



# Terrorism Monitor

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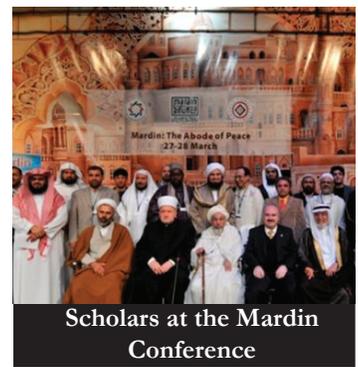
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## INDONESIA'S CONTROVERSIAL SPECIAL FORCES REGAIN U.S. SUPPORT IN COUNTERTERRORISM STRUGGLE

Elite special military forces have played a critical role on the asymmetrical battlefield of the war on terrorism. While applying sophisticated equipment, highly trained personnel, refined intelligence gathering and unconventional tactics to counterterrorism efforts, many Special Forces units have also been charged with secrecy, unaccountability and the use of illegal and extrajudicial measures in their operations. Indonesia's Kopassus (**Komando Pasukan Khusus** – Special Force Command) Special Forces unit is a prominent example of an otherwise effective Special Forces group whose counterterrorism efforts have been compromised by alleged atrocities in its campaigns against Indonesian-based separatist movements.

Unlike the Special Forces units of many Western nations that have seen only sporadic use on an operational level, Indonesia's Kopassus has been highly active since its formation in 1952, particularly in operations targeting Indonesia's many separatist movements. The unit had its origins in the conflict between the newly formed Indonesian national army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia – TNI) and counterrevolutionary forces of the self-declared Republic of the South Moluccas, who were assisted by two companies of the Korps Speciale Troepen (KST), a colonial Special Forces unit drawn largely from Calvinist Melanesians and best known at that point for their ruthless execution of thousands of men while putting down a 1946-47 rebellion in southern Sulawesi. Impressed by the KST's fighting ability, Indonesian Colonel Alexander Evert Kawilarang asked Major Rokus Bernadus Visser (a.k.a. Mohammed Idion Djanbi, a Dutch soldier and



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Special Forces commander who had refused repatriation at independence and stayed on as an Indonesian citizen and convert to Islam) to create an Indonesian Special Forces unit along the lines of the KST. This force, the Kesatuan Komando Tentara Territorium III/Siliwangi (Kesko TT) eventually became Kopassus after a series of name changes. The unit's red beret is derived from the red beret worn by Dutch Special Forces.

Despite being the elite force of the TNI, Kopassus has earned an international reputation as a major violator of human rights, with both local and international rights organizations producing ample documentation of abuses (including torture, kidnappings and targeted killings) committed in Papua, Aceh, East Timor (where they armed and organized murderous pro-regime militias) and even Jakarta during the May 1998 riots which witnessed the murder of ethnic-Chinese Indonesians and the gang-rapes of ethnic-Chinese women.

U.S. support and aid to Kopassus was banned in 1999 but restored last July, possibly because the Indonesians had threatened to turn to China for military training and assistance (*Asian Sentinel*, July 23). A 2008 proposal by the Bush administration to resume U.S. training for Kopassus forces went nowhere after State Department lawyers determined such training was prohibited by the "Leahy Law," a congressional provision that prohibits U.S. military assistance to foreign military forces that routinely violate human rights.

According to US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, the restoration of military aid to Kopassus will be a gradual process, enabled by "the ongoing professionalization" of the TNI and "recent actions taken by the Ministry of Defense to address human rights issues" (*Asian Sentinel*, July 23; Detikcom [Jakarta], July 22). Kopassus members will be vetted individually before being allowed to participate in U.S. military training. According to Kopassus commander Brigadier General Lodewijk Freidrich Paulus, Indonesia and the United States "need each other because we have the same outlook on anti-terrorism. Both parties can support each other" (Antara Online [Jakarta], March 25).

This process may be complicated by the recent leak of an Indonesian intelligence report that revealed Kopassus had drawn up a list of civilian "enemies" and churches to be targeted in Papua (*Jakarta Post*, November 11). [1] Papua, the largely Christian and Melanesian western part of the island of New Guinea, has been home to a simmering independence movement since it was

annexed by Indonesia while preparing for independence from the Netherlands in 1963. A further complication is presented by the posting of a ten-minute video of Indonesian troops burning the genitals of two Papuan detainees on YouTube in October. [2] In an unusual development that may have been prompted by the desire to avoid jeopardizing the renewal of U.S. training and aid, authorities admitted the antagonists in the video were Indonesian troops and suggested court martials might be in order (*Jakarta Globe*, October 22). Local insurgents of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM – Free Papua Organization) have targeted the massive gold and copper mining operations of American firm Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold in Papua, which are guarded by personnel of the Indonesian army. The renewal of Freeport McMoRan's concession was one of the topics discussed during President Obama's visit to Jakarta earlier this month (*Jakarta Globe*, November 4).

With its main base in West Java, the 6,500 man Kopassus force consists of five groups with different responsibilities:

- Groups 1 and 2 are Para-Commando groups responsible for special operations, unconventional warfare, reconnaissance and counter-insurgency operations.
- Group 3 (Sandhi Yudha) is dedicated to combat intelligence.
- Group 4 is a training unit.
- Group 5, known as SAT-81 Gultor, is responsible for counterterrorism operations, hostage rescue and protection of national and foreign dignitaries. Members of the roughly 200 man Group 5 are drawn from the best qualified troops in groups 1 to 3.

Kopassus training is extremely arduous and the development of special military skills is encouraged. Officers must be able to speak a foreign language and enlisted men and NCOs must speak at least two local languages of the more than 700 spoken in Indonesia.

Australia's elite Special Air Service (SAS) conducted a joint counterterrorism exercise in Bali with Kopassus in September, the latest in a series of annual joint exercises since Australia lifted its own ban on cooperation with Kopassus in 2005 (*Jakarta Post*, September 28; *The Australian*, October 18).

## Notes:

1. For the 25 page report, see <http://www.allannairn.com/2010/11/breaking-news-secret-files-show.html>.
2. [http://www.youtube.com/verify\\_age?next\\_url=http%3A//www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DFVaxE1UVCBU](http://www.youtube.com/verify_age?next_url=http%3A//www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DFVaxE1UVCBU).

## SOMALI ISLAMISTS AND CONGO-BASED REBELS THREATEN SECURITY IN BURUNDI

Shaykh Fu'ad Muhammad Qalaf "Shongole," a leading member of Somalia's al-Shabaab Islamist militia, told a gathering in Mogadishu on November 4 that Bujumbura and Kampala would be the target of al-Shabaab attacks if Burundi and Uganda did not immediately withdraw their troops from Mogadishu (*Sunday Vision* [Kampala], November 6; Garowe Online, November 4). Al-Shabaab forces have been strongly pressured in recent weeks by a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) offensive supported by Burundian and Ugandan troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

A more immediate threat comes from the Forces nationales de liberation (FNL – National Liberation Front), formerly known as the Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu (PALIPEHUTU), a Hutu rebel movement formed in 1980 in Hutu refugee camps in Tanzania. Agathon Rwasa, leader of the FNL, is a former Hutu militia leader who took control of the party in 2002. Rwasa fled Bujumbura in July after the opposition accused the government of rigging local polls in May. Rwasa later claimed in an audiotape that he had feared for his life in Burundi, but is believed to be preparing a new round of armed opposition to the Tutsi-dominated government of Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza from bases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], August 1).

FNL members who remain engaged in the political process deposed Rwasa as party leader in late July, saying the FNL had "lost a lot by pulling out of the electoral process" (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], August 1). Rwasa was replaced by Emmanuel Miburo as the party's new chairman.

Security appears to be breaking down in the Burundi capital as well as along the northwest frontier with the DRC. On the evening of October 25 one group of gunmen attacked a police post in the capital while another group attacked the guards of intelligence chief

General Adolphe Nshimirimana (AFP, October 26). Though observers saw Rwasa's hand behind the attacks, Burundian authorities lay the blame for all such attacks on "unidentified bandits." The renewed violence has raised fears that a new civil war could be in the offing - Burundi suffered a thirteen year conflict between Hutus and Tutsis that claimed 300,000 lives from 1993 to 2006. Rwasa's movement was involved in two notorious atrocities – the 2000 "Titanic Express" massacre of 21 civilians on a bus and the 2004 Gatumba massacre of 152 Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsis).

Despite the careful language used by Bujumbura, a senior government official recently told the French press that Rwasa was reorganizing and rearming in the Sud-Kivu province of the DRC and had reached terms with a Hutu rebel movement led by Rwandan "genocidaires" active in the eastern DRC, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR). There are also suggestions that Rwasa may be cooperating with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), best known for its mass atrocities in northern Uganda. Rwasa's deputy described the allegations as an attempt to "demonize" the movement (AFP, October 22).

The army has also engaged armed gangs in the Rugazi Commune of Bubanza Province (Burundi's provinces are divided into "communes" and further sub-divided into "collines"), a stronghold of the FNL (AFP, November 10; AfricaNews.com, November 11). The Rukoko Marshes and the neighboring Kibira forest near the border with the DRC have also been the sites of repeated engagements between insurgents and government forces (AFP, November 2). The marshes are only a few miles north of Bujumbura and have become largely depopulated due to attacks on the civilian population by gunmen (AFP, September 18). FNL fighters also clashed recently with troops of the DRC south of Bukavu, the capital of Sud-Kivu province (AFP, November 6; Net Press [Bujumbura], November 9; RFI, November 9).

## The Halt of S-300 Missile System in the Context of Iranian-Russian Military Relations

By Nima Adelkhah

The Kremlin suspended the planned delivery of the S-300 PMU-2 long-range surface-to-air missile system and other military technologies to Iran on September 22 in compliance with the fourth round of UN-led sanctions against Tehran's controversial nuclear program (al-Jazeera, September 22; Press TV, September 22). The move also banned Iranian officials with known links to Iran's nuclear program from visiting Russia (al-Jazeera, September 22). While Moscow's decision was largely seen as an attempt to appease the United States, especially after the start-up of the Russian-built nuclear plant in Bushehr, the annulment of the 2007 S-300 contract signaled a major complication in Iranian-Russian military relations (Press TV, September 29). The sharp turn in the two countries' relations reflects a major change in Russian policy toward Iran, but also underlines Iran's increasing push toward an asymmetrical military strategy in light of possible Israeli or U.S. attacks on its nuclear facilities.

Why shift toward asymmetrical warfare? And why is Iran keen to acquire the S-300 missile system? For the most part, Tehran's military strategy against a potential U.S.-led attack on its nuclear facilities has revolved around both asymmetrical and conventional warfare strategies. In the asymmetrical dimension the Iranian military forces, especially the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), maintain a number of ground warfare options. Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran's largest neighbors and nations where U.S. forces are stationed, provide a perfect place for unleashing unconventional attacks in case of strikes on Iranian territory. Since the mid-2000s, Iran has expanded its asymmetrical military capabilities in the Persian Gulf, with the Strait of Hormuz as the main geo-military hub to set off attacks and prevent a possible U.S. military invasion (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 29). It is, however, in the air domain that Iran would have to rely on conventional military weapons. This is precisely why the news of the cancelation of S-300, a highly-advanced air defense system capable of destroying aircraft, cruise missiles and short-to-medium range ballistic missiles, was a major disappointment to Iranian authorities, convincing Tehran of Russian unreliability in the midst of the nuclear negotiations

(Press TV, September 26). With the aim of shielding against air strikes on its air force, military headquarters, information and communication facilities and nuclear facilities, the S-300 system would have played a critical role in Iran's air defense capability (Press TV, October 10).

The rise of Russian pressure on Iran through the sale of much-needed military equipment partly reflects improved ties between Moscow and Washington, which began when the two states signed a new treaty to reduce nuclear stockpiles (New START) in March. However, the strain in Russian-Iranian military relations is not an indication of a diplomatic game by Moscow to improve relations with Washington while maintaining greater influence and an upper hand over Tehran. Rather, it is a response to Iranian misbehavior. The decision shows the growing independence of President Dmitry Medvedev from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who originally approved the sale of the S-300 to Iran while still president of Russia. Secondly, despite claims by Tehran that the ban will cost Moscow both politically and economically (specifically one billion dollars), Russia's decision to ban the sale of the missiles can largely be attributed to the trust factor (Press TV, September 29).

Since the November 2009 discovery of the Fordo nuclear facility near the city of Qom and Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's delivery to Medvedev and Putin of a list of Russian scientists suspected of secretly working to build nuclear warheads for Iran, Moscow has been alarmed by Iran's nuclear activities (al-Jazeera, October 9, 2009). The new sense of mistrust became most evident on July 13, when President Medvedev described Iran's nuclear program as nearly weaponized and therefore a major threat to regional security (*Khaleej Times*, July 13; IRNA, July 20; RIA Novosti, July 15). Tensions between Moscow and Tehran grew when Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described Medvedev as a "mouthpiece" for Iran's adversaries, a characterization that was not well received by the Kremlin (al-Jazeera, July 24).

In light of the rising tensions between Iran and Russia, Tehran is alleged to have acquired or planned to acquire S-300 technology through middlemen like Belarus, Croatia, Libya and Venezuela (Middle East News Online, October 28, 2008; al-Manar, November 2). However, Iranian defense minister General Ahmad Vahidi has denied these reports and rejected claims that Tehran was planning to purchase a Chinese version of the S-300 system (IRNA, October 20; Press TV, October 20; Fars,

October 20). Iran claims to have already produced its own anti-aircraft technology with similar features to the S-300 (TradeArabia, February 8; Press TV October 12; Etelaat, October 19). The call for a domestically produced S-300 was echoed by the Iranian Defense Ministry, who drew attention to the expansion of Iran's Air Force, namely with the production of domestically upgraded C-130 military cargo aircraft and stealth-aircraft detection systems (IRNA, September 26; Fars News, September 19).

However, since many of Tehran's claims to have advanced domestically produced military technology appear to be prone to exaggeration, it is likely that Iran will have to rely on unconventional methods of warfare to thwart military threats (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 12). As U.N. sanctions expand with Tehran's persistent failure to remain transparent to the IAEA, Iran may continue to expand its domestically-produced ballistic surface-to-surface missile system, with a focus on the Hormuz Strait as a site of future conflicts.

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## Al-Shabaab Razes Somali Forests to Finance Jihad

By Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

Somalia's al-Shabaab Islamist militant movement is in the midst of a financial crisis that hit after losing protection fees from three Somalia World

Food Program (WFP) sub-contractors and diminished contributions from the Somali diaspora. The radical group has been in a financial squeeze since the beginning of the year after the WFP suspended their work in the area controlled by al-Shabaab because of insecurity (BBC, March 10; Reuters, March 11).

The United Nations Monitoring Group report released in March indicated that the group received millions of dollars from three Somali transportation contractors involved in the diversion of WFP food aid as protection money for the food convoys. The Monitoring Group named the three Somali contractors as Abukar Omar Adani, Somali-American Abdulqadir Muhammad Nuur "Enow" and Muhammad Deylaf. The contractors, who have diverse business interests in Kenya, denied allegations of funding the Islamist movement, saying that the delivery of food in southern Somalia may require "doing business" with al-Shabaab (Somaliweyn, April 2; *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2009).

Not only the WFP operation suspension but the suicide bombings that killed more than 74 people in Kampala on July 11 have led to further financial constraints for al-Shabaab as contributions from Somalis in the diaspora have dried up.

A Somali-born Canadian who used to manage al-Shabaab fund-raising in the North American Somali community explained to Jamestown that after the attacks in Kampala, Somalis considered al-Shabaab as not serving the interests of the country or people of Somalia. According to the former fund raiser, diaspora communities supported al-Shabaab for the sake of God and country but they were all disappointed by the Kampala attack, which he says brought about threats to Somali refugees living in Uganda and neighboring countries. Most al-Shabaab financiers in North America have isolated the group, although some are still sending money. The informant, who was in Nairobi at the time of the interview, declined to state the amount of money which he sent to Somalia to fuel al-Shabaab operations in the country.

Earlier this year, al-Shabaab began looting Somali business people and ordering them to donate cash, weapons and gasoline to the cause. Women were forced to sell jewelry to raise funds for al-Shabaab. Business people in the main market of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, were told to collect approximately one million dollars, according to a businessman who was forced contribute \$1,000. Some bigger companies were

forced to buy anti-aircraft guns and fuel dealers were asked to donate gasoline. The group also announced the fundraising drive in mosques.

However, al-Shabaab's main revenue sources are now reduced to the taxing of port services and the export of illegal charcoal through Kismayo port to the Gulf States. Senior Somali presidential advisor Professor Ahmed Mumin Warfa told Jamestown that Somalis in the diaspora have now withdrawn their support for the group: "Al-Shabaab has lost the Somalis in the diaspora, especially those in North America. At the moment they don't have total support so many sources of revenue have closed their doors on the group." Warfa says that al-Shabaab, which controls three ports in the south of the country – Barawe, Marka and Kismayo – is nonetheless now recovering from its financial crisis and is receiving million of dollars for cutting and burning big trees to make charcoal for export to the Arab states. Dr. Warfa insisted that al-Shabaab is strong financially despite the loss of the WFP funds and diaspora contribution. "It is true that the organization is facing a financial squeeze but they are recovering. They earn around \$1 million per month as taxes from Kismayo port, another half million comes from exporting illegal charcoal and farming," Warfa stated. Al-Shabaab captured the lucrative port of Kismayo from another Islamist group, Hizb al-Islam, in October 2009 (Garowe Online, October 1, 2009).

Herdsmen living in the al-Shabaab-controlled Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Lower Jubba, Middle Jubba and Gedo regions said the forests are disappearing fast as charcoal burners cut down big trees. "We are receiving no rains following five years of drought. Most rural people are now fleeing from the region to seek something to feed their livestock. All forests were cleared," said herdsman Barre Xalane, who is from the rural area of the Lower Juba region.

Kismayo port staff said that approximately five ships leave every month from the port to the Gulf of Aden. Another resident in Barawe says that at least two ships carrying charcoal depart from a port in the town every month.

Al-Shabaab has as many as 6,000 well-paid and equipped soldiers to carry out operations against the UN-recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG), currently backed by African Union peacekeepers in Mogadishu.

The radical group, which is seeking to topple the Somali government, regularly receives arms from unpaid TFG soldiers in return for money to feed their families, according to the former chief-of-staff of Somalia's military, Major General Yusuf Hussein Osman, who resigned last year (AfricaNews, October 30).

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## Anwar al-Awlaki Attacks Mardin Conference's Declaration on Jihad

*By Jack Barclay*

Salafi-Jihadist ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki has penned an emotive response to a declaration by Islamic scholars who challenge the theological basis for the violent jihad of al-Qaeda and its associates. In a lengthy essay published in the second issue of the English-language Jihadist magazine *Inspire*, al-Awlaki criticizes a statement issued at a conference held in Mardin, Turkey, in March at which an international panel of Muslim clerics and scholars reinterpreted a 14th century fatwa that forms a cornerstone of the contemporary Salafi-Jihadist movement's theological justification for violent jihad. [1]

The conference was convened to re-examine the fatwa originally issued in Mardin by Shaykh Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328). This important fatwa attempted to legitimize jihad against nominally Muslim governments whom Ibn Taymiyah deemed insufficiently Islamic. [2] The fatwa has since been appropriated by Salafi-Jihadists to underwrite violence against governments in the Muslim world.

The so-called “New Mardin Declaration” argued that Ibn Taymiyah’s original fatwa was a product of specific circumstances, when the Mamluk sultanate of Syria and Egypt was under constant threat of invasion by Mongol armies who claimed conversion to Islam. However, the scholars suggested that contemporary circumstances are now so different to those in which Ibn Taymiyah issued his fatwa that its modern use by al-Qaeda as a justification for violent jihad is completely illegitimate: “Muslims are now bound by international treaties through which security and peace have been achieved for the entire humanity, and in which they enjoy safety and security, with respect to their property, integrity and homelands.”

In his essay “The New Mardin Declaration: An Attempt at Justifying a New World Order,” al-Awlaki attempts to discredit this viewpoint with a stinging attack on both the scholars behind the declaration and their motives.

#### Justifying a New World Order?

Al-Awlaki first and foremost asks his readers to question the motives of the Mardin scholars and the interests their declaration really serve. Rather than a recalibration of juristic consensus on a single issue, he claims the declaration is “a thorough revision of *usul* (Islamic foundations) based on a new world order agenda.”

In this respect he adopts a position similar to that of other jihadist ideologues by trying to characterize the panel members as scholars of *baatil* (falsehood) waging ideological warfare on the jihadist movement by using religious arguments in a bid to undercut its perceived legitimacy. Why, he argues, would such scholars preach what appears to be a doctrine of non-violence at a time when the Muslim world faces such calamities? Why would they promote pacifism in the face of overwhelming evidence of a global military and ideological “crusade” being waged against the Muslim *ummah* (community) by the United States and friendly regimes in the Muslim world?

Al-Awlaki thus attempts to delegitimize the Mardin Declaration by weaving it into a conspiracy theory framework in which the United States and its allies are attempting to stifle a global Islamic awakening by promoting alternative “pacifist” and “pro-regime” forms of Islam. The West’s supposed ideological war on Islam is a theme explored repeatedly by al-Awlaki and his English-speaking contemporaries in writings and lectures. The ideological war, he argues, is potentially

more damaging to the future of Islam and the ummah than military occupation of Muslim land, as it represents a strategic effort by the West to turn the youth away from an understanding of their true obligations to defend their religion. Apostate regimes and compliant scholars such as those behind the Mardin Declaration are, according to al-Awlaki, an attempt to put a credible face on a U.S.-led attempt to spread a watered-down “CIA Islam” and thus ideologically smother the jihadist movement. Al-Awlaki’s essay is an attempt to “expose” the reality of this campaign. According to al-Awlaki, “We are living in a time when the West has publicly stated that it will use Muslim against Muslim in the battlefield and will use scholar against scholar in the battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim ummah.”

#### So Much for Human Rights

Al-Awlaki does not make any significant attempts to engage the Mardin scholars at the juridical level. Rather, he appeals to the reader to consider the text of the Declaration in light of current events in the Muslim world. In doing so he powerfully highlights what some Muslims may regard as the disconnect between the human cost of the ongoing conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian Territories, and the Declaration’s assertion that Muslim lives, wealth and property are now largely protected under international law. Such a declaration, al-Awlaki argues, is clearly divorced from reality and therefore an irrelevance:

Are Muslims enjoying security and peace? Or they don’t really matter as long as Western societies are the ones enjoying it? Are these scholars following the news? If they think that they are enjoying peace and security, the majority of the ummah think otherwise... [The declaration] is an insolent statement that shows no respect to the sufferings of our ummah. It is a slap on the face of the Palestinian widow and the Afghan orphan. It is disrespectful towards the millions of Muslims around the globe who are suffering because of the international community which these scholars are crediting for bringing so much “security and peace.”

Al-Awlaki is particularly scornful of the Declaration’s assertion that the emergence of civil states has safeguarded the “religious, ethnic and national rights” of millions of people, Muslims included. Al-Awlaki again seeks to juxtapose this statement with examples of what he claims are transgressions of “Islamic rights”

by Western governments. “The civil states referred to here have banned the *niqab* and fiercely defended the right to defame Muhammad,” he says, adding:

They allow a very restricted form of personal worship that does not truly accommodate for the comprehensiveness of Islamic practice. The civil state has more authority over the wife and children than the Muslim head of the household. The law of Allah is not recognized by this civil state and the Muslim is forced to accept rulings of courts of law that are contrary to the law of Allah. So, on the whole, the modern civil state of the West does not guarantee Islamic rights.

Al-Awlaki also suggests to his readers that supporting the international treaties cited by the Mardin Declaration represents a fundamental sin for Muslims. To believe in legislation and systems of governance other than that enjoined by God is to commit major *shirk* (polytheism), he says, which can take a Muslim outside the fold of Islam. Therefore, he argues, these treaties are irrelevant to Muslims and should be ignored. In any case, he adds, the international organizations that formulated them have a less than impressive track record of protecting Muslim lives.

#### The Evil of “Interfaith Relations”

Al-Awlaki uses simple religious arguments and references to early Islamic history to challenge the call by the Mardin scholars for peaceful co-existence with other faiths. This position, he claims, cannot be supported with even a shred of historical evidence. He uses selective references to the Quran to underscore his argument that the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim leaders in early Islamic history in fact fought their non-Muslim enemies purely on the basis that they were non-Muslim and that it was their obligation to fight other faiths until Islam gained total supremacy.

Therefore, he says, instead of working to promote Islamic monotheism and make Allah’s word supreme, “palace scholars” such as those on the Mardin panel are allowing Islam to be subjugated by kowtowing to the demand of the United States that Islam exist peacefully alongside other faiths:

The pagans of Arabia were fought because they were pagans, the Persians were fought because they were Zoroastrians and the Romans were

fought because they were Christians. The great Muslim Sultan Mahmud Sabaktakeen [i.e. Mahmud Ghaznawi; a.k.a. Mahmud Ibn Sebuk Tegin, 997-1010] fought against the Hindus because they were Hindus and he personally led his army in a risky campaign deep into the land of India with the sole objective of destroying the most revered idol in all of India. He was fighting because of this “difference of religion” our esteemed scholars of Mardin are discounting.

#### Conclusion

Al-Awlaki’s critique of the Mardin Declaration could be seen as an example of why he is such an effective communicator. Put simply, he knows his audience – largely a minority of young English-speaking Muslims in the West - and pitches his arguments at a level that is simple, emotive, and compelling. He directly addresses the issues of concern to many young Western Muslims experiencing a growing religiosity and concern about the plight of their co-religionists abroad. By comparison, as al-Awlaki himself puts it, rival “establishment” scholars use what he calls “the language of lawyers and peace activists” to offer nothing more than calls for non-violence and interfaith dialogue, while condemning their fellow Muslims’ use of force to defend themselves and their religion. Al-Awlaki poses another simple question – if the jihad is not legitimate now, while the Muslim world is under such sustained attack, then when is it legitimate?

Al-Awlaki’s essay is an impassioned critique of the Mardin Declaration, not a theological refutation. That is not to say that al-Awlaki does not attempt to support his arguments with references to Islamic doctrine. However, these references are concise and accessible, and he never allows the clarity of his message to become lost amid overly detailed, introspective debate on the finer (though by no means unimportant) points of Islamic jurisprudence. While the publication of tracts at the more detailed juridical level is undoubtedly important in shoring up perceived theological top-cover for Jihadist violence, al-Awlaki possibly knows that much of this screed may be lost on a good proportion of his audience who may possess only modest levels of scriptural knowledge. Al-Awlaki focuses instead on highlighting those issues he knows will provoke a sense of widespread moral outrage among Muslims, such as the human cost of ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Palestinian Territories, and elsewhere.

In the bigger picture, it is interesting that al-Awlaki has bothered to pen such an extensive rebuttal of the Mardin Declaration at all. While initially deriding such pronouncements and their authors as being at best irrelevant and at worst sell-outs to the jihadist cause, jihadist scholars nevertheless seem compelled to respond with exhaustive criticism and theological refutations, which may be a reflection of a perceived strategic vulnerability. The publication in 2007 of extensive recantations by leading Egyptian jihadist ideologue Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl) is one of the most compelling examples of how such critiques have the power to tie down al-Qaeda ideologues in high-profile scholarly debate. If sustained, such critiques have the potential to damage the credibility of the jihadist narrative and the theological undercarriage that supports it. An interesting problem for Western counterterrorism agencies and officials involved in counter-radicalization programs is the extent to which they could or should find ways to amplify or selectively redeploy excerpts of these recantations to maximize their effectiveness against the jihadist adversary.

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Notes:

1. Inspire was released by AQAP's al-Malahim Media in October 2010. A full PDF copy of the magazine can be found at <http://publicintelligence.net/complete-inspire-al-qaeda-in-the-arabian-peninsula-magazine-issue-2-fall-2010/>.
2. For background on the original Fatwa and a report on the Mardin conference, see Andrew McGregor, "Controversial Gathering of Scholars Refutes al-Qaeda's Ideological Cornerstone," *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, April 9, 2010.