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**AL-SHABAAB EXPANDS OPERATIONAL ZONE WITH KAMPALA BOMBING – BUT TO WHAT END?**

After several years of threats and warnings, al-Shabaab's Somali jihad has finally spilled across Somalia's borders to its East African neighbors. On July 11, bombs ripped through the Ethiopian Village Restaurant and the Kyadondo Rugby Club in Kampala, killing 74 civilians gathered to watch the World Cup finale. Somali Islamists have violently opposed the viewing of soccer matches in the past, saying the time could be better spent studying the Koran. Ethiopians are especially hated by al-Shabaab because of their country's military occupation of Somalia from December 2006 to January 2009.

An estimated 5,000 people were in attendance at the rugby ground, which was reported to have little in the way of security arrangements (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 13). The events have been termed suicide bombings, but there is emerging evidence, confirmed by al-Shabaab leaders, that the attacks were carried out by planting suicide vests that could be detonated remotely (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 13; *Daily Nation* [Kampala], July 13).

There is ample speculation that al-Shabaab is expressing its intention to join the global jihad with the Kampala bombings. However, the attacks are more likely to be part of a strategic plan to eliminate al-Shabaab's strongest opposition to completing its conquest of Mogadishu and elimination of the TFG – the 5,000 African Union peacekeepers from Uganda and Burundi. The mandate of the

African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has changed since the first deployment of Ugandans in 2007. With no peace to keep, the mission's mandate now provides for the vigorous military defense of the Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad government.

The bombings were carefully timed, coming a week in advance of the July 19-27 African Union summit meeting of heads of state, hosted this year by Kampala. More importantly, however, they come as a timely warning to the six member nations (Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti) of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional grouping which responded to an urgent appeal from Somali president Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad by pledging on July 6 to provide an additional 2,000 men to AMISOM by September. Addressing worshippers at Mogadishu's Nasrudin Mosque after prayers on July 9, al-Shabaab spokesman Ali Mahmud Raage accused the Somali president of handing the country over to the IGAD group of nations (Shabelle Media Network, July 9). Despite the decision, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi made it clear that Ethiopian forces would not join the new deployment (AFP, July 7; PANA Online, July 6).

Al-Shabaab first issued threats of retaliation against Uganda for its contribution of troops to AMISOM in 2008 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 24, 2008). These threats culminated with a warning from al-Shabaab leader Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane "Abu Zubayr" on July 5 that "My message to the people of Uganda and Burundi is that you will be the targets of retaliation for the massacre of women, children and elderly Somalis in Mogadishu by your forces. You will be held responsible for the killings your ignorant leaders and your soldiers are committing in Somalia" (AFP, July 5).

After the bombings, Shabaab spokesman Ali Mahmud Raage described the attacks as "retaliation against Uganda" as he told reporters, "We thank the mujahideen that carried out the attack. We are sending a message to Uganda and Burundi, if they do not take their AMISOM troops out from Somalia, blasts will continue and it will happen in Bujumbura too" (Shabelle Media Network, July 12; *Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 13; AFP, July 12).

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's resolve as AMISOM's biggest backer to see the mission through is unlikely to be affected by the bombings, but the effect

on support from a largely disinterested population will only begin to emerge after the official five day mourning period is over. For all of their military efforts in Somalia and now civilian losses at home, Uganda and AMISOM cannot turn the tide in favor of a transitional government that exists largely on paper. Most TFG parliamentarians and government leaders live outside the country, the president rarely emerges from the Presidential Palace, only blocks from the frontlines, and newly trained TFG troops desert with their rifles when they realize they are unlikely to be paid. Only a handful of tribal and religious militias with more interest in opposing the Shabaab extremists than preserving the TFG prevent AMISOM from being the lone defense of the TFG, a government that never found its footing and now survives only through foreign financial and military assistance.

More than 1,000 TFG troops are undergoing military training in Southeast Uganda by the European Union Training Mission (EUTM). The goal is to have 2,000 Somalis given basic training by the Ugandan army over the next year before receiving advanced training from the EU force. Salaries for the TFG recruits are being withheld until training is completed to prevent desertion (ABC.es [Madrid], May 31; El Mundo [Madrid], May 28; Nation Television [Nairobi], May 27).

Beyond the threat of al-Shabaab attacks, Bujumbura may soon find itself in need of its elite troops at home rather than in Mogadishu. Only six years removed from a brutal 12-year civil war, Burundi has endured almost daily grenade attacks in the capital and elsewhere in the weeks leading up to the re-election of sole candidate for the opposition-boycotted presidency contest, incumbent Pierre Nkurunziza (AFP, June 28).

Kenya responded to the attacks in Kampala by sending its elite General Service Unit to bolster defenses along its poorly secured 900 km border with Somalia (*East African* [Nairobi], June 14). The nation has received threats from al-Shabaab in the past for training TFG troops and harboring anti-Shabaab Somali politicians in exile (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 4, 2010; April 30, 2009; *Terrorism Focus*, November 26, 2008; November 5, 2008). As part of its new policy on Somalia, Nairobi is urging the creation of a 20,000 man UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping force with full authority to combat al-Shabaab.

## CALLS FOR RESIGNATION FOLLOW GENERAL BASBUG'S PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF TURKISH COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY

In a July 5 interview on Turkey's Star TV, Chief of the Turkish General Staff Ilker Basbug made a number of controversial remarks regarding Turkey's counterterrorism strategy that have led to calls for his resignation, public criticism from the Turkish president and even a criminal complaint.

During the interview, General Basbug pointed out that the PKK has suffered enormous losses over the years from Turkish military counter-measures. Despite this, the movement still has about 4,000 active fighters. Basbug explains this by suggesting the PKK has benefitted from international political developments that have saved the movement each time it was on the verge of collapse. More important, however, is Turkey's failure to properly assess the PKK's resilience; "When incidents of terrorism subside or vanish in Turkey - we do not perceive this correctly. [We assume that] the terrorist organization is finished or that it has disbanded. In reality, the mountain cadres of the terrorist organization remained intact" (Anatolia, July 7; *Milliyet*, July 12).

The General outlined three essentials necessary for the continued operations of the PKK:

- Human Resources – Recruits must be prevented from joining the terrorists, otherwise the constant attrition of PKK numbers will have little real effect.
- Financial Resources – Basbug identified three main sources of PKK funding: the narcotics trade, human trafficking and extortion. All three sources are based on activities in Europe, leading Basbug to ask, "Is it not our right to ask these countries to take serious steps to control and to cut off the financing sources of the organization and to produce results?"
- Safe Havens – The PKK continues to find secure spaces within Turkey as well as in neighboring countries like Iraq. Basbug complained that "powerful entities" in northern Iraq [i.e. the Kurdistan Regional Government] are not playing a part in eliminating the terrorists. He also pointed out that the PKK continues to receive logistical support in this region, making his boldest comments of the interview, "We are at a

point where the time for talking is over. Turkey lost so many martyrs in the last two months. This causes heartaches to all of us. It is time - and getting late - for individuals, institutions, states, and entities in northern Iraq to fulfill the responsibilities incumbent upon them."

Basbug also warned of deeper implications for international relations, even with its American NATO ally. He stated, "The PKK presence in northern Iraq may have a negative influence on Turkish-Iraqi relations in the coming period. To some extent, it may also have a negative effect on Turkish-US relations." There is speculation within Turkey that the United States has cut back on its sharing of actionable intelligence with the Turkish military after Turkey voted against new sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council. Allegedly, this has contributed to the success of several recent large-scale PKK attacks, but a spokesperson for the American embassy in Ankara denied any cutbacks in intelligence sharing (*Hurriyet*, June 20).

Also in the General's sights were parliamentary deputies of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi - BDP). According to Basbug, "They took an oath on the Constitution as deputies in Parliament, but then attended the funerals of terrorists... Either abandon your position as a deputy and go to the mountains [to join the PKK] or fulfill the responsibilities that stem from your oath in Parliament." BDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtas responded, "The Chief of General Staff is not in the position to give us orders. He committed a crime and should be deposed from office... Starting from now, Gen. Ba bu is responsible for any possible undesirable incidents that may happen to BDP deputies" (Bianet, July 8; *Today's Zaman*, July 7). One independent Turkish daily criticized the General's remarks, saying, "While others are struggling to make the people come down from the mountains, the Chief of the General Staff takes efforts to direct the parliamentarians towards the mountains" (*Taraf*, July 8).

Turkish jurists took offense at the General's defense of Ergenekon suspects, including Gendarmerie Colonel Cemal Temizoz, who has been accused of leading a secret Gendarmerie formation in southeastern Turkey specializing in the torture and extrajudicial killing of Kurdish nationalists. According to Basbug, "Unjust accusations against officers, generals and noncommissioned officers disturbed me greatly. They are accused of membership in a terrorist organization.

Colonel Temizoz is such an example” (*Today’s Zaman*, July 7). The remarks were interpreted as an attempt to put pressure on the judiciary in an ongoing investigation. Colonel Temizoz faces nine life sentences without the possibility of parole. The Turkish Human Rights Association (nsan Hakları Dernegi – IHD) said the General’s comments should be interpreted as support for crime and criminals. In cooperation with a number of lawyers from southeastern Anatolia, the IHD filed a criminal complaint accusing Basbug of spreading hatred (*Today’s Zaman*, July 11).

President Abdullah Gul joined in the condemnations of Basbug’s statements, particularly his decision to reveal details of Turkey’s counterterrorism strategy previously discussed at classified meetings of the National Security Council (Milli Guvenlik Kurulu – MGK). Gul stated, “There is already an ongoing counterterrorism program. Talking about this does not bring any benefit” (*Today’s Zaman*, July 9).

General Basbug has also come under fire for publishing a speech on terrorism in the official Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) magazine *Maarachot*. The article underwent final editing after the IDF’s disastrous May 31 raid on a Turkish humanitarian aid ship in international waters that left nine Turks dead (Haaaretz, July 5). Basbug is scheduled to complete his term as chief-of-staff on August 30.

## Pakistani Taliban Widen Jihad with Strikes on Fellow Muslims

By Arif Jamal

The local chapter of Pakistan’s Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) Islamist political party held a rally on April 19 in the historic Kissa Khwani Bazaar of Peshawar to protest the extremely low gas pressure and rolling blackouts that affect Peshawar residents up to 10 hours per day (for the shortages, see *Daily Times* [Lahore], January 18; *Frontier Post* [Peshawar], July 10). As leaders announced the end of the rally and protesters started to leave, a 14-year old suicide bomber ignited his suicide vest, killing 23 persons and injuring 50 others. The suicide bomber successfully targeted local

JI leaders and police officers – among the dead were JI Peshawar vice-amir Haji Dost Mohammad and deputy superintendent of police Gulfat Hussain (*The News* [Islamabad], April 20).

Due to the fact that Deputy Superintendent Hussain was a Shi’a Muslim, it was initially thought that the suicide bomber had specifically targeted him. However, all other evidence suggested that the real target of the bomber was the JI leaders. Had it been by chance or mistake, they would not have continued to target more JI leaders later on. In order to downplay its differences with the Taliban and other jihadist groups, JI tried to blame the Americans for the bombing, with JI leader Hafiz Hashmat accusing private security firm Blackwater (Xe Services LLE) for the attack (*Dawn* [Karachi] April 20).

The suicide bombing of the JI rally was an attempt to widen the war that the Pakistani Taliban are fighting against the state of Pakistan. Although the bombing was not the only attack on JI leaders in recent months, it was the biggest, and such targeted attacks have continued. On June 16 the Taliban in Hangu assassinated JI leader Fida Saadi, a provincial executive council member (*The News*, June 17). Soon afterwards they killed JI leader Haji Mohammad Khan and kidnapped his son in Darra Adamkhel on June 23 (*Dawn*, June 24).

The aim of the Pakistani Taliban is to establish an Islamic caliphate, one excluding the participation of all other Islamist groups. When the Afghan mujahideen found Kabul in sight after the fall of Dr. Najibullah’s regime in the early 1990s, they threw themselves at one another’s throats. The ensuing civil war gave birth to the Taliban movement. Recently, the Pakistani Taliban intensified their war on the Barelvi movement and Sufi Islam by bringing the conflict to Punjab. New fronts were opened against the JI with the April 19 suicide bombing in Peshawar and against the Ahmadi community with a suicide bombing in Lahore on May 28 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 12).

The enmity between the JI and different parts of the Pakistani Taliban is both ideological and political. Although both JI and the Deobandi groups among the Pakistani Taliban follow the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, JI places less stress on ritual and more on political Islam. The Deobandis abhor the JI leaders (some of whom wear Western dress) and accuse them of having a lust for political power.[1] However, the real existential threat to the JI comes from

the Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM), led by Maulana Sufi Mohammad and his son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah. The pair leads the Pakistani Taliban in the Malakand Division and the valley of Swat. Maulana Sufi Mohammad was a local leader of the JI until the early 1980s, when he developed differences with the party. In his desperation to grab political power, Sufi Mohammad started opposing the JI's policy of attaining power through elections. He argued that an Islamic state cannot be established through elections because the majority never votes in favor of Islamist parties. He started believing that the only way to establish an Islamic state is to follow the jihad philosophy of Maulana Maududi (1903-1979), the late founder of Jamaat-i-Islami. Sufi Muhammad accused the JI leaders of deviating from Maududi's example. [2]

The real, personalized enmity between the two started after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. Most Islamist and jihadist groups started holding public rallies across Pakistan in favor of the Afghan Taliban. JI was in the forefront of these demonstrations, threatening that they would cross into Afghanistan to fight Americans if U.S. forces landed there. However, only Sufi Mohammad led thousands of his followers into Afghanistan. Unprepared as they were, most of them died in the U.S. air strikes. Sufi Mohammad retreated with his decimated militia back to Pakistan, where he accused the JI of luring him and his fighters into Afghanistan to weaken or eliminate them. Sufi Mohammad never forgave the JI and started preparing his revenge. In interviews the author conducted in 2004-2005, several TNSM commanders portrayed JI as a bigger threat than the Americans.[3]

It is difficult to say which group of the Pakistani Taliban has an interest in attacking the JI at this time. It is a safe bet, however, to believe that the followers of Sufi Mohammad want to take their long delayed revenge. In the intense sectarian atmosphere, other groups would happily follow the lead. Pakistan seems to be entering a period similar to that which Afghanistan went through between the fall of Dr. Najibullah and the advent of the Taliban in the 1990s, when different factions of the mujahideen fought to eliminate their rivals. As the Pakistani Taliban spread their jihad to rival Islamist groups, the possibility of other Islamist militias being drawn into a civil war between extremist groups is looking more and more probable. If this happens, it will be bloodier than the mujahideen battles in 1990s Afghanistan, with an unimaginable international impact.

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#### Notes

1. Author's interview with Maulana Ajmal Qadri, June 15, 2002.
2. Author's interview with Sufi Mohammad, Maidan, July, 2001.
3. Arif Jamal, "Sharia here, in the country, in the world," *The News on Sunday*, Karachi, March 6, 2005.

## Little-Known Ghazi Brigade Now a Major Player in the Punjabi Jihad?

*By Animesh Roul*

A recent spurt in sectarian attacks in Pakistan has been blamed on a lethal but lesser known group affiliated with Taliban and al-Qaeda elements: the Ghazi Abdul Rashid Shaheed Brigade, also known as the Ghazi Brigade or Ghazi Force (*Daily Times* [Lahore], July 2). What was formed as an Islamic vigilante group has now emerged as a radical jihadi organization in response to the July 2007 Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) siege in Islamabad. Over one hundred religious students were killed by Pakistani security forces during the siege, including the mosque's deputy leader, Abdul Rashid Ghazi. Thousands of mourners pledging their commitment to jihad thronged the funeral of Abdul Ghazi, held in his native village of Basti Abdullah in Punjab (*PakTribune*, July 12, 2007). Indeed, his death heralded the start of a neo-Taliban movement in Pakistan, with radical students calling for jihad against Pakistan and its allies.

The Ghazi Brigade, named after the slain cleric, has two objectives: to enforce Islamic Shari'a in Pakistan through the use of force, and to punish those who stormed Lal Masjid and caused the death of their spiritual leader Abdul Rashid Ghazi. It was Ghazi, along with his brother Maulana Abdul Aziz, who spearheaded the growth of neo-Talibanism within the precincts of the beleaguered mosque that housed two Islamic seminaries, Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Faridia.

The events at Lal Masjid prompted al-Qaeda's Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri to call for revenge attacks in Pakistan. Maulana Abdul Aziz, the brother of Rashid Ghazi, also issued a threat of "bloody revolution" in the country (*Dawn*, July 10, 2009). Addressing an Islamic gathering to commemorate the Lal Masjid standoff, an unidentified cleric said, "You killed one Ghazi. Here are thousands of Ghazis ready to sacrifice in the way of Allah." In effect, the events at the mosque have unleashed a wave of suicide attacks across Pakistan.

The Ghazi Brigade first came to light when music shop owners in Quetta were warned of suicide attacks in May 2008. The Ghazi Brigade distributed pamphlets labeling all forms of entertainment as "un-Islamic" (*Daily Times*, May 15, 2008). Investigations into incidents of suicide attacks on security installations in 2009 revealed the Ghazi Brigade's emerging network in Punjab province and its active involvement in jihadist activities in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Swat, Buner and Orakzai Agency. The Ghazi Brigade terrorists are trained in handling modern weapons and in making improvised explosive devices.

While recruiting youths from different parts of Punjab and the tribal areas, arrested leaders of the Ghazi Brigade have admitted to sending over a dozen new recruits to various training camps operating in Azad Kashmir. The Ghazi Brigade is believed to be operating from the Orakzai tribal agency.

In 2009, the Ghazi Brigade struck at least five times in Islamabad. On March 23, a suspected Ghazi Brigade terrorist blew himself up near the headquarters of the Special Branch (an intelligence agency of the Federal Capital Police) in Sitara Market, Islamabad. Again on April 4, eight Frontier Constabulary (FC – a federal paramilitary) personnel were killed when a Ghazi Brigade suicide bomber targeted an FC checkpoint on the Margala Road in Islamabad (*Daily Times*, March 24, 2009; April 5, 2009).

One arrested terrorist affiliated with the Ghazi Brigade, Jamshed Ahmad (a.k.a. Tahir), confessed to planning suicide attacks on Rescue 15 (a police helpline) offices on June 6, 2009 and on the UN World Food Program (WFP) offices on October 5, 2009 (*Daily Times*, June 7, 2009; *Dawn*, June 7, 2009; *Dawn*, October 5, 2009). These attacks were largely a violent reaction to the military operations in Swat and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

According to intelligence sources, the organization is led by Maulana Niaz Raheem (a.k.a. Bilal), a former student at the Red Mosque's Jamia Faridia seminary. Pakistani agencies have arrested a Ghazi Brigade terrorist identified as Fidaullah (a.k.a. Junaid) who was allegedly involved in the attacks on the Police Special Branch and the FC checkpoint in Islamabad. Fidaullah has been identified as one of the top strategists for the Ghazi Brigade, operating from the Galjo area in Hangu, part of the North-West Frontier Province (Geo TV, June 1, 2009). Two of his accomplices also involved in the FC checkpoint attack, Khairullah and Khurram Shahzad, were arrested on earlier occasions. Ghazi Brigade terrorists adopted decapitation as a tactic to instill fear among those civilians supporting security forces in the battle zones. Fidaullah himself beheaded three people publicly in Sultanwas and Pir Baba in Swat (*The News* [Islamabad], June 2, 2009).

Other key terrorists affiliated with the Ghazi Brigade were identified by the Pakistani investigating agencies, most of them operating from vital locations such as Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Mardan, Karachi and Islamabad (*Dawn*, October 25, 2009).

While details about its operational linkages with other terrorist organizations in Pakistan are still unclear, the Ghazi Brigade worked closely with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) during the Swat operation in early 2009. Both the TTP and the Ghazi Brigade have reportedly planned attacks on western targets in Islamabad including clubs and hotels frequented by foreigners. Reports suggest that the Ghazi Brigade also has active links with the Ilyas Kashmiri group and al-Qaeda. The group "has been involved in abduction for ransom to meet their terror expenses." According to Jamshed's confession, the Ghazi Brigade terrorists have abducted a wealthy businessman named Najibullah Afghani and received Rs 10 million (\$116,000) for his safe release. He also confessed to having abducted more people from a rival sect for money (PakTribune, November 21, 2009).

Largely an offshoot of the Lal Masjid episode, the Ghazi Brigade appears to be loosely organized and geographically scattered for now, but these former student followers of Abdul Rashid Ghazi have a robust jihad agenda in mind to threaten Pakistan's national security.

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## Tribal Resistance and al-Qaeda: Suspected U.S. Airstrike Ignites Tribes in Yemen's Ma'rib Governorate

By Andrew McGregor

A small governorate of roughly 150,000 people, Ma'rib was once the heart of the great Sabaean civilization of pre-Islamic times, a land made prosperous by the construction of great irrigation works. Its wealth figured in the legends surrounding reputed rulers like Queen Sheba. When the Great Dam of Ma'rib collapsed in the 6th century, many of its people spread across North Africa and the region entered a long decline, enjoying a slight revival with the discovery of oil in the mid-1980s and the construction of a new dam funded by the late ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan al-Nahyan. Political violence entered the region, however, and the ruined Awam (Moon) temple of Ma'rib became the scene of an al-Qaeda suicide bombing in 2007 that killed eight Spanish tourists and two Yemenis (France 24, June 7).

Though Yemen's reserves of oil (never substantial by Arabian Peninsula standards) are quickly diminishing, al-Marib remains home to vast oil and gas reserves, making it a hub for the regional energy industry that provides 90% of government revenues, with vulnerable pipelines connecting the region to export terminals on the southern coast. These pipelines were cut by attacks 60 times last year (*Elaph*, June 13).

Like most of Yemen, the population of Ma'rib is largely tribal-based with a certain degree of de-facto independence from the state. Government is as much tolerated as respected. Most notable among the Ma'rib tribes are the Abidah, the Murad, the Jahm, the Jad'an and the Ashraf Ma'rib.

### The Killing of Jabir Ali al-Shabwani

On May 24, what appears to have been an American unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) fired a missile at a home in Ma'rib's Wadi Abieda area (*Yemen Post*, June 19; Al-Quds al-Arabi, June 27). The home belonged to a wanted al-Qaeda operative, Muhammad Sa'id bin Jardane, who was wounded in the strike but managed to escape. However, the strike did not miss Ma'rib Deputy Governor Jabir al-Shabwani and his four bodyguards,

who were all killed. Al-Shabwani had been negotiating Bin Jardane's surrender for a week and had gone to his farm to finalize the terms (AFP, May 25).

Outraged by what they believed was a plot to kill a notable tribal leader, tribesmen of the Shabwani clan and the larger Abidah tribe began attacks on government facilities and military outposts. Tribesmen destroyed parts of the Ma'rib city center, even attacking the city's air defense camp (*Yemen Observer*, May 29). A targeted assassination of a senior military officer carried out in Ma'rib several days later by members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) further inflamed the region as a military offensive sought revenge.

### Al-Qaeda Activity in Ma'rib

According to security authorities, in the last three years al-Qaeda has killed 37 military and government officials in Ma'rib from a list of 40 targets. A new list has allegedly been compiled by the militants (Saba, June 13). AQAP leaders Nasser al-Wuhayshi, Sa'id al-Shihri and Qasim al-Raimi were reported to be in Ma'rib in June. Authorities speculated they were fleeing a government offensive in the Abidah region of Ma'rib (*Yemen Observer*, June 17). Later there were unconfirmed reports that AQAP leader Ali Sa'id bin Jameel was killed by a military bombardment (Okaz.com, July 4; *Saudi Gazette*, July 4).

AQAP is believed responsible for the June 5 ambush and killing in Ma'rib of General Muhammad Salih al-Sha'if (commander of the 315 Brigade), though an AQAP statement denied responsibility, saying the murder was a government ploy to legitimize attacks on the local tribes (Marebpress.net; June 5; *Yemen Post*, June 19). Vowing revenge, government forces concentrated their search for suspects in the Abidah region of Ma'rib, focusing on Hassan Aridan and 28-year-old Hasan Abdullah Saleh al-Aqili, described as an al-Qaeda commander in Ma'rib.

Twelve security men and 11 tribesmen were injured during a June 9 shootout with Abidah tribesmen at al-Aqili's home in Ma'rib's al-Madina district, but the militant and his followers escaped (*Yemen Observer*, June 9). The fighting began after soldiers destroyed the homes of several al-Qaeda suspects and then began shelling the entire area, according to a local official (Xinhua, June 9).

## Resorting to Traditional Mediation

At this point both sides resorted to the traditional Yemeni mediation methods that forever keep Yemen at the brink of disaster rather than falling off the precipice. Unable to allow Ma'rib's energy industry to slip from its control, Yemeni authorities issued an apology for the airstrike and President Saleh formed a special president's committee including leaders of the Abidah tribe to investigate (*al-Hayat*, June 9).

Eventually the Yemeni press published a statement from the late deputy governor's father, Shaykh Naji al-Shabwani, apologizing for the Abidah tribe's "moment of anger" following his son's "assassination." The elder Shabwani was invited to a personal meeting with the president and agreed to accept tribal mediation, thus helping defuse open rebellion in the region over the killing of his son. Addressing the belief in the Abidah tribe that Jabir Ali al-Shabwani was the victim of a plot at the highest levels, the shaykh added, "If the president was behind the killing of my son, then he should confess and I, on my part, will forgive him" (*al-Masdar*, June 6; *al-Quds al-Arabi*, May 31). Confessions, however, were not forthcoming, and there were reports that other Abidah shaykhs had rejected the arbitration. Even as progress was made on defusing this issue the government's broad hunt for the killers of General Muhammad Salih was intensifying the violence in the region.

A Ma'rib arbitration committee decided to take sworn oaths from Yemen's leaders testifying that they had no prior knowledge of the airstrike that killed al-Shabwani. The state additionally agreed to pay blood money in the amount of one billion riyals (approximately 4.5 million dollars) (*Al-Quds al-Arabi*, June 27). The procedure effectively removed all responsibility from the Yemen government and left the United States solely to blame for the attack. Locally this also had the effect of relieving Yemeni officials of any personal responsibility, with all the consequences of tribal vendetta that would follow (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, May 31).

## The Counterterrorist Offensive Meets Tribal Resistance

A leading member of the local tribal structure, Alawi al-Basha bin Zaba, secretary-general of the Alliance Council of the Ma'rib and al-Jawf tribes (al-Jawf is a neighboring governorate) told a London-based Saudi daily that the military operations in Ma'rib and their resulting collateral damage threatened to turn Ma'rib

into "another Sa'dah," referring to the simmering rebellion in north Yemen that has posed one of the Yemeni state's most serious challenges. The operations in Ma'rib "will pull the tribes into confrontation with the state. We have warned of such a situation and said that it must be handled in a completely different way." Of particular offense was the practice of demolishing the homes of al-Qaeda suspects by firing mortars and Katyusha rockets from a range of some kilometers, inevitably destroying the homes of people with no relation to the militants. Bin Zaba saw a darker purpose behind such tactics; "Some officials might be seeking to push the tribes towards allying with al-Qaeda... Some officials and shaykhs are benefiting from keeping the situation as is," he said (*Elaph*, June 13). The tribal leader suggests official reports regarding the presence of al-Qaeda in Ma'rib are exaggerated and designed to increase foreign aid to the state.

Fighting threatened to grow out of control as Yemeni armor began to roll into Ma'rib and tribal allies of the Abidah and the Shabwani clan began to pour into the region from neighboring governorates. Attacks were made against the local Republican Palace, military outposts and power stations. Pylons carrying electric power to Sana'a were brought down and al-Jad'an tribesmen blocked the road between Sana'a and Ma'rib. Gas pipelines were destroyed and technicians prevented from making repairs. When planes of the Yemeni Air Force began flying over the region the Abidah tribesmen responded by firing anti-aircraft weapons. The Alliance Council of the Ma'rib and al-Jawf tribes described the government offensive as "terrorist acts" and warned that if political intervention was not forthcoming, "the tribes will abandon their responsibilities and allow al-Qaeda to take control of Ma'rib Governorate" (Ma'rib Press, June 11).

A June 12 meeting between shaykhs of the Abida tribe and Interior Minister Major General Mutahar Rashad al-Masri produced an agreement in which the tribe vowed to stop harboring al-Qaeda suspects, condemned sabotage and agreed to dismantle roadblocks and allow repairs to the pipeline (AFP, June 13). Al-Qaeda had different plans, however. In mid-June, AQAP released a statement in response to what it described as attacks on "women, children and brothers" in the Wadi Abidah region of Ma'rib. The group appealed to the shaykhs of Abidah and the shaykhs of Ma'rib to distance themselves from the "Crusader campaign" and President Ali Abdullah Saleh stated, "With permission from God, [we will] set the ground alight under the feet of the tyrant



infidels from the regime of Ali [Abdullah] Saleh and his aides – the agents of America” (al-Jazeera, June 19). There has been speculation that the devastating June 19 AQAP attack on the Aden offices of the Political Security Organization (PSO) was intended as revenge for the assault on the Abidah region and was part of an effort to ingratiate themselves with tribal leaders who had agreed to expel al-Qaeda elements from their territories (*Al-Ahali*, June 22).

### Destroying Ma’rib’s Main Pipeline

On June 12, a bulldozer was used to destroy the main pipeline carrying oil to the Hodeida governorate port of Ras Issa, the third attack on the pipeline in less than a month. Ministry of the Interior sources said the attack was the work of the Hatik sub-tribe of the Abidah, angered by the military offensive. Ministry of Defense sources claimed that the attack had actually been the work of Saudi AQAP deputy leader Sa’id al-Shihri (26sep.net, June 14; *Okaz*, June 16; *Yemen Post*, June 28). Al-Hatik leaders denied any participation in the attempt to break the pipeline (*al-Taghyir* [Sana’a], June 17).

Local sources told a pan-Arab daily that those who attacked the pipeline were tribesmen with no ties to al-Qaeda seeking revenge for an entire family that was killed by army shelling during operations in the Abidah region. The tribesmen were also angered by an attempt to arrest Shaykh Nasir Qammad bin Durham, who was accused of harboring al-Qaeda operatives. The shaykh evaded security authorities but his home was destroyed by artillery. The bulldozer attack on the pipeline was said to have created a huge fire with a smoke column that could be seen 40 km away (*al-Hayat*, June 13).

More violence broke out in Ma’rib as tribes began fighting over control of the local oil fields. Government forces did not intervene in recent clashes between the Abidah and the Bal-Harith that killed 18 during fighting over an oil field near the border with Shabwa governorate (*Yemen Post*, June 24; *al-Tagheer*, June 24).

### Conclusion

A recent study of the political role of Yemen’s tribes stated that the often abrasive relations between the tribes and central government had been tempered by President Saleh’s attempts to improve the relationship. The tribes now dominate both parliament and the Shura Council, resulting in some tribal conventions being integrated

into national legislation. However, the hereditary nature of tribal authority and the dominance of tribal chiefs have led to the exclusion of tribesmen from political involvement. An estimated 85% of Yemenis belong to tribes, most of which are well-armed. [1]

Despite evidence to the contrary, Ma’rib Governor Naji Bin Ali al-Zaidi prefers to maintain that al-Qaeda members in Ma’rib are not natives of the area, but are rather “strangers who are exploiting the hospitality of the Ma’rib people to hide and plan for their terrorist operations.” The governor points to the wild terrain and nomadic nature of the local people as draws for a terrorist group seeking safe havens. Al-Zaidi warns that al-Qaeda “are targeting the whole world through our province, because Yemen, several Arab and foreign countries all have interests in this province” (*Yemen Observer*, March 9). Regardless of the governor’s claims, there appears to be continued sympathy for local al-Qaeda members in the region. Recently two AQAP members wanted for attacks on military and security forces, Mansur Saleh Dalil (a.k.a. Salel Salim Dalil) and Mubarak al-Shabwani, surrendered to authorities in Ma’rib. Attacks on security checkpoints quickly followed the death penalties handed down to the men on July 7 (Saba, June 15, July 11; *Yemen Post*, June 15).

By accommodating American requests for direct strikes against al-Qaeda suspects in Yemen, government authorities are left to deal with consequences that can quickly spin out of control in a highly volatile environment. There are estimates that the cost of lost oil revenues, repairs to the power supply and compensation to the tribes in Ma’rib will exceed the annual amount of U.S. aid to Yemen. The military response to the assassination of senior officers seemed to invoke the tribal principle of collective responsibility, with the counterterrorist offensive in Ma’rib making little differentiation between the guilty and the innocent. Coming at the same time as the airstrike that killed a noted Abidah leader, the rapid escalation in violence and its potential to spill into neighboring governorates provided a warning that some areas of Yemen are perilously close to breaking with the government and accepting an al-Qaeda presence. The heavy-handed military tactics that helped break the Houthi rebellion (at least temporarily) during “Operation Scorched Earth” will not necessarily work in other regions. Traditional mediation efforts appear to have subdued the violence, but the risk remains that in the current environment apologies, compensation and mediation may not be effective next time, particularly if the tribes are convinced to accept al-Qaeda operatives

(their relatives and fellow tribesmen) as their protectors and avengers against a state they perceive as working for foreign interests.

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#### Note

1. See Adel al-Sharbaji et al., Palace and the Divan, the Political Role of Tribes in Yemen, Observatory for Human Rights/International Development Research Center. For a summary, see Yemen Times Online, April 7, 2010.