



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....	1
TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY? THE FRENCH HOSTAGE DILEMMA By Pascale Combelles Siegel	4
SEMTEX OR STABILITY? THE CONFLICT IN LIBYA AND ITS IMPACT ON SECURITY IN NIGER By Dario Cristiani	6
THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN SOMALIA: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ISLAH MOVEMENT'S ABDURAHMAN M. ABDULLAHI (BAADIYOW) By Andrew McGregor	7



Hervé Ghesquière and
Stéphane Taponier

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AFGHAN TALIBAN CONDEMN CIA FOR “DIABOLIC” HACKING OF THEIR OFFICIAL WEBSITE

Various reports claiming the death of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar have emerged in the last year, all of them apparently false. The latest report of his death was the most unusual, as it appeared to originate with authentic Taliban spokesmen, the apparent victims of a concerted attempt to hack into their electronic communications devices in order to deliberately spread disinformation at a critical point in the struggle for Afghanistan. The Commission of Cultural Affairs of the Islamic Emirate [of Afghanistan, i.e. the Taliban] responded by issuing a “Statement of the Cultural Affairs Commission of the Islamic Emirate Regarding the Recent Shameful Attempt by the Enemy” a day after the July 20 hacking effort (alemara1.com; July 21; ansar1.info, July 21).

In the early hours of July 20, text messages began to circulate from the mobile phones of veteran Taliban spokesmen Zabihullah Mujahid and Qari Yusuf Ahmadi saying: “Leadership council of IEA [Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan] announces that Amir al-Mumineen [Commander of the Faithful, i.e. Mullah Omar] has passed away. May mighty God bless him.” More detailed e-mails were also sent from the movement’s official website that claimed the Taliban leader had died of a heart attack. The notice was accompanied by a long obituary and the announcement that the Mullah had been succeeded by Gul Agha, a close aide (AFP, July 20).

A spokesman for Afghanistan’s National Directorate for Security (NDS) said his agency had received no reports of the death of the Taliban leader, who has remained in hiding since being forced from the Taliban capital of Kandahar

in 2001. The NDS may have been hesitant to support the latest claims, having been embarrassed in May when it spread reports that Mullah Omar had gone missing from his Quetta hideout. A more elaborate version of this story suggested that Mullah Omar had been killed by his Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) escort on May 21 while being transported from Quetta to a new hideout in North Waziristan in an operation directed by former ISI director General Hamid Gul (Tolo News [Kabul], May 23; Reuters, May 23). Both the Taliban and General Gul dismissed the report, the latter describing it as “rubbish.”

The Taliban statement on Mullah Omar’s latest “virtual death” blamed the hacking effort on the CIA, claiming the agency had hacked the Islamic Emirate’s official website *alemara1.com* by posting a fake announcement of Mullah Omar’s death in Pashto, English and Arabic. The announcement was also sent using the email addresses of spokesmen Zabibullah and Qari Yusuf. Text messages were sent from the spokesmen’s mobile phones through the Roshan and Afghan Wireless mobile communications companies. The work was done at night while the mobile phones of Taliban officials are usually powered off.

The statement admitted that “the enemy” had already created many problems for the Taliban website, including the posting of false information. Nonetheless, “the colleagues working at the website of the Islamic Emirate have foiled all efforts of the enemy. When the enemy hackers managed to take control of the website, our technical managers... promptly retrieved from [the enemy hackers] control of the website.” The Taliban described the hacking as a “diabolic act,” though it noted: “We would like to say that in the world of technology, such pernicious attempts and fraudulent activities are not unusual things... But this incident was unusual in that the attempt had been made by a known party and still more at the level of a government. So it was a shameful and unusual action.” The movement urged the mobile phone companies, the Yahoo and Google web browsers and journalists whose reputation was harmed by circulating the false report to “raise their voice of protest.”

Last January, the *Washington Post* ran an article claiming Mullah Omar had suffered a heart attack on January 7 and had been treated for several days in a Karachi hospital. The report was based on information provided by The Eclipse Group, a “private intelligence” firm operated by former CIA agent Duane R. Clarridge (*Washington Post*, January 18). Clarridge was indicted

in the Iran-Contra scandal but was later pardoned. In 2010, rumors that Mullah Omar had been arrested in Karachi by the ISI were spread by American thriller writer Brad Thor and “confirmed” by Colonel Oliver North, who was also indicted in the Iran-Contra affair.

TOP DARFUR REBEL COMMANDER CAPTURED IN SOUTH KORDOFAN

After several weeks of conflicting reports from Khartoum regarding the presence or absence of fighters from Darfur’s rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in the Sudanese state of South Kordofan, a military spokesman has announced the capture of a leading JEM commander, Brigadier General al-Tom Hamid Toto, in a battle between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and a combined force of JEM rebels and Nuba rebels of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) (for the war in South Kordofan, see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 1).

SAF spokesman Colonel al-Sawarmi Khalid Sa’ad said the JEM commander would soon face trial in Khartoum. The official Sudan News Agency (SUNA) quoted the JEM Brigadier confirming his arrest, which he said happened after his vehicle was destroyed by shelling, during which he sustained a head injury. Toto added that his force had received logistical support from the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) during the JEM incursion into South Kordofan (SUNA, July 21).

A combined SPLA/JEM press release later confirmed the capture of three fighters, including two commanders, Brigadier Toto and Commander A. Zaki. The joint force reported overrunning the SAF garrison in al-Tais (25 km south of the state capital of Kadugli) in a battle that lasted from July 10 to July 17, killing 150 SAF troops and seizing large quantities of light and heavy machine guns, artillery, RPGs and anti-aircraft missiles. The statement also warned the prisoners must be treated as prisoners of war, a status Khartoum has routinely denied to JEM fighters. [1] After earlier denials, the battle and the capture of Brigadier Toto led to an SAF admission that it was indeed fighting JEM units in South Kordofan, but said the rebel alliance would make little difference to the region’s balance of power (*Sudan Tribune*, July 18). The commander of the SAF’s 5th Brigade, Fadl al-Mula Muhammad Ahmad, claimed that government forces had “inflicted enormous losses of life and property” on the joint JEM/SPLA forces at al-Tais (*Sudan Tribune*, July 22).

Though Khartoum seemed reluctant to admit JEM was again operating in Kordofan, the chief of Sudan's Joint General Staff, Lieutenant General Ismat Abdul Rahman Zain al-Abdin, claimed that the SAF had anticipated the revolt of the Nuba SPLA in June by learning of a plan to ally the Nuba fighters with a rebel faction from Darfur prior to announcing the confederation of South Kordofan with the new state in South Sudan (Sudanese Media Center, June 27).

JEM has lately been threatening to mount a new attack on the national capital of Khartoum. Elements of a massive 2008 long-distance desert raid reached the suburbs of Omdurman (Khartoum's sister city on the west bank of the Nile), but fizzled out there under counter-attacks by local security forces before entering Khartoum proper (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 15, 2008).

JEM has also made several raids from Darfur into Kordofan since 2006:

- JEM forces joined other Darfur rebels in a raid on Hamrat al-Shaykh in Northern Kordofan in July 2006 (al-Sahafa [Khartoum], July 4, 2006).
- On August 29, 2007, four columns of JEM fighters seized a Sudanese military base at Wad Banda (West Kordofan) for several hours, killing at least 41 SAF troops and taking large quantities of weapons and ammunition (SUNA, August 31, 2007, *Sudan Tribune*, August 31, 2007; see also *Terrorism Focus*, September 11, 2007).
- In October, 2007 JEM seized Chinese-operated facilities at the Defra oil field in South Kordofan as a warning to China to cease its support for Khartoum (Reuters, October 25, 2007; October 29, 2007).
- A JEM force attempted to take Chinese oil facilities at al-Rahaw (South Kordofan) in November 2007. JEM claimed to have taken al-Rahaw, but the SAF claimed they were driven off.
- JEM officials said the local Arab Missiriya had joined them in a December, 2007 raid on the Heglig oil field in South Kordofan, the most important oil field in Sudan (Reuters, December 11, 2007).

Though Khartoum professes to be unworried, it is almost certain that there is major concern in the capital over a possible alignment between JEM and the Nuba SPLA or the GoSS, which now has one of the largest armies in Africa. Khartoum has hinted at such a development for years and was likely alarmed by the appearance of a high-level JEM delegation in Juba during the July 9 South Sudan independence celebrations. The JEM leaders held talks with SPLM (Sudan People's Liberation Movement – the political wing of the SPLA) leaders and conveyed a written message from JEM leader Dr. Khalil Ibrahim (*Sudan Tribune*, July 10).

JEM and the other major rebel movements in Darfur have abstained from the Doha peace talks, which Khartoum says will be the last opportunity for negotiations. The head of the government delegation at Doha, Dr. Amin Hassan Omar, claimed on July 22 that JEM leader Dr. Ibrahim Khalil had been arrested by Libyan intelligence (Radio Omdurman, July 22). Though this has not been confirmed, Khalil had been staying in Libya after being expelled from Chad when N'Djamena and Khartoum agreed to stop hosting each other's rebel movements in January 2010 (see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, January 21, 2010). Last February, the movement appealed to the United Nations to rescue the JEM leader from Libya, saying his life was in danger as a result of Khartoum's allegations that JEM fighters were acting as mercenaries in Qaddafi's military (Reuters, February 28). [2]

Notes:

1. "Joint JEM/SPLA Forces defeat SAF in South Kordofan: A Military Statement," <http://www.sudanjem.com/2011/07/52292/>.
2. See Andrew McGregor: "Update on African Mercenaries: Have Darfur Rebels Joined Qaddafi's Mercenary Defenders?" Jamestown Foundation Special Commentary, February 24, 2011, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=37563](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37563).

To Pay or Not to Pay? The French Hostage Dilemma

By Pascale Combelles Siegel

After 18 months in captivity, the Taliban released Hervé Ghesquière and Stéphane Taponier on June 29. The two journalists from the French public television channel France Télévision were taken hostage on December 30, 2009 as they were working on a documentary on reconstruction in Afghanistan. The French press and the political establishment greeted the news with obvious elation. [1] The two journalists were not party to the conflict and were simply documenting history in the making. As such, the press described them as innocent pawns in a broader grand strategic game and as victims who should not be sacrificed.

However, after the relief and the self-congratulation, the central question of “why did the Taliban release the hostages” and “what did they get in return” quickly came to the forefront of the debate.

Weary of fueling the “kidnapping-for-ransom business model,” French Government officials repeatedly denied the payment of any ransom. “France does not pay ransoms,” claimed Alain Juppé, the French Foreign Minister, echoed by the Elysée Palace and the Minister of Economy and Finance François Baroin (*L'Express*, June 30). The trouble is, nobody really believes the official version. Security expert Gérard de Villiers said that the government would deny it, but “I don’t know of any hostage liberation without the payment of a ransom” (*Atlantico.fr*, June 30). Frédéric Helbert, a security consultant for the private channel BFM TV, went even further. Based on unnamed sources, he described in great detail how an envelope containing “several million dollars” was handed over to the kidnappers as they released the two journalists to the French authorities, exchanged into local currency and sent back to the Taliban’s Quetta Shura in Pakistan (BFM TV, June 29; *L'Express*, June 30).

It was not the first time that France has been rumored to pay a ransom in exchange for its citizens. The *London Times*, citing Baghdad security officials “who played a crucial role in the negotiations,” claimed the French government paid \$15 million to obtain the liberation of Christian Chesnot and George Malbrunot in Iraq in December 2004 and another \$10 million to obtain the

liberation of Florence Aubenais in Iraq six months later in June 2005 (*Times*, May 22, 2006).

However, after his election in 2007, President Sarkozy clearly indicated that he wanted to distance his government from such practices, advocating instead a resolute opposition to paying ransoms or exchanging prisoners. In August 2009, he declared: “Paying ransoms and swapping prisoners for harmless innocents is no strategy at all,” adding that France must “refuse the terrorists’ diktat” (*Rue89.com*, January 15).

However, a closer look at the French government’s practices since his election shows that the government’s actions are less resolute than its words and that different circumstances yield different remedies.

- In April 2008, Somali pirates seized a French luxury cruise yacht, the *Ponant*, off the coast of Somalia. The owner of the yacht, GMA-CGM of France, paid a ransom of over \$2 million for the 30 crew members, part of which was recovered in Opération Thalatine, a raid on the pirates in the north-central Mudug region of Somalia by French Commandos marine (Naval Commandos) based in Djibouti. Six pirates were captured in the helicopter raid and brought to France for trial.
- A year later, the French government launched a successful assault on the *Tanit*, a luxury sailboat also taken off the coast of Somalia, after the pirates refused the offer of a ransom (*Times*, April 12, 2009). One hostage was killed in the crossfire during the assault by the Commando Hubert, the frogman unit of the Commandos marine, supported by French and German warships. Three pirates were arrested in the operation.
- Denis Alex is one of two *Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure* (DGSE – French external intelligence) agents kidnapped from a Mogadishu hotel in July, 2009 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 30, 2009). Though his colleague escaped from his Hizb al-Islam captors only a month later, Alex continues to be held by al-Shabaab somewhere within Somalia. Al-Shabaab has released two videotaped sets of demands, as read by Alex himself. In both cases the demands were political (prisoner release, cessation of French support for the Transitional

Federal Government, withdrawal of African Union peacekeepers, etc) rather than financial (al-Qimmah.com, July 18, 2009; AFP, June 9, 2010). [2]

- In July 2010, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) announced that it had killed hostage Michel Germaneau in retaliation for a Franco-Malian raid against one of its camps in northwestern Mali (al-Jazeera, July 26). In that case, Defense Minister Hervé Morin indicated that the French Government “didn’t have the slightest discussion with the kidnappers... We never had any specific claims” (*La Dépêche du Midi*, January 10, 2010; AFP, August 1). However, AQIM chief Abdulmalik Droukdel claimed the raid was launched while negotiations for Germaneau were underway (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 23, 2010).

- Finally, in January 2011, the government launched a raid to free two French citizens, Antoine de Léocour and Vincent Delory, who were kidnapped in Niamey, capital of Niger. Both were killed in northern Mali during an assault on the AQIM convoy transporting the prisoners by French and Nigérien troops (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 28).

In contrast, the French government’s attitude toward the September 2010 kidnapping of seven employees and sub-contractors of AREVA by AQIM in Niger is much more ambivalent. In that case, contacts have been established between the government and the kidnappers and a mediation team has been set up (*La Dépêche du Midi*, January 10, 2010). There are also reports that a ransom paid by AREVA secured the liberation of three of the seven hostages (Radio France Internationale, February 25). Most recently, in March 2011, AQIM released new demands asking for 90 million Euros and a prisoner swap in exchange for the four remaining hostages. The French Foreign Minister immediately rejected the ransom demand on the grounds that “we don’t negotiate on that basis,” indicating that the price rather than the principle of ransom is the problem (*La Dépêche du Midi*, January 10). The DGSE special fund allocation for hostage rescue operations amounts to \$53.9 million Euros for the fiscal year 2011 (*Paris Match*, July 1).

Based on this recent history, the French government does not seem to have a consistent position on negotiating the release of hostages taken by pirates or terrorist groups. Nevertheless, the French government is equipped with a dedicated bureaucratic structure, a budget, and a strong political will to engage in negotiations to secure the release of French citizens. There is little doubt that French officials do not want to encourage hostage-taking by paying ransoms - President Sarkozy has made his feelings clear in that regard. However, the collective desire to spare the lives of innocent victims taken hostage and/or to protect the economic and professional interests of large corporations clearly continues to push the government toward negotiating the release of French hostages.

In the Taliban’s release of Ghesquière and Taponier in June, as well as the 2005-2006 cases of Chesnot, Malbrunot and Aubenais in Iraq, there was acknowledgement in the press that money was paid to either the hostage takers or intermediaries. There was, however, virtually no debate on the potential impact of paying ransoms to terrorist groups. The absence of discussion about the impact of paying ransoms to terrorist groups or intermediaries indicates that President Sarkozy faces a steep uphill battle if he truly wants to end French practice of paying ransoms. There remain nine French nationals held hostage in the world.

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Notes:

1. See Prime Minister François Fillon before the National Assembly (French lower house of Parliament), 29 June 2011. Available at <http://www.bfmtv.com/video-infos-actualite/detail/taponier-et-ghesquiere-liberes-annonce-fillon-1426267/>.

2. The second video is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKLtO7Zj7dw>.

Semtex or Stability? The Conflict in Libya and its Impact on Security in Niger

By Dario Cristiani

Libyan stability is critical for Niger's security as well as for its economy. The on-going crisis complicates the already demanding task that the new democratic government of the country faces in strengthening the Nigerien economy and securing its domestic stability (see *Terrorism Monitor* April 14; February 17).

Niger's president, Mahamadou Issoufou, recently flew to Paris to meet French President Nicolas Sarkozy in the first bilateral meeting between the two presidents. Given its economic ties and colonial links, France is Niger's most important ally. As is well known, France is at the forefront of the international coalition that, under the NATO banner, supports the Libyan Transitional National Council (TNC) in its efforts to depose Libyan ruler Mu'ammarr Qaddafi. On this issue, the perceptions and the interests of the two countries are rather divergent (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, July 6).

Issoufou has defined the effect of the Libyan crisis on his country as "catastrophic" (*L'Expression*, July 6). The main fear is that Libya will turn into a sort of "Mediterranean Somalia," with a tremendously damaging impact on the stability of several Sahelian and Maghreb countries. Issoufou is concerned that Islamist extremists could seize power in Libya (*Reuters Africa*, July 17).

The potential of a crisis in Niger is greater in the case of a Qaddafi defeat than a rebel loss, as the Colonel was a key Nigerien partner. Qaddafi's role in negotiations with the Tuareg groups of north Niger and Tripoli's economic links with Niamey are considered fundamental by the new civilian government in Niger. In his meeting with the French president, Issoufou stressed the need to find \$13 billion over the next few years to develop the country (*PANA*, July 7). Niger relies heavily on external powers for its economic needs as well as for its security. These circumstances do not allow Niamey to have a truly independent position on the conflict. However, Niamey's announced neutrality is somewhat of a courageous step and an indication that Niger's government considers stability – which could be defined

as a situation close to the pre-conflict status quo – the optimal result in terms of Nigerien interests.

The main issues that Niger must face in the wake of the Libyan conflict are:

- **Domestic Stability and Security:** In late June, Nigerien security forces intercepted three vehicles in a fire-fight, seizing 640 kg of Semtex (plastic explosive), 435 detonators, RPG-7 grenade launchers and a large number of Kalashnikov assault rifles believed to originate in Libya (RFI, June 24; *Le Figaro*, July 1). Niger, like many other of its Sahelian neighbors, suffers from porous borders and an inability to control its territory effectively due to a lack of appropriate financial and military resources. Algeria and Chad share Niamey's fear that Libya could turn into a major safe haven for AQIM affiliates and emerge as a major weapons market for Islamist militants and local Sahelian criminal gangs cooperating with AQIM in kidnappings and other activities. One of the main issues Issoufou must tackle is how to increase domestic security in Niger. A more secure and stable domestic environment will strengthen Issoufou politically, reducing the possibility of the military's return to power, which is always an option given Niger's troubled political history. Moreover, a boost in domestic security is needed to increase the economic attractiveness of the country for foreign investors, a fundamental step in pursuing the new government's ambitious economic development goals.

- **A Food Crisis and Economic Blows:** According to the International Organization for Migrations (IOM), about 90,000 Nigeriens have returned to Niger from Libya since the beginning of the rebellion (*Jeune Afrique*, July 7). A few days earlier the Nigerien president had provided an even direr figure of 211,000 returnees (*Reuters*, July 2). This assessment is likely rather pessimistic, but the substance of Issoufou's claims is real enough; Niger must now face an intimidating wave of people coming back from Libya without having the means to employ, feed or care for the returnees. Over the past few years thousands Nigeriens have escaped drought and famine in southern Niger, particularly in the regions of Tahoua, Zinder, Tillabéry and Maradi, making food security a major political and social issue in the country (*IRIN*, May 19). The Nigerien

workers in Libya were also a major source of income thanks to remittances, estimated to be \$70 million in 2010. Now, these workers have returned to unemployment in Niger.

Moreover, Niger has suffered a major economic blow through the loss of Libyan development funds. In 2010, Libya announced a plan to invest \$100 million in Niger to increase its presence in the country (Gulf News, August 8, 2010). The Libyan rebellion also means a strong decline in revenues for Niger as trade between the two countries has ceased. The war in Libya is now discouraging the flow of tourists in the region, which was already affected by the presence of AQIM and the frequency of European tourist kidnappings. All these elements have negatively impacted the already weak Nigerien economic structure.

- **The Tuareg Issue:** In 2009, Qaddafi mediated a peace deal which guaranteed an amnesty for 4,000 Tuareg rebels who disarmed in return for a promise of jobs. Although many of them did not find employment, Qaddafi's popularity among Tuareg people in the region remains strong. Some have even joined Qaddafi's loyalists against the rebels. Major political question-marks for the future of Niger are the fate of these agreements and how the Tuareg rebels will act if the Qaddafi regime collapses. A dissident Libyan official, Abdurahman Shalgham, recently claimed that Qaddafi plotted to create a Tuareg state in the Sahara at the expense of Algeria, Mali and Niger (*Echorouk* [Algiers], June 18). These allegations, however, were likely an attempt to reduce the hostility of these three governments to the rebel forces. Tuareg rebels with new weapons grabbed in Libya but without employment or their former political patron could once more represent a major threat to Niger's security.

Niger is experiencing an uneasy geopolitical situation. A stable, secure and Sahelian-oriented Libya would represent the perfect state of affairs for Niamey. In reality, Libya is turning into an unstable playground for militants and the prospect of a Libya led by the rebel forces is perceived as a problem for Niger, as a rebel-controlled Libya will likely have a completely different geopolitical orientation. Moreover, as the conflict goes ahead, Niger's security, economy

and social balances will continue to suffer from the factors listed above. This explains why Niger is still so cautious in abandoning Qaddafi, playing the card of neutrality and pushing for a political solution that will (even partially) save the Qaddafi regime.

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The Muslim Brotherhood in Somalia: An Interview with the Islah Movement's Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyow)

By Andrew McGregor

The Jamestown Foundation recently posed a series of questions in an online interview with Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyow), an Islamic scholar and prominent leader of the Islah (Reform) Movement in Somalia. The interview was designed to shed light on the views of Somalia's Muslim Brotherhood (under the banner of the Islah movement and the incipient Justice and Unity Party) on a number of the political, religious and social issues facing Somalia today. Among the topics discussed are the political activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, the future of the embattled Transitional Federal Government, the influence of al-Qaeda on Somalia's al-Shabaab movement, the introduction of Salafism to Somalia, the effect of American intervention in Somalia, the possibility of a popular uprising in the style of the "Arab Spring" and the roots of Islamic resistance in Somalia in the Dervish movement of Sayid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan. [1]

[Jamestown Foundation] Somalia's Islah Movement is often described as Somalia's Muslim Brotherhood. How close is Islah to the ideology of Hassan al-Banna and the Egyptian Ikhwan? Does Islah maintain contacts with the international Muslim Brotherhood?

[Abdurahman M. Abdullahi] Islah describes itself as an Islamic movement representing the Muslim Brotherhood in Somalia. It takes inspiration and understanding of Islam from the ideological guidelines laid down by Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Its vision is based on looking at Islam as a comprehensive way of life and a religion that, besides calling for worshipping one God (Allah), calls for adopting Islamic principles and values in the social, political and economic spheres. The Islah Movement is part of the international network of Muslim Brotherhood organizations. These organizations are independent entities that are united in their peaceful and gradual approach in reforming their societies and promoting the concept of the universality of Islam and its peaceful coexistence with other worldly regions. The international network of the Muslim Brotherhood plays a consultative role and is a forum to exchange ideas and share experiences among its members.

Can you describe the platform and goals of your new political formation, the Justice and Unity Party?

For the Somali state to recover, a pan-clan national civic movement is required that surpasses clan based organizations, a movement that invigorates the concepts of citizenship and democratic governance on the one side and accommodates Islam and the clan system in a new social contract on the other. Only through a national movement with multiple persuasions and organizations united in the strategic goal of restoring the Somali state and tolerance to each other, will capable and qualified leadership emerge and the state recover.

The Justice and Unity party is a new initiative of the Islah Movement which aims to mobilize Somali society through a national political party. The founders of the party will not be limited to the members of Islah, but will include many prominent personalities, both men and women. This party is in the process of formation and will be announced publicly when all the required steps are completed. It adopts the general guidelines and principles of Islamic moderation, consultation (*shura*), and democracy. Its main principles include safeguarding the dignity of all citizens, protecting universal human rights and realizing justice and unity in the war-torn

Somalia. It also advocates and promotes peace and cooperation in particular amongst the peoples of the Horn of Africa. Moreover, it strives to transform Somali society from clan based partisan politics to a modern society where political affiliation and ideology plays a role in political competitions. Membership of the party will be open equally for all Somalis who are willing to join and adhere to its principles and policies. More details of this party and its leadership will be published after its public announcement.

The Islah Movement welcomed the decision of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) cabinet to implement Shari'a as Somalia's new official legal code in 2009. Two years on, how would you assess the success of this change? Why do you think al-Shabaab, which demands Shari'a in Somalia, continues to reject the TFG's effort to impose Shari'a?

Even though the Islah Movement welcomed this decision, it was well aware that the TFG cannot implement Shari'a because it is very corrupt and weak. Moreover, it is our understanding that implementing Shari'a should not be equated with the application of some elements of *hudud* (criminal punishments) for offenses such as theft, fornication and the consumption of harmful drugs. Application of Shari'a is a very wide concept and instead of focusing on the doable parts of Shari'a, such as mercifulness, cooperation, caring for the weak, respecting other religions and good governance based on consultation (*shura*) or democracy, extremist elements focus on the punishment aspects of Shari'a. Welcoming the TFG's decision was meant to support the right direction in accordance with Islah ideology. On the other hand, even though al-Shabaab calls for the application of Shari'a, their understanding of Islam is a distorted, extremist approach departing from Islamic moderation and the gradual, transformational approach. They want to apply Islam violently without any legitimacy. The only Shari'a they can accept is their way of Shari'a under their absolute leadership.

Al-Qaeda is often claimed to play an important part in the al-Shabaab insurgency. How would you assess al-Qaeda's influence on the Islamist movement in Somalia?

First, let me address the wrong usage of the terminology "Islamist movement" to describe al-Shabaab. Islamist movements are not monolithic and include various organizations promoting, teaching, advocating for the application of Islamic principles and adhering to its values in the society and the state. Al-Qaeda and al-

Shabaab - its offshoot in Somalia - do not represent the Islamic movement and in doing so distorts the image of all Islamic movements. They could be described simply as armed Islamic movements. Historically, direct al-Qaeda involvement in Somalia started in 1991 when its members infiltrated the al-Itihad al-Islamiya movement in the early years of the civil war. Osama bin Laden during his stay in Sudan [1992-96] was interested in creating an al-Qaeda affiliated organization in Somalia and pushed al-Itihad, which was a neo-Salafist movement, toward armed conflict. However, when the leaders of al-Itihad abandoned armed struggle, a splinter group under the name of al-Shabaab appeared on the scene after al-Qaeda's 9/11 attack on U.S. targets. Al-Shabaab today is a formidable force and controls large swathes of southern Somalia though their ideological influence is dwindling.

Al-Shabaab's destruction of Sufi shrines and tombs has led to the formation of a Sufi-based armed movement. How would you assess the role of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a in Somalia?

Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a is a new name which means "Sufi brotherhoods in Somalia" even though the name originally covered all Sunni branches of Islam and only excluded the Shi'a and a number of other sects. Armed Sufis are not a new phenomenon in Somalia; a similar situation occurred during the first two decades of the 20th century when the Dervish movement under the leadership of Sayid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan led the armed Salihyah Brotherhood against Britain and Ethiopia. Moreover, this movement also fought the Qadiriyah and Dandarawiyah brotherhoods that refused to accept the leadership of Sayid Mohamed. The new armed role of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a is a reaction to Shabaab's destruction of the revered shrines. It will have serious consequence on the traditional peaceful approach of the Sufi brotherhoods even as they encounter spreading Wahhabism in Somalia.

The mandate of the Transitional Federal Government is about to expire. Do you view the attempt to renew this mandate as legitimate?

The original mandate of the TFG expires in August 2011, however, it was extended for an extra year in order to be able to complete transitional tasks such as adopting a new constitution, forming a new, smaller parliament, electing a president and forming a new government. Constitutionally, the extension is considered illegitimate;

nevertheless, there is no alternative way for national institutions to be renewed. The unpopular agreement arrived at in Kampala under the leadership of the Ugandan president [the June 9 Kampala Accord] was finally approved by the parliament and a new government was formed under the leadership of a Somali-American professor [new Prime Minister Dr. Abdiweli Mohamed Ali]. Let us hope that things will change for the better during the next year.

Do you believe the TFG has the potential or ability to restore a functioning government to Somalia?

It is very difficult to predict the future performance of the TFG, which is under great pressure. There is no doubt that the capacity of the TFG in terms of leadership, human resources, finances and security institutions is very poor. However, it seems that a new educated elite is entering the political game, which gives us some hope. I am hopeful and see the light at the end of the tunnel. I see improvement day after day, better administration, and dedication of the new leaders.

What direction do you think is appropriate to replace the TFG?

There were many failed efforts at institution building in Somalia during the last 20 years in which Somalis had imposed upon them some sort of state building model that had failed. Indeed, there is a need for new and serious thinking on how to build a new Somalia. It requires new national vision, new approaches and new leadership. The new vision should focus on peacefulness, justice and unity of the society. This approach should be Somali-driven, legitimate and supported by the external stakeholders. New political institutions will eventually produce new leadership beyond the civil war mentality.

Somali president Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad is one of the most controversial figures in Somalia. What differences (if any) do you see between the Shaykh Sharif who was leader of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and the Shaykh Sharif who is the President of Somalia?

The difference is between his two locations of power. In the first place, he was leading armed opposition forces that fought against a warlord alliance believed to be funded by the CIA counter-terrorism task force in the Horn of Africa. The ICU included diverse groups which were united to topple President Abdullahi Yusuf's weak

government and to fight the Ethiopians. Currently, Shaykh Sharif is in the mantle of the President of Somalia under the protection of AMISOM forces. He is in a very difficult position in fighting his former colleagues. For sure, Sharif has gained more experience now than he had during his tenure as the leader of the Islamic Courts Union.

Do you see American military and financial support of the TFG as a positive or negative contribution to the Somali political process? How does your movement view U.S. drone attacks on al-Qaeda suspects within Somalia?

There is no doubt that U.S. counter-terrorism policy in the Horn of Africa has played a bigger role in fuelling extremism and strengthening al-Shabaab. On the other hand, I also think that without direct and indirect American support to the TFG, al-Shabaab could have taken over the rest of Mogadishu and Somalia. It requires a prudent and calibrated approach to cooperate without instigating further violence. With respect to drone attacks, we see them as negative in achieving the goal of eliminating terrorism. New and more dedicated individuals will emerge to avenge their mentors and leaders. The method of drone attack is not welcomed by my organization.

Of all the countries in Africa, Somalia would seem to have the greatest promise for unity. It shares a common language, a common ethnicity and a common religion, yet Somalia remains almost impossibly divided after two decades of political and social instability. Is this an internal phenomenon, or have external factors contributed to this development?

It is true that Somalia's peoples share the same language, adhere to the Islamic faith, and despite its numerous clans, belong mainly to one ethnic group. These factors were thought to serve as vital ingredients in nation building in the developing world. However, the collapse of the Somali state in the early 1990s and the increasing intra-clan conflicts in many parts of the country poses a challenge to reinstituting state and nation-building.. The collapse of the Somali state is the product of complex factors: original, operational and proximate causes that include external as well internal factors. In the final analysis however, responsibility of the collapse of the Somali state and the difficulty of its restoration lies primarily on the shoulders of the leadership of Somalia. All nations have challenges, but their leaderships come

up with solutions and save their nations. In that context, Somalia is not different and eventually leaders will emerge and end this protracted conflict.

Salafism appears to be a growing trend in Somalia, often displacing traditional Sufism. Do you see Salafism as compatible with the national and historical Somali character?

No. Salafism, which is known in Somalia as Wahhabism, is a new intruder in Somalia that is not tolerant to traditional Islamic practices. It is confrontational and fights against al-Shari'a theology, the Shafi'iyah school of jurisprudence and Sufism, which are the three components of traditional Islam in Somalia. All violent confrontations in the name of Islam are driven by some elements who claim to belong to the Salafia ideology. Al-Itihad and its offshoot al-Shabaab share the ideology of Salafism.

Al-Shabaab's Shaykh Jama Abdusalam recently urged Somalis to "carry out Egyptian and Tunisian-style uprisings in Somalia." Is there a possibility for this in Somalia? The response of the Brotherhood to the popular uprising in Egypt has seemed confused and contradictory at times. In the event of such an uprising in Somalia, what role would you foresee for your movement?

Frankly, I do not think there is the possibility of a popular uprising at this particular historical moment in Somalia. With respect to the role of Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian uprising, allow me to disagree that it was confused and contradictory. I have had the honor of visiting Egypt after the uprising and participated in the opening of the Muslim Brotherhood main office in Cairo. I have met and discussed the role of Muslim Brotherhood in the uprising with many of their leaders. They have affirmed that even though they did not initiate the uprising, they were nevertheless the most organized group to participate in it and maintain it. Somalia had passed through a similar uprising in the late 1990s and the Libyan and Yemeni scenarios are very close to what Somalia experienced 20 years ago. The Islah Movement is working to lead civic transformation in Somalia and strives to bring together a divided nation and to restore dignity and unity. This process is not through uprisings, but through planned programs that allow the participation of the majority of Somalia's citizens.

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Note:

1. For the Dervish Movement of Sayid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, see Andrew McGregor: “Expelling the Infidel: An Historical Look at Somali Resistance to Ethiopia,” *Terrorism Monitor*, February 21, 2007.