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AL-QAEDA CELL ON TRIAL AS ETHIOPIA BECOMES A RELIGIOUS BATTLEGROUND

Ten Somalis and one Kenyan are currently under trial in Addis Ababa for their alleged involvement in an al-Qaeda bombing plot after weapons and training manuals were seized in the Bale region of southeastern Ethiopia last December. The Kenyan, Hassan Jarsoo, has admitted his role in the alleged plot, but the others, who allegedly include several members of the army of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government, have denied their involvement. Six of the defendants are being tried *in absentia* (Walta Info Online [Addis Ababa], May 20; *Africa Review* [Nairobi], May 22; AFP, May 18).

Ethiopia is one of the earliest homes of both Christianity and Islam, with its 85 million people being roughly 60 percent Christian and 30 percent Muslim. These communities have traditionally lived in harmony, but in recent years Ethiopia's Orthodox Christians and Sufi-based Muslims have come under destabilizing pressure from external sources, primarily from American backed Christian evangelists and Saudi/Kuwaiti backed Salafists. Both of these trends have caused dissension in the religious communities by describing traditional Ethiopian forms of worship as deviations if not outright heresy and insisting that their adherents must convert to these new, more fundamentalist forms of worship. Ill-considered intervention by the central government has only inflamed the situation, and the result has been a growing wave of religious violence in a nation that has prided itself on religious tolerance.

Islam arrived in Ethiopia even before it had firmly established itself in Arabia, as the Prophet Muhammad urged his persecuted followers to flee Mecca in 615 and take refuge in northern Ethiopia, where he promised they would find protection from its just king and his Christian followers. While many returned when Mecca became safe for Muslims, there is some evidence that others stayed in Ethiopia, founding the first Muslim community in Africa. The first muezzin (prayer-caller) in Islam was the ethnic Ethiopian Bilal ibn Rabah (a.k.a. Bilal al-Habashi), one of the Prophet's closest companions. The Ethiopian city of Harar is regarded in some traditions as the "fourth-holiest city in Islam," with mosques dating back to the 10th century and over 100 shrines.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told parliament in April that the government was "observing tell-tale signs of [Islamic] extremism. We should nip this scourge in the bud" (Reuters, May 10). In response to fears of an incipient Salafist movement to establish an Islamic state in Ethiopia, the government is attempting to make a little-known and non-threatening Islamic sect known as al-Ahbash the dominant form of Islam in the country, a solution that has inflamed Sufis and Salafists alike. The Ahbash movement was founded by Abdullah al-Harari (a.k.a. Abdullah al-Habashi, 1910-2008), a Harari scholar of Islam whose views were regarded locally as divisive, resulting in his being forced to leave for Lebanon in 1950. Al-Harari founded al-Ahbash, also known as the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects, in the 1980s. Ethiopian Salafists have complained the government is importing Ahbash imams from Lebanon to teach local Muslims that Salafism is a non-Muslim movement (OnIslam.com, April 29).

The leading Islamic religious authority in Ethiopia is the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (IASC). Salafists no longer participate in the Council, which is in the process of having its representatives replaced by government appointed members of the Ahbash sect. Even authorities such as Dr. Ali Jum`ah, Grand Mufti of Egypt and Professor of the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence at Cairo's al-Azhar University, charge the movement with having "strange deviant views that have never been expressed by any Muslim sect, group or movement," including the free intermingling of the sexes, unrestricted cooperation with non-Muslims and the issuing of fatwa-s that contradict the Koran and Sunnah. Salafists and orthodox Sunni scholars also charge al-Ahbash with allowing intercession with the dead (saint-worship), overlooking the need to observe the five pillars of Islam, declaring Salafist-favored scholars such as Ibn Taymiyah,

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb to be *kuffar* (infidels) and obscuring their true beliefs by failing to commit them to print (OnIslam.net, April 22). Seven Muslims were killed and scores wounded by Ethiopian police in late April when security forces surrounded a mosque in the Oromia Region in an attempt to arrest Salafist Shaykh Su'ud Aman following protests against the government's efforts to impose Ahbashism (OnIslam.com, April 29; VOA, May 21).

As in many other parts of the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have built numerous schools in underserved regions while Ethiopian workers have found employment in the Arabian Peninsula, where they have been exposed to highly conservative forms of Islam that differ greatly from those traditionally practiced at home. The religiously-inclined can find employment in Saudi-sponsored mosques in Ethiopia after taking advantage of generous scholarships to study Salafist Islam in Saudi Arabia. Local imams suffer from an educational and financial disadvantage in countering the Salafist scholars. To offset the growing Salafist influence in Ethiopia, the United States Embassy in Addis Ababa attempted to have two works by Khalid Abou el-Fadl, a Kuwaiti Islamic scholar who teaches in the United States, translated into Amharic, Oromo and Somali, but were unable to find translators willing to undertake the work. The failed effort was part of an attempt to use "cultural programming" to turn "public opinion against activists who seek to overturn the existing order and import a brand of Islam that breeds conflict through its corrosive teachings that run counter to more orthodox interpretations of the Koran." [1]

In the Bale Region of Oromiya, dozens of Sufi shrines were reported to have been destroyed by Salafists in the 1990s before the Salafists turned their attention to the Shaykh Nur Hussein shrine, a religious center built around the tomb of a 12th century holy man. The shrine is the site of several important annual celebrations and, most importantly, has become a site of pilgrimage, an unforgivable violation of the Salafist code of Islamic worship, which only permits pilgrimage to the holy cities of the Hijaz in western Saudi Arabia. As part of its campaign to counter the Salafist trend, U.S. officials financed a major restoration of the shrine in 2007 at the same time Salafists were trying to force its closure (Ayyaantuu News Online, November 10, 2011). [2]

Local Muslims in Amhara Region then sought U.S. funding for restoration of the 18th century Jama Negus Mosque in Amhara Region, a project which had been

denied funding from Gulf State NGOs on the grounds it had not only become a place of pilgrimage, but was also the center of annual celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*Moulid al-Nabi*), which are also banned in the Salafist creed. [3] Salafists despise the Jama Negus mosque as an alternative center of pilgrimage and Moulid celebrations, leading the Gulf States to refuse financial assistance to its physical rehabilitation and creating an opening for the United States to sap support from their Gulf State allies in the battle for "hearts and minds" in Ethiopia by providing reconstruction assistance. [4]

The introduction of non-Orthodox Christianity by Protestant missionaries has also created often violent dissension in both the Christian and Muslim communities. Evangelical Protestant churches and the homes of some evangelical Christians were burned down by in the town of Asendabo in southwest Ethiopia in March, 2011. Residents of the dominantly Muslim region were incensed by rumors that members of the Pentecostal churches were using pages of the Koran as toilet paper (Radio Netherlands Worldwide Africa, March 20, 2011). Thousands were displaced in violence Prime Minister Zenawi blamed on a sect known as Kawarja. In Bale Region, a group of 17 Ethiopian Christian students were assaulted last year after they attempted to distribute Bibles to local Muslims (Ethiopian Review, March 2, 2011). There have also been Muslim attacks against evangelical Christians in the southern Ethiopian city of Besheno in November, 2010 and May 2011 (AsiaNews, May 2, 2011).

Notes:
1. Wikileaks, U.S. Embassy Cable, 09ADDISABABA1675, July 15, 2009; U.S. Embassy Cable, 08ADDISABABA3230, November 26, 2008. The books in question were The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists (2005), and The Place of Tolerance in Islam (2002).
2. Wikileaks, U.S. Embassy Cable, 08ADDISABABA3230, November 26, 2008.
3. Wikleaks, U.S. Embassy Cable 09ADDISABABA1672, July 15, 2009.
4. Wikileaks, U.S. Embassy Cable, 09ADDISABABA1675, J

EGYPT'S FORMER INTELLIGENCE CHIEF WARNS OF POSSIBLE CIVIL WAR

As the presidential choice for Egyptian voters is narrowed down to an uncertain Islamist future under Muslim Brotherhood candidate Dr. Muhammad al-Mursi or a return to quasi-military rule under Air Marshal Ahmed Shafiq, former Egyptian intelligence chief Major General Umar Sulayman has warned of a potential confrontation between the two political trends that could lead to civil war. General Sulayman, whose own candidacy for the presidential post was nullified by an act of parliament earlier this year, made the remarks in a recent two-part interview with a pan-Arab daily (*al-Hayat*, May 22).

As Egypt's intelligence chief, Sulayman earned an unwelcome reputation for his broad and consistent application of torture as an instrument of state, supervision of a domestic intelligence network that permeated Egyptian society and as Mubarak's point-man on Egyptian-Israeli relations. None of these roles endeared him to Egyptian voters and his claims that he was running for president only in response to wide popular appeals appeared as contrived as the small demonstration of sign-waving supporters that appeared on cue to back the announcement of his candidacy (see *al-Akhbar* [Cairo], April 9). Nonetheless, by means both fair and foul, Sulayman has over several decades compiled a detailed knowledge of Egypt's politics and political leaders that is frequently described as encyclopedic.

General Sulayman hands-on leadership of an often brutal campaign to quell the growing influence of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has naturally placed him at odds with the movement, which successfully manipulated a largely secular revolution to become the dominant party in Egypt's new parliament. Sulayman claims his own abortive run at the presidency was accompanied by repeated death threats from Islamist militants and the law that quickly disqualified ten candidates from running for president was so clearly directed at the ex-intelligence chief that it was nicknamed "the Umar Sulayman law" (*al-Akhbar*, April 9; *al-Hayat*, May 22; Ahram Online [Cairo], April 14).

In this context, it is unsurprising that Sulayman warns that the Islamists do not possess the trained personnel capable of administering state institutions and that an Islamist victory would roll back women's rights, make decisions based on religious considerations rather than

the needs of society, disrupt relations with the West and open up Egypt to a return of Islamist militant groups such as al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad and Takfir wa'l-Hijrah. The general further suggests that good relations with the United States are essential for the stability of Egypt, and if these relations are allowed to deteriorate to score political points for the Muslim Brotherhood, "We will become worse than Pakistan and Afghanistan, and we will be considered as a country that exports terrorism… Thus Egypt will lose its role, its army - whose U.S. weapons constitute 70 percent of its arms - will lose, and its economy will be hit." Sulayman suggests that the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has been deceived by the Brotherhood's conciliatory tone, made possible by the strict discipline enforced within the movement. According to the former intelligence chief, SCAF's biggest mistake has been to allow the Muslim Brothers to assume important roles in the all-important constitution committee that will determine the political and social future of the Arab world's largest nation.

When asked directly by *al-Hayat* if a military coup was possible to prevent the establishment of an Islamist government in Egypt, Sulayman replied: "It is possible, quite possible. However, the Muslim Brotherhood Group is not foolish, and hence it is preparing itself militarily, and within two or three years it will have a revolutionary guard to fight the army, and Egypt will face a civil war, like Iraq."

Despite his description of the dangers of a president drawn from the Muslim Brotherhood, Sulayman has elsewhere expressed his rejection of any attempt to diminish the near-dictatorial powers of the Egyptian presidency: "The head of the state must enjoy real powers. And I think that the country needs a powerful president who restores stability and protects the country's security. It does not need the sort of fighting and power sharing that leads to further anarchy" (*al-Akhbar*, April 9).

Tripoli's Islamist Militia Leader Turns to Politics in the New Libya

Camille Tawil

Abd al-Hakim Belhadj, the former "Amir" of the now defunct Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), announced on May 15 that he is resigning from his post as head of Tripoli's Military Council in order to run in the June 19 election of Libya's General National Congress, the new constituent assembly (al-Sharq al-Awsat, May 16). Belhadj will enter the political contest as a candidate of a newly-established party known as al-Watan ("The Homeland") (al-Jazeera, May 16). It has been suggested that Belhadj may ultimately take a run at the post of president in the new Libya (*al-Youm*, May 15).

Belhadj's decision is important as it shows that the jihadist leader is unafraid of losing his grip on those parts of Tripoli that have been under the control of his fighters since August 2011, when they advanced into the Libyan capital as the regime of the late Colonel Mu'ammar Qaddafi was crumbling. It was the battle for Bab al-Aziziya, Qaddafi's residence in the heart of Tripoli, which made Belhadj a famous "military leader", as he was shown on TV screens leading his men through the last bastion of the former regime in Tripoli accompanied by a high ranking Qatari officer. [1]

However, Belhadj's fighters played only a small part in Tripoli's fall as many other rebel units were advancing on the Libyan capital from different directions at the same time as Belhadj's fighters were moving in. Since then these various rebel factions have managed to partition Tripoli into a number of fiefdoms; each controlled by a different militia. In addition to local rebel units from Tripoli itself, these militias also included non-local groups such as those of Misrata and Zintan.

The military presence of these different militias in Tripoli plays a role in ensuring that the weak interim government listens to their demands, often finding jobs for their fighters and their families or relatives in government posts, as well as receiving financial pay-outs given to those rebels who helped topple Qaddafi's regime. Whenever the government has shown reluctance to meet the fighters' demands, the latter typically respond by flexing their military muscle on the streets of the capital. More often than not, the government relents in the face of these demonstrations of power. However, the

government has recently shown increasing stubbornness in meeting the rebels' demands. On May 8, clashes erupted between guards protecting government offices in Tripoli and rebels who came to protest over "unpaid stipends." These clashes came after the authorities, citing widespread fraud, announced last month that they were halting the payment of cash bonuses to rebels who had fought against Qaddafi's regime in 2011 (*Telegraph*, May 8).

The presence of the different militias in Tripoli irritated not only the government, but also many of the local residents, who have become fed up with the deadly clashes erupting between the rebels units on almost on a weekly basis. Locals have expressed their anger against the militias by organizing frequent protests to demand their removal from Tripoli, most recently on May 12 (alwatan-libya.com, May 12).

Belhadj must have realized that the presence of his fighters in Tripoli (based in the vast military barracks near Tajoura, just east of the capital) may have become a liability rather than an asset considering the changing attitude of the government and the people of Tripoli. However, Belhadj must also be aware that laying down his arms totally and moving into the political field carries with it a certain risk in a country where arms ensure that demands are listened to by authorities. It was noteworthy, then, that Belhadj announced that the Military Council of Tripoli, which is controlled by jihadists personally loyal to him, would not be disbanded after his official departure and would continue to have a say in Tripoli's affairs (*al-Sharq al-Aswat*, May 16).

It is surprising that Belhadj has decided to run in the election as a candidate for al-Watan, a political party that does not include former members of the LIFG. Many former LIFG leaders appear to have decided to go their own way, without Belhadj. A large portion of the LIFG leadership is now consolidated around a new political entity, al-Umma al-Wasat ("The Middle Nation"), headed by Sami al-Saadi (a.k.a. Abu al-Munthir), the former head of the LIFG's religious committee. Al-Saadi was rendered to Qaddafi's regime from Hong Kong in the same operation that led to Belhadj's arrest in Thailand and his transfer to Tripoli in 2004. Al-Saadi's party seems to have attracted many important leaders of the LIFG, including Idris Qaid, the older brother of Abu Yihya Alibi, a high-ranking al-Qaeda leader based in Waziristan. [2] Although it is still too early to make a final judgment, it appears as though

al-Saadi's party contains a more religious-based element from the former-LIFG than Belhadj's party, which is still in the process of being formed.

It would be fair, then, to assume that the jihadists will enter the coming Libyan elections as a fragmented force, with at least two main political parties, al-Umma and al-Watan. This situation resembles to a great extent what happened in neighboring Egypt, where the former jihadists of al-Jama'a al-Islamiya (Islamic Group) entered the parliamentary elections as part of two different political parties. If the Egyptian example repeats itself in Libya next month, it is likely that the results of the elections will indicate a limited support for the Libyan jihadists, compared with that of the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) and other Libyan political parties. In any case, the results of the Libyan elections may shed some light as to where the jihadists have their main pool of support in Libya. In the past, the Islamists' presence was largely confined to the eastern regions, such as Benghazi and Derna, as well as in the south around Sabha.

Whether or not the jihadists make any big gains in the coming Libyan elections, it seems clear that entering the political process is in itself an important step in their transformation from a militant group to a political party. If they are sincere in committing themselves to the decision of the Libyan electorate, this will mark a major change from their past practices and religious beliefs, which rejected democratic principles. This would also represent a significant challenge to al-Qaeda's ideology of rejecting democracy and its insistence on carrying out violent acts, even if these are aimed at Western interests.

Does the decision of Belhadj, al-Saadi and other former LIFG leaders to enter politics and end their militant activities have the support of the rest of the Libyan jihadists? To answer this question one has to distinguish between at least three types of jihadists:

> • Those who could be described as the "old guard"; the leaders and members of the old LIFG. The majority of these, including Belhadj and al-Saadi, seem to have taken a clear decision to cut with the armed resistance of the past and join political life.

• There are also those who could be termed the "new generation" of jihadists that came into being after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many of these were too young to remember the failed attempt of the LIFG's "old guard" to topple Qaddafi in the 1990s. These young jihadists do not believe they have any obligation to follow the decisions of the LIFG leaders. This was made clear between 2006 and 2009 when some young imprisoned jihadists – the "Iraq generation" - reportedly objected to the peace talks that were taking place between the imprisoned leaders of the LIFG and the Qaddafi regime. One can assume that some of these young jihadists may again object to the current policies of the former LIFG leaders regarding political engagement. These jihadists may even be attracted to involvement in what they see as a "jihadi cause," as they did previously in Iraq when they flocked there to join Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda branch in the hope of fighting the American occupation. Syria today could become what Iraq represented a few years ago to the Libyan jihadists. Syria is already seeing more and more Arab jihadists – including Libyans - coming to assist the revolt against al-Assad's regime.

• There is also a third kind of Libyan jihadists who belong to the old LIFG but now consider themselves part of al-Qaeda, whether as part of the "Central Command" in Waziristan or the local branch operating in North Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Some of these Libyan jihadists may be considered an extension of the LIFG branch in Afghanistan which was led by the late Abu Laith al-Libi and which merged with al-Qaeda in 2007.

The challenge to Belhadj's and al-Saadi's decision to turn away from being an armed group and turn into a political party will most likely come from members of these last two categories of Libyan jihadists.

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Notes:
1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8aWOD37I94&feature=related.
2. The first statement issued by the Umma party, with pictures of its leaders at their first meeting, can be found at the following link: http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=280059.

Communist Insurgency Ramps Up as Manila Reaches Settlement with Muslim Militants

Jacob Zenn

The government of the Philippines recorded two key political and military successes in Mindanao in the first half of 2012. First, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) eliminated Abu Sayyaf leader Gumbahali Jumdail, the Malaysian and Singaporean Jemaah Islamiyah militants Zulkifli bin Hir (a.k.a. Marwan) and Abdullah Ali (a.k.a. Muawiyah) and 12 Abu Sayyaf fighters in a February 3 airstrike in Sulu Province. Second, the government agreed to the "10 Decision Points on Principles" with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on April 24, which envisions a new "substate" for Mindanao's ethnic Moro Muslims that will replace the current Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and has been lauded as a "breakthrough" by MILF leader Murad Ibrahim (Mindanews [General Santos City], May 13). The government and military have been focused on the MILF, Abu Sayyaf and Mindanao's other insurgent movement, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which rebuffed Murad Ibrahim's pleas to sign the "10 Decision Points." However, the Communist Party of the Philippines' military wing, known as the New People's Army (NPA), has been intensifying its attacks.

The Commander of the Armed Forces Northern Luzon Command blamed "complacency" as the culprit after 30 to 50 NPA fighters carried out an April 25 surprise attack that killed 11 AFP soldiers and two civilians in Ifugao, Luzon Province as the soldiers were returning from a command turnover ceremony (*Inquirer* [Manila], April 30). This attack represents the highest number of single-day AFP casualties suffered since an October 2011 joint ambush by the MILF and Abu Sayyaf in Basilan that killed 18 Special Forces troops. The attack is also notable because most other NPA attacks have been carried out near the NPA's epicenter of operations in the Davao Region of Mindanao and rarely in Luzon in the north of the country (*Inquirer* [Davao], October 9, 2011).

Although the NPA's current total of 4,000 to 5,000 fighters is some 20,000 fewer than at its height during the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s, the NPA claims to be fighting on 42 fronts in 2012, up from 32 fronts in 2009, and in 2011 it was responsible for the deaths of 187 government personnel (MindaNews, March 29). NPA attacks are often carried out against AFP Peace and Development Teams (PDTs) which are engaged in non-combat missions as part of the AFP's *Bayanihan* counter-insurgency plan, which seeks to build up infrastructure, including roads, wells, medical facilities and schools in remote areas to win the trust of the villagers and pull them away from the influence of rebel groups such as the NPA and Abu Sayyaf.

Recent NPA attacks highlight the expanding geographical breadth of the insurgency:

> • On May 24, one fighter in a group of four from the NPA's Front Committee 4-B assassinated an intelligence officer while he was searching for a fugitive at a cockfighting pit in Lagonglong, Misamis Oriental, Mindanao (ABS-CBN News [Manila], May 25).
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> • On May 20, the NPA attacked an airport construction site in Albay and damaged equipment (Philstar [Manila], May 20).
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> • On May 14, an AFP soldier was killed in a morning shootout with NPA fighters in Barangay Bucalan in Canlaon City, Negros Oriental, Central Visayas (*Visayan Daily Star*, March 14);
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> • On April 29, four soldiers and a civilian belonging to a PDT were killed in an attack by the NPA in Labo town, Camarines Norte, Luzon. The NPA fighters stole six M-16 rifles, a K-3 sub-machine gun and a pistol from the slain soldiers before escaping (*Philstar* [Manila], April 30).
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> • On April 23, the NPA raided a security agency in Butuan City, Mindanao and stole high-powered firearms, including AK-47 and M-14 rifles, automatic shotguns and pistols. The rebels posed as National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) agents and presented search warrants to the guards on duty (Pia.gov.ph [Cagayan de Oro], May 7).

• On April 9, 50 NPA fighters captured a policeman as a "prisoner of war" when they stormed a local police station in Tibao, Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao and stole weapons. However, on May 16, Jorge Madlos (a.k.a. Comrade Oris), the commander and spokesman of the NPA and a fighter since the NPA's founding in 1969, announced that "there were no formal charges filed against [the policeman] before the court of the people's democratic government. Therefore there was no material basis anymore for his detention, thus he was released" (Philstar [Davao], May 6).

The NPA continues to attempt to make itself relevant in a world where Communist revolution has been discredited by focusing on contemporary concerns affecting "the masses," such as the environment and indigenous rights in addition to its traditional Marxist calls for land reform. On October 3, 2011, for example, the NPA shocked the Philippine government and foreign investors when 200 fighters launched simultaneous attacks on three mining companies in the NPA stronghold of Surigao del Norte in Northeast Mindanao that are among the country's leading exporters of nickel ore to Japan, China and Australia. The fighters destroyed roughly $11.5 million worth of equipment and facilities and briefly took employees hostage. In an official statement, the NPA said that the mining company has "ruined both fresh water and marine sources, devastated mountains, violated the rights of the Lumad [indigenous] people, and displaced the livelihood of peasants." [1] However, the AFP countered that the mining companies' refusal to pay "revolutionary tax" to the NPA is what actually motivated the attacks (Interaksyon.com [Manila], October 4, 2011).

The Netherlands-based Communist Party of the Philippines founder, Jose Maria Sison (a.k.a. Joma), has also spoken out about China's maritime claims in the South China Sea and the U.S. military presence in the Philippines, which are of concern to Filipinos across political and class lines and resonate strongly among the peasant fisherman and farmers who are most affected by these two issues. Sison condemns China's "imperialistic activity" and "baseless claims" in the "West Philippines Sea" and demands an end to the joint Balikatan military exercises between the Philippines and the United States, saying that they are "reinforcing [U.S.] imperialism" in the Asia-Pacific region (*Business Mirror* [Makati City], April 24).

The Philippines is waging three distinct counterinsurgency operations in Mindanao simultaneously: one against the Moro Muslim armies of the MILF and the MNLF which view the government as invaders and colonizers; a second against the quasi-jihadi and quasi-criminal Abu Sayyaf which views the government as infidels; and a third against the NPA, which views the government as imperialists and exploiters. The NPA's resurgence adds another layer of complexity to the Philippines' security situation at a time when the country would otherwise have reason to be optimistic about the prospects for stability and unity given the progress in negotiations with the MILF and the elimination of Abu Sayyaf's leadership.

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Note:
1. See "CPP congratulates NPA in Northeast Mindanao for punishing big foreign mining company," Communist Party of the Philippines, October 4, 2011, http://www.philippinerevolution.net/statements/cpp-congratulates-npa-in-northeast-mindanao-for-punishing-big-foreign-mining-company

Syrian Tribal Networks and their Implications for the Syrian Uprising

Carole A. O'Leary and Nicholas A. Heras

Sunni Arab tribalism has a significant socio-cultural, political, and security impact on the current uprising in Syria, with strong implications for post-Assad governance formation. Tribalism has fueled unrest throughout Syria, including in places such as Dera'a, where mass opposition demonstrations began on March 15, 2011, in the eastern city of Deir al-Zor on the Euphrates River, and in the suburbs of Homs and Damascus, where some of the fiercest combat between the Syrian military and armed opposition groups has occurred. Millions of rural and urban Syrians express an active tribal identity and tribal affiliation is used extensively to mobilize the political and armed opposition against the Assad government as well as to organize paramilitary forces in support of the Syrian regime. Both the Syrian opposition and the Assad government recognize the political importance of the tribal networks that cross Syria and extend into neighboring countries. As a result, the support of Syria's tribes is a strategic goal for both the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition.

Tribal Networks – The Social Demographic Impact of Tribalism in Syria

The Syrian Ba'ath Party has traditionally sought to undermine the independence of the country's tribes through intimidation, infiltration, and dependence. These aggressive policies continued under the Assad government and were exacerbated by decades of economic stagnation and the near total collapse of the rural economy of regions in southern and eastern Syria due to drought, corrupt use of water resources and mismanagement of croplands where many tribesmen resided (*Jadaliyya*, February 16). In spite of these severe difficulties, tribal networks in Syria are, ironically, better equipped at present to influence the opposition against the Assad government than at any other point in Syria's modern history.

Over the last several decades, relationships between different tribes have been strengthened by the mutual difficulties that all Syrian tribesmen face, and by a shared bond of kinship and a common Arab-Bedouin heritage that differentiates tribesmen from the ruling Assad family that usurped the power of the Syrian Ba'ath Party.

[1] The economic disaster facing tribal youth, combined with the political pressure that is constantly applied by the Assad government, caused Syrian tribes to look to each other for mutual help and support. The traditional vertical authority of the shaykhs over the rest of their tribesmen weakened over time, causing decision-making authority to extend beyond one person (or family) in a specific tribal lineage to mutually supporting individuals in a wider network of tribes. [2] Under coercion from the state, many tribal shaykhs were forced to leave their traditional areas to live quietly in Damascus or Aleppo, or left Syria entirely, becoming remote figures from the perspective of their tribesmen. Without revenues, they became unable to provide for the essential needs of their tribes, particularly during the most recent drought that began in 2003 and lasted through the rest of the decade.

The result is a series of horizontal, activist networks of mainly young and economically displaced tribesmen residing in Syria's most restive cities who have adopted an inter-tribal identity that champions the importance of their shared tribal cultural background and dissatisfaction with their economic and political marginalization in what they view as a corrupt, repressive state. The torture and subsequent death of tribal youth in Dera'a by agents of the regime, as in other regions of the country such as Deir al-Zor and the suburbs of Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus, makes such agents of the government the target of retributive violence by aggrieved tribesmen, codified under *'urf*, or customary tribal law. With the recent evolution of tribal social networks, murdered al-Zoubi tribesmen are mourned for and revenged not only by their tribal kinsmen in Dera'a, but also by networks of tribal peers, such as the Shammar who recently migrated to Dera'a from the north in large numbers. Two of the most famous opposition martyrs in Dera'a in the opening months of the uprising, Hasan al-Shammari and Hamza Khateeb, were tribal youth who were part of these activist networks. [3]

Tribalism's Impact on the Syrian Opposition

Tribal participation in the uprising from its inception is well documented and is celebrated by the Syrian opposition. During the incipient phase of the uprising, the first "Day of Rage" demonstration against the Syrian government in the ethnically mixed, heavily tribal eastern city of Hasakah on February 5, 2011, was conducted by networks of tribesmen from the Jabbour, Ta'i, and the Ounaiza tribal confederations. [4] The

"Union of Arab Syrian Clans and Tribes," an Aleppo-based opposition group claiming to represent more than 50 percent of Syria's tribal population, announced its existence via YouTube on March 11, 2011. [5] One of the first nationwide Friday demonstrations organized by opposition groups inside of Syria, held on June 10, 2011, was called the "Friday of the Tribes" in recognition of the role that tribesmen played in leading resistance to the Syrian government (al-Jazeera, June 10, 2011). Many Syrian tribal leaders, such as Shaykh Nawwaf al-Bashir, an important leader of the large Baggara tribe and a former member of the Syrian Parliament, are active members of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) (al-Jazeera, January 16). Recently, a group of Syrian tribesmen and shaykhs in exile in Istanbul created the "Assembly of Tribes," claiming to represent 40 percent of Syrian tribesmen (al-Arabiyya, April 16).

In addition to their political role in the Syrian opposition, Syrian tribesmen also participate in the armed groups that fight the Assad government, particularly the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and its affiliates. These tribesmen predominately fight the Syrian military on the local level, in the areas where they reside, relying on young tribesmen who defected from the Syrian military for materiel and tactical advice. [6] Further, the tribes of northeastern and eastern Syria, such as the Shammar, Baggara, Jabbour, Dulaim, and Ougaidat, have close and enduring relationships with their tribal kin in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Anti-Assad regime states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar are reported to be using tribal networks to move materiel and weapons into Syria, though this is officially denied (al-Arabiya, March 4). There is also strong evidence that Iraqi tribesmen in particular are moving arms and material as well as fighting alongside their tribal kinsmen against the Assad government in small but growing numbers.[7] The shared cross-border kinship ties possessed by Syrian tribes and networks of tribal youth in Gulf Arab countries present a regional geopolitical complication to the uprising.

Syrian Tribalism and the Assad Government

Although Syrian tribes are well represented in the internal opposition, some tribal shaykhs and tribesmen continue to cooperate with the government. Like the opposition, the government has been aggressive in attempting to secure the support of the tribes. Since the beginning of the uprising, the government has sponsored a series of conferences called the "Syrian and Arab Tribes and Clans Forum," which emphasize the role of Syrian tribesmen in resisting foreign intervention and ensuring Syria's sovereignty (Syrian Arab News Agency, May 5). Under regime pressure, Syrian tribal shaykhs were forced to meet the Russian Ambassador to Syria and present him with gifts after Russia's veto of a February UN Security Council resolution that would have demanded political transition in the country (Syrian Arab News Agency, February 22).

Since the start of the uprising, many Syrian tribesmen have supported the state's security apparatus, controlled by the Assad family. This is not a new practice, and Syrian tribes have been used as enforcers for the Syrian government for decades. In many restive regions of Syria, tribesmen are deployed by the Syrian military as paramilitary forces called *shabiha* (literally "ghosts" with the connotation of "thugs"), although interviewees referred to them as *jahaaz*, which means "apparatus," as in a security apparatus, but has the connotation of "political tools." [8] There is evidence that affiliation with the Syrian government or the armed opposition in these areas is splitting the loyalty of tribesmen and fraying relationships between tribal shaykhs asked to choose a side. In Deir al-Zor, tribal loyalties are reportedly being put to the test even within families, as youth join the opposition against the wishes of their more cautious parents, family elders, and shaykhs (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], January 16). These reports correspond with the authors' field research on developments in the Jazirah region, indicating that members of the Jabbour tribe in and around al-Hasakah, and the Ta'i tribe in and around Qamishli have been organized and deployed by the regime against restive Kurds and tribal opposition members in these cities. [9] Both of these tribes, in a precarious position in their respective cities, were susceptible to the coercion and manipulation of the Syrian government, which desires to keep its "Kurdish problem" cost effectively managed through the arming of tribal militias and cash "gifts." Divided loyalties and conflicting networks of mobilization both for and against the opposition add another element of potentially severe instability to the current uprising.

Implications for Regime Change and Stability in a Post-Assad Syria

Interview data collected since the uprisings began in 2011 indicates that without clear guarantees from the United States, leading shaykhs across Syria will not put their tribesmen and women at risk by openly siding with the opposition. At the same time, shaykhs of large tribes located along Syria's strategic border areas are pursuing quiet but active dialogue with U.S., Turkish, Saudi, and Qatari officials about how they can support the opposition without putting their tribes in danger. In May, one Arab shaykh of a large northern tribe described a build-up of Iraqi tanks along Iraq's Syrian border (from Abu Kamal to Turkey) in support of the Assad government, as well as the movement of hundreds of trucks coming from Iran and transiting through Iraq, carrying supplies for the government. [10] This same shaykh is now convinced that only the creation of a safe haven along the Turkish-Syrian border will create an environment secure enough for the northern tribes to openly join the internal opposition. Were this to happen, other major tribes across the country would be more likely to actively join the opposition.

Arab tribes are likely to contribute significantly to two key issues in a post-Assad Syria: 1) Syrian Kurdish aspirations and demands in the context of a potentially fragile state and emerging system of governance; and 2) the combined ability of the Islamic parties in Syria (Ikhwan, Salafist, etc.) to turn out enough votes to secure a majority win in the first cycle of post-Assad regime elections, guaranteeing that they will have significant power in determining the nature of the new government. The majority of Syria's approximately two million Kurds inhabit three distinct geographical areas that border Iraq and Turkey, generally living within 15 miles of these borders. These areas are the Jazirah, Ayn al-Arab, and Afrin. In the culturally complex and oil rich al-Jazirah region (i.e. al-Hasakah, Raqqa, and Deir ez Zor provinces), Kurds make up about 25 percent of the population and share the region with Arab tribes (e.g. the Shammar, Baggara and Ounaiza) and Christians.

In the post-Assad context, Syrian Kurds will need to negotiate with the Arab tribes and various Christian communities to organize local and regional level governance in these culturally mixed border areas. Syria's Arab tribes and their shaykhs have a long history of peacefully coexisting with the Kurds in Syria. The Arab tribal shaykhs who have lived alongside and suffered with Syria's Kurds throughout Syria's modern history can help keep Syria's Kurds at the table, negotiating for their political and cultural rights within a united Syria. If Syria's Kurds believe they have no allies among Syria's Arab majority community, they may follow the path of the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) and its Syrian affiliates and become proxy agents of Iran and the Assad regime.

Substantive discussions and negotiations are already taking place between Arab tribal shaykhs and Kurdish political leaders concerning Kurdish demands and aspirations. This sort of ongoing dialogue between the Kurds and Arab tribal leaders can contribute to a peaceful settlement of the Syrian Kurdish question in a post-Assad Syria. A key challenge for both Kurds and Arabs will be to work together to mitigate the ability of the Iranian-backed PKK and its affiliates inside Syria (such as the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat - PYD) to use violence to destabilize not only the Kurdish concentrated areas along the Turkey-Iraq borders and in attempts to form a stable and more democratic system of governance at the national level (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 18).

Critical to a stable post-Assad state that can begin the process of democratization is a political outcome with room for secularists, moderate Islamists and religious and ethnic minorities. At present, Islamist groups inside Syria include an extremist Syrian variant of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as affiliates of al-Qaeda. The lessons from the precipitous post-Mubarak era elections in Egypt are clear. Syrians will need time to organize new political parties capable of competing with Islamic parties and groups linked to mosque networks in the critical first cycle of post-Assad regime national elections. Syria's Arab tribes represent an alternative bloc of millions of votes across the country that can rapidly organize and turn out for elections and thus become strong political powerbrokers in a post-Assad Syria.

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Notes:

1. Field research and semi-structured interviews conducted by the authors in Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey between May 2008 and May 2012.

2. Ibid

3. Interview conducted by the authors on November 4, 2011 via Skype with a well-placed Syrian shaykh from the al-Jazirah (northeast) region of Syria.

4. Interviews conducted by the authors in March 2011 with Syrian tribal guest workers who were present in Hasakah during the February 5, 2011 demonstrations. These guest workers were residing in the Dora, Naba'a, and Sin al-Fil eastern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon.

5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tve9SaH6c6E.

6. Interviews conducted by the authors in Lebanon and Turkey, and via Skype and Facebook message with tribal youth and shaykhs in Syria between March 2011 and May 2012.

7. Email interviews conducted by the authors between December and April 2012 with a well-placed shaykh from the al-Jazirah region. The field research and in-region interviews associated with the authors' original Arab Tribalism Project commenced in Iraq's southern governorates, including Basra, Maysan and Wasit in May 2003, and from there expanded to include the Iraqi governorates of Anbar, Ninewah, Salahaddin, Kirkuk (At-Tamim) and Diyala. Research on tribal linkages and networks, in the context of the out-migration of millions of Iraqis, expanded our fieldwork base into Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

8. Field research and semi-structured interviews conducted by the authors in Lebanon and Syria from May 2008-March 2010.

9. Ibid

10. Skype interviews conducted with a tribal shaykh from al-Jazirah between April and May 2012.