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PROMINENT EGYPTIAN PREACHER DISSECTS AL-QAEDA STRATEGY

In a recent interview with well-known Egyptian television preacher Dr. Umar Abd al-Kafy, the cleric criticized the strategy and theological underpinnings of al-Qaeda's ideology. The interview was carried by Dubai's al-Arabiya TV on July 16.

Al-Kafy suggests there are three ways of approaching the concept of jihad in the Islamic world:

- The first group says jihad must be declared on anyone who does not say there is no God but Allah. "This group does not base its ruling on the Koran or Prophetic Traditions, but on fervent emotions that do not know Islam at all."
- The second group says there is no jihad based on fighting. There is only the jihad ("struggle") against one's own desires and evil impulses (the so-called "Greater Jihad").
- The third group takes a centrist position, saying jihad is imperative if Muslim lands are occupied and holy places desecrated.

Jihad can only be declared by a recognized Wali al-Amr (Muslim ruler or guardian); "Islam does not leave matters to anyone to decide." Al-Kafy maintains that killing civilians and terrorizing the innocent cannot be considered jihad. The

enemy cannot be defeated until one ceases committing injustices through a “jihad of the soul.”

Referring to Koranic scripture, the preacher rejected Bin Laden’s “fatwa” demanding all Americans in Muslim lands be killed. Al-Kafy stated, “Islam ordered us to protect [the disbelievers] as long as they are not fighting against us, not seizing our land and not violating our sanctities. How can I fight them if they are peaceful?”

Al-Kafy criticized the jihadis’ view of the concept of hakimiyah (ruling according to the revelations of Allah), saying it is incorrect to interpret this as a call for theocratic government; “Islam does not say the ruler must be a man of religion, but the ruler must be the most noble and best behaving among people” (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 22). Such rulers can be chosen either through a shura (consultative) system or through democratic means. This places the Egyptian preacher squarely at odds with the Salafi-Jihadists, who reject democracy entirely. Existing rulers cannot be branded as apostates (according to the Salafi-Jihadist embrace of takfir) unless they fail to perform their religious duties or deny the existence of God. Instead of branding wayward rulers as apostates or infidels, Muslim scholars should instead offer prayers and advice.

Al-Kafy bemoans the gradual loss of centrist policies and attitudes in the Islamic world under the pressure of extremism. There is a danger of radicals being given free reign despite having poor knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence; “The opinion over which there are differences will not become a rule.”

The preacher was most damning of al-Qaeda in his discussion of the movement’s use of “Hukm al-Tataruss” (The Law on Using Human Shields) to justify the slaughter of innocent Muslims. Al-Tataruss is based on an obscure medieval ruling that permitted the killing of Muslims if enemies of Islam were in their midst. Al-Qaeda has revived the ruling to justify the death of innocent Muslims in suicide attacks and bombings to bypass the well-known injunction against killing fellow Muslims and thus avoid charges of apostasy. Al-Qaeda’s Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri is a noted proponent of the concept, which he has examined in his books *Healing the Hearts of Believers and The Treatise Exonerating the Nation of the Pen and the Sword from the Blemish of Weakness and Fatigue* (also known as *The Exoneration*). The latter was a 2008 response to the criticism of al-Zawahiri’s reliance on al-Tataruss, contained in the

“Revisions” of the imprisoned ex-leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl), formerly a close colleague and associate of al-Zawahiri. According to al-Kafy, “There is a difference between someone who throws himself in the middle of the enemy that occupied his land and the one who blows himself up among peaceful and secure people, thinking that this is martyrdom. This is not stated in the Koran or said by the Prophet.”

PUNTLAND SECURITY FORCES ATTACK SALAFIST GROUP IN SANAAG

New fighting has broken out in the remote Galgala mountains in Somalia’s Sanaag region, a territory disputed by the breakaway Republic of Somaliland and the semi-autonomous region of Puntland.

Following reports that Shaykh Muhammad Sa’id Atam, a known arms supplier for al-Shabaab, was building a Salafist-Jihadi militant group in the Galgala mountains, Puntland security forces took action on July 26 with a pre-dawn raid on the group’s hideouts in a number of mountain caves. According to Colonel Abdurahman Ali, three Puntland soldiers were killed and seven wounded (AFP, July 26). The attack appears to have followed an assault by the militants on the town of Karin (40 km south of Bosaso, the commercial capital of Puntland) in which four Puntland soldiers were killed, as well as anywhere from four to “dozens” of civilians (Shabelle Media Network, July 26; Mareeg.com, July 26). The arrival of Mogadishu-based al-Shabaab fighters (allegedly including a number of Somali-Americans) in the Sanaag region was first reported last January (*Somaliland Times*, January 29). Elders in the Galgala region told AFP that 400 fighters were training in the region and were equipped with pick-up trucks, heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (AFP, July 22).

Muhammad Sa’id Atam is a native of Galgala and a member of the Warsangali/Darod clan. He is believed to have been behind the abduction of a German national in 2008. According to Colonel Muhammad Jama, an official of the Puntland security services, “Atam has links with al-Qaeda and represents al-Shabaab in the region. We are receiving information that he has mobilized hundreds of Islamist militants in the villages around Sanaag Bari” (AFP, July 22). Local sources said Atam had declared the Galgala region independent from Puntland and installed an Islamic authority to govern

the area. There were reports that the militants had beaten two women for not wearing the hijab (Sunatimes [Bosaso], July 17).

Puntland President Abdirahman Mohamed Farole later claimed that the security forces had killed 13 militants in Galgala and captured a senior militant, Jama'a Ismail Duale (Garowe Online, July 26; Reuters, July 27). Stating that the militants had been trained in south Somalia, Farole warned the international community and neighboring states that "Puntland is under attack from both local and foreign Islamist militants."

Reports of a southern origin for the militants were confirmed by Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Trade Minister Abdirashid Muhammad Irro, who said the TFG was ready to help Puntland against the southern-trained militants (Shabelle Media Network, July 26). The Minister noted that "At least 50 regional officials have recently been killed in Puntland by al-Shabaab organized militias" (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], July 26).

President Farole has suggested terrorists want to establish themselves in Bosaso for the "same reason as Mogadishu. It is a city with business and a big population and is therefore easy to hide [there]." He also described reports of al-Shabaab flags flying in Galgala as a mere fundraising effort; "[The militants want] to say 'Look, we have raised the flag at the corner of a remote mountain. Send us money.' But they have nothing there" (Garowe Online, July 21).

The Sanaag region is the subject of an occasionally violent territorial dispute between Puntland and Somaliland over the Sool, Sanaaq and Cayn regions (referred to as SSC). Fighting began in 2007 and the region is now host to a variety of armed groups with various political allegiances and clan loyalties.

Following months of bombings and assassinations blamed on al-Shabaab, Puntland authorities have begun rounding up hundreds of male migrants from southern Somalia and sending them back to the south. The policy is opposed by the TFG. Puntland is also implementing a new law on terrorism that will establish a special terrorism court to speed up prosecutions (Garowe Online, July 17). A senior al-Shabaab commander, Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur," threatened Somaliland and Puntland with invasions by al-Shabaab last year due to their failure to implement Shari'a (AllPuntland.com, October 31, 2009).

Al-Zawahiri Releases New Message with Focus on the Levant and Iraq

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

Jihadi web forums released a new audio message on July 19 from Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second-in-command of al-Qaeda. [1] The message, entitled "Al-Quds Will Never be Judaized," is only the second from al-Zawahiri since last December and the first since last May. Al-Zawahiri started his message saying the resistance of the Taliban in the February clashes in Marjah, Afghanistan proved the February arrest of Taliban commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar had not damaged the movement. The mention of these two events suggests that his message was recorded several months ago. Most importantly, however, was the message's focus on the Levant and Iraq after two years of decline by al-Qaeda and affiliated Salafist-Jihadi groups in these regions.

Al-Zawahiri begins his message by congratulating the Muslim ummah (community of believers) and the Amir al-Mu'minin (the Commander of the Faithful), "the patient mujahid, Mullah Omar" for his "imminent victory" and his "steadfastness against infidels and tyranny." Al-Zawahiri renewed his bay'at (allegiance pledge) to Mullah Omar, saying, "We renew our vow of allegiance to you... on the path of jihad in the name of Allah." In this context, al-Zawahiri criticized the "Arab and international media" because they broadcast "little about the numerous and various operations of the mujahideen in the all parts of Afghanistan. In contrast, if Hezbollah released a captive or launched a missile, festivals will be held and hours on the [satellite] channels will be given [to discuss that]." This explains al-Zawahiri's constant praise for the "knights of jihadi media" in their efforts to support jihad.

Building the overall picture of the jihadi movement, al-Zawahiri shed light on the enemies beside U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, the "Arab Zionists" who "are more dangerous than the Jewish Zionists," according to al-Zawahiri. "Who is besieging our people in Gaza and is surrounding them with an underground metal fence? Is he not the chief of Arab Zionists [Egyptian President] Hosni Mubarak? ...Who is providing his intelligence service to serve U.S. intelligence and [Israel's] Mossad? Is he not the heir of traitors, Abdullah, the

son of [late King] Hussein of Jordan, and who is aiding Mossad to kill the Mujahideen and capture them? Is he not the Arab Zionist [Palestinian Authority President] Mahmoud Abbas?"

Al-Zawahiri also criticized the presence of Muslim troops in Afghanistan:

It is shameful that there are, among the followers of the Crusaders and their servants in Afghanistan, governments that falsely claim to be affiliated to Islam. In addition to the government of thieves and bribes in Pakistan, there are in Afghanistan troops from Turkey, the UAE, Jordan and Egypt. Not to mention the international cooperation to hunt down the mujahideen everywhere and the media campaigns against them, throwing various charges at them, as well as intelligence cooperation in investigation, torture and recruitment; all these have been done by these countries [who have enmity against] Islam.

Demonstrating the importance of the jihadi movement's presence in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and their alliances there, al-Zawahiri vowed to the Kashmir people that support will come soon from the mujahideen. Al-Zawahiri also hailed the emergence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), describing this as a result of the jihad against the United States. A video version of al-Zawahiri's message produced by as-Sahab Media Productions (al-Qaeda's media arm) added footage of TTP leader Hakimullah Mahsud stating the movement is waging jihad against the Pakistani army and the "kafir" [infidel] government of Pakistan to achieve two goals: to invalidate all treaties with the United States and to establish an Islamic Shari'a state in Pakistan. [2]

The Afghanistan-Pakistan region plays a large part in the overall Salafi-Jihadist movement's strategy. Al-Zawahiri said "imminent victory" will result from the defeat of the Pakistan government and its army. Al-Zawahiri also hailed the "victories" of jihadi movements in Yemen, Somalia, the Caucasus, the Islamic Maghreb and Iraq, which the Salafists now aim to recreate as a jihadi hub in the "liberation of Palestine."

Regarding al-Quds (Jerusalem), al-Zawahiri criticized Arab leaders for not stopping what he called the "Judaization" of Jerusalem. Al-Zawahiri claimed that Arab leaders dedicated half a billion dollars to support people there, which it had not yet paid, while Israel spent 17 billion dollars for "works of Judaization".

Al-Zawahiri aims to link Iraq to what he calls the "mujahideen in Palestine," indicating that Iraq is still an important landscape for Salafi-Jihadists. He directed part of his message to the emerging Salafi-Jihadist movement in Palestine, saying, "The jihad of the Islamic State of Iraq represents a real hope for changing the situation and [to serve the] quest for the liberation of Palestine. So, hasten to build bridges between you and them [the Iraqi mujahideen]." Al-Zawahiri urges the "mujahideen of Palestine" not to replace the concepts of "the role of Shari'a," "the brotherhood of faith" and "jihad" with destructive concepts such as "sovereignty of the people," "national unity" and "national liberation." Al-Zawahiri seems to be criticizing Hamas, without mentioning the movement by name, adding, "If Chechnya - for example - is a Russian internal affair, so too can Palestine be an internal affair of Israel."

Al-Zawahiri also urged President Obama to admit defeat in Afghanistan:

Poor Obama comes to Kabul pledging that the Taliban will not return to power... You threaten the Taliban [but] you are just a puppet of the tyrants... We will see who will not return to Kabul because he will flee it hastily in fear. Obama, whether you admit it or not, Muslims have defeated you in Iraq and Afghanistan and will defeat you in Palestine, Somalia and the Islamic Maghreb.

Taking into consideration the considerable volume of literature from jihadist leaders since 2003 that considers Iraq a golden opportunity to confront American troops and to use it as a launching pad to "liberate Palestine," it is obvious that al-Qaeda continues to consider the Levant and Iraq as the most important elements of the movement's political and geographical ambitions. Since al-Qaeda has lost the positions it gained in Iraq between 2004 and 2007, it is possible that the Salafist-Jihadis will renew their focus on that region in the near future.

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Note

1. As-Sahab Media Production, July 19, the tape was downloaded from al-Fallujah Islamic Forums, July 19, temporary website. From this

link: <http://110.4.44.55/~faaall3s/vb/showthread.php?t=126233>. All quotes in this article are from al-Zawahiri's mentioned audiotape.
2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAam_QH_5KU

Iranian Naval Capabilities and the Security of the Hormuz Strait

By Nima Adelhah

When the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution on June 9 authorizing a fourth round of sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran for its controversial nuclear program, the risk of conflict in the Persian Gulf also escalated considerably. One of the potential points of tension is the resolution's explicit call for cargo inspection. Iran has warned vehemently against such a move. According to Brigadier Ali Fadavi, Iran's military forces, especially the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN), maintain a "special and suitable response to the inspection of Iranian vessels" (Fars News, June 14; Press TV, June 22, July 4). However, a major military move to challenge this particular regime of sanctions in the Persian Gulf would probably involve an attempt to close off the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway between Iran and Oman through which nearly 40% of crude oil supplies pass, including 88% of Saudi Arabian and 98% of Iraqi oil exports (Press TV, May 4; Fars News, June 13).

Since 2008, Tehran has warned bluntly of its potential to seal off the Strait of Hormuz, together with targeting U.S. shipping, to create turmoil in the oil market with a consequent major impact on the global economy (IRNA June 29, 2008; ISNA, July 8, 2008). As an Iranian analyst puts it, the Strait of Hormuz is the "hanging rope" of the American economy (Fars News, May 16). But to what extent is Iran militarily capable of bringing about these tactical objectives in response to a possible U.S. attack? Could Iran effectively close the Strait of Hormuz?

Iran's main military goal in the Persian Gulf is to exploit the vulnerability of the Strait of Hormuz as leverage over possible Israeli or U.S. attacks on its nuclear facilities and Iran's air defense system, which would be the main target of the initial assault. Since Iran is fully aware of American military superiority, the key to Iranian success is not to impair of U.S. naval forces through conventional military means, but to disrupt, dislocate and confuse the adversary in order to deter further attacks on its land-based strategic sites - nuclear or otherwise. Defensive military operations of this sort could be effective insofar as slowing down the progress of the opposing forces and, in psychological terms, allowing Iran to claim victory by surviving a conventional military assault - similar to Hezbollah following the 33 day war with Israel in 2006.

In the event of an attack, both the Iranian navy and the IRGCN (which operates its own force of small boats in parallel with the national navy) would rely on coastal defense forces and asymmetrical warfare, with the aim of limiting the activities of U.S. naval forces from either a far distance (with missiles) or in close proximity (using speed boats or mines). In terms of coastal defense, Iran has recently acquired a number of surface-launched fixed and mobile anti-ship missiles like the Ghased-1 and Nasr-1 (most likely bought from China) (Fars News, March 7; IRNA, May 21). In conventional military operations, these missiles could be used in addition to the anti-submarine torpedoes and Noor C-802 surface-to-surface missiles deployed on newly built frigates like the *Jamaran* (Press TV May 11). [1] Meanwhile, the presence of mines also poses a major threat to the U.S. navy, which is busy, along with British naval forces, in a constant minesweeping mission throughout the Gulf.[2] The target of such coastal missile and mine operations would most likely include oil rigs, oil tankers, commercial ships (from Arab states in the Gulf) and other possible soft targets with the objective of disrupting shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

In terms of asymmetrical warfare, the IRGCN would lead the charge in operations in the Strait (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 29). This aspect of Iranian naval warfare entails the highest risk for military conflict, since the IRGCN is typically undisciplined in its organizational and tactical operations. The unruly tactics of the Revolutionary Guard in the Strait of Hormuz could increase the possibility of misinterpretation and miscalculation on both sides, as was the case with the near confrontation of Iranian fast boats and a flotilla of American naval forces in early 2008 (IRNA, January 8, 2008).[3] In many ways, the 2008 introduction of

74 domestically built missile boats (based on the North Korean Peykaap ISP-16 model), effectively used in war exercises, indicates Iran is turning toward reliance on asymmetrical tactics (IRNA, February 22, 2008). These missile boats can be the deadliest form of naval warfare against U.S. forces, particularly if used in unconventional operations such as suicide attacks.

In spite of structural shortcomings and its role as the smallest branch of Iran's armed forces, the Islamic Republic's navy and particularly the IRGCN remain a substantial threat to U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf. With the new wave of sanctions and President Obama indicating that Iran may not be included in Washington's new commitment not to attack non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons, the Islamic Republic is becoming considerably alarmed by the prospect of war (Press TV, June 22). These fears are making Iran more aggressive in its military policy in the Persian Gulf, with a possible increase in the presence of the IRGCN in the Strait of Hormuz in the months to come. In light of the element of miscalculation, the prospect looms large of a military conflict in a vital maritime region, with consequences for economic security on a global scale.

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Notes

1. The *Jamaran* and other ships in her class are classified as destroyers by Iran, which habitually exaggerates the size of its warships.
2. Author's interview with a senior U.S. navy officer, July 7, 2010.
3. Ibid.

Lashkar-e-Taiba's Growing International Focus and Its Links with al-Qaeda

By Peter Chalk

Recent revelations that several so-called "home-grown militants" connected to terrorist plots in Europe, North America and Australia had passed through camps controlled by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have generated growing concern that the group may be emerging as a new global actor working in collaboration with al-Qaeda. Compounding these fears is evidence that LeT's ideological and operational focus is now going well beyond the liberation of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the foment of an Islamist revolution in India. However, while ties with al-Qaeda cannot be fully discounted, LeT's close relationship with the Pakistani state combined with its fabled discipline and tight organizational cohesion would seem to suggest that it is not (yet) morphing into another affiliate of Bin Laden's global Islamist enterprise.

LeT: Background and Objectives

LeT dates back to 1993 when it was founded as the military wing of the Markaz-ad-Da'awa wa'l-Irshad (MDI), headquartered in Murdike near the Punjabi city of Lahore. [1] It is affiliated with the Ahl-e-Hadith sect of Islamic Wahhabism, which emerged as part of the Deobandi movement in Northern India during British colonial rule. The Ahl-e-Hadith believe everything needed for moral and ethical guidance can be found in the Koran and the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet) and revile syncretism and any form of mystical worship. [2]

The LeT was a creation of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate and its explicit Islamic orientation was meant to counter and eventually replace the Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF) as the primary force fighting in J&K. The JKNLF fell out of favor with the ISI on account of its ethno-nationalist orientation and advocacy of J&K's independence (as opposed to the province's incorporation into the Pakistani state). The group is led by Hafiz Saeed (also its spiritual amir and one of the co-founders of MDI) and Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi (the operational commander) and has a membership of around 150,000 cadres (including 750 insurgents on the

ground in J&K). Lakhvi is currently on trial in Pakistan for masterminding the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Although Saeed was placed under house arrest for his suspected role, all charges were dropped in October 2009. Under international pressure following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, then President Pervez Musharraf banned the group in 2002. However, it has since operated more or less openly under the name Jama'at-ud-Da'awa (JuD), which Saeed leads purportedly as an Islamic charity, although this group was also banned in 2009.

Despite being established as a Kashmiri militant group, LeT has always defined its objectives in local and regional terms. Specifically, the group articulates a twofold ideological and operational agenda that aims to exploit ethno-religious tension in Kashmir in order to trigger a wider religious revolution across the Indian state. [3] To this end, the group has spearheaded terrorist attacks across J&K and has been directly tied to numerous assaults in India, including the attack on India's Red Fort in December 2000, the strike against the Indian National Parliament in December 2001, the Kaluchak massacre in May 2002, serial explosions in Delhi in October 2005, the Varanasi attack in March 2006 and the Mumbai assaults in November 2008. [4] This last attack was allegedly undertaken in collaboration with Ibrahim Dawood, the head of D Company (also known as the Bombay Mafia) and one of India's most wanted men. The *MV Alpha*, the ship the LeT team used to sail to Mumbai, was allegedly owned by D Company. Dawood is currently based in Karachi and is wanted in India for the 2008 attack as well as an earlier spate of bombings in Mumbai in 1993 that left 300 people dead. [5]

These activities were undertaken with the explicit support of the ISI, which has consistently sought to leverage the group as a deniable proxy through which to wage a long-term war of attrition against Delhi. [6] The LeT has been exceptionally amenable to these strategic designs and is certainly one of the most pliable of Pakistan's myriad militant groupings so far as accepting ISI control. This has allowed the LeT to establish a special relationship with both the intelligence community and the state, thereby escaping relatively unharmed from the various counter-terrorism crackdowns instituted by Islamabad. Although now banned, both the LeT and its charitable front, the JuD, continue to operate more or less freely in Pakistan - at least compared to the likes of the TTP, Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM). Even today, the group continues to operate madrassas and training camps and is allowed

to organize mass rallies that act as important catalysts for funding and recruitment. Saeed also remains free, despite the existence of Indian and western intelligence dossiers that point to him as the mastermind behind the Mumbai attacks. [7]

Activities beyond the J&K and Indian Conflict Theaters

Besides its J&K and Indian operations, there is evidence to link the LeT to attacks and plots outside South Asia. The LeT has been tied to numerous Muslims and Islamic converts who have been arrested for planning attacks in the West. In 2003 Willie Brigitte, who was detained on suspicion of planning attacks on the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor and the Pine Gap intelligence-gathering station in Australia, admitted to French authorities that he had been financed and received training from Lashkar. [8] Two years later, one of the main perpetrators behind the London underground bombings, Shezad Tanweer, was similarly believed to have made contact with LeT and allowed to stay at the group's headquarters in Murdike (*Guardian*, July 19, 2005; *Daily Telegraph*, July 19, 2005). [9] Equally, an investigation into the so-called Sauerland cell, a four-man team that was planning on bombing US targets in Germany during 2007, has since revealed that numerous nationals from the country have traveled to Pakistan to seek out and work with Lashkar operatives (Speigel Online, April 16, 2009; The Local [Berlin], March 4).

Other jihadis allegedly trained by the LeT include Australian David Hicks, who was held in Guantanamo Bay until 2007; Omar Khayyam, who spearheaded a 2004 fertilizer bomb plot in the UK; Dhiren Barot, who masterminded a 2004 failed gas cylinder bombing plot in London and David Headley, who conducted surveillance for the Mumbai attacks and was also apparently dispatched to murder the chief editor and cartoonist for the Danish newspaper *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* (which in 2005 published depictions of the Prophet Muhammad that many Muslims found highly offensive) (Rediff.com, December 10, 2008; *Guardian*, November 7, 2006). [10] All of these cases have been taken as evidence that the LeT is now at the forefront of indoctrinating, training and deploying militants with so-called "clean skins" to carry out terrorist attacks in the West and/or their country of origin.

Apart from inspiring and inculcating would-be jihadists around the world, the LeT has been implicated in attacks that strongly suggest an extension of its operational and ideological focus. On March 2, 2009, members of the

Sri Lankan cricket team, together with officials, umpires and their police escort, were viciously attacked in Lahore, leaving eight dead (*The News* [Islamabad], March 3). Speculation is rife that the commando-style operation was the work of the LeT, which if confirmed would be the first time that the group carried out a dedicated attack on Pakistani soil (*Times of India*, March 6, 2009). U.S. officials have periodically claimed that the LeT has been instrumental in recruiting Islamists to fight against allied troops in Iraq, while in 2008 a Pentagon report to Congress claimed that the group is now active in six to eight provinces of Afghanistan – a significant leap from hardly any presence five years ago (*Kashmir Herald*, May 2004). [11] The LeT has also been directly tied to the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai, which, although clearly aimed at India, involved venues that appear to have been deliberately chosen on account of their affiliation with American, European and Israeli interests. Notably, these included the Taj and Oberoi hotels (luxury five star facilities that specifically cater for wealthy international visitors) and the Chabad House (a Jewish cultural center). Finally in November 2009 four suspected LeT operatives were arrested in Bangladesh for plotting to lead a *fidayeen* assault against the Indian and United States diplomatic missions in Dhaka, reputedly to coincide with the anniversary of 2008's attacks in Mumbai (Press Trust of India News, November 6, 2009; *The Hindu*, November 25, 2009; Channelnewsasia.com, December 2, 2009). The suspected LeT operatives were Tadiyantavide Nasir (the alleged *fidayeen* commander and mastermind behind a string of blasts in Bangalore during July 2008), Mohammad Munwar, Mohammad Ashraf Ali Zahid and Syed Abdul Qayyum. According to Indian intelligence sources, funds for the attack were dispatched by Abdul Reham Saaed, a Pakistani-based Lashkar commander responsible for managing the group's networks in Bangladesh.

Connections to al-Qaeda?

These international connections have raised speculation that certain globalized, “freelance” elements within LeT have established concrete ties with al-Qaeda, solidifying the close ideological relationship that exists between the Ahl-e Hadith and Salafi branches of Islam that the groups respectively embrace. Fueling this concern are various pieces of evidence tying the two organizations together:

1. Cohorts of Bin Laden are believed to have been closely involved with the initial founding of the LeT and to have provided ongoing guidance.

2. Abu Zubaydah, a senior al-Qaeda field commander arrested in 2002, was arrested at a LeT safe-house in Faisalabad.

3. LeT's suspected involvement in the 2005 London underground bombings; although these attacks are not believed to have been directly ordered by al-Qaeda, they were definitely inspired and endorsed by the movement.

4. A sizeable proportion of LeT militants killed or captured have been tied to radicals known to have received training in Afghan camps run by either al-Qaeda and/or the Taliban, including militant centers at Tayyba and Aqsa.

5. Western and Indian intelligence sources have claimed that the LeT acts as an urban “facilitator” for al-Qaeda in Pakistan, helping with the movement of personnel and weaponry as well as the recruitment of suicide bombers and target selection.

6. Indian sources have additionally claimed that contacts exist between Bin Laden's international jihadist network and D Company – the crime syndicate that allegedly collaborated with LeT in carrying out the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

7. Pakistani commentators have periodically claimed that al-Qaeda has funneled financial support to aid Kashmiri militant groups fighting in J&K, including the LeT.

8. JuD's Facebook page contains several pictures of Bin Laden, including one low resolution image of the al-Qaeda chief sitting next to an individual that has a reasonably strong resemblance to Saaed.

Assessment

Currently there is no definitive evidence of an established logistical or operational link between LeT and al-Qaeda. However, the existence of at least residual ties cannot be discounted. LeT's ideological focus has certainly taken on a much more explicit anti-Western tenor in recent years, reflecting aspirations that, at least rhetorically, closely accord with the aims of the broader al-Qaeda jihadist network. Although the LeT has always promoted an international agenda (promising, for instance, to plant the Islamic flag in the capitals of the

United States, Russia and Israel), it has mostly focused its activities on local and regional theaters. Today, there is as much emphasis given to fighting Washington and allied governments supportive of the global war on terror as on staging attacks in India and J&K. [12] This shift in focus is arguably supported by LeT's alleged involvement in the aforementioned attacks and other plots in the UK, Australia and Bangladesh.

That said, the LeT has always been one of the more disciplined Kashmiri militant groups and there is presently little evidence to suggest that it is suffering from the type of anti-Pakistani splintering that has befallen groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Harakat ul-Mujahideen (HuM). While the group may well have had contact with al-Qaeda and possibly assisted the movement in Pakistan, it almost certainly continues to view itself as its own organization rather than an al-Qaeda affiliate. Moreover, investigations undertaken in the wake of the 2008 assaults in Mumbai also seem to suggest that LeT remains close to Pakistan and its ISI "parent," which would cast doubt that it would actively engage in actions likely to directly threaten or bring added pressure on Islamabad – such as formalizing a working relationship with al-Qaeda.

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Notes

1. The MDI was established in 1986 by two Pakistani engineering professors – Hafiz Muhammad Saaed (who, as noted in the text, currently serves as the emir of LeT) and Zafar Iqbal; jihadi ideologue Abdullah Azzam was also closely involved with the formation of the MDI, which was active in the anti-Soviet mujahideen campaign in Afghanistan. President Musharraf banned the group in 2002. See Christine Fair, "Antecedents and Implications of the November 2008 Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) Attack Upon Several Targets in the Indian Mega-City of Mumbai," testimony prepared for the House Homeland Security Committee, Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection, March 11, 2009, p.6. See also Saeed Shafqat, "From Official Islam to Islamism: The Rise of Dawat-ul-Irshad and Lashkar-e-Taiba," in Christophe Jaffrelot ed. *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation* (London: Zed Books, 2002), pp. 131-47.

2. Stephen Tankel, "Lashkar-e-Taiba: From 9/11 to Mumbai," *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence* (ICSR), April/

May, 2009, p. 3.

3. Yoginder Sikaand, "Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of Lashkar-I-Tayyeba," paper supplied to author, Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, August 2002.

4. For a full breakdown of terrorist incidents connected to LeT see South Asia Terrorism Portal, "Incidents Involving Lashkar-e-Toiba," at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/andk/terrorist_outfits/laskar_e_toiba_It.htm

5. Asia Times Online, December 9, 2008; U.S. Department of Treasury, "U.S. Designated Dawood Ibrahim as Terrorist Supporter," <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/js909.htm>

6. Author interviews, Delhi and Srinagar, February 2001. See also Imtiaz Gul, "Pakistan's New Networks of Terror," *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2010.

7. See, for instance, Ajit Singh, "LeT: Spreading Menace," *South Asia Intelligence Review* 8/52 (July 2010); BBC, June 16, 2009.

8. "Interrogations of Willie Brigitte," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Four Corners* Transcript, September 2, 2004, available on-line at <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2004/s1121449.htm>

9. C. Christine Fair and Peter Chalk, *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006), p.18.

10. Stephen Tankel, "Lashkar-e-Taiba in Perspective: An Evolving Threat," *New America Foundation* (February 2010), pp. 5-6; Tankel, "Lashkar-e-Taiba: From 9/11 to Mumbai," p. 5; C. Christine Fair, "Antecedents and Implications of the November 2008 Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) Attack Upon Several Targets in the Indian Mega-City of Mumbai," testimony given before the House Homeland Security Committee, Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection, March 11, 2009, p. 11.

11. Fair and Chalk, *Fortifying Pakistan*, p.18; Singh, "LeT: Spreading Menace."

12. Peter Chalk and Christine Fair, "Lashkar-e-Taiba: At the Vanguard of the Kashmiri Insurgency," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 2002.