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Libyan oil pipeline damaged in fighting

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DISPUTED ABYEI DISTRICT COULD LAUNCH NEW WAR BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH SUDAN

Last weekend's military occupation of the disputed Abyei district by the Northern Sudanese Army is the latest step in a series of armed clashes in the area that threaten to reignite hostilities between North and South Sudan in the lead-up to South Sudan's official declaration of independence on July 9.

Lying on the border of South Kordofan province (part of North Sudan) and Bahr al-Ghazal (part of South Sudan), the oil rich Abyei district is home to the Ngok Dinka and, for part of the year at least, the Arab Missiriya. The Ngok Dinka are well represented in the highest levels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Abyei lies atop the highly productive Muglad Basin, though some believe intensive production in this area since the 1990s has largely depleted the reserves in this area. Several important pipelines from other oil-producing regions run through Abyei.

Both North and South Sudan were to have withdrawn military forces from Abyei by May 21, except for a small joint force that would continue to provide security. Yet, a battalion of roughly 200 Northern troops was attacked seven kilometers south of Abyei's northern border during their withdrawal on May 19, leaving 22 soldiers dead and many more missing. The Northern battalion was being escorted by United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) units, which also came under attack. Northern military officials immediately blamed SPLA forces for the attack (SUNA, May 20; May 21). Khartoum responded by occupying Abyei with a force that included 15 tanks, while government aircraft were observed bombing a number of villages (Sudan Tribune, May 22). Armed looters swept through Abyei Town on May 23 without opposition, displacing nearly the entire population.

While the identity of the attackers has not been confirmed, the attack on the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) may have been a Southern response to an incident on May 1, when an SPLA unit attempted to prevent an SAF convoy of 200 men and six land-

cruisers mounted with machine-guns from entering Abyei. The SAF force opened fire, killing 11 Southern troops and three civilians (AFP, May 3).

An SAF statement accused the SPLM of consolidating its military presence in Abyei since December 2010, in violation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) (Sudan Vision, May 23). Khartoum maintains that Abyei remains part of the North under the constitution until a referendum determines otherwise. At a rally in South Kordofan on April 27, President Omar al-Bashir affirmed this position and expressed his support for the Missiriya tribe (SUNA, April 27).

Armed clashes occurred between the Missiriya and the Ngok Dinka in 2007; and, by 2008, units of the SAF were battling the SPLA for control of Abyei, destroying much of the housing and infrastructure in the process. Arbitration at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague reduced the size of the district, giving the productive Heglig oil field to the North and promising a plebiscite on the future status of Abyei to take place simultaneously with a referendum on Southern independence in January 2011.

Inability to agree on whether the pastoral Missiriya, who traditionally cross into Abyei with their herds for six to eight months of the year, should have the right to vote in a plebiscite on whether Abyei should join the North or South led to a postponement of the vote. The postponement was followed by renewed clashes between Ngok Dinka and Missiriya in late February/early March (for the background to the conflict in Abyei, see *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, October 4, 2010).

UNMIS peacekeepers stationed in the region stopped patrols in Abyei after the SAF ambush, citing the danger presented by the violence (Reuters, May 23). With some 15,000 to 20,000 residents losing their possessions and homes, a spokesman for the Government of the South Sudan (GoSS) appealed to the UN peacekeepers to “come out of their bunkers” (*Sudan Tribune*, May 23). The UN mission’s mandate expires on July 9, when the South is scheduled to become an independent state in consequence of the January referendum. According to a state minister of the Khartoum government: “UNMIS must pack their belongings because the time has come for their departure” (*Sudan Tribune*, May 23).

The UNMIS report on the incident failed to assign blame for the ambush, which brought an angry response from Northern officials, who said the UN’s “state of partiality and lack of clarity” would only encourage further violations of the 2005 CPA (*Sudan Tribune*, May 22).

The United States has warned that a continuing occupation of Abyei by Northern forces would jeopardize ongoing efforts to normalize relations with Khartoum, including removal from the list of state sponsors of terrorism (Reuters, May 23). Northern officials have vowed their troops will remain in place until new security arrangements are made.

AL-SHABAAB ISSUES STATEMENT ON CRUCIAL BATTLE FOR MOGADISHU’S BAKARA MARKET

For several years now, Mogadishu’s densely populated and labyrinthine Bakara Market has served as a stronghold for local al-Shabaab militants as well as provided a major source of revenues for the movement through donations, extortion and “taxation.” A continuing offensive by Ugandan and Burundian troops belonging to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)—supported by soldiers of Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Sufi Ahlu Sunna wa’l-Jama’a militia—has now penetrated the southern and western boundaries of the market. While the battle for Bakara will undoubtedly present all the difficulties of urban warfare, its conclusion will play a large role in determining the future of both the rebel Islamist movement and the struggling TFG.

A new statement from al-Shabaab describes the “sinister motives of the Ugandan and Burundian troops and their apostate allies,” suggesting their efforts to take the Bakara market are intended to destroy the local economy:

At a time when the people of Mogadishu are recovering from the severe droughts that had crippled much of the country in the recent months, and started rebuilding their shattered lives, the African crusaders embarked on a brutal campaign to demolish everything the innocent civilians have thus far managed to construct... Lured by greed and an opportunity to pillage and plunder the wealth of the civilians, the apostate militia [i.e. TFG forces], aided by the tanks and artillery of the African crusaders, launched an offensive on Bakara Market, where tens of thousands of civilians gather every day to earn their living. And as the people went about their usual businesses, the militia raided them with mortars, shells and bullets, specifically targeting large companies, hotels, warehouses and stores, and indiscriminately killing dozens of innocent civilians (Press Office of the Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, May 24).

The Bakara Market is an important source of food, clothing and arms for local Somalis. The TFG is intent on ending the latter trade, which offers everything from assault rifles to anti-aircraft guns. In 1993, Bakara was the scene of fighting between Somali militias and U.S. forces, and in 2007, a major fire was started during combat between Ethiopian troops and fighters of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).

As AMISOM forces tighten their grip on the approaches to the market, AMISOM commander Major General Nathan Mugisha has issued an appeal to local residents to “minimize unnecessary movements within the Bakara market area to avoid being caught up in crossfire” (Horseed Media, May 12). Shabaab fighters are digging trenches to prevent the entry of tanks or other military vehicles.

Shortly after the latest operation was launched on May 12, AMISOM forces reported killing Abdufita Muhammad, the

Shabaab commander in the Bakara market, his intelligence officer Abdiwahab Shaykh Dole and two Pakistani mujahideen identified as Hussein Abassi and Abdullahi Yalb (SUNA Times, May 15).

The struggle for the market has also led to civilian casualties, though both sides deny shelling civilians. A mortar round fired at a women's clothing market killed at least 14 people on May 18 (AFP, May 18). An AMISOM spokesman said the mission has "designated Bakara market a 'no-fire' zone and does not fire artillery or mortars into the market. We know that the extremists, who extort money from the businesses, have established a stronghold in the market and deliberately shield their reign of terror behind the civilians and business community who make their living there" (Horseed Media, May 21; AFP, May 20). The fighting is reported to have claimed 50 civilian lives and wounded 100 others in the period of May 22 to May 24 (Mareeg.com, May 24).

In a sign of confidence in AMISOM gains in Mogadishu, AMISOM has begun relocating its civilian staff and police element to Mogadishu from Nairobi, where they have been based since 2008 due to instability in the capital. The TFG has also promised to establish a police post in the market, promising that government forces will not engage in looting and robbery, a recurring complaint from local people (SUNA Times, May 23). Once reduced to a few square blocks around the presidential palace, the TFG and AMISOM now control roughly 60 percent of the city.

Algeria's Response to the Revolt in Libya

By Dario Cristiani

African support for military intervention in Libya against Colonel Qaddafi has been far cooler than that displayed by the United States and Europe (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 14). Among the African countries critical to the success of NATO activities in Libya, Algeria has rapidly emerged as one of the most critical voices against international intervention in neighboring Libya.

In March, Algeria voted against the Arab League's resolution calling for a no-fly zone over Libya, fearing that it would lead to the intervention of foreign ground forces and stressing the need to preserve Libya's security and territorial integrity (AP, March 12).

In April, Algerian Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci once again expressed Algeria's fear that some forces were aiming to split Libya and that terrorists could take advantage of the resulting instability, turning the country in a major regional black market for weapons. Medelci also announced his total support for the political solution suggested by the African Union (*Le Temps d'Algérie*, April 10). Algeria avoided condemning the Qaddafi regime when the Libyan army crossed the border into the Tunisian town of Dhuheiba in pursuit of rebels on April 29—an incursion that sparked protests from the Tunisian government concerning the infringement of its sovereignty (*Tout Sur l'Algérie*, April 30).

Libyan rebels have accused Algeria of supporting Qaddafi in several ways. The rebel Transitional National Council (TNC) sent a memorandum to Arab League Secretary-General Amr Musa claiming Algeria had provided military equipment, weapons and mercenaries to Libya, but Medelci strongly denied these allegations (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 19; *Ennahar*, April 19). A few days later, Medelci returned to the accusations, saying that the charges from the TNC were dilatory tactics that had nothing to do with the current crisis in Libya (*Echorouck*, April 22; *L'Expression*, April 22). Algerian Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablialater stated during an interview that he expected very tense relations between his country and Libya if the rebels seize power (*Ennahar*, May 3).

If seen only through the historical prism of Algerian-Libyan relations, Algiers' stance on the intervention in Libya cannot be easily explained. Like many other countries, Algeria has had a very volatile relationship with Qaddafi's Libya. Algeria supported Libya against Egypt in the border war of 1977, and brokered a peace deal between Libya and Chad in the late 1980s. For many years, the two countries shared good relations based on their support for the West Saharan Polisario Front, a common anti-colonial rhetoric and their criticism of Israel. That said, several points of tension emerged in their relations:

- Algeria remained cool to Qaddafi's efforts to increase influence over Tuareg groups in the Sahara/Sahel region.
- Algeria alleged that Libya allowed weapons to be shipped through its territory to Islamist forces during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s.
- Relations were disturbed by the signing of a unity pact between Libya and Algerian rival Morocco (the Treaty of Ujda) in 1984, a *realpolitik* response to the exclusion of these two countries from the Treaty of Concord and Fraternity signed in 1983 by Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania. [1]

Nonetheless, Algeria is more or less openly supportive of Qaddafi in this conflict for a complex mix of reasons

related to its security, its political stability and its regional geopolitical role:

- Security concerns: The greatest concern for Algeria is that an unstable Libya could turn into a major safe haven and source of weapons for al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Documents recently found in the Bin Laden residence in Abbottabad concerning the “specific attention” paid to Algeria will further aggravate Algerian perception of this threat (*L'Expression*, May 14). Even though AQIM’s threat is not as strong as in the past, it still represents a major security concern for Algeria. A Libyan implosion could provide AQIM with greater opportunities to buy weapons from Libyan arsenals and to expand its activities to new territories. Algerian officials have strongly stressed this point since the very beginning of the conflict. Moreover, these concerns are shared by other regional countries such as Chad, Mali and Niger (AFP, May 1; *El Moudjahid*, April 29).

- Political concerns: It is worth recalling that the wave of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa started with protests in Tunisia and Algeria in December 2010. While the Tunisian revolt ended with the fall of the Ben Ali regime, in Algeria these events did not end in the overthrow of President Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika. It is likely that memories related to the violence of the civil war are still too recent and represent a powerful deterrent to a full-scale revolt. However, the Algerian government is mindful that continuing social turmoil within that country could provide the base for stronger future revolts aimed at overthrowing the current Algerian government. If Qaddafi should lose power, Algeria fears that it could be next in line for a revolution. A Qaddafi defeat could boost the ambitions of those groups looking for a regime change in Algeria. Moreover, Algeria’s hostility to NATO action in Libya was dictated by the resilience of its colonial memory; the idea of having French troops at its borders is seen as a major psychological threat to the Algerian people.

- Regional concerns: Given the highly personalized foreign policy of Qaddafi and the intensity of clashes between Tripoli’s government and the rebels, it is likely that the foreign policy of a Libya freed from the Qaddafi regime will be completely different from that currently in place, which would have the potential of harming Algerian interests. Diplomatic dynamics suggest that France could have a stronger influence over Libya, given the support that Sarkozy has provided to the rebels. A new Libya could also have different regional policies dependent on its relationship with Western powers, characterized by a total rupture with Qaddafi’s choices. In this sense, a major threat to Algeria could be represented by a Libyan-Moroccan rapprochement,

or, once its internal situation calms down, by Egypt increasing its influence over its western neighbor.

Conclusion

Algeria has a clear interest in avoiding a Qaddafi defeat, which could turn into a major security and geopolitical disaster for Algiers. However, this does not imply that Algeria is actively supporting Qaddafi’s forces. Like any other state, Algeria has its own geopolitical interests to advance. These interests are not related to a specific, privileged relationship between Algeria and Qaddafi. They stem more from concrete security and political realities. A regime change or prolonged conflict in Libya could strongly harm Algerian interests, explaining why Algeria has assumed a diplomatic position of opposing NATO intervention as well as criticizing the choices and the declarations of the rebel TNC.

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Notes:

1. Gerald J. Bender, James S. Coleman and Richard L. Sklar, *African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Berkeley, p.272, fn.7.

Demise of Philippines’ Abu Sayyaf Terrorist Group Begins in Abbottabad

By Jacob Zenn

The capture of Indonesian terrorist Umar Patekin in January and the death of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May, both in Abbottabad, Pakistan, may prove to be two of the final blows to the reeling Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. Between January and May, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippines National Police (PNP) further weakened Abu Sayyaf by capturing or killing a number of militants in Mindanao and Manila. The question now is whether Abu Sayyaf can still carry out terrorist attacks with their ideological leader dead, their tactical alliances with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and al-Qaeda disrupted and many of their core Philippine-based operatives in jail. The Philippine National Security Adviser Cesar Garcia predicts Abu Sayyaf’s “disintegration” as a result of the loss of its “leadership, people and logistics” (GMA News, May 4).

Since its formational years, Abu Sayyaf was a project of the Bin Laden terrorist network. The group emerged in the late 1980s from the most radical of the 300 – 500 Muslim mujahideen from Mindanao who were fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan with Bin Laden’s financial support. Upon returning to Mindanao to continue their jihad in the Philippines in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bin Laden’s brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, administered funding from Bin Laden and other Saudi patrons under the name of the Islamic International Research Institute (IIRI) to Abu Sayyaf. Abu Sayyaf was then a new Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) splinter group led by Basilan native and former Afghan jihadi Abdurajak Janjalani.

Throughout the 1990s, Bin Laden sent emissaries and explosives experts to train Abu Sayyaf terrorists in the mold of al-Qaeda. He intended for Abu Sayyaf to be al-Qaeda’s Southeast Asian wing—a partnership that lasted until Bin Laden’s death. [1] Funded and inspired by Bin Laden, Abu Sayyaf’s bombing in 2004 of the Super Ferry 14, which killed more than 100 people, was the Philippines’ “9/11” (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* [Manila], May 4). Umar Patek’s capture on the way to meet bin Laden in Abbottabad in January is evidence that Abu Sayyaf operatives were seeking bin Laden’s patronage and guidance as late as 2011. Now the group will have to manage to survive as a jihadist organization without his overall leadership.

Patek, an Indonesian of Yemeni origin and career member of JI and the Sulawesi-based Komite Aksi Penanggulangan Akibat Krisis (KOMPAK—Crisis Management/Prevention Committee) militant group, joined with Abu Sayyaf in 2002 when he escaped into southern Mindanao after helping to mastermind the 2002 Bali bombings. While based in Mindanao from 2002 to 2010, Patek shared his IED expertise and jihadist ideology with Abu Sayyaf in return for protection, and set up a JI training camp. His presence assured that Indonesian terrorists were welcomed within the Abu Sayyaf ranks. He was also close enough to the al-Qaeda and JI leadership to serve as Abu Sayyaf’s finance officer and to provide Abu Sayyaf with a crucial link to Bin Laden, albeit unsuccessfully in the end (*Manila Standard Today*, March 31).

The links between Abu Sayyaf and foreign terrorist organizations are now irreparably severed. Bin Laden is dead, Patek is in Pakistani custody awaiting extradition—possibly having revealed valuable intelligence during interrogation—and the courier-facilitator system that led Patek to Bin Laden’s hideout is exposed. In addition, on March 9—after Patek was captured, but before Pakistan made a public announcement—President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia and President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding that delineated the two countries’ maritime boundaries and focused on combating terrorism and coordinating air and sea patrols (*Jakarta Globe*, March 9, 2011). This could lead

to greater cooperation between the two countries on shutting Mindanao’s “backdoor” to Indonesia, thus preventing JI terrorists from replenishing Abu Sayyaf’s ranks.

Abu Sayyaf is facing trouble from events transpiring abroad as well as at home. AFP and PNP operations in the first half of 2011 have led to the capture or killing of a number of Abu Sayyaf members. The AFP’s revamped counter-terrorism strategy, announced toward the end of 2010, keeps Abu Sayyaf on the run in its bases in Basilan and Sulu, and forces its members out of their hiding spots (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 2, 2010). Many Abu Sayyaf terrorists tried to blend in with locals in Manila and Cebu, only to be caught by the PNP while living and working among the population (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* [Manila], May 10, 2011).

- On February 3, Arabi Sali, a suspect in the 2001 Dos Palmas Resort hostage-taking, was arrested in Tawi-Tawi, Mindanao (*Philippine Star* [Manila], February 3).
- On March 14, Nawaf Jainuddin was arrested in the house of a former town mayor in Basilan. He was wanted in connection with the Lamitan siege of 2001 (*Philippine Star* [Zamboanga City], March 15).
- On March 30, Philippine army troops killed three Abu Sayyaf members during a rescue attempt of three fishermen kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf in Sulu (*Philippine Star* [Manila], March 30).
- On April 12, Abi Pamanay was arrested in Sultan Kudarat, Mindanao. He was allegedly a liaison between Abu Sayyaf, MILF, JI and al-Qaeda (*Philippine Star* [Manila], April 14).
- On April 14, Mohammed Gaddung was arrested aboard a small boat near Zamboanga City in Mindanao. He had escaped from a detention facility in Basilan in December 2009 along with 31 other prisoners, most of whom were Abu Sayyaf members (*Zamboanga Times* [Zamboanga City], April 15).
- On April 16, two Abu Sayyaf fighters were killed in a village in Basilan when Task Force Basilan troops encountered a group led by Nurhassan Jamiri, one of Abu Sayyaf’s most notorious leaders. Jamiri has been involved in high-profile kidnappings and ambushes and the beheading of Philippine soldiers (*Philippine Inquirer* [Zamboanga City], April 16, 2011).
- On May 5, Imam Arabani Jakiran was arrested in Taguig City, Manila while he was working as a security guard at an upscale condominium where many diplomats live. He has been active in kidnappings since 2001 (*Philippine Star* [Manila], May 7).

- On May 8, Asdatul Sahirun was arrested in Malate, Manila. He had a 3.3-million peso bounty on his head and was wanted for nine counts of murder and four counts of attempted murder from 2007 (*Philippine Star* [Manila], May 9).

- On May 9, Abu Sayyaf member Abdurahman Andang was arrested in Basilan (GMA News, May 9, 2011).

The AFP acknowledges the possibility of retaliatory attacks in the wake of the U.S. operation to kill Bin Laden and this string of counter-terrorism successes. Abu Sayyaf has approximately 300 fighters, which is as low as their membership has been in a decade, but there are also 20 to 30 JI members in Mindanao, several of whom have become localized by marrying Filipina women in order to forge closer ties with Abu Sayyaf (GMA News, May 5). There are also at least five al-Qaeda followers of Bin Laden in Mindanao, including Zulkifar Bin Hir (a.k.a. Marwan), a Malaysian who has had a \$3 million bounty on his head since 2003, as well one as two Indonesians, another Malaysian and a Singaporean who married locally (*Philippine Star* [Manila], May 16, 2011).

There are signs that Abu Sayyaf will focus on kidnapping and ransom instead of terrorist operations in the near future. On May 7, ten armed Abu Sayyaf members kidnapped a Malaysian gecko trader in Sulu and demanded an 80 million peso ransom for his return. On April 29, a Filipino-Chinese businessman was taken captive in Sulu, and on March 19 three fishermen were kidnapped in Sulu (*Philippine Star* [Zamboanga City], May 20). In the past, Abu Sayyaf morphed into a typical criminal mafia to fund itself when its capacity to carry out terrorist attacks, find new recruits and receive outside funding was disrupted. Now is no different, especially as the group is faced with a redoubled AFP counter-terrorism campaign.

Abu Sayyaf will probably maintain its jihadi element because of the influence of the remaining JI and al-Qaeda fighters and its own understanding of jihad in Islam, but for Abu Sayyaf to become the al-Qaeda franchise in Southeast Asia that Bin Laden once envisioned is a lost cause. The current Abu Sayyaf group lacks the connections to al-Qaeda that it once had and, given its recent setbacks, may never be able to rejoin the global jihad network in the same way it has in the past.

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Notes:

1. See Zachary Abuza, "Balik-Terrorism: The Return of Abu Sayyaf." Strategic Studies Institute, September 2005.

From Rommel to Qaddafi: Petrol Supplies Still the Key to Military Success in Libya

By Andrew McGregor

The bravest men can do nothing without guns, the guns can do nothing without plenty of ammunition, and neither guns nor ammunition are of much use in mobile warfare unless there are vehicles with sufficient petrol to haul them around.

- General Erwin Rommel, 1942 [1]

In mid-November, 1942, General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps ran out of fuel in the midst of the battle for eastern Libya. An Italian naval convoy carrying fuel to Benghazi turned back rather than risk entry into the harbor. Though sporadic fuel supplies continued to arrive by air and sea, it was not enough, and the once feared but now isolated Afrika Korps entered a swift decline, eventually surrendering to Allied forces in May 1943.

Unlike Rommel, however, Libyan leader Mu'ammarr Qaddafi does not need to seize and hold territory in the desert, thus eliminating worries about extended supply lines. Occasional raids by small mobile groups are sufficient to prevent the rebels of Benghazi from making new shipments of oil that will fund their revolt. If the Libyan revolution must be funded entirely out of the pockets of Western taxpayers, it will become increasingly hard to sell in countries such as the UK where substantial cuts are being made in all sectors of government, including the military. Such raids may also dry up fuel supplies for the lone rebel-held refinery, which in turn will be unable to supply the gasoline-powered turbines that run Benghazi's energy plant. So long as the regime can operate with a free hand in the desert, time is clearly on Qaddafi's side in this conflict.

Perhaps conscious of this, the NATO bombing campaign seems to have taken on a new tone of urgency, with strikes on Qaddafi's Bab al-Zawiya compound in Tripoli designed to eliminate the leadership in hopes of bringing a swift end to the conflict. The arrival, off the Libyan coast, of the French amphibious assault vessel *Le Tonnerre* with 16 military helicopters may also mark a new phase in NATO efforts to bring the war to an end (*Le Figaro*, May 22).

Of course, this still leaves the vast majority of Libyans who, even if they oppose Qaddafi, have no wish to be ruled by the Benghazi-based clique that a couple Western countries have already recognized as the legitimate government of Libya.

Changing Tactics and Strategies

In one way, the imposition of a no-fly zone actually helped the Libyan regime by forcing it to abandon fuel-consuming armor and aircraft in favor of lighter and highly mobile vehicles that use far less fuel and are difficult to identify from the air. Though Qaddafi began the war as a modern “Rommel,” reliant on conventional armor-based forces, he has been forced to adopt the methods of the long-range desert raiders of World War II, a proven formula in desert warfare. In this, his commanders may be able to apply the bitterly-learned lessons of the 1987 “Toyota War” in Chad, where, like the Italians before him, Qaddafi’s heavy forces were rolled up by highly mobile and lightly armed fighters striking out of the desert on light trucks.

The defeat of Rommel took place at sea as well as on land, with Allied ships and aircraft intercepting an increasingly larger proportion of the fuel tankers sent to resupply his petrol-thirsty army. As Rommel noted: “In attacking our petrol transport, the British were able to hit us in a part of our machine on whose proper functioning the whole of the rest depended.” [2] Qaddafi continues to receive fuel from Italy and elsewhere, shipped through third parties in Tunisia (*Guardian*, May 5; *The Peninsula*, May 21). Unless this flow can be cut off, it will continue to be difficult to bring the regime’s mobile forces to a standstill.

The Evolution of Motorized Warfare in the Libyan Desert

The idea of creating small, mobile attack and reconnaissance groups using specially modified vehicles was devised by Major Ralph Bagnold, one of a number of British officers stationed in prewar Egypt and Sudan, who used their off-duty time to explore the vast Libyan Desert in stripped-down civilian vehicles. [3] Bagnold and his colleagues trained a small but disparate group of volunteers from New Zealand, Rhodesia and various British Guards and Yeomanry regiments in the techniques of desert driving, navigation and warfare as part of the newly formed Long Range Desert Group (LRDG). [4] Besides providing invaluable intelligence, the LRDG mounted raids designed to destroy enemy airfields and petrol dumps, occasionally fighting battles with their Italian counterparts in La Compania Sahariana de Cufra.

In 1941, the LRDG joined Free French forces, including Senegalese and Chadian (Tubu and Sarra) colonial troops under General Leclerc, in a daring 850 km raid from the Chadian oasis of Faya Largeauon, the strategically located Kufra Oasis in southwest Libya. The Italians had thought such a raid impossible, and the loss of Kufra and its airfield was at once both a crippling blow to Italian communications with its East African empire and a resounding demonstration of the abilities of motorized attack forces in desert warfare. Lessons learned here were later applied in the “Toyota War” of 1987, in which largely Tubu forces under Hissène Habré (with French logistical support and the covert assistance of French Foreign Legion units) drove the Libyan army out of northern Chad, seizing the Libyan’s main base at Faya Largeau, despite being outnumbered and outgunned.

Since that time, Kufra’s strategic importance has actually grown as it provides a controlling position over the vast oilfields of eastern Libya, and is a vital point on the Libyan-built desert road system connecting Libya to Chad and Darfur. In late April, a column of roughly 250 Libyan loyalist fighters crossed nearly 1,000 km of desert from Sabha to Kufra, taking the oasis after a brief firefight with rebel forces there. [5] So long as Kufra remains in loyalist hands, there is little chance of the rebels restarting oil operations in eastern Libya.

Desert Raids May Cripple the Rebel Cause

Desert raids have enabled Qaddafi to cripple the long-term prospects of the rebellion quickly, decisively and at little expense. Operating out of the Waha oil field or the military base at Sabha Oasis (home of loyalist Megarha tribesmen), Qaddafi’s raiders carried out a series of long-range operations in early April that struck the Mislá and Sarir oil fields, targeting storage tanks and pipeline pumps. [6] The targeting appears to have been carefully calculated; the damage could be easily repaired under normal conditions, but the skilled workers in the oil fields have been evacuated leaving no-one to make repairs. The rebels do not have the manpower to defend infrastructure and pipelines stretched over hundreds of miles of desert, so in this way Qaddafi has brought rebel oil production to a halt without causing permanent damage to facilities he would like to retain and return to production in the event of a victory or negotiated settlement. Should these prospects dim in the coming months (or years), more permanent damage can be easily inflicted. Aware of their inability to protect the oil fields, the rebel leadership has demanded that NATO do it for them, a task not easily done from the air. With the sanctions in force against government oil sales, Qaddafi’s greatest advantage is that he does not need to hold the oil fields or even conduct regular raids—the mere threat of such operations is enough to keep the oil fields inoperative.

The raids have prompted an announcement by the rebel-operated Arab Gulf Oil Co. (AGOCO) that oil production will not resume until the war is over. According to AGOCO information director Abdeljalil Muhammad Mayuf: “Everything depends on security. We can produce tomorrow, but our fields would be attacked. We cannot put an army around each field. We are not a military company and the forces of Qaddafi are everywhere” (AP, May 15).

For now, the lone rebel-held refinery in Tobruk is receiving only the oil that was already in the pipeline before the attacks as it slowly trickles through by gravity, the booster system that normally pumps oil through the pipeline having been badly damaged in an April 21 raid by loyalist forces. The oil inside Tobruk’s storage tanks is not available for export, being needed to power desalinization plants and Benghazi’s diesel-fuelled hydro-electric plant, which is now running at three-quarters capacity to save fuel. This supply is expected

to last only a few months before, in true “coal to Newcastle” fashion, the rebels will need to start importing oil as well as the gasoline imports it already relies on (Reuters, April 23; NPR, May 15). Benghazi’s energy plant used to be run by natural gas from Marsaal-Burayqah (a.k.a. Brega), but this city is now in loyalist hands. Keeping the desalinization plants running is crucial in case Qaddafi cuts fresh water supplies from the “Great Man-Made River” project, which taps extensive reserves deep under the Libyan Desert. If that were to happen and the desalinization plants fail, rebel-held territory would also depend on foreign shipments of fresh-water to survive.

Both Sides Face Petrol Shortages

The rebels’ lone sale of oil was expected to bring in \$129 million, but \$75 million of this total was needed immediately to pay for a single shipment of gasoline (Reuters, April 23). Yet, instead of rationing precious gasoline supplies, the rebel administration has actually lowered the already low subsidized price, encouraging young men to use the scarce fuel to race their vehicles in pointless displays of bravado better saved for the frontlines (NPR, May 15). The Tripoli government, by comparison, is being far more careful in its distribution of gasoline, even at the risk of inflaming the public. Supplies available to civilians are short, as are tempers at fuel stations that can have waits of several days. Libya’s own refining capacity has always been limited, though efforts are underway to increase capacity at government-held refineries at RasLanuf and Zawiya (*Guardian*, May 5).

Residents of Tripoli recently attacked a bus carrying foreign journalists with knives and guns—such buses are given priority at petrol stations (Reuters, May 22). Fuel purchases are being further complicated by a growing shortage of currency on both sides of the conflict as consumers hoard cash and banks limit withdrawals—a major shipment of new British-made bills is being held up by sanctions, though its military use is disputable. In terms of real funds, however, Qaddafi is well supplied with foreign reserves (estimated at \$100 billion, much of it beyond the reach of sanctions) and a large store of gold that continues to appreciate, in part, due to the instability in Libya.

NATO has begun interdicting fuel shipments to government-held ports in Libya under the “all necessary measures” clause of UN Security Council Resolution 1973, designed to prevent the killing of civilians by the Libyan regime. On May 19, NATO forces boarded the *Jupiter*, a tanker carrying 12,750 tonnes of gasoline from Italy in Libyan waters, ordering it to anchor off Malta. Another vessel, the *Cartagena*, was reported to be on its way to Zawiyah with a load of 42,000 tons of fuel from Turkey (*Petroleum Economist*, May 19). The rebel Transitional National Council(TNC) has asked NATO to prevent all fuel shipments from reaching government ports, but stopping tankers in Libyan or international waters is of questionable legality under international law.

Conclusion

Of course, there is no guarantee that the mercurial Libyan leader will take advantage of the opportunities now presented to him. Yet, those supporting the Benghazi rebels should be aware that the initiative still lies with Qaddafi should he choose to shift his efforts from the now static coastal campaign and exploit the desert option. While the rebels consist largely of urbanized Arabs from towns and cities along the Mediterranean coast, Qaddafi can call on experienced desert fighters from the nomadic Arabs of the interior as well as fighters from the Tuareg and Tubu groups, long recognized as established masters of the desert. [7] NATO currently faces a shortage of refueling and long-range surveillance aircraft in the Libyan deployment that would help secure the vast Libyan interior. Rebel planning to deal with difficulties in the south is complicated by internal divisions within the rebel leadership, a lack of trained men and the general reluctance of defecting troops to participate in frontline operations. In this environment, Rommel’s observations on the importance of petrol as a decisive factor in campaigning in the Libyan Desert are as relevant today as they were in 1942.

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Notes:

1. Erwin Rommel (ed. by Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart): *The Rommel Papers*, 15th ed., New York, 1953, p.359.
2. *Ibid*, p. 328.
3. See Andrew McGregor, Jamestown Foundation Special Commentary on Libya: “It Didn’t Start This Way, but it’s a War for Oil Now,” April 20, 2011.
4. An excellent account of the Guards units in the LRDG can be found in Michael Crichton-Stuart, *G Patrol*, London, 1958.
5. See Andrew McGregor, “Qaddafi Loyalists Retake Strategic Oasis of Kufra,” *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, May 5, 2011.
6. See Ralph A. Bagnold, *Libyan Sands: Travel in a Dead World*, London, 1935.
7. The Tubu of southeastern Libya and northern Chad have a fearsome reputation as desert warriors. According to Bagnold: “For many years, perhaps for centuries, raids had been made by the black Tubuhillmen of the western highlands into nearly every region bordering on the South Libyan Desert. Their movements were unknown. They operated in places as far apart as the Nile Valley and French Equatoria, Darfur and the oases on the Arba’in Road. How they operated across such vast distances of desert no one could tell. The raiding parties were small and extraordinarily mobile; their seeming indifference to water supplies undoubtedly stimulated the general belief in the existence of undiscovered wells away out in the desert.” *Libyan Sands*, pp. 238-239.