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PAKISTANI TALIBAN COMMANDER DESCRIBES COUNTER-MEASURES AGAINST UAV ATTACKS

A commander of the Pakistan Taliban, Sahimullah Mahsud, recently provided a description of the measures taken by the Taliban forces and leadership to lower the impact of the American Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) missile attacks which have claimed the lives of scores of Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders in northwestern Pakistan, including the late leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Baitullah Mahsud. Based in South Waziristan, where he is a deputy to new Taliban leader Hakimullah Mahsud, Sahimullah provided the details in an interview with the Brussels-based *Le Soir* daily (October 12).

Sahimullah described the UAV counter-measures as being based on “mobility, secrecy and anonymity”:

- If a drone is heard, fighters must disperse into small groups of no more than four people. The Taliban has weapons capable of shooting down the drones, but lacks the technology to detect their approach.
- Satellite or SMS [a form of text messaging on mobile phones] forms of communication are no longer used. All communications are done orally or by code.



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- Meetings are announced only at the last minute, with nothing planned in advance in order to avoid leaks. Even senior commanders do not know the precise location of regional commanders.
- Taliban leaders have reduced the size of their security escorts to one or two men “in whom they have complete confidence.”
- Taliban security agents are constantly checking the identity and credentials of those active within the movement.

The Taliban commander added that the movement has many sympathizers within the Pakistan army and the security forces in Afghanistan who provide useful intelligence on infiltration efforts, the progress of NATO convoys and the timing and location of American or Pakistani military operations. American weapons are bought from the personnel of the Afghan National Army or seized in raids on NATO convoys.

Sahimullah claimed the Taliban were ready for the Pakistani offensive in South Waziristan: “We have about 20,000 fighters and we can move from one side of the border to the other as needed. We are very mobile. In eight years the United States and NATO have not managed to defeat the Taliban. How do you expect a few Pakistani soldiers, tanks, and planes to get the better of us! It is impossible!”

IS UGANDA’S LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY OPERATING IN DARFUR?

Various reports are claiming that the guerrillas of Uganda’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) have moved in bulk into South Darfur, where they will allegedly seek supplies and arms from the Sudanese government. The movement into Darfur was reported to have been compelled by helicopter attacks on the LRA by Ugandan Special Forces units operating out of Yambio, Sudan as part of a tripartite (DRC, Uganda, South Sudan) military offensive against the brutal fighters led by the notorious Joseph Kony.

Most prominent of these was a front page cover story in Britain’s *Independent* daily asserting Kony and a significant part of his forces had crossed into southern Darfur (*Independent*, October 17). The main source in the story was a statement by Major-General Kuol Deim Kuol of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) of

South Sudan that was carried in the Sudanese press two weeks earlier (Sudan Tribune, September 28). General Kuol claimed the bulk of the LRA forces had crossed from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR) into southern Darfur, where they had clashed with the local population. The General maintained SPLA reconnaissance groups had tracked the LRA across the border, where he suggested they would seek a safe base for their wives and families while seeking arms and ammunition from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

However, the *Independent* reported Kuol saying hunters had encountered LRA fighters near the town of Tumbara. There is no such place in southern Darfur, though there is a Tambura in the southern part of Western Equatoria (South Sudan), close to the LRA’s operations in the CAR, but far from the border with southern Darfur. The *Independent* added that the LRA had moved into the “Raga district in southern Darfur.” Raga is in Western Bahr al-Ghazal, also part of the South Sudan rather than Darfur. The director of communication from the United Nations/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) declared the mission had spent days going over reports of an LRA presence, but had failed to find any “hard evidence” to confirm them (*Independent*, October 17).

The original Sudan Tribune said that “Kuol suggested that Kony is seeking protection from the Sudanese army and may be used to fight the Darfur rebels” (September 28). Basing its report on the Sudan Tribune story, the Kampala *Observer* claimed several days later that Kuol had stated that the LRA were fighting as mercenaries alongside the Janjaweed militia in Darfur (October 4).

Elsewhere, there were reports of LRA fighters killing two women in raids near Yambio in Western Equatoria at the same time the main group was reported to be crossing into Darfur (Sudan Tribune, October 16; *New Vision* [Kampala], October 16). The fighters were driven off by members of the lightly armed Arrow Boys, a local self-defense group that combats LRA incursions with weapons such as spears and bows and arrows. Yambio is roughly 650 kilometers from the border with South Darfur as the crow flies – much farther in rough and road-less bush country. If these reports are correct, they would suggest either the main body of the LRA has abandoned elements of its forces in the move north, or is still operating in the area where the DRC, CAR and Sudan borders intersect. Other LRA units were simultaneously reported to be carrying out new attacks in the northern DRC (BBC, October 14).

The presence in Darfur of the LRA, which is generally believed to have once been armed and funded by Khartoum in retaliation for Kampala's support of the SPLA, would be a major embarrassment to President Omar al-Bashir, who is currently facing Darfur-related war crimes charges from the International Criminal Court (ICC). Salah Gosh, a senior presidential advisor who has been tied to war crimes in Darfur in his former capacity as director of Sudan's National Security and Intelligence Services, accused the SPLA of issuing "fabrications," adding, "The SPLA knows very well where Kony is" (Sudan Tribune, September 28).

The reports of an LRA entry into Darfur came as Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni invited Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir to an AU summit on refugees held this week in Kampala (*New Vision*, October 14). Despite Uganda being a signatory to the ICC statute—and thus obligated to enforce the ICC warrant for al-Bashir's arrest—Museveni said such an act would not be "according to the culture of the Great Lakes region in Africa... We do not believe in surprise attacks." An ICC representative insisted Uganda had a responsibility to carry out the arrest (*Daily Monitor*, October 16). The issue was resolved when Sudan decided to send two junior ministers to the summit (*New Vision*, October 19). Sudan has also expressed its willingness to share its expertise in the oil sector with Uganda as the latter begins development of a one-billion barrel oil reserve discovered on the Albertine rift in Uganda (Dow Jones Newswire, October 1; Sudan Tribune, October 2).

Challenges to U.S. Proposal to Pacify Northern Iraq May Lead to Extended American Military Presence

By Ramzy Mardini

As the U.S. military prepares for rapid disengagement from Iraq following parliamentary elections to be held early next year, growing Arab-Kurdish tensions in northern Iraq over the ownership of "disputed territories" are emerging as the main threat to Iraqi stability. In response to rising violence and high-profile insurgent attacks in Ninawa

province, U.S. General Raymond Odierno announced an initiative to facilitate Arab-Kurdish cooperation. But as elections approach, his proposal is facing political opposition and practical challenges that complicate U.S. plans to reduce ethnic tensions ahead of the scheduled withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces in August 2010.

At the fault-line of the Arab-Kurdish conflict in northern Iraq is Mosul – Iraq's second largest city and the capital of Ninawa province. Mosul is often characterized as an ethnic tinderbox, with its population consisting of 70% Sunni Arabs and 25% Kurds; the remaining residents include Arab Shi'a, Turcomans, Yezidis, and Christians. Home to a predominately Sunni population and well known as a former Ba'athist stronghold near the Syrian border, Mosul is an ideal locale for active insurgent support and recruitment. According to one report, as many as 300,000 inhabitants of the city offered to contribute to Ba'athist military, security, and intelligence efforts before Operation Iraqi Freedom. [1]

Though Iraq witnessed overall improvements in security after the U.S. military adopted a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy from 2007-2009, the Mosul area continued to witness a high level of casualties. In January 2008, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki deployed the Iraq army towards Mosul in what was intended to be a "decisive" battle against the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). But after multiple operations by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to uproot insurgent strongholds, AQI and affiliated terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq still have the capacity to carry out high-profile attacks throughout the province. By March 2008, the chief of special operations and intelligence information for Multi-National Force-Iraq would call Mosul the "strategic center of gravity" for AQI (American Forces Press Service, March 4, 2008).

According to the U.S. military, insurgents are now exploiting the Arab-Kurdish rift in Ninawa in the hopes of inciting sectarian violence and destabilizing the political process. In late July, Odierno described the ethnic conflict in the north as the "No. 1 driver of instability" in Iraq (AP, July 29). The January 2009 provincial elections shifted the balance of power within the Ninawa provincial government away from the Kurds to the majority Sunni Arabs. The newly elected Sunni Arab governor Atheel al-Nujaifi insists on retaining full sovereignty over all of Ninawa, explicitly demanding that all peshmerga (Kurdish militia) forces yield their security profile to the ISF and exit the province:

The existence of disputed areas in the province does not imply that the Kurdish Region can put them under its control until a resolution is reached. These areas should be under one authority, that of Ninawa Province, which is controlled by the central authority in the capital city of Baghdad (Niqash, February 24).

In August, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) stated that al-Nujaifi was responsible for the recent deaths of 2,000 Kurds, claiming the new Arab leadership was “adopting a policy of national, sectarian, and religious cleansing in Ninawa.” (*Aswat al-Iraq*, August 14). The KRG argues that peshmerga forces in Ninawa are necessary to protect Kurdish inhabitants in “disputed territories” under the provisions of Article 140 of the Iraq constitution. Devised to confront the “Arabization” campaigns of northern Iraq carried out by previous Ba’athist regimes, Article 140 calls for a referendum to determine whether the area under dispute will remain under the authority of the national government or the KRG. The al-Maliki government has purposefully delayed its implementation, leading Kurds to view Baghdad with suspicion.

On August 17, General Odierno announced plans for a new security framework intended to pacify the growing sectarian divide in northern Iraq: “What we have is al-Qaeda exploiting this fissure between Arabs and Kurds in Nineveh [Ninawa]...and what we’re trying to do is close that fissure” (*Los Angeles Times*, August 18).

The proposed security arrangement calls for the formation of a tripartite force – consisting of U.S., Iraqi, and peshmerga soldiers – to patrol the “disputed territories.” The forces would begin deployment in Ninawa and extend to Kirkuk and Diyala province. Though the oil-rich city of Kirkuk is the cornerstone of Article 140, Kurds also lay claim to 30-40 other disputed territories in northern Iraq (*Kurdish Globe*, December 4, 2008).

The joint military patrols will have two primary goals:

- To serve as a “confidence building measure” for the peshmerga and ISF
- To prevent insurgents from exploiting the issue of “disputed territories” (*Asharq al-Awsat*, August 19).

By working in unison to protect the local population alongside U.S. forces, the initiative intends to reduce the insecurity and build upon trusting military relationships. In addition, the security arrangement would allow for the return of U.S. combat forces in urban areas where insurgents have successfully carried out high-profile operations.

Today, political support for the proposal is mixed and uncertain, leading Odierno to claim nearly two months after its announcement: “we still have some ways to go” (Reuters, October 5). Key players have agreed on joint patrols in principle in Ninawa alone, but have yet to establish any specifics on their implementation. Although Odierno received initial encouragement from al-Maliki and KRG President Massoud Barzani, growing political opposition has complicated the negotiation process. While the KRG and Ninawa’s Kurdish Fraternal List endorsed the proposal, al-Nujaifi and his ruling Sunni Arab al-Hadbaa coalition in the provincial government opposed the scheme, claiming that only the ISF can legitimately be deployed in the areas under dispute. Kurdish support for the initiative is based on the U.S. military becoming directly involved in resolving Article 140. Besides a variety of political opposition, numerous demonstrations against the proposal have emerged throughout northern Iraq amongst Sunni Arabs and Turcoman residents (*Awsat al-Iraq*, September 16; *Azzaman* [Baghdad], October 1; September 8).

In the short-term, the Odierno initiative will likely limit the escalation between Iraqi and peshmerga forces. The return of the U.S. military to the urban combat theater after leaving the cities on June 30 is expected to facilitate cooperation and provide a credible arbiter, in effect reducing the feelings of insecurity between the contending factions.

However, the proposal faces an array of challenges that complicate its implementation and prospects for long-term success. Moreover, political opposition and lack of interest towards implementing the initiative may well persist until January’s parliamentary elections. For example, Prime Minister al-Maliki may be hesitant to push forward on joint patrols in an attempt to reap Sunni Arab support in northern Iraq.

The Odierno initiative is unlikely to solidify any significant level of mutual trust between Iraqi and Kurdish commanders. This is to be expected for two reasons. First, the explicit withdrawal deadlines stipulated in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)

render such a task problematic. Assurances of benign intentions are unlikely to establish trust given the current timetable and position that the U.S. military occupies. Second, and more importantly, the dispute over territorial ownership is defined in zero-sum terms by both parties, eroding any level of mutual confidence achieved by the Odierno proposal.

As President Barack Obama seeks to disengage all U.S. combat forces from Iraq by August 2010, unresolved territorial disputes may force a reevaluation of that policy and a renegotiation of the SOFA to allow for a modified U.S. military posture geared towards preventing an Arab-Kurdish civil war.

Notes:

1. Eric Hamilton, "The Fight for Mosul," Institute for the Study of War, April 2008, <http://www.understandingwar.org/files/reports/The%20Fight%20for%20Mosul.pdf>

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Between the Hammer and the Anvil: An Exclusive Interview with PJAK's Agiri Rojhilat

By Derek Henry Flood

Agiri Rojhilat is one of the top seven members of the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (PJAK) which is a part of the larger umbrella organization Koma Civaken Kurdistan (KCK) that includes the PKK. The Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan portrays itself to be more of an armed democratization movement rather than a traditional national liberation movement for Kurdish sovereignty. PJAK says it is taking a stand in the name of all of Iran's ethnic and religious minorities and it is much more than a Kurdish ethno-nationalist organization. Its expressed aim is to change the regime of the Iranian Ayatollahs to form an inclusive, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic participatory, federalized democracy in Tehran. Jamestown spoke to Rojhilat at the PJAK base in Qandil, northern Iraq.

JT: Can you tell our readers about PJAK's internal political framework?

AR: Every four years we will have a congress that is made up of two-hundred delegates that come from within our organization representing our women's wing, youth wing and armed wing. This congress assembles itself in secret in Kurdistan. Because of the situation for Kurds in Iran, the elections for our congress cannot be held in the open. From the 200 assembled delegates, a thirty-person parliament is elected. Of those thirty elected, seven are chosen to form the coordination board of PJAK.

JT: How precisely are these elections conducted? Since your organization is not a legal party in Iran, they must be done clandestinely, no?

AR: The elections are done secretly. I want to let you know that we have over a million supporters inside Iran today. There is a lot of support for PJAK. But these elections cannot be perfectly [democratic] but of the secrecy in which they must be conducted.

JT: It has been reported that PJAK is very concerned about women's issues and gender equality. What can you tell us about this aspect of your organization?

AR: I want to emphasize that women's issues and women's rights are paramount to our organization and we have a quota for female PJAK membership. Women are active at all levels of our organization. From the delegates to the parliament to the coordination board, we require a forty percent quota for females in PJAK. From top to bottom, we stress female participation in PJAK.

JT: Even participating in guerrilla attacks?

AR: Even fighting, yes.

JT: Do the PKK and PJAK conduct joint military operations or are their kinetic activities totally isolated from one another?

AR: What the PKK and PJAK have in common is that we both follow the ideology and philosophy of [imprisoned PKK leader] Abdullah Ocalan and we are both Kurdish parties. Let me explain this; there are four parts of Kurdistan since it was divided. Within both the PKK and the PJAK, there are Kurds from the different

parts of Kurdistan. So within the PKK, there are Iranian Kurds and there are Germans and within PJAK there are Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan, but the PKK and PJAK are different groups with different political objectives.

JT: You are referring to diaspora Kurds from Germany or European Germans?

AR: Both. Let me explain; there are Kurds from all four parts of Kurdistan participating in the PKK, diaspora Kurds as well as some Germans. All of these types of Kurds are also participating in PJAK as well but I want to stress that the PKK and PJAK are two different organizations with different aims and objectives.

I want to add something else. If the regime in Syria attacks Syrian Kurds, PJAK is obligated to have a reaction to such behavior. Despite the fact that PJAK operates primarily in Iranian Kurdistan, we feel we have a responsibility to protect Kurds from the other sectors of Kurdistan as well. There are not different kinds of Kurds. There is one Kurdistan and one Kurdish people.

JT: Is PJAK a purely Kurdish liberation movement or is its appeal more broad based within Iran?

AR: In our movement, there are several nationalities. We have Azeris, Baluchis as well as ethnic Persians fighting.

JT: What is the geographical scope of the insurgency you are mounting?

AR: We have guerrillas in place from Maku all the way to Kermanshah. Throughout Iranian Kurdistan we have over one million sympathizers.

JT: What is the size of PJAK's current military force?

AR: Until now, we do not like to give out precise figures for this but we have over one thousand active guerrillas. Eighty percent of which are inside Iranian territory.

JT: How are the values and teachings of Abdullah Ocalan carried out by PJAK?

AR: Of course it is a matter of evaluating the philosophy of Abdullah Ocalan according to our specific needs. The PKK and PJAK are two different organizations and the situation in Turkish Kurdistan is different than in Iranian

Kurdistan. We implement his teachings according to the needs of Kurds in Iran. Do we put everything exactly as Ocalan says into practice? Not necessarily. You cannot say exactly that whatever Ocalan says we put into practice...

JT: What can you tell us about how PJAK was founded?

AR: For about five or six years before 2004 when our organization was officially announced, we were having some meetings to decide about how to organize ourselves politically and improve the situation for Kurds in Iran.

JT: Can you answer the allegations that PJAK has received support in any form from the Central Intelligence Agency? Journalist Seymour Hersh and former CIA officer Robert Baer have stated the United States government is very likely aiding PJAK in its proxy struggle with the Iranian regime. Is there any truth to these assertions?

AR: It is not right that the CIA is helping PJAK. That is not the reality or right at all. Once we had a meeting with Americans in Kirkuk to discuss possible cooperation. Our friend Akif Zagros [a former member of PJAK's seven person leadership council who the author was informed was killed in a flash flood] talked with them but the Americans said PJAK should abandon the ideology of Abdullah Ocalan and our brotherhood with the PKK if we want help from them. Akif Zagros told the Americans PJAK would not abandon the teachings of Ocalan or our friendly relations with the PKK. Because of the way the Americans approached the issue, *shaheed* Zagros left the meeting. Since the meeting in 2004, no other such meetings occurred.

JT: If the United States were to approach you again asking to work with your organization against the Iranian regime, but this time without such preconditions, what would be the reaction of PJAK's leadership?

AR: We have nothing against the United States of America. We are not closing our doors to anyone. We are open to dialogue with everyone. We are open to America, Europe and still Iran for talks. We decide what is best for our people based on our own will. We decide democratically when, where and with whom we will engage in such dialogue. We do not want to be simply used against others...

JT: So PJAK does not want to be used in a proxy war even if its interests temporarily converge with an outside power?

AR: Until now, both the U.S. and the European Union approach Iran for their own benefit. Within these dialogues, the Kurds are always used and then thrown aside after we have served their purposes. Because of these failed policies, we do not accept these kinds of approaches.

JT: Why do you believe that the Americans put PJAK on the Treasury Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations?

AR: Last year, there was a small bit of rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran and the nuclear issue and then suddenly PJAK gets put on this terrorist-financing list. We know there are some political parties [in Iran] that get some support from the U.S. but we are a totally different kind of party. We have our own will and objectives.

JT: Out here in Qandil, I do not see any visible economy with which your organization can sustain itself. How is PJAK funded? Do you benefit from the Afghan opium trade? Do you receive donations from sponsors?

AR: Our economy is based purely on the Kurdish people living in Iran. We collect voluntary donations from the Kurdish people according to how much they are able to give within their relative means. To explain to you the level of support that we receive, the Kurdish people even bring their children to us to join our organization.

JT: Children of what age?

AR: Normally eighteen. You must understand that Kurdish society is very different than the West. Because there are so many operations to suppress us, Kurdish society has turned inward. This stress from the outside strengthens our communities. We have some recruits that are under eighteen, maybe sixteen, but they are not participating in our military operations. Where we are from in Iran, there is a very large youth population and our party sees a lot of potential in them as we consider ourselves a young party. The Islamic Republic of Iran has three elements it uses in the destruction of our youth. Firstly it encourages and facilitates drug use among them. Secondly, it employs the Basij [militia] system and tries to brainwash our young people to be against the

U.S. and Europe, saying, "We [Iran] stand for Islam and therefore the U.S. and E.U. are our enemy." Thirdly, the regime systematically imprisons and tortures them in order to annihilate us and discourage them from joining PJAK or supporting the Kurdish freedom movement.

JT: Can you be more specific about how the guerrilla movement is financed?

AR: For example, certain Kurdish people that have relations with PJAK come and visit us. They pledge to sponsor maybe fifty or one hundred guerrillas from top to bottom for an entire year. They buy everything for them and it is their way of supporting their own freedom struggle. All of this is done through voluntary sponsorship.

About the drug question you brought up, Iran has very special policies in regard to this matter. They encourage Kurdish youth in Iranian Kurdistan to use drugs and the percentage of addiction among our youth has been increasing. The Iranian state wants our young people to remain outside the political framework of the country. Let me give you an example of how this policy affects our people. Recently, a mother came here from Iran asking us to help her deal with her son who was badly addicted to drugs and she felt powerless to do anything about it. She said she could not turn to the Iranian state for help and came to us because she felt that by joining PJAK, [her son] could shake his addiction. We told her "bring your son to us. We can help him."

JT: PJAK does not profit from the transit of Afghan narcotics through its territory?

AR: There have been clashes with police in Iran with Sunni groups who are fighting the Islamic regime in Baluchistan and Khorosan. Sometimes these police die. From time to time, we also have clashes between our armed wing and regime elements. When some pasdaran [Revolutionary Guards] die, the regime says it is because of bandits involved in the drugs trade. They describe clashes with PJAK as banditry and try to link us to the drugs. Iranian authorities do not like to mention the name PJAK after some pasdarans die, just referring to us as bandits. These Iranians are not dying because of the drugs trade. They are being killed because they are oppressing Sunnis and Sunnis in these provinces are fighting the regime. If you come back to me on another visit, I can provide you with names of those in the regime that are involved in the drugs trade.

When the Iranian regime prepares its annual budget, it does not have enough money to sustain itself and so it supplements governmental coffers with money from the transshipment of Afghan narcotics. The drugs are shipped across Iranian territory under the supervision of Ettela'at (Iranian Intelligence: Vezeerat-e Ettela'at Jomhuri-e Eslami – VEVAK) to Orumieh (provincial capital of West Azarbaijan Province). From Orumieh they are sent to Hakkari Province in Turkey where they are shipped under the supervision of the MIT (Milli Stihbarat Teskilatı - Turkish intelligence) and from Turkey these drugs reach Europe. Both Iran and Turkey may employ some Kurds as part of their trafficking apparatus but the trafficking is state organized by both countries' intelligence services.

Can you imagine this high volume of drugs coming into Turkey from Iran without the Turks' knowledge? It would be impossible. Turkey has many checkpoints. How could they not know about all of these drugs passing through their territory?

JT: Is PJAK a 100% independent organization that exists without the support of international actors?

AR: Yes that is completely right. I will stress that we have not so far [received] any international aid or weapons from anyone. We are an independent organization.

JT: There has been a lot of speculation [surrounding] your leader Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi's visit to Washington in the summer of 2007. Can you comment on it?

AR: As you can see Haji Ahmadi is not here for comment. Whatever I say is on the record as a PJAK official. As the president of PJAK, he is available to have dialogue with anyone. He can visit different countries and meet with different people. Yes, he did visit Washington, as it was within his power to do so. He has the power to do such things. But I want to reiterate that until now we have not received support from any outside powers...

JT: What is PJAK's attitude toward the Turkish-Iranian military alliance?

AR: Iran and Turkey have an alliance against us and [have worked] on joint military operations together for the past few years. Despite their differences, they are unified on the Kurdish issue. The alliance between Iran

and Turkey is not purely a military one though, it is also now political...

Turkey is taking intelligence that it is receiving from the U.S. in regard to PKK positions here in Iraq and passing it on to Iran so they can attack PJAK. So Iran is now acquiring U.S. intelligence meant for Ankara in this Turkish-Iranian bilateral military strategy against the Kurds. Through this cooperation, we are attacked here in Iraq by Turkish warplanes while Iran fires Katyushas from the other side of these mountain ridges. We believe there are even Turks training members of the Revolutionary Guard Corps to fight Kurds inside Iran.

Additionally, I want to let you know that besides Iran's increased alliance with Turkey, it is also greatly expanding its bases along the Iran-Iraq border. It says it is doing this to defend the Islamic Republic against a possible invasion by the United States. But what this effort is really meant to do in our view is to separate the Kurds and stop the flow of our movement across the border. From our observations, some of these expanded military bases look to be modeled on Israeli bases.

JT: What can you tell of your organization's military strategy against Iranian forces?

AR: Iran and Turkey insist that the PKK and the PJAK are the same and this works very well for their own propaganda efforts. We are being shelled here. If you look beyond you, you can see the entire mountainside is burned from Katyusha fire. Our strategy is one of pure self-defense. We do not make offensive operations against the Revolutionary Guards. We defend Iranian Kurds and ourselves. We have a right to retaliate against the Iranian state as part of our self-defense policy. If Iran attacks our people, we will respond. Iran uses the death penalty and likes to hang people. If they will hang more of our friends, we have plans to retaliate directly... Our main work is political but we have to have an armed wing because Iran is not a truly democratic state and it does not allow people to organize themselves politically.

JT: What can you tell our readers about PJAK's philosophy and ideological outlook?

AR: Our aim is a free Kurdistan and a democratic Iran.

JT: Are you speaking of creating an independent Kurdish state?

AR: What we are talking about now is not the changing of borders or the replacing of flags but creating an all-inclusive Iran.

JT: Does PJAK seek to overthrow the religious government of Iran?

AR: We do not oppose religion and we are in no way against the Islamic religion, nor do we have any animosity toward any other ethnic groups living in Iran today. Our goals are not limited to the freedom of Kurds. We wish for all the ethnic groups living in Iran to have their democratic rights.

JT: Do you seek a structure of parallel government for Kurds in Iran comparable to the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq that has its own parliament and issues its own visas?

AR: Not at all. We would prefer to have much more participation in a democratized central government. To achieve this, we are trying to permeate Iranian Kurdistan with democratic values so that our people can improve themselves and organize themselves politically. We never want to impose cultural hegemony on others and would like to see Baluchis and Azeris organize themselves similarly as well.

JT: Do you believe that Iran is a Shia chauvinist regime that uses Khomenism and evangelical Mahdism similar to the way Turkey uses the notion of Turkism at the expense of its minorities?

AR: Yes, that's right. Iran gives Kurds a degree of recognition but with other groups like Azeris, they practice a forced assimilation policy. Iran also practices a divide and rule policy to pit different groups against one another. There is discrimination against Sunnis as well...

JT: Does PJAK have a relationship with the Jundullah insurgency in Sistan-Baluchistan Province?

AR: For us, yes, we have some relations with Baluchi people. However, we do not have a specific relationship with Jundullah. Baluchis have a special meaning for us because of their oppression by the Islamic Republic. Iran's policy has been to make the Baluchis depend on

the income from the transit of Afghan narcotics as well as depend on the Iranian state.

JT: Do you have any connections with Ahwazi Arabs in Khuzestan Province? There has been some unexplained political violence there.

AR: We do not have guerrillas there but we do have some indirect political relations.

JT: In closing, can you tell our readers what core principles drive PJAK's internal dynamics?

AR: Our movement operates under three core principles: democracy, women's rights, and ecology. We believe these three principles must be integrated into our everyday activities. Did you know that every year, it is required that every member of PJAK must plant two trees? PJAK strongly believes that understanding ecology improves people's lives in the region where we are active. We have programs to help surrounding villages to acquire fresh water and PJAK also believes in helping to educate the people in our surroundings.

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Diplomacy Fails to Defuse Iraqi Anger over Alleged Syrian Role in Baghdad's "Bloody Wednesday"

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

Only 24 hours passed between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's warm welcome to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in the presidential palace in Damascus and the attacks on the government buildings in Baghdad that killed dozens and spoiled the development of fraternal relations between the two countries. On August 19, six explosions rocked Baghdad, killing 95 people and injuring 563 others. The two largest blasts targeted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance with truck bombs (AFP, August 19). The attacks were big even by Iraqi standards and August 19, "Bloody Wednesday," as it

became known, emerged as the bloodiest day recorded in Iraq since the U.S. army pulled out from Iraq's urban areas on June 30. Shocked by the destruction of his ministry's headquarters and the number of casualties, Iraq's foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari accused the Iraqi security forces of colluding with perpetrators (Alarabia.net, August 22).

The Iraqi government blamed Syria for hosting the Iraqi groups and individuals behind the bombings, though Syria denied responsibility and President Bashar al-Assad described the Iraqi accusations as "immoral" (Syria-news.com, August 31). A political and diplomatic crisis emerged and the two countries withdrew their ambassadors from each other's capitals (*Al-Quds al-Arabi*, August 26). Iraq went further and called for an international tribunal to prosecute the perpetrators of the attacks (*Al-Sabah* [Baghdad], August 28). Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and President Jalal al-Talabani are united in their calls for the U.N. to establish an independent commission to investigate the bombings (AFP, September 22).

On October 13, Foreign Minister Zebari announced his government's conclusion that there was no use in pursuing further talks with Syria through the mediation of Turkey and the Arab League. Instead, Zebari intended to form a special committee of ministers under his leadership to prepare a dossier of Iraq's evidence of foreign involvement in Iraqi-based terrorist activities to present to a special UN envoy after his anticipated appointment (*Al-Sharqiyah* [Dubai], October 13; Republic of Iraq Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement, October 14).

The sixth annual conference of interior ministers from countries bordering Iraq held in mid-October also failed to make headway in resolving the crisis in relations, with Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad Kazem al-Bolami demanding those in attendance must "criminalize the aggressors" (VOA, October 14; ChamPress [Damascus], October 13).

Regional mediation has failed to contain the situation so far, but the real reasons behind the recent tension between Baghdad and Damascus are deeper than one-day events, no matter how bloody.

Who is Sattam Farhan?

On August 23, General Kassim Ata, the spokesman of Baghdad Operations Command, showed journalists a

video of a detainee who admitted to being behind the attacks. The man, who was identified as Wissam Ali Kadhum, said that he received his orders from an exiled Iraqi Ba'athist in Syria, Sattam Farhan. Kadhum said that Farhan was a member of a Syrian-based faction of the Ba'ath party led by General Muhammad Yunis al-Ahmad.

The name Sattam Farhan did not ring a bell for most of people. A short while later it turned out that the Iraqi authorities were referring to Sattam al-Gaoud, a well known businessman in Iraq since the early 1990s. Benefiting from finding ways around the international sanctions that were imposed on Iraq, Sattam emerged as a tycoon in economically-devastated Iraq, building a business empire and even purchasing a football club. Sattam was not known as a senior member of the then-ruling Ba'ath party, but he would not have achieved his prominence without the regime's blessing.

During the first weeks after the fall of Saddam, Sattam al-Gaoud led protests against the U.S. forces in his hometown of Ramadi and in Baghdad. He also founded the National Front of the Masses and Intellectuals of Iraq (NFMII). Sattam, who belonged to a prominent family of the Sunni al-Dulaim tribe, was arrested by the American army in 2003 and remained in custody for more than two years. He was released in early 2006 and left for Jordan but is believed to be living in Syria now. Sattam's NFMII frequently places statements on pro-Ba'ath web sites.

The Islamic State of Iraq Claims Responsibility

A few days after the attack, the al-Qaeda affiliated Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) claimed responsibility for the bombings, which they referred to as Ghazwat al-Aseer (The Raid of the Prisoner) (Muslim.net, August 25). Even after the ISI claimed responsibility the Iraqi government not only stuck with its accusations but also became more specific. Al-Maliki said on September 2: "We gave them [the Syrians] information collected by our security devices about a meeting between members of the Ba'ath party and takfiris [Muslim extremists] attended also by Syrian intelligence officers held in al-Zabadani (a Syrian resort nearby Damascus) on July 30, 2009. Why do they insist on hosting armed organizations and people who are wanted by the Iraqi authorities and Interpol?" (aswataliraq.info, September 3).

Syria persistently denied any involvement in the attacks by the Iraqi Ba'athists who live on its soil. "They are

there but the Iraqi officials expressed contradicting statements,” said Faisal al-Miqdad, the Syrian deputy foreign minister. “They decided finally to accuse some Iraqi individuals who live in Syria. We confirm that there is no link between those Iraqis and the attacks at all” (Aljeeran.net, August 31).

General al-Ahmad’s Group

The organization of General Muhammad Yunis al-Ahmad, implicated in Kadhum’s testimony, is one of the least known insurgent groups in Iraq (See *Terrorism Monitor*, February 9). In an interview with al-Arabiya TV channel, Ghazwan al-Kubaisi, a leading figure in the group, admitted the limited capabilities of the organization but also indicated that it coordinated and worked with the other insurgent groups. The history of the insurgency in Iraq shows that groups of different, if not contradicting, ideologies have often worked together and avoided fighting each other (*Al-Arabiya*, August 29).

However, does that mean the Iraqi government was correct? Despite the possibilities indicated above, there were some weaknesses in the case that the Iraqi government tried to build. The accusations against Syria originated with General Kassim Ata, the spokesman for Baghdad Operations Command, after the Iraqi security forces came under extensive pressure for their failure to provide security against such attacks (Al-Iraqia TV, August 23). The videotaped confession of Wissam Ali Kadhum that implicated Syria has also been criticized for the possibility that it may have been generated through the use of torture.

But the main challenge to the government’s story came from inside. The Iraqi Presidential Council issued a statement saying al-Maliki’s call for an international tribunal was illegal. The council, which includes President Jalal al-Talibani (Kurd), Vice-president Adil Abd al-Mahdi (Shi’a Arab) and Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi (Sunni Arab), has urged dialogue through diplomatic and political channels to resolve the differences between the two countries (Middle East Online, September 9).

The crisis also showed that al-Maliki’s troubles are not only in the political arena. After the initial criticism of the Iraqi security forces, al-Maliki sacked General Muhammad al-Shahwani, the head of the intelligence service. Critics said that Gen. Shahwani was dismissed

because he insisted there was Iranian involvement in the attack. (*Asharq al-Awsat*, August 24; Iraqforallnews.dk, September 6).

The Iraqi Prime Minister’s authority was to be challenged when he also tried to fire General Abdul Kareem Khalaf, head of the operations of the interior ministry. Al-Maliki was pinned down by his own Minister of the Interior, who refused to carry out the decision. General Khalaf remains in his post (*Asharq al-Awsat*, October 9, 2009)

Syria and post-war Iraq

Governed by two rival wings of the pan-Arab ultra-nationalist Ba’ath party, Iraq and Syria have a long history of mutual hostility since the late 1960s. Both regimes supported the other’s exiled opposition and routinely exchanged accusations of inciting violence and sponsoring plots to topple each other. Despite this, Syria still opposed the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Syrians, who have been involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict since the 1940s, did not like Saddam Hussein but from a geopolitical point of view Iraq was part of their strategic depth in the struggle against Israel while Saddam’s regime was an Arab and unequivocal anti-Israeli power. They would not have welcomed his topple, which put them between the Israeli army in the west and the American army in the east.

After the war the Syrian-Iraqi border became the main crossing point for foreign fighters who were joining the insurgency. In 2006, Nuri al-Maliki, a former member of the Iraqi opposition who lived in Damascus for more than two decades, became Iraq’s new prime minister. Following this, the two countries restored diplomatic relations after a 24 year break (*Al-Sabah*, November 22, 2006).

These developments were accompanied by American willingness to deal with Iraq’s neighboring countries for the sake of controlling the deteriorating security situation in Iraq. All of that seemed to have led to Syrian cooperation, which became a factor in reducing the violence in Iraq. The positive role of Syria was recognized by the then-U.S. commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus: “Iraq has also been helped by more aggressive action by foreign-fighter source countries and by Syria, which has taken steps to reduce the flow of foreign fighters through its borders with Iraq” (VOA, December 6, 2007).

Conclusion

The Iraqi accusation suggests the possibility of a higher level of cooperation between the Ba'athists and Salafis in the Iraqi insurgency. It also suggests a bigger role for Syrian intelligence in that alleged coordination. If proved correct this is a worrying sign for Iraq and its security. On the other hand, if al-Maliki's government is using inaccurate information for political purposes, this will complicate the efforts to stabilize Iraq.

The first wave of the Iraqi diplomatic campaign against Syria does not seem to have shaken the Syrians, while al-Maliki appears to have chosen a poor moment to take on the Syrians. He did not seem to have coordinated with the Americans. His relations with his fellow Shiite politicians and the Kurds are at their worst. He has problems with the regional powers. The Iranians are not comfortable with his refusal to join the Shiite coalition and the Saudis have been refusing to invite him to visit Riyadh.

The same border which let hundreds of fighters into Iraq was also open for hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who fled the violence in their country. According to the Syrian authorities, one and a half million Iraqis live in Syria. One of the main arguments of the Syrians against the Iraqi accusations is that Syria would not support attacks against Iraqis while it was hosting hundred of thousands of Iraqis who had fled to Syria to save their lives.

Whether the Iraqi accusations are right or not, Syria openly hosts many Iraqi insurgent individuals and organizations. Damascus's stance is to support the "Resistance" against the "Occupation." Iraq has passed on a list to Damascus of the suspects it wants extradited to Iraq, but Syria has cited a lack of evidence as the reason for their failure to cooperate. According to an Iraqi spokesman, Iraq is also seeking the closing of militants' training camps, an end to terrorists crossing the Syrian border into Iraq and a pledge that Damascus will stop supporting terrorist groups that target Iraqis (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], September 26). Although Iraq has taken the initiative in this row, the Syrians seem to have a more stable strategy than the Iraqis. The latter will need to have more international and regional support to effectively pressure Syria on the issue of cross-border terrorism.

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