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IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....	1
SPLIT IN THE ISLAMIC ARMY OF IRAQ OVER POST-OCCUPATION STRATEGY By Rafid Fadhil Ali	3
GAMA'A ISLAMIYA ADDRESSES THE ROLE OF COPTS IN MODERN EGYPT AS AL- QAEDA USES THE COPTIC ISSUE TO JUSTIFY BAGHDAD CHURCH ATTACK By Hani Nasira.....	5
THE GROWING SEPARATIST THREAT IN YEMEN'S HADRAMAWT GOVERNORATE By Michael Horton.....	8



Iraqi Christians following the bombings in Baghdad

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

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TUAREG REBELS JOINING BATTLE AGAINST AL-QAEDA IN THE SAHARA?

On October 14 former Tuareg rebels under the command of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga attacked a heavily armed convoy of cocaine smugglers roughly 60 miles from the northern Mali town of Kidal. Some 12 people were killed in the clash in which the Tuareg fighters received “material support” from the Malian army, according to a local government official (Reuters, October 18; *Jeune Afrique*, October 18; *Afrique en Ligne*, October 20). It is unclear whether the Tuareg fighters were acting under their own initiative as a kind of demonstration of their potential in combating AQIM and narco-traffickers, or whether the action was officially sanctioned by the Bamako government, which has so far been reluctant to rearm the Tuareg. The traffickers were alleged to be running a shipment of cocaine from Morocco to Egypt across the sparsely populated Sahel region.

Ag Bahanga is a noted smuggler and rebel commander who is a leading proponent of transforming former Tuareg rebels into armed units tasked with expelling al-Qaeda operatives from the Sahel/Sahara region. Though his proposal was given a sympathetic ear in Algeria, the longtime rebel is little trusted in Bamako and continues to operate from self-imposed exile in Libya. Ag Bahanga’s proposal has elicited little sympathy from Mali’s press. One commentator noted that “in the recent past Bahanga has demonstrated proof of his inconsistency and his warlike inclination by swearing peace one day and indulging in atrocities the next day” (Info Matin [Bamako], October 20). Another commentator complained that Ag Bahanga’s “renewed patriotism” was “hard to understand” and rearming the Tuareg could turn Mali into “another Afghanistan” (*Nouvelle Libération* [Bamako], October 12).

Nevertheless, the Tuareg attack came only days after Ag Bahanga was reported to have met with Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré on the sidelines of the October 10 African-Arab summit meeting in the Libyan city of Sirte to discuss the reintegration of Ag Bahanga and his men into the Malian army (*Nouvelle Libération* [Bamako], October 12).

According to former rebel spokesman Ahmada Ag Bibi (now a parliamentary deputy in Bamako), “AQIM wants to dirty the image of our region. We aren’t going to accept that. [AQIM fighters] often seek shelter on our land, and we know the terrain. If we were armed we could easily take care of them... We’re just waiting for the Malian government to give us the green light to chase al-Qaeda from our desert” (AFP, October 10).

The 2006 Algiers Accord between Bamako and the Tuareg rebels provides for the establishment of Tuareg military units under officers of the Malian regular army, but like many aspects of the accord, these provisions have never been implemented. There are indications now, however, that such units may be formed soon – according to an authority in the Kidal administration, their establishment may be only weeks away (*Afrique en Ligne*, October 20; *Ennahar* [Algiers], October 10).

A small number of Tuareg are believed to be working for AQIM as drivers and guides, though there are also unconfirmed reports that a Tuareg imam from Kidal named Abdelkrim has become an amir in the AQIM organization (*Libération* [Bamako], October 31; *Jeune Afrique*, October 9). Though direct Tuareg participation in AQIM activities may be limited, there are signs, nonetheless, that the massive influx of cash into the region from AQIM-obtained ransoms has had an indirect benefit to the Tuareg and Arab tribes of the region. In the town of Kidal, expansive new villas and shiny 4 x 4’s have begun to appear in a region almost entirely devoid of development (*Libération* [Bamako], October 31).

A veteran Tuareg rebel, Iyad ag Ghali, has been designated as the government’s official mediator with AQIM forces in northern Mali (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], October 4). An AQIM *katiba* (military unit) led by Abdelhamid Abu Zeid is believed to have established bases in the rugged Timetrine Mountains of northern Mali (once a refuge for Tuareg rebels) and is currently believed to be holding French and African hostages there who were kidnapped from the French-owned uranium operations in neighboring Niger (*Le Monde*, October 18).

Many Malian politicians complain that they have been excluded from the decision-making process in regard to the security of northern Mali. Such decisions are now made exclusively by the president, himself a former military commander in the north, and a small group of senior officers, including General Habib Sissoko, General Kafougouna Kone, Brigadier Gabriel Poudiougou and Colonel Mamy Coulibaly (*Jeune Afrique*, October 9).

MAURITANIAN DEFENSE MINISTER DISCUSSES JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS WITH FRANCE

Mauritanian Defense Minister Hamadi Ould Baba Ould Hamadi recently described the new offensive posture his country is taking in regard to the threat posed by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in an interview with an Algerian daily (*El Watan* [Algiers], October 28). Noting the vast size of Mauritania and the difficulty of securing a territory that is two-thirds desert, Ould Hamadi said authorities now believe that “a defensive and static strategy is not efficient. This is why we have opted for an offensive defense against terrorism, which consists in not allowing the setting up of terrorist operational and logistic bases at our borders.”

The Defense Minister said the September 17 joint military operation with France that attacked AQIM suspects in neighboring Mali was an example of Mauritania’s new approach:

According to our information, the terrorist groups were regrouping to attack us. We effectively benefited from French logistic support that has enabled us to conduct our offensive attack. We will repeat this sort of operation whenever we can, and we will not wait to be attacked and then retaliate. When we have information about the existence of operational bases, we will do our best to destroy them.

Though the September operation was carried out to muted opposition from Algeria, the most powerful country in the region and a firm opponent of military intervention by “former colonial powers,” Ould Hamadi indicated that Mauritania would address its security concerns in its own way despite the recent creation of a number of multilateral security mechanisms in the Sahel/Sahara region. According to Ould Hamadi, “Consultation does not mean that when you feel that an attack is coming you wait for consultation with other countries. Threat imposes a daily vigilance, and we are obliged to react when we are faced with a threat.”

The Algerian position on foreign intervention was echoed by Jemil Ould Mansour, leader of the Islamist opposition Tewassoul party, when he said, “We all agree to condemn terrorism and fight it vigorously, but we do not agree on coordination with foreign countries, especially when they have a colonial past in the region” (AFP, October 28). His remarks came during a five day national forum on terrorism held in Nouackchott (October 24-28). In his opening remarks to the forum, Mauritania’s president, Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, expanded on his government’s new security policy:

We have transferred the battle circle to the strongholds of the aggressors’, away from our borders in order to, on the one hand, prevent them from launching their shameful operations in our populated regions and on the other hand, with the aim of carrying out our global development programs in an atmosphere of security and peace (Maliweb, October 27).

The forum was boycotted by most of the opposition parties, who complained of being invited only at the last minute (PANA Online [Dakar], October 25).

September’s Franco-Mauritanian operation, which resulted in the death of two Malian women, proved an embarrassment for Mali’s president Amadou Toumani Touré. Malian troops had an almost negligible role in the operation, which was carried out close to the city of Timbuktu. Malian spokesmen at first denied any knowledge of the foreign military intervention, but by late October the president had acknowledged being informed of the operations, even claiming the mission “was largely supported, if not accompanied, by the Malian Army” (Radio France Internationale, October 25; *Le Soir de Bamako*, October 27).

Nevertheless, Mauritania is trying to distance itself from being seen as a security proxy for France and the West. Ould Hamadi confirmed that the government was seeking to upgrade Mauritania’s arms and military equipment, but tried to emphasize the limited French military role. He stated, “There is no French base in Mauritania, nor will there be, not for France, nor for other countries.” In an effort to not be seen as the West’s ally in the “War on Terrorism,” President Abdelaziz has explained several times that Mauritania is “not engaged in an open war against al-Qaeda or any other person,” suggesting instead that Mauritanian military operations are directed at “armed criminal bands” (al-Jazeera, October 9). According to an AQIM statement,

however, the president is an “agent of France” and the Mauritanian army is “acting in the way of infidels and crusaders who kill innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq” (*Ennahar* [Algiers], September 21).

Split in the Islamic Army of Iraq over Post-Occupation Strategy

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

Only a few days after the U.S. army ended its combat mission in Iraq came the declaration of a split within one of the most prominent insurgent groups, al-Jaysh al-Islami fi’l-Iraq (Islamic Army in Iraq - IAI). A group of IAI field fighters, calling themselves the Renewal and Correction Movement (RCM), claimed that they had ousted the anonymous amir (leader) of the group along with IAI spokesman Ibrahim al-Shammari. Although the incumbent IAI leadership denied the move, it is believed that the split may have been a result of the recent appeal of al-Qaeda in Iraq for the other insurgent groups to join forces with them (*al-Hayat*, September 8).

Al-Shammari presented the split as an expulsion of dissenting members of the movement:

The whole issue is that the IAI has expelled some elements at different intervals for failing to adhere to the group’s regulations, policies, and Shari’a-based methodology. After exhausting all means of reforming these people, the group sacked them and released a statement on this move, since defamation is not one of its habits, particularly when it comes to its own sons. Later on, some lazy individuals and opportunists approached the dismissed people and prepared

funds, a network of suspicious relations as well as media outlets to present the IAI's move as a split. Therefore, they planned to steal the IAI's name and involve it in dubious projects. When the promoters of destructive projects failed to drag the IAI to their projects, they undertook this scandalous and desperate move (*al-Arab* [Doha], September 16).

The IAI is one of the largest and most active Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups, although its activity has decreased over the last few years. This relative inactivity and the perception that too many IAI leaders were fighting from hotels in the Gulf States partly inspired the RCM break. IAI was one of the first Iraqi Sunni groups to fall out with al-Qaeda and its umbrella organization, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). IAI fighters from around the country are believed to have left the movement to join the anti-al-Qaeda Sahwa [Awakening] movement. Two years after the handover of responsibility for the Sahwa from the U.S. Army to the Iraqi Shia-led government only a few of these Sunni fighters have been integrated into the Iraqi security forces. Most of the others are worried about their future after the American withdrawal (Elaph.com, August 19).

The IAI rejected al-Qaeda's practices and did not welcome the 2006 declaration of the Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiya (Islamic State of Iraq). However, the IAI leadership's position has always been to condemn the Sahwa groups and to launch attacks against them. Nonetheless, the hard times that the Sahwa fighters are facing are affecting the morale and choices of those still in the IAI ranks. Both the Sahwa and the IAI have fought al-Qaeda and both belong to the Sunni community.

As part of its post-withdrawal strategy, al-Qaeda's ISI has applied a carrot and stick approach with the other Sunni groups, calling for strikes on the Sahwa at the same time as it calls for the Sahwa fighters to rejoin the insurgency under the ISI umbrella. The new fracture within the IAI was reported to be the work of a new generation of young Iraqi al-Qaeda fighters. The first statement of the RCM condemned the IAI leadership practices which led to the isolation of the group from other jihadi groups in Iraq. It called for opening a new page in relations with the jihadi groups and accused the leadership of turning the IAI from an Islamic group to a tribal one. Video of attacks by the new group started to appear on pro-al-Qaeda web-sites only days after the split (*al-Hayat*, September 10). In its efforts to play down the new developments, the IAI leadership came

up with an initiative called the "reconciliation and forgiveness campaign," which called for reconciliation even with those who fought the IAI in the past (iaisite.org, September 9).

The IAI claims that it is the largest resistance group in Iraq. It is hard to evaluate this statement, but there is no doubt that the IAI is of considerable size and well-organized. It was one of the first groups to release videos of its attacks and its web-site is among the best managed. The IAI might deny that it has Ba'athist roots or ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, but it has always included men from various backgrounds. The Islamic nature and identity of the group is mixed with pan-Arab sentiments and Iraqi nationalism.

The movement's military activities, its position with regard to the political process and its relations (or lack thereof) with al-Qaeda have consistently caused differences within the IAI. This most recent split is not the first; in 2007 a group called Jaysh al-Forqan left the IAI, calling for the abandonment of the political process and more involvement in military attacks on the Coalition (al-Jazeera, August 22, 2007).

The IAI has so far survived these fractures and splits. The newly-formed RCM is unlikely to dominate the main group and may ultimately become a small group within the ISI. The emergence of the new group, however, is an indicator of new trends within the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. The process of the American withdrawal has put the insurgent groups in a new environment. The days when different Sunni groups united their efforts against the Coalition forces as the sole enemy are over. The IAI and the other Iraqi Sunni Islamist factions now seem unsure about their strategies. The former ruling Ba'ath Party and al-Qaeda's ISI look more confident in this regard. The Ba'athists have stepped up their propaganda lately, stressing their goal of returning to power, while the ISI is the only major insurgent organization to adopt a new strategy for the next phase, setting it months before the American scale-down (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 10).

For a group as large as the IAI, suffering a decline in their activity and influence makes it hard to avoid dissidence and internal conflicts. The question of which ideology and strategy the organization should adopt is more urgent now than anytime before. This question is challenging not only the IAI but most of the other Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups as well. Many of these Sunni groups were once amongst the most powerful and

influential in the field, but lost their momentum with the emergence of the Sahwa and seem unable to restore their influence even as the Sahwa movement has declined.

Rafid Fadhil Ali is a freelance journalist based in Iraq who specializes in Iraqi insurgent groups.

Gama'a Islamiya Addresses the Role of Copts in Modern Egypt as al-Qaeda Uses the Coptic Issue to Justify Baghdad Church Attack

By Hani Nasira

The al-Qaeda affiliated Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) has released a statement claiming the October 31 hostage-taking at Baghdad's St. Joseph Chaldean Catholic Church was carried out in order to free two Egyptian Coptic women they allege are being held prisoner in Coptic monasteries after converting to Islam. The ISI operation resulted in the death of 46 worshippers and clerics in a botched raid by Iraqi Special Forces supported by American advisors (*Asharq al-Awsat*, November 3). ISI's statement indicated the movement was attempting to pressure the Egyptian Coptic Church (which has no connection to Rome) by attacking a Chaldean Catholic congregation: "Let these

idolaters [i.e. Iraqi Christians], and at their forefront, the hallucinating tyrant of the Vatican, know that the killing sword will not be lifted from the necks of their followers until they declare their innocence from what the dog of the Egyptian Church is doing." The ISI attack was quickly denounced by Cairo's al-Azhar seminary (the most influential Sunni institution in the Islamic world) and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (AFP, October 27).

The Coptic issue in Egypt has been raging since the beginning of the year. On the Coptic Orthodox Christmas Eve (January 6), six Copts and one Muslim were killed in a drive-by shooting outside a church in the Upper Egyptian town of Nag' Hammadi. Three local Muslim men were arrested in what Copts came to refer to as the "Nag' Hammadi massacre." The attack was allegedly in response to the rape of a 12-year-old Muslim girl by a Coptic youth two months earlier. Government efforts to portray the killings as the isolated work of criminals rather than a sectarian attack led to protests in Upper Egypt and Cairo by Copts dissatisfied with the response of their clerics.

The issue of conversion continues to inflame relations between Copts and Muslims, with both groups accusing the other of abducting young women from their respective communities before forcing their conversion. Most harmful to Coptic-Muslim relations, however, was the alleged conversion of Camilia Shihata, a priest's wife who disappeared on July 19 and is one of the two "detained women" cited by the ISI (the second, Wafa Constantine, left her husband, also a priest, in 2003 and lives in a Coptic institution, since telling state prosecutors she never converted to Islam). Coptic protests began after rumors circulated that Camilia had been abducted and forcibly converted to Islam. After several days she was located by state security forces and returned to the custody of her husband and male relatives. However, internet claims by influential Salafist Shaykh Abu Yehya reported that Camilia had converted to Islam and sought the shaykh's protection before being returned to her family by security officials. Other Salafi shaykhs insisted she had been hidden in a monastery where she had been given mind-altering drugs by Coptic priests to force her to renounce Islam. Lawsuits were filed for her release in the midst of accusations Camilia was being tortured. Massive protests by Muslims and women's organizations demanding her release were not stilled by declarations from state security and al-Azhar officials that she had never converted to Islam. A September 8 video shot by Muslim journalists in which

Camilia denied the stories of her detention and physical intimidation in a Coptic monastery also had little effect. [1] Camilia's "supporters" claimed the woman in the video was a double.

Bringing a resolution to the situation was complicated by unassociated comments on the Koran by Anba Bishoy, deputy to Coptic Pope Shenuda III. In a draft lecture intended for discussion by a gathering of Coptic clerics, Bishoy suggested a Koranic passage declaring Christians to be "infidels" was added after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, thus challenging the Muslim view that the Koran was received from the Angel Gabriel and recorded intact by the Prophet. Bishoy's remarks were furiously rejected by Muslim scholars and al-Azhar's Grand Shaykh demanded a formal apology, which was later given by Pope Shenuda on state television (Ikhwan Web, September 28).

The Bishop, who is emerging as somewhat of a loose cannon in the Coptic hierarchy, further widened the divide between Copts and Muslims by telling an Egyptian daily that "the Copts are the original inhabitants of Egypt. We are interacting lovingly with guests who descended upon us [i.e. the Arab Muslims who conquered Egypt in the Seventh Century]." The Copts style themselves as the descendants of the original Egyptians of the ancient world, but the characterization of Egypt's Muslim majority (most of whom are descended in part from Coptic Egyptians who converted to Islam centuries ago) as "guests" was wildly inflammatory and led to demonstrators outside mosques chanting "We are not guests!" (*al-Masry al-Youm*, September 15).

At this point al-Jazeera TV aired an interview with influential Egyptian Islamist Dr. Salim al-Awa, who claimed Copts were storing Israeli-made arms in monasteries for use against Muslims in the creation of a Coptic Christian state (al-Jazeera TV, September 15). Pope Shenuda denounced al-Awa's accusation that Copts were stockpiling Israeli-made arms and rejected al-Awa's assertion that the Church acts as "a state within a state." Pope Shenuda stated, "This is absolute nonsense. Just because the state responds to the demands of Christians, this doesn't mean the church is more powerful than the state" (*al-Masry al-Youm*, September 20).

For the first time this year, Muslim-Christian relations reached a dangerously unprecedented level of deterioration, triggering interference by the government, religious leaders and civil society figures. Statements were

issued by all parties emphasizing the need to re-establish the citizenship principle among Egyptians. Despite the GI statement condemning the Nag' Hammadi violence, the group still practices symbolic violence and considers Copts to be a tolerated religious minority, rather than full citizens of Egypt. [2]

Articles highly critical of the Coptic Church are posted on the GI website. A GI op-ed dealing with Bishop Bishoy's speculation on the Koran described the Christian religious leader's words as "fires seeking the destruction of Egypt." The GI website also adopted a call to prosecute Bishoy. The GI believes the Church is targeting the state's sovereignty in the pursuit of a Christian religious state.

It is worth mentioning here that Christians were a primary target of the GI's violence before the release of the GI's 2003 "Revisions," which saw the movement renounce political violence. Prior to the Revisions, targeting Copts' interests and souls was part of the GI's struggle against the regime. In one incident, the GI killed 17 Copts to avenge the killing of one Muslim in the Deirut massacre of June 19, 1992 (Deirut is a town in Middle Egypt's Asyut governorate). The sectarian violence moved to al-Minya governorate in mid -1994. [3]

After assassinating Egypt's former People's Assembly speaker, Rifaat al-Mahjoub, in 1990 in retaliation for the killing of GI spokesman Ala Muhyi al-Din, the GI's plan was comprised of three main strategies:

- Attack state security officers in charge of religious activities.
- Attack tourism establishments to weaken the regime's economy.
- Play the Coptic card in a bid to embarrass the regime internationally.

After the release of the Revisions, the GI's stand on the Copts took a new turn. The group even stopped asking for them to be classed as a religious minority within an Islamic state, leaving their status to the regime's legislators. A GI figure, Asim Abdul Majid, wrote a book entitled *Questions on Non-Muslims*, in which he sought new relations with Copts, asserting the importance of the citizenship concept (Copts still have certain restrictions on their Egyptian citizenship based on the 7th century *Dhimmi* codes). The GI also links the

Coptic issue to the stability and prosperity of the state. An article headlined “A call for reconciliation with the society” by the group’s chief theorist, Dr. Najih Ibrahim, reads, “The first step Islamic movements have to take is not to try to undermine the state’s authority and vice versa, as undermining both parties is the beginning of defeat and their strength is the way to victory.” [4]

Ibrahim believes protests by a vocal faction of Copts abroad to be attempts to apply international pressure on the Egyptian regime and are “methods to achieve undeserved and illegal gains.” [5] The GI asserts that Copts abroad and Pope Shenuda are the main causes of sectarian dissent in Egypt. However, it is the unwillingness of the Pope and his bishops to adopt a critical stance toward the government response to the Nag’ Hammadi incident that has led to the new phenomenon of widespread but peaceful protests by Copts in Cairo and Upper Egypt acting outside of the framework of the church as their representative.

One of the GI leaders and Shura Council members, Osama Abdul Rahman, describes the group’s attitude toward the Copts by saying, “We are committed to protecting them and being fair to them. In return, they are committed neither to question the Islamic faith nor to betray the country they live in.” [6]

In part, the GI’s stance on the Copts concludes that there is a tendency on the part of Copts to exaggerate disputes for the benefits of two elements: hardcore secularists and certain Copts abroad. This view is further fed by the steadfast position adopted by the Egyptian Church under Pope Shenuda since March 1971, which politicized the Church’s role by working in parallel with the regime, according to the GI’s Hussein Bastway. [7]

Though the GI’s approach to the Coptic issue has differed from that of certain prominent Salafist leaders, it is still conservative. The group is always ready for confrontation with Copts whenever sectarian tensions erupt, keeping an eye open for any Coptic political ventures. However, the GI never offers solutions to pressing issues such as the construction of churches or religious conversion. [8] The GI rejects the call from secular forces and civil society activists in Egypt for the institution of a state-of-law, the citizenship principle and the rejection of discrimination. The group insists on a concept of minority treatment for the Copts, not the concept of full citizenship. The Islamist movement also doubts the intentions and tendencies of the current Coptic Pope, which they see as an expression

of Christian fundamentalist politics in Egypt. It will be worth watching to see whether the attack on Baghdad’s St. Joseph church dampens anti-Coptic outrage in Egypt or further inflames it.

Hani Nasira is an Egyptian writer who specializes in ideological movements.

Notes:

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5csSijSaA8&feature=related>.
2. <http://egyig.com/Public/articles/announce/6/62964459.shtml>.
3. *The State of Religion in Egypt* 4, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1996, p.190.
4. An interview with Najih Ibrahim on the Islam Today website: http://islamtoday.net/albasheer/show_articles_content.cfm?id=72&catid=77&artid=8789.
5. Ibid.
6. Interview with Shaykh Osama Abdul Rahman on the following link: http://www.alriyadh.com/Contents/16-08-2003/Mainpage/POLITICS_14785.php.
7. Hussein Bastway “A Tour of the Life of Pope Shenuda, the Bishop of Firebrand Education,” http://egyig.com/Public/articles/books_studies/11/01607049.shtml.
8. Additions to churches or the construction of new churches continue to be regulated by the Ottoman-era *khatt al-humayun* (“imperial rescript”) regulations, while mosque construction is unhindered by any government restrictions. Reform of the existing regulations to create a single statute (“the common law on places of worship”) covering all religious facilities has been delayed for years in parliament.

The Growing Separatist Threat in Yemen's Hadramawt Governorate

By Michael Horton

Hadramawt, located in eastern Yemen, is the country's largest governorate. While the Hadramawt is a vast province that encompasses roughly 38,000 square miles, it is thinly populated with less than a million inhabitants. Continued stability in the governorate is critical because of the vital oil fields and oil infrastructure located there. Over the last two years, the usually quiet region has seen an increase in militant activity. In January 2008, a convoy of Belgian tourists was fired upon, resulting in the deaths of two Belgians and a Yemeni, and in March 2009, four Korean tourists and their Yemeni guide were killed by a suicide bomber, an attack that was later claimed by al-Qaeda (al-Jazeera, January 19, 2009; *Yemen Times*, March 15, 2009). In addition to these two widely reported attacks on foreigners, attacks on military checkpoints, oil production infrastructure and state security personnel have all increased markedly over the last two years.

In the last month, three senior officers with Yemen's Political Security Organization (PSO) have been assassinated in the Hadramawt towns of Say'un, Foha, and Mukalla (AFP, October 14; *al-Thawra*, October 9; *Yemen Observer*, October 25). The government has blamed the attacks on al-Qaeda, but the organization has yet to claim credit for them. The assassins, like those operating in the restive governorates of Abyan and Shabwa, worked in two-man teams mounted on motorcycles, whose presence is ubiquitous in Yemen. Since late 2009, assassins and suicide bombers mounted on motorcycles have struck across the south. In the governorate of Abyan, Yemeni authorities have sought to ban motorcycles within the towns. There have been more than 30 reported motorcycle attacks since the beginning of the year.

While there is no doubt that Salafist-inspired militant groups are active in the Hadramawt, the governorate is also home to a growing separatist movement. These separatists are largely allied with groups that operate under the umbrella organization known as Southern Mobility, which seeks the reestablishment of an independent South Yemen. In addition to the southern secessionists, the Hadramawt also hosts a growing

number of what can be termed Hadrami separatists that would like to recreate an independent Hadramawt that is distinctly Hadrami in character.

The Southern Mobility Movement in the Hadramawt

Southern Mobility is a decentralized umbrella group that was formed in 2008 as a result of widespread anti-government protests across the south. Since then, Southern Mobility, while still lacking a centralized leadership structure, has evolved into the foremost secessionist organization. The core of retired People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) military officers that made up much of the original leadership of Southern Mobility called for non-violent and unarmed demonstrations. While many in the Southern Mobility movement still advocate peaceful forms of protest, it is clear that some members have taken up arms as both a defensive and offensive measure.

Mukalla, the capital and principal port of the Hadramawt governorate, has been the scene of frequent and widespread protests and strikes. Southern Mobility has a natural and growing constituency among the majority of its poor residents. Mukalla, like much of the governorate, has seen little real development relative to the Yemeni capital of Sana'a and parts of the north central highlands. Development has often been restricted to marquee projects that have little impact on the broader populace. Damaging floods that struck the Hadramawt in 2008 further aggravated the region's already high levels of poverty and unemployment. The impact of the floods, which displaced an estimated 22,000 people, is still being felt in some areas where homes have yet to be rebuilt and critical irrigation infrastructure has yet to be replaced (IRIN, November 4, 2008). In the wake of the floods, the government promised a comprehensive response, but two years on, many communities in the Hadramawt are still awaiting the promised aid. The Southern Movement has capitalized on the government's limited response to the floods. The many wealthy Hadramis that reside in Southeast Asia and Saudi Arabia have contributed significant funds for relief efforts, thereby removing some of the burden and responsibility from the government. However, this external aid further undermines faith in the government and buttresses an already prevalent view of the government as distant, corrupt, and ineffective. In addition, the lack of development, though not as severe as in other southern governorates, has resulted in an increased following for the southern secessionists.

A History of Division and Independence

For much of its history prior to incorporation in what became the PDRY in 1967, the Hadramawt was divided into a patchwork of fiefdoms and tribal territories. Harold Ingrams, the British Resident Adviser to the Qu'ayti Sultanate that ruled a large swath of the Hadramawt, estimated that in 1936 there were 2,000 separate governments in the Hadramawt. [1] These "governments" were made up of tribal territories governed by shaykhs, autonomous towns governed by local worthies, and the British-recognized Qu'ayti and Kathiri Sultanates. Despite the numerous divisions, a distinct Hadrami identity evolved. While the Hadramawt is etched with seasonally watered wadis, the region's agriculture has never been able to support the entirety of its populace. Because of this, Hadramis have emigrated since the 13th century, many to the East Indies. The emigrant experience and the idea of return to the *bilad* (homeland) have been responsible for developing much of the Hadrami identity. An emphasis on the importance of the homeland and connections with the Hadrami diaspora are both components in what can be described as a nascent but growing Hadrami separatist movement.

Hadrami Separatists

It is difficult to determine how well organized and widespread Hadrami separatism is in the region. It is often difficult to differentiate the Hadrami separatists from the southern secessionists that operate in the area and in Mukalla in particular. However, in 2009-2010, residents and members of what can be termed the "merchant class" often referenced the idea of a return to an independent Hadramawt. [2] Lectures and talks distributed via cassette tape frequently refer to the Hadramawt's independent past. It is important to note that significant divisions exist within the community of Hadrami separatists; there are members who support the idea of an independent South Yemen organized along federalist lines, those who support an entirely independent Hadramawt and still others who advocate a union with Saudi Arabia. The desire for Saudi Arabia to absorb the Hadramawt is commonly expressed in light of Saudi Arabia's relative stability and its close ties with the governorate. Residents often cite the historical example of the province of Asir, which was taken from the Yemen by Saudi Arabia in 1934. On the operational front, the nascent Hadrami separatist movement appears to be limited to fundraising activities. Like Southern Mobility, the separatists rely heavily on the

community of expatriate southern Yemenis for funding. The potential to draw on some of the wealthy members of the Hadrami diaspora should not be underestimated.

Al-Qaeda Activity in the Region

Elements within core al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have a lengthy history of using the Hadramawt as a base of operations. In the early 1990s, a number of "Afghan Arabs" [i.e. Arab veterans of the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad] were resettled by the Saleh government in the areas around Say'un. In August 2008, Hamza al-Qu'ayti, a regional commander within al-Qaeda, was killed along with four other al-Qaeda operatives in the Hadrami town of Tarim in a shootout with Yemeni security services (*Yemen Observer*, August 14, 2008). The shootout followed two attacks on the police station and PSO office in the nearby town of Say'un. A convoy carrying three provincial security chiefs was ambushed near the Saudi border in November 2009 (*al-Thawra*, November 3, 2009). The senior security officers were killed along with two of their guards in the ambush. The Yemeni government viewed the attack as revenge for the killing of Hamza al-Qu'ayti.

While the government blamed the ambush on al-Qaeda, it remains unclear as to whether the ambush was the work of al-Qaeda or smugglers. The un-demarcated and mostly unguarded border regions of northern Hadramawt have long been favored by drug runners and smugglers. As the Saudis tighten security along their northwestern border with Yemen, the northeastern border, though far more dangerous and inhospitable due to the Rub al-Khali desert, is increasingly popular among smugglers.

The thinly populated governorate provides an ideal operational and training environment for al-Qaeda. Much like the governorates of Shabwa and Abyan, large swaths of the Hadramawt are not actively patrolled - much less controlled - by state security services. In addition to the operational advantages that the governorate provides, the Salafi-inspired militants are likely to find some of the populace, albeit a minority, sympathetic to the ideologies that inform their movement. While much of the Hadramawt has traditionally followed the more moderate Shafi'i *madhhab* (school of law) over the last thirty years, the far more conservative and intolerant Wahhabi sect has made significant inroads. Prior to a government crackdown three years ago, some of Yemen's most strident imams were active in the governorate.

The extent of al-Qaeda's connections with the separatists is difficult to assess given the decentralized structure of the various separatist organizations. The opposition in the Hadramawt to the enforced socialism and secularism of the former PDRY by members of the merchant and *sada* (descendants of the Prophet) classes means that, outside of Mukalla, many among the populace that support the separatists are likely to be drawn towards the faction within Southern Mobility that advocates a kind of Islamic socialism. Elements within the al-Qaeda organization could enmesh themselves among the more conservative and religiously motivated southern separatists.

Conclusion

As the Yemeni government focuses the bulk of its limited military resources on combating AQAP and the separatist threats in the other southern governorates, it risks losing control of large parts of the Hadramawt. Stability in the Hadramawt is critical because the region produces a significant percentage of Yemen's oil. While many of its blocks are in decline, the Masila basin is still one of the country's richest oil fields. The Yemeni government's use of what is frequently regarded as the Hadramawt's and southern Yemen's oil wealth is often cited by separatists as one of the reasons the region must secede. Much of the rhetoric focuses on government corruption and the pilfering of oil wealth by the largely Saleh-aligned "northern tribes." The already difficult task of protecting the infrastructure associated with oil fields, the 150 km pipeline and the handling facilities at Ash Shihr will become even more difficult if separatist and al-Qaeda allied organizations are allowed to continue to establish themselves in the region. The governorate, like the even more thinly populated neighboring governorate of Mahra, could easily become a place of refuge for both AQAP operatives and separatists seeking to escape the more limited operational environments of their home governorates. It is likely that the separatist movements in the Hadramawt will continue to expand their influence unless the Yemeni government makes a concerted effort to address the governorate's widespread underdevelopment and unemployment.

Michael Horton is an independent analyst who specializes in Yemen and the Horn of Africa. He writes for Jane's Intelligence Review, Intelligence Digest, Islamic Affairs Analyst, and the Christian Science Monitor. Mr. Horton studied Middle East History and Economics at the American University of Cairo and

Arabic at the Center for Arabic Language and Eastern Studies in Yemen. Michael frequently travels to Yemen, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

Notes:

1. See Harold Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles*, London, 1942.
2. Based on conversations between residents and the author during travels in the region 2009/10.