



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 12 ♦ MARCH 26, 2010

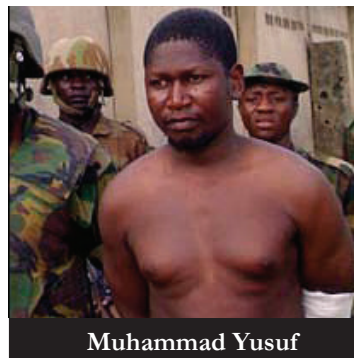
## IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....1

NORTHERN NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM MOVEMENT: DEAD OR ALIVE?  
By Frank Gargon and Sharon Bean.....3

SALAFI-JIHADIS IN MAURITANIA AT THE CENTER OF AL-QAEDA'S STRATEGY  
By Murad Batal al-Shishani.....5

KURDISH-ARAB TENSIONS AND IRBIL-BAGHDAD RELATIONS  
By Michael M. Hunter.....6



Muhammad Yusuf

Terrorism Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jamestown Foundation.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.

## MILITANTS REVIVE NIGER DELTA INSURGENCY WITH BOMBING “FROM THE PIT OF HELL”

Nigeria’s Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) made clear its complete rejection of the amnesty program and a peaceful approach to solving the problems of the Niger Delta region on March 15 with a deadly attack on a major post-amnesty dialogue in the Delta State city of Warri.

The conference was well attended by government officials (including the governors of four states and a former Chief of Defense Staff) and a number of prominent ex-militants who had taken advantage of the government’s amnesty program. The event, entitled “Restoring Hope in the Niger Delta,” was sponsored and organized by Nigeria’s Vanguard Media Limited.

Two bombs went off at Warri’s Delta State Government House Annex, where the meeting was being held. Though three people were killed and many more injured, MEND insisted that it had called off the detonation of a third bomb that might have caused massive casualties as those attending the event were observed fleeing in its direction. A MEND statement claimed the bombs were set off by remote control by its operatives who later retrieved the unused third bomb and returned safely to base (*This Day* [Lagos], March 17).



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to [pubs@jamestown.org](mailto:pubs@jamestown.org), or contact us at:

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320  
Washington, DC • 20036  
Tel: (202) 483-8888  
Fax: (202) 483-8337  
Copyright ©2009

A spokesperson for the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), an umbrella group composed of Niger Delta militants, described the bombing as “an act of evil devised from the pit of hell and within the corridors of Lucifer” (*This Day*, March 17; *Niger Delta Standard*, March 17). The spokesperson went on to call MEND a “dementia inflicted cabal” which has “cunningly infiltrated the just and noble struggle for the liberation and emancipation of the Ijaw and Niger Delta struggle.” The MEND attack was the first claimed by the movement since MEND announced on January 30 it would no longer observe the ceasefire to which it agreed in October, 2009. A blast occurred on Shell’s Trans-Ramos pipeline only hours after the January 30 statement, but the movement issued a somewhat ambiguous denial of responsibility (Reuters, February 2; *Daily Champion* [Lagos], February 10).

With MEND intensifying its struggle by directly targeting government leaders rather than oil facilities, Nigeria’s Joint Security Taskforce (JST) has begun security sweeps through the region, including a manhunt for MEND leader Henry Okah, who accepted a government amnesty in July, 2009 (*This Day*, March 18; *Punch* [Lagos], March 23). The Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) is also seeking the movement’s bomb-maker, a native of Anambra State who is alleged to have been contracted by MEND to supply ten bombs (*Vanguard* [Lagos], March 20).

A MEND statement indicated that the attack was a response to a statement by Delta State governor, Emmanuel Uduaghan, who described MEND and its “virtual” spokesman Jomo Gbomo as “paper tigers.” It was also a reminder of how the “lands of the people of the Niger Delta were stolen by the oil companies and Northern Nigeria with a stroke of the pen” (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], March 17; March 21). The movement promised to strike at “oil companies across the Niger Delta,” including “companies such as Total which have been spared in the past. We hope the actions which will follow will persuade Mr. Uduaghan that we exist outside of cyberspace” (*Daily Trust*, March 17).

Many ex-militants have complained that the government’s amnesty program has stalled as a consequence of the severe illness of President Umaru Yar’Adua, who was the prime mover behind the program. Temporary President Goodluck Jonathan and other ministers have said the post-amnesty program will continue and assured foreign oil companies that the government was “on top of the situation” in the Niger Delta (*Port Harcourt Telegraph*,

March 17). The continuing violence in the Delta is beginning to have a severe effect on oil production and its revenues, on which the Nigerian state is reliant.

#### AL-QAEDA AND ALGERIA DEVELOP NEW STRATEGIES IN BATTLE FOR THE SAHEL

During a March 16 meeting in Algiers consisting of Foreign Ministers from Saharan and Sahel nations (including Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), Algeria presented a new strategy for dealing with the threat posed by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The strategy is designed to interfere with the operations of smugglers and terrorists alike by restricting their access to vital supplies of fuel and water (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], March 17). The plan calls for abandoned wells to be blocked up while access to other wells will be closely restricted by security forces.

Sources involved with the conference told the Algerian press that several Western nations were considering direct air strikes against AQIM targets in the desert. To facilitate these operations, the French Army’s engineering corps is looking at building four runways in north and central Mali (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], March 17). There appears to have been some consensus at the meeting that earlier plans for the Sahara/Sahel nations to gradually build military capacity had been superseded by AQIM’s growing activity on the ground. Lack of surveillance and attack aircraft as well as an absence of long-range artillery has impaired the ability of these nations to respond to the AQIM threat.

Algeria’s plans to restrict access to water and fuel in the region are actually a regional expansion of a local program that began in 2006 and is credited with reducing militant activity in southern Algeria. Fuel smuggling is rampant in the region and provides the means for criminal and terrorist groups to operate across vast unoccupied tracts of desert. Algeria is also considering restricting the circulation of 4X4 vehicles in the area, particularly Toyota FJ55 Land Cruisers, which are often converted to hold up to 1,000 liters of gasoline or diesel fuel. There are fears, however, that an effective campaign against smuggling will only exacerbate the region’s serious unemployment problem and aid the militants’ recruitment efforts.

An AQIM attack on a military outpost in western Niger on March 12 killed five soldiers, reinforcing the perception that local militaries are incapable of tackling AQIM (AFP, March 12; *Ennahar* [Algiers], March 13).

According to an AQIM statement, the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber who drove a truck filled with 600 kilograms of explosives into the barracks at Tilwa. The bombing was followed by a general attack by militants that succeeded in seizing large quantities of vehicles, weapons and ammunition (al-Andalus Establishment for Media Production, March 14). Though al-Qaeda is normally dominated by Arabs, the statement said the attack was carried out by “the descendants of Yusuf Bin Tachfin,” a reference to the famed Berber king of the Almoravid Empire (1061-1106). Berbers are the indigenous people of North Africa, though many have adopted the Arab language, religion and culture after the Arab invasions.

A video message from AQIM spokesman Abu Ubaydah Yusuf entitled “A Message Addressed to the Peoples and Rulers of the States of the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa” suggested that AQIM has no desire to fight with the militaries of the Sahel-Saharan nations, but has been compelled to do so in “self-defense” (al-Andalus Establishment for Media Production, March 9). Abu Ubaydah warns the rulers of these states that ongoing French “military interference” and the American “colonial project” AFRICOM are part of an effort to convince Sahara-Sahel militaries to act as “Crusader proxies” and will lead to new strikes by AQIM as well as other consequences, such as tribal conflict and the revival of dormant animosities:

If these criminals [i.e. Western nations] were honest about what they are saying, they would have ceased to plunder your goods, steal your wealth, control the decisions of your governments and direct their policies to what serves their interests and goals. They would have aided you to lift your economies. However, as you see, they only seek to build military bases on your lands and then lure your governments into side wars that will increase your suffering and misery.

Though AQIM appears to be taking a simultaneous aggressive and conciliatory approach to most of the Sahara-Sahel nations, it still did not hesitate to label the Algerian regime “apostate.” Over the period 2005-2009, Algeria was the world’s ninth largest purchaser of weapons, though many of these, such as submarines and anti-aircraft guns, have no practical anti-terrorist applications (*Tout sur l’Algerie*, March 22, based on figures from SIPRI).

## Northern Nigeria’s Boko Haram Movement: Dead or Resurrected?

By Frank Gargon and Sharon Bean

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is a hotbed for insurgencies of many kinds. The Niger Delta conflict garners the most attention for its frequent kidnappings and sabotaging of petroleum production facilities. Equally disconcerting and potentially more destabilizing is a little known extremist group called “Boko Haram.” Though their Hausa language name is commonly translated in the press as “Western Education is Sacrilege,” the movement insists it means “Western Civilization is Forbidden:”

The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West, that is Europe, which is not true, the second affirms our believe [sic] in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader; it includes education but [is] not determined by Western education (Vanguard [Lagos], August 14, 2009).

Incubating in the northern regions of Nigeria, Boko Haram draws its recruits from the large swath of poorly governed territory stretching across northern Nigeria into Chad. Boko Haram seeks the imposition of strict Islamic law in the predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria. Nigeria’s population of 150 million is split nearly evenly, 50% Christian and 50% Muslim. With a trend towards more conservative religious practices, tensions between Muslims and Christians have increased. The poorer Muslim north sees systemic bias in the provision of basic services and repeated incidents of police brutality. In recent months, Boko Haram conducted attacks on Nigerian police stations, killing dozens, burning buildings and battling security forces across five Nigerian states. Hundreds were killed, including sect members and civilians alike. The group’s leader, Malam Muhammad Yusuf, was killed on July 30, 2009 after he was captured by the army and turned over to the police in Maidiguri (al-Jazeera, July 31, 2009). Footage obtained earlier this year by al-Jazeera showed Mohammad Yusuf’s mutilated body still wearing handcuffs (al-Jazeera, February 9). Seventeen policemen, seen executing unarmed men in other footage of police sweeps of alleged Boko Haram members, were arrested in Borno on March 1 (*Daily*

*Independent* [Lagos], March 1, al-Jazeera, March 1; *Guardian* [Lagos], March 4). [1]

Nigerian Information Minister Dora Akunyili welcomed Muhammad Yusuf's death, telling reporters that it was "positive" for the country, though adding that the government "does not condone extrajudicial killings... What is important is that he [Yusuf] has been taken out of the way, to stop him using people to cause mayhem" (BBC Africa, July 31, 2009). A spokesman for the National Police said, "This group operates under a charismatic leader. They will no more have any inspiration... The leader who they thought was invincible and immortal has now been proved otherwise." The spokesman added that there were still pockets of violence in the largely Muslim north, but otherwise "life is back to normal" (*The Guardian* [Lagos], July 31, 2009).

But is life really back to normal in Northern Nigeria? Is the Boko Haram dead or is it just waiting for its next chance to regroup in another northern Nigerian state or even a neighboring country? Historically, the organization has been in existence under various names since 1995. When its founder, Abubakar Lawan, left to pursue further studies at the University of Medina, a committee of shaykhs appointed Mohammad Yusuf the new leader. In 2003, Mohammad Yusuf ousted the shaykhs who had supported him by charging them with corruption and failure to preach "pure Islam" (*Vanguard* [Lagos], August 4).

With the movement now under Yusuf's personal control, Boko Haram set up operations in a village in Yobe state, located near the border of Nigeria and the Niger Republic. The base was called "Afghanistan" and was developed as the first step in creating an independent Boko Haram state. The organization wanted to free itself from the corruption in Borno state by creating its own government and territorial boundaries, within which it could practice its own religious and political ideology (*The Daily Sun* (Abuja), August 5, 2009).

In January 2004, Boko Haram attacked several police stations, carting away police arms and ammunitions to create their own arsenal. Patrick Smith, editor of *Africa Confidential*, expanded on the group's organization in an interview:

The group was quite organized and fit the bill as almost "military-like," as it was setting up training grounds, striking local police stations and local government infrastructures [and] building up its firearms, but also accomplished very complex acts of terrorism, such as eliminating mobile phone towers and shutting down the Nigerian Police's ability to communicate throughout the region - which shows the intelligence and a well-planned and organized group. [2]

In recruiting many of his followers, Yusuf encouraged the wealthy to make large donations for weapons and food, and for the poor to take part in the "divine vision" of the group and exercise their religious membership by surrendering themselves to the achievement of the group's objectives. In most cases, Boko Haram members were young, unemployed, and angry at the northern Nigerian states for introducing moderate Shari'a codes that subsequently allowed the region to suffer from heavy corruption and severe poverty (*The Vanguard*, August 4, 2009). Not all members were Nigerian - some came from Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.

With its charismatic leader killed in the July uprising, some hoped that Boko Haram would lose its momentum or disintegrate. However, on August 14, Mallam Sanni Umaru wrote the Nigerian Vanguard newspaper to state that Boko Haram is still alive and currently active in 32 Nigerian states. As the new leader of the organization, he intends to create a new "Islamic Revolution" in northern Nigeria and forecasts terrorist actions in Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt in the near future (*The Vanguard*, August 14, 2009).

Though these attacks have yet to materialize, Boko Haram continues to resurrect itself from Lawan to Yusuf, and now with Umaru. The organization may be re-grouping in northern Nigeria now, possibly even in the violence-plagued city of Jos, but will certainly return in a region where political instability often goes hand in hand with religious rivalry and pervasive poverty.

*Frank Gargon is a Senior Analyst with Los Alamos Technical Associates (LATA).*

*Sharon Bean is an expert trainer and consultant working on Counter-Terrorism issues in Western Africa.*

Notes:

1. The footage of the executions may be seen at: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/02/2010298114949112.html>.

2. Author's interview of Patrick Smith, Editor of *Africa Confidential*, March, 2010

## Salafi-Jihadis in Mauritania at the Center of al-Qaeda's Strategy

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

Salafi-Jihadi activities in Mauritania have increased significantly in the last couple of years, indicating that al-Qaeda affiliated groups are becoming more effective in that country. The frequency of attacks and the nature of the tactics employed suggest that the number of Salafist militants is growing. Their activities are linked, in one way or another, to the increasing inclination of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to adopt more regional strategies and expand its activities in the Sahel countries (Mauritania and Mali in particular) rather than limit its activities to Algeria. On March, 10, al-Andalus Establishment for Media Production (the AQIM media group) released a video recording of Shaykh Abu Ubaydah Yusuf entitled, "A Speech to People and Rulers of the Sahel and South of the Desert Countries." The recording warned these countries against joining Algeria and Western countries like the United States and France in their war against al-Qaeda. Yusuf said that it was never AQIM's aim to lure Sahel countries to the "battlefield," as they were just targeting the Crusaders and their interests in those countries. Shaykh Abu Obida stated that "some limited incidents" that occurred previously against the armies of the Sahel countries were only self defense. He warned these governments that this situation will change if they take part in the war against AQIM (aqlame.com, March 10).

The first appearance of modern Salafi-Jihadist movements in Mauritania goes back to the mid-1990s,

when authorities announced the arrests of members of several jihadi organizations, such as the Mus'ab bin Umair Brigade, al-Jihad and Hasim (*al-Hayat*, February 16). Later, more organized Salafi-Jihadi movements emerged in Mauritania, with the first al-Qaeda associated group starting activities in Mauritania in 2000. The group's name was "al-Murabitun," though this was later changed to the "Mauritanian Group for Preaching and Combat" (*al-Hayat*, February 16). This group, as the name implies, was based on young Mauritians who trained in the Algerian camps of al-Jama'at al-Salafiyyatu li'l-Da'wati wa'l-Qitaal, better known by its French name, Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC). Following this, Salafi-Jihadis in Mauritania became more organized. In 2005 they launched attacks on the army base in Lemgheity that killed 15 government soldiers (*El-Watan*, July 6, 2005; AFP, June 5, 2005; al-Jazeera, June 5, 2005).

In 2007, Salafi-Jihadis in Mauritania started to conduct more sophisticated attacks, such as killing four French tourists in Aleg (southeast of Nouakchott, near the Senegal border) (al-Jazeera, December 24, 2007). Nine AQIM members were arrested in connection with the murders (Agence Nouakchott d'Information, January 8). A few days later, jihadis killed three Mauritanian soldiers in an attack on the Ghallawiya army base (Reuters, December 27, 2007). Such attacks led to the cancellation of the Dakar Rally for the first time since its inception thirty years ago (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 9, 2008). After that, the jihadis in Mauritania attacked the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott in February 2008 (the embassy is now closed) and continued to target Westerners and the Mauritanian military (al-Arabiya, June 22, 2008). Since December 2009, several Westerners have been kidnapped by jihadis who are seeking to exchange them for their imprisoned colleagues in Mauritania. On August 18, 2009, AQIM released a video recording in order to reveal the name of Mauritanian suicide bomber Abu Ubaydah al-Basri, who failed to reach his target, the French embassy in Nouakchott, and blew himself up in the street in front of the embassy in August 2009 (*El Khabar*, August 19, 2009).

The development of the Salafi-Jihadi movement in Mauritania is linked to the development of the jihadi movement in Algeria, with significant jihadi leaders in Mauritania, such as al-Khadeem Oled Saman, having been trained in Algeria (anbaa.info [Nouakchott], January 6). AQIM has also established training camps in Mauritania (alakhbar.info, February 2, 2009). The growth of AQIM in Mauritania coincided with the

merger of the Algerian jihadis with al-Qaeda in January 2007, which led to AQIM's growing interest in regional expansion.

This was reflected in the appointment of Yahya Jouadi (a.k.a. Yahya Abu Ammar) as Amir of the Sahel-Sahara Zone, instead of Mokhtar Belmokhtar (a.k.a. Khalid Abu al-Abbas), the latter of whom was in charge of field operations in Mauritania and who succeeded Benmessaoud Abdelkader as the Amir of AQIM's 9th region, which includes the Sahel and south Sahara region. The current leader of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Musab al-Wadoud), believes that Jawadi is more capable of expanding jihad activities, especially in Mauritania. Belmokhtar refused to pay allegiance to Jawadi and has started to negotiate with the Algerian government.

The way that AQIM looks at Mauritania indicates an increasing centralization in co-ordination between different al-Qaeda or Salafi-Jihadi branches, designed to open more than a front fighting only against the West and its interests. The weakness of the Mauritanian government and the existence of more than a million square kilometers of ungoverned desert between Algeria and the other Sahel countries increase Mauritania's importance to AQIM, especially at a time when military pressure is being increased within Algeria.

*Murad Batal al-Shishani is an Islamic groups and terrorism issues analyst based in London. He is a specialist on Islamic Movements in Chechnya and in the Middle East.*

## Kurdish-Arab Tensions and Irbil-Baghdad Relations

By Michael M. Gunter

Iraqi Kurds possess at present not only their most powerful regional government since the creation of Iraq following World War I, but they also play prominent roles in the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, including the posts of president (Jalal al-Talabani), deputy prime minister (Barham Salih) and foreign minister (Hoshiyar Zebari). This dual role in the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) stands in marked contrast to the

situation that existed before the events of 1991 and 2003, when Kurds were treated as second class citizens or worse. The question is how long this unique Kurdish position of strength will last. Many Arabs still resent Kurdish claims to autonomy as a challenge to Arab patrimony and regard a federal state for the Iraqi Kurds within Iraq as simply a prelude to secession. Indeed, most Kurds would quickly opt for independence if they perceive the time as ripe. When will the Iraqi Arabs start trying to reduce the Kurds again? The time may have already arrived.

As the recent "Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community" pointed out in its otherwise largely positive assessment of Iraqi security needs:

Arab-Kurd tensions have [the] potential to derail Iraq's generally positive security trajectory, including triggering conflict among Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups. Many of the drivers of Arab-Kurds tensions - disputed territories, revenue sharing and control of oil resources, and integration of peshmerga forces - still need to be worked out, and miscalculations or misperceptions on either side risk an inadvertent escalation of violence. [1]

Although their current role in Baghdad has been a hedge against renewed Arab chauvinism, it is likely that the Kurds will play a reduced role in the new Iraqi government being formed after the March 7 elections.

First, however, one must query whether the Kurdish house itself is in order to meet this impending struggle. The long conflict for ultimate power in Iraqi Kurdistan between Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal al-Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) - a contest that led to a bloody civil war between the two as recently as the mid-1990s and even saw Barzani call upon Saddam Hussein for help in 1996 - was put on hold by ceding Barzani the presidency of the KRG while al-Talabani assumed the largely ceremonial presidency of Iraq. Although one might wonder what will follow once al-Talabani retires from the Iraqi presidency, the KDP-PUK compromise continues to hold as Barham Sahih from the PUK has become the new KRG prime minister despite significant PUK losses to Nawshirwan Mustafa's Gorran (Change) Party in the KRG elections at the end of July 2009. The KDP-PUK also continued their joint electoral slate for this month's Iraqi parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, the Gorran Party has the potential to divide the Kurds.

The Iraqi Constitution approved by a hotly contested referendum on October 15, 2005 established a federal structure for Iraq that grants significant powers to the regions. [2] The actual division of power between the Iraqi government and the KRG, however, remains in dispute. Contested powers include the ownership of natural resources and control of the revenues flowing from them, the role of the KRG peshmerga (militia) and the final status of Kirkuk and several other disputed territories such as Sinjar and Makhmur. Control of Mosul, Iraq's third largest city, including a big Kurdish population in its eastern part, is also being contested.

### Controlling the Oil Reserves

Dr. Ashti A. Hawrami, the KRG Minister for Natural Resources, addressed the issue of natural resource ownership in an interview in the KRG capital of Irbil on June 14, 2006. He argued strongly that Article 115 of the new Iraqi Constitution "states the supremacy of regional laws over federal laws, and can be invoked if no agreement is reached on the management of oil and gas resources and the distribution of proceeds." He also argued that Article 112 of the Constitution only permits the Iraqi Government an administrative role, while the extraction process is to be supervised by elected regional authorities.

Hawrami went on to maintain that since the new Constitution was silent on undeveloped fields or any new fields, "the regions and governorates will have all the controls." Although he stated that the KRG and the government in Baghdad would be able to cooperate, there is heated verbal conflict over the issue of natural resources (KurdishMedia.com, June 14, 2006).

Since Hawrami's speech, several apparent compromises on a Hydrocarbons law have fallen through, leading to the suspension of oil exports from Kurdistan in October 2010. Since then the KRG's output has slumped to 20,000 barrels a day. Nevertheless, in February 2010, Iraqi Minister of Oil Hussain al-Shahristani announced that Iraq expected to resume oil exports from the Kurdistan region "in the near future." However, the fate of the earlier disputed deals between the KRG and foreign companies remains unclear and an impasse remains (Medya News, February 9).

### The Current Situation

The present relationship between Irbil and Baghdad is "characterized by suspicion, animosity and

brinkmanship" that threaten the stability of the Iraqi state (Medya News, February 9). [3] As al-Maliki's Baghdad government grows in strength and confidence, it has naturally begun to seek to re-impose its authority over the northern Kurdish part of the state. The 2005 constitution that guaranteed real federalism and thus semi-independence for the KRG is now challenged as having been imposed during a moment of weakness. Many (but not all) Shiite and Sunni Arabs now seek to return to a more centralized state that will need to alter the constitution. [4] This offers al-Maliki a strong position as he seeks to rebuild Iraq and end the sectarian violence between Shiite and Sunni Arabs. Given the existing demographics and assets of the two sides, there is a sense that time is on Baghdad's side. In the KRG, however, there are those who think it would be best to confront Baghdad militarily sooner rather than later, when the power equation between the two would be less favorable to the Kurds.

For the past two years, Barzani and al-Maliki have been locked in a bitter verbal struggle over the situation. During a tense meeting in Baghdad in November 2008, Barzani told al-Maliki, "you smell like a dictator" (*Economist*, November 27, 2008). In August 2008, these semantic fireworks nearly resulted in open hostilities over the disputed Diyala province city of Khanaqin on the *de facto* internal border, often referred to as the "trigger line." Here the Kurdish peshmerga ignored an ultimatum by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to withdraw within 24 hours. After some very tense brinkmanship, the two sides each withdrew some 15 miles, leaving security within Khanaqin to be handled by the police.

The two sides have come close to fighting on several subsequent occasions, usually in rural areas where military commanders are more prone to act on their own. In 2009, however, Baghdad ISF units entered the disputed but mainly Kurdish town of Altun Kupri. When residents supported by the peshmerga began to demonstrate, the Baghdad troops were told to shoot to kill. Only the presence of U.S. troops stationed nearby prevented bloodshed.

Oil-rich and strategically located Kirkuk represents the center of these Irbil-Baghdad tensions. It is a divided city beset by a highly complex territorial dispute. [5] Though Baghdad once appeared ready to hand Kirkuk to the KRG under the provisions of Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution, the contested city and province now seem the proverbial "bridge too far" for the Kurds. While the Kurds maintain that the Iraqi constitution

(including Article 140) must be implemented, Baghdad has become increasingly critical of the constitution in general (and Article 140 in particular) as being part of a constitution that is now out of date.

Ironically, many Arabs fall back on the constitution by pointing to Article 142, which implements a promise to the Sunnis to review the document by allowing amendments agreed to by a parliamentary majority (*Daily Star* [Beirut], November 19, 2009). To buttress his position, al-Maliki has established so-called Isnad (Support) councils in Mosul, similar in scope and purpose to the earlier Sahwat (Awakening) councils in the center and south of Iraq. He also ordered the Baghdad Interior Ministry to assume direct responsibility for security in Mosul in November 2008, and transferred those units of the ISF dominated by Kurds. Earlier the Iraqi prime minister had also replaced Kurdish officers in ISF units stationed in the provinces of Niniwa, Diyala, and Salahadin.

#### The Future

How then will ties between the KRG and Baghdad play out? Will Iraq remain truly federal as the KRG demands or federal in name only as the Arabs recentralize the state? KRG president Massoud Barzani has warned; “We will not allow the Kurdish people’s achievements to be wrecked by the Iraqi parliament. Iraq will fall apart if the Iraqi constitution is violated.” [6] So far, the KRG leadership has shown an astuteness and good judgment that argues against any such rash action. Violence and even civil war, if they come, are more likely to develop inadvertently.

A shaky Iraqi political order currently exists in which Sunnis have only recently begun to participate. Extremist sectarian violence has been constrained and effective central government instituted. Within this order, the Kurds have been major participants. They have instituted their own successful government, the KRG, protected by some 75,000 peshmerga, with increasing acceptance from Turkey and a tenuous U.S. guarantee of protection, which, however, will become increasingly problematic as U.S. forces begin to withdraw. As this occurs, violence between Irbil and Baghdad could result.

If Sunnis continue to participate in Iraq’s new order, they may replace the Kurds in Iraq’s governing coalition with the Shiites. It is likely, for example, that while the next prime minister of Iraq will again be a Shiite, the Kurds may lose their hold on the Iraqi presidency to the Sunnis.

Although this might decrease Iraq’s sectarian divisions, it could stimulate Kurdish marginalization from the Iraqi state and thus make ethnic violence between the Kurds and Arabs more probable. The continuing uncertainty over the future of Iraq’s rich oil reserves would certainly fuel any such struggle.

Others, however, like Zalmay Khalilzad, the former U.S. ambassador to Iraq, argue that despite these signs of Arab impatience with the Kurdish gains and continuing demands, there is still a general consensus to accept the Kurdish federal state given the realities of post-Saddam Iraq. [7] What is required then is a wisdom and maturity that will lead both sides to compromise their extreme visions in order to implement a federalism satisfactory to both.

*Michael M. Gunter is a professor of political science at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee.*

#### Notes:

1. Dennis C. Blair (Director of National Intelligence), “Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” February 2, 2010, p. 23.
2. For background, see Brendan O’Leary *et al.*, eds., *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).
3. For a lucid analysis, see Gareth Stansfield and Liam Anderson, “Kurds in Iraq; The Struggle between Baghdad and Erbil,” *Middle East Policy* 16 (Spring 2009), pp. 134-45
4. The Shiite Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) agrees with the Kurds about maintaining real federalism in Iraq. Although influential in Basra, the ISCI lost considerable electoral support in the local Iraqi elections held in January 2009.
5. Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk: Ethnopolitics of Conflict and Compromise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 9.
6. “President Barzani: Iraq Will Fall Apart If Constitution Violated,” KRG Press Release, August 7, 2008; <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.aspx?map=02010100&Ingr=12&anr=25113&rn=223>.
7. Zalmay Khalilzad, remarks made at the Jamestown Foundation conference: “The Iraqi Elections & the



Changing Politico-Security Environment in Iraq,”  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,  
Washington, D.C., March 4, 2010.