



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 39 ♦ OCTOBER 28, 2010

## IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....1

AL-QAEDA EXPLOITS KASHMIR CONFLICT TO EXPAND OPERATIONS TO INDIA  
By Seth Nye.....4

CHARTING THE REVIVAL OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN  
By Roman Muzalevsky.....6

MALI PAYS THE PRICE OF AL-QAEDA'S ASYMMETRICAL THREAT  
By Andrew McGregor.....7



Mohammed Ilyas  
Kashmiri

Terrorism Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jamestown Foundation.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to [pubs@jamestown.org](mailto:pubs@jamestown.org), or contact us at:

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320  
Washington, DC • 20036  
Tel: (202) 483-8888  
Fax: (202) 483-8337

Copyright ©2009

## PHILIPPINES ADOPTS MORE MOBILE SEA-BASED STRATEGY AGAINST ABU SAYYAF

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are restructuring their campaign against Abu Sayyaf Islamist militants in Western Mindanao by adopting the fleet marine concept as a replacement for the Sulu Archipelago-based Joint Task Force Comet (Sun Star Network, September 15). The make-up of the Philippine Republic presents a special challenge to internal security forces, as it is composed of 7,000 islands and islets spanning 60,000 square miles of sea.

The commander of the Western Mindanao Command (Wesmincom), Lieutenant General Benjamin Muhammad Dolorfino, described the fleet marine concept as an opportunity to use the sea as a maneuvering space rather than an obstacle. The transfer of assault operations to amphibious units will help level the intelligence-gathering battle, which the AFP has been losing to the militants' intelligence network. According to Dolorfino, "We are so easy to detect with our ground operations. The whole island instantly knows [we are coming] just by the sound of a six-by-six truck revving up" (Sun Star Network, September 15). Landings from the sea will help restore the element of surprise to AFP operations.

The seas and waterways of the southwestern Philippines were once plagued with Muslim pirates - now these are part of the operational zone of Abu Sayyaf, a notorious composite Islamist terrorist group/criminal gang with deep roots in Western Mindanao, specifically the Zamboanga Peninsula and the islands of the Sulu Archipelago (most notably the island province of Basilan). Abu Sayyaf

is light on ideology but capable of striking with brutal effectiveness and a callous disregard for civilian lives, as seen in the February 2004 bombing of Superferry 14 in Manila harbor, killing 116 people.

Though Abu Sayyaf has been pressured by U.S.-supported Filipino troops for several years, they still have the ability to lash back, as was seen in a September 16 ambush in which militants under the command of Nur Hassan Jamiri and Long Malat Sulayman killed three soldiers of the 32nd Infantry Battalion. Later in the day, however, a government mortar team zeroed in on the militants, killing two, including Commander Sulayman (*Manila Times*, September 17; *Philippine Star*, September 18). Police and Air Force intelligence agents have also recently captured long-wanted militants Bidung Ismael (a.k.a. Ben Ismael) and Jul Ahmad Ahaadi (a.k.a. Jul Puti) (*Philippine News Agency*, October 15; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 8). Three days earlier, the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police and the Directorate for Integrated Police Operations killed Sulu provincial leader Gafur Jumdail (a.k.a. Doc Abu) and two associates (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 5).

October witnessed a pair of important training exercises conducted in the Philippines with U.S. military forces – the joint naval Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT – which included the first participation of U.S. and Philippine riverine forces) and PHIBLEX 11 (amPHibious Landing EXercises), which rehearsed amphibious assaults (*SunStar Network*, October 13; *Philippine Star*, October 13; *Manila Bulletin*, October 10).

Created in 1950 for use against communist guerrillas, the 9,500 man Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) has already been active alongside the Philippines Army and police units in fighting against Abu Sayyaf terrorists in the southern province of Basilan, though they have been operating largely as infantry units (*Manila Bulletin*, March 21; ABS-CBN [Manila], December 19, 2008). The Marines are organized into three active-service brigades, a fourth reserve brigade, and a support and services brigade.

According to Rear Admiral Ernesto Marayag, current Marine amphibious assault operations are executed by small units carrying out “surgical strikes.” Marayag stated, “This is not the same as in the *Saving Private Ryan* film. We put in one or two teams or one company during the right time, under cover of darkness, because

surprise is vital in any special operations” (ABS-CBN [Manila], December 19, 2008). Marine commander Brigadier Rustico Guerrero announced that 60 dogs of the military K-9 unit will also be deployed in hunting down ASG members (*Pilipino Star Ngayon*, September 8).

However, amphibious operations will be hampered by the absence of the surveillance and attack capabilities offered by helicopters – the Navy’s last helicopter crashed off Zamboanga nearly two months ago and the bidding for two new helicopters has been suspended due to suspected collusion between suppliers and defense officials (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 5; *Manila Standard*, October 5). The Philippine Navy (Hukbong Dagat ng Pilipinas), to which the Marines belong, is in desperate need of modernization. Its 31 Second World War-era ships are generally conceded to be incapable of patrolling and securing the Philippines’ territorial waters (*Manila Bulletin*, July 27).

#### CHADIAN INSURGENCY COLLAPSES AS SUDAN SECURES WESTERN BORDER BEFORE REFERENDUM IN SOUTH

The new friendship between Chad and Sudan has led to the complete collapse of the once powerful Chadian armed opposition, which was reliant on Sudanese bases and assistance. The collapse comes as part of a major security restructuring in the Chad-Sudan-Central African Republic region, one that will help enable Khartoum to focus on the South Sudan as the January 2011 South Sudan independence referendum draws near.

With last year’s rapprochement between Khartoum and N’Djamena came new joint border patrols that put an effective end to cross-border operations by Chadian rebel groups. Union des Forces de Résistance (UFR) spokesman Abderahman Koulamallah acknowledged that the movement’s armed presence in Sudan was “a matter of longstanding concern for Sudanese authorities,” adding that UFR forces would leave their bases in Sudan voluntarily “because of the friendly ties that bind us” (*Afrol News*, October 4). Nevertheless, Khartoum encouraged their departure by expelling their leaders to Doha and restricting access to local markets. In these conditions, Koulamallah announced the willingness of the UFR to hold immediate and unconditional talks with the Déby regime, saying, “It is time that the leaders of the armed opposition and those in government meet as soon as possible. This is a new step since we are calling for a dialogue without

condition. We believe that the reconciliation with Sudan was one thing and the reconciliation between Chadians is another. We are awaiting the Chadian government's response" (Radio France Internationale, October 20).

General Mahamat Nouri, leader of the Alliance nationale pour le changement démocratique (ANCD) and the Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement (UFDD) coalition, opposed the disarmament of his forces, but could do little about it, after being expelled to Doha, other than offer the hope that his fighters would be granted refugee status rather than returned to Chad (L'Observateur [N'Djamena], September 30; PANA Online, September 7). There were fears in the ANCD that President Déby had demanded the extradition of some 30 ANCD leaders, though authorities in N'Djamena later denied this (Radio France Internationale, September 27). Timane Erdimi's UFR agreed to disarm and return to Chad in mid-October, though some have vowed to establish new bases in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Afrol News, October 11; for Erdimi and the UFR see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, July 30).

There are reports that Chadian rebel Adam Yacoub, a former military commander in the UFR, has crossed into the CAR with fighters under his command (*Sudan Tribune*, September 27). Many UFR fighters had planned to move to the CAR, but the border was better patrolled than expected and hoped-for assistance from the Sudanese government in making the move failed to materialize (Afrol News, October 4).

With their leaders gone, discipline began breaking down in the remaining formations of opposition fighters. Near the North Darfur town of Kutum, Chadian fighters were accused of raping local women, terrorizing farmers, preventing the harvest from being brought in and threatening people with their weapons (Radio Dabanga, October 1). In the Wadi Saleh district of West Darfur, Chadian rebels entered the town of Garsila with the intention of liberating two of their leaders who had been arrested after refusing to order the fighters to disarm (Radio Dabanga, October 21). Many of the rebels have chosen to return to N'Djamena and take advantage of an amnesty being offered by President Idriss Déby. Most UFR fighters assembled in the North Darfur capital of al-Fashir to be returned in five batches with the cooperation of officials from the Chadian government and military (*Sudan Tribune*, October 12).

The UN's Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine et au Tchad (MINURCAT), which has provided security along Chad's borders with Darfur and the CAR since 2007, ended military operations on October 15 in preparation for a full withdrawal by the end of the year at the request of the Chadian government (UN News Service, October 20). As the UN forces prepare to depart, regional solutions to the continued insecurity caused by groups like the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are being developed. A mid-October meeting in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), resulted in a commitment from Uganda, Sudan, the CAR and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to create a joint operations center responsible for enabling the effective exchange of intelligence (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], October 19).

Sudan is also forming a joint border patrol with the CAR to monitor the movements of Chadian and Sudanese rebels moving to the region. According to Colonel Fatah al-Rahim Abdalla Sulayman, the commander of Sudanese forces operating in the area, a military protocol has already been signed between Bangui and Khartoum with some elements of the new border force already active (SUNA, September 26; *Sudan Tribune*, September 27).

The establishment of the joint border patrol with Chad gave Khartoum a chance to find a useful role for Minni Minawi's faction of the rebel Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), which abandoned the rebellion in Darfur in 2006 to join with the Khartoum government. Since then, Minawi's group has suffered from extensive desertions as it was put to work fighting former comrades and fellow tribesmen in Darfur. The joint border patrol had a recent success with the liberation of a kidnapped Chinese engineer who had been seized in northern Darfur by Chadian gunmen from Ennedi, close to the Sudan border (AFP, September 17; Radio France Internationale, September 15).

With the resolution of Chad's long-standing dispute with Sudan and the dispersal of the armed opposition, President Déby has been displaying a newfound confidence that extends to risking the departure of French military forces in N'Djamena (Opération Epervier) by demanding rent for facilities used by the French. The French forces (which include three Mirage 2000 warplanes) have ensured the survival of the Déby government by providing intelligence and logistical support in the regime's struggle with rebel forces. French military medical teams also provide free surgical

and dental operations to Chadian citizens, but the entire force has the option of moving to Gabon if Déby's demands prove excessive (*Jeune Afrique*, September 3). Legislative elections are scheduled to be held in Chad on February 5, 2011 with a presidential poll set to begin on April 3.

## Al-Qaeda Exploits Kashmir Conflict to Expand Operations to India

By Seth Nye

It appears increasingly clear that al-Qaeda is intent on striking in India. In fact, the organization provided assistance in the 2008 Mumbai attacks and may already have been connected to bomb strikes this year. India has remained largely untouched by al-Qaeda directed violence, but the nation is discussed in the group's propaganda, along with the Kashmir conflict. Until recently al-Qaeda seemed to possess little ability to strike in India itself. That may be changing. With the rise of Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri, an al-Qaeda commander and strategist with years of experience gained fighting in Kashmir and conducting operations in India, the organization has likely augmented its capability to strike within India.

A number of conditions exist which al-Qaeda may attempt to exploit. Significant tensions continue to exist between India and Pakistan over the 2008 Mumbai attacks, particularly with recent revelations of involvement by Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operatives and military personnel. The resurgent separatist movement in the form of mass demonstrations in Kashmir is bringing increased attention to that conflict. Continued Pakistani military operations in Pakistan's tribal areas along with U.S. drone attacks are

placing significant pressure on al-Qaeda, which may seek to alleviate this by inflaming tensions between Pakistan and India. The 2008 Mumbai operation carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) already demonstrated the effect such an attack could have in forcing Pakistan to boost its military forces on the border with India. India also offers an easier route to strike at Western-connected or Jewish/Israeli targets than further abroad in the United States or Europe.

Of the major jihad-connected conflicts taking place worldwide, Kashmir (and by extension India) have remained areas in which al-Qaeda has failed to establish any significant presence and influence. Involvement by Indian Muslims in al-Qaeda has always been extremely limited. Other Pakistan-based groups, such as the LeT, have been much more effective in establishing Indian networks and recruiting among Indian Muslims. In Bin Laden's 1996 "fatwa" declaring war on the United States, Kashmir was cited as a location where Muslims were being "massacred" and an example of the West's war on Islam (al-Quds al-Arabi, August 23, 2006). As early as 1996, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was said to have visited India and admitted to planning an attack against the Israeli Embassy there (*The Hindu*, December 21, 2009). The Kashmir conflict and India have been mentioned in a number of the group's statements since the 1990s, but with little indication there was any follow-up to the threats. However, al-Qaeda did develop extensive ties with many Pakistan-based groups which operate in India, such as LeT and Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM).

An initial series of possible Indian-based al-Qaeda plots in 2001 and 2002 appear to have been disrupted or fizzled out. In 2001 the first serious evidence of an al-Qaeda directed plot in India surfaced with the arrest of Sudanese national Abd al-Raouf Hawash for planning a car bomb attack against the U.S. Embassy in Delhi (*Outlook India*, June 22, 2001). A possible 2002 joint HuM-al-Qaeda plot to kill Western tourists in India may also have been disrupted. [1] The year 2006 brought a number of reports about al-Qaeda's involvement in India, including possible airline hijackings and plots against the Taj Mahal (*Asia Times*, August 22, 2006; see also *Terrorism Focus*, November 21, 2006). In 2006-2007 there were two separate occasions in which individuals claimed to be part of a newly established al-Qaeda faction in India, but nothing was heard from them afterwards (*The Asian Age* [Mumbai], June 8, 2007; *Economic Times* [New Delhi], June 9, 2007).

Recent years have brought a renewed focus from al-Qaeda on India with Ilyas Kashmiri likely at the forefront of efforts to strike there. Prior to his involvement with al-Qaeda, Kashmiri led Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami's (HuJI) and Brigade 313 operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and India. In June, a posthumous audio message issued by al-Qaeda's former senior commander Mustafa Abu al-Yazid stated that Kashmiri leads one of the brigades of "Qaedat al-Jihad in Kashmir" (As-Sahab Media Foundation, June 15). According to David Headley, the American jihadist arrested in connection with the Mumbai attacks, this group will work under Kashmiri's Brigade 313 to "carry out attacks in India and other non-Islamic countries" (Outlook India, June 15). Along with identifying Kashmiri's role, al-Yazid further claimed that al-Qaeda's Kashmir faction carried out the June bombing of the German bakery in Pune, India, which killed 17 people (including two foreigners) (As-Sahab Media Foundation, June 15). Though there is no evidence the bombing was actually the work of al-Qaeda, the bakery was one of the sites investigated by David Headley (Outlook India, October 11). Kashmiri's Brigade 313 also issued threats against international sports events in India, including the Commonwealth Games (Asia Times Online, February 10). These threats may have been followed up on in April when bomb blasts occurred outside a cricket stadium in Bangalore (NDTV, April 17; Hindustan Times, April 18).

Along with the continuing information emerging regarding Headley's role on behalf of Kashmiri and the LeT in India, the recent statements by al-Yazid and Kashmiri appear to point toward a much more serious al-Qaeda threat to India. Headley's interviews have disclosed a range of possible targets in India and shed further light on the militants' intentions in India. Oil installations, a software engineer's conference, the National Defence College, the Prime Minister's residence and Jewish centers were among the various locations where Headley conducted his surveillance (Outlook India, October 11). Following the Mumbai attacks, Kashmiri wanted Headley to carry out surveillance on Israeli locations in India. Kashmiri was said to be planning possible attacks on these sites in response to Israel's invasion of Gaza in 2009 (Indian Express, April 6). Some of the assailants and handlers in the Mumbai attacks were overheard in communication intercepts referencing Kashmiri's Brigade 313, which may point to an al-Qaeda role in that operation (NDTV, August 7).

Al-Qaeda's senior ranks have always lacked a veteran commander of the Kashmir jihad – a void now filled by Ilyas Kashmiri. Indian intelligence agencies are reported to believe that Kashmiri now heads up al-Qaeda's operations in the country (Rediff.com, September 27). The jihadist insurgency in Kashmir has lessened in intensity while a terrorist campaign against India appears to have become the priority. Other Pakistan-based jihadist groups have already been successful in establishing networks in India, allowing them to conduct attacks on a fairly regular basis.

Al-Qaeda will likely seek to create fissures between India and Pakistan and possibly provoke communal tensions in India. LeT's attack on Mumbai in 2008 and the joint LeT/Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001 demonstrated the immense capability of jihadist groups to impact relations between these countries. Occasional collaboration by Kashmiri and al-Qaeda with the LeT (or dissident LeT factions) and HuJI would provide a significant avenue for al-Qaeda to attack in India. Aside from striking in India itself, al-Qaeda could hit Indian-connected targets regionally, as with major attacks in 2008 and 2009 against the Indian Embassy in Kabul. Indian jihadist networks, such as the Indian Mujahideen (IM), may also present an avenue for al-Qaeda into India. According to Indian authorities, IM is believed to have carried out the Pune attack. Arrested operatives said they were shown surveillance videos made by Headley (Zeenews, February 16). Discussing the threat posed by al-Qaeda, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has stated, "Al-Qaeda, along with the LeT, is focusing on not only Pakistan but also on India" (Indian Express, January 20). Given the increased difficulty al-Qaeda has faced in attacking the United States and Europe, India offers an attractive alternative in which al-Qaeda would have much less difficulty in gaining access for its operatives to many American, Jewish/Israeli and European-connected sites.

*Seth Nye is an Instructor with the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point's Practitioner Education Program and an Adjunct Professor at New York University (NYU) where he teaches a graduate course on terrorism and insurgencies.*

Note:

1. Praveen Swami, "Al Qaeda in India," India Frontline 19(1), January 5-18, 2002; "Was an al-Qaeda man held in Kashmir after 9/11?" DNA India, October 12, 2010.

## Charting the Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

By Roman Muzalevsky

The death of Tahir Yuldash, the late leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), in an August 2009 U.S. Predator airstrike in Pakistan raised questions surrounding his succession and the continued viability of the IMU as a terrorist organization. Yet a year after the killing, and following many more years of targeted attacks by Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the IMU not only has a new leader, Abu Uthman Adil, but is also supposedly becoming more active in Tajikistan and the northern areas of Afghanistan (for Adil, see *Furqon.com*, August 17). Assessing the capabilities and future of the IMU is thus highly pertinent in light of intensified drone attacks against the group's forces, the planned U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan and ongoing talks with the Taliban.

The IMU originally had a strong presence in the impoverished Fergana valley of Central Asia, where it had unsuccessfully attempted to establish a caliphate by replacing the secular regimes of the post-Soviet Central Asian countries. In practice, most of its efforts centered on Uzbekistan. Faced with resistance after some initial success, the group was forced to retreat to Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime provided it with a sanctuary in the late 1990's. As a result of the military response by the United States and its NATO allies following the 9/11 attacks, the IMU suffered heavy losses, with most of its members following the Taliban to the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier to regroup and raise funds. Over the years, the IMU has worked closely with al-Qaeda and the Taliban, training jihadists in Pakistan and Afghanistan and capitalizing on the regional drug trade.

According to General Abdullo Nazarov of the Tajikistan State Committee for National Security, the IMU consisted of three factions in 2009 (*Deutsche Welle*, April 25, 2009). This may well indicate flexibility and adaptability rather than disunity in the organization. The IMU is known to have produced an offshoot called the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), which operates in Europe and espouses a much more global jihadist agenda (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 8, 2007; April 9, 2010). It also has its own allies, including al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Operational and financial constraints have apparently

led the IMU to seek the support of other jihadist organizations in advancing global jihad. The IMU, for instance, trained militants who recently planned al-Qaeda-coordinated attacks against European cities (*Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, October 15).

Currently, the IMU's strength is unknown, but recently forces have been targeted by intensified drone attacks in both Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, which may be forcing them to flee and step up their activities in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan (*tjknews.com*, October 4). The group may also be seeking to undermine the Northern Distribution Network that runs NATO supplies across Central Asia to Coalition forces in Afghanistan.

In September 2010, the IMU issued a statement claiming that inmates who escaped from a prison in Tajikistan in August 2010 were passed to a safe place. According to Muhammad Omar, the late governor of Afghanistan's Kunduz province, most of the escapees took cover in the Taliban-controlled areas of northern Afghanistan (*Newsweek*, October 3). On September 3, a suicide bomber set off an explosion at a regional police unit in Khudzhand. Officials initially blamed the IMU for the attack, which was later claimed by a previously unknown group calling itself *Jamaat Ansarullah*. A regional prosecutor claimed on October 14 that the new movement was part of the IMU, but a week later Interior Minister Abdurahim Kakhorov disregarded the claim, saying a full investigation into the group was required (*Kavkaz-Tsent*, September 8; *Rian.ru*, October 14; *IWPR*, October 21).

The IMU also claimed responsibility for the September 10 ambush of a military convoy in the Kamarob gorge that killed 28 soldiers, though the government accused Tajik militant Abdullo Rakhimov (a.k.a. Mullo Abdullo) of carrying out the attack (*ferghana.ru*, September 24; *centrasia.ru*, October 14; *tjknews.com*, October 4; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, October 4). The attacks were allegedly in response to Tajikistan's support of Coalition forces, restrictions on Muslim practices and arrests of a number of Muslim activists.

Critics of the Tajik regime believe that the authorities inflate the IMU threat in order to secure Western support and assistance (*www.ferghana.ru*, October 4). However, if claims about recent IMU attacks in Tajikistan are true, northern Afghanistan and Central Asia may encounter a more potent IMU threat as Coalition forces scale down their military presence in Afghanistan. For now, the

available data suggests that the IMU has survived the death of its longtime leader, even if IMU forces may be running from the intensified attacks of Coalition forces. Compromises with the Taliban could allow the IMU to regroup and intensify its operations in Central Asia.

How the military campaign ends in Afghanistan will thus affect the IMU's future. Talks with the Taliban will not only determine the post-war position of the Taliban but also that of the Taliban's ally - the IMU. The role of the Pakistani military will also be critical for the IMU's future operations. Currently, Pakistani tribal leaders host IMU fighters, while the Pakistani military is unwilling or unable to clamp down effectively on the Taliban and its affiliates in the country's tribal areas. Pakistan fears that doing so would deprive it of an opportunity to use the Taliban as an asset in a confrontation with India.

The extent to which Central Asian states, their partners and regional security bodies are capable of thwarting potential IMU infiltrations will determine the IMU's future trajectory. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are particularly weak in this regard. The two countries already experienced IMU incursions in 1998. Both states are also experiencing high levels of political instability, with Tajikistan enduring frequent terrorist attacks and Kyrgyzstan becoming vulnerable to external threats in the aftermath of the April 7 government overthrow and clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Fergana valley. The support of Russia, the United States and China, as well as the Collective Treaty Security Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), will therefore be crucial in bolstering regional defenses against a reinvigorated IMU threat. Cultivation of the region's traditionally tolerant Islam and advancement of socio-economic and political conditions will further contain the influence and operations of radical and terrorist movements such as the IMU.

*Roman Muzalevsky is an international affairs and security analyst based in Washington D.C.*

## Mali Pays the Price of al-Qaeda's Asymmetrical Threat

*By Andrew McGregor*

Over half the world's kidnappings for ransom occur in Latin America, however, among these nations only Mexico and Colombia merit official U.S. travel advisories that mention the danger of kidnapping. Despite this, Mexico and Colombia continue to enjoy thriving tourist industries. Yet the African state of Mali, with only a handful of such kidnappings each year, has been afflicted with similar travel advisories, not only from the United States, but from other Western nations as well that have devastated a nascent tourism industry with enormous potential. The difference? Al-Qaeda.

With an economy based on agriculture and gold production, Mali is one of the poorest nations in the world. The development of a tourism industry based on the growing popularity of Saharan tourism (particularly in European markets) promised a new economic sector, a source of foreign currency and a potential solution to the unrest in Mali's Saharan north, which is largely based on lack of economic opportunity. To the disappointment of Mali's government, this growing economic sector has come to a halt due to the criminal activities of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), whose Southern Command now focuses on drug trafficking, smuggling and high-profile kidnappings for ransom. The tourism industry of some regions of the north is now operating at only 10-15% of capacity.

On October 15, Mali's Minister of Tourism and Crafts, N'Diaye Ba, complained of what might be termed "the al-Qaeda effect," or the disproportional damage caused by even the limited presence of Islamist terrorists:

While it is undeniable that some events that took place in the Sahel-Saharan strip incite prudence to avoid endangering the lives of visitors, it's equally evident that a zero risk exists nowhere in the world... The use of the terrorist menace, which gives free publicity to the terrorists, seems like a fearful weapon to compromise all the prospects of development of a place, a region, a country (AFP, October 15).

Since al-Qaeda took advantage of Mali's weak security infrastructure to establish bases in the vast desert wilderness of the country's north roughly two years ago, Mali has entered a situation in which the presence of the terrorists prevents the economic development that would convince tribal elements in the north (particularly the Arab tribes and to a lesser degree, the Tuareg) from joining or doing business with AQIM units that are rolling in cash as a result of collecting enormous ransoms (estimates vary from 70 to 150 million Euros in total) based on their fearsome reputation.

### International vs. Regional Solutions

Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré says that Mali is both "a hostage and a victim" of AQIM: "These people [i.e. AQIM] are not Malians. They came from the Maghreb with ideas that we do not know. The problem is the lack of regional cooperation. Everyone complains about their neighbor..." (*Ennahar* [Algiers], October 1). Mali's government has declared a series of measures designed to deal with the concerns about its security:

- A rational occupation of territory by the state administration.
- Increased mobility on the part of troops for prevention and intervention.
- A social mobilization to reduce the influence of sects and criminal groups (AFP, October 15).

The G8's Counter-Terrorism Action Group (CTAG) held a two day meeting in Bamako in mid-October to discuss the AQIM threat. President Amadou Toumani Touré told the meeting that security alone could not resolve the AQIM issue, saying that development of the Sahel region is necessary to undercut support for militant groups (AFP, October 14). Though the meeting was also attended by representatives of the African Union (AU), the UN, the EU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), its success was hampered by the absence of Algeria, which refused to attend due to the presence of Moroccan representatives (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], October 14; *Ennahar* [Algiers], October 13; AFP, October 13). Tensions between the two states remain high due to disagreement over the status of the Western Sahara.

Malian Colonel Yamoussa Camara said in the meeting that foreign forces should avoid operations in Mali and limit themselves to providing training and equipment

to Mali's armed forces to prevent the latter from losing popular support (AP, October 13). There were complaints in Mali in September that Mauritanian troops were operating against AQIM in the north of the country while Mali's own troops were busy with parades celebrating the 50th anniversary of independence (*Jeune Afrique*, October 9). Colonel Camara's remarks were echoed a week later by Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mourad Medelci who said foreign military operations in the area are undesirable. According to Medelci, "We are responsible for security, as the Sahel, of all who live in the area where the situation is worrisome... Algeria has never said that countries that are not part of this area were not affected [by terrorist activities]. If these countries can provide assistance, they are welcome but they can not establish themselves among us to bring the solution" (*Ennahar*, October 22).

Mali's insistence that regional cooperation is the key to solving the AQIM dilemma must overcome significant distrust between many of the countries of the Sahel/Sahara region. Besides the seemingly intractable diplomatic conflict between Algeria and Morocco, there is also suspicion of the motives and activities of Libya's Muammar Khadafy. Even inside Mali, there are misgivings regarding the sincerity of Algeria's counterterrorism efforts; according to numerous reports circulating in Mali, the last words of Colonel Lamana Ould Bou (a senior Malian security officer investigating AQIM activities in northern Mali before being gunned down in his home last June by unknown assailants) were, "The Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité [DRS] is at the heart of AQIM" (al-Jazeera, August 29; *Le Hoggar* [Bamako], October 11). The Algerian DRS is widely believed to have infiltrated operatives into the DRS, with some suspicious Sahel observers even claiming AQIM is a false-flag operation run entirely by the Algerian intelligence service.

The question of allowing foreign military operations in Mali became more complicated when Mauritanian aircraft in pursuit of suspected al-Qaeda fighters killed two civilians near Timbuktu in September (Reuters, September 20). However, with little ability to control its northern region, Mali seems determined to avoid inflaming AQIM by allowing military forces of France (the former colonial power) to be based there (*Le Monde*, September 22). Mali does, however, accept military training from French forces and has a number of American Special Forces training teams stationed within Mali (see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, June 4). Nevertheless, based on the inability of Mali's military to

even refuel Mauritanian forces during a September 18 clash with AQIM in northern Mali, Algerian authorities have described Mali's armed forces as "incompetent" (*Jeune Afrique*, October 15).

### The Arlit Hostage Crisis

The latest crisis involves the kidnapping of seven Areva and Satom employees from the uranium mine at Arlit in northern Niger on September 15. The operation was carried out by the Tarek Ibn Ziyad *katiba* (military unit) led by AQIM commander Abdelhamid Abou Zeid (a.k.a. Abid Hammadou) (*Le Monde*, October 11). Five of the hostages are French; the other two are from Togo and Madagascar. Heavy fighting between AQIM forces under Algerian commander Yahya Abou Hamam and Mauritanian forces was reported shortly after the abductions (*Ennahar*, October 15; *Jeune Afrique*, October 9).

While this latest group of hostages is being held in northern Mali, there are denials from all sides that France ever requested permission to base troops or aircraft involved in the search on Malian territory, though this may be a sop to Bamako's sensitivity on the issue. The air component of the search is thus based in Niamey in neighboring Niger, while French Special Forces are awaiting deployment in the Burkina Faso capital of Ouagadougou. The Kidal airstrip in northern Mali would be useful in the search, but would have the disadvantage of exposing French forces to direct attacks by AQIM (*Jeune Afrique*, October 9; *Air & Cosmos* [Paris], September 29; *Le Monde*, September 22). Not surprisingly, one of AQIM's reported demands for the release of the hostages is a commitment from Bamako that further French and Mauritanian military operations will not be allowed on Malian territory (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], October 12). When and if the time comes for a military intervention on Malian soil to save the hostages, it is expected that Bamako will look the other way until the operation is completed.

### Is Regional Security Cooperation a Mirage?

As a result of the Tamanrasset meeting, a joint Sahel information center (Centre de Renseignement sur le Sahel - CRS) was established by the intelligence chiefs of Algeria, Niger, Mali and Mauritania in Algiers on October 7 to collect intelligence from the security services of the four nations and make it available to the new joint military operations center in Tamanrasset (*L'Expression* [Abidjan], October 7).

In April, Algeria, Niger, Mali and Mauritania formed the Tamanrasset-based Joint Operational Military Committee, designed to provide a joint response to border security and terrorism issues (see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, July 8). Ten days after the Arlit abductions, the committee (composed of the military chiefs of the four nations) met on September 26 to establish a coordinated response against the AQIM threat. The committee is currently headed by Malian Brigadier-General Gabriel Poudiougou, but there is little enthusiasm in Bamako for the new security center in Tamanrasset, which is referred to at the highest levels of the government as "an empty shell" (*Jeune Afrique*, October 15).

The absence of Chad, Libya and Morocco from the new cooperative security infrastructure will certainly hinder efforts to eliminate AQIM from the region. The leaders of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Mali and Chad held a consultative meeting on the sidelines of the Arab-African Summit in the Libyan city of Sirté on October 10, though this did not seem to ease the admission of new members into the four-nation Sahel security grouping. Mali's efforts to broaden the group have been continually vetoed by Algiers. Earlier this month, however, Libya donated two much-needed Italian Marchetti surveillance aircraft to Mali to combat local unrest (AFP, October 4).

Despite the insecurity in its own northern region and the fact the Arlit hostages were seized in Niger before being moved to Mali, Niamey has been quick to identify Mali as the source of regional insecurity. According to Amadou Marou, president of Niger's National Consultative Council (which is managing the country in the aftermath of February's military coup), "Somalia got away from us and northern Mali is in the process of getting away from us" (AFP, October 15).

### Conclusion

International crime statistics alone will not solve Mali's dilemma, nor will claims that it is the object of a "disinformation campaign" (AFP, October 15). So long as AQIM can conduct one kidnapping or hold one hostage on Malian territory each year, it will, in the current perception that there is no kidnapper as deadly as an al-Qaeda kidnapper, prevent the necessary economic development of Mali's northern region. To enable development, Mali is left in the unenviable situation of having to establish almost complete security in a vast region with precious few security resources or having to turn to foreign military forces to aid in the elimination

of al-Qaeda elements – something these same forces have failed to achieve elsewhere. Mali, however, cannot disclaim any responsibility or involvement in the rash of AQIM kidnappings. A sophisticated network of mostly Malian negotiators and mediators has emerged, with these middlemen making enormous profits through receiving a cut of the ransoms. Some mediators are even believed to participate in the kidnappings and then act as negotiators (*Info Matin* [Bamako], October 14; *L'Indicateur du Renouveau* [Bamako], October 14; *Daily Times* [Karachi] October 12). There can be little doubt that, as with the Sahel/Saharan narcotics trade, some of these illicit funds are reaching senior levels of the political and military structure in Bamako. This does not make Mali unique among nations facing similar problems, but the lure of easy money in an impoverished nation represents a threat in itself.

One option being considered in the Malian capital to deal with the security threat is rearming and deploying Tuareg fighters (only recently disarmed after rebelling against the central government) to hunt down and eliminate al-Qaeda operatives. At present, Bamako faces a problem that is more criminal in nature than political or religious, but foreign intervention brings the immediate risk of escalation and an uncertain political future in the event of a popular backlash in Mali. Neither prospect promises a new era of stability, so Bamako will likely continue for now in its calls for a regional security cooperation that may be largely illusory due to the mutual suspicions of the Sahel/Sahara nations.

*Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world.*