



# Terrorism Monitor

*In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror*

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Red Shirt Revolt, Thailand

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## RUSSIAN NAVY TO USE PORT IN DJIBOUTI FOR ANTI-PIRACY OPERATIONS

News that the Russian Navy will begin using port facilities in Djibouti is further proof that the small, resource poor nation intends to take full advantage of its strategic location in the Horn of Africa (Shabelle Media Network, May 17; Interfax, May 17). The former French colony is already host to French and American military bases, with a base for Japan's Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) currently under construction (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 6).

Hard on the heels of a successful anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden by the *Marshal Shaposhnikov* came an announcement that the government of Djibouti and the command of the Djibouti Navy (which consists primarily of five U.S. donated patrol boats) had approved Russian use of port facilities. However, both Russian Navy officials and the Russian Embassy in Djibouti emphasize that the new agreement with Djibouti does not provide for the establishment of a land forces base or permanent Russian naval facilities like those being built for ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet at Tartus in Syria. Work on the Tartus base is expected to be complete in 2011 (Vzglyad Online, May 18).

According to a Russian Naval staff spokesman, "[The Djibouti port] is located quite close to the area where our combat objective is being carried out, it is convenient and cost-effective to use if staying long in the region. With the use of the port of Djibouti, it is no longer necessary to send support ships to the region

alongside our warships... As regards the creation of a base facility for ships of the [Russian] Navy in Djibouti, as is now the case with Tartus, it is too early to speak of that at this stage. The issue is not being discussed right now” (Itar-Tass, May 17, May 19). Though French and American authorities have not commented publicly on the Djibouti government’s decision, it seems unlikely that it could have been made without the approval of both of these parties.

Currently the flagship of the Russian Pacific Fleet, the *Marshal Shaposhnikov* is a 1980s vintage Udaloy class destroyer designed for anti-submarine warfare. With a crew of 300 men, the ship is armed with anti-submarine missiles, surface-to-air missiles, torpedoes, two 100 mm guns and two Kamov Ka-27 helicopters.

In a May 6 operation using helicopters and Russian Marines borne on small assault craft launched from the *Marshal Shaposhnikov*, Russian naval forces succeeded in rescuing the MV *Moscow University*, a Russian oil tanker seized by pirates in the Gulf of Aden (Zvezda TV, May 10). After a short firefight, one hijacker was killed and ten others captured, some of them wounded. The MV *Moscow University* is a Liberian-flagged tanker capable of carrying 86,000 tons of crude oil. At the time it was taken by pirates it was shipping oil from Sudan to China (Itar-Tass, May 10).

After initial reports the pirates were to be taken to Moscow for trial, they were instead set free on one of their own boats. According to Captain Ildar Akhmerov, “We gave to the pirates in the boat water, food and the remnants of the junk that was with them, except for the weapons, boarding ladders and navigation devices that we had seized” (Interfax, May 10). The pirates are not believed to have survived the 350 mile trip back to shore – as one Russian media outlet said, “It seems that what happened to them afterwards does not interest anyone in either Russia or Somalia” (NTV, May 10). Nevertheless, Moscow has proposed the creation of international tribunals at the U.N. to deal with the jurisdictional problem of pirates captured on the high seas (Itar-Tass, May 13).

A Russian Navy spokesman said the *Marshal Shaposhnikov* had been “overwhelmed” by applications from foreign merchant vessels asking to be escorted by the Russian destroyer (ITAR-TASS, May 10). After a short stay in Djibouti on May 16-17, the Marshal Shaposhnikov began preparations for escorting a convoy of commercial ships through the Gulf of Aden

on May 18 (Interfax-AVN Online, May 19). The passage typically takes four days.

#### SPOKESMAN OF THE ARMY OF ISLAM DESCRIBES SALAFIST STRUGGLE FOR GAZA

Despite their insistence that there is only one type of Islam, Gaza’s Salafists continue to operate as a number of separate groups and organizations with few apparent connections. One of the most militant of these groups is the Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), known for its role in the 2006 Kerem Shalom attack that resulted in the abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and the 2007 kidnapping of BBC reporter Alan Johnston. Jaysh al-Islam is also believed to have carried out a number of bombings against targets such as internet cafés and has engaged in serious clashes with Hamas, the governing body in Gaza. Jaysh al-Islam (a.k.a. Katbiyan Tawhid wa’l-Jihad) is dominated by the powerful Dughmush clan of Gaza City.

In a recent interview with the Palestinian Ma’an News Agency, Jaysh al-Islam spokesman Abu Umar al-Ansari described the ideological approach of the Salafist movement in Gaza, focusing in particular on Jaysh al-Islam’s relations with al-Qaeda, Hamas and Gaza’s Christian minority (Ma’an News Agency, May 19).

Abu Umar began by defining Jaysh al-Islam as an Islamic group opposed to Jews, Christians, Shiites and Sufis. The movement espouses *tawhid* (monotheism), opposes polytheism and practices *takfir* (the act of declaring a group or individual to be infidel); all of these traits are typical of militant Salafist groups.

Though Jaysh al-Islam has been frequently cited by Israeli sources as an arm of al-Qaeda, Abu Umar did not acknowledge any such relationship, suggesting instead that, since the Muslim community was united in their fight against the enemies of Islam, formal alliances between Salafist groups added “little in terms of support and advice,” noting, “The Army of Islam has its own path and mechanism to achieve its goals, just as the al-Qaeda organization has its own vision and policy on jihadist issues in general and the Palestinian issue in particular.”

Despite commenting that “Islam does not accept division,” Abu Umar addressed the proliferation of armed Salafist groups in Gaza and their apparent lack of coordination by saying each Salafist group saw reality in a different way and had their own path to follow.

He rejected the division of Muslims into “moderates and radicals,” claiming that those Muslims who were “obsessed with Western civilization, democracy and freedom” were “semi-infidels” and “pseudo-Muslims.” According to Abu Islam, “Either [Islam] is completely correct or it is complete darkness born from the ideas and concepts of humans. Leaving Islam and joining modernity does not necessarily mean progress.”

The absence of respected Islamic scholars in the Jaysh al-Islam leadership was of little consequence, as “the Salafist method does not depend on human concepts,” relying instead on textual and traditional sources such as the Koran and Sunnah. In any case, most Salafist scholars have been killed or detained. “The prisons of the tyrants are full of them because they speak the truth.”

Abu Omar has little respect for other Palestinian organizations, describing them as failures that “should be consigned to the garbage heap of history.” He dismisses the concept of “resistance” [to Israel] as being tied to geographical locations and thus without foundation in Islam, which endorses jihad for much larger purposes. Resistance “is not Islam, but endorsement of the Sykes-Picot agreement [the 1916 secret agreement that divided the Middle East into colonial spheres of influence] and recognition of borders. Islam does not recognize borders.”

Though Jaysh al-Islam has been accused of bombing internet cafes, schools and hair-dressing salons, Abu Omar suggested the blame for these attacks lies with those who seek to create a state of emergency to eliminate the Salafist movement. The bombings also serve to create the perception of “violent Salafists” pitted against “moderate and centrist” Muslims.

The Jaysh al-Islam spokesman divides Gaza’s Christians into two groups: those “who are good” and cause no problems for Muslims, and those who are treasonous, hostile to Muslims and spreaders of “vice, infidelity and atheism.” The latter group “serves foreign agendas” and “spoils the relationship between Christians and Muslims.” Abu Omar goes on to accuse the Red Cross of killing Muslims on the orders of Christian clergymen and claims “thousands of Muslim women are raped inside Christian churches.”

Abu Omar claims Hamas has done great harm to the Palestinians by falling into reliance on the established political system of international relations, Arab initiatives

and U.N. resolutions. Their advocacy of democracy and modernity has created a gulf between them and the mujahideen. Hamas has prevented jihadis from “fighting the Jews,” while peaceful demonstrations organized by Hamas have only “deceived the masses.” In the view of Jaysh al-Islam, governments derive their authority from the Shari’a, “not from popular elections.”

## The Deobandi Debate Terrorist Tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan

By Tayyab Ali Shah

Muslim clerics following the Deobandi school of Islamic theology (named after the movement’s original seminary in Deoband, India) are now increasingly associated with the Taliban and other allied militant groups in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though the parent Deobandi seminary in India has distanced itself from the Taliban and their violent activities in both countries, Deobandi-affiliated clergy in Pakistan have squarely refused to follow suit. The parent institution has condemned suicide terrorism in all its forms, opposed attacks on shrines, barber shops and educational institutions and has even characterized the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan as “un-Islamic” (*Dawn* [Karachi], June 20, 2009). The Pakistani Deobandis have failed to adopt such an unequivocal anti-terrorism stance so far. Some 150 Deobandi clergy who recently met in Lahore for three days (possibly at the behest of the Pakistani government as some participants suggested) deliberated over the ongoing violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The scholars were expected to issue a consensual *fatwa* (religious ruling) against terrorist suicide attacks, but failed to do so.

Some Deobandi leaders fear their movement will be discredited by its close identification with militancy and terrorism. However, the hardliners attending the conference prevailed and in the final communiqué, diverted the blame for terrorist tactics away from the Deobandi movement:

Militancy and terrorism continue to haunt this country in spite of wide denunciation of such acts [suicide bombings and subversive activities] by all patriotic people as well as use

of organized military force. The situation calls for a dispassionate analysis of the fundamental causes [of this situation]. In our view it is the consequence of the foreign policy that Pervez Musharraf pursued [in the aftermath of 9/11] and the incumbent government continues to follow. We demand that the government separate itself from the war in Afghanistan and stops pursuing pro-American foreign policies and providing logistics support to foreign forces [for military operations in Afghanistan] (*Dawn*, May 2).

Nevertheless, those in the Deobandi movement who oppose the growing trend to greater violence did manage to make their voice heard in the final communiqué:

If the government is following erroneous policies, it does not mean that we set our home afire. We, therefore, confidently and honestly believe that only peaceful struggle is the best strategy that can help enforcement of Islamic Shari'a in Pakistan and secure it from foreign influences. The use of violence is contrary to Islamic teachings and detrimental to our objective of enforcement of Shari'a in the country and efforts to expel Americans from this region. Rather, it is helping the United States deepen its influence in this region.

The Deobandi school has the largest number of religious seminaries in Pakistan and most of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban either studied at these seminaries or hold the same theological and religious world view. Of a total of approximately 20,000 registered seminaries in Pakistan, 12,000 are run by Deobandi scholars while the rival Barelvi sect manages just 6,000 seminaries. Many of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban leaders, including Mullah Omar, the late Baitullah Mahsud and Maulana Fazlullah have studied at Deobandi seminaries. All factions of the biggest religious-political party in Pakistan, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI), which forms part of the current government, also subscribe to the Deobandi world view and are led by clergy who studied at Deobandi seminaries and run many seminaries themselves. Sectarian movements like the anti-Shi'a Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ) and the anti-Ahmadiyya Alami Majlis-i-Khatmi-Nabuwat (AMKN) are affiliated with the Deobandi school of thought. The international Tablighi Jamaat preaching organization also follows Deobandi beliefs. The Deobandi clergy is the most powerful in Pakistan, partly because it attracts those clerics who oppose the

state. The roots of this attraction can be found in the Deobandi domination of militant training camps in Afghanistan and Kashmir (*Daily Times* [Lahore], June 14, 2009).

The Deobandi clergy have historically shied away from issuing anti-Taliban fatwas and have opposed those fatwas issued by other groups. When in 2005 a group of non-Deobandi clerics produced a collective fatwa that the use of suicide-bombing against fellow-Muslims was not permitted in Islam, severe criticism emerged from the Deobandi clerical community (*Daily Times*, June 14, 2009). Many non-Deobandi clerics believe that a fatwa would not make a difference to the current state of affairs anyhow because the suicide-bombers would not abide by it, and attacks would continue so long as the root causes are not addressed. Others, especially government functionaries, feel that such a fatwa would go a long way in developing a consensus in the fight against terrorists. They also believe that a fatwa would at least discourage the use of suicide bombings in sectarian battles with the Shi'a and would dissuade many non-militant Deobandis to be less sympathetic to the Taliban.

Such a fatwa has assumed even greater importance in light of the Taliban's expansion into newer areas of operation like central and southern Punjab, Karachi and Baluchistan, the increasing involvement of Deobandi groups in suicide attacks against the Shi'a and growing evidence of Deobandi mosques providing sanctuaries to the Taliban. The Punjab government has now officially admitted that the Taliban are present in southern Punjab. A recent report filed by Punjab Police discloses that the network of the Taliban is fast expanding in the region and a recruitment drive has been launched in some religious schools. The report adds that Taliban leaders can be found at a number of seminaries in the Punjabi city of Jhang, several of which have launched a drive to recruit youths for training in the tribal areas of Pakistan (*The News*, May 17). Similarly, copies of forged national identity cards and alien registration cards belonging to activists and sympathizers of the proscribed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) organization were recently found at a Deobandi mosque in Karachi along with stickers and posters eulogizing jihad, and receipts of donations (*Dawn*, May 11).

The western province of Balochistan has also started to see the influence of Deobandization. Religious schools in Balochi-dominated areas, owned and administered by leaders of the pro-Taliban JUI, have dramatically

mushroomed in recent times. Around 95% of religious schools in Balochistan are owned and administered by JUI leaders. This has given birth to more intolerance among the youth who now refuse to coexist with members of rival religious sects. This phenomenon is also being held responsible for a recent suicide bomb that struck Quetta's Civil Hospital on April 16, killing at least 11 people including two top police officials and a television journalist (*Daily Times*, April 17).

All of the above examples show the expansion of Taliban activities into hitherto non-militant areas under Deobandi influence. A fatwa by the top Deobandi clerics would be an important step in stemming this tide and reducing suicide attacks both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. But though some in the movement favor such a step, more influential members continue to oppose it, citing the continuing importance of such tactics in resisting the international military presence in Afghanistan, and American military operations [i.e. drone attacks] in northwest Pakistan.

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## An Ominous Break from the Past in Thailand: Implications of the Red Shirt Revolt

By Dan G. Cox

King Chulalongkorn (Rama IV-1868-1910) is responsible for initiating the modernization process in Thailand. Enamored with European civilization of the time, especially European economic and scientific gains, King Chulalongkorn embraced European rule of law, capitalism, education, and to a limited extent, politics. The king even introduced European dress to the Thai court by embracing popular European hats.

The foundation of modernization laid by King Chulalongkorn set Thailand on a path that would eventually lead to democracy, but the way in which this genesis occurred is unique. In 1932, in the shadow of the global economic depression, the Thai military took control, bloodlessly, of the government and changed

the government's form from absolute to constitutional democracy. A series of mostly benign, but self-interested interventions from the military created what Elliott Kulick and Dick Wilson dubbed a "zig-zag", or, two steps forward, one step back democratic process. [1] The military was motivated to embrace democracy for self-interested reasons, concluding that democratic capitalism was more likely to pay the military well—and more regularly—than a communist or monarchical system. The Thai military also often insinuated itself deep into the Thai business system, starting with Field Marshal Philbul Songkram's penchant for placing senior military officials on influential company boards in an attempt to thwart the growing dominance of Chinese businessmen in the 1930s and 1940s. It was this self-interest on the part of the Thai military that broadened democratic development over time.

Eventually, the Thai military embraced its role as defender of democracy, intervening less frequently and only when corruption in the Thai government was rampant. The Thai military saw both communism and corrupt officials as enemies of the state and of the economic system they had come to rely on. Modern military coups and control of government lasted for shorter and shorter periods of time, occurred in conjunction with the blessing of the king, and were largely nonviolent affairs where the corrupt officials involved apologized on exit. These coups became known as "soft coups," or coups with "a light touch."

Many Thai watchers breathed a sigh of relief when a decade passed without a coup attempt (after 1991). It appeared that Thailand was no longer on the "zig-zag" development path. Such notions, however, were shattered on September 19, 2006 when the Thai Military staged a coup d'état against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (*Asian Sentinel*, May 20). The coup itself was bloodless and initially appeared similar to a typical Thai "soft" military takeover.

Unfortunately, this is where similarities with past military coups ended. The king, an integral arbiter in past military coups, remained silent. While many have interpreted King Bhumibol Adulyadej's silence as tacit support, in the past he had been formally consulted prior to coups and had typically made public endorsements or condemnations of such actions. In fact, two rather recent coups (1981 and 1985) were not formally endorsed by the king and failed quickly. One commentator finds King Bhumibol's current silence inexcusable and blames the king for the ongoing political violence (*Asian Sentinel*,

May 20). The scale and duration of violence and disruption associated with protests initiated by former PM Thaksin's supporters, the United front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD – more commonly known as the “Red Shirts”), dwarfs that of any other protest movement in recent Thai history. With 85 deaths, over 1,400 wounded and no end in sight to the violence between Red Shirts, Yellow Shirt counter-protesters and government forces, Thailand teeters on the verge of civil war or insurgency (*Bangkok Post*, May 24). Even recent military crackdowns producing the surrender of key UDD leaders have failed to produce quiescence; an angry mob of protesters engaged in a rampant arson campaign soon after the leaders surrendered (*Bangkok Post*, May 19). Even if the military crackdown is successful in quelling open protest and violence, it is likely that Thaksin will use his billions in ill-gotten gains to perpetuate political agitation, possibly fueling a more clandestine insurgent or terror campaign against the military-backed government that deposed him (*Asian Sentinel*, May 20).

Worse yet, this is not the only violence that the Thai government has encountered. In the south, the Islamic independence movement continues unabated. A recent bomb attack targeting a police officer also produced 53 civilian casualties (*Pataninews.net*, April 21). Malay Muslims living in southern Thailand have declared that they do not recognize the legitimacy of the central government in Bangkok despite the efforts of the government and the military (*Pataninews.net*, March 30).

Faced with either two insurgencies or a civil war and an insurgency, Thailand is no longer on a “zig-zag” democracy development path. Instead, Thailand is on the precipice of state failure. Lest anyone assume this is a problem solely facing the Thai people, they might do well to remember the Asian economic crisis that originated in Thailand in 1997 and eventually brought Asia, and later the rest of the world, into a deep recession.

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*United States Army, the Department of Defense, or any other U.S. government agency.*

Notes:

1. Elliott F. Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn: Profile of a New Dragon*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan Publishers, 1994

## The Hizbullah Trial in Egypt: A War of Words in the New Middle East Cold War

*By Chris Zambelis*

The latest exchange of blows in the ongoing feud between Egypt and Lebanon's Hizbullah came on April 28, as the Egyptian State Security Court convicted and sentenced 26 individuals who Cairo accuses of being part of an active Hizbullah cell in Egypt. Authorities claim the suspects operated on Egyptian soil in late 2008 before their detention between December 2008 and January 2009.

The announcement of the verdict marked the end of an eight month-long trial characterized by incessant controversy and political intrigue. Egyptian authorities accused the suspects of a host of charges ranging from conducting intelligence activities on ships traversing the Suez Canal to plotting attacks against Sinai tourist resorts popular with Israelis in Sinai. The alleged cell members are also accused of possessing arms and explosives and smuggling weapons and fighters into Israeli-occupied Gaza, where Egypt helps to enforce Israel's economic and travel blockade of the territory (*al-Jazeera*, April 28; *al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], April 28). The case, which continues to arouse strong emotions inside Egypt and the wider region, marks the first time Egypt has prosecuted alleged members of Hizbullah. The trial also showcased an underlying subtext behind the dynamics shaping some of the most important trends in Middle East politics today.

The alleged members of the cell, which included Lebanese, Palestinians, Egyptians, and Sudanese, were

sentenced to prison terms ranging from six months to life; four of the suspects who remain on the run were tried and sentenced *in absentia*, with three of them receiving life sentences. According to the defendants and their defense team, Egyptian State Security authorities extracted false confessions through torture and other threatening methods (*al-Masry al-Youm*, November 22, 2009). Because the trial took place in the State Security Court—an institution founded under the emergency laws set in place following the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981—there was no option for the defendants to seek a higher appeal, as the only remaining recourse is a presidential pardon (*al-Jazeera*, April 28).

Hizbullah has been remarkably forthright in admitting to having deployed operatives to Egypt. Specifically, Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah acknowledged that Muhammad Yusuf Mansur Ahmad (a.k.a. Sami Shehab), the lone Lebanese suspect in Egyptian custody, is a member of Hizbullah. “Our brother Sami is a member of Hizbullah, we do not deny this...” (*al-Manar* [Beirut], April 10, 2009). During the trial’s initial hearings, one of the defendants is reported to have shouted in the courtroom, “We are at your command Nasrallah” (*Menassat* [Beirut], August 24, 2009). At the same time, Hizbullah scoffed at Cairo’s charge that it had any intention of targeting or inflicting harm on Egypt; Hizbullah maintains that it was and is concerned solely with supporting the Palestinians in Gaza. Hizbullah also disputes Egypt’s allegations that Shehab was part of a 26-man team, insisting that no more than ten others assisted Shehab in his activities (*Reuters*, April 28).

### Hizbullah Answers the Charges

The announcement of the trial’s verdict elicited a bold and defiant response from Hizbullah. Branding the Egyptian court’s decision as “unjust” and “political,” Nasrallah reaffirmed the group’s support for the prisoners and its determination to support the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. “Our brothers are honest mujahideen, not terrorists as they were described by the court...Since when is helping the Palestinians in Gaza a crime?” (*al-Masry al-Youm*, April 29). In a statement directed to the prisoners, Nasrallah lavished praise on what he described as their commitment to supporting the Palestinian cause, saying, “You were prepared to face death for the Palestinian cause and should wear these sentences as a badge of honor” (*al-Masry al-Youm*, April 29).

A Hizbullah delegation to the family of Sami Shehab led by Sayyed Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed, the head of Hizbullah’s political council, rebuffed Cairo’s assertion that Hizbullah posed a threat to Egypt’s security and stability, stating that Shehab and the other prisoners were “fulfilling the duty of supporting the oppressed Palestinian people and their brave resistance in the besieged Gaza Strip (*Al-Manar*, April 29; see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 10, 2009).

### Egypt Lashes Back

The ensuing war of words between the prosecution and defense teams escalated steadily throughout the trial. Since the initial arrest of the defendants, the prosecution—bolstered by official statements out of Cairo and the diligent efforts of official and semi-official media outlets—painted a picture of Hizbullah as an enemy of Egypt. Media outlets closely tied to the regime went so far as to label Nasrallah “the monkey shaykh” and described Hizbullah as “the devil’s party.” Other venues attempted to link the group to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, the moderate, democratic reform-minded movement that represents the strongest opposition to the authoritarian regime (*Menassat*, May 5, 2009).

Prior to handing down his sentences, presiding judge Adel Abdel Salam Gomaa asked, “Does supporting the Palestinian resistance include collecting information on Egyptian [interests] in the governorates of North and South Sinai, pinpointing tourist resorts [for attack], renting property overlooking the Suez Canal, making explosives and keeping them with [one of the defendants] in the governorate of North Sinai?”. The judge added that the defendants sought to hurt the Egyptian economy and to destabilize the country (*al-Masry al-Youm*, April 28). The prosecution repeated the regime’s longstanding argument based on the “Shi’a crescent” thesis that the actions of the defendants were part of Iranian designs aimed at undermining Egypt and controlling the Middle East, a theme repeated by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. “We will not allow any interference by foreign forces [i.e. Iran] . . . who push the region towards hell out of a desire to spread their influence and their agenda on the Arab world” (*Menassat*, May 5, 2009).

The especially strong language coming out of Egyptian officialdom is a form of reprisal against Hizbullah for the latter’s rhetoric targeting Egypt’s stance during Israel’s invasion of Gaza in December 2008, namely Egypt’s

decision to seal the border between Gaza and Sinai to prevent an influx of refugees escaping the bombardment and to block the flow of humanitarian aid. Nasrallah castigated Egypt for collaborating with Israel and called on Egyptians to rise up against the regime in a show of solidarity with the Palestinians. “Let the Egyptian people take to the streets in millions. Can the Egyptian police arrest millions of Egyptians? No! They cannot” (Press TV [Tehran], December 30, 2008). Nasrallah even addressed “the officers and soldiers of the Egyptian armed forces, who are still proud of their Arab roots and continue to oppose Zionism”:

I am not calling for a coup in Egypt, and I am in no position to call for one. But I am calling for generals and officers to ask their political leadership whether it is their devotion to the military, the responsibilities entrusted in them and their rows of medals that prompt them to guard Israeli borders while watching our own people being slaughtered in Gaza?” (Press TV, December 30, 2008).

#### Playing on Egypt’s Shame

Led by Muhammad Salim al-Awwa, an attorney who also serves as the secretary general of the International Union of Islamic Scholars (IUMS), the defense team built its case based on the premise that the entire trial was essentially a political show by drawing heavily from examples of Egypt’s history of resistance to foreign occupation and support for national liberation movements in the Arab world and beyond. Al-Awwa emphasized that under the rule of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian intelligence services had established the Arab World Unit, a department charged with providing national liberation movements in countries such as Algeria and revolutionary movements across Africa and the Middle East with arms, financing and political support.

The defendants, according to al-Awwa, were only acting in the tradition of Egypt’s once proud sense of revolutionary spirit and commitment to defending the oppressed in Palestine and beyond (*Al-Abram Weekly* [Cairo], February 25 – March 3). Al-Awwa refuted charges that Hizbullah was targeting Egypt. “[Hizbullah] is not a secret and illegal organization that seeks to destabilize Egypt.” Al-Awwa quoted Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, a close Egyptian and American ally, on Hizbullah’s role in Lebanon as a “political partner

and a political force” (*Al-Abram Weekly*, February 25 –March 3). The defense added that armed resistance is permitted against occupation under international law and that as a party to a variety of international and pan-Arab legal charters, Egypt is essentially failing to live up to its commitments. To further support his assertion that Cairo’s position toward the defendants amounts to little more than a show trial as opposed to a case based on sound legal or national security grounds, al-Awwa cited statements issued by Mubarak critical of Israel’s occupation of Gaza and the West Bank as well as Mubarak’s recognition that armed resistance under these circumstances is legitimate (*Al-Abram Weekly*, February 25 –March 3).

#### The New Middle East Cold War

To understand the implications of this war of words between Egypt and Hizbullah, a brief look at the recent history of the region is in order. The influence of the brand of pan-Arab nationalism promoted by Nasser (“Nasserism”) reached its height between the mid-1950s and 1967 as a bitter rivalry developed between Egypt and advocates of the status quo in the Middle East, led by Saudi Arabia and other conservative, pro-Western monarchies. This period is often referred to as the “Arab Cold War.” [1] Powerful rhetoric, proxy wars, insurgencies, terrorism, coups, and counter-coups characterized the politics of the day. As the *de facto* leader of the resistance faction in the region, Egypt actively supported revolutionary campaigns across the Middle East under the banners of popular struggle and resistance typical of anti-colonial movements of the day. In this context, undermining Saudi influence was critical to furthering Arab nationalist goals due to the Kingdom’s strong links to foreign powers, including the United States and the former colonial powers. Today, many observers point to a new Middle East Cold War paradigm, essentially an expanded version of previous rivalries between competing power blocs that feature a host of new players. Egypt, this time as a member of the pro-U.S. status quo camp, along with fellow U.S. allies Saudi Arabia, Jordan, other pro-U.S. Arab regimes and Israel, stands against the so-called “Resistance” faction led by Iran, Syria, Lebanon’s Hizbullah, and Hamas. Depending on the politics of the day, Turkey and Qatar (through its al-Jazeera news network) may navigate a fine line between both factions.

Given this background, Egypt’s predicament is that Egyptians tend to identify strongly with the resistance



camp, despite Egypt's alliance with the United States and cooperation with Israel. Cairo is vulnerable to internal criticism and perceives Iranian and Hizbullah attacks against its positions on the regional and global stage as a serious threat, especially in their potential to embolden domestic political opposition among groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and other dissenting factions in Egyptian society.

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Notes:

1. The term was coined by Malcolm Kerr. For more background on this critical period in modern Middle Eastern history, see Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).