

# TERRORISM FOCUS

Volume VI ■ Issue 6 ■ February 25, 2009

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

* BRIEFS.....	1	
* Jihadis Speculate on Secret Cooperation between Iran and al-Qaeda.....	3	
* Rising Arab-Kurdish Tensions over Kirkuk Will Complicate U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq .....	4	
* Polish-Born Muslim Convert Sentenced for Leading Role in Tunisian Synagogue Bombing .....	6	
* Government Forces Overrun Tuareg Rebel Camps in Northern Mali.....	8	

**AL-QAEDA AND OIL FACILITIES IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS**

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

In its latest issue, Bahraini weekly business magazine *The Gulf* reported that Middle East oil companies are spending billions of dollars on security every year and the cost is rising fast, with Saudi Arabia alone expected to spend \$14 billion over the next six years (*The Gulf*, February 21-27).

In the shadow of the global economic crisis—a time when oil prices have seen a great decrease over the last couple of months—it seems that the threat of targeting oil interests by al-Qaeda and affiliated Salafi-Jihadi groups is currently on the rise. Two factors explain the increase in such risks: (1) the Salafi-Jihadi switch to a strategy of waging a war of attrition against their “enemies” in the global economic crisis; and (2) the decrease in oil prices, which al-Qaeda and affiliated groups believe should stay high.

One of the major aspects of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden’s latest audio tape (January 14, 2009) was a threat to wage a war of attrition against US interests:

For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to [pubs@jamestown.org](mailto:pubs@jamestown.org), or contact us at:

1111 16th St., NW, Suite #320  
 Washington, DC 20036  
 T: (202) 483-8888  
 F: (202) 483-8337  
<http://www.jamestown.org>

The Terrorism Focus is a fortnightly complement to Jamestown’s Terrorism Monitor, providing detailed and timely analysis of developments for policymakers and analysts, informing them of the latest trends in the War on Terror.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.

Copyright ©2009



The real question is: can the United States persist in its war against us during the coming decades?... [ex-President George W. Bush] created a grave inheritance for his successor, and left him with two unattractive options—like being forced to swallow a double-edged sword that will wound him however he deals with it...If he withdraws from the war, it will be a military defeat. If he continues it, he will drown in the economic crisis. How will he act, having inherited two wars, not one of which he is capable of continuing? And we are in the process of opening new frontlines, God willing (For a full transcript of his speech in English, see <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefabinladen0109.pdf>).

Furthermore, the decline in oil prices is not preferable for the Salafi-Jihadists, as the oil is the “entire nation’s property” and the ummah (Islamic community) typically benefit from its high prices. In 2004 Osama bin Laden declared that the price of a barrel of oil should reach \$100, considering that oil is subject to looting by the United States and its allies. After the foiled attempt to attack the Abqaiq refinery in 2006, al-Qaeda issued a book that legitimized the targeting oil pipelines and oil workers who facilitate the looting of the ummah’s wealth, but forbade the targeting of oil wells and fields, as they belong to the ummah (See Shaykh Abd-al-Aziz bin Rashid al-Anzi, *Hukm Esthdaf al-Masalih al-Nftiah* [The Religious Rule on Targeting Oil Interests], 2006).

According to this understanding, it seems that the targeting of oil facilities by al-Qaeda or affiliated Salafi-Jihadis is designed to affect the flow of oil: raising fuel prices in the midst of a global economic crisis seems to be important for al-Qaeda’s war of attrition against the West.

#### SOMALIA’S AL-SHABAAB LAUNCHES SUICIDE STRIKES AFTER AL-QAEDA CALLS FOR ATTACKS ON AU PEACEKEEPERS

Eleven Burundian peacekeepers were killed in a two-man suicide assault on an African Union peacekeeping base in Mogadishu on February 22, 2009. Shaykh Mukhtar Robow “Abu Mansur,” the spokesman for Somalia’s radical Islamist al-Shabaab movement, claimed responsibility for the attacks shortly afterwards (Radio

Garowe, February 22). Al-Shabaab has made extensive use of suicide attacks since 2006, a tactical innovation in Somalia.

The bombings followed a communiqué issued earlier this month by leading al-Qaeda strategist Abu Yahya al-Libi that called for renewed attacks on AU peacekeepers in Somalia (As-Sahab Media Productions, February 13). Abu Yahya frequently provides advice or direction to al-Shabaab, urging them to reject all efforts at reconciliation, even with fellow Islamists deemed to lack sufficient enthusiasm for a relentless jihad against secularists, nationalists, and foreign troops (muslm.net, June 23, 2008). In turn, Abu Yahya has been praised by al-Shabaab leader Shaykh Ahmad Abi Godane and greeted in the martyrdom videos of Somali suicide bombers.

Abu Yahya’s message opened with congratulations to the “brave, well-born tribes” of Somalia and its “courageous heroes of jihad” for their “splendid victory” over the Ethiopian military after it withdrew from its occupation of Somalia in January. The senior al-Qaeda leader points out that the withdrawal was not achieved as a result of diplomatic efforts, but through a jihad carried out by patient and serious men: “It was impossible for those [Somali] men to flee the heat of the battle while seeing the forces of the Abyssinians [Ethiopians] raiding their homeland, raping their women, tyrannizing their elderly people, massacring their youth, and boasting on their land.”

Describing the peacekeeping mission as a kind of concealed occupation, Abu Yahya urges al-Shabaab to attack the AU peacekeepers with all the determination they applied to attacks on Ethiopian forces:

[Concealed occupation] has been adapted by the West as a new method to control Muslim countries by flashing slogans like “Peacekeeping Forces” and others that belong to either the UN, the African Union, or other regional or international organizations. Therefore, you should continue to carry out your attacks on the Ugandan [and Burundian] forces that occupy your territory, so you would inflict them with what you have done to the crusader Ethiopian forces. Kill them everywhere you find them without distinction. Take them on, close in on them, and disable them through ambushes.

Abu Yahya also urges al-Shabaab to do everything it can to avoid internal disputes (a constant problem in the radical organization) and avoid needlessly antagonizing the Somali people (another problem stemming from al-Shabaab's crude application of a version of Shari'a law). Somalia's new Islamist president, Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad, is denounced as "one of the Karzais [Quislings] of modern times" that have begun to proliferate in Muslim countries. According to Abu Yahya, the "enemies of Islam" seek to bring Somalia "within their orbit and control it as they please, forcing you to believe its legitimacy and adhering to the decisions of their organizations, while wasting your efforts, burying your sacrifices in its graveyards and looting the wealth of your country."

### **Jihadis Speculate on Secret Cooperation between Iran and al-Qaeda**

A discussion in jihadi internet forums triggered by a posting entitled "Is there a secret cooperation between Iran and al-Qaeda?" raised suspicions over possible clandestine connections between Shiite Iran and al-Qaeda, the self-declared enemy of Shi'ism (muslm.net, February 18, 2008).

A jihadi forum chatter nicknamed al-Natiq bil-Shahada posted a message in the jihad forum that raised the issue of al-Qaeda's possible secret relations with Iran. Even though Iran's Islamic creed is in stark contrast with al-Qaeda's Salafi-Jihadi ideology, Shahada wonders why al-Qaeda never targeted Iranian interests inside or outside Iran. "Much skepticism revolves around al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda has been active in Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, Europe and the U.S. but never in Iran," says Shahada, who goes on to cite new Western reports of a letter allegedly sent from al-Qaeda to Iran's leadership, thanking them for the support of the Revolutionary Guards in carrying out the September 2008 attack on the U.S. embassy in Yemen (*Daily Telegraph*, November 24, 2008).

Justifying the absence of al-Qaeda attacks on Iran, some forum members responded to Shahada's suspicions by noting that there is a big ideological gap between Iran and al-Qaeda, but the latter had to refrain from attacking Iran because many members of al-Qaeda are in Iran, either

as prisoners or as fugitives sought by Iranian authorities. Also, Iran's porous border with Afghanistan and Pakistan allows al-Qaeda members to exit the region whenever necessary.

On the other hand, some forum participants pointed out al-Qaeda serves Iranian goals by exhausting and weakening Sunni Muslims. If al-Qaeda was not serving Iranian strategic objectives in the region, Iran would have cracked down on al-Qaeda in Iraq and tightened its borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan, given Iran's influence in Iraq. "Al-Qaeda only attacks soft targets. If al-Qaeda harasses Iran in Iraq, Iran would finish off al-Qaeda in a few days," says a forum chatter nicknamed Ali al-Hashimi.

According to another forum member nicknamed Abu Issa, there are other reasons that prevent al-Qaeda from attacking Iran. Public opinion in the Islamic world supports Iran on the false belief that Iran is the only Islamic country confronting U.S. expansion in the region by backing Hezbollah against Israel. Also, Iran began to demonstrate animosity towards Sunni Muslims only in the last few years. Retribution attacks by al-Qaeda against Iran will take some time, especially with the lack of Iranian members of al-Qaeda. The current members of al-Qaeda in Iran are either in prison or under house arrest. Even though al-Qaeda has not struck in Iran, many Iranian-backed militiamen were killed by al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Responding to the claim that al-Qaeda has no presence in Iran, Abu Issa said that the Iranian Sunni group Jondallah is a Salafi-Jihadi group affiliated with al-Qaeda and is already waging jihad operations in Iran ([see \*Terrorism Monitor\*, February 9](#)). Jondallah is an Iranian Sunni insurgent group based in Balochistan, but many regard it as being inspired by nationalism rather than Salafi-Jihadism. The group's amir, Abdul Malik Baluchi, has denied any association with al-Qaeda (al-Arabiya.net, February 22). In the same context, a member of another forum corroborated Abu Issa's claim by saying that al-Qaeda is responsible for bombing a mosque in the Iranian city of Shiraz five months ago (nationalkuwait.com, February 21, 2009).

Some jihadi forum members referred to press reports released by Arab news agencies confirming some kind of connection between al-Qaeda and Iran. These reports

suggest that 35 wanted Saudi al-Qaeda members are in Iran or in the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran triangle. Al-Qaeda members in Iran led by Salah al-Qar'awi (a.k.a. Nijm—he uses another 14 pseudonyms) are reported to be planning terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia or Jordan, and others are planning to join al-Qaeda in Yemen (moheet.com, February 5). Al-Qar'awi received intensive training on electronic detonators in Iran and uses Iranian territories as a launching pad for terrorist activities that extend to Iraq and Lebanon (moheet.com, February 5). Other reports referred to by forum members indicated that Iranian Mullahs previously hosted prominent al-Qaeda members in Iran, such as Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi (a.k.a. Saif al-Adel), Sa'ad bin Laden (Osama bin Laden's son), and Ayman al-Zawahiri (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 1, 2003). According to the forum members, al-Zawahiri has close relations with Iranian Revolutionary Guard Brigadier Mohammad Baqir al-Qadir. Finally, some forum members highlighted Iran's refusal to hand over to their countries of origin al-Qaeda members who fled from Afghanistan into Iran.

Regardless of the ideological differences between Iran and al-Qaeda, they share a mutual enemy, the United States. The temporary mutual objective of al-Qaeda and Iran is to rid the Arab and Islamic countries of U.S. influence and exploitation. Once this provisional common objective elapses, Shiite-Sunni ideological differences will likely hinder any further cooperation between the two sides.

*Abdul Hameed Bakier is an intelligence expert on counter-terrorism, crisis management and terrorist-hostage negotiations. He is based in Jordan.*

### **Rising Arab-Kurdish Tensions over Kirkuk Will Complicate U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq**

Kurdish suspicions of Iraq's central government have reignited after a January 22 decision by Baghdad to deploy the army's 12th Division north towards the disputed oil-rich city of Kirkuk. This development, coupled with U.S. military plans to gradually disengage from Iraq, led Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani to declare that U.S. President Barack Obama "has said more than once that they will

withdraw in a responsible manner from Iraq...What we understand by a responsible withdrawal is that the United States resolves the problems outstanding in Iraq [before leaving]" (AFP, February 18). As the U.S. military relinquishes its security role to the Iraq Army, unresolved political issues are likely to exacerbate tensions between Iraq's central government and the KRG, complicating American plans to withdraw and leave behind a stable and secured country.

Since 2003, four independently motivated forms of violence have defined Iraq's security environment: the anti-Coalition insurgency, terrorism, sectarianism, and Shiite-on-Shiite violence. As of 2009, the threat posed by these four fronts has been dramatically alleviated due to the formation of the Sunni Awakening councils, Muqtada al-Sadr's self-imposed militia ceasefire, and the U.S. adoption of a counterinsurgency strategy of clearing and holding territory. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has taken advantage of the improved security regime to consolidate and centralize his power. However, Maliki's efforts have hastened a new form of instability many have characterized as inevitable, an instability that has emerged at the intersection of differing strategic interests held by Iraq's two formal governmental institutions: the KRG and the national government in Baghdad.

There are five political issues that characterize the KRG-Baghdad rift:

- Kurdish foreign oil contracts
- Redistribution of oil revenues
- The role and size of the Kurdish peshmerga (militia) forces
- The growing debate over centralization and federalism
- Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution dealing with disputed territories

Last November, five committees consisting of members from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), Prime Minister Maliki's Dawa Party, and the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) were formed to tackle most of these

unresolved issues. Though progress seems somewhat fruitful when dealing with differences on the gas and oil laws, progress on Article 140 seems to be gaining no traction.

Article 140 is the most contentious issue behind the rising tensions. The article refers to a constitutional provision that sets forth a framework—normalization, census, and referendum—for dealing with territories disputed between the KRG and national government. Its implementation deadline of December 2007 was not met by Maliki, which has frustrated the Kurds. During the former Ba’athist regime, the government executed an “Arabization” campaign in Kurdish territories, expelling Kurdish families from their homes while providing financial incentives for Arab families to replace them. Today, Article 140 represents a symbolic justice to many Kurds who call for a reversal of the Arabization campaign. Though Article 140 represents 30 to 40 territories in dispute in Iraq, most emphasis is placed on the city of Kirkuk. With an ethnically mixed population of Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, and Christians, the Kirkuk region holds 13 percent of Iraq’s known oil reserves (*Middle East Times*, February 18). Turkey, Iran, Syria, and many in Iraq believe that Kurdish acquisition of Kirkuk will sustain the economic base for a future declaration of statehood, and fear that it may provoke their oppressed Kurdish populations to secede as well.

During a November 20 press conference, Maliki claimed that the Iraqi constitution was put together too hastily and supported amending the governmental provision for federalism. Maliki openly called for greater centralization and for more powers to be allocated to Baghdad. The KRG immediately condemned this idea, warning that the Prime Minister planned to suspend the constitution. Maliki’s remarks led the Director of Kurdish Intelligence, Masrour Barzani, to make an early January visit to the U.S. Department of Defense. Barzani told his American hosts that the Kurds planned to fight any changes to the country’s constitution, pointing to the implementation of Article 140 as a critical solution to Iraq’s political problems (*Kurdish Globe*, January 9). Today, many Kurds fear that Maliki will use his upgraded political clout to call for a stronger central government, which Kurds fear would undermine Kurdish regional autonomy and any hopes of Article 140’s implementation.

Regarding the Iraq Army’s January military deployment around Kirkuk, peshmerga leader Mustafa Chawrash said, “The movement of the division is not normal and it is a planned agenda” (UPI, January 22). The army intends to create “a military belt” encircling the city, constraining contact with the Kurdistan provinces of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil and reducing the presence of Kurdish forces in Kirkuk (*Kurdish Globe*, January 22). According to Chawrash, the commander of the Iraqi 12th Division is General Abdul-Ameer Ridha, an ex-Ba’athist who led the same division against the Kurds during the Saddam Hussein regime. The U.S. military imprisoned him for four months before he returned to his post. The division consists of about 9,000 soldiers – 70 percent Arab, 20 percent Kurdish, and 10 percent Turkmen. The Kurdish press claims some Kurdish officers from the 12th Division, like the 9th Brigade and 2nd Battalion commanders, were transferred from Kirkuk to Tikrit city and replaced by Arab and Turkmen officers (*Kurdish Globe*, January 22).

Last December, then-President George W. Bush signed a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iraq, creating a legal framework for a continued U.S. presence in Iraq. In effect since January 1, the SOFA requires U.S. forces to pull out of Iraqi cities by July 2009, with complete withdrawal from the country by the end of 2011. Many Kurds are uneasy about the prospects of the American safety-net disappearing. This fear is in large part inspired by Maliki’s use of the Iraq Army for political ends. Last summer, under the pretext of Operation Bashaer al-Kheir—a military campaign directed towards militias and terrorists in Diyala province—Maliki ordered the Iraqi Army to invade Khanaqin (see *Terrorism Focus*, September 18, 2008). An oil-rich city, Khanaqin is a disputed territory under Article 140. Many Kurds found this military decision provocative and dangerous since Kurdish peshmerga soldiers had occupied the area since 2005.

Dangerous rhetoric has also accompanied the expected American withdrawal and Maliki’s use of the military (*Azzaman* [Baghdad], December 2, 2008). Kurdistan PM Nechirvan Barzani recently suggested the possibility of an Arab-Kurdish civil war if Article 140 was not implemented (*Middle East Times*, February 18). Kamal Kirkuki, the KRG Deputy Speaker, went so far as to call al-Maliki “a danger to Iraq and to democracy; he is a second Saddam” (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 19). The growing Arab-Kurdish divide is also intensifying on the basis of a classical security dilemma: as a power vacuum develops in accordance with U.S. disengagement, both sides will

unilaterally attempt to fill power gaps because neither side can afford to trust that the other's future behavior will be benign. As a senior Kurdish official put it while speaking on condition of anonymity, "Kurds have made a judgment that he [Maliki] cannot be trusted and that's the worst part of this—it's not about the technicalities of oil law and this and that—this issue of trust was shattered" (CSM, December 11, 2008).

While the Obama administration seeks to disengage from Iraq, the transition of power is likely to increase tensions between Baghdad and the KRG as factions compete to out-leverage one another. Maliki's consolidation of power and provincial electoral gains have lessened his dependence on the PUK, KDP, and ISCI—the three factions that once saved his government from collapsing in August 2007. This may provoke a realignment of power amongst Iraq's domestic players. The surprising performance of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi in the January provincial elections will provide an adequate challenge to Maliki in national elections later this year. This circumstance may lead the PUK, KDP, and ISCI to form a common alliance to save Iraqi federalism. Conversely, strong nationalists—like Shiite firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sunni Arab tribesmen—may adhere to an alliance of convenience with Maliki.

*Ramzy Mardini was Special Assistant on Iranian Studies at the Center for Strategic Studies in Amman, Jordan, and a former Iraq Desk Officer for Political Affairs at the Department of State.*

## **Polish-Born Muslim Convert Sentenced for Leading Role in Tunisian Synagogue Bombing**

A French court has sentenced Christian Ganczarski, a Polish-born German national and convert to Islam, to 18 years in prison for his role in the 2002 bombing of a synagogue in Tunisia. Though Ganczarski has been under suspicion for years, it was only the recent intervention of a shadowy Paris-based counterterrorism center that allowed the long-time al-Qaeda associate to be brought to trial.

The June 2003 arrest of Ganczarski at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport while he was in transit from Riyadh to Frankfurt was an early example of cooperation between

international intelligence agencies using the Paris-based Counterterrorist Intelligence Center (CTIC), better known as "Alliance Base." First mentioned publicly in an article published in the *Washington Post* in 2005, the "Alliance Base" is a counterterrorism command center in which security officers from Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, and the United States work together towards the common goal of defending the West from al-Qaeda attacks. To properly understand the level of cooperation and the priority given by Western governments to counter the very real al-Qaeda threat, it is worth bearing in mind that the decision to establish the command in France was made in 2002, at a time when the French and American administrations were involved in a deeply acrimonious dispute over whether to invade Iraq. The name "Alliance Base" is a direct reference to the meaning of the name al-Qaeda – "The Base." The center has been at the nexus of a number of delicate international counterterrorism efforts. When the German government recognized that it was unable to prosecute him in his home nation, it arranged to have him transported through France where stricter terrorist legislation meant that he could be arrested and charged.

In France, Ganczarski was charged under the nation's "association with terrorism" legislation for his role in the April 11, 2002, bombing of the Ghriba synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia. The attack, which claimed 21 lives, including 14 German and two French nationals (it was as a result of the French deaths that Ganczarski could be tried in France), was carried out by a 25-year-old Tunisian named Nizar Naouar, who detonated a gas-filled truck outside the historical synagogue. Seen as the first major success by an al-Qaeda affiliated group since the September 11, 2001 attacks, the bombing was claimed by the "Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Sites" in a letter received by the London-based Arab dailies *Al-Quds al-Arabi* and *Al-Hayat* (*Die Tageszeitung*, April 17, 2002). This was the same group that claimed the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in East Africa. *Al-Quds* also reported receiving a will attached to the letter in the name of Seif ul-Dinn el Tunisi, dated July 5, 2000 (AP, April 17, 2002). Prior to the attack it was reported that the German Embassy in Tunis had received a letter from "al-Qaeda's Tunisian wing" in January 2002, threatening German assets in the Islamic world. A German tour group in the country reported being attacked five days before the bombing by a group of protesters who pelted their bus with rocks while chanting "Bin Laden" and "Arafat." (*Le Figaro*, April 18, 2002)

The connection to Ganczarski was established as a result of an intercepted telephone call made by Naouar at 6:18 a.m. on the morning of the strike, in which he uses his nom-de-guerre Seif al-Din and asks his friend Ganczarski for “dawa” (blessing) before carrying out his attack (*Der Spiegel*, April 22, 2002; *Le Journal de la Dimanche*, February 6). The two had met at a camp in Afghanistan in the late 1990s. Naouar was also reported to have made a call to al-Qaeda mastermind Khalid Shaykh Muhammad in Pakistan before the attack, a number that Ganczarski also called at around the same time. The intercepted telephone call between Ganczarski and Khalid Shaykh Muhammad was later cited as the first in a chain of events that led to Khalid’s subsequent arrest in Pakistan (*Telegraph*, March 4, 2004). Khalid Shaykh Muhammad and Walid Naouar (Nizar’s brother) were co-defendants with Ganczarski in the trial, though Khalid’s current detention for an indefinite term in Guantanamo meant that French judges had decided he would be tried separately once he was able to appear in court (*Der Spiegel*, February 6). Much was made in parts of the French press of the fact that the court decided to not call upon Muhammad’s witness statements, which Ganczarski appealed to be included (*Le Figaro*, January 6; AFP, January 6)

Ultimately, this phone call is the only direct connection between Ganczarski and the atrocity in Djerba, a fact that made his successful prosecution in Germany very unlikely. At the same time, his long track record of connections with al-Qaeda and the fact that French citizens were killed in the Djerba attack meant that he was liable for prosecution under French law. According to German authorities, these ties date back to 1991 when, as an early member of al-Qaeda, he was responsible for recruiting fighters in Krefeld and Essen in West Germany. Born in 1966 to Polish Catholic parents in Gliwicie, his family moved to the Western German city of Mülheim an der Ruhr when he was young (*Der Spiegel*, February 5). In the late 1980s he converted to Islam—apparently thanks to a North African co-worker he met as a metallurgist in one of the many Rhur valley factories—and started down the path of radicalization. In 1992, he was spotted by a visiting radical cleric and won a scholarship to study Islam in Medina as part of a Saudi-driven effort to convert Westerners to the Wahhabi brand of Islam prevalent in the Kingdom (*Le Monde*, January 28). [1]

Ganczarski proved to be a less-than-stellar student, however, and he was unable to overcome linguistic and academic difficulties to get into the university. His zeal, however, remained strong, and from August-September 1999 he made the first of six trips to Afghanistan (*Der Spiegel*, January 5). Here he was spotted by fellow convert “Jihad Jack” Roche, a British-Australian convert to Islam who was convicted of being involved with Jemaah Islamiya in a series of planned bombings in Australia. Roche testified before the court in Paris via videolink that he had seen Ganczarski at one of these camps in deep conversation with Osama bin Laden (AFP, January 26). It has also been confirmed that Khalid Shaykh Muhammad knew Ganczarski and used him to transmit messages to Osama. Further video evidence was provided to the court through an al-Qaeda propaganda video shot on January 8, 2001, at the Tarnak Farm al-Qaeda training camp in Kandahar, where Ganczarski is seen sitting in the front row with Mohammed Atta sitting behind him. Ganczarski dismissed this as a coincidence, asking, “When you go to the theatre, do you know everyone in the audience?” (*Der Spiegel*, February 5) It has also been alleged that Ganczarski knew Mounir El Motassadeq, the Moroccan national who was initially imprisoned in Germany as a co-conspirator to the 9/11 plotters but has now had his sentence overturned by the German constitutional court (Deutsche Welle, June 12, 2006).

What is unclear, however, is the degree to which Ganczarski was a leader in al-Qaeda. The prosecution provided documentary evidence found in Kandahar in 2002 that identified him, under his nom-de-guerre Abu Muhammad al-Alamani, as the “contact for the recruitment of new terrorists.” Furthermore, a set of laminated cards found on the bodies of dead al-Qaeda fighters giving the radio call signs of the leadership included radio code CG 135 for Abu Muhammad al-Alamani (*Der Spiegel*, February 5). Most coverage has focused on his apparent technical and computer skills. At the same time, the absence of clear links from Ganczarski to other plots has raised questions in some minds about his role as a senior planner, though his membership in al-Qaeda is not in doubt. In the end, the prosecution won the case, with the French court handing Ganczarski and his co-conspirator Walid Naouar 18- and 12-year sentences respectively. Walid was accused of providing false documents and a satellite phone; two others accused of providing false documentation earlier in the plot will stand trial later this year (*Der Spiegel*, February 6). The fate of the final conspirator, Khalid

Shaykh Muhammad, remains unclear, though it appears he will face either execution or a lifetime of incarceration for his terrorist activities before he is able to stand trial in France.

*Raffaello Pantucci is a Research Associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London.*

Notes:

1. See Milena Uhlmann, "European Converts to Terrorism," *Middle East Quarterly*, 15(3), Summer 2008, pp.31-37.

## Government Forces Overrun Tuareg Rebel Camps in Northern Mali

By Andrew McGregor

Mali's security forces appear to have broken the latest Tuareg rebellion in that country as a month-long offensive concludes with the seizure of all Tuareg bases in north Mali. The leader of the revolt, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, is believed to have escaped across the border to Algeria, where he may try to regroup despite the loss of most of his fighters to amnesties or Malian military operations. Mali is eager to bring a series of Tuareg rebellions to an end to allow for more intensive oil exploration by Chinese and Australian firms already at work in northern Mali.

The offensive followed a deadly raid by Ag Bahanga's Alliance Touareg Nord-Mali (ATNM) forces on a military camp in northern Mali in December. A rebel column led by Ag Bahanga is reported to have traveled 1,000 kilometers from its base near the Algerian border to attack the military garrison at Namapala. After the garrison repelled the first attack, a former rebel recently integrated into the army killed his platoon leader, leading to panic in the garrison forces. The second attack overran the camp, killing anywhere from 9 to 20 soldiers (*Jeune Afrique*, January 27).

Afterwards, questions were raised as to how a Tuareg column was able to advance for a week undetected. Newsmagazine *Jeune Afrique* reported that the column was spotted by U.S. satellites, but the intelligence was not taken seriously in Bamako. Mali lost its own aerial reconnaissance capability when the Ukrainian pilots from its military helicopters returned home last April after one of the pilots was killed by rebel fire (*Jeune Afrique*, January 27).

At least 30 rebels were killed during the government's response, an offensive through the Gao and Kidal regions of north Mali that included a three-hour battle at Tin Essalek on January 19 (*Le Malien* [Bamako], January 22). A prisoner who later succumbed to his wounds was identified by the Malian press as Shaykh Abdul, a Lebanese mercenary (*Le Malien*, January 19). Ag Bahanga proclaimed, "Today, the only alternative offered to us is the counter-thrust and armed warfare" (*El Khabar* [Algiers], January 25). U.S. Special Forces training missions are based in Mali as part of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, but there are no reports of direct U.S. involvement in the government offensive.

The offensive was led by Colonel Elhadj Gamou, a Tuareg, and Colonel Mohamed Ould Meïdou, an Arab from Timbuktu (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], February 4). The combination of these two hardened officers with an intimate knowledge of northern Mali's barren and inhospitable terrain shattered Ag Bahanga's forces in a matter of weeks. At the risk of pitting Tuaregs against Arabs, Bamako has allowed Colonel Meïdou to assemble a force of several hundred Bérabich Arabs for the work of eliminating Ag Bahanga's rebels (*Jeune Afrique*, January 27). Hama Ag Sidahmed, an ATNM spokesman, alleged that Mali's regular army has yielded its place to combined Arab-Tuareg militias designed to fight the Tuareg rebel movement (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], February 4). The Bamako government is dominated by the southern Bambara, part of the larger West African Mande group.

Security forces reported the capture of 22 rebels and quantities of vehicles, fuel, food, arms (including heavy machine guns), and ammunition as they swept through the Tuareg camps. A Malian government official claimed that "All the operational and logistical bases of the group of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga have been taken and are under the control of our army and security forces" (*Independent*, February 11; *L'Essor* [Bamako], February 11). A



spokesman for Ag Bahanga later denied in an interview that any rebel bases had been captured, claiming that the only bases taken by the military belonged to Algerian traders (BBC, February 11). Ag Bahanga's main base was at Tinzaoutin, close to the Algerian border. Other bases were located at Tin Assalek, Abeïbara, Boureïssa, and Inerdjane (*L'Essor*, February 11). From these locations his men took scores of soldiers hostage and planted land mines on routes likely to be used by the military.

Ag Bahanga has repeatedly rejected participation in the Algerian-brokered peace talks that have brought most Tuareg rebels back into the national fold. Under pressure from the military offensive, Ag Bahanga had a sudden change of heart and appealed to Bamako and Algiers to reopen the peace process, but Mali's government has run out of patience with Ag Bahanga and clearly stated there would be no further negotiations (*El Watan* [Algiers], February 12; *L'Indépendant*, February 4). The government in Bamako described Ag Bahanga's appeal as a typical delaying tactic employed whenever things began to turn badly for the rebel leader (Afrol News, February 5). The last of Ag Bahanga's hostages were released on January 25, 2009, after mediation from Libya and Algeria (*Afrique en ligne*, January 26).

The July 2006 Algiers agreement calls for greater development efforts in the northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal on the part of the national government in return for Tuareg rebels abandoning their demands for regional autonomy. A key part of the negotiations focused on the creation of mixed security units of former rebels and government troops to keep order in the north. Ag Bahanga's rapidly diminishing group of rebels appears to have little public support in the region, possibly confirming speculation that the ATNM is only a front for Ag Bahanga's smuggling activities (*Le Malien*, January 22; BBC, November 5, 2007).

On February 6, a Malian army officer spoke to the French press from the remote northern region, stating that Ag Bahanga was "no longer on Malian territory" (AFP, February 6). Algerian officials monitoring implementation of the Algiers agreement confirmed Malian reports that Ag Bahanga had crossed into Algeria with Malian troops in a pursuit as far as the border (*Ennahar* [Algiers], February 6). As the government offensive continued, ATNM fighters and members of Ag Bahanga's own family began to pour into camps where former members of the dominant Tuareg

rebel group, The Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), were gathering for a disarmament ceremony in the town of Kidal rather than follow Ag Bahanga across the frontier (Radio France Internationale, February 12). One of the leaders of those seeking reconciliation with the government is Lieutenant Colonel Hassane Fagaga, who twice deserted the army to join his rebel cousin, Ag Bahanga (*L'Essor*, September 18, 2007).

The Ag Bahanga rebellion is the latest in a series of Tuareg uprisings in Mali and Niger since those countries gained independence from France in the 1960s. In a promising sign of surrender, nearly 600 former rebels met with authorities in Kidal on February 17 to lay down their weapons and return arms and vehicles seized from government forces (*Elkhabar*, February 17). The Tuareg rebellion has been exhausted for now, but continuing oil exploration on Tuareg lands in northern Mali promises to provide a new point of contention between the vastly different peoples of northern and southern Mali.

*Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world.*