



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Karachi Violence

NEW YEMENI RESOLVE TO DEFEAT AL-QAEDA BEARING RESULTS IN LAWDAR

The battle for southern Yemen has intensified since the succession of Abd Rabu Mansur al-Hadi to the Yemen presidency and his subsequent vow to suppress the Islamist insurgency. The latest battleground in this struggle is the strategically located city of Lawdar in Abyan Governorate, where local volunteers bought time for state security forces in rebuffing an attempt by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and their Ansar al-Shari'a allies to take the city and expand their occupation zone in Abyan.

The battle in Lawdar comes at a time when the Yemeni armed forces are still badly divided and in the opening stages of major reforms and changes in the leadership, which is dominated by members of ex-president Ali Abdullah Salih's family. State forces engaged in the battle in Lawdar include the 111th Infantry Brigade and the 26th Republican Guard Brigade (*al-Mu'tamar* [Sana'a], April 14). The locally raised People's Defense Committees (PDC) have played a vital role in the battle, despite having no formal military training. Some of the ex-president's relatives have proven dangerously reluctant to relinquish their posts – Yemen's main airport was recently closed for a day after Yemen's Air Force commander, Muhammad Salih al-Ahmar (a half-brother of the ex-president) responded to his dismissal by shelling the airport before surrounding it with loyal tribesmen and military personnel (Yemen Times, April 7; Marib Press, April 9). An attempt to assess the combat-readiness of the Republican Guard was derailed by its commander, Ahmad Ali Abdallah Salih, the eldest son of the ex-president, who submitted a report containing "major errors and inaccurate numbers" (*al-Ahali* [Sana'a], April 14; *al-Jumhuriyah* [Ta'izz], April 15). The ex-president's

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nephew, Tariq Muhammad Abdallah Salih, has refused to hand over command of the 3rd Republican Guard Brigade (*Akhbar al-Yawm* [Sana'a], April 10). The new president has come under fierce attacks from local media outlets still loyal to the ex-president's family that oppose the dismissal of family members from top posts in the military and security services (*al-Ahali* [Sana'a], April 14).

The battle began on April 9 when Ansar al-Shari'a attacked the military barracks near the power station on the outskirts of Lawdar and seized a large variety of weapons that would be used in their attempt to take the city, including tanks, anti-aircraft guns, artillery and missile launchers (Ma'rib Press, April 10). The Yemeni Army initially withdrew, but the defense of the city was quickly taken by local youth and other civilians using their personal weapons, mainly AK-47s (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 10).

Yemeni fighter-jets were also active in striking militant training camps and other positions held by the Islamists in Abyan, though Ansar al-Shari'a claims U.S. drones have been responsible for some of the targeted attacks from the air (*Akhbar al-Yawm*, April 5; Reuters, April 16).

Dozens of militants were reported killed, including two senior commanders, in an April 11 operation to clear Islamist checkpoints from the highway outside of Lawdar. The Defense Ministry said that Saudis, Somalis and Pakistanis were among those killed (26September.net, April 11; Saba [Sana'a], April 11).

Pro-government forces claimed on April 13 to have arrested two al-Qaeda leaders, Jalal al-Saydi and Abd al-Ra'uf Nasir, though the latter's family has denied the report (*al-Mu'tamar*, April 13; *al-Masdar* [Sana'a], April 14). Nasir was reported to have been seized by members of the Lawdar Youths Gathering, a local militia formed to defend the city (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 15). Two senior al-Qaeda militants, Akram al-Hafizah and Ahmad Darawish, were reported killed on April 11 (*al-Mu'tamar*, April 11; Yemen Post, April 12). Yemen's Defense Ministry has also reported the death of Ansar al-Shari'a leader Ra'id al-Sa'id in Zinjibar, which is still held by the movement (Yemen Post, April 15; for Zinjibar see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 12, 2011).

Two hundred men of Yemen's American-trained Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) arrived in Abyan on April 14 to join the battle against the Islamist militants for the first

time. Under the command of the ex-president's relatives, this elite unit was withdrawn from counterterrorist operations in the provinces and deployed as a presidential guard in Sana'a last year after anti-government protests began (Yemen Times, April 16).

Arriving with the CTU was the new Abyan governor, Jamal al-Aqil, whose motorcade came under fire on his way to meet with local military commanders and leaders of the popular committees. Like al-Aqil, both President al-Hadi and Defense Minister Major General Muhammad Nasir Ali are from Abyan, which encourages those hoping for a greater government focus on reversing the successes the militants have achieved there during Yemen's political turmoil.

As the militants begin to crumble under military pressure in Abyan, AQAP has intensified its campaign of suicide bombings in Abyan and elsewhere in Yemen (AFP, April 6). Nonetheless, the battle for Lawdar is a major propaganda blow for the Islamist militants, who rather than being met as liberators, were instead repulsed by Lawdar's residents in league with military forces loyal to the new regime. If al-Hadi can unify the military (still no easy task) and maintain the momentum established at the battle for Lawdar, this may be remembered as the moment when the tide turned against AQAP and its allies in Yemen.

BORDER CLASHES SHUT DOWN OIL PRODUCTION AS THE TWO SUDANS PREPARE FOR NEW ROUND OF WAR

In response to South Sudan's surprise occupation of its northern neighbor's most productive oilfields, Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir announced on April 12 that South Sudan had "chosen the path of war" (Sudan Tribune, April 12).

With the support of the United States, South Sudan declared its independence in July 2011 without having first reached an agreement with Khartoum on vital issues such as oil revenues, transfer fees and border demarcation. Juba's occupation of the Heglig field goes well beyond applying pressure on Khartoum; it deprives its northern neighbor of revenues, foreign currency reserves and fuel. It also places an already unpopular regime in a corner from which it may feel it necessary to return to a state of war for its own survival. Khartoum might be able to buy peace with Juba and the return of Heglig by looking favorably on Southern claims in other border disputes, but this would be a humiliating response by a military/Islamist regime that cannot afford to show any weakness. In the meantime, the Sudanese pound is rapidly dropping in real value and lineups for petroleum products are growing longer by the day. However, South Sudan, which possesses no refineries, is also suffering a rapid decline in the value of its currency and is running short of hard-currency reserves needed to purchase refined petroleum products, much of these reserves having already been spent on Juba's massive re-armament program and expansion of its military.

The South Sudan maintains that Heglig was part of the southern region according to administrative divisions existing at the time of independence in 1956 and now appears to be rejecting a 2009 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague that Heglig lays inside the northern Sudan rather than the South. The Heglig oil fields, which are in gradual decline but still provide over half of Sudan's remaining oil production, are operated by the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Co. (GNPOC), a Chinese, Malaysian, Indian and Sudanese consortium. China, a major arms supplier for Khartoum, is reported to be shipping arms to South Sudan through the Kenyan port of Mombasa (*Nairobi Star*, April 8).

The occupation of Heglig is the latest stage in a growing battle over Sudan's oil wealth. Khartoum lost roughly 75% of its oil production with the separation of the South Sudan, where most of the oil is found. However,

the only outlet for this oil is via pipeline through the north to Port Sudan, which gave Khartoum the idea of replacing its lost revenues by charging transfer fees of \$36 per barrel rather than the going international rate of \$1 per barrel as well as siphoning off significant amounts of southern oil for its own use. Juba turned off the taps in January in protest even though oil exports account for 98% of South Sudan's budget (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 22). Khartoum has not backed down on the transfer fees, so Juba has apparently decided that if South Sudan must do without oil, so must Sudan.

South Sudan's information minister has indicated a withdrawal of Khartoum's forces from the disputed Abyei region would be among the conditions required for a South Sudanese pullout from Heglig (al-Jazeera, April 12; for Abyei see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, May 27, 2011). On March 15, South Sudan President Salva Kiir told an audience in Wau that border demarcation cannot begin until Khartoum acknowledges the Abyei region belongs to South Sudan. [1] President Kiir has been unresponsive to international pleas to pull his forces back, complaining that he has been unable to sleep because of telephone calls from international leaders: "The UN secretary-general [called] yesterday; he gave me an order... to immediately withdraw from Heglig. I said, "I'm not under your command" (al-Jazeera, April 12; Sudan Tribune, April 12).

The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) maintains their advance into Heglig came in response to an incursion into the oilfields of South Sudan's Unity State with two brigades of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) regulars, 16 tanks and various pro-Khartoum militias. The SAF were defeated by the SPLA's 4th Division under General James Gatduel Gatluak and pursued as far as Heglig, where they have remained (Sudan Tribune, April 11). Sudanese forces are reported to be moving on Heglig gradually, with SAF spokesmen citing delays caused by mines laid by South Sudanese troops (Sudan Tribune, April 15).

Sudan's military maintains that the SPLA were joined in the April 10 attack on Heglig by fighters belonging to Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). An AFP reporter said they had observed dead bodies in Heglig bearing JEM insignia and two destroyed land cruisers with JEM emblems. JEM denied the allegations, providing the unlikely suggestion that the SAF may have dressed their own dead in JEM uniforms (AFP, March 28). In June, 2011 the Darfur-based rebels claimed to have carried out a long-distance raid on the Heglig

Airport (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 1, 2011).

The SPLA claims to have shot down one of Khartoum's Russian-built Mig-29 fighter jets during an April 6 air raid in the Heglig region, though this was denied by an SAF spokesman (al-Jazeera, April 6). According to South Sudanese intelligence and other sources, Mig-29 air strikes targeted a strategic bridge in Abiem-nhom County in Unity State, a target at Ajakkuac in Warrap State and the main bridge in Bentiu (capital of Unity State), killing five people and wounding five others (Sudan Tribune, April 11; April 14; April 15). The SPLA does not yet possess a combat-capable air force, but is believed to have plans to develop an air arm for their military.

Sudan's defense minister, Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, says the SPLA offensive is part of a cooperative effort with components of the recently formed Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) to occupy Heglig and the South Kordofan capital of Kadugli (Sudan Tribune, April 11; for the SRF, see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 11, 2011). The SRF includes JEM and the SPLA-North, which operates in Sudan's South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. Hussein said SPLA-North forces in South Kordofan consist of 22 battalions of 500 men each, while JEM and Darfur's Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) have a combined 125 Land Cruisers across the South Sudan border in Bahr al-Ghazal preparing to launch cross-border attacks (Sudan Tribune, April 11). While the deployment of large numbers of Darfur rebels in the border region of South Sudan cannot be confirmed, it is consistent with Khartoum's claims of greater cooperation between the rebels and the SPLA over the last year. If JEM actually was involved in the attack on Heglig, it would be the first sign that the SRF alliance was becoming a military reality with the support of Juba.

Note:

1. "The Crisis in Abyei," The Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment Project, Small Arms Survey, March 28, 2012, <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures-abyei.php>

Karachi's Deadly Political and Sectarian Warfare Threatens the Stability of Pakistan's Commercial Capital

Arif Jamal

Karachi is one of the most violent cities in the world where, according to Additional Inspector General of Police (AIGP) Akhtar Hassan Gorchani at least 396 persons have lost their lives in ethnic, sectarian, and political violence in the first three months of 2012. [1] Forty-seven of these murders were targeted killings while 24 of them were political and ethnic killings. However, the violence in Karachi cannot be explained by mere statistics. Dozens of state and non-state actors are involved in this violence for as many reasons.

Political violence was introduced to Karachi in the mid-1980s by the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), which emerged as the ethnic party of the *muhajir*, refugees from the Muslim-majority areas of the British India in 1947. Renamed in the late 1990s as the Muttahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM - United National Movement), it largely remains a party of the *muhajir* and their descendants. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the bodies of MQM opponents were frequently found in gunny bags on Karachi's roadsides and many of the MQM's political rivals blamed these killings on the movement. [2] Several law-enforcement operations also unearthed torture cells run by the MQM. [3] Under pressure from the Pakistani military, a small group led by Afaq Ahmed split from the MQM in the late 1990s under the name MQM-Haqiqi. Since then, the two factions of the MQM have been at each other's throats. The military operations and the split of the MQM-Haqiqi weakened the mainstream MQM; but not enough to stop it from using violence as an instrument of its political strategy.

Demographic change in Karachi in the 2000s further weakened the MQM. Large numbers of Pashtun tribesmen migrated to Karachi as a result of the Taliban's rise and the initiation of subsequent military operations in Pakistan's Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa Province. As a result, the Pashtun-based Awami National Party (ANP) succeeded in having two lawmakers elected from Karachi. As the ANP encroached on turf which the MQM claimed as its exclusive right, political violence spread, pitting the MQM against the MQM (Haqiqi) and the ANP. [4] Although the ANP is a peaceful political party,

some of its members have met the MQM's violence with violence, but on a much smaller scale. [5]

Any murder of a political worker causes large outbursts of violence. When an MQM worker and his brother were assassinated on March 27, the entire city was shut down. Eleven people died in the ensuing violence while angry mobs set some 45 vehicles alight. The killing of an ANP worker the next day sparked another wave of violence that left 14 persons dead and 53 vehicles set on fire. [6] Interestingly, both parties are coalition partners of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in the central and provincial governments. The PPP governments are thus unable to take action as they cannot afford to lose their coalition partners.

As Karachi is the commercial center of Pakistan and until recently the only port city, jihadi groups, particularly those of the Deobandi, have long focused on the city for fundraising. The rise of jihadi groups in Karachi greatly agitated the South Asian Barelvi Sufi movement, a dominant force in Karachi. Two ferociously anti-Deobandi groups were formed in Karachi, the Dawat-e-Islami and the Sunni Tehrik. Although Dawat-e-Islami claims that it does not resort to violence, there are cases where its workers have committed violent acts, most famously the assassination of former Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, who was assassinated by his own guard, Mumtaz Qadri, a Dawat-e-Islami member (*Dawn* [Karachi], January 5, 2011; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, February 24). As the membership of the two groups tends to overlap, it is difficult to identify which group is responsible in many cases. Scores of Deobandi leaders and members of Ahle Sunnat wal Jamat (ASWJ, formerly the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan) have been assassinated in Karachi in recent years. Police sources say that the Sunni Tehrik, a Barelvi organization, is behind most of these assassinations. [7] Although the big Shi'a Muslim groups and parties in Karachi oppose violence, according to one law enforcement officer some of the young Shi'a men are believed to have acted under the umbrella of Sunni Tehrik. In other cases, they have acted in small Shi'a groups. [8]

The sectarian conflict between the Deobandi SSP/ASWJ and the Sunni Tehrik intensified in December 2010 and shows no sign of abating. Both groups accuse the other of murdering their members. According to a police officer in Karachi, the Sunni Tehrik has emerged as a perfect match for the ASWJ in Karachi and most assassinations of ASWJ members can be traced back

to the Sunni Tehrik. [9] The violence in Karachi has been growing since it started in the mid-1980s and is likely to grow in the years to come in the face of the Pakistani state's inability or unwillingness to act to prevent it. The growing violence and subsequent chaos in Karachi has paralyzed the Pakistani security forces and created a vacuum which is being filled by Islamists, a situation that became abundantly clear when Islamist terrorists attacked the Mehran naval base in Karachi with impunity in May 2011 (*Express Tribune* [Karachi], May 23, 2011).

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Notes:

1. Ahmed Jatt, The News Tribe. April 2, 2012. <http://www.thenewtribe.com/2012/04/02/karachi-in-2012-396-killings-only-47-target-killings-police-claims/>
2. Author interviews with several Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League lawmakers during the 1990s.
3. Author's field work in Karachi during 1990s.
4. Author's telephone interview with an ANP lawmaker, March 2011. All non-MQM sources agree with his statement.
5. Author's telephone interview with a senior police officer in Karachi, November 2011.
6. Available at <http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2012/04/karachi-city-of-blights/>
7. Author's telephone interview with an ANP lawmaker, March 2011.
8. Author's telephone interview with a law-enforcement officer in Karachi, April 2012.
9. Author's telephone interview with a senior police officer in Karachi, November 2011.

Insurgency in Xinjiang Complicates Chinese-Pakistani Relations

Jacob Zenn

China typically exercises caution when making public statements about terrorist attacks in Xinjiang. When China blames attacks on Pakistan-based terrorist organizations, such as the possibly defunct East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), it risks adding tensions to the Sino-Pakistani “all-weather” friendship. [1] However, when China blames attacks on local Uyghurs it is tantamount to an admission that its policies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region have not created a “harmonious society.”

In unprecedented fashion, China recently pointed the finger at Pakistan after a February 28 attack in Yecheng, a city 200 kilometers from the oasis city of Kashgar, close to the border with Tajikistan. The Chairman of the Xinjiang Regional Government decisively remarked on March 7 that the attackers had “one thousand and one links” to Pakistan (*Times of India*, March 8). China further implicated Pakistan on April 6, albeit indirectly, when it published on the Ministry of Public Security website profiles of six Uyghurs from China who allegedly operate in “South Asia” as members of the ETIM. [2] Despite these allegations, there is almost no evidence that the recent attack in Yecheng was plotted from Pakistan and there are only inconclusive reports that the two major attacks in Xinjiang in 2011 were planned in Pakistan. There is scant evidence that recent attacks in Xinjiang have actually been plotted from Pakistan. It is possible that China is publically citing Pakistan as the source of terrorism in Xinjiang to put pressure on Pakistan for strategic purposes or to deflect attention from the regional government’s inability to contain outbreaks of violence in Xinjiang.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence establishing a Pakistan tie to terrorism in Xinjiang comes from a martyrdom video posted on the Shmukh al-Islam online forum in September 2011 that showed Memtieli Tiliwaldi training with the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) in what appears to be the mountainous tribal regions of Pakistan (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 26). [3] Tiliwaldi had been killed by Chinese security forces days after taking part in attacks on Han Chinese pedestrians and diners in Kashgar on July 30 and July 31, 2011 that left ten

people dead. The video, which was allegedly created by Nurmemet Memetmin, one of the six Uyghurs profiled on the Ministry of Public Security website, seems to prove that Tiliwaldi trained in Pakistan with the TIP and then carried out attacks in Kashgar. However, one of several issues with this video is that it is unclear why the TIP would honor only Tiliwaldi and not the other dozen “martyrs” that took part in the Kashgar attacks if the TIP was indeed responsible.

One explanation of this omission that is consistent with China’s initial probe into the Kashgar attacks is that “the heads of the group [possibly including Tiliwaldi] had learned skills of making explosives and firearms in overseas camps of the ETIM in Pakistan before entering Xinjiang to organize terrorist activities” and that they then recruited locals who “adhered to extremist religious ideology and advocated jihad.” Presumably to assuage Pakistan, the final investigation of the Kashgar attacks contradicted the initial probe and said that there was no evidence that the perpetrators were trained in Pakistan (*The News* [Islamabad], October 12, 2011). Ultimately, China seemed to absolve Pakistan of involvement in the Kashgar attacks.

The Yecheng attack was carried out on the evening of February 28, when, according to Chinese sources, around ten Uyghurs rushed into a commercial market and stabbed to death 13 people with axes and knives. Chinese police responded by fatally shooting several of the attackers and arresting several others. On March 27, a court in Kashgar sentenced to death one attacker, Abudukeremu Mamuti, for “preaching religious extremism” and recruiting the “terrorist group” (Tianshannet.com, March 27). However, Mamuti’s trial either ignored his connection to Pakistan-based terrorists or made no mention of it because there was no real connection. Thus, it is surprising that the chairman of Xinjiang’s regional government indicted Pakistan after this attack, but not after the Kashgar attacks, for having “one thousand and one links” to terrorism in Xinjiang.

The Yecheng and Kashgar attacks are notable for the lack of sophistication one would expect from Pakistan-trained terrorists. In Yecheng, for example, none of the attackers used a gun or set off explosives. In the Kashgar attacks there were reports of “homemade” explosives, but there were apparently no guns involved. Knives were the weapon used to cause most of the fatalities in both attacks. A similar incident in Hotan on July 15, 2011 involved a group of as many as 18 Uyghurs

who allegedly used homemade materials to make Molotov cocktails to set off explosions in a local police bureau where they attempted to take people hostage and attack people with axes and knives (*Guardian*, July 20, 2011). Another incident last March involved a Uyghur man, previously imprisoned for discussing politically-sensitive topics, who accidentally set off an explosion at a farmhouse in Korla (Radio Free Asia, March 19). While these activities in Yecheng, Kashgar, Hotan, and Korla may be terrorism, they appear to be predominantly homegrown operations rather than the work of Pakistan-based cells.

In contrast, at least three attacks in Kazakhstan in 2011 claimed by the Pakistan-based Jund al-Khilafa (JaK) show a higher level of sophistication and a more likely tie to Pakistan than the attacks in Xinjiang. The JaK attacks included a series of shootings of policemen by a cell near Almaty, bombings carried out by a cell in Atyrau that had contacted JaK on the Internet and a shooting spree by a lone gunman in Taraz that was planned for months by his cell members (Tengrinews, December 5, 2011; November 1, 2011; November 30, 2011).

One reason for the inconsistencies in China's statements about attacks in Xinjiang may be the different interests of Xinjiang's regional government, which seeks to blame Pakistan for attacks to deflect attention from its own inability to preempt attacks, and the central government, which prioritizes maintaining friendly relations despite Pakistan's failure to root out terrorist training camps in the tribal areas. Another explanation is that China may see a foreign policy benefit in occasionally applying pressure on Pakistan by blaming it for attacks in order to win favorable military arrangements from Pakistan in the future, such as permission to operate bases or intelligence facilities in Pakistan's tribal regions or to expand China's naval presence at the Beijing-funded port in Gwadar, Balochistan (*Asia Times*, October 26, 2011).

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Notes:

[1] ETIM was founded in 1993 by ethnic Uyghurs, and its earliest members are believed to have received protection and training with the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. After its leader Hasan Mehsum was killed by a suspected CIA drone strike in Miramshah, Waziristan in Pakistan in 2003, the ETIM may have faded into extinction since no terrorist has claimed an attack under the name of ETIM since his death. The TIP emerged in 2008 with the same goal of "liberating" Xinjiang from Chinese control and has claimed attacks in China and issued propaganda videos since 2008. China, however, still only references ETIM, not the TIP, in its public statements.

[2] The Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China. <http://www.mps.gov.cn/n16/n1237/n1342/n803715/3197850.html>. April 6, 2012.

[3]: "On the Occasion of the Military Operations in the Prefectures of 'Hutan' and 'Kashghar' in East Turkestan," Video message from the Amir of izb al-Islami al-Turkistani [Turkistan Islamic Party] Shaykh Abd al-Shakur Damala, awt al-Islam Media Foundation, October 15, 2011, <http://jihadology.net/2011/10/15/%E1%B9%A3awt-al-islam-media-foundation-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-amir-of-%E1%B8%A5izb-al-islami-al-turkistani-turkistan-islamic-party-shaykh-%E2%80%98abd-al-shakur-damala-on-the-occas/>

“The Sons of the Land”: Tribal Challenges to the Tuareg Conquest of Northern Mali

Andrew McGregor

After the last month’s shocking developments in Mali, including a military coup, the collapse of the national security forces, the conquest of northern Mali by Tuareg rebels and the emergence of an Islamist group with apparent ties to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the land-locked African nation has entered into a tense stand-off in which next steps are being planned by all parties. Even as the military staff of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) form plans for a possible military intervention and neighboring Algeria places a reinforced garrison and substantial air elements on high alert at their military base in the southern oasis of Tamanrasset, the most immediate source of further conflict may be Arab and African tribal militias unwilling to accept Tuareg dominance in northern Mali.

Ganda Koy

The most prominent of these militias is known as Ganda Iso (“Sons of the Land”), the successor to an earlier group notorious for its attacks on civilians known as Ganda Koy (“Lords of the Land”). According to Seydou Cissé, regarded as the “founding father” of Ganda Iso, the earlier Ganda Koy movement was formed over 1994-1995 by Imam Muhammad n’Tissa Maiga to resist attacks on the sedentary and semi-nomadic population (largely black African Songhai and Peul/Fulani) from bandits and lighter-skinned nomads (primarily the Tuareg, Arabs and Mauritians, collectively and commonly referred to in Mali as “the whites”).

After its formation, Ganda Koy engaged in brutal attacks on the lighter-skinned peoples of northern Mali in a conflict that became racially and ethnically defined. Ganda Koy’s most notorious operation involved a massacre of 53 Mauritians and Tuareg marabouts (holy men) of the Kel Essouk clan near Gao in 1994. The militia was alleged to have received support and funding from the Malian army and was composed largely of former Malian soldiers, many of whom were granted an amnesty and reabsorbed into the military when the movement was officially dissolved in March, 1996 (*Jeune Afrique*, September 24, 2008). In reality,

however, the movement had merely entered a dormant phase and has since been resurrected in one form or another whenever tensions rise between the rival communities of northern Mali.

Ganda Koy was effectively disrupted by Colonel Amadou Baba Touré, who succeeded in infiltrating the movement with his own agents so that their every move was known in advance. The Colonel also harassed the leadership of the movement, including Cissé, with short periods of detention without charge. Cissé attempted to convince Colonel Touré that Ganda Koy was not engaged in an ethnic struggle, but the continued pressure from security forces split the movement (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], August 12, 2010; *Mali Demain* [Bamako], September 26, 2008).

Efforts by Ganda Koy in 2008 to enter the political process were rebuffed by the Malian establishment. Refusal to hear Ganda Koy grievances led to threats from the movement that they would resume their military activities (*Nouvelle Liberation* [Bamako], November 19, 2008; *Le Tambour* [Bamako], November 25, 2008).

A Ganda Koy unit believed to be largely Fulani in origin attacked a military camp at Ouattagouna in Gao region in March 2011. The attack closely followed the arrest of a Ganda Koy commander, Aliou Amadou (a.k.a. Sadjou), on charges of possessing illegal weapons (22 *Septembre* [Bamako], March 25). When the president of the Ganda Koy movement, Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga, did not appear for a press conference in July, 2011 it was believed that his absence was due to pressure from the military (22 *Septembre* [Bamako], July 4, 2011).

A statement attributed to Ganda Koy was issued in December 2011, in which the movement declared it was reactivating its armed units in Mali as of December 11 to counter Tuareg fighters returning from Libya with their arms and called on Songhai and Fulani members of the Malian military to join the fighting units of Ganda Koy as soon as possible (*Le Politicien* [Bamako], December 16, 2011).

Ganda Iso

Seydou Cissé says he formed Ganda Iso in 2009 in the interests of “maintaining social stability in the region” and ensuring there would be justice rather than immunity for malefactors: “We had no choice in creating the Ganda Iso. Each community had its own militia. And

to be feared and dreaded, we needed to have our own militia” (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], August 12, 2010).

Sergeant Amadou Diallo, a Peul/Fulani, was appointed head of the military arm of the movement with responsibility for training recruits, while Seydou Cissé was to be the civilian head of the political movement. This arrangement fell apart after Sergeant Diallo conducted a broad daylight massacre of four Tuareg civilians in the village of Hourala on the weekly market day, bringing swift retaliation from armed Tuareg (*Mali Demain* [Bamako], September 5, 2008; *Nouvelle Liberation* [Bamako], September 9, 2008). At this point Cissé says he realized Diallo had “deviated from our goal” and “deflected our plans.” Though Ganda Iso was blamed for this attack, Cissé claims it was the result of Diallo allying himself with the Tolobé Peul/Fulani of Niger, whom Cissé described as “great bandits.” When Cissé was called to account by then Malian president Ahmadou Toumani Touré, he told the president he was only seeking respect for his people and asked for the transfer of his nemesis, Colonel Ahmadou Baba Touré. A split followed between Diallo and the civilian leadership of the movement; according to Cissé: “Sergeant Diallo did not understand our struggle. While we are fighting for the security of the area, he was fighting for his own account. In a document that the State Security gave me, Ahmadou Diallo required as a condition of peace that the state gives him 30 million FCFA [West African CFA Francs], a villa and a car” (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], August 12, 2010). An ex-member of Ganda Iso echoed this evaluation: “The movement of Diallo is not a product of the Ganda Koy. It pursues the unsatisfied plan of a man who manipulates his brothers to try to intimidate the Malian nation in the sole goal of making money” (*Nouvelle Liberation* [Bamako], September 26, 2008).

Ganda Iso’s September, 2008 killing of the four Tuareg civilians was variously reported to have occurred in reaction to the murder of an elderly Peul man by an armed group in Tin Hamma or as the result of damage to Peul herds during a May 12 attack by Imghad Tuareg on a Malian gendarmerie base in Ansongo (*L’Essor* [Bamako], October 7). [1] It is uncertain whether the Ganda Iso killers were aware that three of their Imghad victims were also cousins of Colonel al-Hajj Gamou, the powerful leader of a loyalist Imghad Tuareg militia, but a reported call from Diallo after the killings to the office of the Malian president complaining that Colonel Gamou’s militia was harassing Peul/Fulani in

the Ansongo region suggests that this had a role in the selection of targets. However, making a personal enemy of one of the most effective and occasionally ruthless desert fighters in northern Mali was ultimately a poor decision and Diallo soon had new complaints that Gamou had buried many of Diallo’s relatives up to their neck in holes in the desert. [2]

On the night of September 14, 2008 a gun battle broke out in Gao when one of Colonel Gamou’s patrols surprised a group of Ganda Iso (possibly led personally by Ahmadou Diallo) allegedly caught in the midst of an assassination attempt on Muhammad ag Mahmud Akiline, the director of Mali’s Agency for Northern Development (*Nouvelle Liberation* [Bamako], September 16, 2008; *L’Indépendant* [Bamako], September 18, 2008). While the Army was busy arresting some 30 suspected members of Ganda Iso and hunting down the movement’s leadership, its communications branch was simultaneously denying the presence of any militias in Mali, insisting the Army’s deployment in Gao was intended only to “prevent people from creating a mess” (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], September 24, 2008).

Colonel Gamou retaliated against Ganda Iso in a September 16, 2008 attack on Fafa, Ahmadou Diallo’s hometown in the movement’s Ansongo district stronghold (*Nouvelle Liberation* [Bamako], September 19, 2008). The raid yielded a large store of guns, grenades and mortars, but many of the movement’s supporters claimed they could not understand why security forces were focused on a “self-defense” unit rather than rebels and brigands in northern Mali (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], September 19).

Security sweeps arrested dozens more members and Ahmadou Diallo fled to neighboring Niger, where he was arrested only days later and extradited to Mali, where he was soon released “on the sly” by his friends in the government (*Radio France Internationale*, September 27, 2008; *Info-Matin* [Bamako], June 15, 2009).

Ganda Iso was far from finished, however, and on January 1, 2009 members of the movement hurled hand grenades at the homes of three prominent Imghad Tuareg leaders in Timbuktu, including Muhammad ag Mahmud Akiline, who had escaped an earlier Ganda Iso assassination attempt in September, 2008. General Ahmadou Baba Touré claimed that the grenade-throwers were among those arrested in the September, 2008 security sweep and later released. [3] In June, 2009, an armed group believed to be Peul/Fulani members of

Ganda Iso attacked a Tuareg camp in Tessit, part of the Ansongo district of Gao Region, killing six Tuareg (*Info Matin* [Bamako], June 15, 2009). It was reported by some sources that the murderers were the same as those suspected in the September 2008 killing of four Tuareg civilians (*Info-Matin* [Bamako], June 16, 2009).

After talks with the government, a demobilization and disarmament “peace flame” ceremony for Ganda Iso was held in 2010, emulating an earlier and better-known “peace flame” commemorating the Tuareg demobilization and disarmament following the 1996 rebellion. The event was widely regarded as a failure in which old and obsolete weapons were turned in for public incineration before an audience that included neither senior members of government nor the military leader of Ganda Iso, Ahmadou Diallo (22 *Septembre* [Bamako], August 9, 2010).

Ganda Iso in the Current Conflict

There have been reports that the post-coup Malian military has resumed its old patronage of the “Ganda” movements by providing food and military equipment to 1,000 members of Ganda Iso and Ganda Koy (*Le Combat* [Bamako], March 28). Ganda Iso clashed with the independence-seeking Mouvement National de Libération de l’Azawad (MNLA) in mid-March, reportedly killing six rebels and wounding seven others. The MNLA attacked a Ganda Iso training camp in the Ansongo district in retaliation on March 15, suffering the loss of al-Her ag Ekaratane, a deserter from the Malian Army and the former chief of the camel corps in Ansango (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], March 20; 22 *Septembre* [Bamako], March 19). Ganda Iso fighters gathered at Gao are reported to have melted away when combined MNLA/Ansar al-Din forces approached.

The MNLA has maintained from the beginning of the rebellion that the movement brings the various peoples of northern Mali together in pursuit of an independent state of “Azawad,” including the Kel-Tamashek (the Tuareg self-name), the Songhai, the Peul/Fulani, the Arabs and the “Moors” (Mauritanians). In practice, however, there has been little evidence that any of the non-Tuareg communities are represented in the MNLA in any significant numbers.

Ahmadou Diallo appears to have shared the concerns of the military coup leaders over the handling of Tuareg rebels by the Bamako politicians, telling an interviewer

in 2008 that Bamako’s response to Tuareg rebellions in the north was “too politicized.” According to Diallo, “The military had the means and the weapons to fight dissidents and bandits in the north, but had its hands tied and was forced to follow orders” (*Le Témoin du Nord* [Bamako], October 17, 2008). Though this may have been true at the time (as the 2009 defeat of Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga attests), this was no longer the situation when the Tuareg began the new rebellion last January, wielding firepower superior to that of the Malian Army courtesy of the looted armories of Libya. Diallo is reported to have met his end in a battle with MNLA rebels in the Ansongo district on March 25 (Reuters, March 25; *L’Essor* [Bamako], March 28). A Bamako report that honored this “outstanding” warrior claimed that Diallo’s death had dealt a serious blow to the morale of Ganda Iso and its civilian supporters (*Le Combat* [Bamako], March 28). It is for now unclear who might succeed Diallo as military leader of the movement.

In the meantime, a somewhat less aggressive and more diverse alternative to Ganda Iso may have emerged in the north. On April 4, the newly formed Coalition of People from North Mali brought together a variety of former politicians and administrators from the northern provinces under the chairmanship of former Prime Minister and Gao native Ousmane Issoufi Maigi (2004-2007). The Coalition urged soldiers and civilians to prepare for a liberation struggle and there are reports that the recruitment of volunteers has begun, possibly with an eye to opening a corridor for humanitarian aid as severe food shortages loom in the north (*L’Essor* [Bamako], April 7; *Le Républicain* [Bamako], April 6).

Pro-Government Tuareg Militias

After the current rebellion began on January 17, there were early reports of victories by Colonel Gamou’s pro-government Tuareg militia, followed by the surprising news in late March that this arch-loyalist had defected to the MNLA. However, when Colonel Gamou arrived in neighboring Niger in early April he admitted that his defection was only a ruse following the collapse of the Malian Army in the north, one that enabled him to shift 500 men and dozens of combat vehicles through rebel lines to safety without losses. For now his men have been disarmed and Gamou and his leading officers moved to Niamey (Radio France Internationale, April 6). In the event of an ECOWAS intervention, they would likely be returned to the field. There are other Tuareg,

particularly of the Imghad, who want no part of the MNLA or the Ansar al-Din, but organized resistance in the current circumstances would be difficult. Many who oppose the rebels have simply fled across the borders until a safe return is possible.

The Arab Militias

Though Ganda Iso may treat the Arabs and Tuareg as a common enemy, there are in fact enormous differences between the two communities exacerbated by a traditional lack of trust and the recent introduction into northern Mali of the largely Arab al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb movement (AQIM). AQIM's apparent alliance with the newly-formed Salafist-Jihadist Ansar al-Din group under the command of veteran Tuareg militant Iyad ag Ghali has only complicated affairs.

After the Malian Army fled Timbuktu, the strong Arab trading community in that city formed its own resistance group of several hundred men to combat Tuareg rule, the Front de Libération Nationale d'Azawad (FLNA). According to the movement's secretary-general, Muhammad Lamine Sidad, the Arabs "have our own interests to defend – a return to peace and economic stability" (Reuters, April 9). Unable to match the firepower of the rebels, the Arab militia has decamped to the outskirts of Timbuktu, waiting for an opportunity to expel the Tuareg.

The pro-government Bérabiche Arab militia led by Colonel Muhammad Ould Meidou appears to have ceased operations in northern Mali for the present, though there are reports of a new Bérabiche militia in training (*Le Combat* [Bamako], January 31). The Bérabiche have often turned to self-defense militias in the past and it is possible that Mali's Kounta and Telemsi Arabs may do the same now if it is the only alternative to Tuareg rule.

Conclusion

Many Malians believe that Ganda Koy and its successor Ganda Iso enjoy a certain immunity in their relationship with Mali's security forces as a means of applying pressure on the nation's northern communities. A 2009 U.S. Embassy cable noted that Bamako's "catch and release policy" regarding Ganda Iso suspects "does not seem to have helped matters" [4] With the looming possibility of a clash between nationalist and Islamist Tuareg in northern Mali (with the latter possibly receiving support from AQIM), there is a growing

likelihood that Arab and African-based "self-defense" militias may take advantage of such an opportunity to try and reverse the recent Tuareg gains in the region. A descent into tribal and ethnic warfare in northern Mali would be sure to devastate an already marginal region for years to come.

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Notes:

1. Wikileaks: U.S. Embassy Bamako cable 08BAMAKO778, September 9, 2008.
2. *Ibid*
3. Wikileaks: U.S. Embassy Bamako cable 09BAMAKO3, January 5, 2009.
4. *Ibid*