



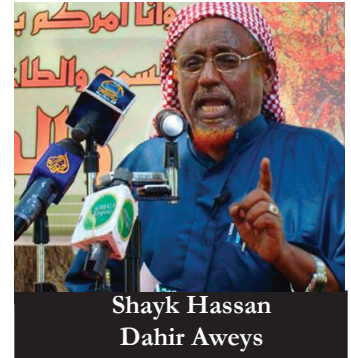
Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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MAURITANIAN ISLAMISTS EYE EGYPTIAN PROTESTS AS AL-QAEDA SEEKS REVENGE ON PRESIDENT ABDEL AZIZ

In an interview with a Nouakchott daily, Jemil Mansour, leader of the Islamist Rassemblement national pour la réforme et le développement (RNRD Tawassoul), compared the demonstrations in Egypt to the situation in Mauritania, where General Muhammad Ould Abdel Aziz seized power in a military coup in 2008 and then won the presidency in the election that followed in 2009. “I think the situation in Mauritania is a little different... The situation in Mauritania is still recoverable. But without political reform, the economic and social situation will worsen and lead to revolutionary acts of the citizens. These preventive reforms require a political opening, a real dialogue to find a solution to the problems of prices, unemployment, the problems of national unity and a merciless fight against slavery [which continues to be a social problem in Mauritania].” The Islamist leader pointed out that the West prefers to promote democracy at home while encouraging dictatorships in the Arab-Muslim world: “Islamist parties tolerate not only democracy; they defend it whether the people vote for them or for secular regimes... The examples of Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia and Malaysia confirm that the Islamist parties can play the democratic game perfectly well” (Quotidien Nouakchott, February 3).

Ahmed Ould Daddah, the leader of the Regroupement des forces démocratiques (RFD), the country’s largest opposition party, also warned that “The causes that led to a revolt in Egypt are the same, if not worse in Mauritania,” adding that President Abdel Aziz must “go before it is too late” (AFP, January 31). Like the regimes in Algeria and Egypt, Mauritanian authorities have responded

to the political unrest by increasing subsidies on food staples like sugar, rice, cooking oil and flour (Quotidien Nouakchott, February 2).

Meanwhile, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) appeared to be trying to precipitate such a confrontation with a failed long-distance raid on Nouakchott they later described as an attempt to kill the Mauritanian president. Mauritanian authorities apparently received a tip (possibly from French surveillance aircraft or American satellites) that three AQIM 4x4s had crossed from Mali into the southeast Nema district of Mauritania and were heading for Nouakchott.

A puzzling aspect of the infiltration is presented by government reports that one of the vehicles approached the Nema military barracks in an apparent attempt to duplicate a similar suicide attack last August (AFP, February 2). The vehicle was driven off by fire from the garrison, suggesting the vehicle's approach was unintentional. At this point the AQIM team was presumably unaware their presence had already been detected, and an attack on the barracks would have disclosed their presence in Mauritania before being able to carry out an attack on the Mauritanian president in Nouakchott.

The lead vehicle was spotted by a Presidential Guard patrol 12 km south of Nouakchott in the early hours of the morning. Perhaps unaware the vehicle was packed with explosives for use in a suicide bombing, the troops shelled the vehicle with a mortar at relatively close range. Shrapnel from the resulting explosion injured nine soldiers and was heard in several districts of the capital. The blast left a crater eight meters deep and four meters wide (Quotidien Nouakchott, February 3; AFP, February 2).

A later statement by an AQIM spokesman disputed this version of events, claiming the explosives in the vehicle were deliberately detonated by its occupants. According to the spokesman, the unit sent to carry out the operation was composed of several nationalities (including two "veteran" Mauritanian members) and was planning to "assassinate Aziz" in retaliation for Mauritania's military cooperation with France in operations against AQIM. The spokesman promised videotaped "martyrs' wills" would verify these claims (Agence Nouakchott d'Information, February 2).

According to Mauritanian security sources, another vehicle carrying two AQIM members at first gave indications it intended to flee, but then turned on its

pursuers, injuring one security officer (who later died) before seizing his weapon and fleeing in the direction of the Senegal River, where Senegalese troops had been deployed to prevent the fugitives from crossing (AFP, February 3). One suspect was later detained in the Brakna region near the Senegal border after locals alerted authorities, while the second blew himself up when encircled by security forces (Reuters, February 6). The two AQIM operatives in the third vehicle were captured.

A French Foreign Ministry spokesman said France was not ruling out the possibility French establishments in Nouakchott were among the intended targets. One of those arrested was a national of Guinea-Bissau, who told investigators the targets included a Nouakchott military barracks and the French Embassy (AFP, February 2). The French Embassy was previously targeted by a suicide bomber in 2009. Despite the casualties to the Presidential Guard battalion, the operation presented Mauritanian authorities with a notable success in its continuing efforts to combat AQIM.

SECURITY FAILURE LEADS TO TALIBAN SUICIDE ATTACK ON PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC KOHAT TUNNEL

A pair of suicide bombings on January 28 constituted the latest round in a bitter struggle between Taliban militants and government security forces for control of Pakistan's strategic Kohat Tunnel, an important part of Pakistan's N55 highway (popularly known as the "Indus Highway"), which is heavily used by NATO supply convoys headed for Afghanistan and Pakistani military convoys headed for volatile Waziristan.

The first bombing was carried out by a Bedford truck full of explosives that entered the tunnel from the Darra Adamkhel side, apparently unchallenged by tunnel security units. The explosives were detonated some 600 meters inside as the driver crashed the truck into the wall of the tunnel. The blast damaged the electrical, drainage and exhaust systems and created a crater one meter deep and six meters wide. This forced a 24-hour closure of the tunnel, which was later reopened to small vehicles only (Express Tribune [Karachi], January 30; Daily Times [Lahore], February 2). Repairs enabling the passage of heavy vehicles are expected to take some time. Bomb disposal experts later estimated the truck-bomb contained roughly 500 kg of explosives (Pakistan Observer, February 4).

A second explosion followed as an oil tanker rigged with a similar charge of explosives crashed into a military checkpoint outside the tunnel. Normally manned by units of the regular army and the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC), the checkpoint was unmanned at the time of the attack, approximately 12:30 AM. The tunnel has only been open at night for the past two months after night-time use was banned following its brief seizure in January 2008 by Taliban forces who set off explosives inside the tunnel. A male civilian and two women were killed immediately in a car following the tanker to the tunnel. The death toll in the two attacks has now reached eight, as several wounded have succumbed to their injuries (Pakistan Observer, February 4). The owner of the oil tanker has appealed to the government for compensation for the destruction of the tanker (The News [Islamabad], February 5).

Responsibility for the blasts was claimed by the Darra Adamkhel Taliban under the leadership of Tariq Afridi (The News, January 30). Tariq Afridi took command of the Darra Adamkhel fighters in November 2009 after the group's two principal leaders were killed in a military operation in 2008 (for Tariq Afridi, see Terrorism Monitor, February 13, 2008; Terrorism Monitor, March 3, 2009; Terrorism Monitor Briefs, November 19, 2009). Taliban fighters based in the hills around Darra Adamkhel (and its thriving arms bazaar) have made regular attacks on supply convoys passing through the region (see Terrorism Focus, February 13, 2008). The Darra Adamkhel command is most notorious for the kidnapping and murder of Polish engineer Petr Stanczak in February 2009 (The News, February 15, 2009; Dawn [Karachi], April 26, 2009). Taliban fighters in the area have also been responsible for numerous attacks on the region's substantial Shiite minority. Reports last December indicated that members of the local Taliban were shaving their beards and infiltrating the Darra Adamkhel area (Daily Times, December 6, 2010).

The strategic 1.9 km tunnel was built with Japanese assistance and completed in 2004. It connects the relatively isolated Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa district with Peshawar and the rest of Pakistan. The tunnel allows shipping by large trucks that was previously impossible due to the dangerous hairpin turns of the old 14 km Kohat Pass road. Control of the tunnel has been an important Taliban objective for several years. A major battle between militants and government troops over several days in January 2008 saw Taliban fighters led by Tariq Afridi take temporary control of the tunnel before being driven off by a massive military response

(PakTribune, January 28, 2008; The Nation [Islamabad], January 31; Reuters, January 27, 2008).

Makati City Bombing Brings Abu Sayyaf Terrorism to Manila

By Jacob Zenn

The bus bombing in Makati City (Metro Manila) that killed five passengers and wounded 13 others on January 25 has forced the Philippines to reevaluate the terrorist threat in that country. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) believed that Metro Manila was secure, but after the Makati City bombing and a spate of terrorist attacks in the provinces of Mindanao where Abu Sayyaf is based, it is now clear that Metro Manila is not beyond the range of Abu Sayyaf.

The bus bombing occurred one month after a Christmas Day church bombing in Jolo (Sulu province) wounded 11 people and four months after three explosions struck the Mindanao Island provinces of Cotabato and Maguindanao in September 2010 (Manila Times, December 26, 2010; Philippine Star, September 7, 2010). Provincial police in Sulu also prevented two men on motorcycles from planting an IED 60 meters outside of the Capitol building on December 29, 2010 (ABS-CBN News [Zamboango], December 29, 2010).

Despite the attacks in Mindanao and President Aquino's warning that the Christmas Day church bombing could be part of a wider Abu Sayyaf "terror plot," AFP leaders assured the country that Metro Manila was secure (Philippine Inquirer, December 29, 2010). Three days

after the church bombing, the National Capital Region Police chief in Manila said: “We do not see any spillover of what happened in Jolo and there’s no indication that (an attack) will happen. Both the police and the military have the same assessment so far” (Manila Bulletin, December 28, 2010).

The evidence points to Abu Sayyaf as the group responsible for carrying out the bus bombing in Makati City. The 81-mm mortar detonated by cell phone has the signature of past attacks attributed to Abu Sayyaf. The same size shell and cell phone detonation device were used in the church bombing on Christmas Day, the foiled IED plot against the Sulu provincial Capitol building, and one of the September 2010 bombings in Maguindanao. The Rizal Day bombing on December 30, 2000, and another bus bombing in Makati City on Valentine’s Day in 2005 also employed similar explosive devices (GMA News Online, January 26).

Abu Sayyaf made no claim of responsibility for the attack, but the spokesperson of the AFP’s Western Mindanao Command said there was a “high probability” that Abu Sayyaf was behind the bombing. The motive for attacking in Metro Manila may have been to divert the attention of the AFP from its ongoing operations against Abu Sayyaf in the island province of Basilan and elsewhere in Mindanao (Business World Online [Manila], January 26). The AFP began deploying more forces to Cotabato City in September 2010, and in the same month members of Philippine National Police Special Action Force (SAF) killed a “high value target,” Abu Sayyaf leader Gafur Jumail, and his two sons in an operation in rural Sulu province (Philippine Inquirer, September 9, 2010).

The National Capital Regional Police Office chief released sketches of two “persons of interest” who were sitting in the seats where the bomb went off and disembarked one stop before the explosion (Philippine Star, January 29). Military intelligence agents are also gathering evidence on five suspects who are members of Abu Sayyaf and its affiliate Rajah Sulayman movement.

The Philippines is instituting new nationwide preventive measures in the aftermath of the bus bombing: 372 bus marshals will inspect the 7,000 buses plying Metro Manila and 40 new closed-circuit television cameras will be installed throughout the city (Philippine Star, January 29). The Philippines Coast Guard was told to make sure that sea marshals, canine handlers, expert divers and members of boarding teams are at piers round-the-clock

and tighter security measures were put in place at the Mactan Cebu International Airport (Philippine Star, January 27).

Abu Sayyaf’s attack in Metro Manila is significant for at least two reasons. First, it shows that the AFP’s goal of “finishing off” Abu Sayyaf is still far from being achieved. Second, the AFP is no longer confident that any place in the country can be secured from Abu Sayyaf attacks. National Security Adviser Cesar Garcia now says Metro Manila is under a “continuing threat” since the region is considered an “aspirational target” for terror groups (Philippine Star, January 29).

Finally, the attack shows that the Philippines’ anti-terrorism strategy has not diminished the influence of international terrorists who are tied to Abu Sayyaf. Currently, there are as many as 40 members of Indonesia’s Jemaah Islamiya (JI) operating in southern Mindanao and Philippine intelligence officials have identified a Yemeni-Indonesian jihadist, Omar Patek, as the explosives expert and operational planner behind the Makati bus bombing and the Jolo church bombing (Sun Star [Manila], January 28).

Patek first arrived in southern Mindanao with then JI leader Dulmatin from their native Indonesia after masterminding the Bali bombings in 2002. In southern Mindanao Patek received protection from Abu Sayyaf in exchange for providing terrorist training to locals, including members of Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Patek’s terrorist career originated with Kompak, a decentralized al-Qaeda and JI-affiliated group that is known for sending members like Patek to share knowledge of military skills with other terrorist organizations.

Patek is a unique threat because he also provides ideological leadership. In a video recorded in Sulu in late 2009, Patek said: “I am calling all supporters of jihad to do their part. Give food, give any financial help, any amount. In any capacity, it is your duty to be part of this holy war. We will be the ones to hold the battle for all of us, but do not be afraid to do your share for the time has come to initiate extreme actions that will cause pain and suffering to all infidels. We will be victors in the end” (Philippine Inquirer, January 28). Despite bounties offered by the CIA and the Philippine government for his capture, Patek remains elusive. As the Makati bus bombing proves, he is as committed to jihad now as he was ten years ago when he helped plan the Bali bombings.

Jacob Zenn is a third-year law student and Global Law Scholar at Georgetown Law and was a Young Leader at the Pacific Forum - Center for Strategic and International Studies conference on "US-Thai-Philippine Alliance Cooperation" in Bangkok on October 24-27, 2010.

Merger of Islamist Groups Challenges Somali Government's Pledge to Retake Mogadishu

By Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

Speaking to parliament on November 20, 2010, Somali Prime Minister Muhammad Abdullahi Muhammad vowed to clear the streets of Mogadishu of al-Shabaab fighters during his first 100 days in office if the MPs approved his cabinet. [1]

No less than 92 MPs, including Hawo Abdullahi, Asho Haji Elmi, Abdirahman Afrah, Awad Ahmed, Ali Mohamud Farah and Hared Xasan Ali, immediately described the Prime Minister's pledge as rhetoric, but Muhammad Abdullah Muhammad said the plan would succeed by giving the Somali army long overdue salary payments. The prime minister, who praised the army for its resilience in defending the country from the internal Islamist enemy, said "the only way to defeat al-Shabaab is to give the troops their salary." [2]

The new cabinet of 18 members (less than half the size of the previous cabinet) received the endorsement of a majority of the Transitional Federal Government's

parliamentarians a week later, but the prime minister's plan was complicated by the merger of al-Shabaab and the Hizb al-Islam movement, led by Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys. The unification of the two long-feuding movements was announced at a ceremony on November 21, 2010 in the Afghoye district, 30 km south of Mogadishu, making the new formation the only significant militant Islamist group operating in Somalia. [3]

Hizb al-Islam finally decided to join hands with their insurgent rivals after failing to defeat al-Shabaab fighters who had captured most of the territory held by Hizb al-Islam in southern Somalia. The movement's fighters are now under al-Shabaab commanders after Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys was not given a command position in the newly united movement.

A Nairobi-based political analyst suggested the unification was meant to prepare for an expected government offensive and gave al-Shabaab a larger force than that fielded by the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). [4] However, the Somali government said it had prepared 8,000 troops to begin an attack against the "al-Qaeda linked al-Shabaab group." The prime minister promised that this number would be sufficient to expel Islamist rebels from Mogadishu.

Two months after the approval of the Somali cabinet, the 8,000 government troops were finally paid their salaries and began preparing for attacks against al-Shabaab. This force will eventually include some 1,000 troops who will soon be returning from training in Uganda. Somali Information, Posts and Telecommunications Minister Abdulkareem Jama said the payments had boosted the troops' morale. [5]

Somali troops fighting one of the most rapidly expanding Islamist groups in the world are rarely paid their monthly dues. The soldiers, who are mostly from poor families, often have wives and children and face a real threat of being shot, blown up or tortured because of their unpaid work. Those who were not paid for long periods include thousands of troops trained with U.S. and EU funds in neighboring countries such as Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, said former Somali chief-of-staff, Major General Yusuf Hussein Osman, who left the army in 2009. [6] The United States spent \$6.8 million to train almost 2,100 Somali soldiers in Djibouti and Uganda in 2009, while the European Union paid €5 million for the training of 2,000 Somali soldiers in Uganda.

The troops' camps are grisly; they have neither telecommunication nor even military dress in some cases. Some soldiers suffer from malnutrition and the wounded do not receive enough medication. The difficulties of Somali military life lead some of them to routinely sell their arms to the Islamist militias they are supposed to be fighting.

The country's military was once the fourth most powerful in Africa, behind only South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria. It collapsed in 1991 after Somali warlords overthrew long-time military dictator Muhammad Si'ad Barre. Since that time, there have been efforts to re-establish a regular armed force by various unsuccessful incarnations of the Somali government. The latest TFG effort to rebuild the national army has focused on recruiting and training new cohorts of soldiers.

Despite this, human rights groups have accused Somali forces of looting civilians in military-controlled areas to cover their needs. Allegations are circulating within Somalia that claim political and military leaders are making huge personal profits from international assistance meant to aid the army. Major General Yusuf Hussein Osman, however, says only the political leaders are lifting military funds. [7] The new cabinet, which has only six months to work before the TFG mandate expires, has promised more efforts to improve the troops' lives and morale.

Somali Information Minister Abdulkareem Jama says his government is focused on eliminating corruption and has taken measures to prevent embezzlement and properly manage all funds directed for the TFG and its military. The minister said the government has the military's salaries for the next six months in hand and the troops will now be paid on a regular basis. According to Jama, 4,000 troops will be added to the army in the next few months and the resulting 12,000 man force will begin to establish stability in Mogadishu. The information minister seemed optimistic about achieving the goal of eradicating al-Shabaab from Mogadishu due to the weakened state of the Islamist militia that resulted from their constant internal disagreements and a lack of popular support as civilians continue to flee to TFG-held territories from those areas held by al-Shabaab. According to Jama, government soldiers and African Union peacekeepers now control 50% of the capital of Mogadishu. [8]

A senior military official who sought anonymity said that although the regular payments will give the army self-

confidence, it will not be easy to wipe out al-Shabaab in 100 days. The officer claimed that a government offensive would succeed in occupying areas currently held by the Islamists, but that would not be the end of al-Shabaab: "They will last for many years."

Somali Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed told reporters in New York on January 15 that a recent poll in Mogadishu indicated 80% support for the government and just 7% for opposition groups, though he did not indicate who had carried out the poll. Despite the considerable obstacles to a quick military victory, the prime minister told state-owned radio on February 4 that there was no change to his 100-day plan, assuring listeners that al-Shabaab would be driven out of Mogadishu soon (Radio Mogadishu, February 4).

Muhyadin Ahmed Roble is a Somali journalist who writes for The East African, AfricaNews and Eurasia Review as a correspondent based in Nairobi.

Notes:

1. Speech by Muhammad Abdullahi Muhammad at the parliamentary center, Mogadishu, November 20, 2010.
2. MP Abdirahman Afrah talked to local radio stations on November 21, 2010, Mogadishu.
- MP Hared Hassan Ali spoke to the Jamestown Foundation on January 20 in Nairobi, Kenya.
- MP Ali Mohamoud Farah talked to local radio stations on January 13 in Mogadishu.
- MPs Asho Hajji Elmi and Awad Ahmed spoke at a January 10 press conference in Mogadishu.
- MP Hawo Abdullahi spoke at a January 13 press conference in Mogadishu.
3. See Andrew McGregor, "A Jihadi in the Horn of Africa: Al-Shabaab's Ahmad Abdi Godane 'Abu Zubayr,'" *Militant Leadership Monitor*, January 2011.
4. Interview with a political analyst who requested anonymity, January 25, Nairobi, Kenya.
5. Interview with Somali Information, Posts and Telecommunications Minister Abdulkareem Jama, January 14, 2011, Nairobi, Kenya.
6. Interview with former Somali Chief-of-Staff, Major General Yusuf Hussein Osman, December 11, 2010, Nairobi, Kenya.
7. Ibid.
8. Interview with Somali Information, Posts and Telecommunications Minister Abdulkareem Jama, January 14, 2011, Nairobi, Kenya.

“We Wish to Be In the Front Lines With You”: Islamist Radicals on the Lotus Revolution

By Andrew McGregor

Caught off guard no less than Egyptian authorities by the spontaneity of the anti-regime demonstrations that have swept Egypt, the ideologues of the Salafi-Jihadi trend have struggled to somehow incorporate these momentous events within the framework of the greater jihadi cause. While some Western commentators have weaved fantasies about the hidden hand of the Muslim Brothers or even al-Qaeda behind these events, the Salafi-Jihadists are fully aware of the highly limited role they have played so far in a revolt that has a notable absence of any religious dimension. The effective al-Qaeda leader, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri (himself an Egyptian militant who fought a failed terrorist campaign against the Egyptian state), has so far maintained surprising silence on the demonstrations in Egypt’s cities. Nonetheless, a number of Salafi-Jihadi ideologues have attempted to insert the movement into events in Egypt, while still acknowledging the difficulty of doing this in a country where decades of struggle have resulted in the imprisonment, exile or recantation of most of Egypt’s once powerful militant Islamist movement.

Thirwat Salah al-Shehata: Back from the Shadows

One of the most surprising statements was attributed to veteran Egyptian jihadist Thirwat Salah al-Shehata, who has not been heard from since his escape from the 2001 collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. A lawyer from al-Sharqia governorate in the Egyptian Delta, al-Shehata was a colleague of Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, Shaykh Omar Abd al-Rahman and Ayman al-Zawahiri in the incipient Egyptian jihadi movement. A member of the Shura Council of Jama’at al-Jihad bi Misr (Egyptian Jihad Organization), al-Shehata was charged in connection with the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981 and served three years in prison.

In 1993 al-Shehata left for Yemen after a series of detentions by Egyptian authorities. He was again charged in the 1994 attempted assassination of Egyptian Prime Minister Atif Sidqi and was this time sentenced in absentia to the death penalty. He left for Sudan during the period of Bin Laden’s residence there before leaving

with al-Zawahiri for Afghanistan in 1995. During his stay there he was placed in charge of the movement’s security committee (Al-Ahram Weekly, October 18-24, 2001). In 1999 al-Shehata was sentenced to death in absentia for the second time in Egypt’s “Albanian Returnees” case. In 2001 he is believed to have escaped the American invasion of Afghanistan by fleeing to Iran, where he was reportedly placed under arrest. At that point, al-Shehata basically disappeared from view.

The fate of those al-Qaeda members and associates who sought refuge in Iran after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan is one of the most poorly understood aspects of the “War on Terrorism.” The question has been subject to speculation loaded with political motivations, but the evidence appears to point to Iranian detention of those who crossed into Iran, either in prisons or under house arrest. Nearly ten years later it seems probable that Iran has begun releasing these individuals (most of whom were likely considered too hot or ideologically unsound to be made use of by Iranian intelligence) from their confinement or has allowed them to leave the country.

In a February 2 message issued by Jama’at al-Jihad in Egypt entitled “A Statement by the Jihadi Leader Thirwat Salah al-Shehata to the Popular Revolution in Egypt,” the long missing jihadist applauded “our defiant Egyptian people, in all segments of society, for their courageous, chivalrous and heroic stance against tyranny,” while urging Egyptians to “continue their march to uproot the Pharaoh and his minions, and purify our precious Egypt from his filth, after years of suffering from humiliation, subjugation, contingency, silencing, imprisonment, torture, disease, hunger, theft and wastage of the umma’s [Islamic community’s] resources, and slavery to the enemy...” The message was sent to the London-based Al-Maqreze Center for Historical Studies, run by Egyptian Islamist Hani Al-Siba’i, and published by the center on its website (almaqreze.net, February 2).

Al-Shehata goes on to explain the absence of the jihadists from the important events in Egypt, making reference to the notorious Abu Za’bal Prison, 15 km from Cairo, where a large number of prisoners including Palestinian and Egyptian militants managed to escape in a January 30 uprising (Asharq al-Awsat, February 2):

We wish to be in the front lines and participate with you in this great honor and to serve as shields for you, but are prevented from this.

We were locked into cells, and the scorpion is severe in its guard duties. Abu Za'bal was filled with mujahideen currently living out their unjust sentences for the rest of their lives. The rest of us were forced to leave the country, after the government launched their war against us, to join the mujahideen in various other fronts.

Al-Shehata made a plea to the Egyptian military and security apparatus to “join the ranks of the masses” and warned Egyptians against settling for a superficial package of reforms:

Complete the course till its end, and do not suffice with mere ministerial revisions, reduction of prices, raising of wages, nor any other solutions resorted to by dictatorial regimes when the noose is tightened around them. Rather suffice with nothing other than the departure of this rotten Pharaoh and his minions.

Sources “close to Egyptian Islamic Jihad” told an Egyptian daily that al-Shehata had issued the statement from Tehran, where he was a resident (al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 3). The Maqreze Center, however, speculated that al-Shehata is now living in Khurasan (a somewhat ambiguous geographical term that may refer here to Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan, but could also refer to Khurasan Province in Iran).

Abu Mundhir Al-Shanqiti: Denouncing Salafist Inaction

A fatwa (religious ruling) regarding participation in the Egyptian protests was issued on the Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad (Pulpit of Monotheism and Struggle) website of Jordanian Islamist Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the former mentor of al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The fatwa was the work of Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti, a regular contributor to Maqdisi's website, and followed an earlier article by the same author entitled “The Revolt Against Mubarak,” in which he suggested people “claim their rights by force, not by begging” (tawhed.net, January 25).

Al-Shanqiti ruled in favor of participation in the demonstrations, acknowledging that the protestors might succeed in doing something even the “largest jihadi organizations” would find difficult. Like al-Shehata, al-Shanqiti is aware of the weak state of the jihadi movement within Egypt. Nevertheless, he urges

any mujahideen still operating in Egypt to participate in the “blessed revolution,” as this would be their “most preferable jihad.” He suggests that ten or even a hundred mujahideen should carry out a martyrdom operation to eliminate Mubarak and his regime “because it is in the interests of Islam and Muslims and defeats the enemies of religion.”

Al-Shanqiti suggests that the demonstrators have only just arrived at the same conclusion reached long ago by the Egyptian jihadi groups – that the Western-supported “corrupt and tyrannical” regime must be overthrown.

The Egyptian Salafists, who have largely abstained from participation in the protests on religious grounds concerning the permissibility of deposing a Muslim ruler, also come in for criticism by al-Shanqiti for their lack of action: “Some affiliated with the methodology of the Salaf leave or abandon all the matters concerning the Muslim umma and have no interests other than their books and papers and study circles, ignoring the words of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), ‘He who does not care about the affairs of the Muslims is not one of us.’”

The Shaykh compares the Salafists' inaction to the “passivity of the Tablighi Jama'at,” which would make no changes to its program of peaceful missionary work “even if the Ka'aba was hit by nuclear bombs.” The Salafists warn only of the sin of fitna (creating strife and discord in the Muslim community) “as though they don't know that people are already full of fitna around them.” The Salafists also warn that Mubarak's government would likely be replaced by a secular regime that would ignore “the law of Allah,” but al-Shanqiti says this is not necessarily the case, as a new constitution could be created based on the primacy of Islamic law: “The matter is about reducing the evil and achieving what can be achieved from the good.”

A revolution in Egypt would present the West with a serious defeat and the loss of one of its most important client regimes: “This is what explains their strong attachment to the survival of Mubarak... if not for this support he would not have dared to defy the legions that insist on his immediate departure.” According to al-Shanqiti, the U.S. government is following events in Egypt closely and is trying to prepare Muhammad Mustafa al-Baradei as their new client. Israel in particular would lose its “sentry” on the southern border if Mubarak's regime was overthrown. “If the Egyptian regime fell,

God willing, perhaps several other systems would fall down... If the Egyptian regime fell, God willing, there may occur in the region a major earthquake similar to the raids of September 11.”

Hussein bin Mahmud: The Scholars of al-Azhar Must Play a Greater Role

Another commentary appeared on jihadi websites in the form of a question and answer session with Shaykh Hussein bin Mahmud, the pseudonym of a Salafi-Jihadi ideologue who is a regular contributor to Islamist forums and websites (*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, November 30, 2006).

Bin Mahmud denounced those religious scholars in Egypt who are “still in fear of these events and wait to see what unfolds... If the scholars were to come forth, the masses would follow them.” [1] He points especially to the scholars of al-Azhar (the Cairo-based Islamic university that is the center of Sunni Muslim theological studies), advising them to “play a greater role.” He does not, however, have any hope for intervention by the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmed al-Tayab, whom he describes as “an employee of Hosni [Mubarak]. He is not worth anything.” Al-Tayab was a leading member of Egypt’s ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) until criticism after his appointment to Grand Shaykh led to his official resignation from the party.

The Salafists, however, do not come under the same severe criticisms leveled by al-Shanqiti; Bin Mahmoud appears willing to give them time to realize the important role they should be playing in events: “Some of them have taken praiseworthy stances. However we are waiting for more... We await stronger stances, may Allah protect them and make them steadfast.”

In a commentary posted last year in the wake of the Israeli attack on the Gaza aid flotilla, Bin Mahmud accused Egypt (without specific reference) of “protecting the Jews from outside [Israel’s] borders” by preventing the entry of mujahideen into Palestine. He suggested the military campaign should begin outside of Israel: “Those who want to enter Palestine and fight the Jews must first start with the [Arab] border guards... It is not forbidden to kill the Jewish state’s border guards, even if they pray and fast” (*al-Faluja*, May 31, 2010).

Conclusion

In their long absence from Egypt, those Salafi-Jihadis of Egyptian origin now find themselves sidelined from

events they are unable to manipulate in their favor. Though they may “wish to be in the frontlines,” they are instead reduced to issuing missives that must compete with the violence-denouncing “Revisions” of their imprisoned colleagues, the confused response of the Muslim Brotherhood and the passivity of Egypt’s indigenous Salafist groups. None of these appeals appear to have resonated in any particular way with the Egyptian masses and those who continue to pursue Egypt’s largely secular “Lotus Revolution.” Though many await al-Zawahiri’s response to the events in Egypt, it seems unlikely that any statement from the long absent jihadi leader will have a significant impact on the demonstrators in Tahrir Square, who seek political and economic reforms rather than the establishment of a militant Islamist state.

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Note:

1. <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=92303>.