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Iraqi Awakening Council

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TALIBAN COMMANDER DESCRIBES OFFENSIVE IN AFGHANISTAN'S NORTHERN PROVINCES

Ongoing Taliban military operations in northern Afghanistan were recently described by Khalid Haidari, the “official in charge of [Taliban] military affairs” in the province of Faryab, on the border with Turkmenistan (Voice of Jihad, May 17). The population of Faryab is largely Uzbek and Turkmen, with a sizeable Parsiwan minority (a Shi’a Tajik sub-group). Located far from the Pashtun-dominated regions of the south, where most Taliban operations take place, Faryab has been relatively peaceful since the 2001 U.S. invasion. Despite the lack of Pashtuns in Faryab, Haidari insists that the “mujahid people” of Faryab province have supported the Taliban both financially and with manpower. “The reality, contrary to what was in the past, is that the north is not a tranquil area for the internal and foreign enemies either.” Last year, the Taliban appointed Abdul Hamid Akhundzada as “governor” of Faryab province, but Akhundzada was soon killed in a raid by security forces after they received a tip-off regarding his location (Reuters, July 19, 2008).

Haidari denies the Coalition claims that the north has been cleared of mujahideen, explaining that this is a routine reaction by Coalition forces when they fail to expand the areas under their control. The Taliban leader claimed to have recently inflicted a “shameful defeat” on the enemy in “face to face fighting” that has left the Coalition in a defensive state, only able to venture out of the urban areas with an escort of dozens of tanks and aircraft.

Regarding the forthcoming Afghan elections, Haidari maintains they are nothing more than “a conspiracy by the Americans. We are seriously trying to prevent them... This is because elections in the presence of invaders are a great betrayal of Islam and the homeland.” He urged all Afghans to refrain from voting or from working in the elections.

Haidari dispensed with the coming American “surge” in Afghanistan by noting that the more troops the enemy deploys, the greater the opportunity for Taliban fighters to inflict casualties. “If our faith and belief is strong and we rely on God alone, the decrease or increase in the number of foreign soldiers or their equipment will not affect our activities.”

Faryab province is in the German-controlled sector of Afghanistan, known as Regional Command North. In response to a request from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) last year, German forces carried out a joint operation with the Afghan army designed to flush out Taliban fighters who infiltrated Faryab and neighboring Badghis province (Deutsche Welle, May 16, 2008). The German mandate calls for military operations in Afghanistan to be of a limited nature. Another 1,000 troops are on their way to join Germany’s ISAF force in northern Afghanistan, bringing the size of the force up to 4,500 troops. Four Taliban fighters were killed in an encounter with Afghan police in Faryab on May 12 (Reuters, May 12).

CHANGES TO AL-SHABAAB LEADERSHIP AS MILITANTS CLOSE IN ON MOGADISHU

Even as Somalia’s militant al-Shabaab movement closes in on the capital of Mogadishu in league with its allies in the Hizb al-Islam coalition, there are signs that a major shakeup in the Shabaab leadership is under way.

On May 21, Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage, who is also known as Shaykh Ali Dheere, replaced al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Mukhtar Robow “Abu Mansur” (Radio Simba, May 21; Shabelle Media Network, May 22). Abu Mansur has long been the public face of al-Shabaab as well as its most prominent field commander. His successor was previously the al-Shabaab chairman in Hiran region. Abu Mansur said at a press conference that he welcomed the move, though his new role in the movement was not outlined and little has been heard from him since the change was made. The transition appeared amicable, but no explanation was offered for the surprising move.

There have been unconfirmed reports of differences within al-Shabaab’s leadership, particularly over the movement’s continuing Salafist-inspired destruction of Somalia’s Sufi Muslim heritage, which has inspired a new Sufi-based movement, Ahlu Sunna Wa’l-Jama’a, to take up arms against al-Shabaab. However, a new round of destruction of Sufi shrines and tombs in the Bardhere district of Gedo region indicates that no change has occurred to this controversial policy (see Terrorism Focus, February 6).

Shaykh Fu’ad Abdullahi, the local al-Shabaab leader explained the demolition of tombs by al-Shabaab forces outside the port city of Kismayo in early May: “The destroyed gravesites were places where people worshipped and this is forbidden by Islam” (Garowe Online, May 6). The government’s implementation of Shari’a (Islamic law) in Somalia, a principal aim of al-Shabaab, may also have created divisions within the movement.

The replacement of Abu Mansur occurred just days after al-Shabaab’s official leader was seriously injured. The more reclusive Amir (Commander) of al-Shabaab, Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane “Abu Zubayr” (a.k.a. Ahmad Abdi Aw Muhammad, a.k.a. Shaykh Mukhtar “Abu Zubayr”), appears to have been killed or incapacitated by an accidental bomb-making explosion at a safe house outside Mogadishu on May 17.

Shaykh Abdi Godane was seriously wounded in what was variously described as a training exercise with explosives, a car bomb that detonated prematurely, or an incident involving a Pakistani suicide bomber who accidentally crossed the wrong wires while being fitted with his suicide vest (Garowe Online, May 18, May 20; Waagacusub.com, May 18). As many as 17 Shabaab members may have been killed in the blast, including a number of leaders present for a meeting with Abdi Godane and at least three Pakistani volunteers. Only days before, the normally reticent Abdi Godane issued an 11-minute audiotape condemning the new government of Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad, in which he states, “The so-called government cannot be described as an Islamic government, because it was created to destroy Islamists in Somalia” (Garowe Online, May 13). The Shaykh made clear al-Shabaab’s commitment to a global jihad, saying “We will fight and the wars will not end until Islamic Shari’a is implemented in all continents in the world and until Muslims liberate Jerusalem... The fighting in Mogadishu is between the forces of Allah and elements whose intention is to introduce democracy

and Jewish theories, so we ask the population in the capital to choose the right path.” (AFP, May 13). Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane is believed to have organized several suicide bombings in Somalia and Somaliland (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 8, 2008).

Indian Army Reacts to the Taliban Threat

By Animesh Roul

For India’s military, the Taliban is a threat looming large on the horizon. The perception of the Taliban making inroads to India has increased since December 2008, when Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) chief Baitullah Mahsud vowed to fight alongside the Pakistan army if a conflict broke out between India and Pakistan (*The News* [Islamabad], December 23, 2008; see *Terrorism Focus*, December 12, 2008). The verbal threat has since been underlined by the Taliban’s eastward movement inside Pakistan, from its bases in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to the city of Lahore, close to the Indian border in Pakistan’s Punjab province (India has its own, smaller Punjab province on the other side of the boundary). The advance on Lahore was marked initially by the Manawan police academy siege just outside of Lahore on March 30, in which 8 policemen were killed and 95 wounded, and more recently by the May 27 suicide bombing of the Lahore headquarters of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (*The News*, May 28; *Geo News*, May 28). Manawan is strikingly close to the international border with India; hence the fear of the Taliban reaching India through the Wagah border drew enormous public and military attention at the time. These fears are now reinforced by the Taliban bombing in Lahore.

Particularly worrisome were the conversations intercepted by India’s intelligence services between Lashkar-e-Taiba militants in Jammu and Kashmir that gave hints of a Taliban presence inside Kashmir. [1] TTP spokesman Muslim Khan refuted the reports but said if the Taliban ever decided to fight the Indians in Kashmir, no power on earth could stop them (*Greater Kashmir*, April 20).

Amidst these developments, speculations are rife about the possible impact of the Taliban’s growing strength on India’s security. Fears are being expressed by political and military elites about a potential Taliban incursion into Indian territory in the near future. Similarly, anxiety

over a “nuclear-armed Taliban” in the event it takes over Pakistan’s nuclear installations and missile arsenal also dominates the security discourse in India. Indian Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor has expressed his concerns with the growing number of warheads being developed by Pakistan: “Even if Pakistan is looking at deterrence, they require a minimum amount. But when you keep increasing [the number of warheads], it is a matter of concern....I think the world community should put the kind of pressure that is required for Pakistan to cap their nuclear weapons” (Sify.com, May 29).

The issue of the Taliban turned political in the recent parliamentary elections in India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh drew attention to the possibility of a Taliban attack during the elections. He was overtly critical of Pakistan’s peace deal with the Taliban in Swat in light of recent military aid to Pakistan. According to Singh, New Delhi has no problems with economic aid for building schools, roads and hospitals in Pakistan, but is concerned with military aid that has been used against India in the past (Indo Asian News Service, April 20). The opposition right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called the Taliban’s advance in Pakistan a threat to India’s national security, calling for better counterterrorism mechanisms to be put in place (Indo Asian News Service, April 25).

At the time of the Manawan police academy siege by Taliban militants, the Indian army second-in-command, Lieutenant General Noble Thamburaj, responded to the threat cautiously, though asserting that the army would thwart any jihadi spill-over (*Times of India*, March 31). General Deepak Kapoor denounced the impending threat of the Taliban and noted that any attempt by terrorists to infiltrate the border would be met by a three-tier defensive system (Rediff.com, January 31; Indo-Asian News Service, April 14, NDTV India, April 14).

With over 1 million active-service personnel and 1.8 million reserves, the Indian Army has 13 corps organized under six operational commands and one training command. Of these, eight corps and three commands (Western, Northern and South-Western) are specifically dedicated to countering the Pakistani military (*Daily Times*, Lahore, May 27).

Any Indian military response to a Taliban threat from Pakistan would take place within the context of India’s “Cold Start” military doctrine, implemented in early 2004. By creating eight Integrated Battle Groups

deployed close to the border, “Cold Start” significantly decreases the mobilization time needed by full strike corps while providing for rapid pursuit of enemy forces and penetration of enemy territory without the old emphasis on holding ground (*Daily Times*, May 27). By design, penetration efforts would be shallow in depth in order to avoid crossing various “nuclear-response red-lines” set by Islamabad. Indian Army operations would be closely supported by the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy where possible (*Friday Times* [Lahore], December 19-25, 2008).

The “Cold Start” doctrine was devised in response to the slow mobilization of the Indian Army and the hesitation of its command structure in “Operation Parakram” (Operation Victory), the Indian Army’s reaction to the December 2001 attack by Pakistani militants on the Parliament buildings in New Delhi. In short, the Indian plan “seems to be aimed at inflicting significant military reverses on the Pakistan Army in a limited war scenario short of a nuclear war”. [2]

In the midst of India’s Taliban anxiety, former Chief of Army Staff Shankar Roychowdhury wrote a column in a leading daily urging India to “recognize the Taliban threat” as far as India’s national security is concerned but cautioned India’s leaders and media “not to hype it” beyond a certain point (*Asian Age*, May 5). He warned that the Taliban could create an “existential threat” to India if they succeeded in seizing power in Pakistan through a radicalized government under their control. He also noted the threat of “nuclearization of jihad” in this scenario cannot be ignored and demands serious attention from the security establishment.

Brahma Singh, a retired Army officer and commentator claimed that the Taliban is the real threat to India, urging the security establishment and the political leadership to “recognize the inevitability of a confrontation with the state-sponsored Taliban sooner rather than later” (*MeriNews*, May 8).

Following the Manawan incident, reports from border areas of Indian Punjab indicated that civilians had begun to feel insecure following the Taliban’s advance into that region. There are growing fears that Punjab’s own jihadi groups are now aiding the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in carrying out bombings and other operations close to the Indian border in Pakistani Punjab (*Dawn* [Karachi], May 24). Recognizing the people’s apprehensions about the geographical spread and the emergence of the Taliban forces as a grave security

threat, the Indian military has just finished an exercise code named Hind Shakti to check the operational readiness of its elite Kharga Corps in southwest Punjab (*India Today*, May 6).

The Ambala-based II “Kharga” Corps is one of the Indian Army’s two designated “strike corps.” It consists of two infantry divisions (including one Reorganized Army Plains Infantry Division - RAPID), a division and independent brigade of armor and a brigade of engineers.

Hind Shakti was a three-day exercise carried out in the Punjab plains (about 100 km from the Pakistan border) beginning on May 3. It involved India’s “premier corps” conducting what the Indian Army described as a “blitzkrieg type armored incursion, emphasizing rapid penetration into enemy territory.” The exercise included “intensive electronic and information warfare” and the coordinated use of a wide variety of intelligence and surveillance equipment, including satellites, helicopter-borne systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and ground-based surveillance systems. The exercise began with a massed mechanized attack, followed by a parachute drop by airborne troops and the insertion of assault troops by helicopter (Indian Ministry of Defence, Press Information Bureau, Statements of May 3; May 6).

The three day operational exercise at the Indo-Pakistan border was aimed at any Taliban or al-Qaeda threat emanating from Pakistan as well as serving as a confidence-building measure for a worried population.

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Notes:

1. For the full transcript of the intercepted conversation, see, “Taliban men sneak into J&K,” NDTV, April 7, http://www.ndtv.com/news/india/taliban_men_sneak_into_jk_ndtv_reports.php

2. See Subhash Kapila, “Indian Army’s New ‘Cold Start’ War Doctrine Strategically Reviewed, Part 1, South Asia Analysis Group Paper no. 991, May 4, 2004; Part 2, SAAG Paper no. 1013, June 1, 2004

Al-Qaeda Investigation Raises Questions on British Counterterrorism Cooperation with Damascus

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

In response to reports appearing in the British media, the Syrian embassy in London released a statement on May 10 regarding two British nationals who were arrested in Damascus on March 17, Maryam Kallis and Yasser Zahur Ahmed. According to the statement, “interrogations indicated that both Ms. Kallis and Mr. Ahmed are working for a terrorist network related to al-Qaeda organization... other members of the network were also arrested by the Syrian authorities” (Press TV [Tehran], May 11). The Syrian statement said Kallis received funds from her husband, Massoud Ahmed, who resides in the UK and was allegedly responsible for sending funds to the terrorist network (*Daily Mail*, May 11). The statement denied claims raised by British Labor Party member Lord Nazir Ahmed (who has taken up their case) suggesting that British intelligence was involved in providing information to Syrian security forces that led to the arrest. Despite the Syrian denials, Lord Ahmed maintains he has proof of British involvement. The UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) declined to comment as part of a policy of refusing to discuss intelligence matters (*Guardian*, May 14). The pair have been held by Syrian authorities without charge since March 17.

The 36-year old Kallis moved to Damascus with her family in 2002 to study Arabic at the Abu al-Nur Islamic Foundation (also known as the Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro Institute), which attracts students from all over the Muslim world. There were reports that the school had been under surveillance by Syrian security services for several months prior to the arrests (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], May 18). Later Kallis went back to the UK in 2008 but returned to Damascus in March 2009 without her husband “to collect her children and bring them home” (BBC, March 31).

Difficulties in keeping track of foreign students and their activities within Syria have led to a proposed reform that would require all foreign students of Islam and Arabic to register at a single government-run school, rather than at the over 30 academies that take foreign students at present (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], May 18).

28-year old Yasser Zahur Ahmed, who was arrested separately, travelled to the country with his British wife and daughter to study Arabic at the same complex in December 2006. Ahmed, who previously worked with mentally ill children in east London, was in the second year of a degree course when he was arrested (*Daily Mail*, May, 11). His precise role as an alleged al-Qaeda operative remains undefined.

The Syrian regime usually treats jihadist related information in a highly secretive fashion, making it difficult to confirm whether Kallis and Ahmed are genuinely linked to al-Qaeda or any other terrorist group (see *Terrorism Monitor* October 24, 2008).

Syria’s accusations against the two British citizens come as Syria adopts a carrot-and-stick policy in dealing with the West on the counterterrorism file. According to a London-based Syrian journalist who spoke to Jamestown on condition of anonymity, these developments come in the context of President Barak Obama’s decision to renew sanctions against Syria, first imposed in 2004. The Obama administration justified the renewal by pointing to Syria’s support of terrorism, pursuit of nuclear weapons and missiles and its willingness to undertake actions that undermine U.S. and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq (AFP, May 9). Syria is capable of disrupting U.S. plans in Iraq and this is how it uses “a stick”, according to the Syrian journalist.

“The carrot” comes as Damascus demonstrates it can be cooperative in counterterrorism issues. Despite the Syrian denial of any British intelligence involvement in this particular case, there is now an ongoing “security co-operation” between Syria and the UK, according to FCO Minister of State for the Middle East, Bill Rammell, who confirmed the existence of British-Syrian cooperation in counterterrorism measures (*al-Watan* [Damascus], April 5). Rammell said the UK government wants this cooperation to continue, beginning with a new joint project funded by the British government and conducted by the Centre of Islamic Studies in Syria. The project aims to show the “tolerant face of Islam” and de-radicalize the jihadis’ sympathizers (*al-Watan*, April 5). There have also been claims that the British security agencies tipped off their Syrian counterparts to the alleged terrorist activities of the two British citizens as part of a British-Syrian antiterrorism cooperation agreement concluded last November (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], May 18).

Apart from the dynamics of Syrian-Western relations, it worth noting that since the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, Syria has become more influenced by the jihadi movement. Syrian nationals have recently become involved in jihadi activities, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and Europe. In some ways the Syrian group of Salafi-Jihadis is similar to the Egyptian group of the early 1990s or the Saudi group in early 2000. These Syrians have associated with the new generation of Salafi-Jihadis who were associated with the emergence of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq) and his project of creating an al-Qaeda branch in the Levant. Syrian involvement in jihadi activities persisted after al-Zarqawi was killed in 2006. On the other hand, due to its proximity to Iraq, Syria has become a transit hub for jihadis moving to Iraq, which means it is vulnerable to the so-called "Iraqi Alumni" phenomenon. Addressing this issue will require Syria to be more transparent in revealing information regarding Salafi-Jihadi incidents in order to encourage other states to increase their counterterrorist cooperation with Syria.

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Al-Qaeda and the Iraqi Resistance Seek to Win Over Fighters of the Awakening Councils

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

After a gradual handover process, the Sunni fighters of the Sahwa (Awakening) Councils have come under the responsibility of Iraq's Shi'a-led central government. From their emergence two years ago until recently, the Sahwa councils, which cooperated with Coalition forces to drive al-Qaeda out of their areas, have been paid and backed by American forces in Iraq.

On April 2, the handover was completed and all 92,000 men of the Sahwa councils transferred to the payroll and command of the Iraqi government (Elaph.com, April 2). Yet this date was barely indicated in the media, which was still busy reporting the aftermath of clashes in central Baghdad between Iraqi government forces and

the Sahwa fighters of the Sunni Fadhil neighborhood. The fighting broke out on March 28 when the Sahwa fighters protested the arrest of the leader of their group, Adil al-Mashadani. After a two-day operation supported by the American army, the Iraqi forces took control of the area and the Sahwa fighters surrendered. Two people were killed and 11 others arrested (al-Jazeera, March 30).

The spokesman of the Iraqi government pointed out that al-Mashadani was a wanted terrorist. An Iraqi military spokesman accused him of leading the local branch of the banned Ba'ath party, but one of al-Mashadani's men said after their defeat "The Sahwa is over now. Al-Qaeda and the bombings will be back" (*al-Hayat*, March 30). Violence increased by 40% in the month of April, with mass bombings in Shiite civilian areas and attacks on Sahwa fighters both on and off duty.

Al-Fadhil is a small neighborhood and it is unlikely there was a direct link between events there and the recent surge of violence in different areas around Iraq. Yet the events of al-Fadhil might be an indication of how the relations between the Iraqi government and the Sahwa councils could affect the security situation in that country.

By mid-2007, the American surge strategy had been applied and had started to work. Yet that strategy could not have been effective without the unexpected help of the Sunni population in Iraq. Thousands of Sunni fighters, many of whom were members of insurgent groups (including al-Qaeda), turned against the insurgency and started an alliance with the U.S. military. These fighters formed the first Sahwa councils. The Sahwa movement started in the western province of al-Anbar and expanded to all of the Sunni population in central Iraq. With American support they succeeded in pacifying their areas and violence consequently dropped in the country. Al-Qaeda lost its urban strongholds, all located in Sunni areas. Whereas al-Qaeda elements were comfortable enough in October 2006 to celebrate the declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq with a parade in the main street of al-Ramadi, capital of al-Anbar, within a matter of months Sahwa fighters defeated al-Qaeda in such a way that former American President George Bush was able to visit al-Ramadi in September and meet the founder of the first Sahwa Council, the late Shaykh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha (who was assassinated in a suicide attack a week after that meeting).

The Sahwa Councils and al-Qaeda's Infiltration Efforts

The Iraqi government and Shiite politicians often refer to an infiltration of the Sahwa councils by al-Qaeda and the Ba'ath party. In addition to the al-Fadhil events, recent developments have included the arrest of 11 Sahwa fighters in different areas around Baghdad and the arrest of Mullah Nadhim al-Jubouri, the prominent Sahwa leader and former member of al-Qaeda from Dhuluiya (north of Baghdad). Al-Jubouri was wanted on terrorism charges related to his earlier al-Qaeda membership and is also alleged to have played a leading role in the killing of Shiites in the town of Dujail (Reuters, May 3).

Many Sahwa leaders do not rule out the possibility of infiltration but see it as a result of government policies and actions. Adnan al-Janabi, a tribal leader from south Baghdad, warned that the security situation could collapse in his area and criticized the government for not fulfilling its promise to recruit Sahwa members from his area into the security forces; "It is possible that al-Qaeda will succeed in infiltrating the Sahwa councils if the situation stays the same" (*Al-Hayat*, April 23).

The major demand of the Sahwa members has been to join the Iraqi security forces. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has promised that only 20% of them would be able to join the Army and the police. The others are to have civilian jobs or pensions. The Iraqi government says the process of recruiting and employing Sahwa fighters is continuing while the latter believe government hesitation has created a stagnant situation (*Al-Hayat*, April 23).

In response to the clashes in al-Fadhil, al-Maliki took to the government-owned television station to deny reports of a clash with al-Sahwa. "What have been happening in al-Fadhil lately were not armed clashes with the Sahwa forces but with a Ba'ath party branch... We want what happened in al-Fadhil to be a message to all of those who follow the route of the gang ... They might think that they operate and make contact out of the sight of the state and its security forces. They are all under monitoring and surveillance and each of them will receive his fair punishment" (*al-Iraqiya*, April 3).

Al-Qaeda Makes an Offer

Al-Qaeda would not have missed the opportunity to gain something out of the row between al-Maliki and the Sahwa councils. The leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu

Hamza al-Muhajir (a.k.a. Abu Ayoub al-Masri), called upon the Sahwa fighters to switch their loyalty back to al-Qaeda and the insurgent groups. "The Sahwa fighters are criminals. They committed crimes against their religion and people. However, if they abandon what they do and sincerely repent to Allah we will not chase or hunt them down. Those who were in groups which claim jihad will have our word to ensure their safety on condition that they do not carry arms again until we make sure that their repentance is sincere" (*Alssiyasi.com*, April 22). It was interesting that al-Muhajir, who had not been heard from for almost two years, chose this moment to renew an offer he made earlier in late 2006. That offer did not bring much interest at the time, a rejection that led al-Qaeda in Iraq to form the Siddeeq brigade to fight the Sahwa Councils.

Recruitment Attempts by the Jihad and Change Front

Months before the current crisis, the Jihad and Change Front (JCF), an Iraqi insurgent organization, claimed that its attempt to change the loyalty of the Sahwa men had been met with a positive response. In an internet interview, a JCF spokesman claimed many Sahwa fighters were ready to join the resistance:

The front was approached by groups and individuals from the Sahwa councils...our call was for all who realized the scale of the conspiracy and the reality of the American traps...The response proves the sincerity of the JCF's initiative. It also indicates that those who are aligned with the occupying American forces to fight the extremists of al-Qaeda or to confront the Iranian-backed Safavid [i.e. Shi'a] militias have concluded that they served the occupation. Their positive response expresses their faithful intention to change their course and to make amends for what they have done against the country and the armed resistance. What also helped the Sahwa members was that the American occupying forces had used the Sahwa Councils for their occupying purpose. When the Sahwa Councils had done what the Americans wanted they were no longer necessary. The Americans started to get rid of them. With the increase in assassinations, hunting and arrests of the Sahwa elements, many of them decided to respond positively to the JCF initiative (*aljazeeraatalk.net*, September 26, 2008).

Conclusion

Trying to create a political representation to support their demands, many of the Sahwa councils formed political groups and participated in the last provincial election in January 2009. With the exception of the western province of al-Anbar, where the population is overwhelmingly Sunni and Sahwa Councils are part of the tribal structure of the society, most of the Sahwa groups failed to place members in parliament.

With their choices significantly reduced, the Sahwa are not in a comfortable negotiating position with the Iraqi government. If the latter intends to maintain a hardline approach, it will not be surprising if some of the Sahwa fighters decide to rejoin the insurgency or give up their positions in the government. The recent deterioration in the security situation might be an indication that some fighters have already done so. The Sahwa row reflects one of the most significant questions in post-war Iraq - how to deal with the Sunnis. It is no secret that many of the Sahwa council fighters used to be active members in the insurgent groups, including al-Qaeda. By the Iraqi and American definitions, they have committed crimes. They attacked Iraqi and Coalition forces and during the Shiite-Sunni sectarian conflict some of them may have been involved in crimes against civilians. Yet the Sunnis argue that the Shiite militias on the other side are guilty of similar behavior. There is currently a great need for a legal and political framework to deal with this situation. Without an effective and workable national reconciliation, the danger of a great deterioration in security will always be there, as proven by recent setbacks.

With a timetable now set for the American withdrawal from Iraq, sectarian tensions have become the major challenge to Iraq's stability. Both the Shiite and Sunni insurgents found the energy and resources to fight each other and the Coalition forces in 2005, 2006 and 2007. It would be naive to rule out the possibility of a new wave of Shiite-Sunni violence if the issue surrounding the Sahwa councils is allowed to deteriorate.

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Security Threats to Yemen Create Dilemma for United States

By Munir Mawari

Many American political analysts think that the problem the new American administration faces in Yemen relates mainly to the fate of the 100 Yemeni detainees presently incarcerated in Guantanamo. Their homeland cannot guarantee that these individuals, if repatriated, will not become a renewed terrorist threat to America and others. In reality, Yemen's inability to deal effectively with this problem is just a small symptom of a much larger problem that faces President Obama and the West: Yemen's near future will undoubtedly witness a bloody resolution to the problem of the undemocratic nature of the present regime. The regional repercussions of this unavoidable event could be uncontrolled and widespread.

The regime that has held power in Yemen for over 30 years presents itself as democratic, yet Yemeni democracy has produced the same president in every election since July 17, 1978 (al-Hisbah, May 30, 2007). Although the constitution of Yemen sets a limit of two terms for a president, Ali Abdullah Saleh easily amends the constitution and resets the meter to start from zero every time his term reaches its end (*Al-Hiwar*, February 25). It now appears that Saleh is grooming his son to succeed him when his current term expires in 2013. There is a belief held by some in Yemen that the policies and actions of the president have contributed to the development of an effective armed opposition (Aram, April 28). In consequence, President Saleh faces five major threats to his country's stability (*Sawt-Al-Yaman*, December 2008):

- The Secessionist movement in the South: Saleh's Yemen did not always include the socialist South, which was independent until 1990. After a political unification, the leader of the South, Ali Salem al-Bied, was subjected to a series of calculated acts on the part of Saleh designed to marginalize him and his constituency, and to basically create a vassal state in the South (*Yemen Times*, May 26, 2003). This met with resistance, to which Saleh's reaction was an invasion of the south under the slogan "Unity or Death!" (Aleshteraki.net, March 31, 2008). After many deaths, Saleh won that war and achieved unity through military occupation. In

his haste to neutralize the remaining southern forces, he disbanded both the southern army and security forces, sending more than 60,000 men in arms packing and many jobless (Aleshteraki.net, April 6, 2008). This, of course, created a large reserve of anti-Saleh militants who were without positions but not without means. Over the course of the last 18 years, these people have reorganized themselves and now present a major threat to the “unity” of Yemen.

- The Houthi Insurgency in the North: The Zaydi Shiite “Believing Youth” movement of northern Yemen was originally an organization supported as well as exploited by Saleh, who used it as a check against the spread of the Salafist movement in the North. Others, more cynically, suggested it was a means of occupying the energies of his cousin, Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, the most powerful military man in Yemen (Al-Arabiya, April 7, 2007, Nashwannews, May 11). This organization, however, grew out of its intended role and assumed its own agenda, holding its own in five rounds of serious armed conflict against Saleh (Nashwannews, May 11). A sixth round is not an unlikely event at this point, but it could very well spread from the provincial environment to larger areas, including even the capital of San’a (Alahali, April 7). The insurgency is named after the late Shi’a cleric Hussein al-Houthi, who led the Believing Youth’s first major military campaign against San’a in 2004.

- Al-Qaeda and other militant Jihadist groups: The recent announcement by al-Qaeda’s leader in Yemen, Nasir al-Wuhayshi that he is throwing his support behind the secessionist movement in the South received little approval in the jihadi forums (Alboraq, May 2009). Some political analysts believe the statement is an indication that Saleh is “engaging in dangerous games with the terrorists” (Al-Majalis, January 28). Al-Wuhayshi (transferred to Yemen by Iran in 2003) was one of the 23 al-Qaeda prisoners who “escaped” from a well-guarded Yemeni jail in 2006 (al-Jazeera, January 26). Since a public pronouncement of political support like this is not common al-Qaeda practice, it appears to be a transparent and manipulative act designed to mislead someone. The secessionist movement

being socialist and secular, there is no apparent reason for al-Qaeda support to suddenly materialize.

Regional observers may conclude that none other than Saleh’s political agents arranged the statement of support, using al-Qaeda operatives who owe him favors to create a political theater that can be presented to the West (al-Jazeera, May 14). The goal, of course, is to have the South aligned with inimical forces so they can be discredited by a gain in defensive allies for Saleh’s regime. But this dangerous game could lead to actual war crimes being committed against Southern secessionist leaders, all in the name of “fighting terror” (Marebpress, May 3).

- Popular grievances and grassroots movements: The U.S. Justice Department recently indicted Latin Node Communications Company, an American contractor accused of bribing one of President Saleh’s sons and members of the Ministry of Telecommunications (Yemen Post, May 20). Latin Node eventually entered a guilty plea. [1]

The news immediately plastered the front pages in Yemen, causing President Saleh to shut down eight independent newspapers, claiming they were guilty of “anti-unity” conduct. The origin of this retribution against the press is as follows: Saleh appointed a whole generation of his family members to high positions in the military and the government, placing them in control of the government’s foreign investments committee (Bilakoyood, April 10; *Al-Masdar*, April 14). These individuals, including his son, Ahmad Ali Abdullah Saleh, were charged with profiting from corrupt practices that used foreign investments for private gain by running fairly primitive “protection scams” wherein they were bribed to not do damage (*Al-Masdar*, April 28). While the president’s son was cleared by the U.S. Justice Department, the general public in Yemen is not fooled by these corrupt practices, and as poverty levels and unemployment soar (both at 35% of the population) public resentment soars as well (*Yemen Times*, December 20, 2007; *Yemen Post*, April 25; May 7). The state of corruption in Yemen is not lost on the average citizen of Yemen who sees \$80,000 Rolls Royce and Porsche

automobiles being driven around the capital by clerks and mid-level personnel while he or she is commonly found standing in the bread line (*Alhadath Yemen*, April 24). The result has been a generalized and ever present anger within the population that could be galvanized in a form of an uprising, should some precipitating event come along.

- Conflicts within the regime: Even within the regime, there are high-ranking members of the military or the ruling General People's Congress party who prefer their own candidacy for president to that of Saleh's son, Ahmad Ali Abdullah Saleh, leader of Yemen's Republican Guards and the Anti-Terrorism Special Forces. Many of these top officials are family members appointed by Saleh. Over the last decade a series of car accidents, helicopter crashes and illnesses have claimed the lives of many figures in Saleh's inner circle (*Hadramut.net*, March 3, 2006; *Marebpress*, April 30, 2008; *Yemen Times*, May 24). The frequency of fatal car crashes involving regime members and opposition figures (even in a country where 1,000 road fatalities a month is not uncommon) is a matter of public comment and has led to anxiety at the highest levels of the national leadership (*Marebpress*, April 30, 2008).

Conclusion

The policies and actions of the Saleh Regime have, in the course of 31 years, led to a critical situation that can be resolved by the Yemeni people only if Saleh is not supported by outside forces. A factor that does not often find its way into the press in this country—that the ordinary Yemeni citizen is armed—is of enormous importance in assessing the near future of Yemen. Among a population of 22 million, there are between 40 to 50 million weapons (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 9, 2007). No matter who supports or opposes Saleh, he still lives in the middle of an armed camp. Saleh's hope is that his son takes over for him, not simply to consolidate power within his family, but also to prevent the opening of countless files about the methods used to ensure his 31 years in control. In the meantime he may find that the many armed camps within Yemen are unwilling to agree to this plan.

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Notes:

1. "Latin Node Inc., Pleads Guilty to Foreign Corrupt Practices Act Violation and Agrees to Pay \$2 Million Criminal Fine," usdoj.gov. April 7, 2009; Department of Justice Press Release, miami.fbi.gov, April 7, 2009.