



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Armed tribesmen working with Yemeni Army

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## QADDAFI ALLY ROBERT MUGABE CALLS NATO "TERRORISTS," THREATENS TO EXPROPRIATE WESTERN FIRMS IN ZIMBABWE

Mu'ammarr Qaddafi's policy of using Libya's oil wealth to build stronger ties with sub-Saharan African nations through financial aid, investment and arms supplies has resulted in a distinct lack of support in many of these nations for NATO's military intervention in the Libyan rebellion. Among the most vociferous of Qaddafi's supporters has been the long-time ruler of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwe has been frequently mentioned as a possible place of exile for the Libyan leader and there were rumors earlier this year that Zimbabwean troops had been sent to Libya, rumors that gained strength within Zimbabwe after the nation's defense minister declined to issue a straightforward denial (*Zimbabwean*, February 25). One Zimbabwe daily later claimed to have confirmation from state intelligence sources that 500 soldiers and a number of state security agents intended to reinforce Qaddafi's female bodyguard had been deployed in Libya (*Zimbabwe Mail*, March 17).

President Mugabe, who has been consistent in his support for the Libyan leader, took the opportunity of using a 90 minute speech in Harare to castigate NATO for its actions in Libya, particularly those directed personally at Qaddafi and his family, describing the NATO members as "terrorists." The speech was delivered as part of celebrations honoring the Chimurenga War, the local name for the national liberation struggle that brought Mugabe's Zanu-PF party to power in 1980.

Mugabe warned Zimbabweans to be vigilant of foreign attempts at regime change in Zimbabwe as he defended his friend and ally, Mu'ammad Qaddafi:

Look what they are doing in Libya. The brazen way they seek to kill Qaddafi... they are deliberately throwing bombs at his family residences. [NATO] has lost its legitimacy, it has become terrorist and beware this they can do on any other African country than Libya. We must always be in a state of preparedness. They seek to kill Qaddafi. They have in fact deliberately killed some of his children. Now when they do that deliberately, it is exactly what the Taliban and al-Qaeda do – what is the difference in terms of what they [NATO] are doing? That's why I say NATO is now a terrorist organization as well. If it defies international law it has no rules and goes out blatantly wanting to kill - that's brazen murder, assassination, who then can respect it as a law-abiding organization? (*Zimbabwe Guardian*, August 8).

Mugabe also warned he will soon take action against foreign firms operating in Zimbabwe that originate in countries supporting sanctions against his regime, naming mineral giant Rio Tinto in particular: "If they are to continue mining, then the sanctions must go." The president added that Western investment could easily be replaced by investment from friendlier countries, such as Russia, China, India and Cuba (*Zimbabwe Guardian*, August 8). China is making strong inroads in Zimbabwe; after loaning the nation \$700 million earlier this year it was rewarded with substantial diamond and platinum concessions. Chinese corporations also appear to have received an exemption from a government program that requires mining companies to turn over 51% of their shares to black Zimbabweans by September 31 (ZimOnline, August 9).

#### MURDER OF SOUTH SUDANESE REBEL LEADER PUTS JUBA'S AMNESTY PROGRAM AT RISK

The mysterious death of South Sudanese rebel commander Colonel Gatluak Gai (a.k.a. Galwak Gai) may jeopardize future attempts to rein in some seven other renegade commanders who refuse to join the new post-independence government of South Sudan.

Gatluak was a Nuer from Unity State's Koch county. A colonel in the region's prison service, Gatluak was little known until his failure to receive an expected

appointment as Koch county commissioner led him into politics as a supporter of Angelina Teny (wife of South Sudan vice-president Riek Machar and a failed candidate for Unity State governor) and eventually into rebellion (see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 17, 2010).

Unity (Wahda) State contains some of the largest oil reserves in Sudan. Its economic potential and position along the North-South border has resulted in its devastation by marauding troops, militias and tribal fighters since 1997, resulting in a massive displacement of the population.

Colonel Gatluak took up arms against the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA – the armed wing of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement - SPLM) in May 2010 with an announcement that he had seized 27 machine guns and intended to join the rebel movement of Lieutenant General George Athor Deng (*Al-Ra'y al-Amm* [Khartoum], May 29). The SPLA replied by accusing Gatluak of working in the interests of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) in Khartoum (Sudan Tribune, May 29). However only a week later, Gatluak was defeated in a clash with the SPLA in Unity State's Mayom County. Gatluak was reported to have fled into thick brush (Sudan Tribune, June 8, 2010). The SPLA was confident Gatluak's rebellion was broken and an offer of amnesty was given in September 2010 as part of a larger amnesty program sponsored by South Sudan president Salva Kiir. Gatluak remained in the field rather than accept the amnesty.

Negotiations with Gatluak resumed in July after South Sudan's declaration of independence. An agreement was reached under which Gatluak's forces would be integrated into the ranks of the SPLA while Gatluak himself would receive the rank of Lieutenant General. While the rank of Lieutenant General (and its associated salary and perks) appears to have become the default compensation for rebel commanders joining or rejoining the SPLA, it was a remarkable jump in rank for a prison service colonel who was virtually unknown to the rest of South Sudan's inflated general staff.

Gatluak agreed to the terms of the July 20 amnesty, which included an end to hostilities and cattle-rustling, the provision of a list of all members of his rebel formation, the integration of his men into the SPLA, and an agreement to be moved anywhere in South Sudan as a senior officer in the SPLA (Sudan Tribune, July 20).

According to Ruei, Gatluak's group was seeking a new supply of arms from Khartoum, though the latter had made this supply conditional on Gatluak's group joining the larger Nuer rebel movement led by Peter Gadet, the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA), operating out of Unity State's Mayom county (Sudan Tribune, July 27). [1] Colonel Gatluak had previously denied having any ties to Gatdet, who is Gatluak's son-in-law.

While it is confirmed that Gatluak and three of his followers were killed on July 25, accounts of his death begin to diverge after that. Gatluak's deputy, Marko Chuol Ruei, admitted responsibility for his commander's death a week later on local radio, saying Gatluak and several other rebel officers had decided to renege on the agreement with the SPLA and ally themselves with the North Sudan, adding: "Gatluak Gai should blame himself for his death" (Bentiu Radio, July 24; Sudan Tribune, July 25). The former deputy said he had taken command and was ready to honor the agreement with the SPLA/M.

However, Gatluak's brother, John Nguanyeat Gai, disputed Ruei's version of events, saying Gatluak had no intention of dishonoring the agreement but was instead murdered by SPLA elements angered by his sudden promotion to Lieutenant General. Nuer Colonel Bol Gatkuoth, a spokesman for Peter Gadet's rebel group, said Gatluak "was killed by the SPLA... He signed a peace agreement and was ambushed by the same forces he signed the agreement with... It was a way of luring him in so that they could catch him" (AFP, July 23). Gatluak's wife claimed their camp was already surrounded by SPLA troops by 5 AM and that Gatluak was killed while trying to escape with his family, rather than in a confrontation with his deputy (Sudan Tribune, July 25). Nine of Gatluak's sons served in his almost exclusively Nuer militia, which SPLA officials confirm will still be integrated with SPLA forces (AFP, July 23).

The SPLM's deal with Gatluak appears to have been hastily fashioned as Juba was eager to present a unified face to the world when South Sudan celebrated its independence in July. Though the deal reached with Colonel Gatluak was seriously flawed – his promotion to Lieutenant General suggested that rebellion was a sure route to an exaggerated rank for disaffected soldiers and government officials – his death poses similar problems, in that it dissuades other notoriously suspicious rebel commanders from reaching an agreement with officials in Juba. Regardless of its real motives, however, Gatluak's murder might serve to disabuse some potential rebels

from the belief a quick insurrection is the key to rapid promotion.

Note:

1. Footage of the SSLA can be seen at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_zoe1kaoIo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_zoe1kaoIo) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJkGDPVNPY&feature=related>.

## Somalia's Famine Contributes to Popular Revolt against al-Shabaab Militants

*By Muhyadin Ahmed Roble*

Somalia's drought and famine have slowed the progress of al-Shabaab operations in Somalia as people continue to flee from areas of southern Somalia under the movement's control. These areas also happen to be the regions hit hardest by the growing shortages of food and water. The drought has likely played an important role in provoking al-Shabaab's unexpected military withdrawal from the Somali capital of Mogadishu on August 6.

Hundreds of internally displaced people (IDPs) fleeing from the al-Shabaab-controlled regions of Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Bay and Bakool arrive in Mogadishu daily to get assistance from government and international aid agencies. International aid agencies are forbidden to operate in areas under al-Shabaab administration. More than 1,300 refugees arrive daily at the Dadaab camp, the world's largest refugee camp in Kenya's North-Eastern Province. Up to 2,000 other Somali refugees cross the border into Ethiopia every day (Reuters, July 28).

The refugees from insurgent-held areas are mostly farmers and herders who were a major source of income to fuel al-Shabaab's operations against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the African Union's peacekeeping force, AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia). The al-Shabaab extremists used to take the people's hard-earned income to pay for their arms and

ammunition as well as salaries for their fighters. These depredations became too much to bear when combined with a devastating drought. Due to years of little to no rain the people have lost all of their livestock, their crops, and an ever increasing number of lives.

Al-Shabaab has come under pressure for relief from local communities under their rule, but has instead created only greater discontent by halting the work of international aid agencies in southern Somalia. Not only farmers and herders are leaving al-Shabaab controlled areas, but also the young men who might otherwise be recruited to the movement.

In disallowing international aid agencies the opportunity to help locals, al-Shabaab leader Shaykh Ahmed Abdi Godane “Abu Zubayr” has enforced his will despite the bitter disagreement of al-Shabaab commanders from the most affected areas of southern Somalia. According to Somalia author and politician Ahmed Shaykh Ali, the commanders of the most-affected drought areas are now at risk of a revolt against the leader of al-Shabaab which could result in the loss of even more territory and the revenues that could be accrued from them.

Ahmed Shaykh Ali told Jamestown that the beginnings of a popular revolt have already been seen in the areas around Mogadishu, the Lower and Middle Shabelle regions as well as some towns in central Somalia. [1]

On July 24, Somali pastoralists and al-Shabaab fought in the Jazira region located on the outskirts of Mogadishu. The Somali government is attempting to benefit from conflicts between local residents and al-Shabaab by sending soldiers to reinforce the locals. Al-Shabaab, however, has countered by sending reinforcements from the Middle Shabelle region (Somalia Report, July 25). Only a day later, herders and farmers in the Marka district of the Middle Shabelle region refused to pay the taxes demanded by al-Shabaab, further threatening to fight the movement, which they accused of looting their properties. A similar confrontation occurred the same day in Laanta Buure, near the Afgooye District, 30 km southwest of Mogadishu (Radio Shabelle, July 27).

On July 27, residents in the Ad-Addey neighborhood of the Lower Shabelle region’s main town of Jowhar fought against al-Shabaab militias who had demanded funds and ordered them to forcefully surrender their youths as new blood in the war against the TFG and AMISOM in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab’s militia in Jowhar ordered each family to surrender either a teenager or two camels

to finance the group’s operation, but residents declined and took up arms against the militants. Business places in the city remained closed while armed residents and al-Shabaab took their dispute to the streets of Jowhar (Radio Muqdisho, July 6). Similar clashes are increasingly reported in recent weeks as al-Shabaab struggles to retain public support and assert its control over the territories it occupies.

In a message broadcast on a pro-Islamist radio station in Mogadishu, Godane said that infighting between al-Shabaab officers had contributed to the group’s recent losses and warned against division of the outlawed group into two parts. This radio message marked Godane’s first admission of the group’s failure and its internal divisions (Radio al-Furqaan, July 5).

“Several of our overall commanders, senior officials as well as intelligence officers were killed and many others injured in Mogadishu and other places. I believe these are the most important people in our group... I am so worried to see our fighters surrender in the fighting,” Godane said, adding “We all know that some people who claim to be in our group are betraying us by spying and sharing secrets with our enemy.”

However, the group’s other leaders have been working hard to regain the movement’s popularity through discussions with clan elders in southern Somalia and by recruiting youth to retain areas under al-Shabaab rule. In the first week of July, senior al-Shabaab commander Mukhtar Robow “Abu Mansur,” movement spokesman Ali Mahmud Raage and other al-Shabaab officials met with Robow’s Digil and Mirifle clan elders at Day-Nuunay in Baidoa in an attempt to improve relations with populations in areas hit hard by the drought. In the meeting, al-Shabaab officers who seemed to be admitting their wrongdoings asked elders and residents to forget al-Shabaab’s previous mistakes, but the elders openly declared that they were not interested in continuing to wage war in Somalia (Somalia Report July 6). In central Somalia, other officials are also busy meeting elders and locals to ask them to assist the group both financially and militarily, but the locals failed to support the group’s appeal.

Al-Shabaab’s attempts to rally Somalis behind the movement at a time when many are occupied in a grim struggle to survive a drought and a resultant famine partly caused by Godane’s stubborn refusal to allow the UN and other agencies to provide relief aid, have largely failed, leaving the future of the movement in question

as the TFG begins to talk of extending its writ beyond Mogadishu.

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Notes:

1. Author's interview with Ahmed Shaykh Ali, author and politician, Nairobi, July 22, 2011.

## Indonesia's "Ghost Birds" Tackle Islamist Terrorists: A Profile of Densus 88

By Jacob Zenn

After the 2002 Bali bombings, Indonesia recognized that the main threat to national security came from regional terrorist networks whose leaders returned to Indonesia after Suharto fell from power in 1998. An elite counterterrorism unit, Densus 88 (Detasemen Khusus 88, or Special Detachment 88), was Indonesia's answer to the terrorists who exploited the country's weakened security environment. Among the terrorists were many former Afghan jihadis as well as Abu Bakr Ba'asyir and the late Abdullah Sungkar – the duo that founded Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) while in exile in Malaysia between 1985 and 1998.

Densus 88 is an all-Indonesian force with 400-500 personnel led by Brigadier General M. Syafii. The unit is equipped primarily with U.S.-made Colt M4 carbines (which were effectively employed in the siege of Dr. Azahari Husin's hideout in Batu in 2005), Armalite AR-10 sniper rifles, Remington 870 shotguns, and Austrian-made Steyr AUG assault rifles. Training is provided by American security services and Australian Special Forces. There is some debate about the origin of the "88" designation, though most likely it represents the number of Australians who died in the Bali bombings and the image "88" is reminiscent of two handcuffs [1].

From 1999 until 2002 – the year Densus 88 was created – JI attacks included a bombing at the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, an assassination attempt on the Philippine

ambassador in Jakarta, and church bombings in Jakarta, Sumatra, Lombok, Java, and Batam. The JI-affiliated Lashkar Jihad also sent thousands of students from five JI-linked *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Java to the Moluccas, Sulawesi, and Papua to fight against Christians (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 5, 2005). JI's terror offensive culminated with the bombings at Kuta Beach in Bali, which killed eight Americans, 88 Australians and more than 100 others.

Following the Bali attack, the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Services identified Indonesia as a frontline in the global war on terror and provided funds under the Anti-Terror Assistance Program to establish Densus 88 and pay for salaries, weapons, high-level training in communications interception, close combat warfare and forensic sciences, and surveillance and intelligence gathering and analysis. The budget included start-up costs of \$130 million in the second half of 2003, followed by annual funding which increased from \$1.3 million in 2004, to more than \$13 million in 2005, to more than \$40 million in 2006 [2].

Currently, Australia funds Densus 88 with \$16 million annually and in 2004 Australia pledged \$35 million over five years to build a training center at the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Co-operation, where the Australian Federal Police (AFP) runs seminars for Densus 88. [3]

In November 2005, Densus 88 turned the tide in Indonesia's war against JI. A Densus 88 sniper shot Dr. Azahari Husin, the JI mastermind behind the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings and the JW Marriot and Australian Embassy bombings, during a raid on Husin's hideout in Batu, East Java. An accomplice set off a suicide explosive killing himself and a third man who had joined Husin in engaging the counterterrorism force in an intense gun battle. After Husin, Densus 88 eliminated JI's other top operatives in near succession:

- In 2007 Densus 88 captured Abu Dujana in Central Java with the help of U.S. satellites operated by Australian Police which tracked his cellphone activities. (Tempo Interaktif [Jakarta], June 20, 2007; for a profile of Abu Dujana, see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 4, 2006).
- In 2009 Densus 88, acting on tips and surveillance, surrounded a house that Noordin Mohammed Top was renting in Solo. Noordin blew himself up along with his wife and two children to save himself from being killed or

captured by Densus 88 (for a profile of Noordin Top, see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 25, 2006).

- In 2010, Densus 88 tracked down and killed Dulmatin, who had a \$10 million bounty on his head, in an internet café in Jakarta. Indonesian President Yudhoyono confirmed Dulmatin's death while giving a speech to the Australian Parliament (for a profile of Dulmatin, see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 9, 2006).

- In May 2011 Abu Bakr Ba'asyir received a 15-year sentence after his conviction for sponsoring a terrorist camp in Aceh that Densus 88 raided in 2010.

Densus 88's collaboration with the U.S. and Australia has not gone unnoticed by the terrorists it hunts down. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir said during his trial that allegations of terrorism were "deliberately spread by God's enemy - the Zionists and their allies America and Australia, and followed by Densus 88" (*The Age* [Melbourne], February 23). Radical Islamic groups in the country, such as the Islamic Peoples' Forums (FUI) and Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), see Densus 88 as a U.S. and Australian-backed paramilitary unit that systematically arrests and kills Islamic activists under the pretense of terrorism. They cite Densus 88's start-up and operational funding as proof (*Jakarta Globe*, August 31, 2010).

Densus 88 has also come under scrutiny from human rights groups because of its reputation for torture, especially when it comes to suppressing separatists, and its use of American and Australian wire-tapping technologies to track suspects. In 2007, Densus 88 tortured many of the 22 people responsible for unfurling the South Mouccan independence movement flag in front of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono during his visit to Ambon. In 2010, their leader died in prison three years into his 12-year sentence for treason after having been denied medical access for kidney problems he attributed to beatings and being forced to drink hot water infused with carbon paper (*Sydney Morning Herald*, September 13, 2010). In August 2010 Densus 88 allegedly tortured 12 Mouccan separatist suspects for a week, suffocating them with plastic bags, stabbing them with nails, and forcing them to eat raw chili peppers.

Densus 88's reputation was tainted again in October 2010 one month before President Obama's visit to Indonesia when a video showed Indonesian security forces pressing a stick smoldering from fire against a Papuan separatist suspect's genitals, a plastic bag wrapped around the suspect's head, and one officer

holding a large knife next to the suspect as he pleads, "I'm just an ordinary civilian." [3] This was only months after the Obama administration announced it would resume aid to Kopassus in July 2010. Congress had prohibited relations with Kopassus in 1999 due to allegations that Kopassus aided militias in East Timor that carried committed human rights abuses.

Cutting off funds to Densus 88 is still unlikely since Densus 88's record of more than 500 militant arrests and decapitating the JI leadership has drawn as much, if not more, international attention and praise. Since its last major attack in July 2009 – the bombings of the JW Marriot and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta, allegedly planned by Noordin – JI has not been able to orchestrate sophisticated large-scale attacks.

Although Densus 88 has dismantled and decapitated the JI network, small cells of former JI fighters and other separatist movements have attacked Ahmadiyah Muslims, churches, moderate mosques and various Islamic organizations to create religious divides in the normally tolerant country. [3] These terrorists have employed letter bombs, suicide-bombings, and drive-by shootings in their campaign, which typically targets Indonesians rather than Westerners.

A look at Densus 88's recent operations shows the effectiveness of Densus 88 in detecting new cells, connecting suspects from one cell to related cells and tracking down long-time terrorists:

- On June 9, Densus 88 arrested Heri Kuncoro, a brother-in-law of Dulmatin, and Sugeng Setiaji, in Central Java. Interrogation of Heri and Sugeng led to the arrest of two of the 18 suspects in police shootings in Palu, Sulawesi in May 2011 (*Antara News* [Jakarta], June 16).
- On June 10, acting on reports from local residents, Densus 88 found three bombs tied with yellow tape behind a church in Poso, Central Sulawesi (*Jakarta Post*, June 10).
- On June 11, the police arrested Muhammad Sibghotulloh and Yuwardi in East Kalimantan Province. The pair supplied weapons from the Philippines that were used in drive-by shootings that killed two police officers in Palu, Central Sulawesi, in May. They were also suspected of being involved in planning last April's suicide-bombing of the Adz Zikra mosque in Cirebon, West Java (*Antara News*, June 16; *Reuters*, June 15).

- On June 15, Densus 88 confiscated bomb components, detonators, and notes on bomb-making and arrested a terror suspect at a sports store in Pemalang, Central Java. The 42-year old suspect, Sudirman, was believed to have been involved in the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings as Dulmatin's right-hand man (Jakarta Post, June 17, 2011).
- On July 19, Densus 88 arrested seven people in Yogyakarta and 5 people in Central Java allegedly linked with the network of Upik Lawanga (a.k.a. Taufik Bulaga). Lawanga was a student of Azahari Husin and is now JI's bomb making expert (*Tempo Interaktif*, July 20).

Densus 88 is living up to the local reputation of its emblem, the *burung hantu* ("ghost bird," or owl). Having come into its own since 2005, Densus 88 has turned JI into the prey, disrupted the terrorist infrastructure in Indonesia, and protected its citizens as well as the facilities and citizens of its American and Australian allies.

Densus 88's operational capabilities are proven, but Densus 88's leadership still has to find a way to eliminate rogue members from the unit and abolish the heavy-handed tactics that provide a source of propaganda for Islamist and separatist groups as well as justification for unsympathetic members in the U.S. Congress and Australian parliament calling for a reduction or halt in funding.

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Note:

1. See "Indonesia's Elite Forces Detasemen 88," <http://indonesiaeeliteforces.tripod.com/id37.html>
2. See Muradi Clark, Densus 88 AT: "Peran dan Koordinasi Dalam Pemberantasan Terorisme di Indonesia" [Densus 88 AT: The Role and Coordination in Counter-Terrorism in Indonesia], May 12, 2009, <http://muradi.wordpress.com/2009/05/12/densus-88-at-peran-dan-koordinasi-dalam-pemberantasan-terorisme-di-indonesia/>.
3. See <http://video.ahrchk.net/AHRC-VID-012-2010-Indonesia.html>
4. The Ahmadiyah are a Muslim movement founded in India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), who

declared himself the expected Mahdi. The movement is considered unorthodox by orthodox Muslims and heretical by Salafists.

## The Battle for Zinjibar: The Tribes of Yemen's Abyan Governorate Join the Fight against Islamist Militancy

By Andrew McGregor

As if Yemen did not already face enough political, social and economic challenges in the midst of a multi-sided civil war, there are significant and not unreasonable fears in the Yemeni opposition that President Ali Abdullah Saleh has manufactured a new conflict between the state and al-Qaeda in Abyan governorate designed to ensure Western support for his continued rule. Many Yemeni political and military leaders insist the bitter and ongoing battle for the coastal city of Zinjibar (capital of Abyan governorate) is merely the culmination of a decade long policy of manipulating the al-Qaeda threat.

Yemen's military is badly divided at the moment; some units and commanders have crossed over to the opposition, some units are engaged with Huthist rebels in northern Yemen, some (such as the Republican Guard) are devoted to crushing protestors, and still others, such as the leadership of the embattled 25th Brigade in Zinjibar, say they are neither pro- nor anti-regime, but will fight to the death to prevent an al-Qaeda takeover.

Saleh's regime has attempted to capitalize on the seizure of Zinjibar as a warning of what can result from the instability sweeping Yemen as a result of anti-regime protests, describing the militants as "members of al-Qaeda [who] benefit from any instability to establish their Islamic state (*Yemen Times*, June 2).

## The Islamist Takeover of Zinjibar: Betrayal at the Top?

According to official reports, Zinjibar was taken by about 300 Islamist militants (which the government identified as al-Qaeda) in late May after two days of fighting with government forces (AFP, May 29). Residents of Zinjibar reached by Western media provided a different version of events, describing a city abandoned to militants who went on a looting spree (BBC, May 29). Only the 25th Brigade refused to evacuate the city and was soon surrounded by militant forces. It seems that the original 300 militants received substantial reinforcements before tribal forces recently began cutting the roads into Zinjibar.

Not long after the occupation, reports began to appear in the jihadist forums of the proclamation of an “Islamic Emirate of Abyan,” as declared by AQAP (Ansar1.info, March 28; al-Bawaba, March 31). The forces in Zinjibar, however, are gathered under the banner of the newly formed Ansar al-Shari’a (al-Watan [Sana’a], August 4). The exact identity of the Islamist forces in Zinjibar remains uncertain. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has not issued any statements regarding the fighting there, though government statements routinely refer to the forces occupying the city as “al-Qaeda.” Yemen’s foreign minister, Abu-Bakr al-Qirbi, strongly denied suggestions that the government was using al-Qaeda in Zinjibar to further its own interests and collect Western funding intended for anti-terrorism activities: “It cannot be said that the state that spares no effort in fighting [al-Qaeda], is the one that planted it there” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 29).

Perhaps reflecting the level of suspicion that surrounds the Saleh regime, some commentators in Yemen’s press have rejected the notion that al-Qaeda has anything to do with the events in Abyan (*al-Masdar* [Sana’a], July 26). Ali Nasir Muhammad, a leading figure in the separatist Southern Mobility Movement (SMM), views the seizure of Zinjibar by Islamist militants as part of an effort to create international concern over the future of south Yemen, tarnishing in the process “the image of the southern peaceful struggle” (Ma’rib Press, July 27). Meanwhile, the Abyan Forum for Reconciliation, Tolerance and Solidarity denounced the “suspicious alliance” between the army and al-Qaeda, which it suggested was impeding “any victory over terrorism” (Aden Press Online, July 31).

## The 25th Mechanized Brigade Besieged

General Muhammad al-Sawmali, commander of the 25th Mechanized Brigade, based on the east side of Zinjibar, has been steadfast in his refusal to abandon Zinjibar in the fashion of the other security services and military units based there. The General caustically remarked: “God bless our colleagues in the Public Security, Police, and Central Security who pulled out of the governorate and left behind all their military equipment and munitions as a gift for al-Qaeda elements... I do not want to go too far and accuse my colleagues of complicity with al-Qaeda against us and I do not cast doubt about them... but we can say that it is cowardice and fear that filled them after the governor, his deputies, and directors of departments left Zinjibar” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27).

The 25th Brigade is considered a close ally of Major General Ali Muhsin Saleh al-Ahmar, a powerful commander in the Yemen Army who has thrown his lot in with the opposition. In May, Ali Muhsin joined eight other generals in issuing “Statement Number One,” in which the generals accused the President of “surrendering Abyan [Governorate] to an armed terrorist group” (iloubnan.info - May 29, 2011; AFP, May 29; see also *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 17). An intensified effort by militants to drive the Brigade from Zinjibar began on May 30. Despite serious shortages of food and water in his garrison, the general maintains that his brigade’s “national, religious and moral duty to our God, homeland and governorate” do not permit his force to evacuate from Zinjibar (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27).

## The Tribes Join the Battle

AQAP was once clearly subordinate to the tribes in the Yemeni power structure, but the occupation of Zinjibar by AQAP-allied militants and the flight of tens of thousands of refugees brought about a realization that the militants were now willing to operate independently of the approval or interests of the tribes. Only days before the tribal intervention in Zinjibar, Yemen’s embassy in Washington claimed that AQAP had only been able to expand its operations in Abyan through the efforts of tribal elders who had offered the militants shelter and protection while refusing to cooperate with government security units (Yemen Post, July 10).



The tribal intervention began when tribal leaders such as Shaykh Abdullah Bal'idi of Abyan's Bal'id tribe called on members of all the local tribes, especially the locally powerful al-Fadl tribe, to unite against the Islamist militants (*Akhbar al-Yawm* [Sana'a], July 6). The shaykh's appeal came from concern for local security, as he pointed out many of the militants were actually natives of Ma'rib and Shabwah governorates. Shaykh Abdullah also accused the authorities of having an interest in prolonging the fighting in Abyan (*al-Watan* [Sana'a], August 4). Some of the Islamists were reported to have arrived from abroad via Aden Airport as tourists before joining the ranks of the Ansar al-Shari'a (*al-Hayat*, August 1). General al-Sawmali maintains that many of the Islamist reinforcements in Zinjibar have arrived from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Somalia. He described his opponents as "scattered groups from various areas or even from various countries whose concern is to kill. They use religion as a tool while some of them are ignorant to a large extent concerning religion. Some of them are extremists and others are tribal elements that have no objective. They do not have a clear objective or a clear leadership. Many of them are children who have enthusiasm to fight, and some of them have been bought by money" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27).

By mid-July, tribesmen in the Abyan towns of Mudiyah, Mehfed and Ja'ar began pushing the militants out of their towns after seeing the devastation wrought in Zinjibar and witnessing the murder of tribesmen affiliated with the security forces (AFP, July 17).

On July 17, the Yemen Army launched an offensive involving troops from the 119th Brigade (based in Lahj governorate), armor and rocket launchers designed to relieve the 25th Brigade, supported by rocket attacks from naval ships offshore (Reuters, July 17). The offensive, which approached Zinjibar from the west, was joined by roughly 450 tribesmen.

One tribal leader, Shaykh Ahmad al-Rahwi, suggested that the tribesmen were uniquely qualified through local knowledge and traditional fighting techniques to engage and defeat the militants in the same type of guerrilla warfare the militants use (Yemen Online, July 15). In this matter the shaykh has the agreement of the 25th Brigade's General al-Sawmali: "We want these tribes to assume their role in the war against al-Qaeda because the people of the area are aware of the circumstances of their area better than the regular forces. They can also distinguish between the armed men and they know from

where they have come and to which tribes they belong" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27).

Yemen's Defense Ministry claimed two prominent al-Qaeda operatives, Ayid al-Shabwani and Awad Muhammad Saleh al-Shabwani, were killed in fighting on July 20, though both had been reported killed in the past (26 September.net, July 20; Reuters, July 21). At the same time, reports emerged from Zinjibar of a rift between two factions of militants, the Ansar al-Shari'a and a second faction of local Abyan fighters (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 20). Two days later, tribesmen prevented a convoy of militants from reinforcing their colleagues in Zinjibar, killing one militant and arresting ten others on the main highway leading to the city (Reuters, July 22).

Elsewhere in Abyan, tribesmen claimed to have forced al-Qaeda fighters under commander Salim al-Shayabi from the town of Lawdar on July 25, seizing a large quantity of arms and mines in the process (AFP, July 25). The town was taken after the tribesmen gave militants two days to leave (*al-Hayat*, July 27). Members of the local al-Awazil tribe had held a lengthy meeting on July 18 during which it was decided to drive armed militants out of the Lawdar district, especially foreign elements (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 20). Lawdar was the scene of heavy fighting between AQAP and government forces in August 2010 (Reuters, August 22, 2010; Sep26.net, August 21, 2010; AFP August 22, 2010; see also *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, September 15, 2010).

Ten militants killed in a July 25 attack on the 25th Brigade (al-Masdar [Sana'a], July 25). The next day, a militant leader known as Sa'id Qarnoushh was one of five to ten militants killed on the Brigade (*Dawn* [Karachi], July 26; Reuters Africa, July 26). Reports later emerged from Zinjibar of the July 27 death of wanted Saudi jihadist Abdullah al-Juwayr (a.k.a. Ibrahim al-Najdi), one of 17 militants killed in a fierce battle with Yemeni forces. Al-Juwayr was reputedly the Amir of AQAP forces in Yemen's Hadramawt governorate and was a veteran of al-Qaeda in Iraq who was believed to be planning terrorist strikes in the capital of Sana'a (*al-Hayat*, July 27).

A major setback occurred on July 28 when air strikes by the Yemen Air Force killed 15 to 25 armed tribesmen supporting the military offensive, causing a temporary withdrawal of tribal forces from the battle. The airstrike also killed Lieutenant Colonel Haidara Ali of the

Yemeni army. The tribesmen remained on the sidelines for two days before returning with a warning from their field leader, Muhammad al-Ja'adani: "We caution the government's forces to be careful of another strike on our fighters. Repeating that mistake will lessen the tribes' desire to help clear out the militants" (Reuters, August 3). Al-Ja'adani had earlier claimed that the tribesmen had given their positions to government forces before the airstrike, adding: "The regime and the al-Qaeda organization are two different sides of the same coin, and it is hard to distinguish between them" (News Yemen Online [Sana'a], July 30). On August 2, al-Ja'adani announced the tribes of the region would soon hold a council to take a determined line against the regime's "conspiracy" against Abyan (*Akhbar al-Yawm* [Sana'a], August 2).

By July 20, the 119th Brigade was involved in overnight battles in the Khamila and Dio districts of western Zinjibar. Brigadier General Ahmad Awad Hassan al-Marmi, the commander of military forces in Abyan, was killed in intense fighting in Zinjibar over July 29-30, less than a week into his new appointment. A number of other officers and tribal leaders were also killed in the battle (*al-Hayat*, August 1). After yet another "friendly fire" incident that wounded some 20 tribal fighters, the SMM claimed that the Yemen Air Force, U.S. forces and Yemen's Republican Guard were deliberately targeting the tribes of Abyan using coordinates provided by the jihadis (*Akhbar al-Yawm*, July 31). Both before and after the incident, leaders of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform accused the regime of trying to dissolve the military-tribal alliance in Abyan to allow the militants to occupy Zinjibar (*Akhbar al-Yawm*, July 26; *al-Sahwah* [Sana'a], July 31).

On August 1 the fighting shifted to the nearby village of al-Khamila, where 18 militants were killed by air strikes and artillery (*al-Masdar* [Sana'a], August 1). A day later the 119th Brigade killed three militants during a battle in al-Khamila (Xinhua, August 2). The Zinjibar garrison began receiving artillery support from the 39th Brigade based in neighboring Dawfas, though the 39th has had to repel its own attacks from militants (*Akhbar al-Yawm*, August 2; *al-Mu'tamar* [Sana'a], August 3). Militants continue to operate in the Hassan Valley just outside of Zinjibar, with Yemeni intelligence units complaining of difficulty in tracing their movements as the militants have stopped using cellphones to communicate (Xinhua, July 29).

## Drone War in Yemen

The United States has been heavily involved in air operations in Abyan, striking terrorist targets with cruise missiles, fixed-wing aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). For now, drone operations in Yemen are conducted by the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command, but CIA-directed drone operations are expected to begin soon, operating from a purpose-built base within Yemen or somewhere else in the Persian Gulf expected to be completed by September. U.S. drones currently operate out of the American military base in Djibouti. The U.S. administration appears to be stepping up its drone attacks in Yemen following their success in eliminating much of the militant leadership in northwest Pakistan by this method.

A June 3 American airstrike on Zinjibar killed two important AQAP members, Ammar Abadah Nasir al-Wa'eli, a veteran of Afghanistan, and Ali Abdullah Naji al-Harithi, a veteran of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq currently serving as a commander in the al-Qaeda affiliated Aden Abyan Islamic Army (Inspire 6, Summer 2011; for al-Qaeda's Aden Abyan Islamic Army, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, November 11, 2010).

July 14 – Another U.S. airstrike on July 14 targeted a police station in the Wahdi district of Abyan, killing at least six militants, possibly including their commander, Hadi Muhammad Ali (al-Jazeera, July 14). One who escaped, however, was Fahd Muhammad al-Qusa, an al-Qaeda operative and veteran of Afghanistan who was released from prison in 2007 after serving part of his sentence for involvement in the attack on the USS *Cole*. Since then the Yemen government has refused to extradite him to the United States and he survived a drone attack in 2009. Most of the militants in Wahdi were believed to have moved there after being expelled by tribesmen from the Mudiyah district of Abyan.

U.S. drones killed five militants, including a field commander, on July 27 in western Zinjibar (Xinhua, July 27). American drones made a further strike on militants on August 1 near the Wahda stadium, at a site between Zinjibar and Ja'ar, and in the village of al-Khamila, roughly six miles outside Zinjibar, though there were conflicting reports claiming at least one of the three strikes was actually carried out by the Yemen Air Force (Reuters, August 1; *Yemen Post*, August 1). At least 15 militants were believed to have been killed in the raids, including AQAP commander Nasser al-Shadadi.

## The Threat to Aden

Many of the 90,000 refugees from Zinjibar and elsewhere in Abyan have fled to the port city of Aden, which has also been subject to AQAP violence recently, including a bomb that killed a British shipping agent and a suicide attack by a Saudi militant that killed nine soldiers headed to Zinjibar on July 24 (*Yemen Post*, July 20). These blows were preceded by a number of other attacks, including the car bomb killings of Colonel Mutea al-Siyani (June 29) and Colonel Khalid al-Hubaishi (June 23). Both men belonged to the 31st Armored Brigade. Another car bomb targeted armored vehicles on June 13. The attack was carried out by a suspected al-Qaeda operative who had been briefly jailed but was released five months previously without explanation (*Yemen Times*, July 4; July 25). On June 20, Major General Mahdi Maqwala, the military commander of the Southern military area, narrowly escaped assassination by a car bomb planted in front of his house. Major General Ahmad Mansur al-Sawma'i, who has defected to the opposition, accused General Maqulah of planning the other attacks against the officers, whom he alleges were not on good terms with Maqulah, as part of a conspiracy to "drown Aden in a sea of blood" (*Ma'rib Press*, July 26).

Aden is only 35 km from Zinjibar; the latter could easily act as a base for operations against Aden if the militants are not expelled. According to General al-Sawmali, only the 25th Brigade forms a barrier to the Islamist takeover of Aden: "If we pull out or surrender, they will enter Aden the following day and from it they will go to the other governorates" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27).

So far, it has only been the resistance of the 25th Brigade in Zinjibar that has saved Aden from a similar occupation by Islamist militants. There are reports from within Aden that security forces have backed away from controlling the streets, encouraging armed individuals to wander around the city at night and hang banners promoting the Caliphate without opposition (*Yemen Times*, July 25). Yemen's Minister of Defense, Major General Muhammad Nasser Ahmad, admitted in early July that armed Islamists from Abyan had already entered Aden before a military cordon was built around the port (*Yemen Times*, July 4). As a strategic port city, Aden is normally well defended, but in the current environment it is difficult to gauge the loyalty of the troops based there or to know what orders they are acting under.

## Conclusion: A Fragile Alliance

One month into the combined army-tribal offensive only slight progress can be reported. The militants are still far from being dislodged from Zinjibar, though some progress has been made on halting reinforcements from reaching them.

In the volatile political climate that prevails in Yemen at the moment, each faction in the multi-sided fighting has interpreted the events in Abyan in light of their own concerns and suspicions. Lack of a common perception of the forces and their intentions in the conflict will inevitably dissolve opportunities for negotiation and lead to prolonged hostilities.

The tribesmen of Abyan have no love for the regime, which they barely differentiate from the Islamist militants in terms of their malicious intent towards the people of Abyan governorate. While the struggle of the 25th Brigade in Zinjibar may have aroused some admiration from the tribesmen, it is nonetheless a fact that the tribal elements are only one "friendly-fire" incident from abandoning their new alliance with a badly divided military, leaving the way open for an Islamist assault on Aden.

Though the militants in Abyan are not fighting under the AQAP banner, the large number of known AQAP operatives engaged in the struggle for Zinjibar confirms the militants are at the very least closely affiliated with al-Qaeda.

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