



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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WAS THE BATTLE FOR GALKAYO A CLAN DISPUTE OR A VICTORY FOR PUNTLAND OVER AL-SHABAAB?

A gun battle between militants and Puntland security forces in Galkayo (the capital of Mudug region) on September 1 and 2 has left 68 dead and 153 wounded. The administration of the autonomous Somali province of Puntland announced the defeat of a group of al-Shabaab fighters in the battle in Puntland’s second-most populous city, but there are serious questions as to whether security forces were engaged with al-Shabaab or were actually fighting in a clan-based conflict.

The insistence of both President Abdirahman Muhammad Mohamud “Farole” and Puntland security minister Kalif Isse Mudan that Puntland security forces were battling al-Shabaab militants was challenged by the president’s own terrorism advisor, General Muhammad Dahir Shimbir, who said his unit’s investigation of the incident had revealed only local residents “mostly from one clan” involved in the fighting. The General further suggested that the massive number of killed and wounded could not be justified (Raxanreeb Radio, September 11). A hospital and various hotels were also reported to have suffered from damage inflicted during the fight and subsequent looting by government forces (RBC Radio, September 10). Mortars and artillery are reported to have been used by Puntland forces.

The fighting was concentrated in the Garsor village district of Galkayo, populated mainly by the Leelkase sub-clan of the Darod (RBC Radio, September 10). One report claims that a police unit made up of men belonging to a rival sub-clan was deployed to Galkayo several weeks ago, heightening tension in the town (Horseed Media, September 8). The southern part of Galkayo is administered by Galmudug,

an autonomous region of central Somalia with an uneasy relationship with Puntland. Puntland claims that South Galkayo, under the Galmudug administration, is a base for militancy in North Galkayo and supplied the fighters in North Galkayo with “safe refuge, medical assistance and even ammunition” (Horseed Media, September 5; Radio Garowe, September 4). [2]

To confirm their version of events, Puntland authorities displayed a group of men they alleged were al-Shabaab fighters captured in two separate operations in the Garsor neighborhood of Galkayo. A police official informed journalists that all the men had pleaded guilty and were awaiting arraignment in court (SUNA Times, September 8). Puntland officials say the Garsor neighborhood is a base of operations for assassinations and violence across Puntland. Some of the prisoners displayed were said to have been captured during a raid on an al-Shabaab safe-house in Galkayo as they planned further acts of violence, while other prisoners were said to have been arrested while engaged in combat against Puntland security forces (Horseed Media, August 8). Journalists in attendance apparently did not talk to the prisoners.

A video of young men fighting the security forces in Galkayo did not show the organized and heavily-armed veteran fighters of al-Shabaab, but rather a line of young men hugging a building while waiting for their turn to fire off one of two weapons in their possession. [1] Al-Shabaab has not issued a statement regarding the fighting, odd for a movement that has rarely shied away from admitting its participation in battles against Somali authorities.

Puntland also condemned Galmudug leader Muhammad Ahmad Alim for telling the BBC the fighting in Galkayo was “clan-based” and asserted that the men killed or arrested by security forces in Galkayo came from a number of different areas and belonged to several different clans.

Most of the fighting on behalf of the Puntland government was carried out by the Puntland Intelligence Service (PIS), the strongest armed group in Puntland, where it absorbs an enormous amount of the annual budget. The PIS is formed largely from the Osman Mahmud sub-clan of the Majerteen (which also dominates the Puntland administration) and has been accused of inciting clan warfare against the Warsangeli clan of the Darod in Bosaso. In the summer of 2010 the PIS engaged in battles against a militia led by Islamist Shaykh Muhammad Sa’id “Atam” (a Warsangeli) in the

mountainous Galgala district of Puntland’s Bari Region (for a profile of Shaykh Atam, see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, October 2, 2010). Local radio reported on September 7 that Puntland security forces had engaged in an hour-long gun battle with militants led by Shaykh Muhamamad Sa’id Atam that killed five people (Radio Shabelle, September 7, 2010). The PIS has been targeted by al-Shabaab in the past, most notably with a pair of suicide car bombs that struck two PIS anti-terrorism offices in Bosasso, the economic capital of Puntland, killing six PIS agents (AFP, October 30, 2008).

According to a report in the Somaliland Press (generally unsympathetic to the regime in Puntland), the conflict started as a traditional dispute over water wells by members of the Issa Mahmud sub-clan of the Majerteen/Darod (the sub-clan of President Farole) and the Leelkase sub-clan of the Darod. The conflict spread to Galkayo, where members of both sub-clans live, before the government sent in troops and armor to subdue the Leelkase, dubbing them al-Shabaab fighters in the process (Somaliland Press, September 5). However, Puntland President Farole stated: “There was no clan fighting in Galkayo. Our forces were fighting against terrorists who target our citizens. This is our duty. Our government stops clan wars. We spend massive resources and manpower to stop clan wars, and presently our forces are deployed in many regions of Puntland to prevent clan wars. But al-Shabaab terrorist group is notorious for using the clan card, for hiding under local grievances, similar to methods they used during the Galgala conflict” (Radio Garowe, September 4).

Puntland officials never fail to point out that al-Shabaab’s leadership is in the hands of members of the Isaaq clan of Somaliland, and insist that the campaign of bombings and assassinations plaguing Puntland are organized and funded in Somaliland (Garowe Online, September 10). The town of Burao, in particular, is often mentioned as the source of al-Shabaab plots against Puntland (Radio Garowe, September 1).

There is very little incentive for regional governments such as Puntland to admit to clan-based clashes when it is more profitable to claim threatening incursions by al-Shabaab/al-Qaeda and watch the military support and funding roll in, strengthening the hand of the regional government against its neighbors. Admitting to clan clashes is also an acknowledgement that serious clan differences exist, an uncomfortable admission for a government almost entirely based on a single sub-clan. Though Puntland has undoubtedly been a

target of al-Shabaab in the past, the ongoing series of killings and bombings is every bit as likely to have its motivation in pre-existing clan rivalries or in disputes over the unprecedented amount of cash that is rolling into Puntland as a result of the Puntland-based piracy industry.

Notes:

1. Video provided by Waagacusubmedia on Sep 2, 2011, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awoaw7Ax2Bk&feature=related>.
2. Press Release, Ministry of Security and DDR, Government of Puntland, September 2, 2011.

OPPOSITION CLAIMS UGANDAN GOVERNMENT MANIPULATING TERRORIST THREAT

Proceedings have opened in the Kampala trial of over a dozen East African men suspected of involvement in the July 11, 2010 suicide bombings of crowds gathered in Kampala to watch the World Cup soccer championship (see *Terrorism Focus*, September 24, 2008; *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, July 15, 2010). Responsibility for the attacks, which killed 74 civilians and came to be known in Uganda as the “7/11 bombings,” were later claimed by al-Shabaab spokesman Ali Mahmud Raage, who described them as “a message to Uganda and Burundi” to withdraw their troops from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (Shabelle Media Network, July 12, 2010; *Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 13, 2010).

The trial began with the liberation of Kenyan human rights activist Al-Amin Kimathi and four other men, bringing the total number of suspects on trial to 14 (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], September 12; September 13). Kimathi, the head of the Muslim Human Rights Forum, was detained along with his lawyer Mbugua Mureithi on September 15, 2010 when they visited Kampala to oppose the extradition of Kenyans to Uganda to face charges related to the 7/11 bombings. Mureithi was quickly freed and deported, but Kimathi was forced to spend a year in prison after being charged with murder and terrorism (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], September 12).

Two of the suspects pleaded guilty on September 12 to playing a role in the Kampala bombings. One of the two, Mohamoud Mugisha, told the court that he had participated in a conspiracy drawn up in Somalia, Kenya and Uganda, revealing the growing regional scope of al-

Shabaab (*New Vision* [Kampala], September 13).

Of the remaining suspects, the most prominent are Omar Awadh Omar (a.k.a. Abu Sahal), a Kenyan described as the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in East Africa and an important logistician for both that group and Somalia’s al-Shabaab movement, Hijar Seleman Nyamadondo, a Tanzanian deported from that country to face charges of being second-in-command of the Kampala plot, and Issa Luyima, a Ugandan arrested in Mombasa who is believed to have fought with al-Shabaab (*New Vision* [Kampala], September 12).

Despite the high local profile of the Kampala bombing trial, there are reports that the once heightened vigilance that followed the bombings has now declined to almost nothing (*The Independent* [Kampala], September 10). Uganda’s opposition has complained that the government is using terrorist alerts to suppress public assembly and foil attempts to demonstrate against the government. Many alerts have come at the same time as popular “walk-to-work” protests over economic conditions within Uganda. Uganda’s Director of Counter Terrorism, Abas Byakagaba, suggests that such complaints are the work of “cynical people” who “misinterpret us” (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], September 9).

Kenyan Muslim groups such as the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims have appealed to the Nairobi government to bring the ten Kenyan 7/11 suspects back for trial in their homeland, citing a willingness expressed by the Ugandan government to allow the transfer (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], September 14). A September 11 rally of concerned Muslims in Nairobi called on the government to work for the release of Kenyans being detained in Uganda and the United States. National Human Rights Commission member Hassan Omar said at the rally that the Ugandan government had “indicated it is waiting for Kenya to claim her people.” Omar and three other Kenyan human rights activists were deported from Uganda in April after arriving in Kampala to seek the release of the Kenyan suspects (*Nairobi Star*, September 11).

Kenyans underwent a scare recently when reports emerged that security services had arrested 40 to 50 Ugandans at a guesthouse in Nairobi who were reportedly on their way to Afghanistan, possibly for involvement in terrorist activities according to local security services. However, after the men were deported to Uganda and taken to Kampala for questioning, it turned out that the suspected jihadis had actually been

duped into making payments to a bogus recruiting firm claiming to place security guards for high-paying jobs in Afghanistan and Iraq (*Daily Monitor*, August 20; *New Vision*, August 18).

Shiite Proselytizing in Northeastern Syria Will Destabilize a Post-Assad Syria

By Carole A. O'Leary and Nicholas A. Heras

Iran's ties to Syria go beyond the geo-politics of the "Axis of Resistance." This is evident in the remote, volatile, and oil-rich al-Jazirah region of northeastern Syria, where there has been a noticeable increase in Iranian investment in religious and cultural centers over the last decade. Information gathered from interviews with Arab shaykhs, tribal youth, Kurds and Assyrians from the region suggest that Iranian financed Shi'a proselytizing, including cash handouts for conversion, is having an impact on conversion rates in the region. Arab shaykhs representing the six largest tribes in the region assert that the Assad government covertly supports a missionary effort that has affected both the Sunni (Arab and Kurd) and Christian (Assyrian) communities. [1]

The Jazirah region encompasses the areas including and surrounding the cities of Hasakah, Raqqah, Qamishli, Deir al-Zawr, Mayadin and Abu Kamal. This region includes the Euphrates River and its major tributary, the Khabour River. Al-Jazirah is considered to be the agricultural "breadbasket" of Syria. It is also the locus of Syria's oil industry and a major transit point for the entry, whether legal or illegal, of goods and livestock. [2] Arab tribal society is strongest in this region of Syria, which is comprised of tribal and mixed ethnic communities. Approximately 60% of Syria's Arab tribal population resides in this complex ethnolinguistic zone, which also includes significant numbers of "politically sensitive" (non-Arab) communities of Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians and Turkomans.

Lingering ethnic conflicts and Kurdish nationalism have resulted in an extremely heavy security presence in al-Jazirah. The Syrian government has historically employed a divide-and-conquer approach that has negatively impacted civil society and social cohesion in the communities of this region. Scores of individuals from al-Jazirah interviewed by the authors assert that the Syrian government is trying to create a pervasive atmosphere of distrust, especially between the Kurds on the one hand, and Arabs and Christians on the other. In addition to the intelligence and informant networks deployed by the regime in the northeast, other tactics to inhibit local level authority and autonomy are also utilized. These include land nationalization, restrictions on farming and grazing rights and even forced relocation of whole groups of people (e.g. tribal Arabs and Kurds). The Syrian government's attempts to assert total control over this oil-rich region have included blocking outside aid agencies from bringing relief to the area during the multi-year drought and subsequent famine that began in 2003.

The economic situation in al-Jazirah is dire. The Hasakah Governorate in particular has been fiercely impacted by the economic crisis, precipitated by a multi-year drought that crippled the local agricultural economy and forced 36,000 families to leave the land they once farmed. Over 1.3 million people have been affected by the drought, and more than 803,000 Syrians have lost their work because of its impact on successive harvests (*Executive* [Beirut], November 2009). Even the more wealthy shaykhs of northeastern Syria are feeling the economic effects of the drought. Many of them are in debt to either the Ba'ath Party (through government-controlled banks) or to private lenders who cooperate with the Ba'ath Party. Shaykhs who refused to pay the exorbitant fees of the loan sharks were forced to leave thousands of acres of their land uncultivated for the 2009 planting season. [3]

While there are no generally accepted figures for conversion rates to Shi'ism in Syria, information provided to us by local shaykhs is informative. Shaykhs representing the six largest tribes in the region stated repeatedly that Shi'a missionaries were having an impact on Sunni to Shi'a conversion in the region, especially among the economically vulnerable young men forced to seek work outside of al-Jazirah. A Baggara shaykh reported that a Shi'a religious center near Aleppo, for example, sustains young tribesmen who leave al-Jazirah in search of jobs with financial support, information

on safe housing and a place of refuge where they can interact with other youth from their home region. When questioned about the financing of the mosques, one local shaykh from the Jabbour tribe became uneasy, and would only state that the mosques were financed by “outsiders,” although he would not state who these outsiders were.

In a 2009 discussion with two tribal leaders, the Baggara shaykh (whose community is based both in al-Jazirah and south of Aleppo) stated that fully 25% of his tribe had converted to Shi’ism. While the second shaykh from the Shammar tribe (whose community is based in Hasakah) concurred with this figure regarding Baggara conversion, he stated that for his own tribe the conversion rate was less than one percent. He added that the reason the Shammar are largely immune to religious conversion is their very strong adherence to what he termed “traditional Bedu values.” He went on to explain that the Baggara were never historically “noble” camel herders and thus were “weak” in terms of adhering to traditional Arab tribal or “Bedu” norms. In an interview that took place in June 2011, a local contact of one of the authors stated that the entire population of Qahtaania (a Baggara village between Qamishli and Malakiyya) has converted to Shi’ism, praying in the Ali ibn Abu Talib mosque built there in 2007. [4]

Conversion to Shi’ism is a contested phenomenon in the region. According to our interview data, the majority of converted Shi’a in al-Jazirah are secretive about their practices, preferring to practice their faith with fellow converts in *husseiniya*-like study groups in private homes. The main reason for this secrecy is the disapproval of the converts’ families and/or tribes. A contact of one of the authors, a young convert to Shi’ism from the Walde tribe that live near Raqqah, stated in September 2010 that: “There is a problem between the tribes and the Iranians, but between the leader [Bashar Al-Assad] and the Iranians, there is no problem.” Influential Sunni Syrians such as Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni of the Muslim Brotherhood have warned against “Shia-ization” in Syria. In a May 2008 interview, al-Bayanouni stated that: “on the cultural level, the Shi’ite school of Islam is spreading in Syria, funded by Iran and supported by the Iranian regime... This situation is exploited by people who give financial incentives, and pay the salaries of some tribal leaders, imams, and shaykhs, in order to convert these influential people to the Shi’ite school of Islam” (al-Arabiya, May

2, 2008).

The spread of Shi’ism in al-Jazirah, a majority Arab Sunni tribal region, adds another element of complexity to the dynamics of identity politics and organization of resistance to the regime there. Tribal, ethnic and sectarian differences exacerbated by decades of oppression and years of economic decay and out-migration, now coupled with Iranian cultural penetration through Shi’a missionary work, have destabilized the region and will have an impact on any attempt to form a post-Assad government in Syria. It is the view of the authors that Iran has “soft” tools or resources in place that it can draw upon in a post- Assad Syria that reach beyond military and political power politics into the sociocultural realm.

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Notes:

1. This article draws extensively from interviews conducted by the authors in 2008-2011 in Lebanon and Syria. The interview data suggests that there has been an increase in the number of Shi’a Muslim mosques and attendees at these mosques in al-Jazirah over the last decade.
2. See “On the Ground from Syria to Iraq,” Harmony Project. (Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point: July 22, 2008), p. 86.
3. Information drawn from author interviews. See endnote 1 above.
4. The village of Hatla, near Deir ez Zawr in Hasakah Province, is also described as having been completely converted from Sunni Islam to Shi’ism (*Washington Post*, October 6, 2006).

Pakistan Seeks Administrative Solution to Terrorism on the Northwest Frontier

By Arif Jamal

Although new changes to colonial-era laws known as the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) are aimed at giving more political freedom to the people living in the lawless Pakistani tribal areas, one of the unstated objectives of the government seems to be defeating the militants with political rather than military force. [1] President Asif Ali Zardari hinted at this when he said that a bigger “challenge of defeating the militant mindset awaits us... In the long run, we must defeat the militant mindset to defend our country, our democracy, our institutions and our way of life” (*Dawn*, August 13).

To achieve this objective in the turbulent Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari signed two executive orders, the Amendments to the FCR (2011) and the Extension of the Political Parties Order (2002), into law on August 12. Most political parties and analysts in Pakistan welcomed the reforms, which will establish a new three-member FATA tribunal and introduce political activity in the area in the form of enfranchisement and the establishment of political parties (*The Nation* [Islamabad], September 4). There is a consensus that these laws will lead to even more far-reaching social and political reforms in the coming years (*Dawn* [Karachi], August 13; *The News* [Islamabad], August 13).

Reforming the Frontier Crimes Regulations and extending the Political Parties Act to FATA has long been on the agenda of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (*Dawn*, August 4). President Zardari had agreed to a similar package of reforms in August 2009 but various political concerns prevented him from enacting them (*Dawn*, August 13). Pressure from different quarters, including the Pakistan army, stalled any further progress on the reforms. According to a senior government official, army top brass had opposed these reforms in the belief that legal reforms in FATA would hinder the war on terror as questions of rights violations would be raised against the army. However, the political leaders disagreed with the army and wanted to fight terrorism by bringing FATA under Pakistani law and by integrating the lawless tribal lands with the rest of the

country. The political leaders have found a middle way by introducing a new package of reforms that does not completely replace the FCR. [2]

The reforms have put checks on the arbitrary power of the powerful Political Agents. They now give the accused the right to bail and make it mandatory for the political authorities to produce the accused before the competent authorities within 24 hours of arrest. The reforms also set up a three-member FATA tribunal. Headed by a chairman, it would have two members. One of them must be a senior civil servant and the other must be qualified to be a judge of the High Court. It will have powers similar to the High Courts under the constitution. The reforms also address the concept of collective responsibility, under which the political authorities used to punish an entire tribe, including women and children, for the crimes of one person. Henceforth, women, children under 16 and seniors would not be subject to arrest under the concept of collective responsibility. Under the reformed laws, in the first stage, only the immediate members of the family would be arrested, followed by the sub-tribe and other sections of the tribe (*The News*, August 12).

The FCR helped militants to turn the tribal areas into their sanctuaries. It is because of FATA’s tribal status that the region was chosen as the springboard for jihad in Kashmir in 1947. In the early 1980s, Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) set up many training camps for the Afghan mujahideen and other Pakistani mujahideen groups in the tribal areas. Different mujahideen groups later set up their bases here for the same reason. It was the region’s tribal status that aided al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the Haqqani Network in making it their base. Commentator Khalid Aziz writes in *Dawn* that “One only wished that these reforms had begun in 1947, rather than now. Had that happened, we may have prevented the growth of extremism in FATA. But as they say, it is better late than never” (*Dawn*, August 19).

The Pakistan Army has always supported the status quo in FATA for its importance as a launching point for jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan. Although the civilian government has taken this step in spite of opposition from the army, it will not be easy to implement the reforms. Their positive impact will be slow to be felt as the militant groups in these areas will put up severe resistance to the coming of political parties, as most of them are anti-Taliban. Most importantly, the Pakistan Army will have to abandon the search for strategic depth

in Afghanistan and the use of jihad as an instrument of its defense policy if the reforms come into effect and reduce the regional insecurity that makes FATA a haven for militants (*Daily Times* [Lahore], August 20).

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Notes:

1. For a detailed analysis of the FCR, see Human Rights Commission of Pakistan report, "FCR – A bad law nobody can defend," 2004. Available at <http://www.hrcp-web.org/pdf/FCR%20Report.pdf>.
2. Author's telephone interview with a senior government official, August 2011.

What the Tuareg Do After the Fall of Qaddafi Will Determine the Security Future of the Sahel

By Andrew McGregor

At least 1,500 Tuareg fighters joined Muammar Qaddafi's loyalist forces (though some sources cite much larger figures) in the failed defense of his Libyan regime. Many were ex-rebels residing in Libya, while others were recruited from across the Sahel with promises of large bonuses and even Libyan citizenship. Many of the Tuareg fighters are now returning to Mali, Niger and elsewhere in the Sahel, but for some the war may not yet be over; there are reports of up to 500 Tuareg fighters having joined loyalist forces holding the coastal town of Sirte, Qaddafi's birthplace and a loyalist stronghold (AFP, September 3; September 5).

The Regional Dimension of the Libyan Regime's Collapse

Media in the Malian capital have warned that the "defeated mercenaries" are back from Libya with heavy

weapons and lots of money to prepare a new Tuareg rebellion, labeling themselves "combatants for the liberation of Azawad" (*Le Pretoire* [Bamako], May 9). Mali has not yet recognized the Transitional National Council (TNC) as the new Libyan government; Mali's reticence in recognizing the rebels as the new government in Libya may have something to do with the large investments made in Mali by the Qaddafi regime (*L'Independant* [Bamako], September 6). The Libyan leader has significant support in Mali and other parts of West Africa and a number of pro-Qaddafi demonstrations have been witnessed in Mali since the revolution began in February.

The new president of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, has warned of Libya turning into another Somalia, spreading instability throughout the region:

The Libyan crisis amplifies the threats confronting countries in the region. We were already exposed to the fundamentalist threat, to the menace of criminal organizations, drug traffickers, arms traffickers... Today, all these problems have increased. All the more so because weapon depots have been looted in Libya and such weapons have been disseminated throughout the region. Yes, I am very worried: we fear that there may be a breakdown of the Libyan state, as was the case in Somalia, eventually bringing to power religious extremists. (*Jeane Afrique*, July 30).

Algeria has its own concerns, fearing that instability in the Sahara/Sahel will provoke further undesirable French military deployments or interventions in the region.

Convoys Out of Libya

Tuareg troops escaping from Libya have been observed using 4X4 vehicles to cross into Niger (*El Khabar* [Algiers], August 29). On September 5, it was reported that "an exceptionally large and rare convoy" of over 200 military vehicles belonging to the southern garrisons of the Libyan Army entered the city of Agadez, the capital of the old Tuareg-controlled Agadez sultanate that controlled trade routes in the region for centuries (*Le Monde*, September 6; AFP, September 6). A number of people reported seeing Tuareg rebel Rhissa Ag Boula in the convoy (*Le Monde*, September 6). Ag Boula was last reported to have been under arrest in Niamey after re-entering Niger in April 2010 (see *Terrorism Monitor*

Brief, April 17, 2010). Ag Boula mistakenly believed he was covered by a government amnesty against a death sentence passed *in absentia* for his alleged role in the assassination of a politician.

According to NATO spokesman Colonel Roland Lavoie, the convoy was not tracked by the concentrated array of surveillance assets deployed over Libya: “To be clear, our mission is to protect the civilian population in Libya, not to track and target thousands of fleeing former regime leaders, mercenaries, military commanders and internally displaced people” (AFP, September 6). In a campaign that has seen NATO target civilian television workers as a “threat to civilian lives,” it is difficult to believe that a heavily-armed convoy of 200 vehicles containing Qaddafi loyalists was of no interest to NATO’s operational command. There has been widespread speculation that the convoy contained some part of Libya’s gold reserves, which were moved to the southern Sabha Oasis when the fighting began.

Nigerien foreign minister Mohamed Bazoum initially denied the arrival of a 200 vehicle convoy in his country, but admitted that Abdullah Mansur Daw, Libya’s intelligence chief in charge of Tuareg issues, arrived in Niger on September 4 with nine vehicles (*Le Monde* [Paris], September 8; AFP, September 5). Daw was accompanied by Agali Alambo, a Tuareg rebel leader who has lived in Libya since 2009 and was cited as a major recruiter of hundreds of former Tuareg rebels in Niger. Alambo later described escaping south through the Murzuq triangle “and then straight down to Agadez” after his party learned the Algerian border was closed and the route into Chad was blocked by Tubu fighters who had joined the TNC (Reuters, September 11). Daw and Alambo reached Niamey on September 5 with an escort of Nigerien military vehicles. Libya’s TNC has promised it will request the extradition of leading Qaddafi loyalists from Niger (AFP, September 10).

General Ali Kana, a Tuareg officer commanding government troops in southern Libya, was reported to have crossed into Niger on September 9 with a force of heavily armed troops (Tripoli Post, September 9). A former spokesman for the Tuareg rebel group *Mouvement des nigériens pour la justice* (MNJ) said that Kana was considering defecting after having angered Libyan Tuareg by leading an attack on a Tuareg town in Libya in which several Tuareg were killed, and by recruiting Tuareg mercenaries from Mali and Niger but failing to pay them the huge sums of cash he was given

by Qaddafi for the purpose (AP, September 9). Ali Kana was reported to be with Libyan Air Force chief Al-Rifi Ali al-Sharif and Mahammed Abidalkarem, military commander in the southern garrison of Murzuq (AFP, September 10).

Some Tuareg returning from the Libyan battlefields expressed disenchantment with their time in Libya, complaining they were not allowed to fight in units composed solely of Tuareg (AFP, April 21). Others have complained they were never paid; one fighter said he was part of a group of 229 Tuareg recruited by Agali Alambo with a promise of a 5,000 Euro advance, but had never seen a penny (AFP, September 3). Others did receive smaller payments and the offer of Libyan citizenship. One Tuareg fighter described being assigned to a Tuareg brigade that was later attached to Khamis al-Qaddafi’s 32nd Mechanized Brigade for battles in Misrata and elsewhere (*The Atlantic*, August 31).

Some Tuareg leaders in Niger and Mali are urging Tuareg regulars of the Libyan Army to rally to the rebel cause and remain in Libya rather than return to Niger and Mali with their arms but little chance of employment. The tribal leaders have set up a contact group with the TNC to allow Tuareg regulars to join the rebels without threat of reprisal in an attempt to ward off a civil war in Libya (Reuters, September 4, Radio France Internationale, August 23). “Niger and Mali are very fragile states -- they could not take such an influx...” said Mohamed Anacko, the head of the Agadez regional council and a contact group member (Reuters, September 4). At the moment, however, crossing the lines to a disparate and undisciplined rebel army remains a dangerous proposition for Tuareg regulars closely identified with the regime.

The Tuareg may not be the only insurgents forced out of Libya; there are reports from Chadian officials that over 100 heavily armed vehicles belonging to Dr. Khalil Ibrahim’s Darfur-based Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) had crossed the Libyan border. Ibrahim had taken refuge in Libya after losing his bases in Chad to a Chadian-Sudanese peace agreement. JEM denied knowledge of the movement and also denied receiving weapons from Libya (AFP, September 9).

The Libyan Tuareg

Besides the West African Tuareg who rallied to Qaddafi, Libya is home to a Tuareg community of roughly 100,000 people, though the regime has never recognized

them as such, claiming they are only an isolated branch of the Arab race. Though some Libyan Tuareg have opposed Qaddafi, many others have found employment in the Libyan regular army, together with volunteers from Mali and Niger. As a result, many Libyans tend to identify all Tuareg as regime supporters. Near the desert town of Ghadames local Tuareg were threatened by rebels seeking to expel them from the city before Algeria opened a nearby border post and began allowing the Tuareg to cross into safety on August 30 (*Ennahar* [Algiers], September 1; *El Khabar* [Algiers], September 5). Five hundred Algerian Tuareg were reported to have crossed into Algeria while the border remained open (*Le Monde*, September 8). Some of the refugees promised to settle their families in Algeria before crossing back into Ghadames with arms to confront the rebels (*The Observer*, September 2).

The Death of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga

The most prominent of the Tuareg rebel leaders, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, was reported to have died in a vehicle accident in Tin-Essalak on August 26 after having spent most of the last two years as an exile in Libya (*Tout sur l'Algérie* [Algiers], August 29). [1] It was widely believed in Mali that Ag Bahanga was preparing a new rebellion with weapons obtained from Libyan armories (*Nouvelle Liberation* [Bamako], August 17; *Ennahar* [Algiers] August 27).

He was reportedly buried within hours, preventing any examination of the cause of death despite some reports his body showed signs of having been shot repeatedly. Some claim that Ag Bahanga was actually killed by other Tuareg in a dispute over weapons, though others in Mali have suggested the Tuareg rebel leader was killed by a landmine or even a missile after his Thuraya cell phone was detected by French intelligence services, though it seems unlikely the veteran rebel would make such a mistake (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], August 30; *Le Pretoire* [Bamako], September 6; *Info Matin* [Bamako], August 29). Despite Ag Bahanga's resolute opposition to the Malian regime, President Ahmadou Toumani Touré was reported to have sent a delegation to Kidal province to offer official condolences on the rebel's death (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], August 29). Ag Bahanga was a noted opponent of the political and military domination of Mali by the Bambara, one of the largest Mandé ethnic groups in West Africa (*Jeune Afrique*, September 8).

The veteran Tuareg rebel had many enemies, including the Algerians, who were incensed by his refusal to

adhere to the 2006 Malian peace agreement mediated by Algiers. His rebellion only came to an end when former Tuareg rebels and Bérabiche Arabs joined a Malian government offensive that swept Ag Bahanga and many of his followers from northern Mali in 2009 (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 25, 2009).

Ag Bahanga returned to Libya, where he became an active recruiter of Tuareg fighters from across the Sahel when the Libyan revolution broke out in February (*L'Essor* [Bamako], August 29). One returning fighter described seeing Ag Bahanga fighting with loyalist forces at Misrata: "He was with many former rebels from Mali. They were fighting hard for Qaddafi" (*The Atlantic*, August 31).

If the many reports of Ag Bahanga shipping large quantities of heavy and light weapons and large numbers of 4X4 trucks back to Mali are true, Ag Bahanga was about to become an extremely powerful man in the Sahel. His death will satisfy many, but there are still concerns about the dispersal of his arms, which would certainly be of interest to buyers from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has developed contacts with some young Tuareg by employing them as drivers and guides in unfamiliar territory.

In an interview conducted only days before his death, Ag Bahanga expressed discontent with his one-time patron, offering what might be a bit of revisionist history: "The Tuareg have always wanted Qaddafi to leave Libya, because he always tried to exploit them without any compensation... The disappearance of al-Qaddafi is good news for all the Tuareg in the region... We never had the same goals, but rather the opposite. He has always tried to use the Tuareg for his own ends and to the detriment of the community. His departure from Libya opens the way for a better future and helps to advance our political demands... Al-Qaddafi blocked all solutions to the Tuareg issue... Now he's gone, we can move forward in our struggle" (*El Watan* [Algiers], August 29). Ag Bahanga, who at one point had unsuccessfully offered to turn his rebel movement into a transnational security force capable of expelling al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) from the Sahel/Sahara region, also came out against AQIM's Salafi-Jihadists: "Our imams advocate and educate our youth and families against the religion of intolerance preached by the Salafists, which is in total contradiction with our religious practice. In fact, on an ideological level, the Salafis have no control over the Tuareg. We defend ourselves with our meager resources, and we envision

a day soon be able to bring Bamako to account” (*El Watan*, August 29).

Conclusion

Hundreds of thousands of workers have returned to Niger and Mali, which are unable to provide employment to the returnees. There are also 74,000 workers returning to Chad. Moreover, the loss of remittances from their work in Libya will devastate many already marginal communities reliant on such transfers. Many of the returnees suffered rough treatment at the hands of rebels who consider all black Africans and Tuareg to be *mourtazak* (mercenaries). Motivation, money, arms and a lack of viable alternatives form a dangerous recipe for years of instability in the Sahel/Sahara region, particularly if it is fueled by a political cause such as the restoration of the Qaddafi regime or the establishment of an independent Tuareg homeland.

Ana Ag Ateyoub has been mentioned as the most likely rebel leader to succeed Ag Bahanga. Ag Ateyoub has a reputation for being a great strategist but is considered more radical than Ag Bahanga (*L’Essor* [Bamako], August 29; August 30). Ag Bahanga’s group remains a regional security wild card. If their late leader was actually intending to launch a new rebellion in Mali with high-powered arms obtained in Libya, will the group follow through with these plans?

Former security officials of the Qaddafi regime recently told a pan-Arab daily that Libyan intelligence has conducted extensive surveys of the more inaccessible parts of the country and areas of Niger and Chad while building ties to the local populations in these places (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 8). According to a TNC report based on a communication from the former Libyan intelligence director Musa Kusa, Qaddafi is now moving between al-Jufrah district in the center of the country, home to a strategically located military base and airstrip at Hun, and the remote Tagharin oasis near the Algerian border, where he is guarded by Tuareg tribesmen (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 5).

Much of southern Libya and its vital oil and water resources remains outside rebel hands and might remain that way for some time if the Tuareg oppose the new rebel regime in Tripoli. It is possible that Qaddafi may threaten the new government from the vast spaces of southern Libya if he can gain the cooperation of the Tuareg. Despite signs of disenchantment with Qaddafi

among the Tuareg tribesmen, there is still the lure presented by the vast sums of cash and gold loyalist forces appear to have moved south on behalf of Qaddafi, who has always understood the need to keep a few billion in cash under the mattress, just in case.

Tuareg rebel leader Agali Alambo believes Qaddafi could lead a prolonged counter-insurgency from the deserts of southern Libya: “I know the Guide well, and what people don’t realize is that he could last in the desert for years. He didn’t need to create a hiding place. He likes the simple life, under a tent, sitting on the sand, drinking camel’s milk. His advantage is that this was already his preferred lifestyle... He is guarded by a special mobile unit made up of members of his family. Those are the only people he trusts” (Fox News, September 13).

Though small in numbers, Tuareg mastery of the terrain of the Sahara/Sahel region, ability to survive in forbidding conditions and skills on the battlefield make them a formidable part of any security equation in the region. Historically, the Tuareg have been divided into a number of confederations and have rarely achieved a consensus on anything, including support for the Libyan regime or the ambitions of those seeking to establish a Tuareg homeland. However, the collapse of the Saharan tourist industry due to the depredations of AQIM and a worsening drought in the Sahel that is threatening the pastoral lifestyle of the Tuareg will only enhance the appeal of a well-rewarded life under arms. The direction of Tuareg military commanders and their followers, whether in support of the Qaddafi regime in Libya or in renewed rebellion in Mali and Niger, will play an essential role in determining the security future of the region, as well as the ability of foreign commercial interests to extract the region’s lucrative oil and uranium resources.

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1. For a profile of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, see Andrew McGregor, “Ibrahim Ag Bahanga: Tuareg Rebel Turns Counterterrorist?” April 2, 2010. See also Terrorism Monitor Briefs, November 4, 2010.