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MYSTERY SURROUNDS DEVASTATION OF KARACHI MARKETS AFTER ASHURA BLAST

The terrorist bombing that struck an Ashura Shiite religious procession in downtown Karachi on December 28 was followed by a wave of arson attacks that destroyed most of the commercial market district of that city. The apparent organization of the arsonists and the failure of security forces and the local fire department to restrain the arsonists or suppress the conflagration until most of the market area had been destroyed has raised serious questions about the government's declaration that the arson attacks were a spontaneous reaction by Shiites to the bombing that killed 43 people.

The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the bombing, which it says was carried out by a suicide bomber, though a police investigation says the bomb was an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated by remote control (AFP, December 30; Onlinenews.com.pk, January 5). Shortly before the attacks, reports emerged of CDs being distributed in Karachi that demonstrated the use of weapons and bomb-making methods (*Daily Times* [Lahore], December 22, 2009).

A respected Islamabad daily reported "the Rangers [a paramilitary under the Ministry of the Interior] and the police were simple bystanders watching the looters with folded hands" as apparently well-trained young men "methodically burnt one building after another, turning goods and property worth billions into

ashes” (*The News* [Islamabad], January 2). Following the mass arson attacks, both the Sindh-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the ruling Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) accused each other of failing to provide security and failing to check the fires. There were reports that local authorities sought permission to open fire on the arsonists, but authorization was denied (*The News* [Islamabad], January 2). There are accusations that the objective of the unknown arsonists was “not only to destabilize the city, but to pave the way for the mighty land mafia that is adamant to demolish all old, historical buildings and replace them with skyscrapers” (*The News*, December 31, 2009).

Interior Minister Rehman Malik provided a rather shocking explanation of the security collapse that allowed the markets of Karachi to be destroyed when he explained to Karachi business leaders, “The police and the Rangers do not know how to fire their guns. They have no training and the business community must contribute to a fund to provide training to these forces” (*The News*, January 2). A government suggestion that temporary markets could be built elsewhere was rejected by the business community on the grounds that acceptance might evolve into a final settlement as developers and influential politicians demolish the damaged markets and construct new commercial plazas with exorbitant rents.

The leader of the Sunni Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami political party, Syed Munawwar Hasan, suggested that India’s Research and Analysis Wing (RAW- Indian external intelligence) and U.S. private security firm Blackwater (now Xe Services LLC) may have played a role in the bombing. Blackwater (Xe) is commonly blamed for terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Noting that security forces did not act to prevent the arson and fire brigades did not respond for four hours, Syed Munawwar asked President Asif Ali Zardari whether the state “actually existed anywhere and why it did not act in time” (*The News*, December 31). Most notably in a city known for Sunni-Shi’a sectarian tensions, Syed Munawwar clearly stated that the arson attacks had been carried out by “conspirators” rather than the Shi’a community.

The Grand Mufti of Pakistan, Muhammad Rafi Usmani, stated at a press conference days after the destruction that Blackwater was responsible for the bombing of the procession of Shiite mourners celebrating Ashura (*The News*, December 30). The Interior Minister blamed “certain powers” (India is most likely to be understood here) for the destruction of Karachi’s markets, but

denied the presence of Blackwater (Xe) private security forces in Pakistan (*Daily Times* [Lahore], January 2; *The News*, January 2).

The National Assembly leader of the Sindh-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Dr. Farooq Sattar, appeared at a press conference alongside Interior Minister Malik to state that “land and drug mafias” were behind the Ashura violence (*The News*, January 1). Malik said the bombing was not a suicide attack and the markets had been set aflame in an organized rather than spontaneous manner (*Daily Times*, January 2; *The News*, January 1). An investigation is expected in order to inquire why several hours passed before any effort was made to extinguish the blazes.

The blast was followed by the alarming news that the alleged mastermind of the December 28 Ashura bombing, Sirajullah (a.k.a. Zeeshan, a.k.a. Shani), had been in police custody since December 23 and had revealed details of the bombing (including planning and the type of explosives) before the attack was carried out (*Daily Times* [Lahore], January 1, January 3; *The Nation* [Islamabad], December 31, 2009).

Algeria Introduces New Military Strategy to Combat Terrorism in the Sahara

By Andrew McGregor

As al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) terrorists grow more active in the Saharan region, Algeria has introduced a new military strategy designed to restrict movement through the volatile border regions that Algeria shares with Niger, Mali and Mauritania. Algeria has deployed an additional 3,000 troops to the force of 15,000 men along the southern borders. Algerian military forces in this region fall under the command of the 6th military region, headquartered at Tamanrasset. Together with border guards and the gendarmerie, the army will restrict movement in a number of regions of southern Algeria to those with a security permit. Eight border gates have been created along Algeria’s southern borders, intended to reduce the free movement of smugglers in the region. Individuals making unauthorized crossings through the border region will be given a single warning before being shot

at by Algerian security forces. Vehicles moving at night through restricted zones will also be fired on by patrols equipped with night vision equipment. Wells and other water sources in the region will continue to be tightly controlled (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], December 22, 2009).

Algeria and Mali have also formed a joint military technical committee to address common security concerns. The committee held a three day meeting last month to discuss military coordination and cooperation with Western security services in dealing with the growing number of kidnappings of Westerners in Saharan Africa (*El-Khabar*, December 21).

Three Malians alleged to be associates of al-Qaeda were recently arrested in Ghana in a U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) sting operation. The suspects told undercover DEA agents that they were working with Colombia's Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC) to ship cocaine through Algeria, Libya and Morocco to Spain under the protection of al-Qaeda operatives (*Bikya Masr* [Cairo], December 20, 2009; *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2009; AFP, December 18, 2009).

The discovery of a burnt out Boeing 727 airliner in the Malian desert in the region of Sinkrebaka, 125 miles north of the town of Gao, has reinforced the belief that South American drug smugglers are now actively involved in shipping drugs through West Africa into Europe (*Air Cargo News*, November 17, 2009; AFP, December 11, 2009).

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Abu Sayyaf Resurgent in the Philippines

By Dan G. Cox

Through the combined efforts of the United States Joint Special Operations Task Force in the Philippines (JSOTF-P) and the newly updated, trained and active Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), some semblance

of law, order and normalcy has returned to the Muslim-dominated Sulu Island archipelago and the southern island of Mindanao. However terrorist activities, including kidnappings for ransom and beheadings of captives for effect, have recently been conducted by the most notorious terrorist group in the Philippines – the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). According to several sources, ASG has recently resurfaced despite claims that the organization had been dealt a crippling blow by the U.S.-trained AFP.

Cracks in the apparent success of JSOTF-P and the gains made by the AFP in the Sulu Islands began to appear in the fall of 2009. Abu Sayyaf conducted a series of successful kidnappings and terrorist bombings in October, the latter aimed at infrastructure, including the important commerce artery of the Tanga-Tanga Bridge in Barangay Taung, Paktil (*Manila Bulletin*, October 23, 2009; *Mindanao Examiner*, October 20, 2009). The attacks followed a September roadside bombing that killed two members of the U.S. Special Forces and wounded several members of the AFP (Philippine News Agency, September 29, 2009; *Mindanao Examiner*, October 3, 2009).

By November, indigenous terrorism experts concluded that ASG was operating at a very high level and that the group had reorganized at an alarming rate. Rommel Banloi, the head of the Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, reckons that ASG is firmly entrenched in the jungle and more than capable of conducting future terrorist attacks (*Manila Bulletin*, November 11, 2009).

With the situation on the Sulu Islands in a state of deterioration, terrorist attacks perpetrated by ASG are now aimed at four operational and strategic objectives:

- An increase in terror and fear among the local populace to reduce public support for counterterrorism efforts.
- The destruction of infrastructure in order to decrease economic development and, in turn, the legitimacy of the government. The ASG has continued to conduct coordinated attacks against infrastructure targets, showing a preference for schools and bridges. Four bridges were recently attacked in an obvious bid to undermine economic development and the legitimacy of the civilian government. It is likely that these infrastructure attacks will continue, perhaps

expanding in the future to include a more diverse target set.

- An attempt to fund operations through kidnap-for-ransom schemes. On the island of Basilan, the ASG successfully kidnapped three workers from a plywood factory. The local courts immediately tagged ASG-Basilan leader Furuji Indama and twenty-seven other ASG members as the perpetrators of the crime and vowed to use paramilitary police in a cordon and search operation with an aim to rescue the hostages and bring the perpetrators to justice (Manila Bulletin, November 17, 2009). Almost a week prior to this kidnapping, the ASG abducted a school principal on the island of Jolo. This kidnapping did not end well—the ASG publicly dumped the severed head of the principal near a garbage site in order to send a message intended to strike fear in the local populace (Manila Bulletin, November 11, 2009). Unfortunately, the kidnapping of the plywood worker on the island of Basilan appears headed down a similar path. In early December 2009, one of the hostages from the plywood factory was killed and his head deposited in a public park (*Philippine Inquirer*, December 10, 2009).

- Breaking out fellow terrorists from local prisons in a bid to swell numbers and delegitimize the local judicial process. Perhaps the most audacious attack of late was the December 13, 2009 attack on a Basilan jail in the provincial capital of Isabela. The pre-dawn attack involved over 100 gunmen who were able to breach the outer walls of the prison and help 31 individuals escape, including hardened criminals, five members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and 12 members of the ASG (*Philippine Star*, December 30, 2009). One guard and one inmate were killed in the raid and four of the escaped prisoners have surrendered or have been recaptured, but 27 remain at large (*Manila Times*, December 14, 2009; *Philippine Star*, December 30, 2009). This jailbreak exposed some very real security weaknesses inherent in the system as it was reported that only four guards were on duty to monitor all of the prisoners in the jail (Malaysian Insider Online, December 17, 2009). This is very similar to a tactic employed by ASG to swell numbers in 2004, when 53 alleged ASG members were broken out of jails and prisons

over the course of the year. Two members of the Philippine Navy's Special Operations unit based in Western Mindanao were killed on December 29, as naval Special Forces and Marines pursued ASG fighters and escapees from the Basilan jailbreak (*Manila Bulletin*, December 30, 2009; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 31, 2009).

It is unlikely that such a coordinated and reinvigorated terror campaign is an indication of a terrorist group in its last throes. Instead, it appears that ASG is re-establishing its presence in the Sulu Islands. Despite the fact ASG has been diminished by over half since the U.S. forces in JSOTF-P first began building host nation capacity in 2001, it appears that ASG is able to conduct multiple terror operations on multiple fronts threatening both infrastructure and governmental legitimacy. Recruitment will be key for ASG if it hopes to continue its momentum; hence a premium may be placed on protecting ASG members—both potential members and actual sympathizers already in custody.

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Notes:

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Opposition Group Promises Attacks Following Sanctions on Eritrea for Support of Terrorism

By Andrew McGregor

Tensions continue to rise in the volatile Horn of Africa as Eritrean insurgent groups promise a new wave of political violence following the imposition of UN sanctions against Eritrea for its alleged support of

terrorism in the region. Eritrea is strategically located on the Red Sea, sharing borders with Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti. A former Italian colony, Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia in 1962, sparking a long and bitter struggle for independence that concluded in 1991 with the expulsion of Ethiopian forces. According to the 1997 constitution, Eritrea is supposed to be a parliamentary democracy with an elected president, but the constitution has not been implemented and elections have never been held. In practice, Eritrea is a one party state, ruled by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) under President Isaias Afewerki, an Orthodox Christian and former leader of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Afewerki has been the nation's sole president since 1993.

The Security Council Sanctions

The text of the December 23 Security Council resolution accuses Eritrea of "efforts to destabilize or overthrow" the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia. The resolution also calls on Eritrea to withdraw its troops from the border with Djibouti, where they are deployed to pressure Djibouti in a longstanding territorial dispute, calling their deployment "a threat to international security." Resolution 1907 was approved with 13 votes in favor, one vote against (Libya), and one abstention (China). The sanctions provide for travel restrictions for Eritrean political and military leaders, the freezing of Eritrean assets abroad and an arms embargo on Eritrea. An earlier Security Council resolution, no. 1862, followed fighting between Eritrean and Djiboutian forces in June 2008 and called on Asmara to withdraw its forces from the disputed region along the border, but no action was taken by Eritrean military forces to comply.

The new resolution was drafted by the Ugandan government. Uganda is the main source of troops for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which is now nearly the only armed support of consequence for the TFG. Isaac Musumba, the Ugandan Minister for Regional Cooperation, said Eritrea "provided sanctuary to international criminals. It is a rogue state" (*New Vision* [Kampala], December 29).

According to Dr. Ilmi Ahmad Du'alem, the UN envoy to Somalia, the sanctions were based "on proof that Eritrea supports terrorism... Eritrea supports [terrorist groups opposed to the Somali government]. Arms, material and moral support to these groups are delivered through Eritrea. Eritrea is the headquarters, and most of

the [Somali] opposition is still in Eritrea... There were resolutions before the current one, warning Eritrea to end these actions" (Radio HornAfrik, December 29, 2009).

Eritrea's Role in Somalia

Islamist opposition group Hizb al-Islam (composed largely of the Asmara-based Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia led by Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys), a former partner of al-Shabaab, condemned the sanctions, noting that while other countries were intervening in Somalia, no sanctions had been imposed on them (Mareeg.com., December 24, 2009).

An Ethiopian government spokesman suggested the "international delinquent state of Eritrea" was "promoting and abetting terrorist forces in the region." A statement from the Eritrean Foreign Ministry described the resolution as a "brazen act" based neither "on fact nor on the provisions of international law. It constitutes a travesty of justice and amplifies the dangers inherent in a unipolar world." The statement identified Britain, the United States and Uganda as the principal forces behind the resolution:

It must be stressed that the accusations against Eritrea for involvement in Somalia have never been substantiated or verified... Indeed, how can Eritrea provide logistical support to armed groups in Somalia when it does not have a contiguous border with that country? Eritrea has neither the political will nor the financial clout to bankroll armed groups in Somalia... The United States has simply employed its preponderant influence to ram through unjustifiable sanctions against a small country (Shabait.com, December 23, 2009).

The Eritrean ambassador to the UN, Araya Desta, said, "The Security Council has decided to impose sanctions on Eritrea based on fabricated lies, mainly concocted by the Ethiopian regime and the US administration" (*New Vision* [Kampala], December 28).

Strangely enough, the sanctions imposed on Eritrea for supporting al-Shabaab came after senior Shabaab member Shaykh Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur" issued a threat to Asmara in October, saying Eritrea opposed the implementation of Shari'a law in Somalia because its leaders were not Muslims. The shaykh added that the non-Muslim regime was ruling the Muslim majority in

Eritrea by force (AllPuntland.com, October 31, 2009). It is difficult to assess the reasoning behind this threat, though there are several possibilities:

- Eritrea has ended its support to al-Shabaab in favor of rival Islamist group Hizb al-Islam.
- Al-Shabaab may be doing a favor to the Eritrean regime by publicly denouncing it before the sanctions proposal could be introduced at the UN Security Council.
- The threat may be yet another in a series of self-defeating moves by the increasingly fanatic Shabaab movement.

Eritrea's envoy to the United Nations described the allegations of military support for groups fighting in Somalia as "lies and propaganda," indicating that it is archrival Ethiopia that is responsible for fueling the conflict in Somalia, as well as causing instability in the region by occupying lands belonging to its neighbors, including Eritrea (Dayniile, December 20; AllPuntland, December 2, 2009).

Eritrea's Armed Opposition Threatens the Regime

One of the many Eritrean opposition groups saw an opening in the UNSC sanctions. Cornelius Osman, leader of the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK) said, "This is a good opportunity for us. We are preparing our military forces to launch more attacks. We are inside Eritrea and will hit selected targets and institutions." The DMLEK chief added that the freeze on foreign assets and travel ban on Eritrean political and military leaders would isolate the regime and "deter it from receiving the hundreds of millions of dollars it gets" annually from the Eritrean diaspora (AFP, December 29, 2009).

DMLEK is a member of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), an opposition umbrella group based in Ethiopia. The movement, based on the Kunama people, was formed after Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1991. The Kunama are a Nilotic people related to the Nilotic tribes of South Sudan, but in Eritrea they represent only 2% of the population. The Kunama live near the Ethiopian border between the Gash and Setit rivers, an area that has placed them between opposing Eritrean and Ethiopian forces. Another even smaller Nilotic group known as the Nara has formed its own opposition movement – the Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement Gash-Setit, under Ismael Nada.

DMLEK has claimed a number of small attacks against Eritrean government forces or facilities. Some sense of the scale of these attacks can be gained from examining DMLEK statements:

- In November 2007, DMLEK forces attacked a military outpost at Melezanai, claiming to have killed 15 soldiers and wounding five others. An administrative office at Shambaco was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade (DMLEK Military communiqué, November 8, 2007).
- In January 2008, DMLEK claimed to have destroyed the government's agricultural office in the town of Binbilina along with goods stored in a warehouse. In the same operation, a water truck and tanker were set ablaze in the town of Barentu (Walta Information Center, January 30, 2008).
- In March 2009, DMLEK claimed to have destroyed a military hospital in the southwest region of Gash-Barka with RPGs, hand grenades and small arms (*Sudan Tribune*, March 23, 2009).

A North American-based Kunama group has undertaken a campaign to depose Cornelios Osman as the movement's leader. The group accuses Osman of "kidnapping, imprisoning, torturing and killing a lot of innocent, educated and knowledgeable Kunama" and acting as an agent of the Eritrean government. They claim many Kunama fighters have deserted the organization. [1] Osman addressed the accusations in a Paltalk discussion with members of the Eritrean diaspora. While he did not deny the extra-judicial killings, he identified the victims as "rogue elements" working for the PFDJ regime to sabotage the Kunama movement (Awate.com, November 8, 2009).

The Armed Opposition

There are strong regional, religious, cultural and linguistic divisions in Eritrea. This situation is reflected in the many national and diaspora opposition groups. The Eritrean regime is dominated by members of the Tigrinya ethnic group, who form 50% of the population in Eritrea. Most Tigrinya are Christians, though a minority are Muslims. Many of the opposition groups are based on ethnic minorities that feel excluded from the Eritrean power structure, such as the Afar, the Kunama and the Nara. Regardless of the extent of their

military activities, all such opposition groups are termed “terrorists” by the Asmara regime. Most opposition groups oppose what they regard as the “Tigrinyiazation” of the country as well as the nationalization of lands traditionally held by ethnic minority groups.

The large number of opposition groups has so far prevented the emergence of an effective armed opposition to the Asmara regime, but lately this problem has been addressed by the formation of three larger coalitions (Gedab News/Awate.com, February 25, 2007). Last June, DMLEK joined the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) to form the Democratic Front of Eritrean Nationalities (DFEN). At the conclusion of a two-day congress, DFEN declared its intention to work under the umbrella of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) and called on all of Eritrea’s armed opposition groups to coordinate their efforts. The new alliance also called on Eritrea’s Tigrinya to turn against the regime (Gedab News/Awate.com, June 19, 2009). The three main opposition coalitions are preparing a unity conference in Addis Ababa with the intention of forming a single armed opposition front with the aid of Ethiopian authorities (Nharnet, December 25, 2009; *Sudan Tribune*, December 30, 2009).

Eritrea maintains a massive defense establishment at considerable cost. Universal conscription of both men and women is used to provide the numbers that the government feels necessary to maintain in expectation of a further conflict with Ethiopia. Nevertheless, conscription is unpopular and desertion is common. DMLEK maintains that the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) have been “weakened by the economic and political crisis in the country as well as internal resistance” and are fleeing to neighboring countries whenever they get the chance (Walta Information Center, November 21, 2007). There are roughly 180,000 Eritrean refugees living in Sudan, which occasionally sends some asylum seekers back to Eritrea (*Sudan Tribune*, September 25, 2008).

Conclusion

Opponents of the government make regular efforts to tie the regime to Iran and its alleged support for terrorism in an effort to depict Eritrea as a regional threat (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 3, 2009). Typical of this is a recent and unconfirmed story carried on an Arabic-language opposition website that described the offloading of a weapons cargo from an Iranian ship in the port of Massawa under the supervision of

representatives of al-Shabaab, the Houthis rebels of northern Yemen and an unnamed Djiboutian insurgent group (Adoulis, December 24). Such efforts are likely to increase as the opposition seeks international support beyond the usual support it receives from Addis Ababa. For the moment, none of the Eritrean insurgent groups or coalitions appear strong enough to topple the PFDJ government, which has built a strong security structure to ensure its survival. If the opposition succeeds in forming a single front, it may receive military and financial support from the many enemies of the Eritrean government. An outbreak of political violence and even civil war in Eritrea has the potential to drag in Eritrea’s neighbors (particularly Ethiopia) and further inflame the conflict in Somalia and the low-level Afar insurgency in Djibouti, the site of a major American military base.

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Iraq’s Security is Kurdistan’s Security: An Interview with KRG Intelligence Chief Masrouf Barzani

By Wladimir Van Wilgenburg

According to Masrouf Barzani, director of the Ajansi Parastini Asayishi Heremi Kurdistan (Kurdistan Region Security Protection Agency) of northern Iraq, Kurdish security agencies have the legal right to operate outside of the borders of the three provinces of the Kurdistan region. Barzani is the son of the current president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Masoud Barzani.

Barzani is also a leading member of the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which established the Parastin (“Protection”) agency in the late 1960s as the intelligence arm of the KDP. Barzani is also director of the Parastin, which became a legal institution in 2004 and focuses on intelligence gathering, while the KRG’s Asayish counterterrorism and internal security directorate has executive power and carries out

operations against security threats. After 9/11, the KRG established an umbrella organization that coordinates between the security and intelligence bodies of the KDP and the Dazgay Zanyari (“Information Agency”) of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the KDP’s onetime rival and current partner, now led by Jalal al-Talabani, President of Iraq.

JF: Why is Iraq’s Kurdistan region so safe? You can go out late at night here, while the Kurdistan region borders with dangerous areas like Mosul, Kirkuk and the Sunni triangle.

MB: This is a collective work of all people involved in providing security for this area. But the main reason is the culture of our people and our region. The people in the Kurdistan region do not support radicals or extremism. There is very good cooperation between our agency and our people. The support we get from our people is the key.

[There is also] the good system and mechanism that we have put in place, so that all organizations that are working in this field are closely coordinating and have joint centers to share information and to perform according to different situations that come up and to respond and face the challenges that we have.

JF: The Kurdistan region borders Kirkuk and Mosul. Some say the Sunni Arabs have grievances against the Kurds. Do you have a policy of accommodation towards the Arabs?

MB: This is a political decision. The Kurdish leadership has been trying tirelessly and will [continue to] try to make sure that this conflict will never become an ethnic problem between the Arabs and the Kurds. After 1991, there were more than 70,000 Iraqi troops that surrendered to the Kurdish forces, but the Kurds did not [take] revenge despite the fact that the wounds of the chemical bombardments and Anfal campaign were still fresh in the Kurdish mind. [1]

Secondly, there was a major drought here and in the rest of the country and many Arab tribes asked for Kurdish support. President [Masoud] Barzani called on the Kurdish leaders and requested that if Arabs want to come, they should make a good gesture and open our land to them.

The third instance was in 2003, after the fall of the Saddam regime, [when] the Kurds were the only organized people with the most power at hand; they could really do much more [politically] than they did. They left all disputed, outstanding issues to the political process and to the Iraqi government to solve this problem, rather than taking over. The Kurds showed that they were here to create peace, harmony with other components in Iraq.

That is the intention of the Kurdish leadership and what our agency is also advocating. We are not there to do any harm to anyone based on their ethnic backgrounds. Our mission and duty is to fight terrorists. If someone happens to be a terrorist, they are treated as terrorists, not because of their religious or ethnic background.

JF: In the last elections in January 2009 the Sunni Arab list al-Hadba won the majority in Ninawa Province. Is this a threat to Kurdish security?

MB: When al-Habda won the majority in the last provincial election, they decided not to include any Kurdish representatives that had won votes in their districts. [2] It was the decision of al-Hadba that the Kurds should not be part of the Mosul government. They decided to boycott the Kurdish representatives in their own local government. The Kurdish reaction was not to participate if they are not included in the government. It was their choice.

The Kurds have not been complaining much. Despite atrocities and allegations and complaints against the Kurds, the Kurds have not been so vocal and bold, complaining about their situation. This is not widely reported in the international community, but the truth is that Kurds are still victims of ethnic cleansing in Mosul and many of the disputed territories where the Kurds are not well protected.

JF: Is this one of the reasons you also operate outside of the Kurdistan region, because of the huge attacks against Kurds in Ninawa, while the Iraqi government does not want you to operate in the disputed regions?

MB: There is not a clear indication of who should run those areas in the disputed regions, because the fate of those areas is not yet clear. So we have to expedite the process of implementing article 140 to determine who will be responsible for the security and the political affairs

of those areas. [3] For as long as these areas remain in ambiguity, there will be a problem or challenges [over] who controls these areas.

In the areas that are predominantly Kurdish, the Kurdish security forces and Kurdish administration have the right to protect their constituencies and Kurdish populations from the threats we have witnessed [bomb attacks against Kurds]. In those areas, we have tried and have expressed our willingness to closely coordinate and cooperate with other legal institutions in those areas, namely our Iraqi military, security or police and the Coalition forces, for providing security. So it is a joint effort to protect those people in these disputed territories. More recently there have been attempts to form joint committees.

JF: A *New York Times* editorial says Kurdish troops should be reintegrated into the Iraqi army, while Kurdish President Barzani has called for a unified Kurdish army. [4] The United States is also trying to integrate the Kurds into the Iraqi security apparatus. How do you see this?

MB: Most of that stems from misunderstanding the Iraqi constitution or misreading it. The President never said he is going to create an army. He said he is going to reintegrate the armed forces of the Kurdistan region rather than having different groups [with] their own forces. That is his idea of creating the unified armed forces of the Kurdistan region. That does not mean it will be an army. Iraq will have one army. The Kurds were the very first ones who formed the core of the Iraqi military when nobody was willing to become an Iraqi soldier. Some of the Peshmerga [Kurdish militias] already joined the Iraqi army. If there is a need to reintegrate more troops, then obviously this is something which will happen.

Now when you look inside the security of Kurdistan, according to the Iraqi constitution, Kurdistan has the right to be responsible for the internal security of Kurdistan. It is the responsibility of the Kurdistan region to provide that security. Kurdistan is part of Iraq, so if we have security [forces] operating in the Kurdistan region or other parts of Iraq, that is security operating in Iraq collectively.

Once Kurdistan is secure and you have security forces operating in Kurdistan, they should be included in the overall defense policy of Iraq because Kurdistan cannot be seen as a separate entity—it is part of Iraq in terms of

rights and duties. Protection of Kurdistan in this region is therefore protection of a part of Iraq. For as long as Iraq is a united country, obviously this is the mission of all of us to protect the country in the best possible way we can. When you look at the defense policy of Iraq, there is a budget that is supposed to be spent on defense, which is distributed from the overall budget. So this also should include the Kurdistan region, but unfortunately, until now the Kurdistan region has been deprived of this budget.

JF: The White House declared it would support Article 140 and Article 142 (on constitutional amendments) of the Iraqi constitution. Some say it is a clear signal of U.S. support for the Kurdish position on Kirkuk. But on the other hand, you have people saying that President Obama wants a special status for Kirkuk.

MB: Well, I am not in the position to be speaking on behalf of the Americans, but they tell you what is right. Iraq has a constitution; this constitution determines which way we should move to solve outstanding issues with the federal government. The best solution for the disputed territories is what the Iraqi constitution laid down through Article 140; it is very clear. The constitution should be the only way forward to solve those outstanding issues.

Every other article, including article 142, whatever is in the constitution, we have accepted that constitution. Most Iraqis, 80% of the Iraqis voted for that constitution. So we cannot be selective in picking one article or ignoring another.

There is a mechanism in the Iraqi constitution on how the amendments should be made. As long as we are committed to protecting and implementing the constitution, there should be no problems. The problems arise when there are alternative solutions to the constitution that have been pushed from time to time. These types of efforts are complicating the issue and they are contrary to the principles of democracy. This is running away from the principles of the constitution. As long as the constitution is the arbitrator, I do not think anybody would have any problems with it.

JF: So in general, you are saying we should support the Iraqi constitution, while the *New York Times* says that the United States should not support Article 140, because the Kurds will use Kirkuk as a stepping-stone for independence. [5]

MB: My question to them: Do you want democracy or do you insist that the Kurds should never get Kirkuk? My question to those people who wrote that article is this, are you against the Kurds in Kirkuk? What you are saying indicates that although there is a democratic process and the Kurds will probably win, we should not let them win. This is against democracy; this is hypocrisy... They have to make up their mind, do they believe in democracy or not?

And why it is perceived that Article 140 is pro-Kurdish, who knows? Is there any indication in Article 140 that favors the Kurds? No. Article 140 asks for normalization of the situation, which means undoing the injustice to the people in Kirkuk. Conducting the referendum means letting the people of Kirkuk make the decision of where they want to be in the end; whether part of the Kurdistan region or not, either way it will still be part of Iraq.

Why is there so much sensitivity over why Kirkuk should not be part of the Kurdistan region? Is it a separate state? Is it different? No. They have to understand that Iraq, which includes Kurdistan, is one country. Kirkuk being [part of the Kurdistan region] or not, it would not make a difference. Kirkuk would still be part of Iraq. I am calling upon the conscience of the international community to make a judgment. OK, we have a democratic process and now they say you cannot apply the democratic process to this problem because they do not like the results beforehand.

JF: The conclusion of some foreign analysts is that if Kirkuk becomes part of the Kurdistan region, Iraq could fall apart.

MB: OK, can you make important decisions based on assumptions? Then how can they give themselves the right to make such important decisions based on assumptions, but they will deprive or prevent the Kurds or forbid the Kurds to make similar assumptions. The Kurds will also assume that they do not want a solution, because they have in mind to once again overrun the Kurds or to repeat the Anfal operations [or] repeat chemical bombardments.

JF: Human Rights Watch says Kurdish security agencies mistreat minorities and Christians in Mosul, while the Christians support the Kurds in general. What's your response to this?

MB: We say, let the facts speak. Our counterargument is: the majority of the Yezidis, Shabaks, Christians and Turkmen [ethnic and religious minorities] have voted for the Kurdistan list in the Kurdistan region, in Kirkuk and in Mosul. So, I do not credit these critics, who are criticizing and accusing the Kurds of mistreatment.

OK, here is a question to them: If Kurdistan is so bad, why do so many Arabs, Christians, Turkmen, Shabak and Yezidis who are fleeing those areas which are known for violence [come] to Kurdistan to seek protection, security and stability? We have the facts to speak. Everybody can say what they want, but they have very little to prove. We have much [evidence] to prove [our case] and many facts on the ground. We are not in need of talking so much.

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Notes:

1. Anfal was the codename of the brutal and repressive campaign carried out against the Kurds of northern Iraq by forces of Saddam Hussein between 1986 and 1989.
2. Al-Hadba is a Sunni Arab political party formed to reduce Kurdish influence in the contested governate of Ninawa.
3. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, related to the means of determining the status of contested areas of the Ninawa, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din governates. Article 140 also seeks to normalize the situation in these areas by undoing the administrative changes and demographic policies introduced by Saddam Hussein.
4. "Iraq, the Kurds and the Americans," *New York Times*, December 17, 2009
5. Kirkuk has significant oil reserves that could provide the financial basis of an independent Kurdish state.