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Islam4UK press conference

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ARMED OPPOSITION GROUPS REDEPLOY IN WAKE OF CHAD-SUDAN BORDER SECURITY PACT

Recent talks in N’djamena seem to confirm both Sudan and Chad have realized that their use of proxies in a long-standing dispute is a dangerous game that threatens the existence of both regimes.

An agreement was reached during talks on January 8-9 that committed both parties to cease the hosting or supporting of armed opposition groups, basically reviving the March 2008 Dakar Agreement between Chad and Sudan (see text at *Sudan Tribune*, March 18, 2008). A statement issued by the Chadian Foreign Ministry said N’djamena was prepared to allow all participating bodies, including the Khartoum government, to “verify on the ground the absence of any anti-Sudan presence in Chadian territories” (AFP, January 11). Chad and Sudan have also agreed to stop using their respective media to launch attacks on each other (SUNA, December 29, 2009). The Sudanese Foreign Ministry was adamant that the negotiations were strictly “tactical” and had nothing to do with the ongoing Darfur peace negotiations in Doha.

Sources at the Chadian Foreign Ministry told the French press that a government delegation had been sent to eastern Chad to tell Dr. Khalil Ibrahim that he and his Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) forces would have to leave the country (AFP, January 11). JEM is the most effective opposition group in Darfur and the only one with national aspirations. Its largely Zaghawa leadership has maintained

close ties to the Zaghawa president of Chad, Idriss Déby. While the Zaghawa of northern Chad and northern Darfur represent only 2 to 4% of the total population in both countries, they have developed a political and economic importance far greater than their numbers would indicate. A JEM spokesman stressed that the movement was not concerned by the rapprochement, insisting that JEM forces were “in Darfur, not in Chad” (*Sudan Tribune*, January 12). Nevertheless, JEM and other rebel groups in Darfur draw recruits from the over 250,000 Darfur refugees living in camps in eastern Chad.

On January 14, JEM reported that government planes were bombing the rebel stronghold at Jabal Mun in West Darfur, forcing hundreds of civilians to flee across the border to Chad (*Sudan Tribune*, January 14; AFP, January 13). JEM has also complained that Chadian rebels newly based in the Sayah district of North Darfur are “committing crimes against our people there” (*Sudan Tribune*, January 11).

Residents of al-Sayah have complained to aid groups that the Chadians were raping, beating and looting locals, mostly members of the non-Arab Berti tribe, as well as helping themselves to scarce quantities of water, livestock, food and firewood without compensation (Reuters, January 11). The United Nations/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) reported the arrival of the Chadian fighters at al-Sayah on December 3, 2009. The appearance of an estimated 5,000 fighters in some 700 vehicles has put a severe strain on available resources. A Berti appeal to the regional governor to withdraw the rebels was met with a firm refusal, with the governor reportedly saying the rebels were there as part of an agreement to withdraw Chadian opposition groups from the border (*al-Sahafa* [Khartoum], December 19). JEM deputy chairman Muhammad Adam Bakhit claims the redeployment is designed to make the forces available for the defense of al-Fashir if it is threatened by the Darfur rebels (*Sudan Tribune*, January 20).

The Chadian forces belong to the Union des Forces de la Résistance (UFR), an umbrella group of rebels based in Darfur. The principal component of the UFR is the Rassemblement des Forces pour le Changement (RFC), whose Zaghawa leader, Timane Erdimi, is also leader of the UFR. Though Timane and his twin brother Tom are nephews of Chadian president Déby and former cabinet ministers in his government, they are now among his strongest opponents. Timane was sentenced to death

in absentia in August, 2008. Most RFC fighters are Zaghawa defectors from the Garde Républicaine.

N'djamena and Khartoum have agreed to deploy a joint border patrol designed to prevent cross-border infiltration of armed groups. Enforcement of the terms of the new agreement may prove more difficult for the Chadian opposition groups than JEM. While JEM forces have bases within Darfur, the Chadian groups are based solely in Darfur and only emerge onto Chadian territory to carry out raids. JEM is largely armed from stocks captured from the Sudanese Armed Forces, while the Chadian groups rely on Khartoum for their arms. Expelling these groups from Sudan could result in the permanent loss of a potential asset that could be used against N'Djamena should relations falter once more in the pattern typical of Chadian-Sudanese relations. Khartoum will likely prefer to keep such forces away from the border for the time being and deploy them against Darfur rebel groups to earn their keep.

REBEL MOVEMENT SUGGESTS MALIAN GOVERNMENT DELIBERATELY DRIVING TUAREG TO AL-QAEDA

In a recent interview with an Algerian newspaper, a spokesman for the Tuareg rebel group Alliance Démocratique du 23 mai pour le Changement (ADC) suggested that the Malian government's failure to implement a two and one-half year-old peace agreement was a direct cause of the growth of al-Qaeda forces in the Tuareg-dominated Kidal region of northern Mali (*El Watan* [Algiers], January 14).

Spokesman Hama Ag Sid Ahmed claims al-Qaeda forces in the area have grown from 250 to 800 members in the last year alone. At the same time, the Malian government has little presence in the region despite the commitment of vast sums of money for development projects. The absence of development efforts has been exacerbated by the return of drought to the area. The Tuareg “have a hard time understanding where their money has been spent.” The ADC claims the devastation brought by the drought has been subject to a news blackout orchestrated by Bamako. The result has been a steady alienation of the Malian Tuareg, especially the youth. The failure to provide development or security appears to the ADC to be a “premeditated wish to push these young people towards drugs, smuggling, or terrorism.” Hama Ag Sid Ahmed says he and others have warned young Tuareg against allowing their dissatisfaction with

the government to lead them into a trap that will result in their destruction.

According to the ADC spokesman, forces belonging to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) now consist of 800 full-time members and 200 auxiliary members. Hama Ag Sid Ahmed warns that AQIM's tactic of kidnapping Westerners in the region has understandably drawn the attention of numerous Western intelligence agencies concerned with terrorism.

The non-Arab Tuareg (a branch of North Africa's indigenous Berber people) have traditionally been rivals of the Arabs for control of large swathes of the Sahara. Sufi rather than Salafist, the Tuareg have until now had little reason to identify with the dominantly Arab and Salafist al-Qaeda movement. Asked how it was possible for Mali's Tuareg to allow the growth of AQIM forces in their own region, Hama Ag Sig Ahmed explained that such growth was impossible when the Tuareg maintained security in the region before the Algiers Agreement of 2006. Since then, however, Bamako has taken over security for the region under the terms of the agreement, without, however, creating the Tuareg special security units called for by the agreement. While AQIM could not previously have been active in the region without the permission of the Tuareg, the latter have changed from "actors to observers": "The Tuareg have always wanted to chase the terrorists out of the region, but the army officers prevented them from acting, telling them: 'These matters do not concern you. You are citizens, stay far away. We will catch the terrorists. That is why we are here, and if you play at being the police we will arrest you.' That is how the Malian Army reacts each time the Tuareg try to chase the Salafists."

Mystery Persists in Assassination of Iranian "Nuclear Scientist" in Tehran

By Babak Rahimi

The January 12 Tehran assassination by bomb blast of Masoud Ali-Mohammadi, a professor of physics at the University of Tehran, invites the prospect of new tensions over Iran's controversial nuclear program (Islamic Republic News Agency [IRNA], January 12). The assassination comes as Tehran faces

the possibility of new U.N. Security Council sanctions following the passing of the latest deadline to respond to economic and technological incentives in return for Tehran's cooperation over its nuclear program. Who killed Ali-Mohammadi and why? And what implications could his death have in regard to the ongoing nuclear negotiations?

The Iranian regime described Ali-Mohammadi as a "staunch" supporter of the Islamic Republic who was involved in Iran's nuclear program, insinuating that foreign agents were involved in his murder (IRNA, January 12; Press TV [Tehran], January 12). Shortly after the explosion, Iran's foreign ministry blamed Israel and the United States for carrying out the operation with the help of a pro-monarchist group that seeks to re-establish the Iranian monarchy (IRNA, January 12). In other media accounts, the assassination was described as a desperate act by the Western powers to hold back the country's nuclear research (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting [IRIB], January 12; Fars News Agency, January 12). While Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised Ali-Mohammadi as a martyr, the hardliners in power identified the culprits as those who seek to inhibit Iran's scientific progress and prevent the country from developing nuclear technology (Fars, January 16). A number of conservative news websites compared the terrorist act with Israel's airstrikes on Iraqi and Syrian nuclear facilities and alleged attacks on Egyptian nuclear scientists (Tabnak [Tehran], January 12). Hardline analysts were also quick to compare the bombing with the June 2009 disappearance of nuclear scientist Shahram Amiri, who Iran claims was kidnapped by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the United States (Payvand News, January 12).

To what extent Israel and the United States were involved remains unknown. Israel has so far refused to comment on the assassination and other possible covert operations designed to eliminate key human elements in Iran's nuclear program (Haaretz, January 14). The U.S. State Department has publicly ruled out the possibility of American involvement, calling Iran's accusations "absurd" (Haaretz, February 2, 2009; Haaretz, January 14).

In many ways, the assassination leaves a puzzling mix of questions, beginning with why an academic at a research university, with no political links with the state, would be a target of assassination. As the Iranian Atomic Energy Agency has publicly explained, Ali-Mohammadi had no associations with the state's nuclear program

[1] In fact, Ali-Mohammadi's latest research largely involved participation in a scientific project led by an academic association based in Jordan (Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East - SESAME), which conducts experimental science in cooperation with other leading academics in the Middle East, including Israeli researchers (Payvand, January 12). Not only did Ali-Mohammadi have no relations with Iran's secretive nuclear program (run by the Revolutionary Guard), but according to a close colleague, he also had little expertise in nuclear physics. [2]

Ali-Mohammadi was not a supporter of the regime. New evidence underlines the possibility that Ali-Mohammadi had become increasingly involved in the opposition movement since the disputed 2009 elections. In his "Kaleme" website, Mir-Hussain Mousavi (the defeated 2009 presidential candidate and current leader of the opposition) described Ali-Mohammadi as a strong supporter and prominent member of the Green (opposition) movement (al-Jazeera, January 14). Mousavi also described the murder as "part of an extensive plan" to stifle dissent (Radio Zamaneh, January 15). To many reformists, the murder of Ali-Mohammadi, who is known to have participated in the post-election street-demonstrations, serves as a warning to other opposition figures and may herald a campaign of assassinations reminiscent of the 1999 wave of murders charged to Iran's intelligence-security forces (Radio Zamaneh, January 15). The latest attack may have been meant to shift the public's attention from Iran's domestic turmoil to an external enemy in an attempt to stroke nationalist sentiment in a state that has lost considerable credibility since the elections.

This latest development raises new concern about the possible emergence of new tensions between Iran and the West. With the post-election unrest and subsequent crackdowns pointing to the formation of an increasingly militaristic regime, Iranian accusations of foreign assassination could trigger a conflict with the potential to destabilize the region. Moreover, the assassination of a prominent scientist could aggravate Iran's already volatile political situation regardless of the party responsible. With the hardliners in power evidently ready to adopt a more combative foreign policy in the months to come, it is conceivable that future assassinations, whether generated internally or externally, could be used by the regime to stifle dissent at home in order to restore the stability the regime has lost since the elections.

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Notes:

1. See Dr. Ahmad Shirzad's blog; http://shirzad.ir/2010/01/post_164.html. Ali-Mohammadi was a professor of particular physics who had published numerous articles in international journals. Shirzad was a friend and a colleague of Ali-Mohammadi.
2. See http://shirzad.ir/2010/01/post_164.html.

Ban on U.K. Radical Islamist Group al-Muhajiroun Raises Free Speech Questions

By Raffaello Pantucci

The British Home Office finally proscribed the radical Islamist organization al-Muhajiroun (The Emigrants) and a number of its successor organizations on January 14. The ban included the best-known offshoot of al-Muhajiroun, Islam4UK. Described by the Home Office as a sort of "cleaning up" following the proscription in July 2006 of two predecessor organizations, al-Ghurabaa (The Strangers) and the Saved Sect, the order awakened a heated debate in the United Kingdom about whether the government was taking responsible security measures or criminalizing dissent and persecuting Muslims. U.K. Home Secretary Alan Johnston cited al-Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect in his defense of the proscription of al-Muhajiroun in a letter to the *Guardian*, which had been critical of the move:

Prior to its proscription in 2006, those two organizations called for readers of its websites to "kill those who insult the prophet," praised the terrorist actions of Osama bin Laden, and advised that it was forbidden to visit Palestine "unless you engage in the main duty of that place, i.e. jihad." These are not views that are merely provocative – they are designed to encourage violence and legitimize violent acts in the name of religion. They are vehemently opposed by the vast majority of Muslims.

Anyone living in a democracy has to accept that freedom of speech gives people the right to say things that others find offensive. But all democracies have to set reasonable limits. Freedom of speech, cannot, by definition, be extended to those who use this right to incite hatred or violence – to curtail the rights of their fellow citizens to life, liberty and security (*Guardian*, January 19).

For many, the actual proscription of al-Muhajiroun may come as something of a surprise, given the general perception it had been banned years ago. This incorrect assumption was borne out of the fact that the British government had previously proscribed the predecessor groups, without bothering to add the name al-Muhajiroun to the official list of banned organizations since the group had officially disbanded in October 2004. The group claimed the decision to disband was made as in the wake of 9/11 as, “there is nothing left except that the sincere Muslims who fight with their lives, flesh and wealth unite for the sake of Allah.” Analysts have instead speculated that there was growing concern in the organization about a schism between the Pakistani and British branches, and the fact that earlier in 2004 a group of individuals linked to the organization had been arrested as part of a major police counterterrorism investigation codenamed Operation Crevice.

According to group founder Omar Bakri Mohammad, al-Muhajiroun was established on March 3, 1983 in Saudi Arabia. At the time Bakri Mohammed was an on again-off again member of the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, which he was then having difficulty with as they disapproved of his activities in Saudi Arabia. He was duly arrested and expelled by Saudi authorities and landed in the United Kingdom in January 1986. He spent the next decade establishing Hizb ut-Tahrir in the U.K., making it into the most public face of the “Londonistan” phenomenon. However, his brash pronouncements (including a declaration that Prime Minister John Major would be a target for assassination) attracted increasingly negative attention and in the end resulted in his falling out with Hizb ut-Tahrir. In January 1996, he announced the “reformation” of al-Muhajiroun, taking only two loyal followers with him.

Unfettered by Hizb ut-Tahrir’s politically wary global leadership, Omar quickly steered al-Muhajiroun deep into the radical fringe. While already known before 9/11, the group achieved even greater notoriety

afterwards by hosting events honoring the “Magnificent 19” [the 9/11 suicide bombers] and became a focus for counterterrorism investigators. While initial attention focused on the more overt jihadi preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri (currently in a British jail fighting deportation to the United States), over time it became increasingly apparent that al-Muhajiroun figured prominently in the background of a number of terrorist suspects and cells. The group regularly rejects links to terrorism; the standard denial is that the people concerned were not members when they were involved in terrorism, but this is something very hard to prove or disprove given the opaque nature of al-Muhajiroun’s official membership. Nevertheless, it is hard not to note the group’s presence on the British jihadi fringe for much of the late 1990s and 2000s. Aside from the group arrested in Operation Crevice, there has been evidence linking the rest of the organization to numerous terrorist networks in the U.K.. Looking abroad, members or former members of the group have been present on the battlefields of Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine and Afghanistan, both before and after 9/11. In late 2000, al-Muhajiroun founder Omar Bakri Mohammad claimed responsibility for recruiting Britain’s first suicide bomber, Mohammed Bilal (a.k.a. Asif Sadiq), who blew himself up and several Indian soldiers in Kashmir on Christmas Day, 2000 (*Asian Age*, December 30, 2000; *Dawn Weekly*, January 6, 2001).

Within the U.K., however, the decision to ban the group was seen by many in a very different light. Early this year, the group announced that it was planning a protest march in Wootton Bassett, a village in southwest England which has become famous for honoring fallen British servicemen whose remains pass through after repatriation at nearby RAF Base Lyneham (*Times*, January 2). Al-Muhajiroun’s plans met with universal opprobrium, including that of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who declared the plans “abhorrent and offensive” (*Guardian*, January 4). At the same time, in the town of Luton, a group of five local men tied to al-Muhajiroun were convicted of using “threatening, abusive or insulting words and behavior likely to cause harassment and distress” (BBC, January 11). The men had protested a march through Luton by servicemen of the Anglian Regiment returning from Iraq by waving placards denouncing the troops as the “Butchers of Basra.” Thus when the Home Secretary made the announcement that the group was to be proscribed on January 12, the events were naturally linked. This opened up a debate about whether it was proper to proscribe groups for expressing distasteful opinions.

The government's response was to point to a just completed (and confidential) Joint Terrorism Analysis Center (JTAC) report commissioned after the group announced its "reformation" in May of last year (BBC, January 12, 2010). Naturally this was received with some skepticism, and when the renewed attention brought to "Londonistan"—in the wake of revelations that Christmas Day "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab may have been in part radicalized in London—was factored in, the belief was that the government needed to take visible action and this group was the target (*Times*, December 29, 2009).

The actual impact of the ban is very hard to measure. Al-Muhajiroun co-founder Anjem Choudary remains a very public figure (he did numerous public interviews in the wake of the proscription) and has not given any indication that he is going to curb his calls for Shari'a in the U.K. As he pointed out, "unless the Government can prove that you are ostensibly exactly the same organization, doing the same things at the same time, it's very difficult to clamp down" (*Times*, January 16). More likely, the group will go relatively quiet for a while before re-emerging under a new name – as it did when some of its predecessor groups were proscribed. This cycle will likely continue to repeat itself until enough of the senior leadership receives heavy prison sentences for infringing terrorism legislation – something that is unlikely given Choudary's background as a lawyer and the care with which the extremists make their inflammatory statements.

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Notes:

1. For the official proscription order and complete list of the proscribed al-Muhajiroun off-shoots see: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100034_en_1.
2. Omar Bakri Mohammed, "An official declaration dissolving Al-Muhajiroun," <http://www.almuhajiroun.net>, October 8, 2004.
3. For a comprehensive history of the genesis of the group, please see: Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
4. For a complete overview of the group's links to

terrorism, please see the forthcoming Raffaello Pantucci, "The Tottenham Ayatollah and the Hook Handed Cleric: An examination of all their *jihadi* children," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33(3), March 2010.

The Politics Behind Iraq's Second Parliamentary Election

By Joel Wing

Iraqis will head to the polls on March 7 in the second parliamentary election since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Iraqi politics are in a state of flux that is reflected in the run-up to the vote. The election law was held up over longstanding issues like Kirkuk. At the same time, the ethno-sectarian parties that dominated the 2005 polls are being challenged by a new wave of nationalist parties. This has created challenges to forming a state ruled by law, given tensions between the new parties and the old lists that are attempting to hold onto power.

Iraq's parliament passed a new election bill on December 6, 2009. Three days later, the three-member Iraqi Presidential Council approved the legislation and it became law (Aswat al-Iraq, December 9, 2009). That was almost two months past the original deadline of October 15, 2009 set by the Iraqi Election Commission (RFE/RL, October 7, 2009). The original version of the law was passed by parliament on November 9, 2009 after long arguments. [1] One of the disputes was over what type of voter system to use. An open list was chosen where the public is able to pick from parties, lists, and politicians. Due to disputes between Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen, voting in Tamim province (which includes Kirkuk) was made provisional for one year while a committee looks for any irregularities that could invalidate the balloting (Aswat al-Iraq, September 24, 2009). Finally, the number of seats up for grabs was increased from 275 to 323, based upon population numbers from the Ministry of Trade and a requirement that there be one seat in parliament for every 100,000 people (Niqash.org, November 9, 2009).

Iraq seemed to be ready for the polls when Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi vetoed the first draft of the bill on November 18, 2009. Al-Hashimi objected to the fact that Iraq's refugees, mostly from his Sunni

constituency, would have their votes go towards only eight compensatory seats shared with smaller parties that did not get enough ballots at the provincial level, but did well nationally. [2] This backfired when the Kurdish Alliance, backed by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), ignored al-Hashimi's concerns and amended the law to reduce the number of available seats in parliament by basing them upon older 2005 statistics with a 2.8% increase for recent population growth. [3] This reduced the number of seats in many Sunni areas while increasing them in Kurdistan. That dilemma was finally worked out on December 6 by giving every province an increase in seats, including three in Kurdistan, and allowing refugees to be counted as part of their home provinces. The new number of seats in parliament is now set at 325. [4]

The Iraqi Election Commission then set the voting date for March 7, 2010 (Aswat al-Iraq, December 9, 2009). This will cause legal problems as the constitution says that elections should be held no later than January 31, 2010 and parliament's term ends March 15, 2010 (Reuters, December 7, 2009). It is expected to take months to put together a new government, so some sort of caretaker administration will have to be assembled in the meantime.

With the election law finally passed, Iraq's many lists are left to focus upon their campaigns. In 2005 there were three main ethno-sectarian lists competing:

- The Shiite United Iraqi Alliance, made up of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, now ISCI), the Sadrist, and the Dawa Party.
- The Kurdish Alliance, consisting of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).
- The Sunni Iraqi Accordance Front, consisting of the Iraqi Islamic Party, the General Council for the People of Iraq and the Iraqi National Dialogue Council (BBC, January 20, 2006).

By 2009 almost all of those alliances had broken apart and there is now a mix of ethno-sectarian and nationalist lists running for office. [5]

The Shiite bloc for example, has split into two. Prime Minister al-Maliki's Dawa Party formed the State of

Law coalition for the 2009 provincial elections. The coalition calls for a strong central government and better security. The ISCI, the Sadrist, former Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari's National Reform Trend and Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress created the Iraqi National Alliance (INA). Since they have disparate views on many issues, the INA's main selling point is its Shiite identity. Iran played a large role in its formation in an effort to maintain Shiite power in Iraq. [6] Tehran and the INA also wanted al-Maliki to join because he is the most popular politician in Iraq, but they did not want his leadership and refused to assure him the prime minister's post. [7] The two lists are likely to get the most votes from the Shiite majority, but because of their split neither may even get a plurality. There are constant hints and rumors that the two may rejoin after the voting (Alsumaria TV, January 7).

The other major list is the Kurdish Alliance of the KDP and PUK. They and their constituency are still rather homogenous, which means they will probably get about the same number of votes as in 2005, when they received the second-highest number of seats after the United Alliance. In 2010 this means they will be looked at as the main element in the formation of any new coalition. The Kurdish Alliance will be asking for the retention of ethno-sectarian quotas that assure a Kurdish president and deputy prime minister in the national government, concessions to allow them to export oil, and a resolution to the Kirkuk issue. Their most likely partner is the National Alliance since the Kurds and the ISCI have a long-standing relationship predating the U.S. invasion, but this relationship is complicated by the fact the Sadrist are not friendly to Kurdish demands.

After these three larger lists, there are several medium-sized groups:

- The Iraqi National Movement coalition, which includes former Prime Minister Ilyad Allawi's Iraqi National List, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi's Renewal List and Saleh al-Mutlaq's Iraqi National Dialogue Front. On January 8, the Accountability and Justice Commission (successor to the De-Baathification Commission) banned al-Mutlaq from participating in the election, accusing him of being a Ba'athist. [8] Al-Mutlaq ran in the 2005 election, where his party garnered 11 seats, and he also helped draft the 2005 constitution (McClatchy, January 7). The Commission has questionable legal standing and its decision to ban al-Mutlaq could disrupt

the voting, as other members of the list have threatened a boycott in response. It would also set a bad precedent if the Commission were able to ban parties that have actively been involved in Iraqi politics with no previous problems.

- The Unity of Iraq Alliance is made up of Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani's Constitution Party and Iraq's Awakening Conference, led by Anbar governate's Shaykh Ahmad Abu Risha (Aswat al-Iraq, October 21, 2009). Bolani has been mentioned as a possible candidate for prime minister, but his party has never done well in elections.
- The last significant list is the Iraqi Consensus, which is led by the Iraqi Islamic Party. [9] It is the successor to the Iraqi Accordance Front.

Most of these lists are more nationalist and secular in orientation than ethno-sectarian. Their real importance will be seen after the votes are tallied and the large parties need to put together ruling coalitions. These medium-sized lists will be crucial in getting the required number of seats to rule, and will be offered ministries as a reward for their support.

Conclusion

Iraq's 2010 election is likely to bring about both change and stasis. The 2009 provincial elections showed that voters were more interested in issues like security, services, and nationalism than ethno-sectarian identity. The 2010 vote will continue that trend, as there are more serious secular contenders this time around. At the same time, groups that still hold onto identity politics (like ISCI and the Kurdish Alliance) will have enough power to upset any broad consensus on Iraq's major issues, such as the implementation of federalism or the development of the oil industry. This was demonstrated when the Kurdish Alliance and their ISCI allies were able to hold up the election bill over Kirkuk and a closed list. The voting is also causing legal problems, as the Accountability and Justice Commission is attempting to ban parties just prior to the vote and the delay in passing the election law means that constitutional deadlines will be broken and a caretaker government will have to be formed. These are all important developments for Iraq's nascent political system. New voices are emerging, and some of the old ones are trying to intimidate them. This, along with the inability to follow deadlines, even ones set in the constitution, will test the resiliency of

Iraq's government ability to move towards a more open system.

Joel Wing is an Iraq analyst based in Oakland, California who runs the blog Musings on Iraq: <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/>

Notes:

1. Reidar Visser, "The Election Law Is Passed: Open Lists, Kirkuk Recognized as a Governorate with 'Dubious' Registers," *Historiae.org*, November 8, 2009. <http://historiae.org/election-law.asp>
2. Reidar Visser, "Constitutional Disintegration," *Iraq and Gulf Analysis*, November 19, 2009. <http://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2009/11/19/constitutional-disintegration/>
3. Reidar Visser, "The Hashemi Veto Backfires, Parliament Ups the Ante," *Iraq and Gulf Analysis*, November 23, 2009. <http://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2009/11/23/the-hashemi-veto-backfires-parliament-ups-the-ante/>
4. Reidar Visser, "No Second Veto: The Election Law is Approved by Tariq al-Hashimi and the Iraqi Presidency," *Historiae.org*, December 6, 2009. <http://www.historiae.org/hashemi.asp>
5. Marisa Cochrane Sullivan, "Iraq's Parliamentary Election," *Institute for the Study of War*, October 21, 2009. <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraqs-parliamentary-election>
6. Jeremy Domergue and Marisa Cochrane, "Balancing Maliki," *Institute for the Study of War*, June 2009. <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/balancing-maliki>
7. Nimrod Raphaeli, "Al-Maliki Turns His Back on Iran, Embraces Iraqi Nationalism," *Middle East Media Research Institute*, September 2, 2009. <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/112/0/3619.htm>
8. Reidar Visser, "Why Ad Hoc De-Baathification Will Derail the Process of Democratization in Iraq," *Iraq and Gulf Analysis*, January 8, 2010. <http://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2010/01/08/why-ad-hoc-de-baathification-will-derail-the-process-of-democratisation-in-iraq/>
9. Ahmed Ali, "Iraq's Elections Challenge: A Shifting Political Landscape," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, November 20, 2009. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3145>

Hybrid, Homegrown and Transnational: The Indian Mujahideen and the Islamist Terror Matrix

By Animesh Roul

Following a series of urban terror attacks in 2008, including the three-day long Mumbai siege, terrorist groups maintained a low profile throughout 2009. Jihadi groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) and the homegrown Indian Mujahideen (IM) remained surprisingly inactive as they regrouped in the face of a continuous crackdown on terror infrastructure across the country. Investigating agencies have managed to arrest a number of IM, LeT and HuJI operatives and have neutralized their support structures, mostly comprised of outlawed Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) cadres.

However, in a twist of events, the intelligence agencies issued an alert this January about a novel threat emanating from the supposedly weakened Indian Mujahideen. According to intelligence inputs, the IM have been planning to carry out major terror strikes using hijacked airliners. India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) has identified a pair of IM militants who have undergone pilot training in recent years, namely Shahzad Ahmed (a.k.a. Pappu) and Mirza Shadab Baig, a senior IM operative. Both are suspected of spearheading a planned 9/11-style terror event on Indian soil.

Shahzad, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, has been on the run since the September 2008 Batla House encounter in the national capital of Delhi. Shahzad's online profile and activities on a social-networking website (Orkut) exposed IM's future designs. (*India Today*, January 6).

The Intelligence Bureau Discovers a Massive Plot

IB officials achieved a breakthrough on January 17 when they arrested a self-styled HuJI commander identified as Mohammad Abdul Khwaja (a.k.a. Amjad) from Chennai, in Tamil Nadu. The 27-year-old native of Andhra Pradesh had intended to strike major installations in South India during the forthcoming Republic Day (January 26) celebrations. According to his confessional statements he planned to target the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) depot on the outskirts of

Hyderabad city as well as refineries in Visakhapatnam and Chennai. Besides these installations, he also plotted to carry out assassinations in Hyderabad, mostly targeting police officials involved in past terror investigations. For these activities, Khwaja scouted at least 25 other Muslim youths from south India and reportedly sent them for terror training in Pakistan (*Daily News and Analysis* [Mumbai], January 19).

The most disturbing aspect of Khwaja's activities is the transnational linkages he has established over the years. Khwaja was found to be operating in and out of India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in the past few years, coordinating with the LeT, Jaish-e Muhammed (JeM) and IM leadership and establishing close ties with IM's elusive mastermind, Riaz Bhatkal (a.k.a. Ismail Shahbandri). Khwaja, who had worked closely with HuJI's slain operative Shahid Bilal and underwent terrorist training in Pakistan, was found to be using three passports—Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani—in three different names (*Times Now TV*, January 20).

Transnational Ties of the Indian Mujahideen

Though IM, a relative newcomer to the South Asian jihadi landscape, claims to be an indigenous terror group, IM's working relations with transnational terror groups (primarily Pakistan and Bangladesh-based) calls for close scrutiny. Even if the indigenous tag of IM is well suited, it is becoming clearer by the day that IM is a hybrid terrorist group with militants from a number of other terrorist outfits (including SIMI, LeT and HuJI) comprising the group's core. Recent Gujarat police investigations established the existence of this lethal combination when they concluded that IM operatives had carried out blasts under the direction, guidance and assistance of Pakistan-based HUJI operative, Amir Raza Khan (*Ahmadabad Mirror*, January 12). Khwaja's confession has now substantiated that assertion.

Following the countrywide crackdowns and the well-executed September 2008 Batla House encounter in Delhi (in which two IM members were killed by police), many IM militants are in custody while others are still evading arrest. A number of IM operatives with obvious SIMI backgrounds were arrested from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Others, including Zahid Shaikh, Yunus Mansuri, Abu Bashir Kazmi, Qayamuddin Kapadia, Abdul Raziq, and Asghar Peerbhoy, were arrested in the southern states of Karnataka and Kerala. However, the top leadership and the masterminds of the attacks, Iqbal

Bhatkal, Riyaz Bhatkal, Abdul Subhan Qureshi (a.k.a. Taqueer), are still at large, with as many as 29 others who have been identified by the investigating agencies (*Indian Express*, January 9).

A Record of Terrorist Attacks

IM has claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist acts across India between 2006 and 2008, including the Mumbai commuter train blasts (July 2006); the serial blasts in Uttar Pradesh (November 2007); serial explosions in northeast India's Assam and Tripura states, (October 2008); and attacks in Jaipur city (May 2008), Bengaluru (July 2008); Ahmadabad (July 2008); and Delhi (September 2008). The Assam and Tripura (Agartala) attacks were claimed by the previously unknown Islamic Security Force-Indian Mujahideen (ISF-IM), which appeared to be IM's northeastern franchise. Lastly, investigations into the November 2008 Mumbai episode reveal tell-tale signs of IM's footprint, though the evidence is not yet conclusive. According to intelligence sources, a huge amount of money was sent from the Gulf through IM's Riyaz Bhatkal to execute the Mumbai carnage. The recent probe into LeT's Chicago conspiracy (which is directly linked to the Mumbai terror events) revealed that prime suspect David Headley and Tahawwur Rana received logistical support from IM operatives while they were in India. IB believes that Bhatkal knew about the Mumbai attack plan and helped arrange local logistics through his underworld links in the city.

Connections to Lashkar-e-Taiba

IM's LeT connection is much deeper than previously thought. IM-LeT operations in South India (mainly in Kerala state) were looked after by Tadiyandavede Nasir (a.k.a. Ummer Haji) and his brother-in-law Shafaz Samsuddin, with direction from Pakistan-based Amir Raza. Both IM operatives hail from the Kannur district of Kerala and masterminded the July, 2008 Bengaluru serial blasts with funding and instructions from the LeT. Both Nasir and Shafaz were believed to be part of IM's Shahbuddin Gohuri Brigade as well (See *Terrorism Monitor*, March 3, 2008). Nasir's arrest in late 2009 also revealed IM's recruitment tactics and operational secrets. According to his disclosure, SIMI/IM and LeT operate under the guise of a Sufi sect known as Noorisa Tariqat, which has branches in many parts of southern India, including Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Nasir and his fellow cadres reportedly indoctrinated many Muslim youths in the jihadi ideology with anti-Hindu diatribes

and by focusing on alleged atrocities against Muslims in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine. (*Indian Express*, December 21, 2009; Express Buzz, December 5, 2009)

Al-Qaeda Infiltration?

The threat from this hybrid but loosely knit terror group called IM now seems to be going in a more lethal direction. Recent reports suggest that SIMI/IM will give way to al-Qaeda, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and the anti-Shi'a Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) of Pakistan as these groups set up bases on Indian soil. Intelligence Bureau officials suspect that international terror groups are thinking seriously about revamping IM, which is now in a state of disarray. There are terrorist sleeper cells across South India and a well entrenched SIMI network, primarily in Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. It has been reported that SIMI has at least 12 front organizations in the above-mentioned states which not only facilitate the establishment of an al-Qaeda led conglomerate, but also provide ample operational advantages (Rediff.com, January 12).

The IB believes that al-Qaeda and its affiliates have already started their operations with IM/SIMI by setting up sleeper cells, giving a breather to LeT and JeM, whose activities came under international scrutiny following the 26/11 Mumbai events.

Though al-Qaeda's foray into the region's Islamist terror scene came as a bit of surprise to many, the recent capture of Afghan national Ghulam Rasool Khan (a.k.a. Mirza Khan) has cleared the picture. Ghulam Khan, associated with the Hyderabad-based Indian Muslim Mohammadi Mujahideen (IMMM), has admitted to associating with al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the past. He also revealed his activities in Pakistan's Swat Valley and Afghanistan's Kandahar province during 2004-05. He was arrested while attempting to sneak into Bangladesh through the India-Bangladesh border at Purnia, Bihar state (Press Trust of India, January 19; *Hindustan Times*, January 20). The IMMM in question seems to be the same group headed by the LeT's Azam Ghauri prior to his April 2000 death in Andhra Pradesh. However, there are still lots of dots to be connected before the police figure out the actual extent of the activities of Ghulam Khan's organization and its purported ties with al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the terror trajectory in India perhaps will take a sharp turn with al-Qaeda's formal entry into the

region by bringing the existing terror groups under one umbrella. However, the most pressing threat to India in the long term comes from none other than the hybrid and homegrown Indian Mujahideen, as the IM/SIMI combined will provide the necessary space and foot soldiers to the sub-continental terror strategy of the larger LeT and al-Qaeda organizations.

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