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SOMALIA’S AL-SHABAAB EXPLAINS ITS BAN ON FOREIGN AID ORGANIZATIONS

Somalia’s al-Shabaab militants have provided a detailed justification of their recent and controversial decision to halt the work of 16 foreign aid organizations in areas under al-Shabaab control in drought and famine-stricken southern Somalia. The statement, prepared by al-Shabaab’s Office for Supervising the Affairs of Foreign Agencies (OSAFA), was released to various jihadi websites (Ansar1.info, November 28). The statement allegedly comes as the result of a year-long investigation into what al-Shabaab refers to as “the illicit activities and misconduct” of the foreign aid agencies.

The 16 banned aid organizations include the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and a number of Scandinavian, German and French relief organizations.

The al-Shabaab statement charged the international aid organizations of the following:

- The collection of data on Shabaab-held territories “under the guise of demographic surveys, vaccinations reports, demining surveys, nutrition analyses and population censuses.”
- Conveying information about the activities of the Mujahideen.

- Inciting the local population against “the full establishment of the Islamic Shari’a system,” in part by financing and aiding “subversive groups seeking to destroy the basic tents of the Islamic penal system.”
- Working in league with unnamed organizations to “exploit the country of its natural resources.”
- Undermining the “cultural values” of Somali Muslims by using corruption and bribery as methods of operation.
- “Failing to implement durable solutions” to relieve the suffering of internally displaced peoples.

Some organizations were accused of promoting “secularism, immorality and the degrading values of democracy,” while others were accused of working with “ecumenical [evangelist?] churches” to proselytize Muslim children.” In light of these findings, al-Shabaab announced that a committee would perform a yearly review of all aid organizations working in their territory, warning: Any organization found to be supporting or actively engaged in activities deemed detrimental to the attainment of an Islamic State or performing duties other than that which it formally proclaims will be banned immediately without prior warning.”

Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have already fled southern Somalia to Kenya, where many of them live in the world’s largest refugee camp. Kenyan authorities, who regard the refugees as a security risk, are eager to return many of these refugees to new camps in southern Somali territory under the control of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Kenyan Defense Forces now operating in that region (*The Standard* [Nairobi], November 30).

EGYPT’S GAMA’A AL-ISLAMIYA AND THE WAR IN SOUTH SUDAN

In a surprising statement, a leading member of Egypt’s Gama’a al-Islamiya (GI) has revealed members of the militant group had been sent to fight alongside government forces against South Sudanese rebels during the 1983-2005 Sudanese Civil War. The revelation was made by Dr. Najih Ibrahim, a founding member of the movement (*al-Rai* [Kuwait], November 16).

In the 1990s, Khartoum’s civil war with rebel forces in the South Sudan was given a religious character when the regime declared it a jihad, partly as a means of inspiring, and later enforcing, recruitment to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) or the lightly-armed Popular Defense Forces (PDF), which was armed with rifles and Qurans in an unsuccessful effort to destroy the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the most powerful rebel movement in the South Sudan. It was likely during Khartoum’s jihad against what it described as the “communist, tribal and atheist/Christian” SPLA that GI fighters joined the conflict, most probably in the ranks of the PDF, which suffered enormous losses fighting the veteran guerrilla forces of the SPLA on their own turf. Lately, however, there are fears that Khartoum is reviving the rhetoric of jihad to support its offensives against rebels in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile Province (*Sudan Tribune*, November 1).

The Alexandria-based Islamist ideologue said that GI’s “participation [in the civil war] was a huge mistake that led to what is Sudan’s fate now... The Sudanese regime focused its efforts on Islamizing the south and the Egyptian Islamists considered their participation in the war [was for the cause of] safeguarding Islam.”

From 1992 to 1997, al-Gama’a al-Islamiya waged a pitched war against the Egyptian state, its institutions and its financial underpinnings. Some 1,200 people died as the group unleashed a wave of assassinations, mass murders of tourists and back-street battles with security forces. However, the movement went too far in November 1997 when it massacred 58 foreign tourists and four Egyptians in a brutal attack at the Temple of Hatshepsut near Luxor. With popular support fizzling away and security forces successful in imprisoning most of the movement’s members, most of the members of the GI agreed to renounce violence, leading to the later release of some 2,000 Islamists from prison. However, some members, including Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, denounced the deal, and fled to Yemen and Afghanistan. Further

renunciations of violence by those group members left in prison eventually led to the release of Najih Ibrahim in 2006 after serving 24 years.

The GI's newly-formed political wing, Hizb al-Bena' wa'l-Tanmia (Building and Development Party), ran a slate of candidates in the Egyptian parliamentary election after a court overturned a ban on the formation of a political party by the GI (Ahrum Online, June 20; *al-Masry al-Youm*, September 20; MENA, October 10). [1]

A member of GI's Shura Council, Najih Ibrahim resigned from the council in March, along with Karam Zohid, reportedly as a result of differences that arose within the movement after the release of Colonel Abboud al-Zumar and his cousin Tarek al-Zumar, the GI founder who was imprisoned for three decades for his role in the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat (Ahrum Online, March 29).

Both before and after his release from prison, Ibrahim has been a major proponent of the "Revisions" produced by GI and other Islamist militant groups in Egypt. According to Ibrahim, these reassessments of the political use of violence "have revealed the major Islamic jurisprudential errors that al-Qaeda has made, especially with regard to the rulings and the pre-conditions of jihad" (*al-Shorfa* [Cairo], August 2). Though he regrets the slow pace with which the "Revisions" are penetrating extremist youth circles in Egypt, Ibrahim maintains that there is a major difference between GI and al-Qaeda: "Their aim is jihad, and our aim is Islam" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 14).

Note:

1, For Najih Ibrahim's views on the Egyptian Revolution, see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, February 17, 2011.

Islamist Reaction to the NATO Airstrike on the Pakistani Border

Zia Ur Rehman

Following the November 26 incident in which two Pakistani Army check posts in the Salala area of the Mohmand tribal agency were hit by a NATO air strike that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, Islamist religious parties and banned militant organizations have joined Pakistani authorities in reacting with outrage to what they perceive as a violation of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty. The Islamabad government has already closed NATO/U.S. supply routes through Pakistan to Afghanistan and has also banned the commercial sale of fuel to Afghanistan, citing domestic shortages and high prices (*Daily Times* [Lahore], December 4).

Pakistani military spokesperson Major General Athar Abbas claimed that NATO helicopters carried out an unprovoked and indiscriminate attack on a military post in Mohmand Agency, adding that he didn't believe NATO or Afghan forces had received fire from the Pakistani side, raising the possibility that the attack was a deliberate strike by NATO (*Express Tribune* [Karachi] November 27; *Daily Jang* [Karachi] November 27, *Guardian*, November 27).

On the other hand, Afghan and NATO officials claimed that a small group of U.S. and Afghan forces conducting a nighttime raid on a suspected Taliban insurgent base in Afghanistan's Kunar province near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border were fired upon from a position inside Pakistani territory, prompting calls for the close air support that wiped out the two Pakistani mountain posts (*Tolo News* [Kabul], November 27).

Abu Hamza, a senior Afghan Taliban commander who leads the militants in the Kunar Khas area of Kunar province, strongly denied having carried out any attack on NATO or Afghan forces in Kunar the night NATO helicopters bombed the Pakistani military posts. However, Abu Hamza said that a group of Pakistani militants led by Omar Khalid (real name Abdul Wali Khan), a key leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), planted an improvised explosive device during the day of November 25 on Kunar's main road which later struck a U.S. tank (*The News* [Islamabad] November 30).

Although the Pakistani military claimed that there was no militant activity in the area at the time of the attack,

Mohmand is a well-known hub of militancy which has a significant impact on the security situation on both sides of border. Omar Khalid heads the network of Mohmand militants that carries out terrorist attacks in both countries. [1] The Pakistani military claimed that it had cleared 80% of the Mohmand area of militants and the operation would be completed in a few days. Seventy-two soldiers, including three officers, have been killed during the operation (*Dawn* [Karachi] September 1).

Afghan officials also regularly complain about cross-border incursions in Kunar province originating in the Mohmand tribal agency. Kunar's governor says that the Dangam, Shigal and Sarkan districts of Kunar have suffered casualties and losses from cross-border missile attacks from Mohmand Agency (Pajhwok Afghan News, June 18). Former Afghan intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh accuses Pakistan of creating the problem that led to the recent NATO attack in Mohmand, asking who is supporting Omar Khalid and who is supporting unrest in Kunar? (*Friday Times* [Lahore] December 2-8). Many security experts are of the view that Pakistani and Afghan militants have teamed up to attack each other's border areas, killing civilians and military officials and aiming to disrupt security co-operation between Islamabad and Kabul (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 22).

Maulvi Fariq Muhammad, deputy head of the TTP, has said that the recent NATO attack on Pakistani check posts proved that "the United States can never be a friend of Pakistan" and that Islamabad should accept Taliban's stance after this attack (BBC Urdu, November 29). Mukarrum Khurasani, an aide to Mohmand Agency TTP leader Umar Khalid Khurasani, has said that Pakistan should sever its relationship with the United States. Instead of merely stopping NATO supplies, Mukarrum said Pakistan should take revenge for every person killed (*Express Tribune*, November 28).

The heated diplomatic row between Pakistan and NATO has escalated since the attack, with Pakistan ordering the United States to vacate the important Shamshi Air Base in Balochistan, closing NATO's supply routes through Chaman and the Khyber Agency and boycotting an international conference on the future of Afghanistan in Bonn, Germany (*Daily Jang*, November 27).

The retaliation taken by Islamabad in the aftermath of the NATO attack clearly matches the demands recently made by the TTP as a prerequisite for holding peace negotiations with the government. TTP demands for

Islamabad to halt NATO supply convoys and evict U.S. forces from the Shamshi Air Base were made public on November 19 (*Daily Aaj* [Peshawar], November 20). Speculation regarding TTP-Government peace talks has been widespread since the passage of a resolution endorsing talks with the Taliban at an All-Party Conference held in Islamabad on October 18. The conference was chaired by Pakistani Premier Yusuf Raza Gilani and attended by all the key political parties of the country in a bid to bring peace (*The News*, December 1).

Following the NATO attack, thousands of enraged Pakistanis, including members of religious parties and banned militant outfits, took to the streets across the country, setting fire to American flags and shouting anti-American slogans. Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), a banned outfit whose previous name was Lashkar-e-Taiba, has been in the forefront of protests against the NATO operation.

In rallies across the country, JuD leaders urged the young protestors to prepare for jihad and called on the Pakistani military to give a "befitting response" to the NATO attack. Ahl-e-Sunnat wa'l-Jamaat (ASWJ), the new name of the banned Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), also organized anti-NATO protests in various cities. Opposition parties are also supporting the government's stance by condemning the NATO attack (*Daily Umamit* [Karachi] November 29).

Although it is currently unknown what triggered what one analyst described as the "tactical development" along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, it seems the only way to prevent cross border attacks is to tackle the militants operating in the border areas of both countries. [2] Though the security forces of both countries have begun operations to repel further attacks, the Islamabad and Kabul government as well as NATO must deal collectively with the issue of cross-border militancy in order to avoid the mistrust created by incidents like that of November 26.

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Notes:

1. Telephone interview with a Mohmand Agency-based journalist who requested anonymity, November 29, 2011.
2. Telephone interview with Raees Ahmed, a Karachi-based political analyst. December 2, 2011

The Impossible Dream: Tehran Rethinks its Commitment to an Iranian-Built Aircraft Carrier

Nima Adelkhah

In late September, the Iranian navy announced it would build an aircraft carrier with the capacity to engage in defensive military operations in the Persian Gulf (Press TV September 28; Fars News, September 28). The statement came as the Iranian navy also announced the near completion of *Jamaran 2*, a more advanced 2010 version of *Jamaran 1* (an Iranian-built Mowj-class guided-missile frigate that Iran likes to style as a destroyer), armed with anti-ship, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles. *Jamaran 1* is currently on a mission in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (Fars News September 28, 2011; Press TV, November 27, 2011). From the Iranian view, the design and construction of an aircraft carrier would be part of a growing indigenous weapons technologies industry that is increasing Iran's missile capabilities and expanding Iran's naval operations well beyond Iranian maritime territories and into the Atlantic and Indian oceans (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 4). Along with the production of three domestically-built Ghadir-class midget submarines for littoral use and the equipping of naval vessels with Iranian-made marine cruise missiles like the Qadar, the construction of an aircraft carrier would signify a major step in the expansion of the Iranian naval power (Press TV, November 28, 2011; Fars News November 30, 2011).

Nevertheless, the November 25 announcement by Navy commander Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, that the Iranian navy has halted its plans for the production of aircraft carrier came as a surprise (IRIB Radio, November 26). The announcement raised a question: If the Iranian navy is purportedly capable of building an aircraft carrier, then why discontinue the development of naval technology that could expand the country's naval presence in international waters? At first glance, the answer lies in the fact that Iran does not have the capability of building technologically advanced carrier-based planes specifically designed for maritime operations. Iran's aging fleet of largely American and Soviet-built fighter jets are land-based. There is also the problem of other technologies used to build a carrier, like arresting cables or aircraft catapults, which are mostly built in Europe or the United States. Under the current

sanctions and given this equipment's sensitive security nature, Iran might be unable to find these technologies, even in the black market.

The main reason for Iran's halt to the aircraft carrier project lies in the fact that the country's navy does not really need one. There are three reasons for this:

- While Tehran has been eager to display its naval power in international waters, including the Red Sea and the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, such naval activities have been mainly a symbolic of advancing Iran's "Soft War" strategy adopted in September 2009 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 12, 2010; November 4, 2011). Soft War activities are meant as psychological operations to impact domestic and global public opinion. In many ways, Iran is keen to portray its abilities as greater than what they might be in reality, partly to foster psychological strength within its military forces, whose younger members have undergone major educational and ideological training in Soft War operations since 2009 (IRNA, October 8, 2011).
- The second reason for abandoning the construction of an aircraft carrier is Iran has made it a priority to develop conventional missiles capable of causing serious damage to U.S. aircraft carriers in the event of an attack.
- The Iranian naval strategy also relies heavily on asymmetrical warfare, which obviously does not require a mobile naval base for air attacks beyond the Persian Gulf. Carriers are also both costly and vulnerable to superior American air power. Tehran is fully aware of this reality and makes sure that its rhetoric regarding naval power mainly is limited to missile capabilities and, more importantly, its grander Soft War objectives.

The Iranian navy will soon launch a major naval exercise, named Velayat 90, with the aim of displaying its naval power to the United States and Arab nations in the Persian Gulf (*Tehran Times*, November 26; Press TV, November 28). While this is not the first naval exercise that Iran has conducted in recent years, Velayat

90 will most likely display Iran's more advanced naval weaponry systems, including its missile and swift boat capacities, signalling Iran's continued focus on using combined conventional and asymmetrical military operations with the aim of deterring a possible U.S. attack. In strategic military terms, an aircraft carrier does not fit the Iranian military trajectory, though it would certainly serve Tehran's growing Soft War strategies aimed at increasing domestic support and waging psychological warfare against its foes, especially its neighbors in the Persian Gulf.

Nima Adelkhah is an independent analyst based in New York. His current research agenda includes the Middle East, military strategy and technology, and nuclear proliferation among other defense and security issues.

Jihadists and Saudi Arabia in the Shadow of the Arab Spring

Murad Batal al-Shishani

In the 1980s the Saudi Arabia-United States alliance supported the mujahedeen in Afghanistan in their battle against the Soviet Union. Hostility has since grown between al-Qaeda, which formed later and the Saudi regime. Hostilities started after the 1991 Gulf War when the Islamic opposition became incensed at the decision to invite non-Muslim troops (i.e. the Americans and their Western allies) to use Saudi soil to attack invading Iraqi forces in neighbouring Kuwait. By then the jihadists had theorized on the “infidelity” of the Saudi state; an ideology Jordanian Islamist Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi described in one of his most famous works, *Al-kawashif al-jaliyya fi kufr al-dawla al-Sa`udiyya* (The Shameful Actions Manifest in the Saudi State’s Disbelief).

If al-Maqdisi laid the foundation for the enmity between jihadists and Saudi Arabia, Osama Bin Laden took it to the next level in the mid-1990s when he turned from criticizing the Saudi state to considering it explicitly a *kafir* (non-believing) state against which Muslims were obliged to wage a jihad. In this stage several small bomb attacks were committed in the capital of Riyadh. The most significant of these was the November 1995 car bombing that killed five U.S. citizens and two Indian citizens at the offices of the Saudi National Guard on Riyadh’s al-Olaya road.

After 2000 the violence escalated between both parties until it reached a peak in 2003, when Saudi jihadists returning from Afghanistan launched a jihadi campaign that lasted until 2007. Saudi authorities dismantled the structure of the Saudi jihadist movement in that year, leading them to migrate to Yemen, where they merged with Yemeni jihadists to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The newly formed movement quickly became a national threat to Saudi Arabia.

The Challenge of the Arab Spring

The “Arab Spring,” the disparate youth-led revolutions that toppled a number of long-lasting Arab despots, presented a challenge for both Saudi Arabia and the jihadists. The Saudis are concerned with their troubled neighbours of Bahrain and Yemen as well as the potential growth of political movements inside their own country.

The jihadists, meanwhile, have lost much of their usual recruitment pool as the Arab youth movements provide an alternative to their violent ideology.

The Saudis have taken several steps to prevent any troubles within or along its borders, including the deployment of troops of the Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) to Bahrain and supporting the GCC initiative for a transition of power in Yemen (for the PSF, see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, March 24). Locally, Saudi authorities have resorted to a stick-and-carrot policy. In February King Abdullah, according to an official statement read on Saudi state TV, “boosted spending on housing by 40 billion riyals (\$10.7 billion)... earmarked more funds for education... raised the social security budget by 1 billion riyals... and ordered the creation of 1,200 jobs in supervision programs and made permanent a 15% cost-of-living allowance for government employees” (Saudi TV 1, February 23; Bloomberg, February 23).

On other hand the Saudi government cracked down on any opposition voices in the country. Amnesty International recently released a report claiming that hundreds of people in Saudi Arabia “had been arrested, many of them without charge or trial.” Prominent reformers had been given long sentences ranging from five to thirty years in prison following trials which Amnesty called “grossly unfair.” [1] These trials increase anger among Saudi youth on social media outlets and have become a source of criticism of the Saudi government. Riyadh has witnessed several rarely-seen demonstrations demanding the release of prisoners.

The trial was conducted by a special criminal court in Riyadh and the 16 terror suspects sentenced to a total of 228 years in jail. The suspects - 14 Saudis, a Yemeni and a Syrian - reportedly belong to a cell called *Istiraha* (Rest House). The Saudi members of the group will not be allowed to leave the Kingdom after their release while the foreigners will be deported after serving their sentences. All of the defendants have rejected the court verdict while the public prosecutor said the suspects deserved tougher punishment (Arab News, November 23).

While many jihadists are among those imprisoned on political charges in Saudi Arabia since 2003, the Salafi-Jihadists — in line with new soft-political rhetoric they presenting since the Arab Spring movements swept, focused on the prisoners issue as a new campaign strategy in Saudi Arabia.

Why Has the Arab Revolution Not Reached the Gulf?

A well-known contributor to jihadist internet forums with the pseudonym Hamzah al-Bassaam was interviewed by a jihadi website regarding al-Qaeda and the Arab Spring. On the question of why the Arab revolution has not reached the Gulf countries, particularly the country of the two holy mosques [i.e. Saudi Arabia], al-Bassaam replied:

Regarding the country of the two holy mosques, there is a good movement and what we've seen recently from the protests [demanding the] release of detainees and raising the voice of their families to the world is healthy evidence. It is important these protests continue... what prevents the movement [in Saudi Arabia from going further] are two things: first, the security grip and maltreatment of any dissenting voice or one calling for a revolution. Second is the official religious establishment, which the Sa'ud family places in the throats of those who want to lift the injustice and change the regime" (muslm.net, September 19).

On November 18, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released an audio message from its Shari'a advisor, Shaykh Ibrahim al-Rubaish, entitled "A'la Khota al-Gharb" (Following in the Footsteps of the West) which focussed on the appointment of Prince Nayf Bin Abduk Aziz as Crown Prince in Saudi Arabia (Ansar1.com, November 18). Al-Rubaish, who had previously set political conditions to stop fighting the Saudi royal family, indicated the sort of changes that have occurred in the jihadists' thinking as a result of the Arab Spring:

The most powerful way to release the prisoners is jihad because what has been taken by force can only be restored by force, but if this is not doable at least people [should] continue gathering in front of the Interior Ministry periodically until they find a solution to this issue [of prisoners to be released] and if some of them [are] imprisoned or force used against them they must be resilient. Some people should be on the frontline and sacrifice to [let others] enjoy [the victory] after them... the reality has proved the fact that the will of the people is unbreakable. [We need] a will

to steadfastly confront the cronies of Ibn Sa'ud, similar to the will of the people of Tunisia [who] succeeded in the expulsion of [Zine al-Abidine] bin Ali, and the will of the people of Egypt in imprisoning Hosni [Mubarak], and the will of the people of Libya in killing [Mu'ammara] al-Gaddafi.

Al-Rubaish criticized King Abdallah bin Abd-al-Aziz's decision to grant women the right to take part in the municipal and Shura Council elections, saying that this decision was considered "a decisive victory" by the media and "scored a goal" for the liberals. He added that "the liberals deem the king's days a golden age because he follows in the footsteps of the West." Al-Rubaish believes this shows "the weakness" of the Islamists, who do not dare to advise the king or blame him for listening to the liberals. Al-Rubaish concludes his message by warning the Saudis against the "Westernization" of women, saying that this will open the door for giving leadership to women.

Conclusion

Although the Arab Spring movements created new challenges for both the jihadists and the Saudi state, the Saudis are more interested in preventing internal dissent inspired by youth movements while the jihadists feel challenged by the loss of their recruitment pool. It is unlikely that al-Qaeda will be successful in mobilizing young Saudis in political demonstrations as they do not have the tools required for public political mobilization. Therefore it is more likely that they will continue to rely on Yemen as a launching pad for attacks inside Saudi territories. However, developments inside Saudi Arabia indicate a level of frustration inside the kingdom which could lead to a political deadlock if the government takes further steps towards political reform.

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Note:

1. See "Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security," <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE23/016/2011/en/126dda68-1c2f-4f3e-b986-3efa797d3b9d/mde230162011en.pdf>.