



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Ismail Guelleh

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## SALAFISTS TARGET WORKS OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS

Egypt’s Salafist parties, which did surprisingly well in the first round of parliamentary elections with 24% of the vote, have tried hard to present themselves as compatible with modern norms, so long as they fit the moral standards established by Islam’s earliest generations. Yousry Hamad, a leader of al-Nour (The Light) Party, the leading Salafist movement in Egypt, has protested claims that the Salafists wish to turn back the clock in Egypt: ““We are surprised to find that the liberal and secular current, which rejects the doctrine of Islam, distorts our image in the media through lies and speaks about us as if we came from another planet... We will not tell people to ride camels, as others have said about us. We want a modern and advanced Egyptian society of people” (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], November 19).

Egypt’s rapidly expanding population is facing a host of major problems that will require the attention of any new government. There have been fears, however, that an Islamist-dominated parliament might devote itself to social issues such as reforms directed at dress, gender mixing and alcohol consumption at the expense of more pressing concerns. While the Muslim Brotherhood continues to keep its distance from suggestions it might have a radical Islamist agenda, many Salafists have embraced the opportunity to express extremist interpretations of Islam in the post-Mubarak environment. Some Salafist preachers have suggested it is time to put an end to the “idolatry” encouraged by the monuments of Ancient Egypt. Though the last known worshipper of the ancient Egyptian religion converted to Christianity in the fourth century C.E., these Salafists have suddenly decided to address the danger posed to Islam by these monuments, suggesting their

destruction or concealment as a solution.

A Salafist leader and al-Nour Party candidate for parliament in Alexandria, Abd al-Moneim al-Shahat, described the civilization of ancient Egypt as a “rotten culture” that did not worship God (Ahram Online, December 2). While al-Shahat has not called for their complete destruction, he has suggested that the ancient works be covered with wax to prevent their worship (Reuters, December 9). Al-Shahat has also voiced his concerns over the literature of Egyptian Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, denouncing it for inciting “promiscuity, prostitution and atheism” (Ahram Online, December 2). Though running in an Islamist stronghold in Alexandria, al-Shahat lost the run-off election last week to an independent candidate supported by the Muslim Brotherhood after Copts and Liberals banded together to defeat the controversial al-Nour candidate (Reuters, December 8).

The growing signs that the newly ascendant Salafists might begin a campaign against Egypt’s vast archaeological and cultural legacy, one of the most impressive in the world, have sent shock waves through Egypt’s tourism industry. The legacy of the ancient Egyptians represents the nation’s principal source of foreign currency and over a tenth of Egypt’s gross domestic product.

In response to the Salafists’ verbal attacks on the ancient remains, a group of roughly 1,000 protestors gathered in Giza near the site of the Great Pyramid to denounce the Salafists’ remarks (Reuters, December 9; Ahram Online, December 10). Al-Shahat’s suggestions for dealing with the issue of idolatry in Egypt were later soundly refuted by Shaykh Mahmoud Ashour, the former deputy leader of Cairo’s al-Azhar University, the most respected center of Islamic scholarship in the world. Referring to the great Caliphs and other respected Islamic leaders who had ruled Egypt, Ashour noted that neither the 7th century Muslim conqueror of Egypt and companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Amr ibn al-As, nor any of the other Islamic rulers of Egypt “had a problem with ancient Egyptian monuments or thought they have to be destroyed or that they are against Islam” (al-Arabiya, December 12; Bikya Masr [Cairo], December 13). Abd al-Nour, a former leader of the Wafd Party and current Minister of Tourism in the interim government, blasted the Salafists’ approach to tourism, saying that the “rejection of God’s blessings [such as Egypt’s] unique location, a shining sun and warm water, is tantamount to atheism” (Ahram Online, December 10).

To counter fears that an Islamist government could mean the end of Egypt’s vital tourism industry, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Hizb al-Hurriya wa’l-Adala (HHA - Freedom and Justice Party) and the Salafist al-Nour Party both announced they would hold “tourism conferences” to promote the industry. Leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood have shaken hands with tourists in Luxor and visited the Giza Pyramids to show their support for tourism based on Egypt’s ancient monuments. A Nour Party spokesman, however, has said his party supports tourism, but prefers a type of “Halal tourism” that would ban immoral conduct and be consistent with Salafist ethics (*Bikya Masr*, December 12).

In some ways the modern Egyptian Salafists appear to be opposed to the views of the early Arab Muslims they emulate, Muslims who were very familiar with the civilization of Ancient Egypt after centuries of Arab migration to Egypt (there is ample archaeological evidence of some of these Arabs adopting the religion of ancient Egypt in the pre-Islamic era). Though the Arab Muslim conquerors that arrived in the Seventh Century were avid treasure hunters and not above stripping pyramids and other monuments of useful building materials, early Islamic scholars from across the Islamic world visited Egypt to investigate its monuments, culture and history in the interest of expanding knowledge of the world and recording the monuments as evidence of the Holy Scriptures in which they are mentioned. [1]

Note:

1. See Okasha El Daly, *Egyptology: the Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*, London, 2005.

## TURKISH-EGYPTIAN NAVAL EXERCISES RECALL MUSLIM DOMINANCE OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The combined fleets of the Ottoman Sultan and his Viceroy in Cairo once dominated the eastern Mediterranean. Beginning in the 19th century, the forces of European imperialism and Arab nationalism began to drive apart the two anchors of Muslim supremacy in the region. Political separation and defeats at sea were followed by a steep decline in naval capacity in both nations. Now, however, new political trends are bringing the Turkish and Egyptian navies together again to restate their military potential in the face of challenges posed by new rivals such as Israel and Iran.

The naval exercises, code-named “Sea of Friendship 2011,” began December 17 and are scheduled to finish on December 23 (Turkish Radio-Television Corporation, December 15). Turkey is acting as the host nation and the exercises will take place in Turkish waters of the eastern Mediterranean. Egypt’s contribution in terms of ships and personnel is the largest yet in the series of three Turkish-Egyptian annual naval exercises. According to Turkish sources, the Egyptian force will consist of two frigates, two assault boats, one tanker, a helicopter and an underwater assault team, while the Turkish contingent will consist of two frigates, two assault boats, a submarine, a corvette, a tugboat, two fast patrol boats and an underwater assault team (Anatolia News Agency, December 15).

Despite growing tensions between Egypt and Israel, the commander of the Egyptian Navy, Vice Admiral Mohab Mamish, publicly insisted that the naval exercises are not directed towards anyone, but were rather part of an ongoing effort by Turkey and Egypt to maintain peace and security in the region (Ahram Online, December 15). A Turkish press release emphasized the development of mutual cooperation and interoperability between the Turkish and Egyptian fleets (Turkishnavy.net, December 15).

The naval exercise with Turkey follows the Egyptian Navy’s biggest live ammunition war games in its history on October 30 in the seas off the coast of Alexandria. Aside from a number of coordinated operations between the navy’s air and sea assets, the games also provided an opportunity to introduce new speedboats to the Navy (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], October 30).

In August, Turkey pulled out of a scheduled naval exercise with Israel and the United States for the second year in a row following the Israeli attack on the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* in May, 2010 (*Jerusalem Post*, August 6). In September, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced a decision to increase Turkey’s naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean in light of the attack on the *Mavi Marmara* and Israeli gas exploration operations in Cypriot territorial waters disputed by Turkey. At a conference held in Tunisia, Erdogan said “Israel will no longer be able to do what it wants in the Mediterranean and you’ll be seeing Turkish warships in this sea” (AFP, September 15). Ankara is also challenging the legality of Israel’s naval blockade of Gaza.

There have also been suggestions that the exercises will present a show of force to Iran as it pursues an aggressive Middle East policy. Turkish friction with Iran over the conduct of Syria’s repression of its growing internal political opposition has increased in recent weeks, with Iranian leaders suggesting that the Turkish government’s Islamist model is unsuitable for the Arab world (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 15). Threats from Iranian military leaders that NATO air defense system bases in Turkey would be attacked in the event of an Israeli/American strike on Iran have further aggravated relations between the two regional powers.

Egypt is in the process of taking delivery of the first of six Turkish-built Yonca-Onuk MRTP-20 (Multi Role Tactical Platform) fast interceptor boats. Some of the boats are being built in yards in Istanbul, while others are being built in Alexandria with technology transfer agreements. Egypt is the fifth country to purchase the MRTP-20, which features the ASELNAN – STAMP weapons system (STABILIZED Machine gun Platform), a remote-controlled system which its builders say is designed to defend against asymmetric threats on land or sea-based platforms.

The Egyptian Navy is also preparing to take delivery next year of four Fast Missile Craft being built in Pascagoula, Mississippi by the VT Halter Marine company under a Foreign Military Sales deal worth \$807 million. The missile ships will each carry a 76mm gun, Harpoon Block II anti-ship missiles designed for use in littoral waters, MK49 Rolling Airframe surface-to-air missiles and a Close-In Weapon System (CIWS) for self-defense (UPI, October 27; AP November 1). Capable of doing 34 knots per hour with a crew of 40 sailors each, the ships are intended for use in the Red Sea, the Suez Canal

and the coastal waters of the Mediterranean.

As Turkey's former strategic alliance with Israel begins to fade away, Ankara appears to be turning towards the new Arab regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia to strengthen its expanding role in the Middle East. Efforts to increase military cooperation through exercises such as "Sea of Friendship" represent important steps in spreading Turkish influence and exerting a more independent post-Mubarak foreign policy in Egypt.

Note:

1. For STAMP, see: Undersecretariat of Defense Industries Export Portal, International Cooperation Department, <http://defenceproducts.ssm.gov.tr/Pages/ProductDetails.aspx?pId=71> .

## Former Pakistan Army Chief Reveals Intelligence Bureau Harbored Bin Laden in Abbottabad

*Arif Jamal*

In spite of denials by the Pakistani military, evidence is emerging that elements within the Pakistani military harbored Osama bin Laden with the knowledge of former army chief General Pervez Musharraf and possibly current Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani. Former Pakistani Army Chief General Ziauddin Butt (a.k.a. General Ziauddin Khawaja) revealed at a conference on Pakistani-U.S. relations in October 2011 that according to his knowledge the then former Director-General of Intelligence Bureau of Pakistan (2004 – 2008), Brigadier Ijaz Shah (Retd.), had kept Osama bin Laden in an Intelligence Bureau safe house in Abbottabad. In the same address, he revealed that the ISI had helped the CIA to track him down and kill on May 1. The revelation remained unreported for some time because some intelligence officers had asked journalists to refrain from publishing General Butt's remarks. [1] No mention of the charges appeared until right-wing columnist Altaf Hassan Qureshi referred to them in an Urdu-language article that appeared on December 8. [2]

In a subsequent and revealing Urdu-language interview with TV channel Dawn News, General Butt repeated the allegation on December 11, saying he fully believed that "[Brigadier] Ijaz Shah had kept this man [Bin Laden in the Abbottabad compound] with the full knowledge of General Pervez Musharraf... Ijaz Shah was an all-powerful official in the government of General Musharraf." [3] Asked whether General Kayani knew of this, he first said yes, but later reconsidered: "[Kayani] may have known – I do not know – he might not have known." [4] The general's remarks appeared to confirm investigations by this author in May 2011 that showed that the Abbottabad compound where bin Laden was captured and killed was being used by a Pakistani intelligence agency (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 5). However, General Butt failed to explain why Bin Laden was not discovered even after Brigadier Shah and General Musharraf had left the government.

General Butt was the first head of the Strategic Plans Division of the Pakistan army and the Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) under Nawaz Sharif,

Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1990 to 1993, and again from 1997 to 1999. Sharif promoted General Ziauddin Butt to COAS after forcibly retiring General Pervez Musharraf on October 12, 1999, but the army's top brass revolted against the decision and arrested both Prime Minister Sharif and General Butt while installing Musharraf as the nation's new chief executive, a post he kept as a chief U.S. ally until resigning in 2008 in the face of an impending impeachment procedure.

Brigadier Shah has been known or is alleged to have been involved in several high profile cases of terrorism. The Brigadier was heading the ISI bureau in Lahore when General Musharraf overthrew Prime Minister Sharif in October 1999. Later, General Musharraf appointed Shah as Home Secretary in Punjab. As an ISI officer he was also the handler for Omar Saeed Sheikh, who was involved in the kidnapping of *Wall Street Journal* journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002. [5] Omar Saeed Sheikh surrendered to Brigadier Shah who hid him for several weeks before turning him over to authorities. In February 2004, Musharraf appointed Shah as the new Director of the Intelligence Bureau, a post he kept until March 2008 (*Daily Times* [Lahore] February 26, 2004; *Dawn* [Karachi] March 18, 2008). The late Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto accused Brigadier Shah, among others, of hatching a conspiracy to assassinate her (*The Friday Times* [Lahore], February 18-24).

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani top military brass had serious differences on several issues. One of the most serious of these concerned Pakistan's relations with Osama bin Laden. However, the disastrous 1999 Kargil conflict in Kashmir overshadowed all of these. General Butt says that Prime Minister Sharif had decided to cooperate with the United States and track down Bin Laden in 1999. [6] According to a senior adviser to the Prime Minister, the general staff ousted Sharif to scuttle the "get-Osama" plan, among other reasons: "The evidence is that the military regime abandoned that plan." [7] General Butt corroborates this. In his latest interview, he says that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had constituted a special task force of 90 American-trained commandos to track down Bin Laden in Afghanistan. If the Sharif government had continued on this course, this force would likely have caught Bin Laden by December 2001, but the plan was aborted by Ziauddin Butt's successor as ISI general director, Lieutenant General Mahmud Ahmed. [8]

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Notes:

1. Author's telephone interview with an Islamabad journalist who requested anonymity, November 16, 2011.
2. Altaf Hassan Qureshi, "Resetting Pak-U.S. relations" (in Urdu), *Jang* [Rawalpindi], December 8, 2011. Available at [http://e.jang.com.pk/pic.asp?npic=12-08-2011/Pindi/images/06\\_08.gif](http://e.jang.com.pk/pic.asp?npic=12-08-2011/Pindi/images/06_08.gif)
3. See "Government – Army - America on Dawn News – 11th Dec 2011 part 2," [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4bYHC2\\_ito&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4bYHC2_ito&feature=youtu.be)
4. Ibid
5. Author's interview with a security officer who requested anonymity, Islamabad, May 2000.
6. "Government – Army - America on Dawn News – December 11, 2011, part 1," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4WLtaxxPPw>.
7. Author's interview with a former government minister who requested anonymity, Rawalpindi, February 2006.
8. "Government – Army - America on Dawn News – December 11, 2011, part 1," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4WLtaxxPPw>.

## The Twitter War: A New Battleground for Kenya and al-Shabaab

*Muhyadin Ahmed Roble*

Two months after Kenya launched a military intervention into Somalia in an effort to seize the al-Shabaab stronghold of Kismayu, the Kenyan military and the Somali militants have entered into a new campaign – a propaganda war through Twitter, a popular online social networking service that is still finding new applications.

Since the start of the Kenya intervention, Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) Major Emmanuel Chirchir (@MajorEChirchir) -- the press officer for the Kenyan Army - has been leading a Twitter war of words and propaganda against the KDF's foes in southern Somalia, the militant Islamists of al-Shabaab. Major Chirchir developed a large following by tweeting both warnings and claims of victory to people on both sides of the Kenyan-Somali border.

Major Chirchir gained more than 10,000 followers in a short time. At the time of publication he had over 12,700 followers. His warning tweets of imminent attack on the al-Shabaab-controlled areas of Baidoa, Baadheere, Baydhabo, Dinsur, Afgoye, Bwale, Barawe, Jilib, Kismayo and Afmadow led residents in those places to flee from their houses (SomaliaReport, November 2).

However, al-Shabaab, which is battling forces of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and peacekeeping troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in Mogadishu, has opened a Twitter account to challenge the KDF spokesman.

Al-Shabaab's Twitter account is under the handle @HSMPress, the initials standing for the group's full name, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Youth Movement). On December 7, its first tweet said in Arabic, "In the name of Allah the merciful and compassionate", a common Islamic invocation known as the *Bismillah* pronounced at the beginning of a new undertaking. Since then, a stream of tweets have followed in excellent English providing updates on al-Shabaab successes and issuing new threats to Kenya.

In response to the following Twitter from Major Chirchir: "@HSMPress ...life has more meaning than denying women to wear bras...RT [re-tweet] in support of Somalia women," al-Shabaab replied: "@MajorEChirchir Like bombing donkeys, you mean! Your eccentric battle strategy has got animal rights groups quite concerned, Major." Al-Shabaab referred here to KDF assertions in November that militants were using large numbers of donkeys as transport for weapons and that large concentrations of the animals would henceforth be regarded as indications of "al-Shabaab activity" and therefore subject to Kenyan military action (BBC, November 4; Garowe Online, December 4).

Abdirahman Taysiir, a technology journalist at Somali-language Bar-Kulan Radio in Nairobi, said it seems that al-Shabaab understood the power of Major Chirchir's tweets: "Now they want retaliatory tweets." [1] Taysiir noted that in the bloodless Twitter battle-ground the warriors are limited to weapons of 140 characters.

However, al-Shabaab's adoption of Twitter is a sign that the group is embracing modern technology in the propaganda battle that accompanies the guerrilla war, the mine explosions and the suicide bombings. But the question is what their target audience is on Twitter. Is it the international community, foreign jihad sympathizers, or Somalis in the diaspora? Aside from the initial Arabic-language invocation, all Shabaab Twitter messages have been in English. Neither Twitter nor the English language is popular with southern Somalis. Local flight from areas about to be attacked by the KDF came only after some Somali media companies translated the messages into Somali. It has also been al-Shabaab policy to ban learning English and communicating in that language (Garowe Online, March 6, 2010; al-Arabiya, March 5, 2010).

Taysiir suggests al-Shabaab may just want to use Twitter as a "showcase space," but the Shabaab Twitter message sent on December 7 had 4,000 followers, most of whom are understood to be journalists, analysts, aid workers or terrorism researchers.

However, @HSMPress (the Shabaab Press Office) tweeted "#KDF: An army without experience, clear strategy & objective is fragile to winds of resistance & slightest confrontation precipitates defeat." This message initiated a Twitter exchange between al-Shabaab and Major Chirchir, who proposed a Twitter counter-offensive against al-Shabaab: "#Operationlindanchi [i.e.

Operation Linda Nchi, “Defend the Country,” the KDF operation in southern Somalia], With al-Shabab joining Twitter, let’s take fight to their doorstep, lets follow them for a week then un-follow.” However, as-Shabaab was undeterred by this and @HSMPress retweeted: “Unable to foot the bill, the young & temperamental #KDF joins the fatigued & timid #AMISOM in a turbulent marriage of convenience.”

The Jamestown Foundation approached @HSMPress for comment but he/she neither wants to talk about their location nor the person behind the tweets. Al-Shabaab militants were initially uncomfortable about electronic communications and other “innovations,” banning television, music and sports. In some areas under al-Shabaab control using the internet can cost one’s life due to suspicions of espionage. Now it seems that al-Shabaab is looking for a new way of reaching and spreading its message internationally through Twitter, which has greater penetration internationally than the movement’s largely Arabic and Somali al-Qimmah website. “[Al-Shabaab] can use Twitter and other social platforms for recruiting and spreading their extremist ideologies,” said Elmi Abdi, an Information and Communications Technology student at Jomo Kenyatta University in Nairobi. [2]

Ibrahim Sheikh Hassan, a Nairobi –based political analyst and former professor at Mogadishu’s Strategy College, said that KDF efforts to engage al-Shabaab via Twitter will gain nothing and advised the KDF press team to avoid engaging in such communications because these efforts will only help spread the militants’ message. [3]

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Notes:

1. Author’s interview with Abdirahman Taysiir, Nairobi, December 15, 2011.
2. Author’s interview with Elmi Abdi, an ICT student at Jomo Kenyatta University, Nairobi, December 16, 2011
3. Author’s interview with political analyst Ibrahim Sheikh, Nairobi, December 15, 2011

## “The Notion of Spring Does Not Exist in the Arab world”: Djibouti’s President Ismail Guelleh Wards off the Arab Spring

*Andrew McGregor*

In a recent interview with a French-language African news magazine, Djibouti’s head of state, Ismail Omar Guelleh, was asked if “the great wind of the Arab Spring” had “blown as far as Djibouti?” Guelleh, leader of Djibouti since 1999, quickly dismissed the notion: “The Holy Koran talks of ‘summer and winter voyages.’ The notion of spring does not exist in the Arab world” (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10). [1]

The importance of Djibouti to American strategic planning was reinforced this month by a visit to the small African nation from U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, who said partnerships with nations such as Djibouti were essential to the American counterterrorism effort (AP, December 13). Djibouti is home to the American Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), a mission of over 3,000 troops engaged in counterterrorism, anti-piracy, surveillance and humanitarian missions. The Task Force is centered on Camp Lemonnier, a former Foreign Legion installation leased by the United States in 2001. The U.S. facility also serves as a base for CIA-operated drones carrying out missions over Somalia and elsewhere.

Government in Djibouti has been dominated by the ruling Rassemblement populaire pour le Progrès (RPP - People’s Rally for Progress) since independence in 1977. After serving as chief of the secret police, Guelleh succeeded his uncle, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, as the nation’s second ruler in 1999. Opposition leaders are routinely jailed before or after elections, leading to election boycotts in 2005 and in 2011 after Guelleh amended the constitution to allow for a third six-year term. Guelleh had previously promised his second term would be his last. The president justifies his reluctance to share power by citing an excuse used frequently by authoritarian rulers: “This time round, I will not change my mind. I did not want this last mandate. It is a forced mandate, because the people felt there was no one ready to take over” (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

## Djibouti's Strategic Importance

Djibouti, a small, hot and otherwise insignificant country of 8,500 square miles nevertheless occupies one of the most strategic pieces of real estate in the world. Close to many of the major oil-producing regions in the Middle East, Djibouti occupies the western side of the Bab al-Mandab, the southern entrance to the Red Sea and ultimately the Suez Canal. Djibouti is also the place where the great east African Rift Valley meets the Gulf of Aden. The deep, fifty-mile-long Gulf of Tadjoura, protected by the Musha Islands at its entrance from the Gulf of Aden, provides an excellent natural harbor for naval and commercial ships, a fact quickly noted by the French imperialists who arrived in the region in 1862, acquiring the port of Obock from local Sultans as a foothold in the region. The modern port of Djibouti City lies on the southern side of the Gulf of Tadjoura and has historically played a major role in projecting French force and influence into Asia. [2]

Djibouti has played a military role in both world wars, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, the Suez War of 1956 (as part of France's Operation Toredor), the Gulf War of 1991 (as a base of French operations) and now the current conflict in Somalia (including anti-piracy operations).

Until recently, Djibouti was home for 49 years to one of the world's most famous fighting forces. The 13th Demi-Brigade of the French Foreign Legion was formed in 1941 from legionnaires who rallied to the Free French cause. The unit was initially created to participate in the attack on Narvik in Norway, but later served in heavy fighting on more familiar desert turf in Syria, Eritrea and most notably in Libya at the Battle of Bir Hakeim. During its nine post-war years in Indo-China the unit took terrible losses, particularly at the 1952 Battle of Hoa Binh and the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu. After service in Algeria the 13th was assigned to permanent residence in Djibouti in 1962. After deploying from Djibouti to missions in Somalia, Rwanda and the Côte d'Ivoire, the 13th left Djibouti last June for a new French base in the United Arab Emirates. (Defense.gouv.fr, June 20).

Djibouti is also home to another unique military formation, the 5e Régiment interarmes d'outre-mer (5e RIAOM), the last combined arms (infantry, artillery and armor) regiment in the French army. The 5e RIAOM is the successor of the 5e Régiment d'infanterie de marine (RIMa - colonial infantry), which deployed one

company of troops to protect the newly acquired port of Obock in 1890. The unit in one form or another had already participated in the assault on Russian forts in the Baltic Sea during the Crimean War as well as colonial campaigns in China, Mexico and Vietnam. In the 20th century the unit was disbanded and recreated several times under slightly different names while participating in campaigns in the Great War, World War II and the Indo-China War. The unit was re-established as the 5e RIAOM in 1969 with the mission of guarding French interests in Djibouti and being available to support French military operations in Africa or the Middle East. The RIAOM is supported by a section of Gazelle and Puma military helicopters.

An agreement reached in May 2010 allowed the Russian Navy to use port facilities in Djibouti but did not provide for the establishment of a land forces base or permanent Russian naval facility. The agreement allowed Russia to deploy warships in the region on anti-piracy or other missions without the necessity of using supply ships (Shabelle Media Network, May 17; 2010; Interfax, May 17, 2010; see also *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, May 28, 2010). The first ever visit to Moscow by a Djiboutian Foreign Minister in October highlighted the growing relations between Djibouti and Russia (Buziness Africa [Moscow], October 20; Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, December 13).

Japan has also identified Djibouti as an important asset in the protection of its vast commercial shipping fleet. A Japanese naval base and an airstrip for Japanese Lockheed P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft opened in July as a port for ships of Japan's Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF). Japan typically deploys a pair of destroyers on rotation in the Gulf of Aden on counter-piracy operations as well as members of the Special Boarding Unit (SBU), a Hiroshima-based Special Forces unit patterned after the U.K.'s Special Boat Service (SBS) (Kyodo News, July 31, 2009; AFP, April 23, 2010).

## Djibouti and the Winds of the Arab Spring

Protests against the regime in Djibouti calling for Guelleh's resignation began at roughly the same time as the Tunisian revolution and the beginning of the Egyptian revolution in late January 2011. Mass arrests of demonstrators quelled the demonstrations by March, but the problems behind the protests remained unresolved (al-Jazeera, February 18; Reuters, March 4). Though Djibouti is not an Arab nation, its proximity to Yemen, its Muslim majority and its membership in the



Arab League mean that developments in the Arab world are often influential in Djibouti's political development.

Guelleh denies the protests had any political motivation, suggesting they were simply an "expression of a purely social malaise, which some big-wigs of the opposition wanted to transform into a revolution... very quickly, it all degenerated into looting... It was, in a much reduced form, the equivalent of [the London riots] in early August. The only difference is that over there, if the media are to be believed, the British police simply restored order when confronted with the urban riots, whereas here we were said to have savagely quelled the peaceful protests" (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

A lingering insurgency by the ethnic-Afar Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie (Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy - FRUD) has survived the 2001 peace agreement that brought an end to a ten-year civil war, with some Afar militants still set on deposing President Guelleh (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 25, 2009). The Afar (also known as Danakil after their home territory in northern Djibouti) form roughly a third of the nation's population, with the majority of the population formed from Somali clans, including the majority Issa (a sub-clan of the Dir) and smaller groups from the Isaaq clan and the Gadabursi, another Dir sub-clan. Religion is not a divisive force in Djibouti, with ninety-six percent of the population practicing Sunni Islam. The government is dominated by the Issa and to a lesser extent by the Isaaq and Gadabursi, with the Afar having only a small representation in the cabinet. For a time in the 1960s, Djibouti was known by the name "Territoire français des Afars et des Issas," reflecting a short-lived desire to build a post-independence partnership between the two peoples.

President Guelleh has been accused of repressing dissent and an independent press, but denies these charges: "It is not a problem of censorship, but a problem of money. In Djibouti, there are neither investors nor advertisers in this [media] domain, and the potential readership is very much reduced. Here, people prefer to talk endlessly" (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

Guelleh regularly derides the opposition in Djibouti as immature and incapable of participating in the democratic process: "In Djibouti the conception of democracy that these gentlemen have is as follows: either one is the head or one seeks to topple the head. They have neither the patience nor the will to take care

of the rest" (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

#### Development in Djibouti

The majority of Djiboutians live in the port city while the rest tend to live as nomadic pastoralists in the harsh conditions of the countryside. Unemployment ranges between 40 percent to 50 percent and provides a source of dissatisfaction with the regime. Other than its strategic location, Djibouti has little to trade on; both resources and industry (other than a small fishing sector) are nearly non-existent.

Djibouti has launched an ambitious \$330 million plan to triple its port capacity by 2014 by enlarging the existing container terminal and constructing two new cargo terminals. The port is currently managed by Dubai's DP World. Much of the new commercial traffic is expected to arrive through a modernized rail line from Addis Ababa and a new rail line from Mekele. Since the loss of Eritrea, land-locked Ethiopia has increasingly relied on a traditional commercial route through Djibouti to the sea. Some 70 percent of the traffic passing through Djibouti originates in Ethiopia. The main stages in the new rail line from Addis to Djibouti are being built with Chinese financing by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and the China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) (Reuters, December 17).

Chinese firms are expanding their interests in Djibouti, particularly in the still-nascent energy sector. There is also speculation that Djibouti could be developed as an outlet to the sea for South Sudan (possibly including the shipment of oil products from Chinese companies working in South Sudan) as an alternative to using Port Sudan on the Red Sea in the now separate north Sudan. President Guelleh suggests that China is attentive to Djibouti's needs in a way that the rest of the international community sometimes is not. Describing Djibouti's search for assistance in the terrible drought experienced this year, Guelleh notes: "We were asking for \$30 million. Four months later, only China made a contribution of \$6 million. The rest? They are pledges without any hope of fulfillment" (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

Djibouti has also obtained Kuwaiti and Saudi funding for the construction of a new container terminal on the north side of the Tadjoura Gulf to relieve congestion in the port of Djibouti and enable the handling of greater traffic from Ethiopia (Agence Djiboutienne

d'Information, December 13).

Although Djibouti has not been directly affected by piracy, the phenomenon has led to many ships refusing to come to Djibouti, preferring to use alternative ports to avoid both pirates and rising insurance premiums. Guelleh has urged the international community to address this situation on land in Puntland and Somaliland rather than at sea, where years of international naval activity have failed to deal effectively with the problem (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

### Djibouti and Somalia

On December 14, Djibouti held a ceremony to mark the long-awaited dispatch of a unit of 850 men and 50 instructors of the 3,500 man Forces Armées Djiboutiennes (FAD) to Somalia to join the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The force, the first Djiboutian military unit to serve outside of the homeland, is under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Osman Doubad Sougouleh (Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, December 14).

Al-Shabaab has been angered by Djibouti's hosting of French and American training for troops of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and has promised retaliatory strikes within Djibouti should FAD troops arrive in Somalia to aid AMISOM operations (Garowe Online, September 18, 2009). President Guelleh says the nation is remaining vigilant, but "on the other hand, I am not overestimating the Shabaab's capacity for causing harm; a 2,000 km stretch separates us from their Baidoa stronghold." Guelleh says he is seeking French military assistance to make Djibouti capable of defending itself, being well aware that French troops do "not want to die for Ras Doumeira [the border territory disputed with Eritrea]" (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

President Guelleh has expressed his sympathy for the task set for the TFG in building a new government in an ungoverned nation: "They have nothing. To try to establish one's authority over a country at war, without revenue, to be constantly solicited [and] harassed by a suffering population is not an easy task" (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

### Regional Relations

Guelleh is one of the most prominent defenders of Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) with genocide,

war crimes and crimes against humanity related to the government's repression of the insurgency in Darfur. According to Guelleh:

Al-Bashir is not what they say he is. He is the only Sudanese leader who has had the courage of negotiating with the south, going as far as amputating his country in the name of peace. Do remember the way those who are opposing him today were treating southern Sudanese as slaves, beginning with [former Sudanese Prime Minister] Sadiq el-Mahdi! They threw this Darfur wrench in [al-Bashir's] works by inventing a scarecrow of pseudo-genocide. It was a fable concocted by evangelists and pro-Israeli lobbies (*Jeune Afrique*, December 10).

Al-Bashir attended Guelleh's inauguration in May alongside the French Cooperation Minister and the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Karl Wycoff (Sudan Tribune, May 8). As a signatory of the ICC Statute, Djibouti was required to arrest al-Bashir but, like Chad and Kenya, Djiboutian authorities have declined to do so.

Djibouti has clashed twice with Eritrea (most recently in 2008) over respective claims to ownership of the Ras Doumeira peninsula along the Eritrea-Djibouti border. In the 2008 border fighting, French troops supplied logistical, medical and intelligence support to Djibouti under the terms of their common defense pact (BBC, June 13, 2008). The opposing forces are now separated in Ras Doumeira by a small Qatari buffer force.

### Conclusion

Though Djibouti's external security is assured by its French patron and the presence of an American military base, internally the situation is different, and the heavy-handed response of the security services seems at odds with the president's casual dismissal of last spring's protests as nothing more than "the expression of a social malaise." It also seems likely that Djibouti's new commitment to the African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia will invite some type of retaliation from al-Shabaab terrorists who have proven capable of carrying out operations as far afield from their southern Somali base as Kenya, Uganda, Puntland and Somaliland. It seems improbable that Guelleh will be able to survive his new six-year term without substantial internal

opposition, though a retaliatory strike by al-Shabaab might play into the regime's hands, allowing mass arrests and new measures of political repression to ensure Guelleh's eventual succession, if not by himself, then by other members of his family or the ruling RPP.

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Notes:

1. Guelleh refers here to the Surat Quraysh, the 106th chapter of the Quran, which refers to journeys by the Quraysh tribe (that of the Prophet Muhammad) "in winter and summer."
2. Charles W Koburger, *Naval Strategy East of Suez: The Role of Djibouti*, Praeger Publishing, 1992.