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Presidents Zardari and Hu Jintao

YEMENI REGIME ACCUSES HAMID AL-AHMAR OF TRYING TO ASSASSINATE PRESIDENT SALEH

A leading member of the Yemeni regime has accused prominent opposition leader Shaykh Hamid al-Ahmar of responsibility for the June 3 bombing of the presidential palace in Sana'a that nearly killed President Ali Abdullah Saleh. While the President continues to recuperate in Saudi Arabia from serious burns and other injuries, his family is locked in a struggle with the al-Ahmar clan for power in Yemen. Hamid is one of ten sons of the late Shaykh Abdullah bin Husayn al-Ahmar, leader of the Hashid tribal confederacy and founder of Yemen's powerful and religiously conservative Islah (Reform) Party.

The accusation was made by the Assistant Secretary-General of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC), Sultan Sa'id Abdullah al-Barakani, who said "There is no longer room for doubt that Hamid al-Ahmar is the prime suspect in the sinful assassination attempt to which the president of the republic and a number of officials were subjected" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 16). Hamid al-Ahmar had earlier suggested it was actually the president's sons and guards who were responsible for the attack (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 14).

According to al-Barakani, the investigation into the bombing had revealed the use of SIM cards belonging to Sabafon, Yemen's biggest mobile network operator and majority-owned by Hamid al-Ahmar, who is one of Yemen's most prominent businessmen. Hamid is also a leader of the Islah Party and is regarded by some in Yemen as Saudi Arabia's chosen candidate to replace President Saleh in the event of Saleh's resignation.

Though the evidence might not be described as definitive, the allegations are indicative of the bitterness that now runs between the Saleh and the Ahmar clans. Both sides appear to have left the point of no return in their struggle for power in Yemen. The al-Ahmar clan came out early in favor of Yemen's opposition movement, but relations with President Saleh deteriorated even further when security forces attacked Hamid's house in the exclusive Haddah neighborhood of Sana'a with artillery and rockets, killing a reported ten followers of Shaykh Hamid (*al-Hayat*, June 7).

Hamid al-Ahmar is considered close to Major General Ali Muhsin Saleh al-Ahmar, his next door neighbor and a defector from the government. Ali Muhsin continues to command elements of his former command, the First Armored Division, and proclaims himself the military guardian of the opposition.

When asked about the assassination attempt in a recent interview, Hamid first addressed the "crime" committed by the president and his "oppressive security organizations" in attacking the former home of Shaykh Abdullah bin Husayn al-Ahmar and many other buildings in the Hasbah district of Sana'a during late May – early June clashes between al-Ahmar loyalists and government forces (see *Yemen Observer*, July 9). However, Hamid then shifted his approach and accused the president's sons and presidential security forces of the attempted assassination while retaining the connection to the attack on al-Hasbah: "No ruler can enjoy safety unless he is just. This is not the case of Ali Salih, who has continued to shed the blood of Yemen's sons all along his rule, and his enemies are spread across the entire Yemeni arena. Also I consider his treacherous aggression on al-Hasbah as a suicide operation, as by committing this aggression he provided the justification for the numerous sides that wanted to get rid of him… By committing the al-Hasbah aggression, Salih provided the pretext for those who wanted to target him" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 14).

State media later reported that Hamid had "implicitly declared" his family's responsibility for the attack on the president by suggesting the attempted assassination was in response to the assault on the home of the family's late patriarch, Shaykh Abdullah (Saba [Sana'a], August 15).

Asked if his younger brother Hamid was responsible for organizing and financing many of the anti-regime protests in Yemen, his brother Shaykh Sadiq al-Ahmar, the chief of Yemen's Hashid tribe, replied that Hamid had "warned of a popular uprising if the regime continued

with its arrogance and intransigence, closed the doors to dialogue, and refused to meet the people`s demands for change. Following the Tunisia and Egypt revolutions, the Yemeni people rose to demand their legitimate rights. If Hamid is today contributing with all the people`s sons to the success of the peaceful change revolution then this is not an accusation but an honor of which we are all proud" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 17). State media recently reported that the al-Ahmars had intensified efforts to buy the loyalty of political and tribal leaders with cash and were launching a campaign to collect donations to the Islah Party from Yemeni merchants resident in Saudi Arabia (Saba [Sana'a], August 16).

INTERNAL DISPUTES PLAGUE AL-SHABAAB LEADERSHIP AFTER MOGADISHU WITHDRAWAL

Al-Shabaab's sudden withdrawal from Mogadishu on August 6 in the face of a concentrated offensive by Ugandan and Burundian troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) appears to have been followed by a major internal dispute over the movement's leadership, possibly resulting in the appointment of a new leader.

Al-Shabaab has tried to cover up the problems and issues that led to the withdrawal by maintaining it was a "tactical" move (Hiraan Online, August 12; AllPuntland, August 10). One al-Shabaab leader, Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys (former leader of Hizb al-Islam, now absorbed into al-Shabaab) admitted in an interview that the movement was forced to turn to a new strategy because it could no longer match the military strength of AMISOM and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces in Mogadishu's intense urban warfare (Somali Channel TV [London], August 12).

However, there are signs that al-Shabaab's withdrawal was not as planned as the movement would like to let on; AMISOM troops and Somali police discovered a store of 137 155 mm artillery shells left behind in a deserted house in a part of Mogadishu's Bakara Market recently occupied by al-Shabaab. As the movement does not possess 155 mm artillery, it is likely the shells were being cannibalized for explosives needed in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices (Horseed Media, August 13; AFP, August 13).

Al-Shabaab has claimed a certain number of fighters were left behind, explaining the resistance that AMISOM forces continue to encounter (especially in the north of

the city) as they continue their cautious occupation of the neighborhoods newly vacated by al-Shabaab. The TFG has attempted to capitalize on al-Shabaab's difficulties by offering an amnesty to those fighters still active in Mogadishu who are prepared to renounce violence (AFP, August 10). In some places, the retreating Islamists have been replaced by local clan militias under the command of powerful businessmen who have no desire to come under TFG rule. Many of these fighters are reported to be veterans of Hizb al-Islam still under the direct command of Hassan Dahir Aweys (Jowhar.com [Mogadishu], August 9).

According to the Ugandan commander of AMISOM, Major General Fred Mugisha, the African Union peacekeepers "now have to cover a much larger area of the city and we risk being overstretched" (AFP, August 10). Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni has recently pledged to send another 2,000 soldiers from the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) to Mogadishu to consolidate AMISOM's gains after repeated pleas for military support from other African Union nations to AMISOM's Ugandan and Burundian contingents failed to win any positive response (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], August 13).

Though his TFG fighters played only a small part in driving al-Shabaab out of the national capital, Somali president Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad is now talking tough regarding his determination to defeat his former Islamist allies: "Al-Shabaab is a threat to Somalia as well as to the stability of the wider region and the world. We will not stop pursuing them. Our determination is to clear them from the territory of Somalia" (PANA Online [Dakar], August 11). However, many Somalis fear the expulsion of al-Shabaab will mean a return of the warlords who devastated Mogadishu for nearly two decades. Their fears were not allayed by the president's appointment of former warlord (and serial opportunist) General Yusuf Muhammad Si'ad "Indha Adde" (Dayniile Online, August 9).

Faced with the consequences of its inability or unwillingness to deal with the growing famine in central and southern Somalia, al-Shabaab has resorted to ever more desperate efforts to prevent the total depopulation of its "Emirate." Among their more fantastic theories is Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage's explanation of the flight of many Somalis from Shabaab-controlled regions to refugee camps in Kenya or Ethiopia to receive the international aid that al-Shabaab forbids in most of its territory. According to the Shabaab spokesman, the non-

Muslim enemy has devised a new strategy to "transport [Somalis] abroad, especially to Christian countries like Ethiopia and Kenya, so that their faith can be destroyed and [so] that they could be staff and soldiers for the Christians" (AFP, July 30).

It is very likely that the Islamist movement's ineffectual response to the massive drought and famine ("pray for rain") has irreparably damaged the movement's credibility as a political movement in Somalia. However, al-Shabaab has displayed a remarkable resiliency for an often divided movement that seems to excel at disappointing old friends and making new enemies. Given its temporarily diminished capacity for direct military confrontation, it can be expected that the movement will pursue other highly familiar tactics, such as kidnappings, bombings and assassinations.

Some Somali sources report that Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane "Abu Zubayr's" controversial leadership of al-Shabaab has come to an end with his replacement by Shaykh Ibrahim Haji Jama "al-Afghani," a former al-Shabaab chief in Kismayo, deputy to Godane and veteran of fighting in Kashmir and Afghanistan. His activities since his return to Somalia, including the murder of several foreigners in 2003-2004, have earned him a 25-year prison sentence issued in absentia in his native Somaliland. Like Abdi Godane, Ibrahim Haji is a member of the Isaaq clan of northern Somalia. Abdi Godane inserted many Isaaq into senior leadership positions in al-Shabaab even though most of the movement's fighters hail from southern Somali clans. Somali sources say the appointment was supported by senior al-Shabaab members Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur," Shaykh Fu'ad Shongole and Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys (Somali Broadcasting Corporation Online [Puntland], August 9).

Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, who commands the largest contingent in al-Shabaab, has sought Godane's replacement for nearly a year now, following the failed "Ramadan Offensive" that was repelled with heavy losses to Mukhtar Robow's southern Somali Rahanweyn fighters, who were pushed into the frontlines and then denied medical treatment for their wounds by order of Abdi Godane (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, October 21, 2010). Nonetheless, al-Shabaab's spokesman, Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage "Ali Dheere," has asserted that reports of a leadership struggle within the movement were nothing but "enemy propaganda" (BBC Somali Service, August 13).

Iraq's Kata'ib Hezbollah Seek Greater Popularity through Threats to Kuwaiti Port Development

By Rafid Fadhil Ali

Last April the Kuwaiti government started building a new port on Boubyan Island near the marine border with Iraq. The port, named Mubarak al-Kabir (Grand Mubarak) after the founder of the Kuwaiti al-Sabah ruling dynasty, triggered the latest crisis between Baghdad and Kuwait, with the port development causing both official and public anger in Iraq. The Iraqi argument states that port activity in the Khor Abdullah channel shared with Iraq will block the channel's shipping lanes leading to a nearby Iraqi port (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], July 18). Kuwait rejects the Iraqi argument, claiming that the establishment of the new port is a matter of national sovereignty as it is being built solely on Kuwaiti territory.

One of the angriest Iraqi reactions to the planned port development came from the Shi'a insurgent group Kata'ib Hezbollah fi al-Iraq (Hezbollah Brigades in Iraq - KH). The group issued a statement on its website calling on Kuwait to stop building the port and threatened to target the workers in the project (Kataibhizbollah.org, July 16).

There has been a noticeable surge in the activities of KH recently. The group has claimed responsibility for many of the recent attacks against U.S. forces. Statements from the movement indicate that most of their attacks are launched with rockets targeting U.S. bases in central and southern Iraq (*al-Joumhouria* [Beirut], June 10; al-Alam TV [Tehran], July 26).

KH is also remembered for its success in hacking the communications systems of U.S. drones. KH had used low-cost Russian-made software called SkyGrabber to intercept video from U.S. Predator drones. KH claimed that it had been hacking the system since mid-2008, however, U.S. officials only admitted the penetration in late 2009 (*al-Akhbar*, January 2, 2010; *Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 2009; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, April 12).

While the public and political debate is escalating in Iraq over the issue of whether to agree to an extension of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, the KH has taken a strong stance against the extension. Months before the other Iraqi parties started debating the issue, KH had already threatened to intensify its attacks on U.S. forces if the complete withdrawal scheduled for the end of 2011 was delayed (kataibhizbollah.org, December 27, 2010).

Along with Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (The Groups of the Righteous- AAH), KH is one of several splinter groups of Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (Mahdi Army - JAM). The group is widely believed to have strong and direct links with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's elite al-Quds Force. Although KH has created its own website where it publishes its statements, videos and propaganda, not much is known about its leadership. KH has, however, long been linked with the controversial Iraqi former militia leader and MP Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (a.k.a. Jamal Ja'far al-Ibrahim), though the MP denies any link to this group or any other insurgent party. Al-Muhandis was designated as a threat to peace and stability in Iraq by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2009 (in part due to his alleged close ties to Iran's Quds Force), but his seat in parliament provides him with complete immunity under the Iraqi constitution. [1] Al-Muhandis was accused of involvement in the 1983 bombings of the French and American embassies in Kuwait City, as well as having a role in an assassination attempt on the Kuwaiti Amir in 1985. Al-Muhandis denies the accusations but typically talks about Kuwait with contempt. In an interview last year, al-Muhandis claimed that the Kuwaiti government had handed a number of his close relatives over to Saddam Hussein's government and that these individuals were later executed (*al-Akhbar*, April 12, 2010; for al-Muhandis, see also *Terrorism Monitor*, March 4, 2010).

The KH has also been tied to Ahmad al-Shaibani, the former spokesman of Muqtada al-Sadr, but al-Shaibani denied such involvement in an interview from the Iranian holy city of Qom, where he stayed with al-Sadr (Almowallem.net, November 29, 2009).

Unlike the AAH, which had been subject to severe criticism and condemnation by al-Sadr, KH and the Sadr movement are on good terms. In spite of the fact that the KH was established by elements that abandoned al-Sadr's leadership and formed their own organization, the anti-American Shi'a cleric has always had a friendly approach when dealing with and talking about the KH.

The group is one of the few Iraqi Shi'a factions to clearly declare its allegiance to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This allegiance puts the group

closer to the ideological line followed by the Lebanese Hezbollah. KH's logo is almost a replica of the Lebanese party's emblem.

Like most other Iraqi insurgent groups, Shi'a and Sunni alike, KH is rarely involved in regional disputes between the Iraqi government and the neighbouring countries, but the Mubarak port issue presents an ideal opportunity for the KH, a small but effective Shi'a group, to appeal to wider Iraqi constituencies. The dispute stirs a national resentment against Kuwait based on a lingering Iraqi belief that Boubyan Island is properly part of Iraq. The new direction in KH's policy might bring it a wave of popularity and help it to build credibility around its claim that it is a national movement with no sectarian agenda.

Iraq's Hezbollah Brigades claim to have obtained three surface-to-surface missiles from an Iraqi weapons depot after the fall of Saddam Hussein which it intends to use against South Korean construction workers in Boubyan and government facilities in Kuwait City if the port project goes ahead (*Arab Times*, August 15). An advisor to the Iraqi minister of defence revealed that the local government in the southern province of Basrah asked for Baghdad's aerial support to locate rockets deployed by KH in the area (Alazma.com, July 20).

Iraqi MP Kazim al-Shemmari, a member of the Iraqiya White Party (formed last August by a group of MPs defecting from the Iraqiya List – see al-Sumaria, March 8), warned Kuwait on August 12 that "there are armed brigades in Iraq which can invade Kuwait entirely without permission from the government, which in such incidents would not bear responsibility for the Brigades' actions since they are militant groups." The MP went on to suggest that tensions between the two countries could be eased if Kuwait dropped its compensation claims for damage done in the 1990-1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and began to allow Kuwaiti investment in Iraq (*Kuwait Times*, August 14).

Whether Baghdad and Washington agree to update the terms of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to extend the U.S. military presence beyond the end of this year, Iraq's Hezbollah has already entered a new phase in its operational history. Characteristic of this phase is a larger role in anti-American attacks in Iraq combined with greater involvement in regional issues designed to boost its influence in Iraqi domestic politics.

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Note:

1. U.S. Treasury Department, Press Release TG-195, July 2, 2009. For a profile of al-Muhandis see the author's article in Militant Leadership Monitor, March 2011.

Iran Uses Cross-Border Incursions to Pressure Iraqi Kurds to End PJAK Insurgency

By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Iran has recently shelled border villages and launched cross-border raids into northern Iraq to step up pressure on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to stop the anti-Iranian operations of the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane (PJAK - Party of Free Life of Iranian Kurdistan). Iran has furthermore diverted the water flow of the al-Wand river that is the lifeline of the Kurdish area of Khanaqin in the Diyala province (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 5). Iran has stated that the KRG or other Iraqi security forces should control the border or Iran would continue operations to destroy PJAK (*Siyasat-e Ruz*, July 28). For now the shelling and operations have stopped, but Iranian officials have indicated military operations will continue.

PJAK was founded by the larger and older Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party) in 2004 as an Iranian-Kurdish equivalent to the PKK insurgency against the Turkish government after the United States toppled the Ba'athist regime in Iraq in 2003. Iran retaliated to PJAK attacks in 2006 with cross-border shelling to press the KRG to act against the group.

There were signs earlier this year that Iran was preparing for the recent cross-border operations. In March, PJAK's intelligence division claimed Iran was dispatching thousands of Basij auxiliary forces to the border (pjak.org, March 9). In June, Kurdish media reported Iran was building local roads leading to the Kurdistan region of Iraq and military camps in the border region (*Peyamner*, June 27).

Iranian media reported there was ongoing frustration in Iran over the PJAK operations targeting the police and border guards in January and March (*Siyasat-e Ruz*, July 8). In April a committee was formed by the Iranian parliament to probe the PJAK attacks (Fars News Agency, April 7). This committee likely played a role in the decision to launch military operations.

KRG president Massoud Barzani denounced Iran's shelling of the border region in early July after increased disaffection among the Kurdish population over the bombardment of civilian areas. Barzani called on Baghdad to act and warned Iran that the bombing could hurt relations (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 6). A high-ranking Iranian military official responded on July 11 by accusing Barzani's government of allocating 300,000 hectares of land to the PJAK, and supporting PJAK operations (*Jaam-e Jam*, July 12). Contrary to these claims, however, the PKK camps used by PJAK were already established in 1991, and not given to the PKK by the KRG (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 21, 2006). [1]

After making these allegations, Tehran deployed 5,000 troops in the northwest corner of Iran along its common border with the Iraqi Kurdistan region, though PJAK claimed the number was closer to 50,000 (Press TV, July 13; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 2). On July 13 there were reports that Iranian forces had entered 150-300 meters inside Iraqi territory in order to prepare operations and warn locals to evacuate their villages (Sbeiy.com [Sulaymaniyah], July 14).

On July 16, Iran launched cross border operations against PJAK, leading to clashes between Iranian security forces and PJAK (Ajansa Nuceyan a Firate [ANF], July 27). According to the PKK, these operations ended on July 31 (ANF, August 2). Iranian media reported two operations on July 17 and July 25 that destroyed several PJAK camps (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting [IRIB], August 11).

Both sides claimed moral victories while sustaining significant losses. However, Iran wasn't able to destroy PJAK's ability to carry out operations within Iran, as shown by the late July killing of a number of Revolutionary Guard officers, an attack on a Basij base in Sarvabad province and August 11 attacks on the Iran-Turkey gas pipeline (Fars News Agency, July 25; *Jomhuri-Ye Eslami* [Tehran], July 30; AP, August 12).

KRG officials have asserted that they will not allow their soil to be used to threaten neighboring countries and urged the PKK and PJAK to end their armed struggle (*Rudaw.net*, August 12). In reality the KRG did nothing to stop the attacks launched from their soil; Kurdish officials admitted to an Iranian newspaper that they don't have the military capability to stop PJAK (*Tehran Times*, July 27). Iran recognized the KRG's inability to combat the PKK and suggested that PJAK disarm itself, end its operations and settle in the Kurdistan region like other Iranian opposition parties such as Komala and the Parti Demokirati Kurdistani Iran (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan – PDKI), which do not carry out armed operations against Iran (*Rudaw.net*, August 2). PJAK leader Hadji Ahmadi responded by saying PJAK is ready to lay down arms if Iran accepts it as a legal political party in Iran (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 2). PJAK, however, doesn't accept being settled in KRG territory.

Any attempt by the KRG to assert its authority over the mountainous areas by launching military operations against PJAK would result in major casualties and public opposition in Kurdistan. Kurdish officials have therefore emphasized the need for a diplomatic solution.

It is unlikely that Iran would allow PJAK to operate as a legal party in Iran, nor is it likely that PJAK will lay down its arms. PJAK's commitment to a military solution to its conflict with Iran is seen in its attacks on the Revolutionary Guard and the sabotage of the Tabriz-Ankar pipeline even while Iran's Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi stated PJAK is on the verge of collapse (Fars News Agency, August 12).

On August 9, the acting leader of the PKK, Murat Karayilan, said that Iran had stopped the attacks, and that PJAK forces will be replaced by guerrillas of the PKK's Hezen Parastina Gel (People's Defense Forces - HPG). "Our movement doesn't consider it right to fight against Iran, who is the second target to be besieged after Syria. For the present, we don't have an agenda to battle against Iran but we will have to take a decision

to fight if Iran attacks on our positions and exhibits a hostile attitude to the Kurdish people" (rojhelat.info, August 9).

However, Iranian officials warned operations would continue. According to Sayed Azim Husseini, Iran's consul in Erbil: "As long as there is activity of the PJAK-militants against Iran on the common border between Iran and Iraq, Iran will not halt its bombardments of these areas" (Albawwaba.net, August 17). This was echoed by Revolutionary Guards' spokesman Hamid Ahmedi, who added that the Guards will not retreat from the borders (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 17).

Turkish jets bombed PKK camps on August 17 after a PKK ambush killed between eight to ten soldiers (Hurriyet, August 17, August 18). After Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the PKK that Turkey would launch more operations, PKK media claimed Turkey and Iran were planning joint operations against the PKK and PJAK (Today's Zaman, August 15; ANF, August 15 2011).

Despite all the speculation in the Turkish, Kurdish, Iranian, and Iraqi media about the goals of the military operations in the border region, it is clear the clashes will continue. The most important question is whether Turkey will conduct its operations on its own, or will cooperate with Iran in fighting the PKK in the future and share U.S. intelligence about the PKK with Iran.

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Note:

[1] The PJAK camps are no different from those of the PKK. One could say the camps were given to PJAK by the PKK. A compiled "martyrs" list of PJAK-insurgents from the PJAK and affiliated Hezen Rizgariye Kurdistan (HRK) websites show that of the 173 listed martyrs, 116 are from Iran (67%), 43 from Turkey (25%), 12 from Syria (7%) and two from Iraq (1%). Although the data identifying where the insurgents were killed is inaccurate, it still shows a large number of PJAK-insurgents were killed in Turkey, which suggests they were part of PKK operations against Turkey. This means there is no difference between the fighting units

of the PKK and that PJAK that consists of insurgents from Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq. The website of the HRK also shows a portrait of "leader Apo" (PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan).

Uyghur Unrest in Xinjiang Shakes Sino-Pakistani Relations

By Raffaello Pantucci

It has been a difficult summer for China's restive western province Xinjiang. A series of incidents characterized as terrorism have struck two of the province's cities, causing death, destruction and ethnic tension. This picture was further complicated when the government of the city of Kashgar published a statement online that claimed at least one of the perpetrators had been trained in Pakistan (Xinhua, August 1). The allegation by Chinese officials cast a shadow over Sino-Pakistani relations, a bilateral relationship that had been characterized in Kashgar jut the month before by Pakistani Ambassador to China Masood Khan as "higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, stronger than steel, sweeter than honey, and dearer than eyesight" (Associated Press of Pakistan, July 1).

Death in Hotan and Kashgar

The most recent troubles in Xinjiang took place in a series of incidents in the western cities of Hotan and Kashgar. The first was an incident in Hotan on July 18 when a gang of some 18 men, described as being between 20 to 40 years old, stormed a local police station after launching an attack on a local tax office (*Shanghai Daily*, July 21). Armed with a variety of axes, knives and firebombing material, the group attacked those they found within the Naerbage police station, killing four people and seriously wounding at least four more. In response, police killed 14 of the assailants and arrested the remaining four (Xinhua, July 20).

This violence was repeated just over a week later in Kashgar when, as described by a local Han Chinese man, "I saw a blue truck speed through the crossing and plough into the crowd" (Xinhua, July 31). The drivers then leapt from the cab of the van and started

hacking at the crowd with knives of some sort. China's official English-language news service indicated that immediately prior to the attack a pair of explosions was heard, but this was apparently omitted in Chinese language reports (Xinhua, July 31; AFP, July 31). In the end, the men killed eight people and injured a further 27 before the crowd turned on them and beat one of them to death while the second was apprehended (Xinhua, August 1). One report from a Hong Kong newspaper suggested that initially there had been three attackers with a vehicle bomb that had blown up prematurely, leading the other two to resort to the tactic of hijacking a truck and ramming it into a crowd (*Ming Pao*, August 3). This was not mentioned in other reports, though one person injured in the attack reported hearing "a big bang like a blast" before passing out (*China Daily*, August 2).

This was not the end of the violence - the next day another group of assailants armed with knives stormed a restaurant in Kashgar and killed the owner and a waiter before starting a fire in the building and racing outside to slash wildly at passersby (Xinhua, August 4). In the melee that ensued six civilians were killed and a further 12 civilians and three police officers injured before five assailants were shot dead (Xinhua, August 1). An unclear number of assailants escaped, though rewards were offered for the capture of two men, identified as 29-year-old Memtieli Tiliwaldi and 34-year-old Turson Hasan. The two were subsequently shot by security forces in cornfields outside Kashgar (Xinhua, August 1).

What Was Behind the Violence?

Broadly speaking the Chinese media and officialdom concur on the point that the violence was stirred by outside forces. However, with regards to the apportioning of blame there seems to be some divergence between the events in Hotan and Kashgar.

In Hotan, locals described the group that stormed the police station as a group of "ruffians" aged about "20 to 40 years old and all male" speaking with out of town accents. They were apparently wearing "convenient shoes" to aid them in "running away easily" (Xinhua, July 20, 2011). Another report characterized the men as "gangsters" from out of town (Zhongguo Xinwen She [Beijing], July 20). Police reported that the men had brought with them flags of "radical religion" that they were planning on flying over the police station. One banner was reported as saying, "Allah is the only God. In the name of Allah" (Xinhua July 20; Zhongguo

Xinwen She, July 20). Officials claimed the attackers confessed they hoped their actions would "stir up ethnic tension" (Xinhua, August 4).

This backdrop was seemingly confirmed by a report in a Hong Kong daily, in which locals said that the spark for the incident was a local attempt to crack down on the wearing of the veil by Muslim Uyghur girls. According to Hotan resident, the government had been using slogans telling girls to "show off their pretty looks and let their beautiful long hair fly." After this approach failed, the government had started to reach out to local religious leaders (*South China Morning Post* [Hong Kong], July 22). Within this context, it is worth highlighting that this all took place shortly before the beginning of Ramadan, a period of fasting and religious observances for Muslims.

At the same time, the importance of an attack on a local Hotan tax office that preceded the assault on the police station was played down in the official press. One report stated that the group had accidentally attacked the office mistaking it for a police station, while another said that two uniformed taxation officers who had been stabbed before the attack on the police station were mistaken for the police officers since their uniforms were similar (*Shanghai Daily*, July 21; Xinhua, July 22).

On the other hand, events in Kashgar came with a simpler explanation. Pointing the finger directly at the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Kashgar government published a statement in which it said that one of the men had confessed that some of leaders of the group had trained in Pakistan in bomb-making and weapons handling and had returned to carry out terrorist attacks (Xinhua, August 1; *China Daily*, August 2; *The News* [Islamabad], August 6; *People's Daily*, August 5).

This was not the first time that China has found links between domestic Uyghur-linked terrorism and individuals with links to Pakistan: Guzalinur Turdi, the 19-year-old Uyghur girl who tried to bring down a China Southern Airlines plane on March 7, 2008 en route from Urumqi was using a Pakistani passport and was part of a group directed by Pakistan. [1] This rather blunt apportioning of blame towards Pakistan was somewhat surprising, especially given the close relations that are clearly visible at almost every level of the Sino-Pakistani relationship.

Pakistan was quick to respond to the charges, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publishing a statement

that condemned events in Kashgar. Using Chinese-style terminology, the statement spoke of the "patriotic people of Xinjiang" and the Chinese government succeeding in "frustrating evil designs of the terrorists, extremists and separatists." [2] According to the Pakistani press, the statement was published after President Hu Jintao called his Pakistani counterpart, Asif Ali Zardari, to "express concern" about ETIM's growing activities in the region (*News Online*, August 6). Soon after this, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief General Ahmed Shuja Pasha headed to Beijing. Whether this trip was linked to events in Xinjiang was unclear, with some reports indicating it was part of ongoing regional discussions about Afghanistan (*The Nation* [Lahore], August 2). Nevertheless, Xinjiang is likely to have been featured during discussions.

Maybe to prove herself to her main ally, Pakistan seems to have responded with a mini-crackdown of sorts on Chinese Muslims in the country. A Chinese individual identified as Muhammad Yusuf was arrested sometime in July with around $50,000, some Chinese Yuan, and Islamic literature (*Dawn* [Karachi], August 7). A few days after this was reported, Pakistan deported a group of five Chinese nationals in handcuffs and blindfolds – two men, two children and a woman. Another man was apparently refused boarding permission by the China Southern Airlines pilot, and the Pakistani press hinted that the group may be involved in ETIM plotting (*Dawn*, August 10).

Conclusions

The full picture of what took place in Hotan and Kashgar remains somewhat obscure, however, some details are clear. People did die, but the methods of attack seemed surprisingly low tech for terrorists who had supposedly undergone terrorist training in Waziristan. However, this was not the first time such attacks had been undertaken using such methods – in August 2008 a pair of Uyghur men ran a truck into a column of policemen on their morning run, before leaping out of the vehicle, using knives and lobbing homemade grenades. Sixteen officers were killed and another 16 injured (Xinhua, August 4, 2008). This was followed a year later by violent rioting in Urumqi that claimed almost 200 lives in clashes between Uyghurs and Han Chinese.

All this suggests that something deeper is afoot than just individual and random incidents of violence. The fact that we have seen similar instances of serious violence in Xinjiang on a relatively regular basis over the last few years suggests some deep-seated anger is bubbling just below the surface. Whether this is directed by external parties is unclear, however. The indications are that some Uyghurs in Pakistan are connecting with extremist groups there. There is evidence from videos released by Uyghur groups that there is a desire to strike within China (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 23). However, the random and low-tech nature of this recent spate of attacks suggest that, while it may have in part emanated from the community of Uyghurs who are transiting back and forth between China and Pakistan, it does not seem to fit the mold of an al-Qaeda directed plot. What is clear, however, is that the Sino-Pakistani relationship will endure – official statements from both sides indicate a high level of bilateral support and recent reports of Pakistan allowing Chinese access to parts of the advanced helicopter abandoned by the Navy SEAL team sent in to kill Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad suggest that Islamabad cherishes its relationship with Beijing over its relationship with Washington (*Financial Times*, August 14). Though both Beijing and Islamabad have denied this report, it is apparent that China requires action against fugitive Uyghur dissidents in Pakistan as a condition of maintaining a bilateral relationship "higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans."

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Notes:

1. Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, "Terrorism and the Beijing Olympics," Jamestown Foundation China Brief, April 16, 2008.
2. "Pakistan extends full support to China against ETIM," Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, August 1
http://www.mofa.gov.pk/mfa/pages/article.aspx?id=787&type=1 .