



MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

Personalities Behind the Insurgency

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IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....1

A PORTRAIT OF ABU BAKR BIN ABDUL AZIZ AL-ATHRI: SALAFI-JIHAD'S EMERGING INTERNET IDEOLOGUE
By Murad Batal al-Shishani3

FAZAL SAEED HAQQANI: A NEW PLAYER ON THE JIHADI SCENE IN PAKISTAN'S FATA
By Arif Jamal.....4

THE MAN WHO KNEW BIN LADEN: A LOOK AT HASSAN GHUL
By Wladimir van Wilgenburg6

A PROFILE OF SUDANESE REBEL LEADER ABD AL-AZIZ AL-HILU: CONTINUING THE CIVIL WAR IN THE NUBA MOUNTAINS
By Andrew McGregor8



Abd al-Aziz al-Hilu

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PAKISTAN RELEASES LASHKAR-E-JHANGVI LEADER

Pakistan's Supreme Court has released Malik Mohammed Ishaq on bail, a key figure in the Sunni sectarian outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), after 14 years in prison (AFP, July 14). Ishaq is believed to have masterminded the deadly attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team on March 3, 2009 near Lahore's Mu'ammarr Gaddafi stadium while behind bars. Ishaq was released on approximately \$12,000 bail from Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore whereby he was greeted by hundreds of supporters who showered him with rose petals (AP, July 14). Ishaq has, even while behind bars, managed to maintain a working relationship with the Pakistani state. It has come to light that when a cell of suicide bombers from the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attacked the Pakistani Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) in October 2009, Ishaq was summoned from his cell and flown in a military aircraft to Rawalpindi—along with three other major jihadi leaders – in an attempt to negotiate with the TTP attackers who were holding an estimated 42 men hostage (*The News International* [Islamabad], July 15). Ishaq's release may become a serious strain on Pakistani-Sri Lankan relations. The Pakistani military establishment has particularly close bilateral relations with their counterparts in Colombo who tilted toward Pakistan after the disastrous Indian Peacekeeping Force era in Tamil-majority northern Sri Lanka from 1987-1990 sullied Indo-Sri Lankan ties. Following Ishaq's release, three other men accused of being involved in the LeJ attack near the Liberty roundabout were also freed on bail by the Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore (Colombo Page, July 16).

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Shia-majority Iran will be none too pleased, either, as Ishaq is accused of assassinating an Iranian diplomat in the southern Punjabi city of Multan in one of dozens of murder counts with which he has been charged and not convicted (*The Express Tribune* [Karachi], July 16). When Ishaq marched proudly out of jail, he made strident statements while greeted by fellow anti-Shia jihadi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan's (SSP) Maulana Ahmed Ludhianvi. The SSP's Ludhianvi told those assembled that he and Ishaq would defend the honor of the *sahabas* (the early companions of the Prophet Mohammed), perceived by many as a slight against the region's Shia minority (Press Trust of India, July 14). Ishaq is in sync with hard-line elements of Pakistan's judiciary who continue to uphold the Islamic Republic's immensely controversial blasphemy laws. An entirely unrepentant Ishaq, who maintains his innocence, defiantly told Geo TV's Najia Ashar in a recent interview: "We will use all legal resources for Sunni cause and for upholding the sanctity of the companions of the Prophet and we would work against those using foul language against the companions of the Prophet" (Geo TV, July 14). Now free after nearly 14 years in detention, there is no indication Malik Ishaq, an unreformed Deobandi extremist, will not do everything in his power to continue to stoke sectarian violence in a Pakistan whose security has deteriorated considerably since he was first incarcerated.

LIBYAN REBELS CLAIM ATTACK ON SENIOR REGIME FIGURES

On July 21, Libya's western-recognized rebel movement claimed a daring rocket propelled grenade attack on a Tripoli hotel where senior Qaddafi officials were holding a meeting (Reuters, July 23). Ali Essawi, the Foreign Affairs minister for the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council (TNC), claimed that Al-Baghdadi Ali al-Mahmoud, Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi's Prime Minister, was injured in the attack while he was meeting with Abdullah al-Sanussi and Seif al-Islam al-Qaddafi (Al Jazeera, July 23). In Libya's western rebel stronghold of Nalut, rumors swirled about said rocket attack on regime officials but it was not possible for the author to independently verify these claims. Some of the first talk included the possible death of Sanussi, but this petered out as no journalist in the tightly controlled capital has been able to actively investigate this claim. Essawi described the location where the assault took place as an "operation center" and continued vaguely, "One person was left seriously injured" (AFP, July 23). Predictably, Qaddafi spokesman Moussa Ibrahim

promptly denied reports of any such attack. A later report speculated that it was in fact Mansour Daw, a senior Qaddafi aide, who was injured rather than al-Mahmoud (Reuters, July 23).

If the rebel operation indeed took place deep within the Libyan capital, which at the time of this writing is impossible to either prove or disprove, it would demonstrate a degree of operational capability inside Tripoli that has, until now, while often touted, eluded the oft boastful movement. A pro-Benghazi website reported in a brief statement issued by the TNC; "We can confirm this [attack]" without providing any specifics (Libya.tv, July 22). Rebel sources based in Libya's western Jebel Nafusa region insisted to the author that Sanussi was indeed killed in the RPG attack while Daw was critically injured and was rushed to an intensive care unit across the border on the Tunisian resort island of Djerba. Sanussi, a brother-in-law of Qaddafi, is being subjected to an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court in The Hague along with Seif al-Islam. The uncertainty regarding the whereabouts or fate of either Sanussi or Daw has faded into the background in light of the assassination of top TNC rebel chief of staff Abdel Fattah Younes (al-Jazeera, July 29). Younes was killed in as yet unclear circumstances after being asked to return to Benghazi from near the Brega frontline for questioning regarding rumored pro-Qaddafi links (Reuters, July 29).

A Portrait of Abu Bakr bin Abdul Aziz al-Athri: Salafi-Jihad's Emerging Internet Ideologue

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

In mid-June 2010, the brother-in-law of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Abu Qudama al-Hami, [1] posted a lengthy article on several jihadi web forums stating that a London-based Jordanian jihadi called Muhammad Eid al-Rifai'i (a.k.a. Abu Hammam; Abu Essa) is using the pseudonym "Abu Hammam Bakar al-Athri" to defend senior Salafi-jihadi ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. [2] Since 2008, al-Hami has launched a campaign accusing al-Maqdisi of deviating from the path of Salafi-jihadi ideology's core message. [3]

In the same article, al-Hami claimed that al-Rifai'i is the founder of the famous jihadi web forum Shmoukh al-Islam. He reminded readers of al-Rifai'i's jihadi history and described him as *takfiri* (empowered to excommunicate fellow Muslims) since the days when al-Rifai'i declared himself as a Caliph in Peshawar, Pakistan in the early 1990s. It is likely that al-Hami made these accusations due to his increasing enmity towards al-Maqdisi and his school of jihadi thought. Additionally, it seems that al-Hami confused al-Rifai'i's *kunya* (an Arabic honorific taken on from one's child) with Abu Hammam. An informed source told Jamestown that al-Athri and al-Rifai'i are indeed different men and that al-Hami targeted his rage at the wrong man.

Muhammad Eid al-Rifai'i is a Jordanian from Zarqa in his early fifties. He was member of Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (the Muslim Brotherhood) until he was expelled in the late 1980s, perhaps because of his espousal of a strain of jihadi ideology out of sync with the Ikhwan. During the Second Gulf War in 1991, he was very active in mobilizing Jordanian youth to fight alongside the Iraqis. When that effort failed to materialize, Rifai'i left for the greener jihadi pastures of Peshawar, Pakistan. He eventually relocated to London where he was imprisoned in Belmarsh. He was later released on health grounds. The case that resulted in his detention was unrelated to his jihadi activities but regarded a mundane immigration issue. [4]

Although his real identity remains obscured, the background of Abu Bakr bin Abdul Aziz al-Athri is

not to be confused with veteran jihadi al-Rifai'i. Al-Athri's stature as a jihadi scholar is gaining momentum as his writings continue to spread across global jihadi websites. Al-Athri was recently announced as a member of the sharia committee of al-Maqdisi's Minbar al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad website. It is in this light that al-Athri appears to be a leading successor of Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi in terms of propagating fervent jihadi ideology.

What little is known about al-Athri's background stems from an autobiographical work. [5] It suggests that he is younger than al-Rifai'i. He has a Bachelor degree in Islamic law from a university in the Levant-though he does not specify which one. He then relocated to Saudi Arabia –although he does not state that explicitly- as he became student for several Saudi sheikhs including Ibn Jbreen and the Sahwa scholar Salman al-Ouda—a moderate by comparison. Al-Athri then distanced himself from al-Ouda because he felt al-Ouda's message had grown too soft. He also became a student of many Salafi-jihadi scholars including al-Maqdisi, which suggests that al-Athri still spent a significant amount of time in Jordan.

Al-Athri describes al-Maqdisi thusly: "By Allah our sheikh al-Maqdisi is like a father [for me] among all sheikhs [who taught me] – either I mentioned them in this biography or not-the Sheikh was, after *Allah*, the main reason behind my steadfastness on this blessed [jihadi] way." [6] But al-Maqdisi's opinion on al-Athri suggests that the latter would be the successor of the former who wrote in an introduction of one of al-Athri's books: "if [a] Sheikh is entitled to show pride of some of his students, I am proud of this beloved brother." [7]

Perusing the books, articles, and fatwas disseminated by al-Athri, [8] one can observe that the appeal of his religious authority is widening. Most read or downloaded writings or fatwas about him as shown on the Minbar al-Tawhid w'al-jihad website indicate that his religious views on particular events and day-to-day minutiae appeal to more people rather than grand theorizing. He is not a jihadi strategist but a jihadi scholar in the same vein as al-Maqdisi who exerts grand influence on jihadis worldwide. Al-Athri currently receives fatwa-related queries from all over the world, which he readily addresses via the pro-al-Qaeda Minbar al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad forum while al-Maqdisi is imprisoned in Jordan.

Al-Athri being a central member of the sharia committee of al-Maqdisi's website and being a potential successor to al-Maqdisi arguably demonstrates that the religious

expression of the Salafi-jihadi movement is becoming more institutionalized. Al-Athri, in the context of this gradual process, appears to be playing a major role in the transformation. The religious legitimization of Abu Bakr bin Abdul Aziz al-Althri will increase the recruitment capacity of the Salafi-jihadi movement to expand its ranks. The current online propaganda arm, of which al-Athri is now a primary actor, has proven to be quite effective. This combination of al-Athri's popularity and newfound legitimacy will help further promulgate the religious edicts that he and his fellow travelers are producing to influence a new generation of jihadis.

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Notes:

1. Abu Qudama al-Hami's real name is Sati Qasrawi. He is a Jordanian national who worked as Jihad Magazine's (a bi-monthly magazine founded by Abdullah Azzam in 1984) correspondent during the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan where lost his leg to a landmine. He is married to al-Zarqawi's sister and currently lives in Jordan.
2. <http://muslmnet.net/vb/showthread.php?t=391727>, June 12, 2010.
3. Murad Batal al-Shishani, *The Dangerous Ideas of the Neo-Zarqawist Movement*, Sentinel, Competing Terrorism Center (West Point), September 2009, Vol 2, Issue 9, pp. 18-20.
4. <http://www.alasr.ws/index.cfm?method=home.con&contentID=7463>, February 16, 2006.
5. http://www.tawhed.ws/FAQ/display_question?qid=3875, April 2011.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. See his writings: <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=bakraziz>.

Fazal Saeed Haqqani: A New Player on the Jihadi Scene in Pakistan's FATA

By Arif Jamal

The split in the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on the eve of a military operation in the Kurram Agency is a victory for the Pakistan army. In a surprising move, Fazal Saeed Haqqani, a relatively lesser known TTP commander in Kurram Agency, announced on June 27 that his group had seceded from the TTP. Kurram Agency is one of the seven constituent regions of Pakistan's lawless Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and is notable for its sizeable Shia population. Fazal Saeed also announced his founding of another group called Tehreek-e-Taliban Islami Pakistan (TTIP), clearly insinuating that the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is not Islamic. Explaining the reasons for the split, Fazal Saeed said his group had opposed the TTP policy of attacking innocent Muslims as well as Pakistan's security forces. Fazal Saeed told a Pakistani daily, "We abhor killing innocent people through suicide attacks and bomb blasts, attacks on our own army and destruction of social infrastructure... The new organisation will not attack our own security forces" (Dawn, June 28).

Fazal Saeed Haqqani, 39, comes from the village of Uchat Killay in Kurram Agency. He studied in a local high school there before joining the Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassa in Akora Khattak in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province from where he graduated in 1995 (*The News International*, June 29). As the Darul Uloom Haqqania is a major center of Deobandi jihadi and sectarian groups, as well as the Afghan Taliban, Fazal Saeed Haqqani came under the influence of Sunni sectarian Deobandi groups such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). By the time he graduated from the Haqqania madrassa, he had become a full-fledged Taliban militant. Fazal Saeed left the madrassa to join the Afghan Taliban in the late 1990s, a time when they were consolidating their rule over much of Afghanistan's geography. He fought along side the Afghan Taliban for a brief period before returning to Pakistan. [1] In the late 1990s, he joined SSP-LeJ and became actively involved in anti-Shia violence. [2]

Like many enraged Pakistani radicals at the time, Saeed formed his own small jihadi group to fight the U.S.-

led forces in post-9/11 Afghanistan. [3] He became close to the late Baitullah Mehsud during those years, which led to him being a founding member of the TTP in 2007. Hakimullah Mehsud, Baitullah's successor following his August 2009 assassination, appointed Fazal Saeed as the local area TTP commander in Kurram Agency in November 2010. [4] After the death of Baitullah Mehsud, he started developing differences with Hakimullah Mehsud over TTP's stated policy of attacking Pakistan's security forces. A schism developed whereby Fazal Saeed considers the United States his paramount enemy while the TTP consider Pakistan to be their primary nemesis. This difference became critical when Fazal Saeed supported a peace agreement [5] between the warring Shias and Sunnis in Kurram Agency brokered by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and the Haqqani Network in February 2011 (*Daily Times* [Lahore], February 24). The TTP tried to sabotage the agreement by carrying out attacks on Shia passengers on the Tal-Parachinar Road in the Lower Kurram district (*Dawn*, July 5).

Fazal Saeed Haqqani is considered to be close to the Haqqani Network led by the father and son jihadi duo of Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani. Like Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Maulvi Nazir, Fazal Saeed is considered pro-Pakistan army (*Dawn*, July 5). However, a spokesman for the Haqqani Network denied Fazal Saeed's group is part of the Haqqani Network (*The News International*, July 2). Fazal Saeed claims that he and his group are loyal to the Afghan Taliban and Mullah Mohammad Omar. In a recent interview, he vowed to fight alongside the Afghan Taliban against the NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan. "We are in favour of the Jihad against the US and Nato forces in Afghanistan. If we have *fidayeen* (suicide bombers), we would like to use them against the American forces and not fellow Muslims" (*The News International*, June 29).

After splitting from the TTP, Fazal Saeed Haqqani has emerged as a major player on the jihadi scene in Pakistan's FATA region. Central Kurram is a conduit for TTP militants from North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Upper Orakzai and the Tirah Valley. After leaving the TTP, he has vowed to stop all outsiders from operating within the Kurram Agency. Fazal Saeed strikes a defiant tone against anyone who challenges his role in Kurram, stating, "But let me make it clear that I will not allow any outsider to operate in Kurram Agency and destroy its peace. It is my area and I will ensure that no locals or outsiders oppose our policies and create problems for us in Kurram Valley." He claims to have up to 800

armed followers. "All my fighters are local tribesmen from Kurram Agency," he touted in a recent interview (*The News International*, June 29). Although this figure may seem rather exaggerated, it is true that Fazal Saeed has enough strength to create problems for the TTP.

Circumstances have pushed Fazal Saeed Haqqani closer to pro-Islamabad militant commanders such Maulvi Nazir and Gul Bahadur, the so-called 'good Taliban' as termed by certain elements within the Pakistani establishment. The timing of the revolt shows that there is likely some form of understanding between Fazal Saeed and the Pakistan army. However, this alliance is fragile and is likely not permanent. He has been at war with the Pakistan army in the past and carries a bounty of approximately \$58,000 (*Dawn*, June 28). He emphasized his differences with the Pakistan army in a recent interview when he said, "I and my men are against Pakistan's alliance with the US. We want Pakistan to end its policy of serving as a slave of America. And at the same time we are against the [Pakistani] Taliban who kidnap people for ransom, kill fellow Muslims and militants for no valid reason and explode bombs in mosques and bazaars." However, his unannounced alliance with the army is his most promising option for the near-term.

Fazal Saeed Haqqani is a hard-line Deobandi sectarian militant in the style of the SSP/LeJ, who harshly deem Shias to be non-Muslim. Perhaps in a calculated bid not to alienate a massive number of his countrymen, Fazal Saeed judged that Barelvis, practitioners of a traditional South Asia strain of Sunni Islam strongly influenced by Sufism, are in fact Muslims. He was not comfortable in the group think of the TTP which is under the influence of some *takfiri* groups (those who believe in excommunicating fellow Muslims who maintain less stringent practices) who support carrying out attacks against Barelvi mosques and shrines. His opposition to this anti-Barelvi policy failed to keep him in good standing with other TTP leaders. Consequently, he split from the TTP. [6] Fazal Saeed Haqqani's secession from the TTP may lower the militant temperature aimed a Barelvi places of worship in Pakistan but his condoning of anti-Shia actions in order to maintain militant credibility will likely aid in the escalation of sectarian tension in a society inherently rife with division.

Arif Jamal is an independent security and terrorism expert and author of "Shadow War – The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir."

Notes:

1. Interview with a classmate of Fazal Saeed Haqqani through research assistant, Peshawar, July 2001.
2. Interview with a family member of Fazal Saeed Haqqani through research assistant, Kurram, July 2001.
3. FATA Research Centre, TTP divided in Kuram Agency Mansur Khan Mehsud, available online at: <http://www.frc.com.pk/linkc/articlecont/41>.
4. Ibid.
5. For details of the agreement, see Dawn Feb 19, 2011.
6. Interview with a former teacher of Fazal Saeed Haqqani at Madrassa Haqqania through research assistant, Akora Khattak, July 2001.

The Man Who Knew bin Laden: A Biographical Sketch of Hassan Ghul

By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

There is not much known about Hassan Ghul, the alleged conduit whose information led to the killing of former al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan. The mysterious Hassan Ghul was an important al-Qaeda facilitator, financier and messenger of Pakistani descent with Saudi residency. Ghul mostly operated inside of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also flew to Saudi Arabia to finance al-Qaeda operations. He was very closely associated with the Palestinian Abu Zubaydah (a.k.a., Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn, Tariq), and his network that operated separately from al-Qaeda until around late 2000. [1]

In 1999, Ghul and Zubaydah registered an import/export business in Islamabad, Pakistan which functioned as an al-Qaeda safe house. In addition, at Zubaydah's request, Ghul also successfully raised money in Saudi Arabia

for the Khaldan militant training camp in Afghanistan. In exchange for doing so, Zubaydah allegedly paid for Ghul's travel to the Kingdom in order for him to renew his Saudi residency. [2] In December 2000, Abu Zubaydah sent Hassan Ghul back to Saudi Arabia to raise money for potential attacks against Israel. [3]

Hassan Ghul also met several al-Qaeda members in Pakistan and Afghanistan, who were later imprisoned in the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. It was they who provided more details about Ghul during their respective interrogations. One such man was Mohammed Abd al-Rahman al-Shumrant [4], who Ghul met in a guesthouse in 1999. Al-Shumrant went to Pakistan to travel to training camps in Afghanistan. He also assisted Mohammed Y al-Zayley [5] in traveling to Afghanistan from Pakistan and met Mansur al-Rimi in Jalalabad, Afghanistan after 9/11. Furthermore, Ghul saw Ahmed Aziz (a.k.a. Abu Jafar) multiple times in a guesthouse in Kandahar in late 2001 after 9/11 and in Karachi in 2002 [6] after the U.S. bombing campaigns in Afghanistan forced the majority of al-Qaeda operatives to flee.

Ghul was also in contact with Ziyad Sa'id Faraj al-Jahdali [7] and Khalid Adullah Mushad al-Mutayri [8]. Hassan Ghul and Zubaydah furthermore helped Mushabib al-Hamlan [9] to cross the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Hamlan, a Saudi national, was one of the individuals selected personally by bin Laden to act on 9/11 but eventually did not participate [10]. Furthermore it was likely that Hassan Ghul knew Abu Musab al-Zarqawi personally, since the leaked Guantanamo file reveals Abu Bakr Mahjoub went with Zarqawi to Lahore, Pakistan to meet Hassan Ghul [11].

Abu Zubaydah eventually was placed on the U.S. sanctions list by way of an Executive Order on September 23, 2001 [12]. Zubaydah was then captured by Pakistani security forces in a raid assisted by the CIA and FBI on March 28, 2002 (AFP, March 31, 2002). On June 20, 2002, Abu Zubaydah, revealed his connections with Ghul [12].

After the capture of Abu Zubaydah, Ghul continued his work as money handler and courier. It was at this point he became one of bin Laden's clandestine messengers, working directly under Khalid Sheikh Muhammad. His task was to transfer funds and letters from bin Laden and al-Qaeda to senior al-Qaeda officials based in South Asia and the Middle East (Kurdistani Nwe, May 10). Ghul's past personal contacts with Zarqawi made

him the perfect man to travel to Iraq and to improve communications and links with Jamaat al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad (Group for Monotheism and Holy War), which later morphed into al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

The CIA pressed Pakistan to arrest Ghul for years. After 9/11 they learned he was being protected by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) at safe houses in the Lahore area. But Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), refused to capture Ghul (AP, June 15). But when the CIA figured out that Ghul was traveling to meet with al-Qaeda operatives who had gone to Iraq after the 2003 invasion to fight the occupying powers, the agency decided to act and contact Iraqi Kurdistan's indigenous intelligence apparatus.

Approximately six weeks after Saddam's capture in 2004, the CIA gave the Sulaymaniyah-based Counter Terrorism Group (CTG), which is headed by Lahur Talabani, a nephew of Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, intelligence about Hassan Ghul. The CTG was established with the purpose to help thwart the threat of Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish Islamist militant group based around Halabja. The CTG was entrusted by the U.S. to carry out the operation. The Ansar al-Islam camps were destroyed after joint operations by the Peshmerga of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and American special forces in late March 2003 (Kurdistani Nwe, March 29, 2003).

Hassan Ghul planned to enter northern Iraq from Iran. Smugglers were tasked to ferry Ghul to Baghdad from Iran and hand him over to someone else, but they tipped off the security services. At this time Abu-Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was based around Baghdad and Fallujah (Kurdistani Nwe, May 10). Several Al-Qaeda fighters and former members of Ansar al-Islam who fled to Iran sought to return to Iraq and to join the al-Qaeda militants lead by al-Zarqawi (Kurdistani Nwe, May 10).

Ghul was detained by Kurdish CTG agents on January 23 2004 at a checkpoint in Kalar, near the Iranian border. After the arrest, Kurdish security officials faxed a photograph of Ghul to their CIA counterparts to confirm his identity (Rudaw, May 9). The documents carried by Ghul gave the CIA insights into both the near term plots and long-range plans of al-Qaeda at the time. Ghul's capture was cited by former President George W. Bush in 2004 in an attempt to re-justify the Iraq war as al-Qaeda's presence mushroomed inside Iraq in the post-2003 chaos there.

Recently, American officials suggested the information provided by Ghul was a key break in the hunt for in bin Laden's personal courier, Shaykh Abu Ahmad al-Kuwaiti. "Hassan Ghul was the linchpin" in finding and killing Osama bin Laden, an official told the Associated Press (AP, May 3).

The Kurdish security forces found an important letter on Ghul, which, according to the American security forces, belonged to Zarqawi, while the Kurdish security chief, Lahur Talabani, said the letter was from Osama Bin Laden. The CTG forces did not recognize the significance of the arrest of Hassan Ghul and handed them over to the Americans who allegedly rewarded the Kurdish security forces and the smuggler who helped them to capture Ghul [13].

Ghul was taken to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan but was later removed over questions about whether the transfer was legal according to former CIA officials (AP, June 15). Ghul was then taken to bin Laden's most trusted courier, al-Kuwaiti. It is believed the information regarding al-Kuwaiti eventually played a role in the assassination of bin Laden.

Ghul told Americans that Ahmad al-Kuwaiti was a Kuwait national of Pakistani origin, not unlike Ramzi Yusuf or Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Ghul was listed as a close aide of Mustafa al-Uzayti (a.k.a. Abu-Faraj al-Libi) and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad successor, who was arrested in Pakistan in May 2005. Al-Libi was, at the time, in charge of al-Qaeda global operations. Based on the information, al-Kuwaiti was one of the close contacts of Abu-Faraj al-Libi and must have visited bin Laden on a daily basis (Kurdistani Nwe, May 10). Therefore the CIA focused its efforts on locating al-Kuwaiti, which eventually led to the killing of bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

In 2005, Human Rights Watch listed Hassan Ghul as number 22 on a list of 26 "ghost prisoners" that researchers believed were secretly in U.S. custody. Heavily redacted CIA memos from 2005 state that a CIA interrogation team obtained permission to use enhanced interrogation techniques on him. [15]

The pressure of human rights groups caused the U.S. to rethink the imprisonment of Hassan Ghul. Two U.S. officials told Reuters that at some point the CIA turned him over to authorities in Pakistan (Reuters, May 12). At an undisclosed location in Pakistan, Ghul talked with a British detainee named Rangzieb Ahmed who

was held in an adjacent cell. Ghul told Ahmed that he had been held in a secret CIA location for 2 1/2 years and had also passed through Morocco (AP, June 15).

The officials said their understanding is that in 2007, Pakistani authorities released Hassan Ghul from custody, despite pledges to the CIA to the contrary. The officials said Washington now believes Ghul has once again become a frontline militant fighter (Reuters, May 12; AP, July 12). There is a possibility he reactivated his ties with LeT, which many believe still has at least some backing of elements within the ISI.

Wladimir van Wilgenburg studied Journalism and New Media at Leiden University and is studying international relations at the University of Utrecht. Van Wilgenburg writes freelance articles on the Middle East and is an editor at the Kurdish newspaper Rudaw, based in Erbil, northern Iraq.

Notes:

1. Author interview with former Western counterterrorism analyst, May 17, 2011.
2. The 9/11 Commission Report, 22 July 2004.
3. JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment Abu Zubaydah, November 11, 2008. Accessible via Wikileaks at: <http://wikileaks.ch/gitmo/pdf/gz/us9gz-010016dp.pdf>.
4. JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment Muhammad Abd al-Rahman al-Shumrant, 24 October 24, 2008. Accessible via Wikileaks at: <http://wikileaks.ch/gitmo/pdf/sa/us9sa-000195dp.pdf>.
5. JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment Mohammed Y Al Zayley, March 3, 2006. Accessible via Wikileaks at: <http://wikileaks.ch/gitmo/pdf/sa/us9sa-000055dp.pdf>.
6. JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment Ahmed Aziz, February 27, 2008. Accessible via Wikileaks at: <http://wikileaks.ch/gitmo/pdf/ym/us9ym-000578dp.pdf>.
7. JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment Ziyad Sa'id Faraj al-Jahdali, December 8, 2005. Accessible via Wikileaks at: <http://wikileaks.ch/gitmo/pdf/sa/us9sa-000286dp.pdf>.
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A Profile of Sudanese Rebel Leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hilu: Continuing the Civil War in the Nuba Mountains

By Andrew McGregor

Since the mid-1980s, Abd al-Aziz al-Hilu has been one of the leading rebel commanders in Sudan. Well known for his organizational skills and dedication to replacing the Arab-dominated central government of Sudan, al-Hilu has advocated for a more broad-based federalist system that would recognize the ancient and indigenous Nuba peoples as an integral and fully enfranchised component of a united Sudan.

After serving a short time as deputy governor of South Kordofan State in Sudan's unity government and losing a disputed election to the candidate of the ruling National Congress Party (an alleged war criminal), al-Hilu has once again taken to the Nuba mountains of South Kordofan, leading a new large-scale insurgency against the central government in Khartoum, an insurgency that threatens to spread beyond South Kordofan, as al-Hilu intends (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 1).

Al-Hilu's Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) forces consist of some 30,000 to 40,000 trained Nuba, operating in their own rocky, cave-ridden hills. The men are disciplined, well-armed, motivated and operate under an established command-and-control structure with highly experienced officers overseeing operations.

The Nuba fighters have seized quantities of heavy weapons and vehicles from government garrisons, though their lack of air cover or armor will likely restrict their activities to the Nuba Mountains region short of some kind of external intervention, either by newly independent South Sudan (unlikely for now) or an international no-fly zone (extremely unlikely). According to an advisor to al-Hilu, much of this material was seized in a June 30 battle with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in Kahliat (west of the South Kordofan capital of Kadugli) in which 83 government soldiers were killed (Sudan Tribune, July 4).

The Nuba are not a single tribe; in fact they represent one of the most diverse collections of people on Earth, with some 50 separate languages bearing witness to their historical formation from various indigenous groups seeking refuge in the easily defended Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan. On the plains below the mountains live the Baggara (cattle-herding) Arabs, tribes such as the Missiriya and the Hawazma, who moved into the area over two centuries ago. Traditionally these groups lived in harmony, pursuing different but complementary lifestyles, though the last three decades have seen increased ethnic discord and violence encouraged by the Arab supremacist policies of successive discriminatory governments in Khartoum. The Nuba also share a number of faiths without religious conflict, including Islam (the majority faith), Christianity and a variety of traditional beliefs often interwoven with strains of monotheism. Though conflicts do exist in the mountains and frequently result in warfare between Nuba groups, these clashes are usually generated by disputes over land and water and are typically settled through traditional

methods of resolution. Similar conflicts exist between the Baggara tribes and clans of the region.

Al-Hilu in the Civil War

Following the implementation of Islamic law by President Ja'afar Nimeiri and the outbreak of the SPLA rebellion in the South in 1983, many Nuba found themselves at odds with the regime. In 1984, a veteran Nuba politician and militant clergyman, Father Philip Abbas Ghaboush, drew on his connections with Nuba in the military and other Arab and non-Arab dissidents to attempt a coup d'état (one of several made during his career). The attempt failed, but it demonstrated the commitment of some Nuba to reforming the Arab-centric regime in Khartoum in which power was perpetually held by a small minority that tended to view Sudan's indigenous peoples as subjects to be ruled rather than citizens represented in an inclusive governing structure.

Al-Hilu's own political mobilization began in 1977, when a number of Nuba students studying in Khartoum formed the Komolo (Youth) movement, a secret organization devoted to improving the Nuba's social and political standing in Sudan. The core group included Yusuf Kuwa Mekki, later the SPLA/M commander in South Kordofan, his deputy and successor Abd al-Aziz al-Hilu, and two men who would also become prominent SPLA commanders, Daniel Kodi Angelo Comba and Isma'il Khamis. [1] The group began working alongside more veteran Nuba politicians, but not necessarily under their direction. Though some members of Komolo had taken political office after the 1981 elections, they became disillusioned by 1983 when the late Colonel John Garang's newly-formed SPLA issued a manifesto urging a unified but federalist Sudan that would end ethnic-based marginalization and aspire to meet the desires and expectations of all the many peoples of Sudan, a concept referred to as the "New Sudan." Many Komolo members joined other young Nuba in the long and dangerous walk to the SPLA training camps in Ethiopia.

Al-Hilu returned to South Kordofan in 1987 as the adjutant of Yusuf Kuwa's Volcano Battalion of the SPLA, composed mostly of Southern troops. The Volcano Battalion was quickly driven from South Kordofan, but after further training in Ethiopia, the Nuba returned (again with strong support from Southern fighters) in 1988-89 with Abd al-Aziz al-Hilu leading in five of the six battalions of the New Kush Division. This time the SPLA held their own and were

never forced from the mountains again, though their position was at times extremely tenuous. Al-Hilu was one of the principal commanders that held off a massive five-month government offensive at Tullushi despite extreme shortages of ammunition and other supplies. At times the conflict in the mountains took on the strains of a civil war within a civil war; Nubas formed a very large part of the Sudanese regular army and many Nuba soldiers and officers continued to prefer (or were unable to evade) government service. The government's failure at Tullushi led to the introduction of new tactics targeted at the civilian population, including their forcible removal to "peace camps." [2]

The 1990s conflict in the Nuba Mountains, a little publicized but tragic episode of the Second Sudanese Civil War, took as many as 200,000 lives. The international community expressed massive disinterest, even when Khartoum declared an official "jihad" against the Nuba in 1992 based on a fatwa that stripped Muslim Nuba of their status as believers: "An insurgent who was previously a Muslim is now an apostate; and a non-Muslim is a nonbeliever standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam, and Islam has granted the freedom of killing both of them." In consequence the SAF and its Popular Defense Force (PDF) militias rampaged through the region, massacring civilians and destroying mosques and churches alike. At the time, a major split had occurred within the southern SPLA spurred by differences between ethnic Nuer and Dinka commanders and the Nuba fighters were cut off and left without supplies or ammunition as a result of the infighting. A 1992 gathering of commanders and community representatives only narrowly decided to continue the struggle. [3]

However, a ceasefire brokered in 2002 still left al-Aziz with a host of problems, not least of which was the fact that the break in hostilities was still a long way from guaranteeing his people's future. A Canadian diplomat described al-Aziz at this time: "[Al-Aziz] seemed tired and dispirited, his petulant attempt to blame the international community in advance for any eventual failure of the ceasefire a symptom of his frustration at being caught between a rock and at least four other hard places: his people's fatigue; the pressure of the international community; the investment of fifteen years' sacrifice, and the greater political ambitions of the SPLA/M." [4]

Al-Hilu, with roots through one of his parents in Western Darfur, was assigned by the SPLM (Sudan

People's Liberation Movement – the political wing of the SPLA) to join Yasir Sa'id Arman in 2002 as envoys to the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) of Darfur, which was in the initial stage of operations at the time. [5] The SPLM would draw on his experience in the 2002 ceasefire agreement to help negotiate a larger treaty with Khartoum – the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, which would eventually lead to the July 2011 independence of the South Sudan.

A Disputed Election

Following a disagreement with the post-Garang SPLM leadership, al-Hilu spent several years in the United States before returning to Sudan in 2008 and taking up a new role as deputy secretary-general of the northern SPLM. After local complaints that the SPLM's deputy governor for South Kordofan, Daniel Kodi Angelo Comba, was not energetic enough in seeing to the full implementation of the CPA in the region, he was replaced in 2009 by al-Hilu, a much more popular choice. Khartoum's response was to appoint an outsider as the new governor; Ahmad Haroun, a veteran of the campaign to repress the Nuba in the 1990s who is now wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity related to his role as a principal organizer of the notorious Janjaweed militia in Darfur.

Al-Hilu's electoral opponents in the May 2011 gubernatorial race were a well-known independent candidate and former SPLA commander, Telefon Kuku Abu Jalha, and the controversial NCP candidate, Ahmad Haroun.

According to a report from al-Jazeera, al-Hilu was ahead in the polls by 14,000 votes with only six polling stations out of 666 remaining to be counted (al-Jazeera, May 7). Results of the election were delayed for several days as top presidential advisor Nafi Ali Nafi flew into Kadugli on March 8 to assess the outcome. A victory was manufactured for the NCP candidate, in part by inventing new polling stations that were unknown to either the opposition or election observers. The head of the electoral commission fled to the United Nations Mission In Sudan (UNMIS) mission in Kadugli as Haroun was declared the winner. Ultimately, despite being well behind in the popular vote, the NCP took both the governorship and 22 of 32 available seats in the state assembly. Khartoum claimed the results were legitimate despite employing a process of gerrymandering and poll-shifting to achieve the result.

The NCP victory essentially guaranteed there would be no further progress on instituting the “popular consultation” process that had been guaranteed by the CPA.

The CPA – Root of the Conflict

While the 2005 CPA provided for a referendum on secession of the South, Blue Nile and South Kordofan were granted only “popular consultations” to be held in 2011 to determine their role and degree of autonomy within the North Sudan. [6] After the Southerners voted overwhelmingly for independence in January, Khartoum quickly lost interest in holding the popular consultations. By now it appears highly unlikely that the consultations will ever be held. The CPA did not provide any direction regarding the disposal of the largely Nuba SPLA army in South Kordofan, and in its absence Khartoum demanded their disarmament or their migration to South Sudan.

The CPA also called for a joint administration in South Kordofan, but in practice the NCP and SPLM continued to maintain separate administrations in the territories they held at the time of the ceasefire.

Objectives of al-Hilu and the Nuba SPLA/M

The SPLM had spread into the North under Garang’s direction before his death in July 2005. The movement changed its direction from federalist to separatist, and in February 2011 decided to split into two parts – the first becoming the governing party of South Sudan, with the second, the SPLM-Northern Sector (SPLM-NS), becoming one of the largest opposition parties in North Sudan. Party leader Yasir Sa’id Arman explained the relationship between the two parties with a European analogy: “It will be like the relations between the green parties in Norway and in Britain. They are in different countries but they share the same vision” (Sudan Tribune, December 22, 2010). The governor of the Blue Nile State, Malik Aggar, became chairman of the SPLM-NS, with veteran SPLM politician Yasir Sa’id remaining as secretary-general and al-Hilu as the deputy SPLM-NS chairman.

The Just Peace Forum (JPF), a political alliance led by the president’s uncle, al-Tayyib Mustafa, called for the SPLM to be banned in any form in the North, as did many within the NCP (Sudan Tribune, February 13). The JPF was organized to advocate for Southern

secession, as this would free the North to return to what they described as Sudan’s natural Arab and Islamic character.

Al-Hilu’s vision of a “New Sudan” sounds much like the secular federalism espoused by the old Garang-led SPLM. Al-Hilu outlined his vision thusly: “We want a restructuring of central government so that each region, each state, is represented in the center according to its weight. We want a new Sudan, built on new basis of justice, of equality, of freedom” (al-Jazeera, July 13). However, the “New Sudan” concept has had little resonance with the Northern opposition since Garang’s death; a May 2010 call by Arman for opposition parties belonging to the anti-NCP Juba Alliance (including Sadiq al-Mahdi’s Umma Party, Hassan al-Turabi’s Popular Congress Party, the Sudanese Communist Party and the Khatmiyya Sufi-dominated Democratic Unionist Party) to join with the SPLM in creating “the New Sudan” brought only a tepid response.

Governor Haroun claims Yasir Arman and various unnamed “leftists” are “responsible for involving al-Hilu in such a critical position. Al-Hilu, a politically mature figure, is also responsible for the deterioration of the situation. We are determined not to allow those who are responsible to go without punishment... If the [SPLA] soldiers continue to stay in the north post-July 7, they will be considered as mercenaries according to international law... al Hilu is wanted as he killed soldiers as well as civilians in addition to betrayal of the constitution as the deputy governor of South Kordofan” (Radio Omdurman, June 9).

A statement from SPLA Brigadier Sa’id Ketchum on the fighters’ objectives appeared to confirm Khartoum’s worst fears: “First we take Kadugli, then [Kordofan capital] al-Obeid, then Khartoum” (Independent, July 11).

The Addis Ababa Agreement

After nearly a month of fighting, SPLM-NS chairman Malik Agar negotiated a pact in late June in the Ethiopian capital with senior Sudanese presidential advisor Nafi Ali Nafi under African Union (AU) mediation led by former South African president Thabo Mbeki. The Addis Ababa Agreement was not a ceasefire, though it was intended to set the conditions for a ceasefire as well as legalize the SPLM-NS as a legitimate political party in the North. [7]

The agreement called for the NCP's recognition of the SPLM-NS as a legal political party in North Sudan and also acknowledged that SPLA/M fighters in South Kordofan are Northerners and not Southerners who need to leave South Kordofan for South Sudan (Khartoum's earlier position). The Nuba SPLA fighters were to be integrated into the SAF and any disarmament would be carried out "without resorting to force" (Sudan Tribune, July 1).

The agreement also called for the creation of a joint NCP/SPLM-NS committee to arrive at an amicable settlement of the South Kordofan issue within 30 days. Criticism of the accord began almost immediately in the North, with pro-government media saying the agreement had made too many concessions to the SPLM (Sudan Tribune, July 4). Al-Bashir expressed his own dissatisfaction with the agreement in an address to a Friday prayer gathering in Khartoum shortly after his return from an official visit to China: "We order the armed forces to carry on its operations and not to stop until South Kordofan is purged as Abyei was purged before, and Abdel Aziz is arrested and brought to trial" for the crimes of terrorizing civilians and killing innocent people" (Sudan Tribune, July 1; Sudan Vision, July 2).

SPLM-NS Secretary General Yasir Arman warned against Khartoum reneging on the agreement: "The only alternative to this agreement is a war, from Blue Nile to Darfur. We don't want that" (Sudan Tribune, July 4).

On June 16, al-Hilu told Mbeki: "They rigged the census, the elections, the ballot boxes. We tested the NCP over six years. They don't respect agreements; they did not implement the CPA. They declared clearly there is no room in this country for any group except Arabs, and no other religion except Islam" (Guardian, June 18).

Khartoum's hard line on South Kordofan is seen by al-Hilu as an attempt to dispose of the CPA and its call for "popular consultations" in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile provinces now that the South has seceded. For al-Hilu, Khartoum's decision is an irreversible turn towards renewed warfare: "Khartoum is trying to avoid paying the entitlement of popular consultation, but we will not give it up even if it leads to another twenty years of war, and there is no concession at all of these rights. We fought for twenty years, and have learned from that war, and the NCP has nothing but tyranny and arrogance. They now declared war, and voided the

agreement, and they have to bear the consequences and we will not go back to dialogue with them again" (al-Sharq al-Awsat, June 9).

The Role of South Sudan

So far, there appears to be little materiel support for the Nuba insurrection from the leaders of newly independent Republic of South Sudan, though South Sudan president Salva Kiir Mayardit said earlier this month: "I want to assure the people of Abyei, Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan that we have not forgotten you... When you bleed, we bleed" (Independent, July 11).

In Tehran, al-Bashir claimed that the South Sudan's SPLM was sneaking fighters into South Kordofan to seize Kadugli and make al-Hilu its ruler (Sudan Tribune, January 26). It was an incendiary accusation given the extreme political tension in Sudan, but reflective of al-Bashir's current inflexible approach that replaced the more conciliatory tone he expressed before the almost unanimous rejection of Sudanese unity in January's referendum on South Sudan independence. The bunker mentality of the regime can be seen in a statement from the NCP Deputy Chairman Mandur al-Mahdi, who said the NCP expected a "fierce foreign attack" to remove the party from power after South Sudan's declaration of independence was internationally recognized on July 9 (Sudan Tribune, June 26).

Conclusion

Though he is ready to lead the Nuba in a renewed struggle against the largely Arab National Congress Party (NCP) regime in Khartoum, al-Hilu appears to be aware that such a struggle can only succeed in the long-term by bringing all the marginalized peoples of North Sudan into a united resistance: "We are aspiring for unity of all the marginalized people, we are actually inviting the Blue Nile, the Darfurians and the rest to come under one umbrella and defeat Khartoum... We will struggle to topple this regime - to remove it and to bring a new democratic system of governance and put an end to wars and continuous hatred between the Sudanese people" (al-Jazeera, July 13).

With signs of growing divisions within the ruling NCP, a continuing conflict in Darfur and unresolved issues in other parts of the country (including the Blue Nile and Nubia), the rule of the militaristic tinged Islamist cabal led by Omar al-Bashir appears increasingly precarious. Sudan's armed forces have been modernized in recent

years thanks to the influx of petro-dollars, but these revenues are already in decline with the separation of the oil-rich south, and the army must face a shrinking pool of recruits from traditional recruiting areas such as South Sudan, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. Khartoum must deal quickly with al-Hilu and his Nuba fighters as sustaining another long conflict without encouraging further armed dissent in the northern Republic of Sudan will prove increasingly difficult as the struggle for South Kordofan carries on unabated.

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Notes:

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3. Nanne op't Ende, "Interview with Daniel Kodi Angelo Comba," Khartoum, Sudan, April 17 & 18, 2006, <http://www.occasionalwitness.com/Articles/20060605.htm>.
4. Nicholas Coghlan: *Far in the Waste Sudan: On Assignment in Africa*, (Montreal, /Kingston, 2005), p.238
5. Hilde F. Johnson: *Waging Peace in Sudan: The Inside Story of the Negotiations that Ended Africa's Longest Civil War*, (Eastbourne U.K., 2011), p.64
6. "North Sudan" is used for clarity's sake throughout this article to refer to the region still under the control of Khartoum, but please note that the official name for this region remains "Sudan," while the official name for the newly independent south is "South Sudan."
7. Not to be confused with the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement that brought an end to Sudan's first civil war.