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Site of the blast, Shahi Koto

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AL-QAEDA VOWS TO BLOCK STRATEGIC AL-MANDAB STRAIT

Al-Qaeda has never attempted to seize and hold strategic territory, but this may be about to change, according to an audiotape message from the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In the 12-minute statement, Sa'id al-Shihri (a.k.a. Sufyan al-Azidi) outlined a new strategy that would involve Islamist fighters from Somalia working in coordination with AQAP fighters in Yemen to secure both sides of the vital strait (al-Malahim Establishment for Media Production, February 8).

Some 30% of the world's annual trade passes through the narrow Bab al-Mandab ("The Gate of Tears," thanks to its navigational hazards). Passing Djibouti and Eritrea on the west and Yemen on the east, the strait connects the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Commercial ships entering or leaving the southern end of the Bab al-Mandab must already contend with pirate-plagued shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden.

Al-Shihri suggested that controlling the Bab al-Mandab and bringing it "back under the protection of Islam" would "create a great victory and international power for us... Then the strait will be closed and the grip will be tightened around the throat of the Jews, because the U.S. supports them through [the strait], by means of the Red Sea in particular." Al-Shihri claims "the Jews" are mobilizing their agents to oppose this, especially those in the "agent governments" of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Al-Shihri mentions in particular Egypt's Lieutenant

General Omar Sulayman, the director of the Gihaz al-Mukhabarat al-Amma (Egyptian General Intelligence Services) since 1993.

Following the offer of Somalia's al-Shabaab Islamist movement to send fighters to join AQAP in Yemen, al-Shihri praises his "great brothers in Somalia" and says they will operate on two fronts in the upcoming battle with the United States. "You and we are standing on the two banks of the Bab al-Mandab... We shall expel our enemies. We should complete each other in our war against our enemies, until God grants us victory or martyrdom, God willing."

Elements of the Arab press quickly pointed out that al-Qaeda's ambition may be beyond its reach. "Control of the Bab al-Mandab might not be easy, especially as it does not possess heavy weapons and modern boats that can be used for this purpose, but this does not mean it does not possess the logistical capabilities that can disrupt navigation in this vital international passageway" (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, February 9). Nevertheless, Yemeni government officials said all such threats were taken seriously (*al-Hayat*, February 9; 26Sep.net [Yemen Defense Ministry], February 10).

Somalia's Minister of Information, Dahir Mahmud Gelle, urged the international community to take steps to eliminate AQAP and al-Shabaab to avert the risk to the global economy posed by a seizure of Bab al-Mandab (Radio Gaalkacyo, February 10).

THAI ARMY READIES CONTROVERSIAL AIRSHIP FOR USE AGAINST ISLAMIST INSURGENTS

Amid rumors that the program has been grounded, the Royal Thai Army maintains it is in the last stages of preparing a controversial U.S.-built manned airship for deployment in the military's struggle against Islamist separatists active in southern Thailand.

The Thai military has been heavily criticized recently by those who allege the armed forces have gone on a spending spree, buying expensive but unproven and potentially useless technology as the nation tries to recover from a financial crisis. Many Thai analysts wonder whether the same amount of investment in human assets or less mobile but cheaper ground surveillance systems would not realize similar results. Even one of the airship's operational support team questioned the airship's usefulness on two grounds: the heavily forested terrain of south Thailand differs greatly

from places where balloon surveillance is currently used, such as the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan; secondly, the insurgents specialize in hit-and-run attacks and do not converge in large groups long enough to be noticed by an airship (*The Nation* [Bangkok], February 4).

The Aeros 40D S/N 21 (Sky Dragon) is made by California-based Worldwide Aeros. Nearly 50 meters long, the Sky Dragon has an operational range of 560 km, a ceiling of 10,000 feet and can travel at a maximum speed of 88 kph.

The airship was procured through a contract with a U.S. defense industry middleman, Aria International. Allegations of corruption in the procurement process were cited as one of the reasons behind demonstrations by the red-shirted United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UFDD) opposition movement at Royal Thai Army headquarters (Thailand News Agency, January 20). The charges were refuted by Aria VP Art Sullivan. "To be specific and blunt, Aria has never paid anyone to gain or retain this contract." Defending the airship against allegations it could be easily shot down by small-arms fire, Sullivan stated. "In fact, you could put 20 bullet holes in this airship and it would still continue to fly. Nonetheless, we operate the airship at a safe altitude above the range of small arms." Sullivan also challenged exaggerated cost figures that appeared in the Thai media, insisting the contract was for a fixed \$9.7 million (Letter to the Editor, *The Nation*, February 8).

The procurement controversy is part of larger public criticism of wasteful defense spending on a bloated defense establishment that has been slow to follow the "leaner and meaner" trend of other militaries (*The Nation* [Bangkok], February 5). Initially, it was planned to purchase two of the airships, though the acquisition of another airship now looks unlikely in light of the procurement controversy.

Delays in the program were attributed to problems in obtaining a U.S. release for the technology used in the airship's complex camera system (worth more than the rest of the airship and its support system). The high-definition, thermal-detecting surveillance cameras can record images night or day, in any kind of weather.

Once deployed, the airship system (described by Aria as a "surveillance programme, not an airship programme") will be operated by 55 officers and NCOs distributed between command, air, ground and support operations.

Airship operations will be supported by three HU-1H helicopters, one in each of the southern provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani. On the ground, a 22-ton Grizzly Armored Personnel Carrier acts as a mobile command-and-control vehicle. The airship also requires the construction of a hangar and support facility in Pattani province.

The U.S. military has deployed cable-tethered blimps – aerostats – as part of its RAID (Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment) surveillance system in Iraq and Afghanistan (Defense Industry Daily, July 18, 2009). Though the aerostats use low-pressure gas to prevent being brought down by a single bullet-hole, insurgents have discovered that if you put enough bullet-holes in an aerostat, it needs to be brought down for maintenance. In many cases this has reduced a projected 30-day aerostat deployment to a length of only several days. Though their effectiveness in South Thailand is yet unproven, airships may soon play an important role on the modern battlefield. The U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the U.S. Air Force have plans to launch a massive unmanned military airship capable of flying a ten-year mission at 70,000 feet. Dubbed ISIS (Integrated Sensor Is Structure), the airship will be 1,000 feet in length, with two enormous radar antennas integrated into the framework of the airship and an advanced radar system designed by Raytheon. According to DARPA, “ISIS will revolutionize theater-wide surveillance, tracking and fire control” (Defense News, May 11, 2009). A prototype built by Lockheed is scheduled to make its first flight in 2013.

Pakistani Responses to the CIA’s Predator Drone Campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda

By Brian Glyn Williams

Conventional wisdom in the West seems to have coalesced around the notion that the CIA’s airborne assassination campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Pakistan’s remote FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) is driving Pakistanis to new levels of anti-Americanism. Western news sources report routinely on Pakistani discontent with the strikes. In truth, Pakistani leaders have spoken against them, the Pakistani media regularly condemns

them and they do seem to be genuinely unpopular with Pakistanis according to opinion surveys. [1] But not everyone in Pakistan is against the killing of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters by the CIA’s robotic killers in the sky. Recent accounts from the Pakistani media and blogs show that an increasing number of Pakistanis have turned against al-Qaeda and the Taliban and many have come to see the Predator and Reaper strikes on al-Qaeda as a legitimate response to terrorism (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 25, 2009; October 1, 2009).

In April 2009, Pakistani security expert Amir Mir published figures which showed that 687 civilians have been killed along with 14 al-Qaeda leaders by American drones since January 2008 (*The News*, April 10, 2009). The newspaper reported that this translated to over 50 civilians killed for every slain al-Qaeda member. In January 2010, another Pakistani daily described an increased death toll for the year 2009 and claimed, “Of the 44 Predator strikes carried out by U.S. drones in the tribal areas of Pakistan over the past 12 months, only five were able to hit their actual targets, killing five key al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, but at the cost of over 700 innocent civilians... for each al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorist killed by the American drones, 140 civilian Pakistanis also had to die” (*Dawn*, January 2). While such statistics of 50 or 140 civilians per al-Qaeda death are unproven (neither the Pakistani media nor the military can get to the remote, Taliban-controlled areas to do assessments on drone strikes on hujra guest houses, compounds, convoys or madrassas), these numbers have widespread currency among Pakistanis who are prone to anti-Americanism. An October 2009 report by Peter Bergen paints a lower number, giving a total of 760 to 1,000 deaths (including Taliban and civilians) over the three years from 2006 to 2009. [2].

Pakistani government officials have officially condemned the drone attacks in an effort to distance themselves from the unpopular strikes which are covertly supported by the Pakistani military and government. The Pakistani Defense Minister claimed the strikes were generating “anti-American sentiments” and creating “outrage and uproar among the people.” Another military official said the missile strikes were “counterproductive” and “driving a wedge between the government and the tribal people.” Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani complained, “We are trying to separate militants from tribesmen, but the drone attacks are doing exactly the opposite” (PakTribune, November 16, 2009).

For all their efforts to distance themselves from the unpopular drone strikes, it was revealed in 2009 that the Pakistani government actually permits the CIA's Predators to be flown from Pakistani soil. When this news was leaked one Pakistani blogger wrote, "Now the cat is out of the bag... it is once more proved how much regard America and our own government has for the people who reside in Pakistan. Their lives are of no value and our own government is involved in the killings. What a shame and what a sorry state of affairs. Another lie of our president has been caught and nobody knows how many more are on the way." [3]

But not everyone shares the above sentiment. In the spring of 2009 a poll was carried out in the FATA tribal area by the Pakistani-based Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy that was to demonstrate that in this area at least there was widespread support for the drone attacks (*The News* [Islamabad], March 5, 2009). [4] The pollsters found that "the popular notion outside the Pakhtun [Pashtun] belt that a large majority of the local population supports the Taliban movement lacks substance." Most importantly the study rejected the notion that the drone strikes are seen as a violation of Pashtun lands or Pakistani sovereignty. It would seem that Pashtun tribesmen who have seen their maliks (tribal chiefs) killed by the Taliban, their theaters closed, their women forced out of work, Islamic law brutally enforced, girls' schools closed, and "spies, traitors and informers" killed in their hundreds by the Taliban are more inclined to be tolerant of the "machays" or "bangana" ("wasps" or "thunder," as the drones are known in Pashtun) than Pakistanis living outside of the FATA zone.

In December 2009, a coalition of FATA-based political parties and civil organizations opposed to terrorism issued the "Peshawar Declaration." Among other provisions, it stated:

- The conference demands that targeted and immediate operations against all centers and networks of terrorism should be initiated.
- This conference also demands the elimination of all foreign, non-local and local terrorists in FATA.

The declaration also dealt with the drone attacks in detail:

The issue of Drone attacks is the most important one. If the people of the war-affected areas are satisfied with any counter-militancy strategy, it is the Drone attacks which they support the most. According to the people of Waziristan, Drones have never killed any civilian. Even some people in Waziristan compare Drones with Ababels (The holy swallows sent by God to avenge Abraham, the intended conqueror of the Khana Kaaba). A component of the Pakistani media, some retired generals, a few journalists/analysts and pro-Taliban political parties never tire in their baseless propaganda against Drone attacks. [5]

Tellingly, when a CIA drone killed Baitullah Mahsud, the notorious head of the Pakistani Taliban who had sent numerous suicide bombers into Pakistani cities, there was no public outcry in Pakistan. On the contrary, many Pakistanis celebrated. One internet forum member from Karachi said, "If (his death is) true, it would be good news and shows the value of drone attacks," while another claimed, "The mass murderer has met his fate. He was responsible for the death of thousands of innocent Pakistanis. May he burn in hell for eternity." [6] When Tahir Yuldashev, the head of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a FATA-based terrorist group tied to al-Qaeda was killed by a missile strike in the fall of 2009, the Daily Times reported, "The death of Tahir Yuldashev at the hands of the Americans has, as in the case of Baitullah Mehsud, provided relief to Pakistan" (Daily Times [Lahore], October 3, 2009).

FATA-based Farhat Taj of the Aryana Institute described the sentiments of the natives of Waziristan as follows:

They want al-Qaeda along with the Taliban burnt to ashes on the soil of Waziristan through relentless drone attacks. The drone attacks, they believe, are the one and only "cure" for these anti-civilization creatures and the U.S. must robustly administer them the "cure" until their existence is annihilated from the world. The people of Waziristan, including tribal leaders, women and religious people, asked me to convey in categorical terms to the U.S. the following in my column. Your new drone attack strategy is brilliant, i.e. one attack closely followed by

another. After the first attack the terrorists cordon off the area and none but the terrorists are allowed on the spot. Another attack at that point kills so many of them. Excellent! Keep it up! (Daily Times. February 6).

The previous remarks would seem to demonstrate that Pakistanis are far from unified in their opposition to the drone strikes. There would seem to be mounting evidence that many Pakistanis, especially those in direct contact with the Taliban, do not oppose the American drone campaign.

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Notes:

1. "Pakistani Public Turns against Taliban, But Still Negative on U.S." World Public Opinion.org. July 1, 2009. <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brasiapacificra/619.php?lb=bras&pnt=619&nid=&id=>
2. Peter Bergen, "Pakistan Drone War Takes Toll on Militants and Civilians," Foreign Policy.com. - Af/Pak Channel, October 29, 2009. Bergen's figures are partially based on the figures from *Dawn* and *The News*.
3. "Dianne Feinstein. We Know Drones Are From HERE." *Chowrangi*, n.d., <http://www.chowrangi.com/dianne-feinstein-we-know-drones-are-from-here.html>
4. "Drone Attacks--A Survey." The Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy. March 5, 2009. <http://www.airra.org/news/DroneAttacks.htm>
5. Short version - <http://www.airra.org/newsandanalysis/Peshawardeclaration.php>; Full text at http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2010/peshawar_declaration_a_path_fo.html. According to organizers; "The workshop was attended by the provincial leadership of Awami National Party (ANP), Pukhtunkhwa Mili Awami Party (PMAP), Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), Pakistan Peoples Party Sherpao (PPP-S), National Party (NP) and Awami Party Pakistan (APP), civil society organizations under the banner of Aman Tehrik (Peace Movement), businessmen, doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, laborers and intellectuals... Representatives from all the agencies of FATA, Swat, Malakand and Buner also participated."
6. <http://www.paklinks.com/gs/pakistan-affairs/339128-baitullah-mehsud-dead.html>

Pakistani Taliban Display Effectiveness of their Intelligence Network with Attack on U.S. Special Forces

By Andrew McGregor

Following the Afghan Taliban intelligence coup that led to the late December suicide-bombing at an American base in Khost province that killed seven CIA agents, Pakistan's Taliban have apparently scored an intelligence success of their own, exposing a secret U.S. operation in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) by killing three American Special Forces operatives in a carefully targeted suicide car-bombing. The attack took place outside the re-opening of a girls' school in Shahi Koto, an area of the Lower Dir district of the NWFP. The Pakistani military claimed to have cleared Upper and Lower Dir of militants in the summer of 2009.

The suicide bomber appears to have waited for the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) vehicle carrying the Americans before driving his car alongside and detonating a powerful bomb of 50 to 60 kilograms of explosives. Other than the three Americans, five schoolgirls and an FC soldier were killed. Dozens of schoolgirls were wounded after being trapped under the rubble of the demolished school building (AFP, February 4). The girls' school was one of dozens destroyed by TTP forces under the command of Maulana Fazlullah last year. It was rebuilt with the assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Investigators from Pakistan's security services claimed the suicide bomber was an Uzbek who was part of a group of militants fleeing from military operations in Bajaur (*The News* [Islamabad], February 8; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, February 11).

The suicide bombing was carried out with deliberation; the attacker appeared to know when the convoy was destined to arrive and which of the five vehicles contained the Americans. Police are investigating whether the attacker had inside information (*Daily Times* [Lahore], February 5).

Besides proving their ability to strike targets even in areas "cleared" of insurgents by the Pakistani military, those behind the bombing also sent a powerful signal to the local community that their children will not be safe at schools which are not authorized by the TTP.

One leading Pakistani daily expressed astonishment that TTP insurgents would take revenge for the death of TTP leader Hakimullah Mahsud by a cruel attack on a crowded girls' school. "Is this the bravado that the Mahsuds are known for?" (*Business Recorder* [Karachi], February 9).

A spokesman for the Frontier Corps initially claimed the dead foreigners were "working for an NGO" and were from "the international community" (*The Nation*, February 9). An editorial in a leading Pakistani daily described the initial confusion that sparked debate in Pakistan over the identity of the deceased and the nature of their mission in Pakistan. "Three foreign nationals were reported killed. Initially they were said to be 'foreign journalists,' then they became aid workers perhaps working with USAID but by mid-afternoon they had become 'U.S. army personnel' and by late afternoon as per a statement by the U.S. embassy in Islamabad they were 'trainers' working with the Frontier Corps" (*The News*, February 4).

Despite clumsy attempts to conceal the identity and mission of the dead Americans, the bombing provided conclusive evidence of an American military presence in Pakistan that had been concealed from the public, the political opposition and the media. A U.S. embassy official in Islamabad denied the mission was ever covert. "It's not a secret program by any means. The F.C. is operational in those areas. They've requested training and assistance and we're providing them... Do we highlight it actively? No. But it's not that we don't talk about it" (AFP, February 4). Eventually embassy officials revealed there were roughly 200 U.S. troops in Pakistan on a mission to provide security assistance and training in combat and intelligence methods to FC personnel. The training program had started in the summer of 2008 and was accompanied by shipments of useful supplies generally missing from FC inventories: night scopes for rifles, night vision equipment, body armor, medical supplies, communications equipment, etc.(AFP, February 4).

Pakistan's Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Qamar Zaman Kaira, said the government has never denied the presence of American troops in side Pakistan, and that their sole purpose was to upgrade the training of forces on the northwest frontier that were not properly equipped to tackle terrorism (Associated Press of Pakistan, February 5).

The bombing and the initial confusion over the identity of the victims immediately fed into the popular belief

in Pakistan that large numbers of private military contractors from American firm Xe Services LLC (still almost exclusively known in Pakistan by its former name – Blackwater Worldwide) are conducting covert operations in Pakistan, including many of the bombings that have been blamed on the local Taliban. In a claim of responsibility made shortly after the blast, TTP spokesman Azam Tariq stated, "The Americans killed were members of the Blackwater group. We know they are responsible for bomb blasts in Peshawar and other Pakistani cities" (*The Nation* [Islamabad], February 3). Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, stated that the dead and wounded servicemen were members of the regular armed forces and not contractors from Xe Services, saying Taliban claims to the contrary were predictable. "They're certain to say that. That's what they do. They're adept at propaganda and distortion" (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 5). Two prominent ex-leaders of the Pakistani military and intelligence services, former chief of army staff General (Ret'd.) Aslam Beg and former military intelligence director Lieutenant General (Ret'd.) Amjad Shoaib, inflamed the controversy by insisting the dead servicemen were actually members of Blackwater's "Special Operational Group" (*Jang* [Rawalpindi], February 7; *PakObserver*, February 5).

Another Taliban commander known as Hafizullah told the press that the attack specifically targeted the U.S. Special Forces soldiers after Pakistani security officials claimed the true target was F.C. Colonel Nadeem Mirza, who suffered injuries in the attack. Hafizullah also hinted that the TTP had prior information about the formation and timing of the convoy (*The News*, February 8).

The former security chief in Pakistan's tribal agencies, Brigadier (Ret'd.) Mehmood Shah, suggested the information may have come from inside the Frontier Corps, which is recruited from the same tribal population from which the Taliban are drawn. Shah remarked that the paramilitary F.C. was not as well disciplined as the regular forces and that the rank and file could not be trusted with secret information (*The News*, February 8).

Pakistani defense analyst Ikram Sehgal noted that the F.C. remains a poor cousin to the Pakistani regular forces deployed along the eastern frontier with India. "Locally recruited Frontier Corps troops are lightly armed, good only in their policing role, dealing with tribal rivalry and border smuggling, rather than engaging in military operations combating well-armed and experienced guerrillas" (*The News*, February 11).

An Islamabad daily usually well-informed on military issues said their sources indicated the Special Forces unit was involved in training a 1,000 man F.C. commando force to carry out operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the difficult terrain of the North-West Frontier. The U.S.-funded program was not publicized to avoid a public backlash in Pakistan. “In the beginning, the American military trainers confined themselves to training compounds due to security concerns in Pakistan. However, they had now started accompanying Pakistani troops on special guerrilla operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda militants, eventually leading to the Wednesday incident in Lower Dir which shares a border with Afghanistan and with the restive Swat district...” (*The News*, February 4).

The Americans were the first U.S. troops killed in Pakistan since an Air Force Major and a Navy cryptologist were killed in the September 20, 2008 TTP bombing of the Marriot hotel in Islamabad.

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Who Speaks for the Shi'a of Iraq?

By Rachel Schneller

Iraq's Shi'a Arabs, the demographic majority with an estimated 60-70% of the population, wield the most political influence in Iraq. But the Shi'a of Iraq are a diverse group, with major regional differences between the Shi'a of Basra and the deep South and the Shi'a of the north-central region. Iraq's Shi'a hold divergent views on the appropriate role of religion in government. Other areas of internal division among Shi'a parties exist, such as a common position on cooperation with the United States, but these are secondary in their influence on Shi'a voters.

Iraq's Shi'a political parties have fought battles with each other that at times were as bloody as the sectarian war between Sunnis and Shi'a in 2006-2008. From 2005-2008, the Badr Corps of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Sadrists fought militia

battles in the streets of Basra. In 2009, the two groups reconciled and formed a coalition for the March 2010 elections. How could two groups bent on eliminating each other become allies only two years later? Why did Da'awa—the compromise party supported by both ISCI and Sadrists in 2006 for the Prime Ministership—break from the coalition in 2009?

Secularism vs. Theocracy

Iraq's Shi'a hold widely divergent views on secularism and the role of religion in post-Saddam Iraq. Many Shi'a view secularism—a main characteristic of Saddam's regime—with distrust. Indeed, secularism and Ba'athism are synonymous in the minds of many Iraqi Shi'a. Saddam's Ba'athist agents, both Sunni and Shi'a, noted who attended Shi'a mosques and reported on Shi'a clergy and Iraqi travel to Iran. Saddam was not trying to exterminate Shiism from Iraq. Rather, he wanted to eradicate the Shi'a opposition that used Shi'a religious institutions and sought refuge in Iran to organize and plan attacks against Saddam. But the effect of Saddam's surveillance of Shi'a mosques and clergy was perceived by Iraq's Shi'a population as a threat to their religious identity. In spite of opposition to Saddam, many of Iraq's Shi'a were as secular in their political and social views as most Ba'athists, and opposed an Iranian-style theocratic government.

With the fall of Saddam's regime and the rise of Iraqi Shi'a political parties, advocacy of an Islamic government became an option, and one that was desired among Shi'a who viewed the incorporation of Shi'a Islam into Iraq's government as an effective way to render a Ba'athist return to power impossible. Da'awa and ISCI are among those Shi'a parties that espouse an Islamic government in order to protect Shi'a interests in Iraq. These parties rose out of the opposition to Saddam, and their leaders were among the Shi'a opposition targeted by his regime. This religious outlook, however, conflicts with the Shi'a who prefer a secular lifestyle and who do not want to live under an Iranian-style theocratic government. Ayad Allawi's al-Iraqiya and Ayad Jamal al-Deen's Ahrar are examples of secular Shi'a parties.

Religious Shi'a parties in Iraq are sometimes assumed to be “Iranian” parties because they share a similar ideology and because of the frequent travel to Iran by religious Shi'a politicians. ISCI in particular has been labeled an “Iranian” party.” Contrary to this assumption, some of the most virulent opposition to Iranian influence in Iraq comes from religious Shi'a parties, including ISCI.

[1] Iran provided shelter to Shi'a resistance fighters, but these Shi'a Arabs were not treated as equals by Iran and were denied residential rights (*Azzaman*, January 27, 2009). Arabic remained their primary language, and they returned to Iraq at the first opportunity. Secular Shi'a parties, such as al-Iraqiya, on the other hand, tend to espouse good relations with Iran and shy away from strong criticism of their eastern neighbor (*Asharq al-Awsat*, January 20).

A great deal of religious rivalry exists between Iraq and Iran. Both Najaf (Iraq) and Qum (Iran) are seats of Shi'a religious power. Religious Shi'a parties distrust Iran's motives for interfering in Iraqi affairs, and are particularly suspicious of Iran's interest in Najaf. Secular Shi'a parties, on the other hand, tend to focus on Iran's potential as a trading partner and how to divide natural resources such as oil and water. When viewed in this manner, anomalies such as the secular anti-Iranian Ahrar party become more comprehensible, in that Ayad Jamal alDeen, a Najaf cleric is both skeptical of Iran's motives in Iraq and committed to secularist government.

Rivalry between the major Iraqi Shi'a religious parties is understandable, given that the prize would ultimately be power and influence in a future theocratic government. The Badr/Sadr battles of 2005-2007 were not surprising as these two factions have been vying for dominance within the religious Shi'a movement in Iraq. Their rapprochement in 2009 makes ideological sense in that both parties believe a Shi'a theocratic government would best protect Shi'a interests against a possible return of a hostile Sunni dictatorship.

However, further schisms between ISCI and the Sadr movement are very likely because both desire dominance over the theocratic movement in Iraq but draw on different voter bases. [2] In the run-up to the March 2010 parliamentary election, arguments between the ISCI and Sadrist coalition partners drew attention to the fragility of the partnership, with Muqtada Al-Sadr accusing ISCI of sympathizing with the Ba'athists (*Aswat al-Iraq*, January 22).

De-Ba'athification Masks De-Secularization

The Shi'a are divided on the "de-Ba'athification" of Iraqi politics. With secularism confused with Ba'athism, selective de-Ba'athification would accomplish the religious Shi'a parties' goals of de-secularization. Some former Ba'athists may be allowed to continue to participate in Iraqi politics as long as they espouse theocratic views. [3] Secularist Shi'a, on the other hand, sometimes wax nostalgic about the Saddamist era, not

because they miss Ba'athism, but because they prefer secularism to the imposition of religious dictates on personal lifestyles. Secular Shi'a parties advocate for reconciliation with former Ba'athists and reintegration of Sunni extremists into the government in the name of political stability, but these populations would also temper the influence of the more religious Shi'a parties in government (*Al-Bawaba*, January 28).

Many Iraqi Shi'a hold both positions simultaneously; they desire a secular government and wish to prevent the return of a Ba'athist government. Shi'a voters will cast their ballots according to which priority is higher at election time. A secular Shi'a voter may prefer Ayad Allawi's secularist platform but may vote for a religious party if the primary concern is preventing a return of the Ba'athists.

South vs. North Iraqi Shi'a

Iraqi Shi'a of the North/Central region differ from the Shi'a of the South, culturally and linguistically. [4] Southern Shi'a, originating from Nasiriyah, Amara, and Basra, feel entitled to a greater share of political power and resources considering their numerical strength in the most oil-rich region of the country. [5] The Fadilah Party, for example, is a Southern Shi'a party with a stronghold in Basra. Fadilah is a religious party and part of the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) of Shi'a religious parties. But while it is an INA member, Fadilah at times differs from ISCI and Sadrists on issues that pertain to the Southern Shi'a, particularly concerning oil and decentralization (*Aswat al-Iraq*, November 16, 2009).

Shi'a party positions on decentralization strongly correlate to the geographic base of the respective party's power. Southern Shi'a favor decentralization, which would result in more revenue remaining in the oil-rich southern provinces. Fadillah, for example, held a referendum in 2008 to declare Basra its own region, but failed to garner the necessary ten percent support to be brought to Parliament. Fadilah's position is not shared by nationalist Shi'a parties with strongholds outside the deep South because they would suffer if a greater share of resources were diverted to Basra. ISCI also supports decentralization, albeit a larger Shi'a region. Sadrists and Da'awa favor a strong central government that would keep revenue flowing to Baghdad, where both parties historically maintained stronger voter influence.

One of the trends to watch in the Shi'a political landscape will be the "migration" of Shi'a politics southward. In the January 2009 provincial elections, Da'awa came to power in the Basra provincial council. The

Fadillah governor was replaced with a Da’awa member. Subsequently, Da’awa began moving away from its strongly centrist position and toward greater regional resource sharing, as reflected in the 2010 budget that accords the Basra provincial government a dollar per barrel of oil produced, a move that puts Da’awa more at odds with centralists but is more representative of the interests of Shi’a in Basra. [6] If Da’awa can maintain a strong power base in Basra, it may not need to ally with the “nationalist” INA to maintain primacy among the religious Shi’a parties. [7]

As Iraq’s population becomes increasingly divided along sectarian lines, a natural occurrence will be the migration of the Shi’a voter base southward. The Basra, Maysan, and Dhi Qar regions likely will gain in power and influence within Shi’a parties because these regions will become almost entirely Shi’a. A strong centralist political line will lose voters in the South. As internal displacement along sectarian lines continues and the country itself becomes more divided, decentralization is a more likely outcome.

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Notes:

1. “Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council,” International Crisis Group. Middle East Report No.70, November 15, 2007.
2. Reidar Visser, “Sadr-Badr Compromise in Tehran the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) is Declared,” www.historiae.org, August 24, 2009. The ISCI voter base draws on upper and middle class, well-educated, middle aged Shi’a. The Sadrist voter base is younger, under-employed and less educated. See “Shiite politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council,” International Crisis Group: *Middle East Report* No. 70, November 15, 2007.
3. Reidar Visser, “Some More De-Baathification Metrics,” Iraq and Gulf Analysis, January 22, 2010. See also Reidar Visser, “The 511 De-Baathification cases: Sectarianism or Despotism?” *historiae.org*, January 20, 2010.
4. Reidar Visser, “Basra, the Reluctant Seat of ‘Shiastan?’” *Middle East Report*. March 12, 2007.
5. Reidar Visser, “Decentralization Bonanza in the Iraqi Budget.” *historiae.org*, January 27, 2010.
6. Ibid
7. Reidar Visser, “After Sadr-Badr Compromise in Tehran, the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) is Declared,” *historiae.org*, August 24, 2009.

	Sadrists	ISCI/SCIRI	Fadhila	Da’awa	Iraqiya/Iraqi National Accord/Allawi	Ahrar
Year of Formation	2003	1982 (from Da’awa)	2003	1957	1990	2009 (from Iraqiya)
Religious vs. Secular Government	Religious	Religious	Religious	Religious	Secular	Secular (clergy)
South Shi’a Party	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (previously No)	No	No
Reconciliation with Sunnis and former Ba’athists	No	No	Yes	No (previously Yes)	Yes	Yes
Voter Base	Younger (under 40), unemployed, rural, uneducated, religious, poor	Older (over 40), veterans of Shi’a uprising, religious, middle and upper class	Religious, some education, linked to oil	Older (over 40), religious, veterans of Shi’a uprising	Educated, secular	Younger (under 40), educated
Main Strongholds	Baghdad (Sadr City), Maysan	Diyala, Muthanna, Basra, Baghdad	Basra	Qadisiyah, Dhi Qar, Baghdad	Baghdad	Najaf, Dhi Qar
Centralized vs. Decentralization	Centralized	Decentralized	Decentralized	Decentralized (formerly centralized)	Centralized	Centralized

Resolution of Turkey's "Kurdish Question" in Critical Stage as PKK Threatens to End Peace Initiatives

By Emrullah Uslu

Last October, eight unarmed Kurdish militants and 28 Kurdish civilians returned to southeast Turkey from bases of the Parti Karkerani Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party - PKK) in northern Iraq. It was intended as the first of a series of government-sponsored "returns" of PKK activists and part of a larger scheme of reconciliation between the Kurdish militants and the state. When Kurdish activists in Turkey organized a massive parade for the returnees that looked more like a victory march, the ensuing public relations disaster brought the government's repatriation scheme to a halt. Progress on the "Kurdish Initiative" (the government's comprehensive approach to resolving the Kurdish issue) quickly dissipated as a result of public reaction to the massive welcoming ceremony.

The Kurdish initiative began to collapse when it became the foundation of an ethnic confrontation that erupted in street violence. While the opposition parties agitated the Turkish public against the Kurdish initiative, the Kurdish nationalist Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party - DTP) organized several political rallies to protest the new prison conditions of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, further escalating the division between the Turkish and Kurdish people (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 3, 2009).

Who's Behind the Street Violence?

Turkish counterterrorism units believe that the violence in the Kurdish region is organized by the Koma Civaken Kurdistan (Peoples' Confederation of Kurdistan - KCK), an umbrella organization that combines pro-PKK organizations and aims to mobilize Kurdish youth in city centers whenever Ocalan orders it. To end the street violence, police raided various addresses and arrested approximately 100 KCK members, including human rights activists, politicians, students and ten mayors (Sabah, December 25, 2009). The police raid on KCK militants disappointed many Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals who supported the Kurdish initiative. In addition to the police operations against Kurdish nationalist activists, the Constitutional Court finalized a two-year long court case against the Kurdish nationalist

DTP, shutting the party down because of its ties with PKK terrorists (ntvmsnbc.com, December 11, 2009).

Both Turks and Kurds were disappointed with the immediate results of the Kurdish initiative. In order to placate Turkish public anger the government slowed down the initiative's implementation. In recent weeks, however, there are signs that the government is going to resume the Kurdish initiative to end the ethnic violence. Interior Minister Besir Atalay held a press conference on January 15 to restate that the government is determined to finalize the Kurdish initiative (Akparti.org.tr, January 15). Furthermore, the ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party - AKP) sent out a handbook to the local branches of the AKP explaining the government's aims behind the Kurdish initiative (*Hurriyet*, January 22).

Reviving the Kurdish Initiative

The AKP also invited public figures, including singers, artists, writers, and celebrities to a meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the Kurdish initiative. The AKP government believes that celebrities and intellectuals could help the government reach out to the larger segments of Turkish society to convince them that the Kurdish initiative is a necessary step to solving the ongoing problem (*Zaman*, February 6).

The AKP has also invited a delegation from the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to examine the prison conditions of Abdullah Ocalan and five other inmates. The Turkish press reported that the delegation had the opportunity to ask questions of Ocalan and the other inmates (*Cihan Haber Ajansı*, January 27). The government's aim in inviting the CPT delegation was to reduce existing tensions based on the speculation that Ocalan's new prison conditions do not correspond to international human rights standards.

With regard to how to deal with the PKK members still in northern Iraq, the Turkish government invited the Commanding General, United States Forces - Iraq, General Ray Odierno, to discuss possible measures. General Odierno had a meeting with Interior Minister Besir Atalay and discussed details of how to evacuate the Mahmur U.N. refugee camp, where 10,000 Turkish Kurd refugees have been residing since 1993. Mahmur is a major source of recruitment for the PKK and its closure will be an important part of any peace settlement (*Hurriyet*, February 4).

New Parties, New Politics?

While the Turkish government undertakes a comprehensive public campaign to explain why it is necessary to address the Kurdish question, the Kurdish opposition is sending mixed signals regarding cooperation with the government. After the DTP's closure, the Kurdish nationalist parliamentary deputies formed a new political party, Bedis ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party - BDP), to continue their political life. PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan warned the BDP leaders not to associate with the PKK or be its spokesman but rather to work in the legal arena (Gundem-online.net, February 4). This is a new approach in Kurdish politics. In the last 20 years of the Kurdish struggle a succession of pro-PKK parties have always acted as if they were the spokesman of the PKK. These ties with the PKK have become a major point of contention between the Kurdish nationalist movement and the European Union (E.U.) since 2004. E.U. representatives have unsuccessfully asked DTP politicians to distance themselves from the PKK.

The new Kurdish BDP party, however, follows a new path. Following Ocalan's advice, BDP leader, Selhattin Demirtas declared, "The PKK and the BDP are two separate organizations. If the PKK want to say something they have the right to say so. We will not be their voice" (aktifhaber.com, February 6). In a recent interview Selhattin Demirtas thanked Ocalan for allowing the BDP to develop its own political program as an independent party from the PKK (ANF News Agency, February 4).

Parallel to these developments, the PKK's acting leader, Murat Karayilan, has issued a statement presenting three principles and four steps to end the violence. Karayilan thinks that a peace settlement based on these principles will require a new Turkish constitution.

The three principles that Karayilan believes are the basis of a potential peace agreement are:

- A "democratic nation" in which no ethnic group and identity is dominant and privileged.
- A "democratic country" which accepts the fact that the country belongs to all ethnic groups

- A "democratic republic" which acknowledges the national and democratic rights of all ethnic groups.

Karayilan's four steps to bringing peace:

- Both the PKK and the Turkish military need to declare a ceasefire. The Turkish state should stop military and political operations against the PKK.
- The local politicians who were arrested as part of operations against the KCK since April 14, 2009 should be released immediately.
- Abdullah Ocalan should be released from prison and put under house arrest.
- Negotiations between the Kurdish political leaders and the government should begin (ANF News Agency, February 3).

PKK leaders have issued similar demands in the past and Karayilan's principles reflect the position the PKK has adopted since 1999. The core demand remains recognition of the PKK as a legitimate representative of the Kurdish people in Turkey.

The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons

Parallel with Cemil Bayik's statement, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (Teyrebazen Azadiya Kurdistan - TAK) issued a new declaration. The TAK is an offshoot PKK organization that concentrated its attacks in major metropolises and tourism destinations in 2006 and 2007, but stopped the attacks in 2008 (see *Terrorism Focus*, October 17, 2006; January 22, 2008). In January 2008 the TAK was added to the U.S. list of designated terrorist organizations. In its declaration the TAK threatens to resume its terror campaign in major metropolises. As a target the TAK names the major Turkish political parties: the AKP, the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi - MHP) and the Republican Peoples Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP). In addition to these targets the TAK threatened to hit economic targets and civilians who play critical roles in maintaining the existing political system. TAK further warns tourists not to come to Turkey.

The TAK accuses the PKK of being passive in its fight with the Turkish state, but is leaving the door open

to cooperate with the PKK if it agrees to intensify its struggle (teyrenkurdistan.com, January 24).

Conclusion

Given that the TAK was formed by PKK leader Murat Karayilan and commanded by Dr. Bahoz Erdal (a.k.a. Fehman Hussein, the former commander of PKK military units), it is unlikely to organize an intense terror campaign in Turkish metropolises if the PKK leaders, particularly Ocalan, do not approve their strategy. Thus, the TAK's public statement cannot be considered an independently-issued declaration. Rather, it could be a tactical maneuver on behalf of the PKK to convince the AKP government it needs to recognize the PKK as a reasonable negotiating partner. As it watches how the AKP's Kurdish initiative unfolds, the PKK will retain the option of playing its TAK card if it thinks further violence will serve the PKK's organizational interests.

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