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FALLOUT FROM MOGADISHU GRADUATION BOMBING RIPPLES THROUGH EXTREMISTS AND GOVERNMENT ALIKE

The sight of the black flag of the highly feared al-Shabaab organization being burned in the streets of Mogadishu by enraged Somalis was not something the leaders of the radical Islamist group hoped to see at this stage of their struggle for control of Somalia. The street demonstrations against al-Shabaab that followed the brutal December 3 suicide bombing of a graduation of medical students in Mogadishu were unprecedented in a nation where the only political opinions taken seriously are those expressed by gunmen.

One protest leader remarked, “Everybody assumed [al-Shabaab members] were fighting foreigners and the government, but we realized on Thursday [December 3] that they are at war with us; it was the last straw. They are killing our best and brightest. They are the enemy” (IRIN, December 11).

The attack by a suicide bomber dressed as a woman that killed 23 people, including badly needed medical graduates, parents, professors, journalists and three cabinet ministers of Somalia’s hard-pressed Transitional Federal Government (TFG), may be the start of a reversal of fortunes for the Islamist rebels of al-Shabaab, who have diverted resources from their assault on the TFG to fight Sufis and fellow Islamists alike over the last year. The movement is increasingly seen as an occupation force, with news of its imminent arrival in a



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certain town or region inevitably preceded by a rush by civilians to leave the area first.

Soon after the bombing came the dismissal of the TFG's police commander, Abdi Hassan Awale, and the TFG military commander, Yusuf Hussein. Kenyan police have intensified their patrols of Nairobi's largely ethnic-Somali suburb of Eastleigh, with reports of over 80 arrests in two days (Reuters, December 6).

Though few in Somalia doubt al-Shabaab's responsibility for the attack, noting that al-Shabaab is the only Somali group using suicide bombers, the movement's spokesman, Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage (a.k.a. Shaykh Ali Dheere), quickly blamed the government itself for the attack, which appears to have been designed to kill the three TFG cabinet ministers. "We have no relation to this attack – it is from the enemy... We know that some so-called government officials left the scene of the explosion just minutes before the attack. That is why it is clear that they were behind the killing... We do not target innocent people" (Raxanreeb.com, December 4; al-Jazeera, December 3).

Local investigations revealed that the suicide bomber was a 26-year-old Copenhagen native and Danish citizen of Somali descent named Abdurrahman. Formerly known for nightclubbing and playing football, Abdurrahman began to change his behavior several years ago, withdrawing from his friends and former activities before deciding to return to Somalia in June 2008 "to study Islam" (Somaliweyn Media Center, December 10). According to the TFG Speaker of Parliament, Shaykh Adan Muhammad Madobe, "It is unfortunate that a child whose parents escaped Somalia's conflict and raised him in Europe came home with extremist ideologies and blew himself and innocent people up" (Reuters, December 11). Abdurrahman left his pregnant wife behind in the Somali coastal town of Marka, an al-Shabaab stronghold (Mareeg Online, December 11; Somaliweyn Media Center, December 10).

There are also reports of a change of leadership within al-Shabaab, but these remain unconfirmed. Djibouti's Foreign Affairs minister, Mahmud Ali Yusuf, told an *al-Sharq al-Awsat* reporter on December 8 that Comoros Islands native and longtime al-Qaeda operative Fazul Abdullah Muhammad had taken over control of al-Shabaab from Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane (a.k.a. Abu Zubayr), who has been less visible than usual since he was seriously wounded in a suicide bomb-training incident in May (Garowe Online, December 8; Mareeg

Online, December 8). Though Fazul Abdullah may have stepped up in the organization after the death of fellow al-Qaeda operative Salah Ali Nabhan in a September U.S. missile strike, it seems unlikely that the leadership of al-Shabaab could be taken over by a non-Somali. The movement has not confirmed the report or made any announcement regarding a change in leadership.

INDONESIAN SECURITY FORCES KILL WEST PAPUAN MILITANT LEADER GENERAL KELLY KWALIK

General Kelly Kwalik, a senior leader of the Free Papua Organization (Indonesian – Organisasi Papua Merdeka – OPM), was shot and killed in a raid by Indonesia security forces on December 16 in the southern coastal town of Timika (*Jakarta Post*, December 16). National Police Chief General Bambang Hendarso Danuri said the shooting of Kwalik was justified by the rebel leader's record of violence (*Jakarta Globe*, December 19).

Kwalik's December 21 funeral in Timika was accompanied by clashes between Indonesian police and up to 800 OPM supporters attending the services (AFP, December 21; Tempo Interaktif [Jakarta], December 21). The coffin was covered with the illegal red, white and blue "Morning Star" flag of the West Papuan independence movement. Displaying the flag can bring a sentence of 20 years to life under Indonesian law. The Catholic bishop of Timika, John Philip Saklil, called Kwalik "a great figure who fought for the best for the Papuan people," but added, "Violence will only generate more violence and murders will only lead to more murders" (AFP, December 21). The funeral followed several days of high tensions, marked by protests and warning shots fired by Indonesian security forces who kept the army on standby to intervene if rioting broke out.

Control of Western New Guinea was transferred from the Netherlands to Indonesia according to the terms of the 1962 New York Agreement, negotiated by the Netherlands, the United States and Indonesia without input from the natives of the area concerned. Several of the region's ethnic groups opposed the agreement and founded the OPM in 1965 to seek independence for western New Guinea (now administered as the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua). In 1971 the OPM declared the existence of the "Republic of West Papua," but the declaration was soon followed by a major split in the movement. Support for the movement was revived in the 1990s by the activities

of American gold-mining giant Freeport-McMoRan in the region and alleged human rights abuses by the Indonesian military. The OPM now operates through at least nine decentralized commands but remains poorly armed, using bows and arrows and arms and munitions left over from battles fought on the island in World War II.

Indonesian police, who claim the 60-year-old Kwalik was guilty of abductions, murders and terrorist attacks (including the murder of two American Freeport employees in 2002 and the killing of an Australian mine technician last July), verified the identity of the body through videos and photos after family members refused to submit DNA samples for testing (*Jakarta Post*, December 17; *Jakarta Globe*, December 19). Kwalik denied any role in the attacks, which others have suggested may have been part of a protection racket run by Indonesian security forces. The rebel commander described the attacks as a “pure conspiracy between the Indonesian police, the Army and Freeport” (*Jakarta Globe*, December 19).

Is the Chinese Navy Reluctant to Use Force Against Somali Pirates?

By Vijay Sakhuja

The Somali pirates have once again warned that they could kill the crew of the Chinese flagged merchant vessel *De Xin Hai* if a military action is launched to rescue them. Speaking from the ship by phone, a pirate cautioned, “We know [the Chinese] have arrayed their warships in Somalia waters to attack us... We are telling them not to gamble with the lives of the Chinese teenagers in our hands. Honestly, we will kill if we are attacked” (*Shanghaidaily.com*, December 1).

De Xin Hai is currently in the custody of pirates and anchored off the Somali coast. The vessel was hijacked in mid-October, 550 miles north-east of the Seychelles. The pirates have demanded \$3.5 million as ransom. The vessel is operated by Qingdao Ocean Shipping Co. and at the time of its hijacking the vessel was carrying 76,000 tons of coal from South Africa to India. Soon after the vessel’s seizure, Ma Zhaoxu, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, announced that Beijing had begun “all-out efforts to rescue the hijacked ship and personnel,” (*Guardian*, October 20), but the vessel continues to be in the custody of the pirates.

In the past, several Chinese-flagged vessels have been attacked; Somali pirates attacked seven Chinese ships between January and November 2008 alone (*Xinhua*, January 7). In one instance, *Zhenhua 4*, owned by the Shanghai-based Zhenhua Port Machinery Co. successfully repelled a pirate attack assisted by a helicopter belonging to the multinational forces. The crew used deck fire hoses and improvised Molotov cocktails to ward off the pirates (*Shanghaidaily.com*, December 19, 2008). On their return to China, the crew was awarded US\$10,000 each by the company to acknowledge their heroic response.

Since January 2009, People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ships have maintained a continuous presence in the Gulf of Aden, with each flotilla being deployed for three months (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 24). The PLAN force operates independently of the multinational forces in the region. The fourth flotilla is composed of the missile frigates *Ma’anshan* and *Wenzhou* (which replaced the *Zhoushan* and *Xuzhou* in November) and *Qiandaohu*, a supply ship already deployed to the region (*Xinhua*, October 31). So far PLAN ships have escorted over 1100 vessels under different flags, including Taiwanese ships.

There are 30 warships from 18 countries currently engaged in multinational counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden-Somalia coast-Indian Ocean region (*www.eunavfor.eu*, November 23). A number of these nations have pursued an aggressive policy in dealing with Somali pirates, including China’s neighbor and continental rival, India. In November 2008, *INS Tabar*, an Indian warship deployed in the Gulf of Aden for counter-piracy operations, destroyed a pirate mother-ship after the latter ignored warnings and threatened to fire back at the warship. More recently, *INS Godavari*, an Indian guided missile ship, deployed a helicopter with marine commandoes to prevent the hijacking of a Norwegian ship (*Hindustan Times*, December 7; *Times of India*, December 8).

French and American ships have also dealt forcefully with hijackers posing a threat to the safety of their nationals. In one operation, French commandoes attacked the hijacked yacht *S/Y Tanit* and rescued four French hostages. Three pirates were arrested, but the skipper of the yacht was killed in the crossfire (*Independent*, April 11). Soon afterwards, U.S. snipers successfully killed three Somali pirates and rescued the master of the hijacked *Maersk Alabama* from a lifeboat in which he had been held for five days (*Bloomberg.com*,

April 13). In response, the pirates threatened retaliatory action and announced on the radio, “If they have started killing us, we have decided to take revenge and kill any American or French crew or passenger members of ships we capture fishing in our seas” (Shabelle Media Network, April 14).

The hijacking of *De Xin Hai* has presented Beijing with a dilemma. There have been calls by relatives of the hostages urging the government to rescue the crew, but Beijing does not appear to be keen on engaging in daring rescue operations as conducted by the French and U.S. navies (Peoples Daily Online, October 22). Instead, it prefers negotiations and payment of ransom for the release of hostage crew and ship, a common practice in dealing with the pirates of the Gulf of Aden.

There are at least four reasons that preclude use of force by Beijing:

- China respects international law and does not wish to enter into foreign territorial waters without prior consent of the legitimate government in Somalia.
- The current force level in the region is comprised of three vessels, including two missile frigates and a supply ship with helicopters. This force is woefully inadequate for a rescue mission in alien territory and is conspicuously deficient in intelligence, surveillance capability and combat air cover.
- The PLAN does not have any combat experience, particularly in anti-piracy operations. If the operation is unsuccessful, it would reflect poorly on its combat capability and undermine its long distance sustained deployment.
- Any anti-piracy combat operation could send discomfoting signals to Southeast Asian countries, particularly those that have boundary disputes with China in the South China Sea. They are bound to view the Chinese decision to use force with concern, knowing full well that the hijacked vessel could be released by paying a negotiated ransom.

Notwithstanding these issues, China has reiterated its commitment to fight piracy off Somalia and called for greater cooperation among the multinational forces.

This is also a sign of a “proactive” Chinese role in Indian Ocean security architecture.

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Taliban Issue Interview with the Jihad Leader of Sar-i-Pul Province

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Every month, the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan releases *al-Somod* Islamic e-magazine, a main Taliban propaganda publication. The e-magazine contains religious, political and military articles on the Taliban’s activities. Often, the e-magazine interviews one of the Taliban’s jihad leaders. The forty-second issue of *al-Somod* carried an interview with the Taliban military leader of Sar-i-Pul province in northern Afghanistan, a region now targeted for an expansion of the Taliban’s militant activities (alsomod.org, October 2009). The Taliban publication also outlined new mujahideen tactics deemed useful in any future negotiations with Coalition forces.

Mullah Mohammad Nadir Haqjo bin Merza Raheem is the Taliban leader in Sar-i-Pul province, in north Afghanistan. Sar-i-Pul consists of six districts of over 16 thousand square kilometers with a population of slightly less than half a million people. The mountainous province is a center for drug cultivation and distribution. The largest ethnic groups are the Uzbeks, Pashtun and Shi’a Hazara, with smaller numbers of Tajiks and Arabs. Mullah Mohammad Raheem, 30 years old, was born in al-Malak village of Sayyad district in Sar-i-Pul. Raheem did not receive a normal school education; rather, he attended elementary school in a mosque and studied religion in different schools in Sar-i-Pul and Jowzjan provinces. When the United States invaded Afghanistan, Raheem was among the volunteers of the Sar-i-Pul mujahideen. He is currently the Taliban’s general commander of Sar-i-Pul province.

Mullah Raheem described the inception of jihad in Sar-i-Pul four years ago as a miraculous event. At the outset, the mujahideen of Sar-i-Pul were only seven jihadis with one AK-47 each and 30 rounds of ammunition. The seven founding members had a hard time recruiting

more mujahideen into Sar-i-Pul because people were influenced by the enemy's propaganda. "People were afraid of extending any support for the mujahideen four years ago," says Raheem. The lack of public support meant the mujahideen had to constantly change their location in the province. A significant jihadi resistance in Sar-i-Pul started when Raheem's mujahideen lured the enemy into the mountains and managed to kill a few enemy troops and win their weapons and supplies. Since then, claims Raheem, many residents of Sar-i-Pul have joined the mujahideen and set up many formations currently fighting the enemy. The present jihadi situation is steadily progressing, says Raheem; the evidence is seen in the mujahideen presence in all districts.

According to the Mullah, the central district of Sar-i-Pul as well as the Sayyad, Sangcharak and Kohistanat districts are under the full control of the mujahideen. He alleges that the French, Italian and Danish forces are ineffective against the mujahideen of Sar-i-Pul. "They used to go out in convoys to carry out military operations against the mujahideen, but now they don't leave the city center."

The jihad activities mentioned by Raheem are small-scale operations, such as kidnapping and killing Afghans collaborating with government and Coalition forces, planting explosives in government and Coalition facilities and bombing vehicles. The conduct of these small operations does not confirm Mullah Raheem's claim of complete control of most of the province.

To counter Coalition propaganda and attract more jihadi recruits, the Sar-i-Pul mujahideen use mosques and other public places to preach the religious obligation of jihad and the justification for fighting the Afghan government.

Raheem claims to have coordinated military operations against the government with mujahideen in other provinces, including the rural areas of Darzab (Jowzjan Province) and Bilchiragh (Faryab Province). There is no mention in the Taliban's monthly military statistics of any attacks in Sar-i-Pul (alsomod.org, October-November, 2009), although Taliban sources claim the killing of two local officials in the Bilchiragh district of Faryab province (aljazeeraatalk.net, November 18).

Raheem asserts that the Sar-i-Pul mujahideen are currently planning future terror attacks to liquidate enemy posts and district centers in Sar-i-Pul. The Mullah calls upon the Afghan people to support jihad

like they did against the Soviets, adding that the latest events indicate that the full liberation of Afghanistan will come soon.

Alleging Taliban control of over 80% of Afghanistan and anticipating victory soon, *al-Somod* magazine suggests the mujahideen's future attacks should concentrate on taking prisoners of war. In any future negotiations with the United States, the Taliban believes Coalition POWs would not only further its position and pressure the United States to release Afghani and Muslim prisoners in U.S. jails, but would also force the United States to make concessions to Taliban demands. These demands include war compensation, the trial of U.S. and British political and military officials for war crimes and the reversal of all U.N. resolutions against the Islamic Emirate. In the field, kidnapping Coalition personal would divert enemy resources from fighting the Taliban to the protection of its facilities and personnel. The Taliban is also aware of the undercover intelligence agents of the Coalition countries. These should be targeted and taken as POWs as well, insists *al-Somod*.

Many jihad forums carried links to *al-Somod* and some forum participants hailed this latest issue in particular because of the Taliban's claim of imminent victory.

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The Disconnection of Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiya and al-Qaeda from the Afghan Jihad Experience

By Mohamed Redzuan Salleh and Muhammad Haniff Hassan

In legitimizing their acts of terror, al-Qaeda and Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) frequently draw inspiration from the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad experience of the 1980s. To what extent, however, does the Afghan event justify their violent operations?

On July 17, 2009 the twin Jakarta bombings of the Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels served as a grim reminder to the world that the threat of terrorism is still unceasing. After a four-year hiatus of major jihad operations in Indonesia, the perpetrators of

the bombings have succeeded in sending a message that terrorism is still “in business.” These incidents underscored the continuous importance of combating the extremist ideology that underlies these violent acts.

Investigators have established that the bomb signatures bore a striking resemblance to those of previous JI operations. However, there was a July 26 online claim of responsibility for the Jakarta bombings that was allegedly circulated on the internet by Noordin Muhammad Top, believed to be the mastermind of the Bali bombings and leader of a JI breakaway group, Tandzim al-Qaeda Indonesia, which read: “It is retribution for all the acts by the United States and its lackeys against Muslims and Muslim holy warriors.[1] Top was eventually killed on September 17 in a police raid in Central Java (*New Straits Times*, September 19). Whether JI, al-Qaeda or its affiliates are eventually proven to be the perpetrator of these incidents, their ideology has justified similar attacks in the past.

Justifying Extremism

The proponents of violent jihad rely heavily on the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s for justification of their violence. Potential recruits are riveted to stories of past victories and miraculous incidents on the battlefield. A pro-jihadist website, azzam.com, used stories of martyrs who died during the Afghan jihad period to inspire Muslims to support jihadist groups in various places. [2]

This “jihad curriculum” is central to the movement’s narrative, and omnipresent on the jihadists’ websites and forums. Osama bin Laden himself described the late Shaykh Abdullah Azzam (1941-1989), the spiritual leader of the Arab Afghan mujahidin and the symbol of the Afghan jihad, in a 1999 interview with al-Jazeera: “Shaykh Abdullah Azzam was not an individual, but an entire nation by himself. Muslim women have proven themselves incapable of giving birth to a man like him after he was killed.” [3]

The use of Azzam’s name for the above-mentioned website is a testimony to the use of Afghan jihad as a source of inspiration and legitimacy for extremist activities. For the same reasons, Abdullah Azzam’s name was used for various jihadi fighting units, such as the one that claimed responsibility for the attack on the Egyptian resort of Sharm al-Shaykh in July 2005. This latter use of the Shaykh’s name invited condemnation

from his immediate family members (Reuters, September 13; *Daily Times* [Lahore], June 11).

Within the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah, “the Afghan generation continues to enjoy high prestige and influence” among the membership. [5] The reason is obvious; the jihadists perceive and use the past as their source of inspiration and religious and military legitimacy. This begs the critical question: Does their reverence and constant reference to the alumni of the anti-Soviet jihad legitimize their violent actions?

The Real Picture

If the past were to be studied carefully, one would find that these extremists have deviated from the experience of the Afghan jihad. In more ways than one, the Afghan experience, like much of the jihadist worldview, has been largely manipulated. Today’s repertoire of bombing attacks and indiscriminate violence by jihadist groups has no precedence in the Afghan jihad. Using this jihad to justify indiscriminate killing demonstrates the degree to which the extremists are willing to manipulate events to justify their extreme violence.

During the Afghan jihad, there was no targeting of Soviet or Afghan communist interests in Pakistan or any other part of the world beyond the Afghan borders. Attacks were confined to targets within the conflict zone and the mujahideen never intentionally targeted civilians. [6] During that particular period, the use of indiscriminate violence was well-known elsewhere. Hijackings, kidnappings, and other terrorist tactics were common to groups such as the IRA and PLO. But terrorism was virtually unheard of during the Afghan jihad. The mujahideen also rejected suicide bombings. All this shows that the non-utilization of terrorist tactics was intentional. It was Osama bin Laden, someone with virtually no ideological influence during the anti-Soviet jihad, who issued his so-called fatwa in 1998, which justified attacking enemies wherever they could be found, in stark contrast to the focused mission of the Afghan jihad.

The Testimony of the Afghan Jihadis

While one “Afghan Arab” (who was not heavily involved militarily) espouses extreme global violence, other veterans reject any connection between today’s terrorism and the anti-Soviet struggle. A growing literature of the Afghan jihad written by Afghan Arabs such as Algerian Abdullah Anas (a.k.a. Boudjema Bounoua),

rejects bin Laden's declarations. In 2002, Anas wrote *The Birth of the Afghan Arabs*, in which he stressed that the Afghan jihad in the 1980s did not introduce the culture of kidnapping civilians and killing them. [7] The mujahideen were also not enjoined to overthrow their governments upon return to their homelands. Moreover, the Russian and Afghanistan embassies abroad were left unharmed by the Afghan mujahideen. [8] Abdullah Anas is now reported to be acting as a mediator in indirect backchannel talks between the Taliban and the United States, undertaken through intermediaries in Saudi and Pakistani intelligence (PK Mirror, December 4).

Anas further mentioned that Abdullah Azzam (his father-in-law) respected the lives of foreigners in Afghanistan. There was one night during which he was with Azzam in a vehicle when they picked up three female Westerners who were waiting for a taxi to get home at a very late hour. When asked the reason why he gave them a lift, Azzam said that they were exposed to harm as the village they were passing by was well-known for banditry. [9]

Another Afghan veteran who has openly condemned al-Qaeda is Libyan Nu'man bin Uthman, better known in the Western media as Noman Benotman (see *Spotlight on Terror*, March 21, 2005). Bin Uthman attended a conference of jihadists from across the Arab world in 1996 where Osama bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri were galvanizing support to spread their ideological virus. In that conference, Bin Uthman argued that attacking the United States would lead them nowhere (*The Australian*, June 28, 2008). In a November 2007 open letter to al-Zawahiri, he argued that citizens of Western countries were not to be blamed and killed. [10] Bin Uthman called instead for "a cessation of military activities in the West, in order to withdraw the terrorist card used by some extremist and malicious Western countries against Islam and Muslims. This will neutralize public opinion in those countries whose people believe, whether we like it or not, in freedom, democracy and the respect of human rights." [11]

During the last decade, Muslim individuals and Islamic groups have begun one by one to denounce the violence advocated by al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Major jihadist groups such as the two largest in Egypt – Gama'a al-Islamiya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad - have disengaged from violence and distanced themselves from the militant extremists. Gama'a al-Islamiya announced their "Non-Violence Initiative" in 1997, while Egyptian Islamic Jihad announced their jihad revisions in 2007 via their

key ideologue, Sayyid Imam Abdulaziz al-Sharif, also known in jihadist circles as Dr. Fadl (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 10, 2007; *Terrorism Focus*, January 8, 2008; *Terrorism Focus*, April 30, 2008). Prominent Islamists who were once seen as hardliners have also condemned Bin Laden publicly, such as Salman al-Oadah, the Saudi cleric who was once imprisoned for supporting violent jihad. [12] As seen above, Afghan veterans are also prominent in condemning al-Qaeda's ideology and tactics.

Conclusion

The remaining question then is why, in the face of resistance, Afghanistan's anti-Soviet jihad is being used as validation for extremism? Al-Qaeda and its fellow travelers are desperate to be seen as the voice of a pure and resurgent faith. They need to be associated with ideas and events that are unquestionably seen as good, which is how the 1980s struggle in Afghanistan is viewed in the Islamic world. The flaw in the argument of the jihadists is that their actions do not have roots in the anti-Soviet jihad. By confronting the jihadist community with these facts, it may be able to slow, if not stop, the spread of this extreme ideological virus. The larger Islamic community must be shown the true nature of the jihadist claims in countering their narrative.

The above serves to demonstrate that, in terms of terror tactics, there is an apparent disconnection, be it ideological or strategic, between the ideology of al-Qaeda and the first generation of foreign Muslim fighters in Afghanistan – commonly described as the "Afghan Arabs." The critical battle now is in exploiting this weakness.

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Notes:

1. See press release in Arabic and Bahasa Indonesian by Tandzim Al-Qaeda Indonesia at <http://mediaislam-bushro.blogspot.com/>.
2. The website was shut down after the 9/11 attacks but can still be viewed at <http://web.archive.org/web/20001204063800/http://www.azzam.com/>.

3. Interview with Osama bin Laden by Salah Najm, aired by al-Jazeera on June 10, 1999. The transcript in English is available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20021113111503/http://www.terrorism.com/terrorism/BinLadinTranscript.shtml>.

4. Interview with Huzaifah, son of Abdullah Azzam by al-Arabiya, July 26, 2005, <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2005/07/28/15351.html>.

5. “ ‘Deradicalisation’ and Indonesian Prisons,” International Crisis Group, Asia Report, No. 142, November 19, 2007, p. 14.

6. Interview with Abdullah Anas by al-Arabiya, January 2, 2006, available at <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2006/01/02/19984.html>.

7. Interview with Abdullah Anas by al-Arabiya, December 27, 2005, available at <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/12/27/19861.html>.

8. Interview with Abdullah Anas by Al-Arabiya, January 2, 2006, available at <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2006/01/02/19984.html>.

9. Ibid

10. See http://counterideology.multiply.com/journal/item/105/Just_sharing_-_Noman_Benotman_Advice_to_Dr._Ayman_Zawahiri_Nov_2007.

11. Ibid

12. Salman Al-Oadah is a Saudi cleric who has a website, islamtoday.com, under his general supervision. His letter to Bin Laden can be found here: http://www.islamtoday.com/showme2.cfm?cat_id=29&sub_cat_id=1521

Militant Iraqi Nationalists Struggle with Approach to al-Qaeda’s Islamic State of Iraq

By Pascale Combelles Siegel

The string of deadly bombings against government buildings and Shiite landmarks in Baghdad that began last August provides a startling reminder

that the Qaeda-associated Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) remains a clear danger to Iraq’s long-term stability. The three sets of multiple attacks that took place on August 19, October 25, and December 8—the three deadliest attacks since 2007—killed at least 362 people and wounded over 1,233. [1] In an otherwise continuously improving security situation, the ISI claimed responsibility for the spectacular, headline-grabbing attacks in an effort to embarrass the Iraqi government, intensify Sunni disgruntlement with the current political establishment and rally former nationalist insurgents behind its banner.

The ISI Claims a New Strategy

Despite the attacks’ high death tolls, the ISI proudly took ownership of the operations. The ISI argued that the attacks were designed to “crush the strongholds of infidelity and the forts of polytheism of the apostate Safavid [i.e. Iranian-influenced] government” (al-falajah.net, August 24). In each claim of responsibility, it identified its targets as government buildings and institutions:

- August 19 bombings - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense, Offices of the Baghdad Governorate
- October 25 bombings - Ministry of Justice and Baghdad Provincial Council
- December 8 bombings - the new Treasury building, Criminal Courts Compound, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Labor

The ISI argued that the ministries are legitimate targets for three reasons. First, Iraq’s current governmental institutions were established by the United States according to a non-Islamic political model; these institutions are therefore those of the “infidels” (those who do not accept the Prophet’s message) and should not be used to govern Muslims. Second, these institutions are currently run by Shiite political parties, which the ISI considers to be apostate, akin to Muslims who have renounced Islam because they do not practice what the ISI considers to be the only “true” Islam. Finally, these governmental institutions are run by political parties allied with Iran, a country which the ISI accuses of seeking to dominate and subjugate Iraq like the Persian Safavid dynasty did in the 16th century.

For the ISI, the symbolic value of the targets far outweighs any other consideration, in particular whether the toll was justified. In claiming responsibility for the August 19 bombing, the ISI argued that it targets “the pillars of this malignant and slaughtered state and those who help it, support it, and establish its pillars” (al-faloja.net, August 24). Hence, in the ISI’s world, all workers who need to make a living by working for governmental institutions are legitimate targets because their daily work enables the government to function. This is a position that sets the ISI apart from most other insurgent groups who hold a much more nuanced position on targeting ordinary governmental workers or security force personnel. Groups such as the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI), the 1920 Revolution Brigades, and the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance (al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil Moqawama al-Iraqiya – JAMI) have long publicized their opposition to the targeting of either governmental workers and/or Iraqi civilians on humanitarian grounds. The only “collateral damage” the ISI regretfully acknowledged were those Sunni passers-by who might have been killed or injured due to “their presence at those locations” (al-faloja.net, August 24).

For the ISI, only Sunni Muslims are worthy of concern, because they are the only Muslims who practice religion “correctly.” While the ISI offers religious solace to those victims, it also suggests advice to Sunnis so as to minimize future unwanted tolls: “We ask them in Allah to avoid passing by and being present in these locations as much as they can.” However, the ISI warns that mass casualties are nonetheless acceptable because the ends justifies the means. “We will not halt the duty of jihad against the polytheists and defense against the infidels because of those who fall as martyrs, as our scholars determined” (al-faloja.net, August 24).

Interestingly, the ISI does not feel a pressing urge to justify its targeting. The ISI only talked about the civilian victims in its first claim of responsibility for the August 19 attacks. It did not even broach the subject when it took responsibility for the attacks of October 25 and December 8, indicating that the movement feels it has satisfactorily answered its detractors.

Nationalist Insurgents Adopt a “Neither-Nor” Approach

The ISI’s renewed focus on fighting the Iraqi government is putting nationalist insurgents in a difficult position. In 2007-2008, nationalist insurgents have massively deserted the anti-U.S., anti-government battlefield and

have fought against the ISI because of its misguided strategy (provoking a Sunni vs. Shi’a civil war) and tactical excesses (anti-civilian tactics). The ISI’s focus on targeting the Iraqi government fits the nationalist insurgents’ stated objective of taking down the post-2003 political process, although its callous disregard for human life goes far beyond tactics the nationalist insurgents deem appropriate and legitimate. Consequently, as much as they have deplored the loss of lives, nationalist insurgents have nonetheless reserved much of their scorn for the Iraqi government and have avoided criticizing the ISI.

The Sunni insurgent groups were quick to deplore the attacks and the loss of human life, but they did so in a generic manner, avoiding blaming the ISI directly for the attacks. For example, JAMI condemned the bombings and called “the death of such a number... a humanitarian and social disaster” (jami.org, December 9). The IAI denounced “these criminal incidents and affirmed its refusal of such acts” (iaisite.org, November 21). After the October 25 twin bombings, the Political Council for the Iraqi Resistance (PCIR) wrote, “the Council condemns these blind explosions that occurred today in the al-Salihyah area of Baghdad, and which did not differentiate between the child and the adult, or between the man and the woman” (pciraq.org, October 25).

However, the Sunni insurgents painstakingly avoided blaming the ISI for the carnage. Regardless of the fact that the attack bore the hallmark of the ISI and despite the fact that the ISI claimed responsibility for the attacks, the IAI, JAMI and the PCIR all failed to mention the ISI in their statements. Moreover, they repeatedly exonerated the “resistance,” arguing that the “mujahideen” could not have carried out such bloody attacks because they act on behalf of and in the interests of the Iraqi people. As JAMI put it after the 19 August bombings, “There is no sane person who thinks that the Iraqi resistance could carry out such an act.” (jami.org, August 19). The IAI went further, chiding the Iraqi government for accusing the “Ba’athists” and “takfiris” of conducting the attacks, questioning whether the groups even existed, let alone played any kind of role in Iraq’s politics. The IAI argued that “the Ba’ath [has] no more existence” and charged that the government was using the term “takfiri” to describe Sunnis in general (iaisite.org, October 27). After the December 9 bombings, the IAI again proclaimed the mujahideen’s innocence: “They will not have an opportunity to blame their crimes on the groups of the mujahideen because no

one will believe them. The resistance proves every time that it sides with the innocent and noble sons of our people” (iaisite.org, December 9).

Rather than holding the ISI accountable for its senseless and bloody attacks, nationalist insurgents concentrated their fire against the Iraqi government and the political process. Following the August 19 bombing, JAMI questioned how powerful car bombs could be smuggled past the security checkpoints and hypothesized that the Iraqi security forces were the “perpetrators of the attacks” (jami.org, August 19). JAMI then implicitly accused the United States and Iran of responsibility, arguing that the bombings only serve American and Iranian long-term interests in Iraq. After the December 8 bombings, JAMI argued that the “occupation and its Quislings are [the ones who] shed Iraqi blood” and warned that parliamentary elections, scheduled for next March, could not fix Iraq’s problems. In condemning the October 25 twin bombings, the PCIR accused the Iraqi government and the United States of orchestrating the attacks, arguing that “with the approach of the parliamentary elections, the conflict between the powers of the unjust [the Baghdad government] and aggression [the United States] increases, aiming to cling onto and to maintain their power and authority... Again, our people in Iraq are paying the price of these fights, as these parties are using the blood and the bodies of Iraqis as a way to maintain their authority, using the ugliest and most horrible ways of murder and destruction” (pciraq.org, October 25).

Conclusion

In an interview with al-Jazeera, a spokesman for the PCIR summarized the ambiguities behind the position held by the nationalist insurgents: “Perhaps it is too early to accuse a certain party or quarter without evidence because struggle for power among these blocs and parties exists on a large scale. The goal, however, is very clear. It is mobilizing the street on a sectarian basis, especially since the street has started to break away from them [i.e., the ISI extremists] after having tested them and [having] discovered their uselessness for the Iraqi people and even for their voters, supporters, and aides” (al-Jazeera, December 9).

As the ISI forcefully claims responsibility for its renewed anti-government strategy, nationalist-minded insurgents have chosen to give the ISI a free pass so as to not appear supportive of an Iraqi government it despises.

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Notes:

1. On August 19, six blasts near government ministries and other targets in Baghdad killed 95 and wounded 536. On October 25, twin car bombs targeted the Justice Ministry and the Baghdad Provincial Government office in central Baghdad, killing 155 and wounding 500. On December 8, at least four car bombs exploded near government buildings and a police checkpoint, killing 112 and wounded 197. Data compiled by Reuters AlertNet: www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/GEE5B70M6.htm.