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Khalil Ibrahim

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CAPTURED BOKO HARAM SPOKESMAN UNDERGOES “INTENSE INTERROGATION”

After enduring strong criticism over the last two years for repeated intelligence failures in its struggle against Boko Haram militants, Nigeria’s State Security Service (SSS) appears to have scored a major intelligence coup with its capture of the Boko Haram spokesman, popularly known as “Abu Qaqa,” who is now said to be providing “very useful and verifiable information to his interrogators (*Vanguard* [Lagos], February 3).

The 42-year-old Boko Haram spokesman was retrieved from under his bed and arrested in an early morning raid in the city of Kaduna on February 1 after security services began tracking his mobile phone. After his arrest, Abu Qaqa was flown to Abuja for questioning at the SSS headquarters (*Punch* [Lagos], February 2). Abu Qaqa is unlikely to have an easy time in SSS captivity after threatening to kidnap or kill family members of agency personnel shortly before his arrest (*Nigerian Tribune*, February 12).

Wary of announcing his capture before his identity could be confirmed, the SSS initially denied making the arrest, but announced their man was indeed Abu Qaqa after the detainee “buckled under intense interrogation,” according to a source in the security services (*Vanguard* [Lagos], February 3).

Some of the confusion appeared to have been caused by the wide number of aliases used by the Boko Haram spokesman, including Muhammad Shauibu, Muhammad Bello, Abu Tiamiya, and Abdulrahman Abdullahi. Reflecting Abu

Qaqa's success at covering his identity, interrogators also discovered that their suspect was actually a member of the Ebira tribe of Kogi State rather than an Igala as they had thought earlier.

A member of Boko Haram claiming to be Abu Qaqa confirmed that a leading member of the movement had been arrested, but insisted it was actually the group's chief of "public enlightenment" Abu Dardaa. Security services are convinced that "Abu Dardaa" is simply one of Abu Qaqa's many aliases (AFP, February 3; *Nigerian Tribune*, February 4).

Following confirmation of the spokesman's arrest bombings came in Kano and Maiduguri, where units of Nigeria's elite Joint Task Force (JTF) are engaged in bitter street battles with Boko Haram fighters (al-Jazeera, February 6; *This Day* [Lagos], February 7; *Vanguard* [Lagos], February 3).

Sources said to be close to the interrogation claim the Boko Haram spokesman has revealed ethnic divisions within the movement, with the Hausa-Fulani members observing that Kanuri members are rarely arrested in comparison to the large number of arrests of Hausa-Fulani members. Suspicion of betrayal by the Kanuris threatens to split the movement, according to Abu Qaqa: "Some of us, the non-Kanuri... were worried at the trend of arrests of our members. It is either that the security agents were so good at their job or some of our members were moles giving us out. The worrying aspect was that most of our key members arrested were non-Kanuri..." (*This Day* [Lagos], February 7; *The Nation* [Lagos], February 6).

Abu Qaqa is also reported to have told interrogators that internal criticism of Boko Haram attacks on civilians was ruthlessly repressed by the movement's leader: "Before I was arrested, some of us had already shown signs of tiredness. Most of us were tired of fighting but we couldn't come out to say so because of fear of reprisal from the leader, Imam Shekau, on dissenting members. Several of our members that denounced the violent struggle were slaughtered in front of their wives and children. Seven were killed recently" (*Nigerian Tribune*, February 7; *This Day* [Lagos], February 7).

Abu Qaqa is best known for announcing Boko Haram's responsibility for the brutal Christmas Day, 2011 bombing that killed 37 people and a series of attacks in Kano in January that resulted in the deaths of 186 people (Reuters, February 1). Qaqa recently told the

Guardian in an exclusive interview that Boko Haram members were spiritual followers of al-Qaeda and the late Osama bin Laden. The spokesman further said that Boko Haram leader Muhammad Abubakr Shekau had met al-Qaeda leaders in Saudi Arabia in August and was able to obtain from al-Qaeda whatever financial and technical support the movement needed. Recruits from Chad, Cameroon and Niger had joined Boko Haram, according to its spokesman, who also promised that all Nigerians would need to follow the group's inflexible version of Shari'a should the movement take power: "There are no exceptions. Even if you are a Muslim and you don't abide by Shari'a, we will kill you. Even if you are my own father, we will kill you." (*Guardian*, January 27).

Nigerian reports suggest several Western intelligence agencies, including the CIA, are now assisting in the hunt for the fugitive Boko Haram leader, Imam Muhammad Abubakr Shekau, who is believed to be hiding in a village in Cameroon, close to the Nigerian border, after having abandoned an earlier refuge in a village in Niger. After Abu Qaqa's arrest, Shekau is said to be relying solely on trusted couriers to remain in communication with his movement (*Nigerian Tribune*, February 6).

SINAI BEDOUIN REJECT EGYPT'S "MILITARY-ISLAMIST ALLIANCE"

The Sinai's well-armed but marginalized Bedouin community has accused Egypt's ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) of "treason" and has threatened a general insurgency if SCAF continues to ignore their quest for greater political representation, return or compensation of land expropriated for tourist developments and the liberation of hundreds of Bedouin men who were arrested without charge in 2004-2007. Bedouin representatives have suggested that Egypt's new Islamist-dominated parliament is designed to serve the military that created it. According to Ahmed Hussein, a leader of the Qararsha tribe of South Sinai, the Bedouin will not recognize a parliament without Bedouin representation and will reject the "alliance between the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and a certain Islamic party [i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood]" (*Bikya Masr* [Cairo], January 17).

The Sinai's Bedouin community has been at odds with government security forces following the latter's heavy-handed response to a series of bombings in Sinai tourist resorts between 2004 and 2006. Thousands of young Bedouin men were arrested and tortured, with many remaining in Egyptian prisons today without trial or even charges having been laid. Though there were expectations this situation would be rectified after the collapse of the Mubarak regime, the military government has done nothing to date.

On February 5, a blast in North Sinai severed the pipeline carrying Egyptian natural gas to Israel and Jordan. The pipeline has come under attack at least 12 times since Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was toppled in February 2011 (Reuters, February 5). The pipeline has become a symbol of the corruption of the Mubarak regime, with many Egyptians believing the unusually low price of the gas provided to Israel in a 20 year deal was the result of behind-the-scenes payoffs to the Mubarak family and their business associates. The Egyptian loss on the deal is estimated at \$714 million.

Jordan has been forced to raise electricity prices this month to cover the cost of imported fuel needed to replace the interrupted Egyptian gas supply. Jordan agreed last October to a substantial increase in payments and Israel may soon be asked to do the same (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 5). The pipeline currently provides 40% of Israel's gas requirements. Most electricity in Israel is now generated by natural gas and the loss of gas

supplies means more expensive diesel and fuel oil must be substituted at an additional cost of nearly \$3 million per day (Ahram Online, January 24).

Most of the pipeline bombings appear to be the work of Islamist militant groups operating in the northern Sinai. One such group, Ansar al-Jihad, claimed responsibility for the latest attack, describing it as retaliation for the death in prison of their leader, Muhammad Eid Musleh Hamad (a.k.a. Muhammad Tihi). Hamad was arrested on November 13 in connection to previous pipeline bombings (Ma'an News Agency [Bethlehem]/Reuters, February 5).

Ansar al-Jihad announced its formation on December 20, 2011, pledging to carry out the work begun by the late Osama bin Laden (Sinam al-Islam, December 20, 2011). The group further proclaimed its full support in January of current al-Qaeda leader Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, a veteran Egyptian jihadist (Sinam al-Islam, January 24; *al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], January 26).

The latest pipeline attack was only one of a series of incidents in the last few weeks that indicate a growing unrest in the Sinai region and a greater willingness on the part of the Bedouin community to resort to arms to achieve their aims:

- On January 24, dozens of Bedouin gunmen seized the Aqua Sun, a Red Sea hotel, as part of an effort to reclaim traditional lands lost in the 1990s when the Egyptian government sold coastal properties to private developers. Well-armed with automatic weapons, the gunmen demanded that the hotel owners either return the land or buy it from the Bedouin. Egyptian military authorities did not respond to the hotel management's pleas for action to retake the property and release the employees held hostage by the gunmen, saying they could not undertake military operations in the area without Israeli approval (*Bikya Masr* [Cairo], January 24).
- On January 26 masked gunmen in two 4x4 vehicles tried to plant explosives on a North Sinai natural gas plant. Their arrival appears to have been known beforehand to soldiers and local guards at the site, who engaged the attackers in a

gun battle (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], January 26).

- A wave of bank robberies in the Sinai by well-armed Bedouin has shocked many in Egypt, where such crimes have been extremely rare. In one such incident on January 28, two Egyptians and one French tourist were killed in the gunfire that followed a police ambush on a band of armed Bedouin that had just robbed a bank in Sharm al-Sheikh of L.E.

2 million. With a further two tourists injured in the crossfire, the robbery struck a further blow to Egypt's faltering tourism industry.

- On January 31, a group of armed Bedouin seized 25 Chinese workers from a Sinai cement factory with the intention of holding the group hostage until the Egyptian government released five relatives of the gunmen who were originally detained in 2004 after an attack on the tourist resort of Taba (AFP, February 1). The abducted Chinese workers were released within 15 hours, suggesting concessions were made by the military government, though details of what prompted the release remain scarce (Xinhua, February 1; *Bikya Masr* [Cairo], February 1). One of the demands made for the release of the 25 Chinese workers called for a halt to gas exports to Israel (*al-Abram Weekly* [Cairo], February 2-8).

- On February 3, two American women were abducted by Bedouin gunmen on their way from St. Catherine's monastery in the south Sinai to the resort of Sharm al-Sheikh. The gunmen, apparently members of the Qararsha tribe of South Sinai, were seeking the release of two detained relatives whom police described as drug dealers apprehended in a violent arrest on January 28 which saw three police officers wounded and one Bedouin killed. The women, who reported they were well treated during a brief captivity, were released after several hours when police promised to review the case of the two

Bedouin detainees (Reuters, February 3; AP, February 4).

In light of the growing unrest in the region, Israel is intent on accomplishing three goals along the Sinai border: 1) Seal off the tunnel network used to smuggle goods and arms into Gaza, 2) Prevent further infiltration of the border by African refugees and drug traffickers, and 3) Insulate Israel from the growing insecurity in the Sinai without having to approve the deployment of larger numbers of Egyptian troops in the region, as required by the 1978 Camp David Accords. To accomplish these goals, Israel is constructing a massive border fence and a secondary defense line several kilometers back. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is awaiting financial approval to deploy remote control gun systems in a series of pillboxes along this line. Reservists normally deployed on border security duties have been replaced by Israeli regulars (YNet News, February 6).

On the other side of the border, Egyptian police have adopted a hard-line "shoot first" policy to prevent Africans from attempting to cross into Israel. Two Africans killed at the border on January 21 were among dozens killed by Egyptian border guards in the last few years (*Bikya Masr* [Cairo], January 21).

Syria's Surprising Release of Jihadi Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri

Murad Batal al-Shishani

After weeks of rumours, a well-known contributor to jihadi web forums has confirmed the release from a Syrian prison of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (real name Mustafa Abdul-Qadir Mustafa al-Set Mariam), one of the most prominent jihadi ideologues and strategists (Shamikh1.info, February 2). The contributor, who uses the name "Assad al-Jihadi 2," frequently provides insights into the strategies of al-Qaeda and affiliated groups in the Levant and Syria and is believed to be well-connected with the leaders of these organizations (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 26, 2009). As such, his confirmation of al-Suri's release can be considered credible.

Born in Aleppo and 54 years old, al-Suri is an experienced jihadist ideologue that fought against the Syrian regime in the early 1980s and arranged interviews with Osama Bin Laden for Western journalists while he was in "Londonistan" in the early 1990s. Al-Suri also ran two training camps in Afghanistan and later theorized global jihadist strategies (see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 15, 2005; September 1, 2006; February 21, 2007; *Terrorism Focus*, May 9, 2006). [1]

Al-Suri is one of the leading developers of geopolitical strategies for al-Qaeda and the jihad movement in general. He urged jihadists to strengthen their position in Central Asia and to use Yemen as a launching pad against the neighbouring Gulf States. The current flow of fighters to their home countries in Central Asia from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region as well as the presence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen shows the influence of al-Suri's ideas. While it is true that jihadists are driven by conditions on the ground, such ideas have nonetheless played a major role in shaping the movement's ideology.

However, al-Suri's most important product is the over-1500-page book *Da'wat al-Moqawma al-Islamiyah* (Global Islamic Resistance Call), in which he discussed the Afghan Jihad and the Islamic movements which it inspired, as well as reviewing military tactics, propaganda, and fundraising methods. Al-Suri's central theory is what he calls *nitham la tanthim* ("a system, not an organization.") He has promoted the idea that jihadist movements should work according to a system;

they should target the close enemy (local regimes) or the far one (United States, Israel, India, etc.) in a way that reveals there is agreement over the general aims of the Salafi-jihadist movements without the need for organizational orders. This theory applies to the so-called "individual jihad."

Al-Suri's strategic insights into "the jihad in Syria" are not limited to the confrontation with the Syrian regime, but also presented a sort of a guide to "the failure of the jihadist experience in Syria," referring to the confrontation between the Syrian regime and Muslims Brotherhood in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He attributed this "failure" to a lack of strategy and planning, unified ideology, jihadist theory and weaknesses in informational and media groundwork.

Since March 2011, Syria has witnessed demonstrations demanding the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad and an end to the rule of the Ba'ath Party on a daily basis. While the protesters insist on the peaceful nature of their political movement, the Syrian regime justifies its violent reaction by claiming they are confronting "Takfiri-Salafi armed groups." All indicators show that no "Takfiri-Salafi armed groups" are involved in leading the democratic protests in Syria.

However, the violence that the regime is using against protestors might inadvertently lead to radicalization and the emergence of new jihadists as well as provoking existing Syrian jihadists. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 played a major role in generating local jihadist networks in Syria (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 26, 2009). As recently as January 24, jihadist forums posted a video announcing the establishment of a new jihadi group in Syria, *Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham* (The Front for the Protection of the Syrian People) created to fight against the Syrian regime and defend the Syrian people. The video was produced by the group's media company *al-Manara al-Baida* (White Beacon).

In this context, al-Suri's release by the Syrian regime raises questions as to the purposes behind such a decision and the implications of this action if al-Suri was released healthy and able to assume jihadist activities. By this action, the Syrian regime is conveying a powerful message to the United States at a time when the Obama Administration is insisting on the departure of Bashar al-Assad. The message essentially reads; there will be no more counter-terrorism cooperation. Al-Suri's rendition to Syria and Syrian action to prevent jihadists from using Syria to cross into Iraq were manifestations

of this cooperation. The Syrian regime assumes that if al-Suri launches any operations inside Syria it would be able to contain them after conveying their message to the United States.

Nonetheless, the Syrian regime may be underestimating al-Suri's abilities as a jihadist and his potential to pose a threat to the regime in the context of the on-going political turmoil. In the 1970s, Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat turned a blind eye to jihadists' activities in Egypt to balance the power of the Muslim Brotherhood. A few years later, the same jihadists assassinated al-Sadat. Syria's experience with contemporary jihadists is quite similar with the regime turning a blind eye to the volunteers travelling through Syria to Iraq to fight against American troops there. Despite the "mutual interests" shared by jihadists and the Syrian regime in fighting American troops in Iraq, the enmity between the parties is genuine, and jihadists could not be used by the Syrian regime to further its own interests.

With his experience and ideological charisma, al-Suri could serve as an inspiration for Syrian jihadists, especially in promoting the concept of "individual jihad," which could form part of a backlash to the American reliance on drones to target al-Qaeda leaders and operatives. While al-Qaeda and affiliated jihadist groups are facing difficulties from drone attacks and the political impact of the Arab Spring, al-Suri could significantly boost "lone wolf" operations by potential suicide bombers and his ideological influence will be obvious if a new jihadist battlefield is opened in Syria. It is also worth noting that al-Suri, with his strong popularity on the internet (most jihadi web forums celebrated his release), could play a major role in advancing and rejuvenating online jihadist strategies.

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Note:

1. For a well-written account of al-Suri, see: Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri*. New York, 2008.

Somalia's Transitional Government Seeks to Finish Off al-Shabaab This Year

Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

The popularity of Somalia's al-Shabaab militants is slowly declining for many reasons, including a growing financial crisis and infighting in the movement's leadership. Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is taking advantage of the group's current weakness by opening different fronts against the militants. The 2012 assignment for the TFG forces backed by African Union peacekeepers is to drive the militants from Somalia. TFG Deputy Prime Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, Defence Minister Hussein Arab Iise and Somali Forces Commander General Abdikarim Yusuf Aden "Dhagabadan" have on different occasions stated the TFG's ambition of defeating al-Shabaab within a year. [1]

Al-Shabaab is being pursued by joint forces on two fronts, with troops from the TFG and Kenya in the south and Somali militias allied to the TFG operating in league with Ethiopian force in the west, forcing al-Shabaab to fall back to their strongholds.

On the last day of 2011 Ethiopian troops and TFG-allied militias seized the strategic town of Beledweyne (Hiraan Province) from al-Shabaab forces (Shabelle Media Network [Mogadishu], December 31, 2011; Radio Muqdisho, December 31, 2011; Bar-kulan Radio [Mogadishu], December 31, 2011). Al-Shabaab had earlier struck at the Ethiopians in Beledweyne on January 24 with a suicide-bombing that collapsed a building occupied by Ethiopian troops. Al-Shabaab claimed to have killed ten Ethiopians in the attack (Raxanreeb Online, January 24; BBC, January 24). Ethiopia is interested in withdrawing its force from Hiraan Province and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has pledged to replace the Ethiopian troops in the coming weeks (Garowe Online, January 14). The loss of Beledweyne led to al-Shabaab's withdrawal from Buulo Burde, another important town in central Somalia.

TFG forces are also pressuring the Islamist fighters in the southwest Somalia region of Bakool, which borders Ethiopia. TFG forces commander General Abdikarim Yusuf Aden announced that the establishment of new frontlines against al-Shabaab was part of this year's assignment to sweep al-Shabaab out of Somalia (Somali

National News Agency/Radio Muqdisho, January 3).

Somali Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ibrahim and Defense Minister Hussein Arab Iise have both called 2012 the year of liberation. The campaign to retake Somalia has already begun. On January 20, TFG forces backed by African Union peacekeepers attacked the last al-Shabaab bases in Mogadishu. The offensive succeeded in ousting the movement from the capital and even resulted in the seizure of al-Shabaab bases beyond the capital. The spokesman of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Ankunda, said the operation was a major step: “This is the first time AMISOM has been able to secure an area outside the parameters of the city, allowing us to defend greater Mogadishu from the exterior.” [2]

Mogadishu has been a key priority for the government, which has been fighting to gain control of city since 2009. Pushing al-Shabaab out of the capital is the biggest achievement made by Somali soldiers and AMISOM since the AU peacekeeping mission began five years ago. However, it is unlikely that the operation will restore Mogadishu to full peace and security. When al-Shabaab pulled out from Mogadishu last August, TFG and AMISOM forces were compelled to consolidate their control of the city slowly. “With the failure of Somali government soldiers to occupy the [whole] city, al-Shabaab returned to some strategic places and accomplished their guerilla war which defused government and AMISOM soldiers in Mogadishu.” said Abdiwali Osman, a Mogadishu-based political analyst. [3]

General Abdikarim Yusuf Aden said the on-going military offensive against al-Shabaab was the latest attempt to eliminate the group, which was threatening to advance to areas close to Mogadishu such as Lower Shabelle’s Elasha Biyaha and Jowhar, about 90 km north of Mogadishu. [4] AMISOM is currently preparing the second phase of the mission, which is to expand government administration into the whole country. In September 2011, AU representative Wafula Wamunyinyi said that the number of AU peacekeepers on the ground was only sufficient to deal with Mogadishu, but there are now pledges from Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti and Sierra Leone to provide enough troops to cover the rest of Somalia. So far, however, only two hundred soldiers from Djibouti have arrived to reinforce AMISOM. [5]

The African Union extended the AMISOM mandate a further 12 months on January 5 to take advantage of the

unique opportunity created by the operations currently being conducted against al-Shabaab in different parts of Somalia. However, al-Shabaab remains active in the capital through a series of grenade attacks, assassinations and roadside bombings (AFP, January 19; Garowe Online, January 29). According to the movement’s military spokesman, Shaykh Abdul Aziz Abu Mus’ab, the war between Shabaab forces and TFG/AMISOM troops has entered a new phase and encouraged civilians to avoid being around Somali government bases. [6]

Nevertheless, al-Shabaab fighters are not far from Mogadishu. Their closest stronghold is Elasha Biyaha, just 20 km southwest of Mogadishu. Although government forces have seized strategic bases from al-Shabaab in Mogadishu, the more sophisticated fighters of al-Shabaab and their commanders are believed to have remained in the city. As the movement promised, these fighters have launched a wave of asymmetric attacks such as suicide bombings, ambushes and IED attacks in the streets and government bases of Mogadishu. Government soldiers and AMISOM peacekeepers who failed to secure Mogadishu after al-Shabaab’s withdrawal in August are now trying to do in one year something they failed to do in the previous five years – eliminate Somalia’s resilient Islamist militants.

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Notes:

1. State-owned Muqdisho Radio interview with Defence Minister Hussein Arab, December 31, 2011.
2. Press Conference held by AMISOM spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Ankunda, Mogadishu, January 20, 2012.
3. Author’s interview with Abdiwali Osman, political analyst, Mogadishu, January 23, 2012.
4. Somali National News Agency interview with TFG forces commander General Abdikarim Yusuf Aden “Dhagabadan,” January 2, 2012.
5. Press conference held by Wafula Wamunyinyi, the Deputy Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU mission for Somalia, Nairobi, September 21, 2011. For the Djibouti contingent, see AFP, December 20, 2011.
6. Press conference via telephone held by al-Shabaab military spokesman Shaykh Abu Mus’ab, January 21, 2012.

The Strange Death of Dr. Khalil Ibrahim and the Future of the Darfur Insurgency

Andrew McGregor

Khartoum scored a major victory in its nearly nine-year-old conflict with Darfur rebels with the December 24 killing of Dr. Khalil Ibrahim, leader of Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the best armed and most organized of the Darfur rebel groups. Khalil rose to the top of Sudan's most-wanted list after his fighters made an audacious cross-country raid on Khartoum/Omdurman, bringing Sudan's civil war to the national capital for the first time. Though the raid was repulsed in the streets of Omdurman, the bold attack and the military's failure to rally to the regime left the government badly shaken (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 15, 2008). [1]

The JEM leader's death will most likely represent a major setback for the newly formed Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), a broad-based armed opposition movement that includes the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army – North (SPLM/A – N), the Beja Congress of east Sudan and three Darfur rebel movements, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the largely Fur Sudan Liberation Movement/Army – Abdel Wahid (SLM/A – AW), and the largely Zaghawa Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi (SLM/A – MM) (See *Terrorism Monitor*, November 24, 2011).

Who Killed Khalil Ibrahim?

Government sources reported Khalil was killed along with 30 of his men in the Wad Banda area of Northern Kordofan during a clash with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). The SAF claimed to have been chasing a JEM force of 300 fighters and 140 vehicles since December 19 (Sudan Vision, December 25, 2011; Sudan News Agency [SUNA], December 25, 2011). SAF sources said the final clash was preceded by a battle at the village of Um Jar near the border between North Kordofan and North Darfur. JEM forces then passed through Wadi Hawar before engaging in fierce fighting with Kababish Arabs near Um Badir in northern Kordofan. Local officials claimed the surviving JEM forces were trying to move southeastward to South Sudan through the Bahr al-Arab region (Sudanese Media Center [SMC], January 2).

However, according to senior JEM commander Sulayman Sandal Hagar, Khalil and a bodyguard were killed by a precision strike by three rockets while the JEM leader was sleeping in his vehicle (Sudan Vision, January 2). A leading JEM official, Mahmoud Suleiman, said the movement did not yet want to expose the parties behind the assassination, but were in possession of “threads of the plot and our knowledge of the countries involved in the conspiracy and the plane that shot the lethal missile” (Sudan Tribune, December 31, 2011). The one party that could be ruled out, according to Suleiman, was the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), which did not have the technical capacity or capability of launching a jet-fighter missile strike of such precision. Suleiman also described reports of battles between the SAF and Khalil's column of 140 vehicles just prior to his death as “novel lies,” insisting that no fighting had taken place before the assassination. The JEM official suggested that JEM would take steps to open “a criminal case against those who participated in the planning and executing the plot,” leading to the “identification of the real perpetrators or those implicated and involved in the heinous crime.”

Khalil's interim successor, al-Tahir al-Faki also suggested that “all indications point to the act being non-Sudanese,” noting that at one point, a JEM group came under intensive fire from Sudan's ancient Antonov bombers (actually Soviet-era cargo planes converted to carry crude bombs) for six weeks while suffering only a single minor injury (*al-Hayat*, December 30). Sudan's small inventory of Chinese and Russian-made jet fighters is not known to operate at night. There is some evidence that Sudan operates a number of small Chinese and Iranian reconnaissance/surveillance drones, but does not operate tactical UAVs with weapons systems.

The purpose of the large movement of JEM fighters under Khalil's personal command was not immediately clear. A London-based JEM spokesman, Jibril Adam Bilal, announced that the convoy was on its way to the capital to make another attempt to forcibly topple the regime led by President Omar al-Bashir, wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur (Sudan Tribune, December 22, 2011). While JEM claimed that Khalil was leading his forces in a strike on Khartoum at the time of his death, Khartoum claimed the JEM leader was actually leading his forces into South Sudan (Sudan Tribune, December 25, 2011).

SAF spokesmen stated on January 3 that the SAF had detected 79 JEM vehicles carrying 350 combatants crossing into South Sudan on December 28, a claim that brought denials from Juba (Sudan Vision, January 6). The JEM forces were allegedly allowed to set up a training camp in Bahr al-Ghazal while the South Sudanese provided treatment for their wounded (Sudan Tribune, January 3). Juba has denied all such reports and reiterated its position that no members of any rebel group fighting against the Khartoum government were on South Sudanese soil (Sudan Tribune, January 19). State-backed media sources claimed in mid-November 2011 that 400 JEM rebels had arrived in South Sudan after receiving “intensive military training” in Israel but provided no evidence (Sudan Vision, November 13, 2011). Khartoum later charged Israel with supplying JEM with weapons and vehicles transferred to France and Chad (SMC, December 27, 2011). Khartoum perceives the deep involvement of many international Jewish organizations in Darfur “anti-genocide” campaigns to be orchestrated by Israel as part of an attempt to create insecurity in the Arab world.

JEM serves a political purpose for Khartoum as a tool in pressuring the newly independent South Sudan through complaints to the United Nations Security Council. Allegations that the SPLM is harboring JEM rebels provide some justification for Khartoum’s sponsorship of Southern dissident movements. Khartoum has also made two previous complaints to the UN Security Council against South Sudan for allegedly supporting military units of the SPLM/A-N, which operates in South Kordofan and Blue Nile State.

The Reaction

In Khartoum, government officials raised security levels and used teargas to drive away crowds of mourners who were gathering at the home of Khalil’s family in suburban Khartoum (Sudan Tribune, December 25). The government also closed two newspapers, *al-Wan* and *Rai al-Shabb*, for publishing interviews with Khalil or Jibril Ibrahim or publishing statements of support for Khalil from members of Hassan al-Turabi’s Popular Congress Party (PCP), where Khalil Ibrahim began his political career (Sudan Tribune, January 14). The PCP recently drew the attention of Sudan’s National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) over its production of a document outlining various scenarios for regime change in Sudan, including the possibilities of a military coup or a nation-wide popular uprising (Sudan Tribune, January 8).

Always eager to promote internal dissension in the ranks of the rebels, government sources provided unconfirmed reports that prominent JEM members from the Masalit and Erenga tribes of West Darfur had been “liquidated” for expressing satisfaction at the death of Khalil Ibrahim while other commanders were arrested on charges of complicity with JEM dissident Muhammad Bahr Hamdin (SMC, January 7). Hamdin was dismissed as the deputy leader of JEM in September 2011 after being charged with planning a coup against the JEM leadership (Radio Dabanga, September 25, 2011). Elements of JEM from the Masalit, Erenga, Meidob and Berti tribes were fiercely repressed in January 2008 after they took arms to protest the exclusion of members of these tribes from the JEM leadership dominated by members of the Kobe Zaghawa, particularly cousins and other relatives of Khalil Ibrahim.

Dr. Qutbi al-Mahdi, an official of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), said JEM was a “moribund” group after Khalil’s death and called on JEM members to abandon their arms and join the Doha peace agreement forged in July 2011 with a number of lesser rebel movements under the umbrella of Dr. Ibrahim al-Sisi’s Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) (Sudan Tribune, December 25, 2011; Sudan Vision, December 25, 2011).

President Omar Hassan al-Bashir described Khalil’s death as “a divine punishment for the crimes he perpetrated against the country and the people, for insisting on war to terrorize the innocent civilians and for his rejection of negotiations to achieve peace,” noting that “parties driven by foreign agendas” did not understand the consequences of the important changes that had taken place in the region, including the normalization or relations between Sudan and Chad that eliminated JEM’s rear bases in Chad, the fall of the Qaddafi regime and the conclusion of the Doha peace agreement between Khartoum and a number of second-level insurgent groups in Darfur (SMC/Sudan Vision, January 2).

The Succession

Despite Khalil’s sudden death, the mechanism for a JEM leadership change operated fairly smoothly, with the London-based head of the JEM legislative council, Dr. al-Tahir al-Faki, taking over as interim leader as specified in JEM’s protocols (Sudan Vision, January 2). Though al-Faki presented a public picture of unity, the fissures within the movement were already beginning to

appear.

JEM announced in late January that a two-day congress in South Kordofan (scene of an SPLM/A-N insurgency against Khartoum) had selected Khalil Ibrahim's brother Jibril as the new JEM leader over Ahmad Adam Bahkhit, an experienced field commander. Jibril, who has no military experience, had been teaching in London and serving as JEM's foreign relations chief at the time of his selection (AFP, January 26; Khalil's half-brother, Abd al-Aziz Nur Ushar, awaits execution in Khartoum after being captured in the May 2008 JEM assault on Omdurman). Officials in Khartoum claimed the congress was held, not in Kordofan, but in the South Sudan city of Bor (capital of Jonglei State), where it was attended by South Sudanese military and political officials. These sources also claimed that Jibril Ibrahim had reached Bor carrying a passport issued by the South Sudan (*al-Hayat*, January 27).

The JEM leadership followed Jibril's appointment with a display of bravado, announcing the next day that the movement still intended to enter Khartoum and al-Bashir's regime (*al-Hayat*, January 27).

Defections

Though the core leadership of JEM is largely limited to the Kobe branch of the non-Arab Zaghawa, a pastoral tribe straddling the Chad-Darfur border that has increasingly challenged Arab supremacy in Sudan, the movement is host to a range of factions and non-Zaghawa tribesmen that united under Dr. Khalil's leadership. Unlike the other Darfur rebel groups, JEM has also presented itself as a pan-Sudanese opposition movement, even mounting hit-and-run guerrilla operations in east Sudan in cooperation with the Beja Congress.

Defections from JEM or any of the other Darfur insurgent groups are not unusual and JEM, like many of the other movements, has been able to survive the merry-go-round of field commanders who generally respond to any dispute with their leadership by forming their own movement or joining a rival group. Nevertheless, there has been a severe escalation in the number of prominent JEM members who have left the movement since Khalil's death.

Some JEM members were reported to be ready to quit the movement and join the SLM/A-Democracy movement of former SLM/A-Unity and SLM/A-

Minnawi commander Ali Karbino in dissatisfaction with the interim leadership of al-Tahir al-Faki (who hails from Kordofan rather than Darfur and thus lacks tribal support) (SMC, January 8).

A group of JEM members led by Zakaria Musa Abbas "Dush" left the movement in mid-January to form yet another offshoot – the Justice and Equality Movement – Corrective Leadership (JEM – CL). The main grievance of the group is the dominance of Khalil Ibrahim's family and the Kobe Zaghawa in the JEM leadership. According to their founding statement: "The movement has turned into a family company to oppress revolutionaries in neighboring countries to strengthen dictatorial regimes; in addition to silencing mouths calling for reform within the institutions of the Movement. A certain group from one family has dominated big decisions to consolidate narrow tribalism and racism" (Sudan Vision, January 14). Another member of the "corrective leadership," Maulana Yusuf Issa Hamid Mukhair, said that JEM had alienated many members of the movement by arresting 12 members and imprisoning them in a Juba facility controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM – the ruling party in the new nation of South Sudan), further alleging that the prisoners had been tortured for three months. A JEM spokesman responded by acknowledging the movement was detaining 12 members who are being investigated regarding their possible collaboration with JEM's former commander in Kordofan, Muhammad Bahr Hamdin, but denied all allegations of torture or the involvement of the SPLM, insisting that the men were being detained in Darfur (Radio Dabanga, January 13). JEM-CL has indicated it is ready to sign on to the Doha Agreement.

Another member of the new group and a former JEM executive member, Omar Abdullah Karma, told a Khartoum press conference the JEM had fought for the Libyan regime of Mu'ammar Qaddafi (who was harboring Khalil Ibrahim after his expulsion from Chad) and lost many of its commanders there (Sudan Vision, January 18). Khartoum had insisted from the beginning of the Libyan revolution that JEM units were involved in the defense of the Qaddafi regime, though there is little evidence of the participation of large numbers of JEM fighters (see Jamestown Foundation Special Commentary, February 24, 2011).

JEM military commander-in-chief General Bahkhit Abd al-Karim Abdullah announced on January 2 that he had decided to leave JEM and sign on to the Doha agreement

(SMC, January 5). On February 4 government sources reported that JEM fighters in the Jabal Marra region under the command of Al-Toum Ababkr had left the movement in protest against the “lack of justice and transparency” in the process used to select Jibril Ibrahim as the new JEM commander (SMC, February 4).

Conclusion

Sudanese defense minister General Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Husayn has promised the armed forces would go on the offensive to smash the remnants JEM and then eliminate the remaining pockets of resistance in Darfur (al-Sahafah [Khartoum], January 15). President Bashir would be happy to be relieved of the threat JEM poses to his regime as he tries to deal with unrest and insurgencies in other parts of the country. Even Sudan’s Islamists, a traditional power base for the military/Islamist government, are showing signs of dissatisfaction with the regime; a memo signed by one thousand former Islamist mujahideen (i.e. volunteers in the civil war against South Sudan) denounced the ruling NCP’s corruption and poor governance (Sudan Tribune, January 17).

The change in leadership will undoubtedly send JEM in a different direction. Negotiation seems more congenial to Jibril’s temperament than the desperate cross-country raids perfected by Khalil Ibrahim’s columns of experienced desert fighters. A much weakened JEM may face a choice of joining the Doha Accords or suffering further defections. The choice of a foreign-based university lecturer as the new military and political commander of the movement appears to be a major mistake that will only reinforce the claims of JEM dissidents that the leadership is the monopoly of a single family that is unwilling to tolerate dissent within the movement. While JEM still has significant military assets, Jibril Ibrahim is unlikely to make good use of them before more JEM commander come to the conclusion that it is better to accept the amnesty and benefits offered by signing on to the Doha agreement than to remain in a movement that no longer has the personnel and resources to present a realistic challenge to Khartoum. The decline or collapse of JEM would likely result in potentially unendurable pressure on the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), the other leading insurgent group in Darfur. The collapse of the resistance in Darfur would likely make the Sudanese Revolutionary Forces alliance yet another failed attempt to unite Sudan’s armed opposition. After years of warfare

in Darfur, Khartoum (possibly through a mysterious benefactor) may have finally achieved its goals there with the death of one man. The question is whether the regime can survive other threats long enough to witness the breakdown of the Darfur insurgency and the success of Khartoum’s diplomatic and military efforts there despite international condemnation and indictments from the International Criminal Court.

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Note:

1. For a profile of the late JEM leader, see: Andrew McGregor, “A Close-up Look at Darfur’s Paramount Rebel Leader: Dr. Khalil Ibrahim,” *Militant Leadership Monitor*, January 30, 2010.