



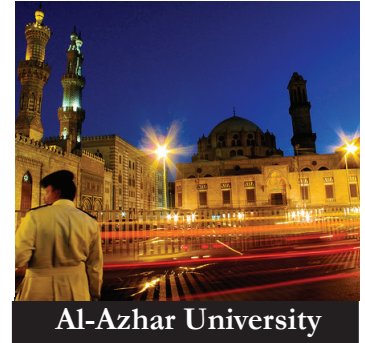
Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Al-Azhar University

“THE WAY OF WAR IS NOT PAVED WITH FLOWERS” – SIRAJUDDIN HAQQANI ON THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Thirty-year-old Sirajuddin Haqqani controls a powerful insurgent group known as the Haqqani Network along Afghanistan's southeastern border with the Tribal Areas of north-west Pakistan, particularly in the provinces of Khost, Paktika and Paktia (Al-Balagh Media Center, April 13). Operating with apparent autonomy under the broader structure of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” (the Taliban-dominated political structure of the Islamic resistance), Sirajuddin's network has earned a reputation for deadly efficiency in its attacks on local and international forces in the region.

Sirajuddin recently answered questions from forum members on a jihadi website, part of an effort to create a public profile for the once reclusive mujahid (ansar1.info; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, January 28).

On the impact of attacks by CIA-directed unmanned aerial vehicles, Sirajuddin did not hesitate to acknowledge their effectiveness, but warned setbacks are part of the longer struggle:

While you sometimes hear some news on the martyrdom of some mujahideen by an unmanned aerial vehicle, you should also know that the mujahideen do weaken their enemies and make them suffer heavy casualties and financial losses. In addition, you should know that the way

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of war is not paved with flowers. Hardships and sacrifices are what bring victory.

With regard to the devastating Khost suicide bombing that targeted CIA personnel last December, Sirajuddin claimed this operation had helped reduce the CIA's operational accuracy by 60%. He noted elite personnel and the "smartest CIA officers" had been killed, while spies (such as Khost bomber Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi) became mistrusted, leading to a disruption of CIA intelligence gathering and delays in the process of recruiting new spies.

When asked about February's joint NATO/Afghan Operation Moshtarak in the Marjah region of Helmand province, Sirajuddin described it as nothing more than "a media stunt... The enemies were defeated in Marjah. They achieved nothing."

The mujahideen commander sees the hand of Israel behind Coalition activities in Afghanistan:

The Crusaders' assaults against Afghanistan aim primarily to establish Greater Israel. The current Crusade plan, which is designed by Greater Israel, aims to remove the obstacles that hinder the establishment of Greater Israel. We believe that defeating the United States in Afghanistan will help to hinder this Crusade against the Muslim world. In addition, we believe that their defeat will pave our way for liberating Jerusalem.

Elsewhere, the mujahideen commander claimed the United States and its agents were encouraging the production of opium, while the mujahideen had no connection with the crop and did not use it for financial support. Sirajuddin also denied reports the Taliban were burning girls' schools, claiming, "This is a blatant lie. It is a weird game played by the Crusaders. They build schools for girls to win over the public and then burn them to harm the reputation of the mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." He added that peace talks would be impossible so long as the occupation continued.

ISLAMISTS ACCUSE BLACKWATER/Xe IN DEADLY BOMBING OF A SHABAAB CONTROLLED MOSQUE

At least 45 people were killed and over 80 wounded in a May 1 bombing of the Abdallah Shideye Mosque

in Mogadishu's Bakara market. The mosque and the market are currently controlled by the radical al-Shabaab Islamist movement. The next day a hand grenade was thrown into a Shabaab-controlled mosque in the southern port of Kismayo. One person was killed and seven injured, though the blast missed senior al-Shabaab officials who were still on their way to the mosque (Shabelle Media Network, May 2). Days earlier, a landmine was set off just outside the Shabaab-controlled Abu Hureyra mosque in the Bakara market, killing one and injuring eight (Garowe Online, May 1).

Two to three explosions occurred simultaneously within the Abdallah Shideye mosque as some 800 worshippers were gathering for noon prayers. Among those injured was a senior al-Shabaab official (and the possible target of the bombing), Shaykh Fu'ad Muhammad Qalaf "Shangole," who described the incident:

While we were in the middle of our lesson and it was near prayer time, three explosions happened, one after the other went off, and I saw the chair I was sitting on fly across the mosque. I saw my white thawb [an ankle-length cotton garment] was red with blood and I couldn't tell where the blood was coming from. When I opened my eyes, I saw that many people were in pain and that many others had been martyred (al-Qimmah, May 8).

Al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage (a.k.a. Shaykh Ali Dheere) insisted "foreign mercenaries" were responsible for the attack (Radio Gaalkacyo, May 2). Shaykh Ali Muhammad Husayn, the Shabaab governor of Banadir region (which includes Mogadishu), accused the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of carrying out the bombings, vowing immediate revenge (Voice of Mudug Radio, May 2). The shaykh also said the movement would improve security in mosques and other public places, describing the bombing as "an unforgettable lesson" (Shabelle Media Network, May 2).

Eventually al-Shabaab leaders agreed the explosions were the work of American mercenaries working for private military contractors Blackwater (now Xe Services LLC). According to Shaykh Fu'ad Muhammad Qalaf, Blackwater personnel had arrived in Somalia two weeks earlier and were involved in training "apostate" forces at the Halane military base near Mogadishu airport, currently used by African Union peacekeepers fighting on the side of the TFG (al-Qimmah, May 1;

May 8; Garowe Online, May 4). Al-Shabaab leaders alleged that Blackwater operatives had been responsible for similar mosque bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage warned of the arrival of “Blackwater mercenaries” last January. “We have discovered that U.S. agencies are going to launch suicide bombings in public places in Mogadishu. They have tried it in Algeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan... They want to target Bakara Market and mosques, then use that to malign us.” The shaykh told tribal elders that Blackwater/Xe was recruiting locals to help carry out a bombing campaign (Dayniile, January 11; Press TV, January 12). In March, the shaykh claimed private U.S. contractors such as Blackwater/Xe were responsible for a wave of assassinations of Shabaab leaders (al-Jazeera, March 10). The Shabaab spokesman was quick to remind reporters of his earlier warning after the attack on the Abdallah Shideye Mosque (Garowe Online, May 1).

The introduction of mosque bombings to the Somali conflict has shocked many Somalis, who almost reflexively look beyond their own culture for an explanation of this phenomenon, much as they did with the earlier introduction of suicide bombings by al-Shabaab. A TFG spokesman described the mosque attacks as a “new foreign barbaric phenomena”; leaders of both al-Shabaab’s rival Hizb al-Islam militia and the pro-government Ahlu Sunnah wa’l-Jama’a (ASJ) militia alleged a foreign origin for the attacks (Garowe Online, May 3). With no claim of responsibility, there is still a wide range of suspects, including the Sufi ASJ, which has suffered from al-Shabaab’s continuing destruction of Sufi shrines and the tombs of revered Sufi shaykhs (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 1).

Xe owner Erik Prince urged the U.S. government last January to deploy private military contractors to fight “terrorists” in Somalia, Yemen, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia (*The Nation*, May 3; Times Online, May 5). Rumors of Blackwater/Xe’s presence and activities are already common currency in Pakistan and now appear to be sweeping Somalia as culprits are sought in a vicious new stage of the continuing transformation of Somalia’s civil war from clan-based warfare to sectarian struggle.

Al-Qaeda Infiltration of the Western Sahara’s Polisario Movement

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Jihadi forum participants were excited about a posting entitled: “Al-Qaeda penetrates the Polisario army and the Mauritanian army is in danger” (atahadi.com, April 20). Endeavors to penetrate the Polisario Front of the Western Sahara have long been on al-Qaeda’s agenda.

The posting gives a short brief about Polisario’s desert army, now supposedly infiltrated by al-Qaeda. Polisario is a nationalist political/military organization, founded in 1973 to end Spanish control of Western Sahara. In the last years of Spanish occupation the territory was divided into two parts: Saguia al-Hamra (the Red Canal) and Rio d’Oro (The Gold Coast). [1] The Sahrawis of the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) when Spain withdrew from Western Sahara in 1976, but independence was preempted when Morocco and Mauritania decided to split the ex-colony between them, with Saguia al-Hamra going to Morocco and Rio d’Oro going to Mauritania. The small and disinterested Mauritanian army was expelled by Polisario fighters in 1979, but Morocco then decided to annex Rio d’Oro, leaving only a small portion of economically useless and largely uninhabited desert in the hands of the Polisario. Based in refugee camps in the Tindouf province of western Algeria, Polisario conducted raids on Moroccan bases until new Moroccan defensive measures (including the construction of an enormous sand berm) forced a ceasefire in 1991. Algeria continues to sponsor Polisario, but is wary of allowing the movement to spark an unwanted war with Morocco (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 10, 2001). The ceasefire was a turning point for the Polisario in its transition from a closed, disciplined and authoritarian movement to an open and loose society vulnerable to external influence. The Islamic movements in refugee camps and their religious manipulations weakened the political loyalty of the Polisario fighters to their leadership.

The rise of the global jihad movement calling upon all Muslims to fight Christians and Jews and topple the “treacherous” secular regimes in the Islamic world attracted some Sahrawi fighters. At present, many Polisario members openly support the jihadi movement to counteract foreign interference in northern Africa. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been

making significant efforts to exploit the confusion among the Polisario ranks, demoralized by decades of unsuccessful attempts to expel the Moroccans. Consequently, many Sahrawi fighters are adherents to the jihadi ideology rather than the nationalism that has been the traditional core of Polisario ideology since the onset of the movement's struggle for independence from Morocco. Therefore, the military capabilities of the Sahrawi army may be at AQIM's disposal in case of any major development on the Polisario front. Jihadi forum members anticipate the presence of foreign troops [possibly referring to A.U. peacekeepers or even U.S. troops] and the mass killing and arrests of Polisario fighters by Moroccan forces, which will further accelerate the shift to extremism and loyalty to AQIM (in practice, Morocco has offered the Sahrawis autonomy within the Moroccan state, an offer that has led to the defection of many former Polisario leaders). The Salafi-Jihadi adherents in the Polisario army are also expected to attack the Mauritanian military patrolling the border, despite Mauritania's recognition of the SADR since 1979.

The first indication of Polisario's involvement with AQIM was the arrest of one of Polisario's most prominent Imams, Mahjub Muhamad Sedi, at his home in the Polisario refugee camp in the Algerian town of Tindouf. The Algerian forces found weapons, explosives and letters between the Imam and AQIM leader Abd al-Malik Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Musab Abdul Wadud) (alam.ma, January 6). In the same context, the Mauritanian army arrested three members of Polisario who were suspected of ties with al-Qaeda in al-Nuss gorge, 60 km east of Um Karin (oujdia.info, January 27).

Jihadi forum members hailed the report about al-Qaeda's penetration of the Polisario army. Some members posted briefs about the difficult internal situation of the Polisario, which makes it easier for al-Qaeda to recruit members. Moroccan nationalists supporting the annexation of the Western Sahara got into heated arguments with Salafi-Jihadi adherents. One nationalist said, "There is no al-Qaeda in the Islamic Moroccan country. There are Algerian dogs and thugs. All the heinous and terrorist crimes attributed to al-Qaeda are mere lies fabricated by the communist regime [i.e. Algeria]." Salafi-Jihadis from the SADR alleged that al-Qaeda is present in Moroccan territory and watching the tyrants. "Thank God, the appearance of al-Qaeda gave us hope of independence and eradication of the occupation."

One Polisario member stated several reasons for supporting AQIM:

Morocco is the third strongest power in Africa, yet does not use this might to protect Islam, the Shari'a and jihad against infidels. On the contrary, its army protected the king, the constitution and the Jews and Christians. The Moroccan army was used to suppress Muslims in Morocco and the desert. This army will become weak once we abandon the king and his throne and seek to fight to uphold God's word and organize [an] Islamic army. The Moroccan army is not an Islamic army. If it was an Islamic, Shari'a-applying army, it would be striking the infidel evils and liberating al-Andalus [Spain], France and other [regions] (drdcha.com, January 28).

Comments from opponents of the Salafi-Jihadi elements in Morocco accused refugees in the Tindouf camps of resorting to religion every time they feel they are losing the struggle. One anti-Polisario Sahrawi wrote, "Thank God, the lie of the so-called desert people came to light. The desert people will become simply a terrorist group. Morocco has 36 million Muslims willing to fight the terrorists and win martyrdom. They are mere communists pretending to be jihadists fighting the grandchildren of the true mujahideen" (the "communist" description refers to Polisario's early Marxist-Leninist "national liberation" ideology, which has long since been abandoned by the movement).

Some believe the mishandling of the western desert struggle with Morocco by the current leaders of the Polisario led to the emergence of radical Islam in the refugee camps. According to supporters of al-Qaeda, the religious awakening brings with it very serious political reforms which will embarrass the "corrupt Polisario government." As part of this drive for political reform, AQIM is preaching the merits of jihad to rid the desert of infidels and gain independence for Western Sahara. Though nationalism remains at odds with al-Qaeda's overall ideology, AQIM is apparently prepared to support the lesser evil against the greater evil with the option of reversing their support for Sahrawi nationalism if the Salafi-Jihadi ideology is not adopted.

An unstable internal security situation in the desert republic would weaken the negotiating position of Polisario with Morocco. To prevent al-Qaeda from disrupting the peace process with Morocco, the SADR/Polisario movement will be forced into direct

confrontation with AQIM. This would represent a very favorable situation for AQIM, which believes a broad wave of internal repression designed to root out al-Qaeda elements in the Tindouf camps will actually convince sympathizers to join the movement.

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Notes:

1. In the movement's official name, Frente Polisario, the latter word is an acronym for (Frente) Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro).

What Kind of Relations Does Egypt's Islamic Group Seek With Cairo's Al-Azhar?

By Hani Nasira

Since opening its doors to academic studies in 975 CE, Cairo's al-Azhar University has become the Islamic world's preeminent institution of Islamic studies and its Shaykh (or leader) has been traditionally regarded as the Sunni Islamic world's most authoritative voice. However, since the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, al-Azhar has lost much of its independence to the Egyptian government. In the process the university has become a symbol of secular interference to radical Islamists in Egypt and elsewhere.

Despite this antipathy, Egypt's al-Gama'a al-Islamiya (G.I. - Islamic Group) issued a statement in March regarding the appointment of new al-Azhar Shaykh Ahmad al-Tayeb, entitled, "We Welcome Dr. Ahmad al-Tayeb as al-Azhar's new Shaykh." [1] Before its renunciation of violence in 2003, G.I. was one of Egypt's most vicious terrorist organizations and a fierce opponent of al-Azhar. The new statement came only two days after the presidential decree appointing al-Tayeb to

the highest religious post in the Sunni Muslim world. The statement emphasized the ability of al-Tayeb to shoulder the great responsibility and challenges ahead as the most senior Sunni authority (*Al-Masry al-Youm*, March 12).

The statement came in clear contradiction to the G.I's constant demand for the election of the Shaykh al-Azhar by fellow scholars of Sunni Islam. Since 1961, the Shaykh al-Azhar has been appointed by a presidential decree. Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's description of al-Azhar as a "government agency" is typical of Salafist views of the institution (As-Sahab Media Production, November 27, 2008). Until his resignation following his new appointment, al-Tayeb was also a member of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of Hosni Mubarak.

G.I.'s relations with Al-Azhar's former director, the late Shaykh Muhammad Sayid Tantawi (who died in Riyadh on March 10), have long been unfriendly, as Tantawi was criticized by all Islamist groups and individuals. Many saw his various stands as diminishing the role of Sunni Islam's biggest religious institution. G.I. demanded his firing following the famous niqab (face veil) case in October last year, when he told a middle school student in a class he was visiting to take off her niqab while in school. At the time, a G.I. representative accused Tantawi of taking stands inappropriate for the Shaykh al-Azhar and demanded his dismissal (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, October 13, 2009).

On the other hand, G.I. has seen al-Tayeb's appointment as a good omen, promising a better era for al-Azhar and better relations with Islamists. That was reflected in G.I.'s welcoming statement, in which they called for opening bridges between al-Azhar and the youth of the Islamist movement in a bid to make use of their potential in the service of the country and faith. The statement also highlighted al-Tayeb's support for G.I.'s so-called "Revisions" of its methods and ideology in recent years (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 6, 2007; January 9, 2008).

Al-Tayeb's recent declarations have been encouraging for G.I. and other Islamists, especially in decisive matters such as not allowing a Copt to be president, his promise to reinstate the teaching of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali and Shafi'i) in preparatory and high schools and his pledge to reduce the Shaykh al-Azhar's authority in matters such as establishing religious schools and gathering donations for such projects. Al-Tayeb also welcomed

the discussion on electing the Shaykh al-Azhar and declared he would not resent a non-Egyptian occupying the post. Such issues have always provided fuel for al-Azhar critics, but al-Tayeb's statements have defused much of their criticism.

Nagih Ibrahim, a member of G.I.'s Shura Council, sees the necessity for bypassing past mistakes by both parties, most notably in the following areas:

- Al-Azhar always saw the demerits of the Islamist movement, ignoring its merits as a vital tool in pushing the Islamic call forward.
- The Islamist movement also focused on attacking al-Azhar and smearing its scholars, ignoring its great role as the highest Sunni seat of learning around the world.
- The Islamist movement always believed that it has among its ranks the best scholars, ignoring the fact that most of them were graduates of al-Azhar.
- Ibrahim rejects Salafist denunciations of al-Azhar scholars and the Salafist assertion that al-Azhar is an Asha'ri institution rather than a Salafi institution. [2] He describes such attacks as "a grave mistake." Al-Tayeb belongs to the Khalwatiya Sufi order of Upper Egypt (*al-Khaleej* [Dubai], March 20; masrawy.com, March 20). He has always been a follower of the Asha'ri theology and is a vocal critic of Salafism in Egypt.

Al-Azhar has not yet replied to G.I.'s statement, which may be due to al-Azhar's awareness of the Islamist movement's perception of historical religious institutions in general. The Islamist movement seeks to penetrate and utilize religious institutions without submitting to them. According to Ibrahim, dialogue between both parties should not focus on who is leading or whose flag they follow. Islamists have therefore always welcomed alternative institutions like Yusuf al-Qaradawi's International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS).

While Nagih Ibrahim, G.I.'s spokesman, criticizes the Salafist attacks on al-Azhar, he ignores the fact that these are the same arguments G.I. has always made, even after their historical "Revisions." G.I. has always been hostile towards Sufism and the Asha'riya doctrine (aqida) followed by al-Tayeb.

The welcoming statement by G.I. is part of their attempt to legalize their existence, in social and Islamic terms, after being confined to cyberspace for a long period. They are also trying to open up with the intention of increasing the probability that their strict theories in issues like citizenship, the civil state and various freedoms may gain support, despite the self-criticism they have practiced or their intellectual attacks on al-Qaeda.

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Notes:

1. The full statement is available on the GI website: <http://www.egyig.com/Public/articles/announce/6/69163409.shtml>

2. The Asha'ri theology was developed in the early days of Islam by Abu al-Hasan al-Asha'ri (d. 936 AD). Its best known proponent was the Persian theologian al-Ghazali (1058–1111), though he had slight differences of interpretation. In May, al-Tayeb gave a speech on the merits of al-Ash'ari to the alumni of al-Azhar. He was joined by Ali Goma'a, Egypt's Grand Mufti, in saying a divided Islamic nation beset by radicalism and violence needs an approach like that of al-Ash'ari, who emphasized moderation and tolerance (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], May 9).

Breaking Yemen Apart: Al-Qaeda Exploits Social Divisions to Further its Agenda

By Sarah Phillips

Since its emergence in January 2009, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has become much more ambitious in carrying out international terrorist operations. The group's ambition quickly grew beyond its stated desire to overthrow the Yemeni regime, reaching first into Saudi Arabia and then into the United States with an attempted airline bombing last December.

The group's online magazine, *Sada al-Malahim*, articulated this shift in August 2009, apparently perceiving its battle against the Yemeni regime as largely won. "We concentrate on Saudi Arabia because the government of [Yemeni President] Ali Abdullah Saleh is on the verge of collapse." That month an AQAP operative attempted to assassinate Saudi Arabia's Deputy Interior Minister, Prince Muhammad bin Nayif (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 17, 2009). While the attempt was unsuccessful, it demonstrated the group's willingness to undertake brazen attacks outside of Yemen and advertised itself as a new vanguard group for al-Qaeda internationally. Since the attempted bombing of a U.S. passenger jet on Christmas Day, 2009, a number of significant planned operations have been linked to Yemen, including a thwarted attack on Saudi oil facilities and, seemingly, an elaborate plan involving a British Airways employee who was passing inside airline security information to AQAP leaders in Yemen (*al-Arabiya*, March 24; *Daily Mail*, March 12). As the Yemeni state becomes more dysfunctional, AQAP is attempting to wedge the cracks wider and position itself as a legitimate political actor against a regime that is widely seen as corrupt. As it simultaneously becomes more aggressive internationally, it is welcoming foreign recruits with Western passports to join its fight against the West (AP, March 17; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 9).

While Yemen's problems extend far beyond those involving al-Qaeda, AQAP's traction is symptomatic of the wider fragmentation within the country's political and economic system. The level of decay apparent in the economy is providing a window for AQAP in the short/mid-term, although it faces a number of likely obstacles in the longer term. [1] In the short/mid term, AQAP has been provided with a combustible mix of economic decline, widespread perceptions of injustice, wayward foreign recruits to militant teachings of Islam and, perhaps most concerning, a steady rise in communally framed violence in parts of the south.

Economic Decline Threatens Political Stability

To understand the interconnectedness of these issues, a brief explanation of Yemen's political economy is in order. Like many oil-based economies, the Yemeni political system is based on patronage relations and functions according to the regime's ability to maintain a wide network of elites who are reliant upon the largesse from the center. The less money the regime has to distribute through its networks, the less influence it has with stakeholders around the country. In a nation

with few functional formal institutions, it is this informal "influence" that keeps the center connected to the periphery and thus keeps the country running. The regime now has less money to distribute through its networks—around three-quarters of the government's operating budget comes from oil revenues but these reserves are rapidly depleting. Oil revenue dropped by around 40% last year, further crippling the government's already anemic budget. The influence of the regime is therefore waning.

Yemen has always been a poor country and its people are certainly resilient, but something significant has shifted in recent years. The gravitational center of this shift is the highly visible disparity of income between those included in the regime's networks and those excluded from them. Perceptions of injustice are now rife—something that AQAP has proven adept at articulating in its propaganda. For example, an article in the August 2009 issue of *Sada al-Malahim* argued that, "The inhabitants of [the oil rich areas, Marib, Shabwa and Hadramaut] are paying for their own oppression" with the oil wealth misappropriated by their government. This was an important shift in the way that oil is usually discussed in al-Qaeda propaganda; the argument was not about the West greedily obtaining oil at any cost, but rather about local communities not receiving what was rightfully theirs because the government is corrupt and unjust. This deep sense of injustice is helping to create to an environment in which violence may make more sense against a perceived threat than it did just a few years ago. However, what is most striking in Yemen today is that legitimate grievances, including those from southerners against the northern-based regime, appear to be metastasizing into communally framed animosities to the extent that vigilantism is on the rise. It should be noted that the Yemeni government also established its own vigilante militias in the south, purportedly in defense of unity (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], July 6, 2009).

A Rapid Security Shift in the South

The unfolding of these events has been disturbingly rapid. Just two years ago it was possible for a foreigner to travel relatively freely throughout most of the former south; now Yemenis report fearing vigilante gangs, particularly in Shabwa, Dhala'e, Lahj, and Abyan. In July 2009, for example, four members of a family in the southern governorate of Lahj were kidnapped by their neighbor, who accused them of being spies for the northern regime. The father, one of his sons and

his brother-in-law were executed while the other son escaped (*Yemen Observer*, July 18, 2009).

If these murders had occurred in isolation, it would not necessarily be indicative of a broader trend, but crimes of this nature have since been on the rise. Shortly after the murders, a northerner was found dead hanging from a tree in the south and a northern contractor was kidnapped and tortured in Hadramaut. He was only freed when he promised to leave the south. In the southern governorate of al-Dhala'e, where anti-regime sentiments are particularly high, stores belonging to northerners are regularly burned down and threats are made against northerners who refuse to leave the area and return to the north. This type of violence carries the very clear potential of providing a spark for much wider unrest.

An editorial in the *Yemen Post* last year illustrated the degree to which these sorts of attacks have increased:

The country's discouraging situation does not mean that southern mobility followers [i.e. the southern secessionists] have the right to attack a northerner just because he is one. It does not mean that any car passing by a southern governorate with a car plate showing that he is a northerner should be attacked and have rocks smashed through its windows. This is what southern mobility followers have been doing over the last month as they killed a number of people just because they did not agree with their way of thinking or because he was a northerner. [2]

One northern Yemeni reported traveling in a shared taxi throughout the south in March 2009, during which time he was told that because he was from the north he was putting the entire car at risk. The driver informed him that people are establishing makeshift checkpoints, searching cars for northerners and that some have even been killed on this basis. He described driving through towns where locals told him they have been operating under a self-imposed curfew for the past two months because crime has become so pervasive in the hours of darkness. [3] While this may be a further indication that identity politics are taking hold in a new way, it is possible that anti-northern animosity is also sometimes being used as a cover for simple banditry. However, this caveat does not belie the fact that this is remarkably new and almost certainly related to the same political decay that AQAP is attempting to manipulate.

Changing Perceptions of North and South

These animosities are not a re-emergence of old cross-border tensions that unification attempted to paper over. The pre-unification border between north and south Yemen was a product of Ottoman and British colonial intervention, not communal feelings of "otherness" between Yemenis on either side of the border. The sporadic conflict between the former northern and southern states prior to unification in 1990 was based on divisions that were largely between the competing elites in each state, not communal identities relating to either state. When unification was announced in 1989, both northern and southern Yemenis welcomed the decision and both regimes correctly perceived unification as a way of enhancing their popular legitimacy. One obvious illustration of this is the fact that the opening sentence of South Yemen's 1970 constitution began: "Believing in the unity of the Yemen, and the unity of the destiny of the Yemeni people in the territory..." [4] The feelings of cultural and historical unity were strong on both sides of the border, as was the belief that the main obstacle to Yemen's ascendance in the Arab world was the fact that its people – the Yemenis – remained artificially divided.

Conclusion

The threads keeping the Yemeni state together are under increasing stress. While AQAP is not a natural alternative contender to power, its willingness to prey on the social trauma caused by injustice and exclusion gives it certain advantages in the prevailing climate. The potency of AQAP rests on its ability to offer only slightly more to communities in crisis than what the government is offering. If the regime is not willing to negotiate a more inclusive political settlement with its citizens, there is little likelihood that the country's situation will improve in the foreseeable future. It is in the regime's own self-interest to respond to the threat that it faces by becoming less extractive and more inclusive, and it is on this point that external pressure might be usefully applied.

Sarah Phillips lectures at the Centre for International Security Studies, Sydney University. She lived and worked in Yemen for nearly four years and specializes in Middle Eastern politics and the politics of state-building.

Notes

1. This argument that the more AQAP asserts itself politically, the more likely it is to come into conflict with local communities, is expanded upon in: Sarah Phillips, “What Comes Next in Yemen: Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper Number 107, March 2010.
2. It is important to note, however, that the attackers are not necessarily attached to the southern movement as the author implies. See Yemen Post, July 26, 2009.
3. Correspondence with the author, March 2010.
4. Cited in Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 357.