



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Security Minister Col. Hashi

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1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320  
Washington, DC • 20036  
Tel: (202) 483-8888  
Fax: (202) 483-8337

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## WAR WITH AL-QAEDA HEATS UP IN NORTHERN MALI AFTER ASSASSINATION OF INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

Assassins believed to be with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) burst into the Timbuktu residence of a Malian intelligence officer on the evening of June 10, blowing half his head away with point-blank gunfire before making their escape. The veteran Arab officer had just made a number of high-profile arrests of AQIM members as part of an ongoing campaign against al-Qaeda elements in northern Mali (*Le Challenger* [Bamako], June 11; *Nouvelle Libération*, [Bamako], June 16).

Troops pursued the assassins of the well-known officer into the Tadoudeni area of Northern Mali (an important region for salt mines), with the Salafists laying landmines behind them as they withdrew to the north (*Info-Matin* [Bamako], June 17).

Lieutenant Colonel Lamana Ould Bou was with Mali's military intelligence and led operations against AQIM in northern Mali. He was a former member of the Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad (Arab Islamic Front of Azawad – FIAA), a rebel movement based around northern Mali's Arab minority. He became a member of the Malian security forces after a peace accord was signed in 1991. His valuable contribution to anti-terrorist operations was described by a fellow officer: "As a native of Timbuktu Region, he had very profound knowledge of

the area and knew where to find the enemy. So, of late, he had been of great assistance in tracking and arresting a score of Islamists and terrorists” (*L’Independent* [Bamako], June 16).

After a funeral attended by thousands, the army took revenge in a June 16 attack on an AQIM base in the Tessalit Oasis, killing anywhere from 16 to 26 fighters, though some sources suggest these numbers may be inflated (*Le Républicain*, June 18; *al-Hayat*, June 18). According to Malian military sources, the Salafist camp was under the command of Abd al-Hamid Abu Za’id. Three Bérabich Arab militiamen and two Malian regulars were killed when their military vehicle struck an AQIM landmine during the pursuit (*Nouvelle Libération* [Bamako], June 17). Arab and Tuareg militias have been increasingly employed by the Malian government for desert operations in remote northern Mali. Algerian security sources said the raid was part of an attempt to encircle AQIM forces near the Algerian border and liberate a Swiss hostage (*al-Hayat*, June 18).

According to reports from the Malian capital of Bamako, President Amadou Toumani Touré has been reluctant to enter into a full-scale campaign in the vast lands and harsh conditions of northern Mali, preferring a path of negotiations. Since security operations were scaled back after the defeat of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga’s Tuareg rebels in February, trafficking in arms and other contraband has increased in the north as the tribes begin to rearm for what they regard as an inevitable resumption of hostilities in the region (*Le Matin* [Bamako], June 17; *Info-Matin*, June 17; for Ag Bahanga, see *Terrorism Focus*, February 26). The government in Bamako is dominated by the southern Bambara tribe, part of the larger West African Mande group.

Algeria has been providing the Malian military with arms, fuel and ammunition to combat the Salafist militants in northern Mali (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], June 18). There are approximately 300 U.S. Special Forces trainers and advisers in Bamako, Gao and Timbuktu, as well as a smaller number of British troops. There are reports of American and British officials following closely behind the Malian offensive, questioning local tribes about the location and strength of AQIM forces in the region (*al-Hayat*, June 18). AQIM executed British hostage Edwin Dyer in Malian territory on May 31 after its demand for the release of al-Qaeda ideologist Abu Qatada was refused by the U.K. government.

#### CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC CLAIMS REBEL GROUP MOUNTING ATTACKS IN RETALIATION FOR ARREST OF THEIR LEADER IN CHAD

After the surprising detention of their leader in Chad, a Central African Republic (CAR) rebel group has mounted new attacks on government forces to press for his release, according to CAR government spokesmen. The rebels belong to the Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix (Convention of Patriots for Peace and Justice - CPJP), led by the recently detained Charles Massi, a former minister of mines and agriculture in the government of the CAR. Massi was ousted from his post when the government of President Ange-Félix Patassé was overthrown by General François Bozizé, the current ruler of the CAR. In recent years the violence in the CAR has become closely tied to political violence in neighboring Chad and Darfur.

Rebels claimed to have killed 24 soldiers in the June 12 attack, while government forces claimed 15 rebels and three soldiers killed (AFP, June 17). According to the Defense Ministry, fighting began after the CPJP rebels attacked a Forces armées Centrafricaines (Central African Armed Forces - FACA) column at Akroub Soulban in the Ndele region (*Le Confident* [Bangui], June 15). CPJP spokesman Assan M’bringa Togbo said the combat, lasting several hours, began when six heavily armed FACA vehicles attacked their camp (AFP, June 13).

Massi’s arrest came unexpectedly after Massi left Paris for N’Djamena, where he had meetings with leading Chadian officials and sought President Idriss Déby’s mediation in his dispute with the CAR government (*Le Confident* [Bangui], June 8; June 11). His arrest was reported to have come in mid-May as he headed towards the CAR border (Radio France Internationale, June 5). CAR President Bozizé has close ties with the Déby regime and came to power with Chadian military assistance. Many members of the Presidential Guard, the best-equipped element of the ramshackle armed forces, are from Chad.

Massi has been charged with “attempted destabilisation of a neighbouring country.” The CPJP has written Idriss Déby, asking for Massi’s release on the grounds he “in no way represents a danger either to internal or external security nor to the national and territorial security of Chad” (AFP, June 17).

It is difficult to say what direction the leaderless CPJP will now take, considering that the movement exists solely as a manifestation of Massi's political ambitions. Junior Defense Minister Jean-François Bozizé (son of President Bozizé) says the CPJP is seeking to use any means "to maintain a climate of insecurity in the country" (AFP, June 17). The CPJP has established a stronghold in the Ndele region and has so far refused to participate in the CAR peace process, aimed at reconciling a host of rebel movements with the Bozizé government.

The other main rebel group still outside the peace process is led by General Abdoulaye Miskine (a.k.a. Martin Koumta-Madji), a Chadian mercenary who inserted himself into CAR politics after acting as a military adviser to President Patassé. With most of the CAR army based in Bangui, the rest of the country is open ground for rebel movements, cattle raiders and coupeurs de routes (highwaymen). Forming an armed group has become the standard way of expressing political viewpoints or resolving political disputes in the CAR. A Bangui daily reported the formation on May 23 of yet another rebel movement, the National Movement for the Fatherland's Salvation, whose central dispute is with the leadership of an existing rebel movement, the Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (*L'Hirondelle*, June 11).

## The Islamic Shi'a Resistance in Iraq and Iran's Confrontation with the U.K.

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

More than two years after their abduction, two of the five British hostages held in Iraq have been confirmed dead. On June 19, the remains of Jason Creswell and Jason Swindlehurst were handed over to the British embassy in Baghdad. The condition of the remains suggested the two men had already been dead for several months. The five men were kidnapped from the Iraqi Ministry of Finance on May 29, 2007 by gunmen wearing Iraqi police uniforms.

The kidnapping was part of a series of mass abductions that struck Baghdad in 2006 and 2007. The scenarios were always similar; dozens of gunmen wearing the uniform of the Special Forces of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, travelling in police SUVs, raiding civilian

targets in central Baghdad and kidnapping dozens of civilians. The most prominent targets were the Ministry of Higher Education, a meeting of the Iraqi Olympic committee, electronic and computer maintenance, and car parts stores in commercial districts. All of the targets were in central Baghdad.

Some of the victims were released shortly after the kidnappings while others were found dead or never found at all. [1] In the attack on the Ministry of Finance the kidnapped people were, for the first time, Westerners. The abductees were Peter Moore, described as a "computer consultant" working for the U.S. firm BearingPoint (a management consulting agency), and his four bodyguards, all employees of Canadian-based GardaWorld, a security firm that has been criticized for its involvement in advising the British Foreign Office on handling the abductions (*Independent*, June 21). The Iraqi Ministry of Finance building is located outside of the heavily fortified "Green Zone" in central Baghdad on the east side of the Tigris river, close to al-Sadr City, where the hostages were taken.

In December 2007, a videotape was released by the kidnappers, calling themselves the Islamic Shi'a Resistance in Iraq, apparently another title for Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (League of the People of Righteousness - AAH). The AAH is one of the militant groups that the U.S. Army frequently accuses of having links to Iran. The video, dated November 18, 2007, showed one of the hostages flanked by masked gunmen, asking his government to respond to the kidnappers' main demand - a British withdrawal from Iraq (al-Arabiya TV, December 4, 2007). The group threatened to kill one of the hostages every ten days if the British troops did not leave Iraq, though the deadline for the British pullout passed without incident. A second video, released in February 2008, included an open letter "to the British people," urging British citizens to pressure their government to meet the group's modified demand for the release of nine detained AAH members (al-Arabiya TV, February 27, 2008). [2]

Both the Iraqi and British governments have always denied being involved in negotiations with the kidnappers. Despite this, the Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat* reported on March 29 that negotiations had started a year earlier between an advisor to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Shaykh Qais al-Khaz'ali, the detained leader of the AAH and a former student of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a major Shi'a religious figure who was assassinated by Ba'athist

agents in 1999. According to *al-Hayat's* sources, a deal had been reached to release the hostages in return for releasing the AAH prisoners.

On June 7, a leading member of the AAH, Laith al-Khaz'ali (a.k.a. Abu Sajjad) was freed, apparently as part of the effort to obtain the release of the British hostages. Abu Sajjad is the brother of AAH leader Qais al-Khaza'ali, and was detained since early 2007. The release of Abu Sajjad combined with the contents of a videotape sent to the British embassy in Iraq in March (showing Peter Moore saying the hostages were safe while calling for greater efforts to obtain their release) spread hope in London that the safe return of the hostages remained possible (*Aswataliraq.info*, May 28).

An AAH spokesman pointed out that the return of the remains of the two men fulfilled their part of the deal as it had not been specified that the hostages be returned alive; "The agreement stipulates the handover the hostages but not conditionally alive. We have met our obligation regarding that part. Now the other party should fulfill its obligations and release a group of the detainees" (*al-Hayat*, June 22).

The Khaz'ali brothers were arrested in March 2007 along with a Lebanese man, Ali Musa Daqduq. Daqduq is believed to be a leading figure in the militia of the Lebanese Hezbollah and is thought to have played a leading role in the abduction of the British hostages (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 29). Daqduq and the Khaz'ali brothers were accused of being responsible for the January 20, 2007 attack on the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center, carried out by AAH insurgents disguised in American uniforms and carrying U.S. pattern weapons. The attackers passed Iraqi police positions in GMC Suburban SUVs, heading directly to the site of a meeting between U.S. military officials and local authorities discussing security for an upcoming pilgrimage. Five U.S. troops were killed - four of the soldiers were taken alive by AAH fighters, but were later shot (some still in handcuffs) and abandoned in the AAH withdrawal. In July 2007 U.S. officials claimed Daqduq admitted to working with Iran's Quds Force (an offshoot of the Revolutionary Guards) in organizing the attack (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 23, 2007; BBC, July 2, 2007).

The AAH claims to be the true heir to the legacy of Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, rather than the much larger Sadrist movement loyal to the Ayatollah's son, Muqtada al-Sadr. AAH is particularly important because it lies outside of the command and control

structure of Muqtada's organization and the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia. Since its emergence in July 2006, the group has engaged in numerous attacks on Coalition forces, kidnappings and sectarian violence. Members are reported to have received training from the Revolutionary Guards in Iran.

AAH allies in the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah have never hidden their animosity towards the United States and Britain. Despite the fact that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein brought a Shiite-dominated government to Baghdad, Hezbollah has opposed the war and the occupation. Its involvement in the Shiite insurgency was unclear until the arrest of Daqduq and the emergence of Hezbollah in Iraq, a sister organization of the AAH. Daqduq's arrest was the first and only time that a Hezbollah figure has been jailed in Iraq. Hezbollah has not confirmed Daqduq's identity but has not denied it either.

There are scores of filmed attacks on the Coalition placed on the internet on behalf of both the AAH and Hezbollah in Iraq. They usually appear on the same websites and forums, yet neither organization has an official website. Most of the recordings are of roadside bomb attacks against American and British military vehicles. There are also videos of operations carried out in revenge for the killing of the late Hezbollah military leader Imad Mughniyeh (assassinated in Damascus on February 13, 2008). In an attempt to benefit from the gradual withdrawal of the Coalition from southern Iraq, where the vast majority is Shi'a, the two organizations claim to have led the liberation of the southern provinces (See *Bahrainonline.org*, June 23, 2008).

The handover of the bodies of the British hostages took place on the same day the Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei attacked the U.K. during Friday prayers, saying, "[The Western nations] are showing their true enmity towards the Iranian Islamic state and the most evil of them is the British government" (*Guardian*, June 19). The speech was followed closely by the expulsion of two British diplomats accused of spying. Some British diplomats are of the belief that the U.K. is being used as a "proxy" target by Iran, which is sending a message to the United States without directly endangering relations with the new administration in Washington (BBC, June 19).

The timing of the handover of the bodies may have been part of a larger Iranian strategy intended to deal with international criticism of the June 12 presidential election. In his Friday sermon, Ayatollah Khamenei

talked about what he saw as a Western role in inciting an uprising in his country after the election. Khamenei spoke in the afternoon and the handover of the remains of the hostages occurred in the evening. Both Iran and Hezbollah have a long history of using hostage taking as a political tool. The death of the two men was a painful blow to the British government, which was accused by the father of one of the abducted men of not doing enough to secure their release (*Guardian*, June 22). But the story of the hostage return dominated the headlines in most of the British media, pushing coverage of the mass anti-government rallies in Iran into second place. The Iranian government was upset by the Western media coverage of the post-election events. One cannot rule out the possibility that the timing of the handover of the corpses was a chapter in Iran's conflict with Britain and the West, a conflict in which groups like the AAH, Lebanese Hezbollah and Hezbollah in Iraq are now playing a significant role.

Notes:

1. One of the hostages released from the mass kidnapping of the Olympic committee told the writer in an interview after his release that they were held in al-Sadr City, a Shia militia stronghold in eastern Baghdad. He said that the kidnappers were not involved in sectarian killing. They released him despite the fact he was Sunni but kept other Shiite hostages accusing them of being associated with the former Ba'ath regime and to Uday Hussein, Saddam's son and the former head of the Iraqi Olympic Committee.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16cNHs0whzw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eiraqslogger%2Ecom%2Findex%2Ephp%2Fpost%2F5451&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16cNHs0whzw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eiraqslogger%2Ecom%2Findex%2Ephp%2Fpost%2F5451&feature=player_embedded)

*Rafid Fadhil Ali is a freelance journalist based in Iraq who specializes in Iraqi insurgent groups.*

## Suicide Bombing Kills Somali Security Minister as Islamists Mount Assault on Mogadishu

By Andrew McGregor

**A** June 18 suicide bombing at the entrance of a hotel in the Somali town of Beled Weyne (the provincial capital of Hiraaan province) killed

Somalia's Minister of Security, Colonel Umar Hashi Adan, the former Somali ambassador to Ethiopia, Abdikarim Farah Laqanyo, and at least 18 others (al-Jazeera [Doha], June 19; al-Arabiya [Dubai], June 18). Responsibility for the blast was claimed by al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage (a.k.a. Shaykh Ali Dheere); "One of our Mujahideen went with his car laden with explosives to a building where the apostate and other members from his group had been meeting... The apostates have been eliminated; they all died in the suicide attack" (AFP, June 18).

Another Shabaab spokesman, Ali Muhammad, told al-Jazeera: "I bring Muslims the joyful news of the destruction of one of the pillars supporting God's enemies. God guided the mujahideen to a successful attack on an enemy stronghold, in which some of the leaders of apostasy were killed, including Ethiopia's primary agent - the [Somali] security minister - and Ethiopian Army officers. It was a martyrdom operation that was executed by a mujahid hero affiliated with the Mujahideen Youth Movement [the full name of al-Shabaab] (al-Jazeera, June 18). Ali Muhammad warned of a wave of suicide bombings against traitors and foreign forces in Somalia.

The attack in Beled Weyne occurred at the end of a meeting between Somali government officials and Ethiopian military officers intended to discuss means of reversing the progress of the Islamist opposition coalition and preserving the diminishing government of President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad. Al-Shabaab is the only Somali faction known to use suicide attacks. The timing of the attack and its target was a clear warning to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that al-Shabaab will strike at anyone thought to be negotiating a return of the Ethiopian military to Somalia.

Carried out by three men in a Toyota, the attack on the Madina Hotel was carefully timed, occurring just as Colonel Umar Hashi was leaving the hotel with the Ethiopian army officers with whom he had been meeting. They were on their way to their vehicles in the hotel parking lot when the suicide bomber drove up to the entrance of the hotel before detonating the explosives. The 20 killed included a number of senior Ethiopian and Somali military officers (including Colonel Umar Hashi's brother), government officials, local Beled Weyne security men and several civilians (Somaaljecel.com, June 18). The Security Minister was a native of Beled Weyne and there is speculation his death and the death of a number of other local authorities in the

suicide bombing may galvanize the resistance of local clans to al-Shabaab in the Hiraan region (al-Jazeera, June 18).

A major battle was fought in the Hodan district of Mogadishu the day before the attack, killing 26 people, including Mogadishu's police commander. Thirteen people were killed when a mortar shell struck a mosque (AFP, June 17). The fighting was Hizb al-Islam's response to TFG attacks on Hizb al-Islam military bases in Hiraan region the day before (Shabelle Media Networks, June 17). The Hizb al-Islam – al-Shabaab coalition has penetrated parts of the capital and is mounting a fierce campaign to dislodge the TFG and those Islamists supporting President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad. Hizb al-Islam is itself a coalition of Islamist groups that grew out of the earlier Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia-Asmara (ARS-Asmara). It is led by Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, the former chairman of ARS-Asmara and a long-time rival of President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad (the former leader of ARS-Djibouti).

Arms are being distributed to members of the President's Hawiye clan, many of them streaming into Mogadishu from areas outside of the capital. Hizb al-Islam and al-Shabaab have also been reinforced in Mogadishu by new fighters arriving from the provinces, including a column from the Shabaab-held port city of Kismayo (AllPuntland.com, June 17).

TFG MP Asha Ahmad Abdalla accused the president of hypocrisy for inviting the return of Ethiopian troops against whom he led a jihad only a short time ago, as well as for bringing warlords back into the government. "Sharif has led Somalia into carnage that is worse than the one committed by Ethiopian troops when they were in the country. He has revived warlords whom we know had caused suffering in the country" (Gobolada.com, June 18). The MP was undoubtedly referring to the appointment of former warlord Shaykh Yusuf Muhammad Siad "Indha Adde" as the new Somali State Minister of Defense. Following the appointment, the government is reported to have handed most of its arms over to Indha Adde (Waaga Cusub, June 18). As a member of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in December 2006, Indha Adde invited jihadis from all over the Muslim world to "continue their holy war in Somalia" (Shabelle Media Networks, December 23, 2006).

The TFG parliamentary speaker, Shaykh Adan Muhammad Nur, issued a request for foreign intervention on June 20; "We ask neighboring countries - including Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Yemen - to send troops to Somalia within 24 hours" (al-Jazeera, June 22). Ethiopian soldiers in central Somalia have told local residents they are looking for "foreign troops" threatening Somalia (Mareeg.com, June 22). Addis Ababa denies sending troops back into Ethiopia, saying it would need an international mandate to do so, but admitted earlier to carrying out "reconnaissance missions" inside Somalia (Reuters, June 12). There are reports that the 4,300 African Union (A.U.) peacekeepers from Uganda and Burundi have become involved in the fighting as part of their mandate to protect strategic sites in Mogadishu (al-Jazeera, June 22).

The President blamed foreign terrorists for the Beled Weyne attack, an accusation that was backed up by Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke. "Somalis have no expertise to carry out this [kind of] attack; this was the work of foreigners" (AFP, June 18). Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad said al-Qaeda was behind the bombing and suggested Somalia was under attack from mercenaries and al-Qaeda terrorists from Iraq and Afghanistan (Shabelle Media Network, June 18; AllPuntland.com, June 18). Al-Shabaab maintains that the suicide bomber was a Somali man named Muhammad Deerow Shaykh Adam. TFG parliamentary speaker Shaykh Adan Muhammad Nur claims the Islamist opposition forces in Mogadishu are being led by a Pakistan al-Qaeda operative based in the capital's Sanna neighborhood, but has provided no evidence to support this claim (al-Jazeera, June 22).

With the TFG on the verge of collapse, the President and his ministers are identifying foreign elements as the main threat to their regime in the hopes of rallying international support, but the real threat is coming from the President's former comrades in Somalia's Islamic Courts Union, such as Hizb al-Islam leader Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys.

*Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world. In October 2007 he took over as managing editor of the Jamestown Foundation's Global Terrorism Analysis publications.*

## Sleeper Cells and Shi'a Secessionists in Saudi Arabia: A Salafist Perspective

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Salafi-Jihadi internet forums continue to warn of Shi'a plots to control the Sunni Arab regions of the Middle East, most recently in a posting entitled "The Sleeper Cells of the Rejectionists - The Danger Within - Iran's Upcoming War of Bubbles" (muslm.net, June 1). The posting compares the gradual Iranian escalation to the bubbles in boiling water – the longer the United States maintains pressure on Iran, the more allies Iran will draw into the confrontation (such as Hamas and Hezbollah), with each new ally acting as another bubble in boiling water. The posting followed an announcement on the same forum of the creation of a Shiite state in the Arabian Peninsula. Intended to warn Sunni jihadis of Shi'a intentions in the Arabia, the posting was entitled "Saudi Shiites announce the establishment of the East Arabian Republic" (muslm.net, May 15).

### Iran's Sleeper Cells in the Sunni World

"It's bad enough getting stabbed in the back by individuals, groups or countries, but it's worse when loud warnings of imminent dangers go unheeded." So started forum member Subhi Jadallah's warning of Iranian penetration of the Sunni Islamic and Arab world. Jadallah complains that Salafis are not paying attention to Iran's efforts, carried out by billions of dollars worth of dedicated research centers, to find new ways to propagate Shi'i Islam and control the region. Iran studied the situation well by planting sleeper cells all over the Gulf States (especially Saudi Arabia) before pursuing its nuclear aspirations. The sleeper cells are trained, armed and funded by Iran. The cells have succeeded in controlling Lebanon and influencing Syrian rule. "They are preparing for the inevitable confrontation" between the West and Iran, says Jadallah, presenting the following to corroborate his argument:

- Israel is not only trying to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power, but is also plotting to rid Pakistan of its nuclear arsenal.

- Americans, Europeans and Israelis know very well that defeating and weakening Iran means the submission of the whole region to Western hegemony. On the other hand, Iran seeks to negotiate control of the Middle East with the West. Once Iran acquires nuclear weapons capable of reaching Israel and Europe, the West will lose influence in the Middle East to Iran. To avoid making any concessions to Tehran, Israel and the West will wage war on Iran sooner or later.

Arab countries will have no independent role in the anticipated confrontation between the West and Iran. Arab countries will only contribute what the West designates for them. The West needs a united and stable Arab front; therefore, the United States will work hard to solve all the issues impeding a united Middle Eastern front against Iran. Jadallah claims the attempt to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict is evident in Israel's conciliatory gestures toward Syria. An Israeli-Syrian peace deal would end the strategic Syrian-Iranian alliance, although Hezbollah would remain the biggest threat to Israel if war breaks out with Iran.

### Iran's War of Bubbles

According to Jadallah, the defeat of the old regime in Iraq favored Iran. Ostensibly, Iran was the number one enemy of the United States, but the Iran-Contra scandal during Ronald Regan's presidency revealed the true nature of their relations and the secret cooperation between the U.S and Iran on certain issue of mutual interest. Further, the cooperation between the U.S and Iran on Iraq and Afghanistan was extensive during George Bush's tenure as President.

Jadallah alleges Iran's sleeper cell tactics date back to Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power in Iran in 1979. The new revolutionary regime realized the Muslim Sunni world would not yield to Shiite ambitions. They established the cells and provided them with money, weapons and secret training in Iran, Syria and Lebanon. The sleeper cells vary from the military type to politically motivated groups. Whole Shiite families are sent off to live in Sunni target countries; once settled in the designated country, the cell commences political manipulation and sabotage activities with the help of similar cells in the same country. According to Jadallah, Iran also managed to plant sleeper cells in Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, all of which contain substantial Shi'a minorities.

## War Scenarios in the Middle East

As Jadallah sees it, there are several possible scenarios for a war involving Iran:

- Iran is capable of absorbing any limited Western strike against its nuclear installations, which would lead to serious negotiations over power-sharing and eventual Western concessions in the Middle East.
- In an all out confrontation with the West, Hezbollah, on orders from Iran, will launch massive rocket attacks against Israel.
- If Hezbollah's rocket attacks on Israel fail to end Western attacks, Iran will ignite the Syrian front. In the meantime, it would strike many targets in the Gulf States. Iranian sleeper cells in the region would be awakened to stir up internal riots and revolts in the whole region.

Very few jihadi forum members thought (from a military and intelligence perspective) that the strength of Iran was exaggerated in Jadallah's posting. Some members underlined the rapid Shi'a surge in the region by warning that Egypt's Sunni Sufi orders could be easily penetrated by Shiites through the unclear dividing lines between Shi'ism and Sufism. The Salafi accusations against Egypt's tiny Shi'a minority echo those of President Hosni Mubarak, who claims Shiites are only loyal to Iran (Jafariya News.com, November 13, 2006). Despite the Salafists' anxiety, the Shi'a have had little influence in Egypt since the collapse of the Shi'a Fatimid Dynasty in 1171.

Iranian sleeper cells and intelligence activity in the Gulf countries and Europe were first revealed by a former Iranian consul in Dubai, Adil al-Asadi, who defected to the West and sought political refuge in Sweden in 2003 (alarabiya.net, March 15, 2007). In an interview, al-Asadi said even European Shiites are approached by Iran, adding, "It's normal practice for Iranian diplomats in the Gulf States to recruit local extreme Arab Shiites, send them to the U.K for training and bring them back laden with big cash."

## The East Arabian Republic

Iranian incitement and interference in the Gulf States culminated in the announcement by Saudi Shiites

of a Shi'a republic in the Arabian Peninsula. Jihadi forums posted a leaflet issued in Beirut announcing the establishment of the East Arabian Republic in the southeastern al-Ahsa and Qatif provinces in Saudi Arabia. The headline of the leaflet read: "In a bold move and in response to Shaykh Nimir al-Nimiri's call, the residents of al-Ahsa and Qatif announce their independence from the totalitarian regime of the Saudis. The East Arabian Republic is located in the southeastern area of the Arabian peninsula." Shaykh Nimir Baqir al-Nimiri is a 50-year old Saudi Shiite opposition leader first incarcerated by Saudi authorities in August 2008. After his release from prison, al-Nimiri accused the Saudi regime of religious discrimination against the Saudi Shiites in a Friday sermon and called for the secession from Saudi Arabia of the Shi'a majority regions of al-Ahsa and Qatif. He has been a fugitive ever since.

Jihadi forum members insist that Iran is not only behind the announcement of a Shiite republic in eastern Saudi Arabia, but is also involved in the war on Iraq, the assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri, the encouragement of Hamas and the instigation of turmoil in Yemen, Egypt and Kuwait. One forum member cited earlier warnings from King Abdullah of Jordan regarding the creation of a "Shiite Crescent" stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Another jihadi forum asserted Iranian interference in Iraq by posting an allegedly official letter sent by the Iranian government to Iraqi Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr (alboraq.info, June 5). The letter said Muqtada al-Sadr represented a base of support for the Islamic Republic of Iran, therefore he and his followers should be consolidated to guarantee Iran unique political weight in Iraq. The Iranians stated they were serious about supporting Muqtada as a representative of Iranian religious institutions on the Iraqi scene.

## Al-Qaeda and the Salafi Perspective

Despite speculation of possible secret cooperation between al-Qaeda and Iran, Salafists believe they should take advantage of any confrontation between the West and Iran, says a forum chatter nicknamed Abu Rashi, who adds that the Salafis usually lose at the end of any such confrontations regardless of who they ally themselves with (muslm.net, May 29). To make significant gains for Salafism in any Western-Iranian confrontation, Salafists should work to prolong the confrontation and demand the following:

- The abandonment of Western-backed secular officials in the Arab world.
- Salafist control of the media.
- The abolition of mundane laws passed by secular regimes and the implementation of Shari'a.

Salafis should not drift towards the West or Iran in the event of a confrontation between the two and should try to make as many gains for Salafism as possible from both sides.

Who might the Salafis and al-Qaeda side with to achieve these goals? In a televised confession, former al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader Muhammad al-Ofi claimed al-Qaeda was supported in Yemen by Iranian intelligence agents working through Shi'a militants of northern Yemen's al-Houthi insurgency (*Yemen Observer*, March 31; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 30; *al-Shooma*, March 29; *lojainiat.com*, March 27). Furthermore, Iran and al-Qaeda already have mutual interests in their struggle with the West. The United States is the number one enemy of both Iran and al-Qaeda. In any confrontation with the west, al-Qaeda expects to receive weapons of mass destruction from Iran to use in attacks on Western targets (*muslm.net*, May 11). Hence, al-Qaeda would most probably join Iran against the West at least until the end of the confrontations.

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

## Mystery Surrounds Alleged Hezbollah Links to Drug Arrests in Curacao

By Chris Zambelis

Mystery continues to surround Hezbollah's alleged links to the seventeen suspects arrested on drug trafficking charges on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao on April 28. According to Curacaon authorities, approximately 250 law enforcement officials took down a major drug trafficking and money laundering ring led by

a criminal network that shipped and sold cocaine and other contraband from Latin America and the Caribbean to Europe and the Middle East. In a significant twist, Curacaon authorities announced that the suspects had ties to international organized crime networks linked to Hezbollah in Lebanon; the suspects are accused of, among other things, having funneled part of their proceeds to Hezbollah through informal banking mechanisms (*St. Maarten Island Times*, May 2; *Netherlands Info Services News*, April 30; *AP*, April 29). Four Lebanese nationals were among those arrested in addition to an unspecified number of Colombians, Venezuelans, Cubans, Curacaons, and Surinamese (*St. Maarten Island Times*, May 2; *NIS News*, April 30). Curacaon authorities reported that officials from the Netherlands, Belgium, Colombia, Venezuela, and the United States aided in the investigation (*St. Maarten Island Times*, May 2; *NIS News*, April 30).

The suspects are reported to have specialized in exporting Colombian cocaine that they obtained from smugglers who transported the drugs to Curacao using speedboats and ocean-going cargo ships that embarked from Venezuela. The drug ring is also reported to have imported arms, ammunition and hashish from the Netherlands to Curacao. Sources in Curacao reported that the suspects established an elaborate scheme to launder their illicit profits. Among other things, the smugglers purchased property in Curacao, Colombia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Lebanon. The Curacaon-based contingent of the drug ring, for instance, operated legitimate businesses on the island that served as front companies for their illicit activities (*St. Maarten Island Times*, May 2; *NIS News*, April 30).

On the surface, these events may appear to validate the concerns of many observers regarding the nexus between international organized crime and radical Shiite Islam in Latin America and the Caribbean. A closer examination of this case, however, indicates that other factors may be at play.

### A Smuggler's Paradise

Curacao's geographic proximity to the Venezuelan coast makes it an ideal transshipment point for narcotics - especially Colombian cocaine - arms, and other contraband originating in Latin America and other parts of the Caribbean destined for international markets. Local- and foreign-based smugglers are also known to exploit the island's direct air traffic links to the Netherlands and close European ties to ship their wares.

The free-trade zone (FTZ) and state-of-the-art shipping and port facilities that have made Curacao a key hub in legitimate global trade and passenger cruise ship traffic are also conducive to smuggling and other illicit activities. While Curacao's oil industry has traditionally served as one of the island's main sources of revenue (Venezuela's state-run *Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. [PDVSA]* runs major oil refining operations at Curacao's Isla refinery), it is also a major offshore banking and financial services center. The offshore banking and financial services industry, an industry which represents an intrinsic part of the political-economy of the Caribbean, is often associated with money laundering, tax evasion, and international organized crime. Due to the scenic island's reputation as a tourist paradise for European and North American vacationers, however, this dark side of Curacao is often overlooked. Yet it is important to point out that Curacao is not alone in the region in this regard; much of Latin America and the Caribbean are beset by corruption, weak institutions, porous borders, and poverty, leaving them susceptible to international organized crime.

While Curacao enjoys autonomy in its domestic affairs, all matters related to foreign policy and national defense remain the responsibility of the Dutch government. The Dutch armed forces maintain a permanent presence on the island. In addition, United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) forces have, since 2000, utilized Curacao and fellow Dutch Caribbean island Aruba as Forward Operating Locations (FOL) to support its mission in the region. U.S. surveillance aircraft, for instance, depart from Curacao's Hato International Airport to conduct counter-narcotics detection and monitoring missions. U.S. investigators, security officials, and military personnel also operate from the FOL in concert with local and regional partners. In spite of its strategic importance and the attention it receives from the United States and the Netherlands, Curacao remains a smuggler's paradise. This reality is emblematic of the scale of the challenges posed by international organized crime in the region.

#### Unanswered Questions

Allegations linking Hezbollah to drug trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean surface periodically (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], March 22). While Hezbollah continues to receive financial and material support from Iran, the group is known to boast an impressive independent fundraising capability. Donations from its supporters and sympathizers across the globe (including

the sizeable Arab diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean), proceeds from legitimate business interests managed by the organization and illicit activities such as drug trafficking, counterfeiting, and related activities are widely assumed to help sustain the organization's social service, political, and military wings.

In spite of reports linking Hezbollah to the crime ring in Curacao, no details regarding the exact nature of Hezbollah's alleged involvement in the drug smuggling and money laundering operation were provided by Curacaon authorities or by the other parties involved in the investigation. In a similar incident, U.S. and Colombian authorities took down a major drug trafficking ring headed by Lebanese nationals in Colombia in October 2008 that was accused of maintaining ties to Colombian drug cartels and right-wing paramilitaries. The suspects detained in Colombia were alleged to have channeled part of their funds back to Hezbollah's coffers (*El Espectador* [Bogota], March 9). Similarly, details to explain the precise Hezbollah link to that criminal enterprise failed to emerge. In another case, Colombian and Ecuadorian officials collaborated in June 2005 to take down a drug smuggling ring with global reach that was said to be linked to Hezbollah. According to Ecuadorian officials, the suspects, who included Lebanese, Syrians, Ecuadorians, Colombians, Algerians, Nigerians and Turks, are reported to have transferred 70% of their profits to Hezbollah. The ringleader of the group, Rady Zaiter (a.k.a. David Assi Alvarez and Almawla Fares), was a Lebanese national wanted on drug trafficking charges in France (*CRE Satelital* [Guayaquil], June 21, 2005). Zaiter's arrest and extradition to France led to further arrests of alleged accomplices involved in his drug operation in Brazil and the United States (*Le Temps* [Switzerland] June 27, 2005). As in the previous cases, no concrete details explaining the exact Hezbollah link to Zaiter's criminal activities ever emerged. Not surprisingly, Hezbollah has denied any involvement in the drug trade. Hezbollah describes attempts to link the group to the drug trade as an effort by its enemies to tarnish the reputation it has cultivated as a Lebanese nationalist movement and a legitimate player in Lebanese politics (*Al-Manar TV* [Beirut], October 23, 2008).

Hezbollah is also implicated in the drug trade in the Middle East, including the trade inside the borders of its archenemy Israel, one of the region's largest markets for recreational drugs. During the July 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, Israeli activists went so far as to call for hashish smokers in Israel to boycott

the product based on the premise that proceeds from the sale of hashish on Israeli streets funded Hezbollah (*The Forward* [New York City], August 11, 2006). In addition to profiting from Israeli drug consumption, Hezbollah is also alleged to have used the drug trade to infiltrate the Israeli defense and security establishment by luring corrupt military, police, and intelligence officers into profitable drug trafficking schemes in exchange for intelligence information. While most reports of Hezbollah's intelligence activities in Israel point to the group's ties to members of Israel's Arab minority and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, Hezbollah successfully recruited a Lieutenant Colonel in the Israeli army who directed his own drug operation in Israel; Hezbollah operatives supplied the Israeli officer with hashish and heroin in exchange for intelligence information. And there are more cases like this one (*Haaretz* [Tel Aviv], April 1, 2008; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 15).

#### Lebanese Organized Crime

In light of reports linking Hezbollah to the drug trade in the Americas and beyond, observers concerned with this topic should also consider the role of Lebanese organized crime networks in Latin America and the Caribbean. Indeed, the situation on the ground in Lebanon as it relates to the relationship between Hezbollah and organized crime networks and drug trafficking suggests that a more complex dynamic is at work (*The National*, April 14; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 15).

Lebanese organized crime networks that traffic drugs and engage in other illicit activities have international connections that extend to the substantial Lebanese diaspora in the Americas and to other ethnic-based criminal organizations. Likewise, drug gangs based in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, including networks led by powerful Shi'a clans, are routinely linked to Hezbollah. Lebanon's impoverished Bekaa Valley, a region where Hezbollah has traditionally drawn strong support, has long been a center for the cultivation of cannabis for the production of hashish, the drug of choice for most recreational drug users in the Middle East. Drug gangs in the Bekaa Valley also cultivate poppy crops used to produce opium and heroin. According to some sources, upwards of 50 heavily-armed drug kingpins, each with their own stake in the drug trade, operate in the Bekaa Valley alone (AFP, October 4, 2008). Beirut and Hezbollah have traditionally turned a blind eye to the drug trade and other illicit activities in the Bekaa Valley to ensure the loyalty of the powerful Shi'a clans in the

region who derive their livelihoods from the drug trade (*al-Jazeera* [Doha], April 14). Shi'a-led clans, however, are not the only groups involved in the global drug trade. When the Syrian army controlled most of Lebanon, Syrian officers regularly engaged in drug trafficking and other illicit activities for both monetary and political gains. Many of these networks remain in place in some form. During the Lebanese Civil War, Christian, Sunni, Palestinian and Leftist militias smuggled narcotics and engaged in other illicit activities on a global scale to the tune of tens of billions of dollars. [1] Following the conflict, many militias eventually morphed into full-fledged criminal organizations spanning the globe. The outward emigration of Lebanese and other Arab communities fleeing the conflict in the Levant to Latin America and the Caribbean provided Lebanese organized criminal networks with an opportunity to make international inroads in a manner analogous to the methods other ethnic-based organized criminal networks use to establish themselves among their kin across the globe.

A spate of recent incidents in Lebanon help shed light on the complex interplay between Hezbollah, Lebanese-based organized crime groups in the Bekaa Valley, and allegations that implicate Hezbollah in a series of major drug cases in the Americas, including the recent case in Curacao. While Hezbollah has often turned a blind eye to drug and criminal activities in areas under its control, a marked expansion of the drug trade, a rash of car thefts, and bold attacks against Lebanese security services by Shi'a crime networks in recent months have raised tensions in the Bekaa Valley and have placed Hezbollah in a precarious position (*al-Jazeera* April 14). Tensions escalated further when thieves linked to local organized crime networks attacked the son of the late Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh and then stole his car near a small village in the Bekaa Valley. When the son of the revered Hezbollah commander mentioned to his assailants who he was and that he himself was an active member of the group, the thieves continued with their assault and took his car anyway. In response to this affront, Hezbollah gave Beirut the go-ahead to deploy security forces in the Bekaa Valley to crack down on Shi'a gangs that are accustomed to operating unhindered (*The National*, April 14; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 15). These events are telling; the recent tensions between the organized crime networks and Hezbollah are indicative of the strength and influence of criminal gangs in Lebanon. Most importantly, these incidents also demonstrate the independence of these groups and their willingness to challenge Hezbollah

(and the state) through violence when they see their interests being threatened.

### Conclusion

Detailed evidence regarding Hezbollah's supposed involvement in the Curacao drug case has yet to emerge. The nature of Hezbollah's alleged connection to the detainees in the Curacao drug case may eventually surface, but in the meantime, serious researchers concerned with these issues should factor in the potential role of Lebanese organized crime networks that may be linked to Hezbollah through their contacts and connections in the Bekaa Valley, but who are motivated by profits, not politics. It is also possible that independent members of Lebanese organized crime networks operating in the Americas and elsewhere are contributing portions of their proceeds to Hezbollah out of sympathy for the group. Hezbollah, after all, remains popular among many Lebanese, particularly the Shi'a, but also among other sects within the Lebanese diaspora. Political motivations intended to harm Hezbollah's standing in Lebanese politics may be behind many of these accusations. At the very least, the recent events in the Bekaa Valley indicate that Hezbollah's connection to the drug trade in Lebanon and beyond is far more complex than is often reflected in the sweeping generalizations characteristic of much of the media coverage of the topic.

### Notes:

1. Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2002), p. 138, 143; also see Georges Corm, "The War System: Militia Hegemony and Reestablishment of the State" in Deirdre Collings (ed.), *Peace for Lebanon: From War to Reconstruction* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 217-18.

*Chris Zambelis is an associate with Helios Global, Inc., a risk analysis firm based in the Washington, DC area. He specializes in Middle East politics. The opinions expressed here are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of Helios Global, Inc.*