Georgia war broke out. If it was not Russia that ordered the PKK to sabotage the BTC, it is possible that the PKK, by targeting the BTC, wanted to send a signal to Russia it could be of service in return for Russian assistance. The second ranking PKK commander, Bahoz Erdal, stated; “as an economic target we chose to attack the BTC pipeline because we think that attacks like these would stop Turkey from pursuing its aggression toward the Kurds” (*Yeni Ozgur Politika*, August 9). Erdal’s statement is far from being a persuasive argument, however. The timing of the PKK attacks on economic targets indicate that the PKK is in search of an open or covert state partner who can provide a lifeline for the PKK in return for directed PKK attacks on strategic infrastructure.

For Russia, the BTC pipeline is an alternative energy route that lessens the West’s dependency on Russian oil. However, even during last August’s Russian-Georgian war, Russia could not directly target the BTC because it is aware of the fact that the international community will not tolerate such aggression towards a strategic energy line. The PKK, by carefully assessing the Russian position, might be targeting the BTC to send a signal to Russia that the PKK could be a useful asset for Russian policy.

Perhaps because the PKK has realized that the United States would not want to use the PKK for its strategic interests, the PKK has turned to Russia and other actors in the region. In fact, Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK’s imprisoned leader, recently stated “I am hearing that the Kurds in northern Iraq have started cooperating with Turkey against the PKK like they did in 1998. [Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud] Barzani and [Iraqi President Jalal] al-Talabani are well aware of the fact that they cannot survive without the PKK in their territory. Thus, they cannot help Turkey to eliminate the PKK. If they do, the PKK would find new allies. Russia, Syria, and Iran would not want the PKK to come to an end” (Gundem-online.com, October 17).

The most recent PKK attack on the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline took place on November 21 in Mardin province (*Yeni Ozgur Politika*, November 24). The timing of the latest sabotage was also interesting. It was organized four days after U.S and Iraqi authorities finally reached an agreement for a U.S withdrawal plan on November 17 and three days before the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of northern Iraq and the central government in Baghdad signed an agreement to carry crude oil from the Kurdish region through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline (*Radikal*, November 26).

Given that the PKK carefully calculates its terror strategy, the timing of all these attacks cannot be merely coincidental. The PKK’s attacks on Iranian-Turkish natural gas lines should be read through the lense of the PKK’s efforts to find a new strategic partner through demonstrating a willingness to do the “dirty work” for the United States against Iranian interests. With the purpose of receiving U.S. support, Rahman Haj-Ahmadi, the leader of an anti-Iranian PKK offshoot, the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (Parti bo Jiyani Azadi la Kurdistan - PJAK), visited Washington in August 2007 to seek U.S. support for his organization’s struggle against Iran. Ahmadi welcomed potential American assistance; “We obviously cannot topple the government with the ammunition and the weapons we have now... Any financial or military help that would speed the path to a true Iranian democracy, we would very much welcome, particularly from the United States (Interview with the *Washington Times*, August 4, 2007). While Ahmadi was visiting Washington to seek support, the PKK was organizing an attack against the Iranian-Turkish natural gas pipeline to “prove” it has the muscle to harm Iranian interests. In the last year, however, the United States has shown no sign that it has any interest in supporting the PKK whatsoever.

The PKK leadership is certain to be alarmed by the developing rapprochement between Turkey and the Kurds of northern Iraq. If Turkey successfully convinces the KRG to isolate the PKK, the Kurdish militants could target the economic interests of Iraq in general and the KRG in particular by attacking the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline. In addition, the PKK could carry out attacks on strategic infrastructure to seek favor with Russian officials interested in pursuing an aggressive foreign policy in the region.

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A Mujahideen Bleed-Through from Iraq? Part Four – The Case of Palestine and Israel

By Michael Scheuer

As discussed earlier in this series of articles, the entry of Sunni mujahideen from Iraq into Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon has been a fairly visible process and tracking it – at least in outline form – is an achievable task. Likewise, the goal of the mujahideen from Iraq has been clear: (a) to spread Salafi beliefs in the Levant countries and (b) to place fighters as close to Israel as possible. These Salafi Islamists are, in essence, trying to create a space where they can begin to operate inside Israel (*Sada al-Balad* [Beirut], January 25). Whether they succeed in that goal is an open question, but their intent is clear.

The bleed-through from Iraq also is having some impact in the Palestinian territories – especially Gaza – and in Israel. In these theaters, of course, access to Israeli targets already is assured, and so the emphasis of the newly arrived mujahideen and a number of in-place Israeli Arabs seems to be to build a foothold from which Salafism can be preached and have a chance to grow among the populace. There have been anti-Israeli operations conducted by Salafi groups in Gaza – such as the Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam) – but the attacks have not been major, and the Salafis appear to spend just as much time fighting with their erstwhile Islamist colleagues in Hamas.

Al-Qaeda and its Salafi allies have long viewed Palestine as “an Islamic endowment,” a place to which “every Muslim has the right to set out for jihad in its land” (Global Islamic Media Front, November 22). Osama bin Laden, moreover, has long railed against the governments of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon for preventing non-Palestinian mujahideen from basing themselves in their countries. Bin Laden’s gripe has now been satisfied to an extent, not by his own hand, but by courtesy of the regional destabilization caused by the U.S.-led war in Iraq. Salafi fighters of various nationalities are now flowing into the Levant from Iraq.

In Palestine, there seems to be a minor Salafi presence in the West Bank but a steadily growing military and proselytizing presence in Gaza. The above noted “Army

of Islam” and several other Salafi organizations have created training facilities in Gaza and have displayed them to the international media, defiantly proclaiming, “We are coming Jews!” (Reuters, September 2; see also *Terrorism Focus*, September 24; for other Salafi groups active in Gaza, see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 17). They have, to date, conducted some attacks on the Israeli army when its units were engaged in raids in Gaza, and have attacked Christian and American targets in Gaza (Reuters, September 1; *Jerusalem Post*, October 21). The Salafi groups in Gaza claim they receive funding locally and “are linked to the brothers of the al-Qaeda organization only from an ideological point of view” (adnkronos.com, September 2). That said, their members have been reported chanting slogans supporting bin Laden and al-Qaeda while they are undergoing training activities (al-Arabiya TV, September 3).

As the Salafists in Gaza began to preach and attract followers there appears to have been an implicit understanding reached between the Salafist leaders and Hamas. The deal allowed the Salafists to train fighters, attack Israeli targets, and preach in Gaza as long as they did not engage in Gaza’s internal political system and did not try to impose their ideology by force on Palestinians (al-Arabiya TV, September 3). This has been an unstable deal at best; even as the Salafists acquiesced to Hamas’s terms, they declared their belief that “Hamas does not implement the rule of God on earth, and does not enforce any ruling of the Islamic Sharia” (al-Arabiya TV, September 3). There have been fire-fights between Salafists and Hamas security forces during the latter’s raids of Salafi mosques and other sites; on one occasion this fall, Hamas policeman killed nine members of the Army of Islam, earning a promise of revenge from the group’s leaders (Al-Arabiya TV, September 26).

The Gaza-based Salafist leaders – with al-Qaeda’s blessing – are also seeking to recruit fighters from the group’s armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Media reports claim that many of these fighters are “exasperated” with Hamas leaders’ talks with Israeli officials, as well as with the on-again, off-again military “calm” between Hamas and Israel. In June, for example, some Hamas fighters used a public appeal to al-Qaeda’s leadership to rebuke their leaders for “drifting away from the path of jihad and engaging in the political process with the Western-backed Palestinian authority that has resulted in the further tightening of the noose around Palestinian necks.” These Hamas fighters also pledged

support for the “global jihad” and asked that “al-Qaeda lend its support to their military effort” (Arrahmah.com, June 29). In separate internet comments, writers who identified themselves as Hamas fighters have said “no one is better suited [than al-Qaeda] to offer salvation to these ill-fated [Palestinian] people,” and argued that “whoever loves Shaykh Osama bin Laden is a believer, and whoever hates him is a disbeliever.” [1] While it appears that the Salafists are having limited success in recruiting Hamas members, an Arab writer has issued a timely reminder that the inflow of Salafists from Iraq is undoubtedly going to have a negative impact on all of the Levant. “Salafis have not yet taken root in Palestine,” Urayb al-Rintawi wrote last September:

However, who had expected to see demonstrations in Beirut of men and women whose appearance is similar to their coreligionists in Qandahar and Peshawar? If the Salafi tide is possible in Lebanon it is likely it will not be impossible in the hungry and blockaded Gaza Strip. Those who blockaded Gaza to take revenge on Hamas and champion Fatah could one not-too-distant day see that their reprehensible deed has only led to bring [in] al-Qaeda and draw [in] fundamentalist organizations that are more extreme than both the hawks of Hamas and the militants of Islamic jihad (*Al-Dustur*, September 12).

As long ago as 2003, Israeli authorities claimed al-Qaeda had established a presence in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon – especially in Ayn al-Hilwah; in the same year, the media reported that Mossad or its surrogates murdered al-Qaeda’s representative in the camp, an Egyptian named Abd al-Sattar al-Masri. Five years ago, it was difficult to determine the validity of Israeli claims. Were they factual, or simply Tel Aviv’s usual formula of hyping terrorist threats Washington also feared in order to secure more U.S. military and financial assistance?

Today there is little reason to doubt Israeli claims. As noted above, armed, Gaza-based Salafist groups have publicly declared their presence, and in late October the *Jerusalem Post* published a claim that “al-Qaeda affiliates” had fired 21 rockets and 18 mortar rounds into Israel since June, 2008, and had laid explosive charges near the security fence (*Jerusalem Post*, October 21). In addition to this claim, Israeli officials and media reported al-Qaeda-related terrorist activities inside Israel in 2008.

Early last July, for example, Israeli officials claimed to have arrested two Bedouin Arab Israeli citizens from Rahat on charges of having links to al-Qaeda and planning attacks in Israel. This arrest was the first in which Israel had charged any of its citizens with cooperating with al-Qaeda (BBC, July 18).

Then, in mid-July, Shin Bet officials announced that they had arrested six men – two Israeli Arabs and four Palestinians Arabs from East Jerusalem – who were trying to set up an al-Qaeda cell. The Israelis claimed the six were part of a religious study group at al-Aqsa mosque. One of the men – a 24-year old chemistry student – was reported to have been planning to attack the helicopter U.S. President George Bush would use when he visited Israel and had sought advice on how to do so from al-Qaeda contacts via internet contact (*Israeltoday*, July 18; *Bloomberg.com*, July 18). Finally, in late August, Israeli authorities announced the indictment of another Arab Israeli on charges of conspiring with a Gaza-based al-Qaeda member named Abu Balal to carry out terrorist attacks in Israel (*Jerusalem Post*, August 22).

As noted in this and the previous articles in this series, there is a steady increase in Salafist militancy across the Levant and there is no apparent reason to think that it will slow. In this context, the worried conclusion of Israeli writer Amos Harel accurately sums up the disastrous ramifications of the Iraq war for Israel’s long-term security:

The collection of [al-Qaeda-related] intelligence [by Mossad and Shin Bet], as well as the wish of Arab Israelis and Palestinians with “blue” (Israeli) identifications to carry out terrorist attacks, is troubling. No less troubling is the growing identification they sense with the agenda of al-Qaeda, which is more extremist than that of Hamas or of the extremist wing of the Islamic Movement in Israel. For some years now the public declarations of Bin Laden and his aides have increasingly focused on Israel and Jewish communities around the world as targets for terrorist attacks. It is also known that cells linked with al-Qaeda operate with relative ease in the Gaza Strip. The desire of al-Qaeda to operate in Israel is finding fertile ground (*Haaretz*, July 20). [2]

The stability of the governments of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon will all eventually be tested by the Salafists. Israel's security, already compromised by the destruction of the reliable, anti-Salafi bulwark provided by Saddam's regime, is likely to encounter a much larger Salafist threat in any future scenario wherein U.S. military forces leave Iraq and the Shia regime in Baghdad has no incentive to control the exodus of Sunni militants across its western border. What long had seemed an unattainable goal for al-Qaeda and other non-Palestinian, Sunni Salafists – a stronger presence in Palestine and Israel and an ability to attack inside Israel – now seems within reach thanks to the westward-bound jihad highway through Iraq to the Levant unintentionally created by the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

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Notes:

1. See, for example, Abu-Muadh al-Maqqisi, "To the lions of al-Qassam in the relentless den," Bayt al-Maqqis Islamic Forums (Internet), February 22.

2. For more on the growing anger of Arab Israelis – especially that of the Islamic Movement's leaders – over the blockade of Gaza and Israeli encroachments on Palestinian property in East Jerusalem, see Sharon Rofe-Ofir, "Shaykh Salah: Israeli Leaders 'Murderers and Criminals'," Ynetnews, November 29; Cherrie Heywood, "Israeli intelligence warns of new Israeli terror," *Middle East Times*, September 30; and Peter Beaumont, "Arabs under siege as Israel tightens grip on Holy City," *Guardian*, July 27.