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LEBANESE FORCES LEADER DEMANDS INCORPORATION OF HIZBOLLAH'S WEAPONS INTO LEBANESE ARMY

The issue of who should control weapons belonging to the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah continues to dominate meetings of Lebanon's high-level National Dialogue Commission (founded in 2006). While Hezbollah insists on retaining its arms as part of Lebanon's front-line defense against Israel, other national leaders demand the movement turn its arms over to the state for incorporation into the Lebanese Army as part of a National Defense Strategy. Most vocal of the proponents for this latter course is Samir Ja'ja, the leader of the Lebanese Forces (LF), a once formidable Maronite Christian militia that has now entered the political process.

Currently an ally of Sunni leader Sa'ad Hariri, Ja'ja was a prominent anti-Syrian military leader during Lebanon's civil war in the 1970s and 80s. After Syria took effective control of Lebanon, the Maronite militia leader was imprisoned for 11 years in solitary confinement in a sub-basement of the Ministry of Defense building in Beirut. The charges and conviction remained controversial, with Ja'ja finally being released by an act of Parliament after the 2005 Cedar Revolution. Ja'ja maintains that a unified state cannot be created in Lebanon so long as arms remain outside state control, and rejects Hezbollah's claim that Lebanon cannot defend itself unless the Shi'a movement remains armed:

It is not true that the Lebanese Army is incapable of protecting Lebanon, and Hezbollah alone is capable of this. In the army there are more and better trained special units than those possessed by Hezbollah. Why do we not allow the army to draw up the necessary plans to defend Lebanon and its south? ... We consider that Hezbollah's weapons expose Lebanon to danger more than they defend it (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 16; *Now Lebanon*, April 14).

This danger emanates from the threat to Lebanese sovereignty posed by Hezbollah's independent military. Ja'ja maintains Hezbollah is part of a regional network that "starts from Tehran and does not end in Damascus" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 16). Decisions regarding confrontation with the Israeli enemy are made not by the elected officials in Beirut, but by Hezbollah in coordination with Tehran and Damascus. Hezbollah insists its weapons are "not a subject for discussion" in the National Dialogue (*Daily Star* [Beirut], March 8). Ja'ja says Hezbollah is not serious about its participation in the National Dialogue as it has failed to present its own plan for a national defense strategy. The LF leader says his party would like to see the Lebanese Army develop special units similar to Hezbollah's highly mobile guerrilla forces (*Now Lebanon*, April 11).

Negotiations on the arms issue have been complicated by unconfirmed Israeli and U.S. claims that Syria is supplying Hezbollah with Scud missiles, a weapon whose relative immobility, sluggish deployment and need for a large support team of technicians and vehicles makes it nearly useless in Hezbollah's tactical planning, which relies on smaller, highly mobile missiles that can be deployed and fired in the few minutes available before an Israeli counter-strike by fighter-jets. Though Hezbollah and Syria have termed the reports a "fabrication," Israeli jets have responded by performing aerial maneuvers over Beirut and southern Lebanon (*Daily Star*, April 19; Reuters, April 16). The primitive Scud missiles were used against Israel by Iraq in the 1990-91 Gulf War, but caused little damage and no direct deaths.

Druze chieftain and leader of the Democratic Gathering, veteran warlord and politician Walid Jumblatt, has called for the issue of Hezbollah's weapons to be dropped from the national dialog after reconciling with his long-time enemies in Damascus (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 16). Ja'ja's Maronite rival, General Michel Aoun, who has also reconciled with Damascus, threatened to quit the dialogue if details were leaked to the press. The

threat led Ja'ja to suggest, "This is an invitation to talk more and more about the issue of arms" (*Ya Libnan*, April 15). The new positions adopted by Jumblatt and Aoun forced President Michel Sulayman to adjourn the national dialogue until June 3.

A related topic being discussed in the national dialogue is the issue of arms held by Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps. After a number of recent clashes within the camps, Syria has offered to assist in the resolution of this matter (*al-Liwaa*, April 9). As Ja'ja pointed out in a recent interview, Syrian intelligence agencies are highly influential within the camps (*Now Lebanon*, April 9).

AFGHANISTAN'S HIZB-I-ISLAMI REFUSES TO NEGOTIATE FROM A POSITION OF WEAKNESS

In a statement released on April 10, Afghanistan's Hizb-i-Islami (Party of Islam) provided an angry response to comments given to a U.S. Senate committee by Defense Secretary Robert Gates. The Defense Secretary said that negotiations would be necessary to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan, but would not work unless Kabul negotiated from a position of strength and the insurgents were convinced they were going to lose (AP, March 24; VOA, March 25). In reply to Gates' statement, Hizb-i-Islami stated:

God willing, this dream of yours will never come true. Your dream of weakening the mujahideen will never come true. The time will never come when you get the upper hand and the mujahideen becomes weak and obliged to accept your conditions. If, God forbid, such a time comes, then our answer will be that the time for talks has passed. Be sure that we will never sit for talks with the enemy when we are weak and powerless... We would rather sacrifice ourselves in God's path than bow down to the enemy. We will never surrender to this shame (Afghan Islamic Press, April 11).

A Hizb-i-Islami delegation was recently in Kabul to present a 15-point Mesaq-e Melli Nejat (National Rescue Plan) to the Karzai government and a number of E.U. and U.N. envoys (Pajhwok Afghan News, April 2; see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 9). According to Hizb-i-Islami, their peace proposal was "logical, practical and easy." The plan called for the complete withdrawal of occupation forces in six months, but did not call for the dissolution of the Karzai government, parliament or the security forces. The implementation of this plan has

been opposed by “some arrogant and warmongering American generals” who have stressed the need for continuing the war (Afghan Islamic Press, April 11).

While urging the Taliban to agree to their proposal, Hizbi-Islami says it is interested only in face-to-face negotiations with other Afghans, rather than negotiating through a mediator. The movement suggests that previous negotiations with representatives of the Taliban’s Quetta Shura, conducted through the mediation of Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, (Dubai, January 2010) led to the detention of a number of Taliban leaders.

Media reaction in Afghanistan to the Hizb-i-Islami statement was mixed. Drawing on past experience of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-i-Islami movement, some suggested there was no guarantee that the group would stop killing people after reconciliation (*Hasht-e Sobh* [Kabul], April 10). Others said Karzai’s efforts to build ties with Hizb-i-Islami would be dangerous for Afghanistan, though one columnist suggested the American and Hizb-i-Islami positions on peace talks would inevitably become closer (*Mandegar*, April 10; *Arman-e Melli* [Kabul], April 10).

The movement’s inclination towards peace negotiations has apparently not prevented it from preparing new attacks in Kabul. Afghanistan’s National Security Directorate announced on April 10 that it had arrested 26 members of the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami on charges of carrying out terrorist operations and suicide attacks in the Afghan capital (Pajhwok Afghan News, April 10; *Mandegar* [Kabul], April 11).

Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurfaces with New Strategy and Specific Operations

By Hani Nasira

The reported death of the elusive leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, and his al-Qaeda colleague, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, in a combined attack by U.S. and Iraqi government forces on April 20 raises important questions regarding the future of the ISI. The movement’s fortunes have been in steady decline for some time as a result of the cooperation between U.S. forces and anti-al-Qaeda tribal militias known as “Sahwa” (Awakening) councils.

Despite their changing fortunes, ISI has still managed to carry out major operations, such as the bombing of the Egyptian, Iranian and German embassies in Baghdad on April 4 (al-Sumaria, April 10). These operations follow a major bout of self-criticism designed to create conditions favorable for the re-establishment of the “Islamic State” in Iraq.

Earlier this year, a new strategy for al-Qaeda in Iraq was issued under the title, “A Strategic Plan to Improve the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq” (Hanein.info, February 20). The document detailed a new strategy outlining various scenarios and priorities of al-Qaeda in Iraq as it determines targets and enemies. It revealed a new military strategy and a different approach in dealing with religious minorities and tribal leaders, aiming to attract a social base to support al-Qaeda’s attempts to impose its Islamic State.

The five-chapter document exposes the structural crises al-Qaeda faces on the Iraqi front, topped by the difficulty of unifying jihadist forces and the lack of a political symbol after the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2006, with his successors Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza Al-Muhajir failing to enjoy al-Zarqawi’s charisma.

A quick look at the document’s contents reveals the movement’s efforts to redesign its campaign in Iraq:

- In the first chapter, “Serious Attempts for Unity,” al-Qaeda calls for a process to unify the ranks of the jihadis under the flag of the ISI.
- The second chapter is titled “Balanced Military Planning” and includes a new military strategy emphasizing the necessity of targeting the Awakening councils first. It also calls for specific operations, not open war, against U.S. forces.
- In the third chapter, “Jihadist Awakening Councils,” al-Qaeda calls for convincing tribal leaders who are resentful of the Awakenings councils’ leaders to form military units for “Jihadist Awakening councils” to replace what they term the “apostate Awakenings.”
- The fourth chapter, “Taking Care of the Political Symbol,” describes the crisis al-Qaeda in Iraq faced after the killing of al-Zarqawi, who enjoyed more support than his successors.

- The final chapter addresses the issue of “Reassuring Opponents.” The new strategy calls for reassuring religious minorities, a reference to Christians whom the authors claim willingly paid jizya (a tributary tax paid by Christians and Jews in an Islamic state) to ISI (see also RFE/RL, April 17, 2008). The document, however, stopped short of mentioning Shiites among those opponents who could be “reassured,” which means al-Zarqawi’s advocacy of killing Shiites remains part of the organization’s policy.

The new document accuses the U.S. forces of launching a media war against al-Qaeda, whether through U.S.-made operations and atrocities blamed on al-Qaeda or by establishing a satellite channel that focuses on smearing the ISI. The most important element in the U.S. campaign, as per the document, is “ignoring the existence of a real state [i.e. the ISI]” and describing the ISI as a “virtual internet entity that a power failure can kill.”

Al-Qaeda acknowledges the decline of the ISI, but is certain it can be regained with the near end of the Sahwa movement. “As the State has fallen after being functional in many areas, it will come back.” It uses as proof the decrease in the number of Awakening troops, a number estimated by al-Qaeda to be roughly 100,000 fighters.

Al-Qaeda’s new strategy implies that it fears the success of the political process and sees the nationalist resistance as more dangerous than the Awakenings, as it has been co-opted by Americans who seek “an alternative that can be easily driven. These are the nationalists, technocrats and democrats.”

The document asserts “the need for an enhanced media operation... carefully tied to a coherent political strategy.” Using political speeches and financial incentives, people’s support can be directed. Meanwhile, the Awakening councils will become less of a real threat to the ISI in the future. The document also calls for making use of past setbacks—especially the delay in fighting the Awakening councils previously in order to focus on fighting American troops—by demanding a reversal of this strategy and making it a priority to target the Awakening councils and the nationalist resistance. Within the context of calling for unity among various military factions, al-Qaeda sees the Shi’a Iraqi Hizbullah movement as a danger to its jihadist project. The

document also refers to the role it alleges was played by the Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq in forming the Awakening councils and confirms it supported them in the beginning, thinking they were intended to target the occupation. The document asserts, furthermore, that unifying jihadists and regaining the fallen State will shatter the Hizbullah Brigades’ political ambition of dominating the Sunni areas.

The new military strategy is based on three key steps:

- 1) Focusing on liquidating the Awakening councils and political powers before dealing with the occupation. “90% of bullets must target apostates (the Awakening councils and politicians) and 10% target the Crusaders (U.S. forces).” Al-Qaeda asserts that war against its Iraqi foes is the most dangerous and the longest conflict, as per the lessons learned from the Afghan situation.
- 2) “Cleansing”: This means establishing al-Qaeda’s control of the infrastructure and bases of U.S. forces, whether it comes after withdrawal or as a result of targeting them with military action. If not controlled, these bases must be destroyed.
- 3) “Targeting”: The document emphasizes the necessity for specific operations targeting commanders and cadres by recruiting human bombs among guards and inside vital installations. The point is to carry out influential operations that target individuals and symbols, giving as an example the January 4 operation by Jordanian bomber Khamis al-Balawy that fatally targeted CIA operatives in Afghanistan’s Khost province (Asharq al-Awsat, January 6; Reuters, January 6).

The new strategic document also sees a possibility for creating “Jihadist Awakening councils,” mimicking the U.S. engagement of the tribes to create broader popular support for the Islamic State. The most revealing element in this document is al-Qaeda’s acknowledgement of the collapse of its state in Iraq. It offers a number of scenarios for restoring it, especially after the U.S. withdrawal, which al-Qaeda sees as a dangerous stage that they need to prepare for, starting now.

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Commander of Iraq's Hizbullah Brigades Insists on Resistance to U.S. Occupation

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

While most of Iraq's armed Shi'a resistance has entered the political process, some independent Shi'a resistance groups remain in the field, determined to expel the American occupation by force of arms. Leading among these is the Kata'ib Hizbullah (Brigades of the Party of God), who have released an interview with one of their field commanders on the movement's website (kataibhizbollah.org, April 4). The interview was circulated in a number of mostly Shiite-based jihadi websites and forums.

The Brigades' commander, whose name was withheld for security reasons, commenced the interview by revealing his participation in the first insurgent attack on a U.S. patrol near the U.N. building in Baghdad on October 10, 2003. The attack was carefully planned, says the commander, using homemade explosives developed by the Iraqi group's bomb experts. At the time of the American invasion, Hizbullah didn't perceive U.S. tanks and soldiers as saviors from Saddam Hussein's tyrant regime, as did many others. According to the commander, "We were on the opposite side, carefully watching as the U.S. tanks and soldiers entered our streets... thinking that the war was over and Iraq had become a U.S. settlement."

The commander described the emergence of the independent Shi'a brigades that would coalesce into the Iraqi Hizbullah:

During the early days of the [movement's] establishment, we used to operate as completely separate groups. Certainly, this method of activity was the result of security precautions that we took for fear of the future. Therefore, we used to represent detached brigades. To some extent, each brigade was not aware that other brigades existed.

Later, the group established a secure network and clear strategic and tactical objectives. Consequently, all the brigades combined under one command named Kata'ib Hizbullah.

The movement believes it was the first group to start organized resistance to the occupation as the foundation and experience of the movement's fighters dates back to Saddam Hussein's time. During Hussein's Ba'athist regime, Hizbullah recruits were thoroughly scrutinized before enlistment, but no major attacks were carried out against the regime because the Iraqi security and intelligence agencies penetrated and controlled every aspect of Iraqi life. The commander provided a few reasons for the Brigades' lack of success against Hussein's regime, including the brutality of Saddam's intelligence apparatus, inexperience in building weapons' caches and explosive charges and the Western, American and Arab support for Hussein's regime.

At first, Hizbullah procured the raw material for explosives from the local market, though the heavy infiltration of Ba'athist security agents in the market made this difficult to do without detection. The Brigade's munitions experts would then prepare the charges in safe places.

Although setting up safe clandestine laboratories wasn't possible during the former regime, it doesn't mean the [current] occupation is less brutal and tyrannical than the former regime. The occupation failed to copy Saddam's tyrannical intelligence and security system that was embedded among the people. It had a limited form of this system and this is the main reason for the failure of the occupation to hamper the establishment and development of jihadist activity.

The Hizbullah Brigades believe firmly in the mandate of the Wilayat al-Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist) system, which calls for an Islamic jurist (or jurists) to exercise guardianship over the people. This system, currently only applied in the Islamic Republic of Iran, is incorporated into the Iranian constitution, where the Supreme Leader (currently Ayatollah Ali Hosayni Khamenei) plays the role of the Guardian. After defeating the occupation forces, the Brigades seek to erect an Islamic Shiite state with the religious authority of Wilayat al-Faqih embedded in its political system. In order to conduct proper jihad, the Brigades operate within the religious framework of Wilayat al-Faqih because this religious authority preserves the unity of the movement. Secondly, Wilayat al-Faqih decides the religious justification for attacking certain targets and determines compensation for innocent civilians harmed in these attacks. The commander alleges the Brigades'

attacks seldom injure or kill innocent bystanders and the very few innocent casualties occurred because U.S. forces started using the public as human shields after realizing Hizbullah's policy was to abort attacks to spare civilians. Since then, the Brigades have resorted to snipers and the use of RPG-7 and RPG-29 rocket-propelled grenades, as well as developing shaped charges that limit the impact of the explosion to the target. In case civilians are injured or killed as a result of the Brigades' attacks, their families are immediately paid blood money as compensation.

Hizbullah denies links to Iran, alleging that Iran supports the Iraqi central government that emerged from a democratic political process. From an Islamist religious perspective, the democratic political process contradicts the Islamic political process. The movement also complains that the Arab media is biased towards the American occupation project. The U.S. asks the Arab media to depict Shiites and Kurds as consenting to the U.S. occupation while only Sunni Iraqis continue the struggle, "not because they oppose the occupation, but because they lost their authority in Iraq."

The commander claims the United States offered to negotiate with the battalions, but the movement completely rejects any talks with the U.S. occupation forces. Furthermore, the Brigades oppose the rehabilitation and inclusion of former Ba'ath party members in the Iraqi political system. According to the commander, "The reinstatement of the Ba'athists is nothing but hurtful to the martyrs, those bereaved of their children, and the families of the martyrs, who were harmed by the oppression and hypocrisy of the former regime." The commander alleges General Raymond T. Odierno, the current U.S. commander in Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador Christopher R. Hill are pressuring the Iraqi government to bring the Ba'athists back, a reference to unsuccessful attempts to persuade the Iraqi electoral commission to allow former members of the banned party to run for election (Middle East Online, February 22, *Jordan Times*, February 21).

The Hizbullah commander is optimistic about the future and the Brigades' ability to eliminate the U.S. occupation of Iraq. "The occupation in Iraq gets weaker every day while the Brigades become stronger and closer to victory. The Brigades know the enemy better than ever now. We are more developed, more ready to excel and better able to cope with the realities of the occupation on the ground."

In the near future, the Brigades expect the Coalition to withdraw to their barracks in Iraq, at which time the Brigades are preparing a second phase of concentrated and efficient attacks against them. Pro-Shiites commented on the interview, praising the Brigades for showing the world that Shiites are the core of the Iraqi resistance and the guardians of Shi'ism.

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Algeria Launches Nation-Wide Counterterrorism Offensive

By Andrew McGregor

With al-Qaeda activities in the Sahel/Sahara region of Africa creating havoc with commerce, trade, resource extraction, tourism and general security, the nations of the region appear ready to mount a coordinated military approach to the elimination of Salafist militants. Algeria, with the largest and best-armed of the militaries in the region, launched a sweeping counterterrorism offensive last week, entitled Operation Ennasr ("Victory").

Algeria's Armée Nationale Populaire (ANP) is under orders from the army's chief-of-staff, Major-General Ahmad Gaid Salah, to "clean out the terrorist maquis" (Liberté [Algiers], April 13). The operation is targeting bases of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the western, central and eastern parts of Algeria. Unlike operations in the desert regions of south Algeria, Operation Ennasr is focusing on the mountainous and heavily wooded regions where AQIM has its hideouts. Ground and helicopter-borne elements of the ANP are being supported by local police and units of the Gendarmerie Nationale (al-Dark al-Watani), Algeria's rural police force. The elimination of AQIM elements in Algeria is complicated by the movement's policy of operating in cells of 4-5 fighters, thus reducing the risk posed to the organization's survival by any one encounter with security forces (*El Watan* [Algiers], April 14).

It was reported that a ground operation supported by helicopters in the forests of Bordj Bou Arreridj province had eliminated 12 terrorists and captured a number of others. Algerian authorities are using DNA evidence to identify the dead militants (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], April 14; *L'Expression* [Algiers], April 15).

Lack of surveillance aircraft, heavy transport, jet-fighters and even helicopters in many of the Sahel/Sahara nations inhibits counterterrorist efforts conducted over a vast and often inhospitable region. In this regard, Algeria, one of the few area nations with a large and capable air force, has been urging Nigeria to add its air force to the campaign against AQIM. Algiers has informed Abuja that AQIM Amirs have begun recruiting in north Nigeria (*Jeune Afrique*, April 17). Both Nigeria and Senegal, another proposed member of the alliance, are expected to attend the next meeting of regional security officials (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], April 7).

After irritating Algerian leaders by including that nation on the American terrorist blacklist following the failed Christmas Day attack aboard an American airliner by a Nigerian would-be bomber, Washington has been making major efforts of late to reassure Algeria it is a vital and trusted part of America's counterterrorism strategy. A recent visit by FBI officials was followed on April 7 by a visit from U.S. Attorney-General Eric Holder to sign a security agreement covering counterterrorism, organized crime, drug enforcement and judicial cooperation (Algerian Radio, April 7).

Developing Regional Counterterrorist Strategies

It was announced on April 20 that a military summit in the southern Algerian oasis town of Tamanrasset had agreed to form a "Joint Operational Military Committee" with headquarters in that town to deal with the problem of AQIM and gangs of drug traffickers who make use of poorly defined or guarded borders. While it was known that Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania were considering such a move, the announcement contained the surprising news that Libya, Chad and Burkina Faso had also joined the initiative. The new joint command, to begin work by the end of April, will include officers from each of the participating Sahara/Sahel nations. Morocco, a rival to Algeria for influence in the region, appears to have been deliberately left out of the new formation. Many details of the initiative have yet to be revealed, including the command's financing, the composition of joint military forces (if any) and

whether joint forces would be permitted to cross borders in pursuit of terrorists (Afrol News, April 20).

The summit of military commanders followed hard on earlier meetings between the foreign ministers and the intelligence chiefs of the seven Sahara/Sahel nations that began on March 16. A summit of regional heads-of-state is expected to follow. Algeria has played the leading role in developing military cooperation in the region; the Algerian Ministry of Defense described the meetings as a means of defining "the ways and means capable of putting in place a collective and co-responsible strategy for fighting against terrorism and transnational crime."

One motivation behind the rather rapid development of diplomatic and military cooperation in the region appears to be the desire of participating nations to avoid foreign [i.e. American] intervention in the region to deal with AQIM. One of those present at the military summit told a Malian daily that "There was a call on Algiers to act quickly to counteract the interference of foreign forces to act on our behalf. We are strongly against any foreign interference" (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], April 15). The United States will begin military maneuvers in Burkina Faso in early May, with the participation of roughly 400 troops from Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Chad, Niger, Mali and Senegal. Algeria declined an invitation to participate after expressing concerns about the U.S.-led military exercises (*El Khabar*, April 15). Though many of the participating nations are eager to receive U.S. arms, funds and training, none have volunteered to host AFRICOM, the new U.S. military command for Africa, which remains based in Germany.

Tackling the Ideological Basis of Extremism

Algeria has also taken steps to confront the religious and ideological foundations of AQIM and other extremist movements. The Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments is hosting a meeting this month of regional religious leaders and scholars to focus on grounding regional religious practice on the Maliki madhab, one of the four schools of orthodox Sunni jurisprudence. The Maliki school is widely followed in north and west Africa, and a renewed emphasis on its merits will be offered as a means of deterring the infiltration of "foreign" (i.e. Salafist) forms of Islam that espouse takfiri practices (the declaration of other Muslims as apostates deserving of death) that form the ideological foundation of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. The conference is intended to examine "the

dimensions of intellectual security, its consequences and the reasons that led to the appearance of negative ideas that had fatal consequences for many countries, including Algeria,” according to Minister of Religious Affairs Bouabdellah Ghlamallah (Magharabia, April 6). Algeria is also seeking technological solutions to the terrorist threat. The recent introduction of sophisticated explosives detectors in the ports of Algiers, Annaba and Oran have resulted in the seizure of 50 tons of TNT as well as 300 tons of chemical fertilizer intended for use in bomb-making. Combined with new restrictions on the sale and distribution of certain chemicals and fertilizers, the inspection of cargos with the new detectors has made it difficult for terrorist groups in Algeria to obtain the necessary raw materials needed to manufacture bombs (*El Khabar*, April 7).

A Surprising Setback for Algeria’s Security Efforts

Algeria’s counterterrorist efforts suffered an unforeseen blow in late February when Ali Tounsi, the head of Algeria’s Direction Générale de la Sureté Nationale (DGSN – Directorate General for National Security) was murdered in his office by a close friend and partner in the counterterrorism effort, Colonel Chouieb Oultache (a.k.a. “The Mustache”). Described by one source as “the architect of the modernization of the national police, the dreaded adversary of radical Islamists [and] the pet peeve of organized crime,” Ali Tounsi was a career security agent who left school in 1957 to join the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in the independence struggle against France (*Jeune Afrique*, March 14). He was particularly adept at undercover work, but was retired in 1988 before the government asked him to return to active service in the early 1990s to combat the growing Islamist insurgency. His assassin, Chouieb Oultache, was chief of the police air unit, a formation he was largely responsible for creating. It was reported that Oultache learned he was about to be investigated on charges of embezzlement on his way to a meeting at Tounsi’s office. No one else was present at the meeting, where the two men apparently argued before Oultache pulled his service weapon and fired three bullets into Tounsi’s head.

Shaykh Ali bin-Hajj, the deputy leader of the banned Front Islamique du Salut (FIS – Islamic Salvation Front), issued a statement after al-Tounsi’s murder calling for reform in the Algerian security services. The Islamist leader claims the security services of the Arab world are consistently engaged in activities forbidden by Islam and international law:

In most dictatorial regimes, only those who are involved in corruption, violations, torture, allegation of false charges against their colleagues, and those who flatter their masters are promoted to higher ranks in the security apparatus. In short, those who are good for carrying out dirty missions (Media Commission of Shaykh Ali bin-Hajj, March 10)

Ali bin-Hajj especially called for the regime to avoid appointing military men to head the nation’s security services. The two individuals considered most likely to succeed Ali Tounsi are General Sadek Ait Mesabh and Colonel Muhammad Boutouili, both of the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS – Directorate of Research and Security) (*Tout sur l’Algérie*, April 12).

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