



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 9 ♦ MARCH 5, 2010

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Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis

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GAZA SALAFISTS DEMAND SUBMISSION OF HAMAS “APOSTATES”

In a recent interview, a commander of the Masadat al-Mujahideen, a Gaza-based Salafist militant group, described his movement’s confrontation with Hamas, demanding that the Islamist movement “repent” its apostasy and stop fighting the Salafists “on behalf of the Jews” (Shabakat al-Tahadi al-Islamiya, February 16). Beset by internal dissension over prisoner swap negotiations with Israel, an international embargo, the cutting off of its tunnel smuggling system by Egyptian forces, and the assassination of a leading Hamas commander in Dubai, Hamas now faces an ongoing and often violent struggle with Salafist militants who reject Hamas leadership.

Describing his movement as a “Salafist Jihadi group,” Shaykh Abu Ubaydah al-Ansari outlined the motivation of Masadat al-Mujahideen. “We gathered and agreed to support our religion and liberate our lands and sanctuaries, not out of patriotism, but as a compulsory Islamic duty. Whenever one expanse of the lands of Muslims is occupied, Muslims must liberate it, under Islam.” Typical of Salafi-Jihadi groups, Shaykh Abu Ubaydah goes on to cite the influence of Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), whose fatwa declaring nominally Muslim Mongol invaders “apostates” because their use of “man-made laws” rather than Shari’a gave the Mameluke rulers of Egypt and Syria the necessary religious justification to fight invaders who claimed to be fellow Muslims. In this context, Abu Ubaydah quotes Ibn Taymiyya, “There is no more necessary duty - after faith - than pushing back the attacking enemy who corrupts the religion and

the world, under any condition. Yet, if the enemy wants to attack Muslims, repulsing him is the duty of everybody, whether they volunteered or not.” Though Ibn Taymiyya’s works remain controversial in Islamic theological studies, Salafists tend to credit him with an authority just short of the Qur’an and the Hadiths in legitimacy. Ibn Taymiyya’s influence is seen in Abu Ubaydah’s declaration. “He who applies manmade law and human legislation, whether he is a Palestinian or something else, becomes an infidel, and whoever resorts to it for judgment also becomes infidel and fighting him becomes permissible.”

Though Hamas has made significant moves in making Shari’a the law of Gaza, these efforts fall short of Salafist expectations. Abu Ubaydah refers to “imitations of Shari’a,” and asks, “What can we say about one who applies Shari’a as legislated by himself? There is no doubt that this person is an infidel, as agreed by all scholars, no matter how big his turban is, nor how small his garment.”

The Palestinian Salafists are also displeased with Hamas’ failure to prosecute a jihad against Israel and what they perceive as a decline in anti-Israel militancy on the movement’s part since it formed the Gaza government. “Formerly, they were fighting the Jews, but currently they fight those who fight and confront the Jews [i.e. the Salafists]... If they want to repent, stop their unilateral battle against us, and leave us alone, we will welcome their desire in order to devote ourselves to fighting the Jews. However, if they insist on fighting us on behalf of the Jews and to keep their positions, the conflict will not be settled... We believe that it is not permissible to reconcile with them for they have become apostates.”

KENYA TURNS TO ISRAEL FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE AGAINST GLOBAL JIHAD

As it gradually becomes drawn into the war in neighboring Somalia, Kenya has begun looking for new sources of security assistance beyond traditional partners like Great Britain and the United States. On February 11, Kenya’s Minister of Internal Security, George Saitoti, met with his Israeli counterpart Yitzhaq Aharonovich in Jerusalem to request Israeli military assistance in countering radical Islamists who are threatening Kenya (Shabelle Media Network, February 14). Saitoti told the Israeli Minister, “The jihad is taking over Somalia and threatening to take over Kenya and all of Africa. No one is more experienced than you in

fighting internal terror.” Israeli officials brought up the problem of African migrants and refugees attempting to enter Israel through the Sinai, evoking this response from the Kenyan Interior Minister: “Help us fight al-Qaeda and we’ll help you with the infiltrators. We have vast knowledge in the subject” (Y-Net News, February 11; *Arutz Sheva*, February 11; Somaliland Press, February 12; *Israel Today*, February 14). The Israeli government was also reported to have said it is ready to hold consultations on forming a joint force with Kenya to guard the northern Kenyan border with Somalia and to prevent the entry of extremists (Shabelle Media Network, February 14).

Somalia’s al-Shabaab movement has threatened repeatedly to attack northern Kenya, most recently on February 10, when Shaykh Husayn Abdi Gedi announced plans to strike at troops belonging to Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) who are completing military training from Kenyan instructors in northeast Kenya (Radio Gaalkacyo, February 10, *Puntland Post*, February 6).

The talks with Kenya appear to be part of a growing Israeli interest in the Horn of Africa. In early February, the spokesman of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yigal Palmor, told Somali media that Israel was ready to recognize the breakaway territory of Somaliland as an independent nation (Golis News, February 11). If Israel proceeds, it would be the first nation in the world to recognize Somaliland since its split from the rest of Somalia in 1991. International recognition is almost an obsession in Somaliland, which is unable to receive foreign aid, military equipment or development assistance without it. The elected government in Hargeisa is sure to show its appreciation to any nation that broke the two-decade-old diplomatic freeze-out. The Israeli declaration came on the heels of a statement by the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula that the movement intends to cooperate with Somali militants to place both sides of the narrow Bab al-Mandab strait at the southern end of the Red Sea “under the protection of Islam” (al-Malahim Establishment for Media Production, February 8; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, February 19). German-made Israeli Dolphin class submarines believed to be equipped with nuclear-armed cruise missiles carried out naval exercises in the Red Sea in June 2009 after passing through Egypt’s Suez Canal (*Haaretz*, July 5). A few weeks later, two Israeli warships passed through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea (AFP, July 14). These excursions were widely interpreted as a warning to Iran.

The Somali press has cited unconfirmed reports that Israeli troops may establish a military outpost in the Somaliland port of Berbera to guard the approaches to the Red Sea (Shabelle Media Network, February 14). Berbera's small naval port is a Cold War legacy, built by the Soviets in 1969. Shifting alliances led to U.S. use of the port by 1980 and a U.S. upgrade of facilities in 1985. Since then, the port has become dilapidated but still continues to provide a major source of foreign currency for the Somaliland government. Berbera also has a long Soviet-built runway capable of handling all types of military and cargo aircraft.

Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Intricate Web of Iranian Military Involvement in Iraq

By Thomas Strouse

It is no secret that Iran's influence runs deep in Iraq. Most Iraqi politicians with close ties to Iran, however, are wary of tarnishing their nationalist credentials by admitting that they prefer to cooperate with Iran rather than the United States, in part because of growing anti-Iranian sentiment in Iraq.

Beginning in late 2006, the leaders of the Sunni Awakening Movement openly aligned themselves with the U.S. military in an eventually successful campaign against terrorist groups in their midst. With a few notable exceptions, Iraqis who have aligned themselves with Iran against the U.S. in Iraq seek to keep their ties with Iran hidden.

While Iran's influence comes in a variety of forms, its covert support for armed militias in Iraq is the source of much speculation. The United States has cited financing, training, and arming of Shi'a militant groups as elements of Iran's "nefarious" conduct in Iraq (Congressional Research Service, June 4, 2009).

Iran's military assistance to armed groups outside of Iran is administered by its Quds Force, a branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRGC was established to defend the Islamic Revolution and cut its teeth during the Iran-Iraq War, fighting Iraqi

forces on the frontlines and backing "fifth columns" throughout the region. The Quds Force was also tasked with propagating the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran's borders. Its most notable success to date has been Lebanon's Hezbollah. The Quds Force supported and trained anti-Saddam Iraqi militias, including those associated with Iraq's main Shi'a political parties now holding power in Iraq. These now-mainstream Shi'a political parties disbanded their militias or integrated them into the Iraqi security forces in order to participate in the U.S.-sponsored political process, but the Quds Force has continued to support new armed militias in Iraq. The role of these militias has been described in the West as the "tip of Iran's spear."

The commander in charge of the Quds Force is Brigadier General Qassem Suleimani. Little is known about Suleimani, but his influence in Iraq became visibly clear when he brokered an end to the fighting between Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi and Iraqi security forces in March 2008 (McClatchy, April 28, 2008). Sadr was the last of Iraq's leading Shi'a leaders to ostensibly disband his party's militia, which was established only months after the U.S. invasion, unlike other Shi'a militias that had been nurtured in Iran by the Quds Force during Saddam's reign.

Kata'ib Hezbollah (Brigades of the Party of God) is one Baghdad-based Shi'a militant group that has been accused of being a surrogate of Iran's Quds Force in Iraq. While not the most powerful or the best known, the group is described by the United States as an Iran-backed militant group that actively smuggles and stockpiles Iranian-made weapons in Iraq.

On February 12, U.S. and Iraqi security forces led a mission targeting Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq's Maysan province. The joint raid took place in rural villages near the Iranian border. At least five people were reportedly killed and some 22 suspected members of the group were arrested. Following the raid, the U.S. military said that there had been "a recent increase in lethal aid smuggling facilitated by members of Kata'ib Hezbollah, who then stockpile weapons and explosives in Iraqi communities for future attacks" (United States Forces – Iraq, Press Release USF-1, February 12).

Between March 2007 and June 2008, Kata'ib Hezbollah led a number of attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq (U.S. Treasury Department, Press Release TG-195, July 2, 2009). Throughout 2008, Al-Manar, Hezbollah's

television outlet in Lebanon, played numerous videos of Kata'ib Hezbollah launching rocket and roadside bomb attacks against U.S. troops. This helped put Kata'ib Hezbollah on the map among leading Shi'a militant groups. In December 2009, it was reported that the group had successfully hacked into U.S. Predator drone video feeds, presumably enabling its members to monitor and evade U.S. military operations (*Army Times*, December 21, 2009).

While the leadership of Kata'ib Hezbollah remains murky, one individual reportedly associated with the group is an Iraqi by the name of Jamal Ja'far Muhammad, but well-known in Iraq as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (a.k.a. The Engineer). He has been described as the "right-hand man" of Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran's Quds Force (Sharqiyah TV, January 2). Al-Muhandis is wanted in Kuwait for his alleged role in the 1983 bombings of the American and French embassies in Kuwait City, as well as for his alleged involvement in the assassination attempt on the Kuwaiti Emir in 1985—both deemed to be Quds Force attempts to deter U.S., French, and Kuwaiti support for Iraq in its war with Iran. The U.S. Treasury Department designated Kata'ib Hezbollah and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis as threats to the stability of Iraq in July 2009 (U.S. Treasury Department, Press Release TG-195, July 2, 2009).

Despite these allegations, al-Muhandis has been a member of the Iraqi parliament since March 2006 as part of the main Shi'a bloc, the United Iraqi Alliance (*Al-Adala*, November 8, 2005). He is running again in the March 7 election as part of the Iraqi National Alliance. Despite holding a seat in parliament for the past four years, he does not attend the parliament's sessions and spends much of his time in Tehran. Prior to 2003, he lived in Iran for about 20 years. In an interview on Iraqi television on January 26, al-Muhandis said that he has come under threats by the United States and has basically decided to wait out the withdrawal of American troops (*Al-Sharqiyah TV*, January 26). Iraq's Constitution provides all members of parliament with total immunity, which can only be lifted by the consent of an absolute majority of the parliament.

Muhandis, 56, joined the Da'wa Party in the early 1970s and left Iraq for Kuwait later that decade, working in Kuwait City as an engineer. Following the 1983 bombings, he fled Kuwait for Iran. He joined SCIRI in 1985 and became a senior leader in its Badr Brigade, which fought against Saddam during the Iran-

Iraq War under the guidance of the IRGC (*Al-Sharqiyah TV*, January 26).

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis is not the only Iraqi political figure to align himself so closely with Iran's Quds Force, but he is one of few who openly admits it. His ability to maintain one hand in Iraq's parliament and another in Iran's Quds Force and its involvement with Shi'a militant groups such as Kata'ib Hezbollah is a clear manifestation of the intricate and tangled web of Iraq-Iran relations.

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Signs of Growing Islamist Insurgency Create Apprehension in Thailand

By Dan G. Cox

Thai and U.S. officials are preparing for another year of unrest emanating from the continuing insurgency in the Muslim Malay-dominated Thai provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. Officials are also bracing for violence from the possible spread of the insurgency to neighboring provinces and the negative effect this would have on the Thai tourist economy. The tourist destination of Phuket has been receiving U.S. anti-terrorism support since 2004, when two bomb blast suppression blankets were given to provincial leaders by the U.S. embassy (*Phuket Gazette*, January 6). The fear of a potential widening of violence in southern Thailand has been manifested recently in a precipitous decline in foreign tourism. The number of foreign visitors to Thailand dropped 7% in 2009. Much of this decline was blamed on wary Chinese tourists choosing Taiwan as their preferred vacation destination (*Thailand Business News*, December 7, 2009).

The recent ranking of Thailand in the "extreme" category of the Terrorism Risk Index (developed by Maplecroft, a private U.S. risk analysis firm) will undoubtedly add to the decline in Thai tourism (*Thailand Business News*, February 18, 2010). [1] This ranking appears justified

given recent terrorism perpetrated by insurgent groups in southern Thailand. Even Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva admitted that he was dissatisfied with the performance of authorities in addressing the violence in Thailand's "Deep South" (Pataninews.net, January 5). Although the number of attacks fell from an estimated 1,025 in fiscal year 2008 to 761 in fiscal year 2009, the death toll was unaffected, with both years producing well over 1,000 deaths (Pataninews.net, January 5).

Tactically, terrorists are using increasingly more sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs), providing a challenge for Thai military and police authorities similar to what Coalition forces are experiencing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Insurgents in southern Thailand are also developing a more sophisticated operational plan to target government, military and police officials. In early January, this new combination of tactics and operations manifested in a 5kg and 20kg buried IED attack that narrowly missed killing Thai soldiers on patrol (*Bangkok Post*, January 5).

Recent violence also seems aimed at influencing top government officials. A series of coordinated attacks perpetrated during Vejjajiva's visit to Yala province is an example of this phenomenon. Two bomb attacks and two targeted assassinations, one of which killed a female defense volunteer, sent a clear message to governmental officials (*Bangkok Post*, January 6; January 7).

Even though insurgent attacks have not grown in sophistication, the situation has proven complex and difficult to deal with. Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is credited with widening the insurgency through the initial use of heavy-handed tactics. In one incident involving Thai security forces (who were apparently acting without a governmental directive), six gunmen opened fire on al-Furqan mosque in Ai Pa Yay village in Narathiwat Province, killing ten and wounding eleven. The gunmen were believed to be former members of the Thahan Phran (paramilitary rangers) and government-supported defense volunteers (Asia Times Online, January 27). Similarly counterproductive is the use of "abusive detentions," which were common in 2007 and seem to have "backfired and increased resentment among Malay Muslims" (Pataninews.net, January 5). All of these actions have taken place under emergency martial law, but current Prime Minister Vejjajiva has attempted to reduce friction recently through cooperation with local leaders and has pledged his desire to lift martial law as soon as possible (Asia Times Online, January 27).

Despite Prime Minister Vejjajiva's more nuanced approach to southern Thailand, some in his administration still view the complex insurgency simplistically. For example, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya idealistically promised an end to violence this year, pinning great hopes on the Thai government's financial support of development initiatives in the region (AFP, February 2).

While Vejjajiva's approach is an improvement over simplified views lumping all of Thailand's Malay Muslims together under a single Islamist banner, any haphazard attempt to address the causes of the insurgency that does not take into account the specific and often highly nuanced dynamics of the local system is unlikely to produce benefits (Asia Times Online, November 17, 2009). It appears that an inadequate understanding of the insurgent operational environment has allowed much of the financial aid to be funneled into the local patron-client system, making it ineffectual in addressing long-standing economic grievances. Having said this, the suggestion that the "government should ensure that projects are implemented transparently and with grassroots participation" may resonate with a new prime minister committed to building local relationships in southern Thailand (Pataninews.net, January 5).

Underlying propensities and tensions within any state make each insurgency unique and highly complex. Because attempts at mitigation lack finesse and a detailed understanding of the underlying tensions which motivate different groups in southern Thailand, simplistic silver-bullet solutions are likely not only to fail, but even to fuel the insurgent movement. Dealing with the insurgency and the resultant terrorism in southern Thailand is made more difficult because the nation remains on the verge of violent conflict over the military's removal of Prime Minister Shiniwatra in 2006.

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Notes:

1. See http://www.maplecroft.com/about/news/terrorism_risk_index_feb_10.html.

An Assessment of the Anatomy of al-Qaeda in Yemen: Ideological and Social Factors

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

Yemen has become one of the most important strongholds and safe havens for al-Qaeda. The impact of Yemen's Salafi-Jihadist movement is no longer limited to that nation and its national security alone. The threat posed by Yemen's militant Salafists has spread to neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and more distantly to the United States, as indicated by the failed Christmas Day suicide bombing of a Northwest Airways passenger plane by Nigerian Umar al-Faruq Abd al-Mutalib, who received his training in Yemen.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen, or al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), as it calls itself at the moment, has gone through different phases. During the era of the Afghan Jihad, Arab fighters recruited a large number of Yemenis, and Osama bin Laden relied on them as personal bodyguards. [1] After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, they returned to Yemen and Saudi Arabia, focusing their operations on the latter. In February 2006, Yemen's "Great Escape" of over a dozen leading al-Qaeda suspects paved the way for a process of reorganization of a movement in Yemen and coincided with their withdrawal from Saudi Arabia after three years of armed confrontations with the authorities (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 7, 2006). Thus, Yemen became a destination for Saudi jihadis and AQAP was born as a coalition of Saudi and Yemeni jihadis (al-Jazeera.net, January 18).

Given the pivotal role that Yemen's militant Islamists are playing as a host for al-Qaeda and a magnet for jihadis from abroad, this article seeks to analyze the structure of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and identify the social and ideological structures that led to its success. In order to obtain reasonably accurate results, the author has collected the names of about 75 people associated with al-Qaeda in Yemen as published, and analyzed them in order to help understand the structure of the organization.

Organization of AQAP

It appears that AQAP draws on three main groups for its recruits: Yemenis, Saudis, and foreigners. [2]

According to the author's analysis, Yemenis form the majority with 56%, followed by Saudis at 37% and foreigners, 7%. This is a key indicator of the level of success that al-Qaeda and Salafi-Jihadists have had in disseminating their ideology among local Yemenis. It also raises questions as to which areas of Yemen in particular that al-Qaeda and the Salafi-Jihadists have been most successful.

Upon analyzing the tribal and regional origins of the persons under study, the author found that Yemeni recruits were equally distributed between northern and southern tribes (52% and 48% respectively). The reason for this relatively equal distribution is that al-Qaeda's discourse finds a ready audience among tribal people, whether in the south or the north. Yemeni journalist Nabil al-Sufi argues that al-Qaeda's area of influence in Yemen forms a large triangle that is half the size of the country (*al-Hayat*, January 31, 2009). The triangle starts from Abyan in the west and extends to al-Jawf in the south, passing through large areas of Shabwa governorate as far as Hadramut. From the north, it is connected to the capital city of San'a by Arhab directorate, overlooking the Maqfar triangle that connects it to another three provinces: San'a, Ghamran and Sa'da. The result is the formation of an area known for its tribal affiliations rather than its affiliation to the state and an area where there are few state institutions and where tribal laws dominate.

A focus on tribes in Yemen has been a main reason behind al-Qaeda's success in finding a safe haven there. Abu Musab al-Suri, the first to see Yemen's potential as a safe haven for the jihadist movement, has said that the main reason for considering Yemen a stronghold for jihadis is the tribal nature of its people and the solidarity between tribes. [3]. It was for similar reasons that Osama bin Laden addressed the southern tribes of Saudi Arabia in 2004, specifically in Asir province (which borders Yemen), naming the tribes and encouraging them to fight in Iraq. "Oh heroes of Asir and champions of Hashed, Madhaj, and Bakeel, do not stop your supplies to assist your brothers in the land of Mesopotamia [i.e. Iraq]. The war there is still raging and its fire spreading." [4]

Abdul-Ilah al-Sha'e, a Yemeni journalist, confirms that al-Qaeda has succeeded in building an alliance with the tribal system in Yemen because the country has not been "tamed" or "civilized" like other countries. Tribes are still in control and thus it was easy to build alliances with them. [5] Abdul-Allah said that al-Qaeda wanted to recruit young people who were not afraid of death

and found these young people in Yemen's tribal and Bedouin societies, where acts of revenge and battles between tribes are still dominant, given the absence of state institutions (al-Jazeera.net, January 21).

Conditions of Militancy in the South

Southern Yemenis, who form the majority of the population, were the first to join the Salafi-Jihadi movement. Political conditions in the south have made tribes closer to al-Qaeda. Saeed al-Jahmi, author of an Arabic language text on al-Qaeda in Yemen, has said that the number of al-Qaeda members in the southern part of Yemen is higher than that in the north and gives the following reasons for this phenomenon: the political conditions in the south; the repressiveness of the former Marxist regime; and the political use of violence ingrained in the south during that period. Moreover, the Salafis of the south are different from those of the north, busying themselves with generalities while northerners focused on details. A key element in the development of southern militancy was migration to Saudi Arabia, where many joined Islamic Shari'a schools and first became introduced to the Salafist ideology. Many Yemeni emigrants wanted to return to their home country and seek revenge on those who had deprived them from living in their homeland. In addition, the charismatic personality of Bin Laden (perceived as a hero and savior by some) and the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood to attract southern Salafists to their movement made it easy for al-Qaeda to recruit fighters from the south. [6]

Political conditions in the south and predominant feelings of unequal treatment by the central government made people there vulnerable to al-Qaeda's rhetoric and ideology. This becomes clear when one reads the letter of Abu Basir al-Wuhayshi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Yemen, entitled "To Our People in the South" (May 13, 2009):

The events, [suppression of protests by Yemeni security forces] in Lahaj, al-Dale, Abyan, Hadramut and other areas, and the injustice and suppression of people who have no weapons to defend themselves, have gone beyond all acceptable limits. It is our duty to support these people, assist them and lend them a helping hand. Oh free men, resistors of injustice and oppression in Yemen and in the Arab Peninsula, what you are preaching is a right that God and your religion have urged you to preach. It is because you by your nature do not accept

injustice and humiliation. With your faith, you were able to resist the British occupation [of the Aden Protectorate, 1839-1967] and to force the [British] troops to leave your country. Then you have practiced your right to peaceful protests. Now even this right, given by the oppressor, is taken away from you. When you protested, you were badly oppressed although your cause was just. If you demand justice, it does not mean that you want separation. [7]

With regard to Saudi operatives in AQAP, most came from the south of Saudi Arabia (up to 50%), while 39% came from the central area (mainly from al-Qassim) and 11% from other areas (*al-Ghad*, January 6, 2005). Al-Qaeda members coming from al-Qassim are tribal and conservative in nature. This geographical distribution reflects the huge impact of al-Qaeda's defeat in Saudi Arabia after confrontations with Saudi troops and the movement's departure for Yemen.

Al-Qaeda's focus on recruitment from the south of Saudi Arabia led to an increase in the number of Saudi al-Qaeda members who have tribal connections to Yemeni tribes. The emphasis on tribal unity can become clear in a 2004 letter by militant Saudi Salafist ideologue Fares Shuwail al-Zahrani (a.k.a. Abu Jandal al-Azadi), also entitled "To the People of the South":

I hereby say to the people of the south, the south of the Arabian Peninsula, avoiding all colonial division of our countries, from the Yamani side to the Arabian Sea, to our proud tribes, who God has favored with Islam and made them occupy the world, I say to them that I am proud of being one of them ... I tell them that our country is in the middle of the world, we have the Qiblah, Mecca and Medina. We have the richest seas, the most important straits and the greatest reserves of oil. Do you accept that the crusaders and their agents control you? Do you accept that they steal your money and your resources? Would you allow them to kill your sons and daughters? Oh people of the Arabian Peninsula, oh people of the Arabian Peninsula, you are the strategic depth of your fellow jihadists. [8]

Among the al-Qaeda members recruited from southern Saudi Arabia were seven of the fifteen Saudi 9/11 bombers. Bin Laden highlighted this fact in a recorded speech, saying, "Asir's tribes formed the lion's share [of

the 9/11 perpetrators], [including] those from Ghamed, Zahran and Bani Shahr [all Asir tribes]. [9]

Conclusion

Based on the above, it is evident that al-Qaeda is attempting to build tribal alliances in the area extending from the south of Saudi Arabia to the south of Yemen. These alliances are made possible by the conservative nature of the Salafi-Jihadi movement's ideology. If we examine the structure of al-Qaeda, it is clear that the Salafi-Jihadis are succeeding in mobilizing youth in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen, even when their families have good relations with the authorities. It seems that al-Qaeda's ideology is becoming more influential and is benefiting from injustices in the south of Yemen.

Local alliances have helped al-Qaeda find a safe haven at the strategic level. This has given the movement the capability of carrying out attacks, not only inside Yemen but also outside the country. Examples of this new reach include the attempt to assassinate Saudi Deputy Minister of the Interior Prince Muhammad bin Nayef and the attempt to bomb the Northwest Airlines plane heading from Amsterdam to Detroit. It is clear that traditional tribal relations, injustice, and local grievances are the best allies of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

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Notes:

1. Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al-Qaeda*, al-Saqi Books, 2006, p.59.

2. In a February 18 phone interview with the author, Yemeni journalist Abdul-Ilah al-Sha'e, the only journalist to interview Abu Basir al-Wuhayshi, al-Qaeda's leader in Yemen, said that on his visit to an al-Qaeda stronghold for the interview, he had seen foreign operatives with al-Qaeda, but did not speak with any of them.

3. Abu Musab al-Suri, "The Responsibility of the People of Yemen Regarding the Sanctuary of Muslims," <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=wksqfnyz>.

4. His letter entitled "Oh People of Iraq", 7 May 2004. The full text can be read on Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi's website: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=riact8vq>.

5. Phone interview with Abdul-Ilah al-Sha'e, February 18.

6. Saeed al-Jahmi, *Tanthim al-Qa'ida: al-nasha'at, al-khalfyat al-adyolojya, al-imtidat (al-Yaman nomouthdjan)* (Al-Qaeda: Its Emergence and its Ideological Background (Yemen as an example)), Madbouli Bookshop, Cairo, 2008, p. 303, pp 306-318.

7. The audio can be downloaded from: <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?p=9394>.

8. Fares Shuwail al-Zahrani letter entitled, "To Our People in the South," May 2004. The audio can be downloaded from: http://www.ukht-benladn.net/mhadrat_show-446.html

9. Osama bin Laden videotape, September 9, 2002, The full text can be accessed at <http://www.alqimmah.net/showthread.php?t=9873>.