

# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

## Personalities Behind the Insurgency

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Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri

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### UFLA LEADERS MEET WITH INDIAN GOVERNMENT FOR PEACE TALKS

The political leadership of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) [1] is engaging in unconditional peace talks on behalf of the decades-old Assamese insurgency with India's central government. Assam is considered vital to the Indian economy due to its crude oil, coal reserves, vast tea industry and its geographical connection to the rest of northeast India's isolated states to the Indian "mainland." The Delhi-initiated peace talks have caused a grave split within the ULFA movement between its Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and its military commander Paresh Barua who is protesting the negotiations from exile in either China or Burma. Rajkhowa along with Pradip Gogoi, ULFA's vice chairman, and six other members of the outfit's leadership have been released from detention in Guwahati, the northeast Indian state of Assam's commercial capital, to meet with top officials from India's Home ministry as well as leaders from the Assam state government (The Telegraph [Kolkata], February 9). For the time being, ULFA has been divided by what the Indian government dub's "pro-talk" and "anti-talk" factions led by Rajkhowa and Barua respectively.

ULFA coming to the table in Delhi, similar to the Isak-Muivah wing of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), another northeastern Indian separatist outfit and an ally of ULFA that is engaging in peace talks with the central government concomitantly, is partly a result of the restoration of democracy in neighboring Bangladesh in January of 2009. With the improvement of Bangladeshi-Indian relations, Dhaka has been quietly arresting

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and extraditing formerly sheltered anti-Indian militant leaders in a bid to win favor with the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. ULFA Chairman Rajkhowa and several other top ULFA leaders, who are now negotiating in Delhi, were originally detained in Bangladesh and handed over to Indian authorities beginning in November of 2009 (Outlook India, February 5). The elimination of northeastern insurgent sanctuaries in both Bangladesh and the Kingdom of Bhutan has led many Indian analysts to believe that many “anti-talk” militant leaders have taken refuge in Burma’s northwestern Sagaing Region flanking India’s eastern border, its northern Kachin State bordering China’s Yunnan Province, or inside Yunnan itself.

Addressing a press conference in Delhi after ULFA’s initial meetings with Indian Home Secretary Gopal Krishna Pillai and Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, ULFA’s Foreign Secretary Sashadhar Choudhury insisted that the ever recalcitrant Paresh Barua, despite his snubbing of the peace process’ possible potential, is still be ULFA’s commander-in-chief. Choudhury somewhat incongruously stated of his rebel superior: “He [Barua] may or may not join the talk process, I cannot say what decision he would take” (The Assam Tribune, February 10). Upon the ULFA leaders’ return to Assam after the conclusion of their meetings in Delhi, Rajkhowa told journalists vaguely that his meeting with Prime Minister Singh was “cordial and satisfactory” while apparently disclosing no specific details about issues relating to the status of Paresh Barua, arguably ULFA’s most important figure (The Hindu, February 15). ULFA recently dropped its call for secession from the Indian state as a precondition for talks and has for the time being relented on its leader’s insistence that talks be mediated by a neutral international body (Reuters, January 3). The meeting was nearly six years in the making after a letter from PM Singh was delivered in late May 2005 asking ULFA’s senior leaders to discuss “core issues” so long as they did not include negotiating outside of India’s borders and Assamese independence. Thus far ULFA has conceded after being thrown out of Bangladesh. Though the fact that the Singh government and ULFA are talking at all is a huge step toward creating stability in the restive, resource rich state of Assam, it is possible that an unrestrained Paresh Barua could easily act as a spoiler in the process should the talks’ results not be favorable to ULFA’s core followers and financiers and ULFA return to full-scale violence. Barua’s checkbook alliance with the Kachin Independence Organization/Army, (KIO/A) which controls territory in northern Burma’s Kachin State,

could quickly reinvigorate Assam’s decades of troubles. The KIO/A, by training new Assamese militants to re-infiltrate India for a price at Barua’s behest, could cause Delhi a major internal headache by forcing it to mount expensive security and counterinsurgency operations (Outlook India, November 22, 2010).

### LEADERSHIP OF MILF COMES TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE WHILE THAT OF ABU SAYYAF FIGHTS ON

When Philippine President Benigno Aquino was inaugurated in June of 2010, he pledged to fulfill his campaign promises of having his new government sit down with rebel groups for full-fledged peace negotiations complemented by mutually agreed cease-fires (UPI, February 14). One of the oldest and most troublesome of such groups, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), agreed to meet with a team from Manila in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. With the resumption of peace talks for the first time in over two years, Murad Ebrahim, the chairman of the MILF, announced that a newly renegade commander named Ameril Umbra Kato from the 105th Base Command angrily split from the organization seven months ago and announced the formation of the splinter Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) which would not participate in formal negotiations (AP, February 5). Not wanting to derail the talks, Manila sought assurances from Mohagher Iqbal on the status of Kato and his newly declared BIFF. Iqbal iterated that Kato would respect the ongoing truce between the central government and the MILF (Xinhua, February 11). President Aquino promised voters an end to the thirty-year-old MILF insurgency in Mindanao in the southern Philippines and is keen on moving forward on his electoral vows. After the two-day summit in Malaysia, both sides have agreed to meet again by the end of March after considering each other’s draft positions (AFP, February 10).

However, the now renegade Commander Kato presents both sides with a wild card in trying to reach a deal. Kato co-commanded attacks in Christian areas of Mindanao in 2008 which were a driving factor in the suspension of peace talks until now. At present, if indeed Kato has formally left the MILF, it is unclear what leverage the Moro rebels’ senior negotiators truly have over him to halt violence at present. The MILF’s assuaging of Manila aside, it looks as though their top echelon will have little effect on the actions of Kato and the BIFF unless he can be reined in. MILF Vice Chairman for political affairs

Ghazali Jaafar indicated that there was still a window to bring Kato back into the MILF fold after a trio of MILF men sent by Chairman Ebrahim reached Kato and relayed back to the MILF's top-tier that Kato was not irreconcilable as of yet and MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu stated that Kato was still tentatively part of the MILF and therefore protected by the in-place cease fire (Manila Standard Today, February 14). Between the MILF's official statements on the Kato matter and those of the government's chief negotiator Marvic Leonen, it remains unclear precisely where Kato stands. The Philippine government seems to be indicating that a near-term terrorist attack or kidnapping by members of the BIFF could cause peace talks to quickly disintegrate stating, "For now, we will hold the MILF to their representations regarding Kato and his men. However, I am also informed that our military and police forces maintain the usual state of defensive readiness keeping in mind the primacy of the peace process." The MILF's spokesman appears to be buying the rebels time until it can crystallize exactly where Kato stands, claiming that Kato is still a part of the MILF (Philippine Star, February 13).

Meanwhile on the island of Basilan straddling the Sulu and Celebes Seas, Philippine Special Forces soldiers from the First Scout Ranger Regiment fought a pitched battle with Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants loyal to commander Puruji Indama which resulted in the death of Juhaiber Alamsirul, an ASG sub-commander in the island's south (The Philippine Star, February 14). In the days prior to the killing of Alamsirul, Philippine troops from the 32nd Infantry Battalion eliminated another ASG commander, Suhud Tanajalin, in an encounter in the town of Tuburan on Basilan's east coast after being tipped off to his presence by local villagers (Sun Star, February 9). Before the Army closed in on Tanajalin, he was believed responsible for the killing of one soldier and the injuring of ten others in an IED attack on a Humvee while troops were en route to pursue leads relating to the abduction of two Chinese nationals believed to have been kidnapped by the ASG in 2010 (Manila Bulletin, February 3).

Additionally, another long-sought after ASG militant known by the nom de guerre Abu Walid was captured in Zamboanga City, Mindanao, in an operation conducted by Philippine intelligence agents (Mindanao Examiner, February 9). Abu Walid has been wanted by Manila for close to a decade in connection with a 2001 hostage-taking raid at a hospital and church in the town of Lamitan in northeastern Basilan. The Lamitan siege

was connected to the kidnapping raid at the Dos Palmas resort on the southwestern island of Palawan in May of 2001 that included a Kansan missionary couple who were transported to Basilan and held hostage there for a year.

When ASG militants stormed Lamitan, they brought their captives from Palawan into town with them while taking additional local hostages before retreating to the jungle after deadly clashes with Philippine troops. The rescue operation in early June 2002 resulted in the death of missionary Martin Burnham and the shooting of his wife Gracia Burnham, who were celebrating a wedding anniversary on Palawan when Abu Sayyaf guerillas stormed the beach where they were holidaying the previous year. An Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman definitively stated that Abu Walid was part of the Lamitan siege but did not comment on whether he was part of the cell involved in the Palawan raid.

Note:

1. For a profile of ULFA, see Derek Henry Flood, *Motivations and Methods of India's United Liberation Front of Asom*, *Terrorism Monitor*, April 10, 2009.

## From 9/11 to Iraq: The Long Arm of Saudi Arabia's Suliman al-Elwan

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

**A**bdulaziz al-Omari, one of the five hijackers on board American Airlines Flight 11 that crashed into the North Tower of New York's World Trade Center on 9/11, devoted part of his final will and testament to the sheikhs (religious scholars) who provided him rigid religious instruction. Al-Omari urged these sheikhs to continue to support the Saudi jihadi movement long after his death. One of several



influential sheikhs among the current crop of Saudi Arabian jihadis has been a jailed scholar named Suliman al-Elwan. [1] Because al-Omari had been al-Elwan's student, his 'martyrdom' in New York was widely used to demonstrate al-Elwan's influence in Salafi-jihadi circles in the Arabian Peninsula. As one the foremost intellectuals of an anti-modernist, ultra-socially conservative movement known as the al-Shu'aybi circle (see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, December, 2010), al-Elwan's actual influence on the Salafi-jihadi movement appeared later when Saudi jihadis banked on his righteous declarations in order to legitimize their war against the Saudi state and their infiltration into Iraq to wage war against foreign forces and the Shia in that country whom they consider apostates.

Like several other prominent jihadis in Saudi Arabia, al-Elwan's relationship to the late Yusuf al-Uyayri, the leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia who was killed by Saudi authorities in 2003 (see *Terrorism Focus*, March 9, 2007), played a role in elevating his profile as a vaunted sheikh among hardcore jihadi practitioners. The most extensive biography of al-Elwan was written by al-Uyayri in July 2000. It is important to note that al-Elwan's and al-Uyayri's wives are sisters and that kinship like theirs is an elemental factor in group cohesion among Saudi Arabia's hardcore Islamists. [2]

### Background

Suliman al-Elwan was born in the socially conservative city of Buraydah, the capital of al-Qasim Province in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, in either 1969 or 1970. He left his formal education in order to informally study Islamic law in study groups held by a number of famous sheikhs in Saudi Arabia.

Beginning in the 1990s, after studying under various sheikhs throughout the Saudi Kingdom, al-Elwan began to instruct students of his own in the same style in which he was taught. He was halted from his teaching activities in 1997 for reasons that remain unclear. Many of al-Elwan's religious interpretations and opinions were considered far too controversial among mainstream pro-Riyadh Salafi scholars. These opinions resulted in al-Elwan being sentenced to 18 days in prison after he criticized ceremonies held for students who had successfully memorized the Quran. Al-Elwan stated that these types of Quran memorizations and celebrations did not exist in the era of the Prophet Muhammad which means they are considered "bid'a" (post-Muhammad period innovations not permitted in Islam). However,

these disagreements with the modernizing Sahwa Salafi scholars did not immediately lead to antagonism between the opposing sides as would occur later.

### Afghanistan

Suliman al-Elwan's emergence as a jihadi scholar, like most of the al-Shu'aybi school's ideologues, was linked to the polarization that gripped Saudi Arabia between jihadi polemicists and non-jihadi Salafi thinkers, known as the Sahwa, in the months before 9/11. The main issue over which the two schools of thought quarreled was Afghanistan and the refusal to impotently stand by and watch the American invasion there from afar. In this context, al-Elwan and his al-Shu'aybi colleagues issued several fatwas advocating on behalf of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (the Taliban) and prohibiting any assistance to the United States with regard to its military and intelligence actions in Central and South Asia after 9/11. Following the tumult of 2001, al-Elwan and his colleagues Nasir al-Fahd, Ali al-Khudair, and Hamoud al-Khaldi became the most influential anti-Western sheiks for jihadis in the Kingdom.

Al-Elwan's prominence among jihadis was elevated further upon his issuing of a fatwa endorsing the use of suicide bombing among Palestinian resistance fighters as a legitimate tactic to be used against Zionist occupation forces in an increasingly Islamicized warfare theater in Israel and Palestine after the outbreak of the second intifada. This fatwa was sent out in 2000, when there were still serious reservations among many Muslim scholars on the religious implications of suicide bombings. Al-Elwan cited approximately 30 examples backing up his radical view that suicide bombing is indeed lawful under his interpretation of Islamic law. [3]

Like other scholars in the al-Shu'aybi school of thought, al-Elwan had issued a fatwa supporting the Afghan Taliban after they decimated the towering Buddha sculptures in central Afghanistan's Hazarajat region in March 2001. [4] Later that year, al-Elwan had issued two notable fatwas (September 21, 2001 and October 19, 2001, respectively) that prohibited any assistance to the Americans in Afghanistan, considered any Muslim who assists Americans in any manner an infidel, and broadly urged Muslims to assist the Afghan people and the Taliban by all means, including partaking in violent jihad. [5]

After his divisive stance on Afghanistan and 9/11 which ran against the current being propagated by Saudi

moderates and modernizers, Al-Elwan's influence began to spread to a wider audience after the American-led invasion of Iraq. It seems his writings inspired a new generation of Saudi jihadis and helped lure them into both the confrontation with the Saudi state that took place from 2003-2007 and volunteering in the Iraq war.

## The Iraq effect

Since the current Iraq war began, al-Elwan devoted his efforts to urging Muslims to fight the Anglo-American forces and issued several statements describing the invasion and subsequent occupation as a Crusade. On March 31, 2003, eleven days after American troops breached the massive sand berms separating Iraq from Kuwait, al-Elwan issued an open letter to the Iraqi people urging them to resist the invading forces and carry out suicide bombings to defeat them. [6] As his call to jihad in Iraq intensified and his justifications for jihad inside Saudi Arabia persisted, Saudi authorities arrested al-Elwan again on April 28, 2004 and have kept him imprisoned until the present, though the religious foundation he laid a decade ago has continued to nurture a new generation of jihadists.

Saudi fighters entering Iraq comprised the highest percentage among the non-indigenous Arab fighters for a time (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 2, 2005), a fact that gives some indication of the influence that al-Elwan's fatwas and those issued by like-minded sheikhs played in the flow of jihadis to Iraq. The influence of al-Elwan surfaced again when the then leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, the late Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, quoted al-Elwan in his response to his ideological mentor, a Palestinian scribe named Isam Mohammad Tahir al-Barqawi (a.k.a. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi), in 2005. Al-Zarqawi challenged al-Maqdisi about the Shia being infidels. Al-Zarqawi cited a pro-takfiri fatwa that al-Elwan had issued on the subject justifying his nihilistic stance against the Iraqi Shia who he termed "despicable." [7]

## Conclusion

Suliman al-Elwan's influence on jihadis in Saudi Arabia and Iraq appears to have started when his late brother-in-law, Yusuf al- Uyayri, presented him to jihadis in Saudi Arabia as a jihadi sheikh. As well as the dual occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan that have become natural recruitment drivers in and of themselves, an oft overlooked factor in the West is that that kinship has played major role in recruitment methods of al-

Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. Aside from using familial ties to advance the cause of jihad, Suliman al-Elwan came to the fore of anti-Western Islamism at a time when the peninsula's Islamists were experiencing a vacuum in their religious leadership on which many have come to depend for theological succour. Suliman al-Elwan was foremost among the jihadi sheikhs filling this void and espousing jihad at a time when the ummah (the global Islamic community) viewed itself as being under immense outside threat from the West and becoming increasingly radicalized.

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## Notes:

- 1 To view a jihadi forum listing Abdulaziz al-Omari's ideological influences (in Arabic), see: <http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=371507>.
2. To view Suleiman al-Elwan's biography (in Arabic) authored by Yusuf al-Uyayri see; <http://www.saaaid.net/Warathah/1/Al-Alwan.htm>.
3. To view Suliman al-Elwan's fatwa legitimating suicide attacks against Israelis (in Arabic), see: <http://www.saaaid.net/Warathah/Al-Alwan/1.htm>.
4. To view Suliman al-Elwan's fatwa justifying the destruction of Afghanistan's Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 (in Arabic), see: <http://www.saaaid.net/Warathah/Al-Alwan/4.htm>.
5. To view Suliman al-Elwan's fatwa urging Muslims to fight in Afghanistan (in Arabic), see: <http://www.saaaid.net/Warathah/Al-Alwan/6.htm>.
6. To view the letter (in Arabic) from al-Elwan to the people of Iraq, see: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=j7auyusx>.
7. To view the letter (in Arabic) from al-Zarqawi to al-Maqdisi, see: <http://www.alltalaba.com/board/index.php?showtopic=12470&chl>.

## **Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi's Last Line of Defense: A Profile of Khamis al-Qaddafi**

*By Andrew McGregor*

**L**ibya's most important military commander has no combat experience and has achieved his rank through nepotism rather than merit. His first active command involved attacking unarmed civilians and ex-members of his own military, yet Khamis al-Qaddafi will play a pivotal role in the coming days as the fate of the Libyan regime led by his father, Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi, is decided.

Born in 1978 and the fifth son of President Qaddafi, Khamis has avoided the allegations of hard partying and womanizing that have plagued the reputations of his older brothers. As commander of Libya's 32nd (Mechanized) Brigade, Khamis al-Qaddafi controls the best-trained and best-equipped elements of the Libyan Armed Forces. The 32nd, popularly known as the "Khamis Brigade," is designed to defend the regime from both external and internal threats, with troops groomed to display loyalty to the Qaddafi family regime and prepared to fight other units of the armed forces in defense of the regime, if need be. While other officers are constantly rotated between various units to prevent the development of personal loyalties within military units to their commanding officers, Qaddafi's sons tend to be tied to certain commands. Better pay, benefits, weapons and equipment in the Khamis Brigade are intended to solidify loyalty to the unit's commander, Khamis.

Khamis is a graduate of the Libyan military academy in Tripoli who took further military training in Russia at the Frunze Military Academy and the General Staff Academy of the Russian Armed Forces in Moscow. After completing his military studies in Moscow, Khamis paid a visit to Algeria, where he was received by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The Khamis Brigade later took part in joint exercises with the Algerian military (JANA [Tripoli], December 1, 2007). In 2009, Khamis was invited to observe joint Belarus-Russian military exercises (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, September 30, 2009).

Spanish sources say Khamis was not with his brigade when the unrest began, but was instead pursuing an international MBA at Madrid's Instituto de Empresa,

studies which he began in April 2010. Khamis was apparently attempting to keep a low profile in Spain, using the name "Mu'ammar Khamis," though the Spanish government was aware of his presence. He was scheduled to attend a seminar in South Africa this week, but the school says it is now unaware of his whereabouts (El Pais [Madrid], February 22). He turned up on Libyan national TV on February 22, saluting and embracing his father after the latter's televised speech to the nation (Afrol News, February 23). The implication was clear to viewers – the Khamis Brigade would be leading the assault on those challenging the regime.

The Khamis Brigade was normally stationed close to Benghazi, but it appears that most of the unit has withdrawn to the Tripoli region. According to the recently resigned Libyan envoy to the Arab League, Abd al-Mun'in al-Huni, the Libyan regime is now largely confined to four military bases in the Tripoli region, including that of the Khamis Brigade and the Bab al-Aziziyah, which contains the residence of Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 26).

Khamis was recently reported to have killed Said Rashid al-Muqarha, a tribal leader in the pro-government Muqarha tribe (al-Arabiya, February 23; ABC Internacional [Madrid], February 25). Elsewhere, French-speaking mercenaries captured by protesters in Benghazi alleged that Khamis issued the orders to fire live-ammunition at demonstrators (al-Arabiya, February 19).

The Khamis Brigade has been reported as taking part in the fighting in several places, including Benghazi and Misurata, where they reportedly failed to retake an airbase (al-Jazeera, February 26; Financial Times, February 23). The reluctance of defecting troops in eastern Libya to take a frontline role in resisting the government suggests they are fully aware of their limitations in engaging the Khamis Brigade or other units still loyal to Qaddafi. However, fear of the Khamis Brigade seems to have played a bigger role in the current struggle for Libya than any actual military operations carried out by the unit so far. It may be that, in classic military style, the regime is holding its best troops back for use in a critical encounter such as the defense of Tripoli and the Bab al-Aziziyah barracks.

U.S. sanctions imposed on Libya on February 25 were followed by UN Security Council sanctions the next day that specifically targeted a number of members of the Qaddafi family, including Khamis (al-Jazeera, February 27; BBC, February 25). UNSC Resolution 1970 includes

travel bans and asset freezes.

Several of Khamis' brothers also hold commands in the military, including Sa'adi and Mu'tasim, the national security advisor, though neither are regarded as serious military prospects. Colonel Mu'tassim is reported to have asked his father for \$1.2 billion in 2008 to establish a military force comparable to that of his brother Khamis (Guardian, February 21). Another son, Saif al-Arab, is rumored to have joined the revolutionaries after having been sent east to repress the revolt.

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## A Portrait of Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri: The Last Ba'athist

*By Rafid Fadhil Ali*

Over the months that followed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, most of the prominent figures of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime and his family members were killed, captured or fled the country. The most senior member of the regime who survived that critical period was Saddam Hussein's vice president, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri. After the execution of the former dictator on December 30, 2006, al-Douri was held up as Hussein's successor and head of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, which had become a secretive,

banned organization. Al-Douri was the King of Clubs in the deck of playing cards depicting the most-wanted Iraqis after the invasion. There is an American bounty of \$10,000,000 on his head. He is also on the top of the most wanted list of the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

### After the Fall

In the years after the invasion, but particularly in 2007 following Hussein's execution, the Ba'ath suffered many splits which led to the emergence of two Ba'athist factions. Al-Douri is leading the bigger of the two. The smaller faction is led by the Syrian-based General Muhammad Younis al-Ahmad. [1]

Izzat al-Douri is recognized as the leader of the party by most of the Ba'athists and pro-Ba'athist web sites. He also has the loyalty of many Ba'athist exiles. When he assumed the leadership of the Ba'ath after the execution of Saddam Hussein, the news was announced on albasra.net under the title "The Mujahid – the one who undertakes holy fight- Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri elected the party's Secretary-General succeeding the martyr Saddam Hussein." The announcement was not dated but it appeared online in January 2007.

### A Life in the Ba'ath Party

Izzat Ibrahim Khalil al-Douri was born in 1942 in the town of al-Dour (alternatively spelled Ad-Dawr) about 120 kilometers north of Baghdad and close to Tikrit, the hometown of Saddam Hussein. Al-Douri had a humble education and earned no degree. He took up his father's work as an ice vendor. He joined the Ba'ath Party early in his life. After the fall of the first Ba'athist regime in 1963 the party suffered crackdowns, arrests and splits. It was during this external pressure on the Ba'ath and its internal tumult that al-Douri became one of the party's early leaders.

After the successful Ba'athist coup of July 1968 and the return of the Ba'athists to power in Baghdad, the 26-year-old al-Douri became a member of the highest executive and legislative body of the party and the state, The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). His real power and influence came from his absolute loyalty and support for the then vice president Saddam Hussein. Apart from al-Douri, the only other two members of that first formation of the RCC who survived the purges of the following decades were Taha Yaseen Ramadhan (executed in 2007) and Hussein himself.



Between 1969 and 1974 al-Douri was a minister of agriculture. After that he became the minister of the interior until Hussein took over the presidency in July 1979. Al-Douri then became the deputy chairman of the RCC and Iraq's vice president.

### The Second Man or Not?

Over the years, and as Saddam began to rely on a smaller loyal circle, Izzat al-Douri was assigned more responsibilities. After the Gulf War of 1991 and the near simultaneous Shia and Kurdish revolts, al-Douri, who had no military background whatsoever, was given the rank of Major General and appointed as the deputy leader of the Iraqi Armed Forces, second only to Saddam Hussein.

In spite of all the sensitive positions that al-Douri occupied, he was not considered influential; neither was he looked upon as a typical second-in-command in the regime, especially when compared to Hussein's role as vice president prior to his taking of Iraq's top post in 1979.

In an interview with the Jamestown Foundation, Dr. Mazin al-Ramadhani, former dean of the faculty of political science at Saddam University (now known as al-Nahrain University), indicated that al-Douri had actually played no major role in the decision-making process of the former regime, despite the top positions he had occupied under Hussein. Al-Ramadhani also criticized the failure of the Ba'ath party under al-Douri to unite its factions and considered that a clear sign of weakness. He also cast doubts on al-Douri's competency: "Because of his age, his deteriorating health and being [a] fugitive, I do not think that Izzat al-Douri will be able to lead the Ba'ath into a better future. He represents the past not the present, nor the future."

### Insurgency

The role of Izzat al-Douri in the insurgency was not clear in the first two years of the American-led war as he, just like his organization, went underground. Beginning in 2005, a number of statements signed by him appeared online. He is now the leader of the National and Islamic Front, which is a coalition of political groups led by the Ba'ath. He is also the leader of the Supreme Command of the Jihad and Liberation Front, an umbrella organization of more than 30 insurgent groups. The latter front expanded when more groups recognized al-

Douri's leadership and became the National and Islamic and National Salvation Front (NINSF).

When the NINSF was formed, a statement by al-Douri was published in the pro-resistance web forum Henin. info on November 2, 2009 where he greeted the move, vowed not to negotiate with the Americans, and set out his plan for the post American withdrawal: "After the invaders pull out or flee, by God willing, there will be coordination with the other resistance groups from outside the NINSF in order to form a National Council formed by those powers who will have achieved the liberation and independence. This council should form an interim government which will organize a general election to establish a democratic patriotic multi-party regime."

That, however, might not be an unconditional commitment to build a Western-style democracy, as al-Douri elaborated: "the members of the council, its powers and duties, the terms of forming the government and its powers are all to be determined later on or by the time those bodies are formed." According to al-Douri, the NINSF includes more than 50 resistance groups. [2]

### Underground

Over the years many of al-Douri's audio cassettes were broadcast on pan-Arab satellite TV channels or uploaded on the internet. Yet he never appeared in video footage and the pictures of him used in the media, online and in the Iraqi and US governments' announcements are all pre-war images. His whereabouts and fate have been a matter of contradicting reports and immense speculation. However in late April 2010, Iraqi security sources revealed that he was in Baghdad (Asharq al-Awsat, April 29, 2010).

The rumors about al-Douri's health date back to before the 2003 invasion. He was said to be suffering from leukemia, but that has been denied by Salah al-Mokhtar, Iraq's former ambassador to India and a senior Ba'athist exile believed to be based in Yemen. At one point in 2005, it was reported that a Ba'athist web site posted that al-Douri had died (AP, November 13, 2005). Though al-Douri himself stressed in a 2008 interview that he was in good health and would fight until death or victory, the rumors regarding his well being continued unabated. A spokesman of the rival al-Ahmad faction claimed that al-Douri had died in 2010 (Asharq al-Awsat, August 20, 2010). This issue will always be a matter of controversy as long as al-Douri and his group operate underground.



### The Post-Invasion Strategy of the Ba'ath Party

The Ba'athists in al-Douri's organization do not recognize the political process in a democratizing Iraq. For them, the elections and the governments since 2003 have all been deemed illegitimate and the only legal government was theirs. In late 2005, while the majority of the Sunni population was about to participate in the upcoming election (held in December 2005 with a huge Sunni turnout), al-Douri announced a fresh strategy for the Ba'ath and the resistance. Al-Douri stressed that the ultimate goal of his organization was to achieve a "complete, comprehensive and profound liberation." That version of "liberation" was explained as ending the coalition military presence in Iraq entirely and eliminating all of its related consequences including the present Iraqi government and emerging American-linked political class. The strategy claimed that the resistance had reached a perfect form and it should focus on defeating its stated enemy, the American-led coalition forces, and their project of shoring up a representative parliamentary democracy in the heart of the Arab realm. Al-Douri warned that this American-influenced framework should not be allowed to succeed and influence other parts of the Arab world (Albasrah.net, October 05, 2005).

Although the Ba'ath Party was comprised of hundreds of thousands of both Shia and Sunni Iraqis before the current war, the resentment and resistance against the advent of Ba'athist discrimination and the ad hoc policy known as de-Ba'athification were much more profound among the Sunni populace. Al-Douri admitted that his party was operating essentially among just the Sunni Arabs. He warned that the Americans were planning to give more power to the Sunnis which would lead to an intra-Sunni conflict between co-opted Sunnis and pro-resistance Sunnis and the result of such a conflict would weaken the overall resistance.

Al-Douri's Ba'ath strategy for regaining power in Iraq has three phases: the liberation, the transitional stage and the post-liberation stage, which includes building a democratic state defined within Ba'athist parameters, a contradiction in terms of the view of most. In an interview with al-Douri posted on his National Islamic Front website, he portrays such a state as one where the Ba'ath party has the sole leading role and where other parties recognize that role (Jabha-wqd.net, May 27, 2008).

### Relations with Other Insurgent Groups

That tendency to dominate the political space alienated all of the Ba'ath's partners in the past and seems to still have the same effect with other insurgent groups today. In response to one of al-Douri's statements, the Political Council of the Iraqi Resistance denied and condemned the allegations of a Ba'athist leadership for the resistance (Alboraq.biz, August 3, 2010).

A spokesman of the Islamic Army in Iraq also denied any leadership role for al-Douri in the resistance: "What did Izzat al-Douri do when he was the second man in the state? What did he do when he was the commander of the Northern Sector during the war? Why did his brigades surrender? Al-Douri has nothing to do with the resistance. If he was the leader we would not be ashamed to admit that. The resistance is of an Islamic identity conducted by people who were chased by al-Douri's security service when he was in power" (Alboraq.info, July 2, 2009).

In turn, al-Douri maintains a conciliatory tone when talking about the other resistance groups, including al-Qaeda in Iraq and other Shia and Sunni Islamists in an attempt not to antagonize them. Although a life-long member of the pointedly secular Ba'ath party, al-Douri has always preserved his faith. He is a well-known adherent of Sufism, a mystical strain of Islam. In accordance with their traditional trend of avoiding politics, Iraqi Sufis did not join the insurgency at its inception. Through the apparent influence of Izzat al-Douri, the Sufi armed group of the Jaish Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandia (The Army of the Men of the Naqshabandia- JTRN) was formed in late 2006 and became one of the most active insurgent groups, especially in the area around the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 25, 2008). The formation of the JTRN may have been an attempt by al-Douri to maintain credibility within Iraq's fissiparous, violent, non-state groups.

### Conclusion

After 35 years in power, members of the Ba'ath party looked at President Saddam Hussein as a symbol not only for their party, but for their very existence. For the young generations, Hussein was the only leader they knew. For the older Ba'athists, he was the man who led them to crush their local rivals ruthlessly and enjoyed decades in power despite the extreme volatility

of local, regional and international politics. After the fall of the regime, the Ba'ath was immediately banned in Iraq. Members of the loyal base went underground to fight the Americans, the ascendant and resurgent Iraqi parties and the then nascent government. For those who represent the hard core of the Ba'ath, al-Douri was a symbol of the continuity of Saddam's leadership.

The attempts to unify the bitter split between al-Douri's core Ba'ath faction and General al-Ahmad's Syrian-based wing of the Ba'ath party have failed. Nevertheless, al-Douri kept consolidating his control over the Ba'athists. General Ghazwan al-Kubeisi, [3] the second man in al-Ahmad's branch, has recently defected and joined al-Douri's organization.

As the date of a comprehensive American withdrawal from Iraq is approaching, the fate of al-Douri and his group remains a major issue for Iraq's new political structure. Further public resentment would give more of a chance for radical forces to appeal to the public and overshadow the still ongoing democratic transition in Iraq. Al-Douri's group has recently welcomed the violent protest in the southern city of al-Kut and predicted an all-out revolution that will ultimately topple the al-Maliki government and the already shrinking American occupation.

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#### Notes:

1. For a profile of General al-Ahmad, see Rafid Fadhil Ali, Reviving the Iraqi Ba'ath: A Profile of General Muhammad Yunis al-Ahmad, *Terrorism Monitor*, February 9, 2009.
2. To view the video of the announcement of the formation of the NINSF on Youtube see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zyfl8ToO2J8&feature=related>.
3. For a profile of General Kubeisi, see Rafid Fadhil Ali, Straddling the New Ba'athist Divide: Iraq's Ghazwan al-Kubeisi, *Militant Leadership Monitor*, December 2010.

## Mohammed Yasin Malik: From Underground Militant Leader to Kashmir's Gandhi

*By Derek Henry Flood*

### Background

Mohammed Yasin Malik, the leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), has undergone a 15-year transformation from underground militant leader fomenting violence to an advocate for a non-violent solution to the festering crisis plaguing South Asia's northernmost tier for decades. He describes himself as a "pioneer of armed struggle in Kashmir" beginning in the mid-1980s who now leads a non-violent movement that is suing India for peace and a de-escalation of the world's largest military occupation. [1] Malik leads his JKLF faction in the Maisuma area of central Srinagar, the capital of Indian-held Kashmir, after a split divided the movement between the disputed territory's Indian and Pakistani sectors. [2] Malik's wing of the JKLF is a secular, ethno-nationalist movement with irredentist aims. Its primary goal is the reunification of a bifurcated Kashmir and the creation of a sovereign Kashmir free from Indian or Pakistani rule yet economically and politically integrated into wider South Asia with secure borders. Malik was an early adapter to Kashmiri militancy, but radically altered his view upon release from an Indian prison in May 1994 when Malik unilaterally declared a ceasefire between the militant fighters under his command and the Indian security forces without the approval of the JKLF's most senior leadership. Malik's ceasefire eventually caused an ideological rupture within the movement, causing the JKLF to fracture, a wound that has not yet healed. [3] Malik espouses a Gandhian mantra of peaceful resistance in the Valley, as Kashmir is known colloquially in the region, but can sometimes signify that he still holds a militant card should matters continue to deteriorate and peace continue remain a distant prospect for Kashmir's burgeoning young populace. Malik, 44, has expressed his lifelong struggle for the liberation of Kashmir is strictly political in nature and he lacks the Islamism imbued in other militant groups operating in the region. In 2009, he married a London School of Economics-educated, controversial Pakistani artist named Mushaal Mullick in Islamabad (Reuters, January 22, 2009).

In a 2010 interview that preceded a deadly summer season intifada that left more than 100 dead, Malik stated: “It has taken us so many years with a very hard effort to bring a transition from violent movement to non-violent movement. This transition needs to be respected ... If Kashmiris are not given respect they could fall back to a violent past” (Reuters, January 25, 2010). Malik is a key figure in counterinsurgency (COIN) and the over-militarization in South Asia, in that many analysts believe the key to solving the Afghanistan-Pakistan Taliban crises lay in finding a working solution to Kashmir. In a constant tug of war between Islamabad and Washington over the positioning of Pakistan’s armed forces, Washington tries to demand that Pakistan move huge numbers of troops away from the border between Pakistan’s Punjab Province and India’s Punjab State and along the Line of Control (LoC) that has acted as the de facto border dividing Kashmir following the signing of the Simla Agreement of 1972. The American position is that the Pakistani Army must mass its troops along the Durand Line facing Afghanistan if the Pentagon’s COIN strategy in eastern Afghanistan is to ever meet success.

### A Militant Life

Yasin Malik entered Kashmiri politics as a vocal member of the Islamic Students League in support of the Muslim United Front, an opposition political party in the Valley. Being intensely disaffected with the outcome of a rigged legislative election in Kashmir, Malik eventually fled to Pakistan as a young man with three like-minded friends who came to be known as the HAJY Group (Frontline [Chennai], September 30-October 13, 2000). After receiving guerrilla training in Pakistani-held Azad Kashmir in the late 1980s, Yasin Malik crossed back over the LoC into Indian-held Kashmir and took up a very active role in the growing insurgency. Malik was allegedly involved in two major incidents at the beginning of Kashmir’s troubles which helped to shape events for years to come. On December 8, 1989, a group of four JKLF militants abducted Rubaiya Sayeed, the then 23-year-old daughter of Mufti Muhammed Sayeed, the Indian home minister. Rubaiya was held in exchange for five jailed militants of the JKLF that Malik demanded released. For years there was speculation in the Valley that Malik was personally involved in the logistics of the kidnapping if not the actual act itself. The operation was successful in that Rubaiya was set free 15 days after the five militants were freed by Indian authorities, and though Malik was never conclusively linked to the it, the accusation continues to surface in the Indian media and in interviews with JKLF Vice Chairman Javed Mir

(Press Trust of India, February 8, 2004; India Today, May 9, 2000). [4] The other incident for which Malik is most associated is the killing of four Indian Air Force personnel in 1989 at Awantipora airbase (The Hindu, January 25, 2006; Deccan Chronicle, September 16, 2010). The insurgents led by Malik were under immense pressure from the start of his imprisonment as the Indian security forces attempted to neutralize them, the ISI encouraged the splintering of the JKLF into groups it could control, and the rise of the Pakistan-backed Hizbul Mujahideen. [5]

Malik was jailed from August 1990 to May 1994 but was never convicted for his involvement in either of these cases, both of which he is accused of having integral involvement. He stands accused in a total of 23 cases related to the JKLF’s early militancy but because of the stultifying bureaucracy of Jammu and Kashmir’s court system, which operates under a provision known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act that requires authorization from the central government before cases can be properly tried, Yasin Malik continues to remain free at present (Hindustan Times, April 25, 2008).

### Malik and the JKLF in Geopolitical Context

The United States regularly tries to insist that Pakistan shuttle troops poised eastward in a traditionally defensive stance toward India (or offensive from the Indian view) to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province and the perennially troubled Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to act as the anvil to America’s COIN hammer in Afghanistan’s eastern provinces. American ambitions in Islamabad are often met with ambiguity at best, as Pakistan views India as a constant external threat. In response, Pakistani elites attempt to explain to the Americans that they are under constant threat from a rising India with an ever-increasing military capability, a cry that tends to fall on deaf ears in Washington. Both parties are talking past one another with divergent interests in the region. The Obama administration has virtually no political leverage in Kashmir because India has for decades insisted the dispute is strictly to be talked of in bilateral terms, and considers even mere comments on the issue by foreign leaders a grave condescension to Indian sovereignty. Malik and other leading separatists have discarded a policy concept known as the “Musharraf formula” put forth by the former Pakistani leader in 2004 that was abhorred by hard line religious parties in both India and Pakistan. The Musharraf formula consisted of a demilitarization of the LoC, shared sovereignty over Kashmir between India and Pakistan,

and facilitating travel and trade across the LoC, making it irrelevant over time as Kashmir would eventually endure a kind of soft reunification (The Pioneer [New Delhi], January 18). This formula was proposed as an interim arrangement to help facilitate a lasting peace at a later, unspecified date and was a pragmatic decision by Musharraf at the time in consideration of Pakistan's post-9/11 geopolitical realities vis-à-vis American strategy in Afghanistan (Frontline [Chennai], November 6-19, 2004). Islamabad's prestige in Indian-controlled regions of Kashmir has greatly declined in light of Pakistan's domestic slide into militant chaos and internal Talibanization. Yasin Malik, as the JKLF's politically astute champion of Kashmiri identity, recognizes that over two decades of insurgency have resulted in few if any serious gains for his JKLF, and Islamist Kashmiri leaders are moving closer to his independence line as Pakistan's Kashmir policy becomes less and less viable.

Yasin Malik has been an independent, largely secular player in the Kashmir dispute much to the consternation of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which prefers to use more pliable, hardline Islamist-inspired militant groups like Hizb-ul Mujahideen, Harakat al-Ansar, and Lashkar-e-Toiba in proxy warfare against Indian forces and as a political lever inside Indian-controlled Kashmir. Hizb-ul Mujahideen, whose position was that Indian-controlled Kashmir should merge with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and thus put it greatly at odds with Malik's JKLF, essentially went to war against Hizb-ul Mujahideen in the insurgency's early period in the 1990s as the two rivals fought for primacy in the rebellion. A rift developed between Malik's independence-minded outfit and jihadis supported directly by the Pakistani state who have viewed Kashmir through a lens of Islamism and Pakistani regional policy. It is important to note this schism in light of the summer 2010 uprising in Srinagar in which "Pakistan zindabad" ("long live Pakistan") was not shouted by protestors who in the past used pro-Pakistani slogans to taunt Indian authorities and goad them into violent confrontations (The Asian Age, January 28). An array of Kashmiri separatists pulling further away from Islamabad's center of gravity may eventually create a more genuine political space for negotiations with Delhi and Kashmiri leaders like Malik.

Malik defiantly does not tow the Pakistani line in Indian-controlled areas evidenced by his very public calls for the return of the Valley's Pandits, Kashmir's indigenous Hindu population that began fleeing the region over two decades ago when they were targeted during the

early phases of militant violence. The right of return of Hindu Pandit refugees from their internal exile in Jammu and Delhi has been one of the most contentious issues of the Kashmir conflict. The remaining Pandits in Srinagar live in a large walled compound in regular fear of Pakistan-backed militants. In his vocal reaching out to the threatened Hindu population, Malik is trying to build credibility to negotiate on behalf of all Kashmiris and disavow that separatism is synonymous with the construction of a hostile Islamic state in the Himalayan territory.

### Conclusion

Symbolically, on the twentieth anniversary of the Gawakadal massacre, a catalytic moment in the insurgency's early days when Indian paramilitary forces massacred a group of unarmed protestors, Malik returned to the notorious site along the Jhelum river and told those assembled: "The minorities [Hindus] living in the valley are not here because of the [Indian] government backing, but they stayed back because of cooperation and support of the [Kashmiri] Muslim neighbors" (Hindustan Times, January 21, 2010). [6] Malik's outwardly pro-Pandit stance signifies an attempt to return the Valley to the concept of Kashmiriyat, an ancient notion of inclusive, cooperative Kashmiri nationalism that aspires toward harmony between Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists hailing back to the era of an undivided pre-1947 princely Kashmir. The promotion of anti-communalist Kashmiriyat erodes the credibility of Islamic nationalism espoused by many Pakistan-backed jihadi groups and takes steam away from Delhi which insists that Muslim-majority Kashmir, from which the father of the modern Indian state, Jawaharlal Nehru, had his origins, is an integral part of a multi-religious, highly heterogeneous Indian republic in contrast to Muslim Pakistan.

A recent report on the outcome of the 2010 violence that erupted in the Valley by an Indian think-tank called the Centre for Policy Analysis found that Pakistani influence had greatly lessened and that the uprising was an indigenously inspired and led one and that protestors expressed the azadi ("independence") sentiment with no strong desire to merge with the Pakistani state (The Telegraph [Kolkata], December 28, 2010). Malik's former JKLF comrade and mentor, Amanullah Khan, heads the other JKLF faction based in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Pakistan proper. Khan's JKLF continues to promote the idea of an armed struggle against Indian domination



as a means to emancipate occupied Kashmir. Khan's faction of the JKLF was virtually destroyed by Indian forces in an assault on their headquarters in March 1996 near Srinagar's Haratbal shrine on the majestic Dal Lake leaving Malik's non-violent wing of the party the dominant and relevant faction in Kashmir today as a constituent member of the umbrella All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an amalgam of militant groups in Kashmir (see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, September 2010). Malik sees a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir crisis as the only means to end the conflict now in its twenty-second year that has brought nothing but unending bloodshed to the tortured Valley. Though he may have the credibility to negotiate with Delhi under particular circumstances when the Indian government sees fit, his life-long quest for azadi for the whole of Kashmir remains as distant as ever. In the context of 2010's massive summer uprising, the administration of an enlightened PM Manmohan Singh may finally view the status quo in Srinagar as untenable and finally begin a troop drawdown. Whatever develops in the near term, Yasin Malik will be involved in Kashmir's political evolution for many years to come as a key figure who has seen virtually every side of this tragedy.

effects, see Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in conflict: India, Pakistan and the unending war*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000 first ed.), p.148.

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#### Notes:

1. The Government of India does not publish precise figures on its troop presence in Jammu and Kashmir but it is estimated to be between 300,000-500,000 depending partly on massive troop movements and the sheer size of India's military (BBC, January 14).
2. The third sector of Kashmir, known as Aksai Chin, is held by China and is mostly a people-less expanse controlled by the People's Liberation Army and is free of militant violence.
3. Arif Jamal, *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*, (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2009), pp.148-149.
4. Pradeep Thakur, *Militant monologues: Echoes from the Kashmir valley*, (New Delhi: Parity Paperbacks, 2003), pp.125-126.
5. Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2005), pp.128-129.
6. For a description on the Gawakadal episode and its