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IS RUSSIA SENDING A DETACHMENT OF THE BLACK SEA FLEET TO SYRIA?

Despite a recent flurry of contradictory reports, it appears that a detachment composed of ships from the Russian Black Sea Fleet and possibly the Baltic Fleet is preparing for deployment to the Russian naval port at Tartus, Syria. The date for their departure has not been finalized and appears to be dependent on developments in the Syrian insurgency, but the ships are reported to be ready to leave on four hours' notice (Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online, June 20). Preparations appeared to intensify following an unannounced visit to Moscow on June 14 by the Syrian Defense Minister, Brigadier Dawud Rajihah (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, June 19).

The Russian Defense Ministry had earlier described American reports that the large amphibious warfare ship (LAWS) *Kaliningrad* of the Baltic Fleet was being sent to Syria as "disinformation... aimed at further escalating the situation in Syria..." adding that "the only true piece of information in these reports is that the LAWS *Kaliningrad* is indeed part of the Baltic Fleet" (RIA Novosti, June 19). Nevertheless, a source in the Russian Navy headquarters told Interfax-AVN the same day that the *Kaliningrad* would depart for Tartus "in a few days" (Interfax-AVN, June 19). The Russian Defense Ministry had also denied reports carried by American media sources to the effect that Russian ships had already departed for Syria by June 15 (Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online, June 18). Pentagon reports that U.S. satellite imagery revealed the BDK (Bolshoy Desantny Korabl – large amphibious landing ship) *Nikolay Filchenkov* was heading for Tartus earlier this month appear to have been incorrect, at least so far as timing is



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Fax: (202) 483-8337

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concerned. Loaded with military hardware, the ship left the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol (on lease to Russia) on June 21 bound for the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk rather than Tartus, but was due back in Sevastopol on June 25 (CNN, June 16; RIA-Novosti, June 21).

Despite the denials, a Russian media source specializing in defense issues claimed its sources had confirmed that the large landing ships *Nikolai Filchenkov* and *Tzar Kunikov* and the SB-15 rescue tugboat of the Black Sea Fleet together with units of a Russian Marine brigade were prepared to leave for Tartus once the *Nikolai Filchenkov* returned to Sevastopol (Interfax-AVN, June 20; June 19). Aerial protection of the ships has been guaranteed by Major General Vladimir Gradusov, deputy commander of the Russian Air Force (Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye Online, June 19).

The Tartus facility was established in 1971 at a time when the Soviet Union had similar facilities in the Syrian port of Latakia and the Egyptian ports of Alexandria and Mersa Matruh. Today, only the facility at Tartus remains. Officially, Russia does not call the Tartus a naval base, but rather a “Navy Sustainment Center” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, June 19). Under the official name of the Russian Federation Navy 720th Logistic-Support Station, the strategically important Tartus facility provides repair, refueling and re-provisioning services for Russian naval vessels operating in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. Following a dredging program that began in 2009, the floating maintenance station (the PM-138), floating docks and workshops at Tartus can handle even the Russian Fleet’s largest ships, such as the Soviet-era aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*, which visited Tartus in January. [1] The station is leased from Syria at a cost of \$2 million per year, with payments made in both cash and arms (Komsomolskaya Pravda Online, June 15). Tartus is also said to act as the receiving port for Russian arms shipments, like that allegedly delivered by the MV *Professor Katsman* in sealed containers on May 26 (Interfax, June 4).

If Moscow remains committed to its opposition to foreign military intervention in the Syrian crisis, any Russian military mission would likely be limited to a primary task of evacuating Russian citizens and personnel, with the option of a secondary task of defending Russian installations at Tartus. The floating PM-138 can actually be moved offshore if threatened.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has estimated

there are approximately 100,000 Russian citizens in Syria, many with Syrian wives and families (Vedomosti Online, June 22). With such numbers, it is certain that a naval evacuation would prioritize diplomatic and military personnel in its calculations. The number of Russian stationed at the Tartus naval facility is estimated at no more than 100 (Vedomosti Online, June 22).

Though a website sympathetic to the Syrian insurrection had announced the Free Syrian Army (FSA – the main armed opposition group) intended to attack Tartus and had already infiltrated troops for this purpose, the FSA’s Colonel Malik al-Kurdi described such speculation as “irresponsible talk” (al-Sharq al-Awsat, June 18).

Units of Russia’s Naval Infantry (*Morskoy Pekhoty* – colloquially known as “Marines”) under the command of Hero of Russia Colonel Vladimir Belyavskiy are reported to be ready to board all three Baltic Fleet ships on the receipt of orders (Interfax-AVN, June 19). Colonel Belyavskiy received his award for commanding Russian Marines of the Black Sea Fleet in a desperate engagement with Chechen mujahidin at the Tezen-Kale Gorge in February, 1995. [2]

The Russian Black Sea Fleet flagship, the missile cruiser *Moskva*, was scheduled to visit Tartus earlier this month, but its voyage was cancelled for reasons apparently related to the Syrian crisis (Interfax-AVN, May 23). The Soviet-era destroyer *Smetlivy*, which was to be relieved by the *Moskva*, was instead ordered to extend its cruise in the Mediterranean (Interfax, May 18). A Black Sea Fleet spokesman reported that security for the *Smetlivy* was provided in Tartus by a counterterrorism unit of Russian marines (Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye Online, June 19).

While a unilateral intervention by Russia in Syria appears to be out of the question for now, the possibility of Russian participation in a UN-authorized multinational force remains open. There is also speculation that a peacekeeping force under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO – a military alliance of seven former Soviet states, including Russia) might have a role in Syria. Various elite Russian military formations are reported to be receiving training for such an eventuality, including the 15th Combined Arms Brigade in Samara and the Pskov 75th Air Assault Division, which has previous experience with peacekeeping in Kosovo and in combat operations in Chechnya and Georgia. Also mentioned as likely participants in such a force are the Chechen Vostok and

Zapad battalions of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), which participated in peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and more active operations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye Online, June 15). [3]

The view of Tartus as strategically vital to Russia's defense is not unanimous, however. A new report from the Russian Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (described as having close ties to the Russian defense community) downplayed the strategic importance of the Syrian naval facility, suggesting that Tartus was "more of a symbolic rather than practical value to the Russian navy," whose loss "would have no significant effect on Russia's naval capabilities" (*Financial Times*, June 26).

Notes

1. The Russian designation for ships of this type is *Tyazholyy avianesushchiy raketnyy kreysler*, "heavy aircraft-carrying missile cruiser."
2. See <http://rusnavy.com/history/branches/bv/belyavskiy.htm>.
3. For Vostok and Zapad activities outside Chechnya, see Andrew McGregor, "Chechen Troops Accompany Russian Soldiers in Lebanon," *Chechnya Weekly*, October 26, 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=416&issue_id=3902&article_id=2371588, and "Peacekeepers or Provocateurs? Kremlin-Backed Chechen Troops Raise Tensions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia," *North Caucasus Weekly*, December 6, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/chechnya_weekly/article.php?articleid=2373839.

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH IN CUSTODY OF BOKO HARAM LEADER HABIB BAMA

Habib Bama, who is alleged to have directed numerous bombings in north and central Nigeria, was arrested in the Yobe State town of Damaturu in the early hours of June 21 by members of the Joint Task Force (JTF), an elite Nigerian counterterrorist unit. According to the JTF's Yobe State commander, Colonel Dahiru Abdulsalam, Bama was picked up while trying to escape after JTF agents were tipped off by local residents (*Guardian Nigeria*, June 22). According to the Nigerian State Security Service (SSS), Habib Bama (a.k.a. Shuabu Bama, Habib Mamman) is a Kanuri from Borno State and a former private in the Nigerian Army before his dismissal. (*Vanguard* [Lagos], February 15). The arrest concluded a manhunt for Bama that began on February 15. Before his death in custody, Bama was reported to be providing useful information to JTF interrogators, who said they were "still extracting words from him," but might move him to Abuja if his condition improved (*The Nation* [Lagos], June 22; *Leadership* [Abuja], June 22).

Nigerian security sources have cited Habib Bama as playing a leading role in a number of especially bloody attacks:

- Mogadishu Barracks Mammy Market, Abuja – December 31, 2010 (see *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, January 6, 2011).
- Suicide bombing of Police Headquarters in Abuja - June 16, 2011 (see *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, June 23, 2011).
- Suicide bombing of the UN headquarters in Abuja - August 26, 2011.
- Car bomb attack on St. Theresa's Catholic Church, Madalla, Niger State – December 25, 2011.

Various accounts have circulated regarding the manner of Bama's arrest. One version maintains that the JTF stormed his base in Damaturu on June 21 and engaged Bama and his aides in a gun battle in which Bama was fatally wounded (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], June 22). Another account suggests that Bama was shopping for food in the market when he was identified by a former army colleague on patrol with his unit. Bama reportedly tried to grab one of the soldier's weapons but was shot

in the leg before four soldiers overpowered him. Two young men who were with Bama reportedly escaped in the confusion (*The Nation*, June 22). A day later it was reported that the two young men (by now “armed to the teeth”) had been arrested along with Bama and were undergoing interrogation, where they had made “some useful statements” according to the JTF (*The Nation*, June 23).

According to another JTF source, Bama was shot in the market “to incapacitate him,” as JTF men were unsure if he and his companions were armed. The latter ran away, while Bama was “given the best of medical treatment to save his life” but died despite the efforts of doctors, though not before “providing some leads for the JTF” (*The Nation*, June 23).

A further JTF source added that “security agencies were able to interrogate him even while in pain and he was able to respond to some questions... It was unfortunate that Bama died of gunshots. We had planned to fly him to Abuja for the best treatment, but he could not just make it” (*The Nation*, June 23).

Gunshot wounds to the leg are rarely fatal if medical treatment is received in a timely fashion, making Bama’s subsequent death in JTF custody somewhat unusual. However, a source from the SSS was quoted as saying that “a deliberate decision” was made to deny Bama medical care, a decision made in light of recent difficulties encountered in obtaining convictions for alleged Boko Haram militants in Nigerian courts due to the reluctance of witnesses to testify against the movement (*SaharaReporters.com* [Lagos], June 22).

Are Yemen’s Ansar al-Shari’a and AQAP One and the Same?

Ludovico Carlino

Since its emergence in March 2011, analysts and experts have tried to pin down the real shape of Ansar al-Shari’a, the militant Islamist group that established seven Islamic Emirates in southern Yemen after its emergence in March, 2011. [1] While many observers maintain that the group is made up of local militants and tribesmen with no direct relationship with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), others suggest that Ansar al-Shari’a is an AQAP affiliate or, going further, that the two groups are essentially one and the same. Although the available evidence is far from conclusive, several strong indicators point to actual links and potential organizational overlaps between AQAP and Ansar al-Shari’a.

The name Ansar al-Sharia’a was first mentioned by AQAP’s leading cleric, Sheikh Abu Zubayr Abil Abab, who said in an online question and answer session with jihadist activists: “Ansar al-Shari’a is what we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work to tell people about our work and goals” (*as-Ansar.com*, April 19, 2011). Abu Zubayr, who is behind several propaganda messages released in the last few years by AQAP’s official media outlet, al-Malahim, recently issued a strong response to a letter by the Syrian-British jihadist ideologue Abu Basir al-Tartusi that criticized Ansar al-Shari’a for its reckless use of suicide bombings and for continuing the fight against the Yemen military as if “the tyrant Ali Salih hasn’t left... and the revolution never happened,” [2] In his response to al-Tartusi, Zubayr did not differentiate between the mujahidin of Ansar al-Shari’a and those of al-Qaeda; similarly, Ansar al-Shari’a commander Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Awlaki used the names of the two groups interchangeably in an interview with Yemeni journalist Abdulrazaq al-Jamal (*al-Yaqeen*, May 30).

According to Yemeni journalist Ali al-Awaridi, who visited the cities of Zinjibar and Jaar, two of the main Ansar strongholds recently retaken by the Yemeni Army, “the militants in the area who call themselves Ansar al-Shari’a claim that they belong to al-Qaeda,” suggesting that the Amir of the Ansar al-Shari’a, Abu Hamza al-Murqoshi (a.k.a. Jalal Mohsen Saleh Baleedi, a.k.a. Abu Hamza al-Zinjibari) “has a direct connection with the

supreme leader of al-Qaeda organization in the Arabian Peninsula Nasir al-Wuhayshi” (al-Masdar Online, March 20; for al-Murqoshi, see Militant Leadership Monitor, March 30).

The most telling indications of close ties between the two groups stem from Ansar al-Shari’a media activities. Since its emergence, the group has been incredibly prolific in releasing audio messages, videos and propaganda material, joining AQAP in positioning itself at the vanguard of jihadist media production. Between November 2011 and June 2012, Ansar al-Shari’a’s media outlet, the Madad News Agency, produced 23 newsletters entitled *Taqrir Ikhbari* (News Report), along with 15 official videos entitled *Ayn ala al-hadath* (Eyes on the Event) and a number of interviews and audio messages. AQAP Amir Nasir al-Wuhayshi and AQAP’s military commander, Qasim al-Raymi, have frequently appeared in the newsletters, while a March video entitled “Ansar al-Shari’a in Yemen, part of a campaign to spread our Shari’a together,” included messages from the two AQAP leaders and the late U.S.-born AQAP cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. [3] Furthermore, several martyrs eulogized in Ansar al-Shari’a newsletters have also been glorified in AQAP’s “Martyrs of the Arabian Peninsula” series. While in many respects this trend could be the result of an opportunistic attempt by Ansar al-Shari’a to boost its status among jihadists by linking its brand to more authoritative figures such as the AQAP leaders, the latest developments suggest an organizational overlapping that goes beyond mere propaganda

One of the clearest indications of strong ties between the two groups emerged on the occasion of the liberation of 73 Yemeni officers and soldiers taken prisoner in the fighting outside Zinjibar in March. An AQAP communiqué stated that after a “generous order coming from the Amir of the mujahidin in the Arabian Peninsula, Sheikh Abu Basir Nasir al-Wuhayshi, Ansar al-Shari’a released the soldiers” [4] Further evidence is supplied by both Ansar al-Shari’a and AQAP claiming responsibility for two attacks, namely the May 20 ambush of three U.S. military experts in the city of al-Hudaydah and the May 25 suicide attack against a group of Houthis in al-Hazm, the capital of al-Jawf governorate (Madad News Agency, May 21; Yemen Post, May 20; Yemen Times, May 28). [5]

Although marking a clear dividing line between Ansar al-Shari’a and AQAP is still complex due to the lack

of conclusive evidence from the ground, there exist solid indicators pointing to strong links and potential organizational overlapping. On the one hand, the claims of Yemen security forces that Ansar al-Shari’a personnel include foreign militants (Somalis, Sudanese and North Africans) contradicts the suggestion that the group is solely made up of local militants and tribesmen with no direct relationship to AQAP (al-Masdar Online, March 20, Yemen Times May 10; June 18, *al-Hayat*, May 18). On the other hand the fact that the two groups still maintain different leaderships and media outlets diminishes the argument that Ansar al-Shari’a and AQAP are essentially one and the same.

Most conceivable is the hypothesis that AQAP is behind the rise of Ansar al-Shari’a, with the strategic aim of gradually extending its presence in southern Yemen by creating an amiable relationship with the local tribes and thus avoiding the mistake made by al-Qaeda in Iraq, which alienated the local populace. Speaking at the April 2012 release of captured government soldiers, Ansar al-Shari’a cleric Sheikh Awad Banajar encouraged the tribes to stand alongside the group, urging them not to “give the Americans an opportunity to repeat in Yemen the experiment of the Awakenings [i.e. the anti-al-Qaeda “Awakening” militias] in Iraq.” [6] The Ansar al-Shari’a Amir, Abu Hamza al-Zinjibari (from the tribe of Maraqisha al-Baleed), is said to have been appointed because “he is from the sons of Zinjibar” (*al-Masdar* Online, March 20). The existence of the anti-al-Qaeda “People’s Committees,” groups of local fighters and tribesmen that have driven the militants out of the Lawdar area, suggests that this strategy is not completely working (Yemen Times, May 21).

What remains to be seen is the potential impact that the on-going government offensive in southern Yemen will have on the relationship between Ansar al-Shari’a and AQAP, though it seems unlikely that the offensive will prove to be decisive in severing their strategic convergence. The fact that the two groups could now share the same hideouts after being partially pushed out of their southern strongholds, coupled with the convergence of their short-term strategic priorities, namely defending the last Islamist sanctuaries and launching a new campaign against the Yemeni army, will indeed increase the possibility of further blurring of the differences between the two movements. Furthermore, the convenience for Ansar al-Shari’a of relying on AQAP resources, both in terms of expertise and militants, to confront the army offensive, along with AQAP’s need

to use Ansar al-Shari'as' manpower to maintain its last strongholds in the tribal areas of southern Yemen make it conceivable that adversity may even strengthen their alliance.

Ludovico Carlino is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of International Politics at the University of Reading, specializing in al-Qaeda and its affiliated movements. He obtained a MA in Analysis and Terrorism Prevention from the University of Madrid and is currently Director of the International Terrorism programme at CISIP, the Italian Center for the Study of Political Islam.

Notes:

1. See Casey L. Coombs, "Hot Issue — The Ansar al-Shari'a Insurgency in Southern Yemen: The View from the Ground," Jamestown Foundation, May 9, 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=39348](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39348).
2. <http://www.ansar-alhaqq.net/forum/yemeninews/showthread.php?t=12345>
3. www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=57413.
4. AQAP Statement no.46 http://shuratulmujahideen.blogspot.com/2012/05/47-qaeda-t-al-jihad-organization-in_01.html.
5. AQAP Statement no.50 <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=162882>.
6. Taqirir Ikhbari 16, April 2012.

The PKK Strategy to Disrupt Political Negotiations on the Kurdish Issue

Francesco F. Milan

Over the last few years, senior officers of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT – Milli İstihbarat Teskilati) have held several meetings with cadres of the separatist terrorist organization Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) in order to find points of agreement for the group's potential surrender. However, this process was abruptly halted in July 2011, when an ambush carried out by PKK members killed 13 Turkish soldiers. The attack was interpreted as a clear sign that part of the PKK did not consider negotiations with the Turkish state an option (*Today's Zaman*, July 17, 2011). One year on, Turkey seems to be facing a similar situation, as it tries to separate the politics of the Kurdish issue from the security and military aspects of the PKK insurgency. High-level representatives from the country's two main parties, the ruling Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP – Justice and Development Party), and the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP – Republican's People Party), have met in the last weeks to discuss the strategies they have developed to address the Kurdish issue (*Hurriyet*, June 5; *Today's Zaman*, June 6). In a break with last years' strategy, dialogue with the PKK is no longer being pursued.

The main reason seems to be that Turkey is now working on a purely political solution for the Kurdish issue. Should these efforts prove successful, such a move would potentially bypass the PKK as an actor in the process. Accordingly, the PKK and its hard-line offshoot, the Teyrebazen Azadiya Kurdistan (TAK – Kurdistan Freedom Falcons), are likely to try and sabotage the process through attacks against soldiers and civilians. In fact, PKK operations against Turkish troops continue incessantly, with at least 28 soldiers killed in the last two months in ambushes carried out by the group. Earlier this month, a large-scale attack hit a military outpost in the Hakkari District's outskirts, killing eight soldiers and wounding 16, while four more soldiers were killed in a June 27 clash with the PKK in the southeastern province of Siirt (*Today's Zaman*, June 19; *Hurriyet*, June 19; June 27). As the summer season facilitates movements in the mountainous areas of southeastern Turkey, the PKK has also revived its kidnapping campaign, which in the past has targeted both soldiers and civilians. In the last month, around 30 people (mainly civilians) were

abducted while travelling in the region, usually after their vehicles were stopped at improvised checkpoints manned by PKK militants (*Hurriyet Daily News*, June 7; *Today's Zaman*, May 29).

The renewed reliance on hostage-taking is worth closer examination. It goes without saying that kidnappings represent a blow to the image of Turkish authorities and security forces, while boosting the PKK's image of being in de facto control of the region – especially given the presence among the hostages of local political figures and soldiers (*Hurriyet*, May 15; *Today's Zaman*, July 13, 2011). Members of the organization never openly engaged Turkish authorities in negotiating the liberation of the hostages (some of whom have been in captivity for almost a year), so the PKK does not seem to want to use them as a bargaining chip. What is more important, however, is that hostages also seem to bring a military advantage for PKK. Turkish authorities have often made use of military units for operations aimed at locating the hostages' whereabouts and attempting to rescue them. Not only have these operations been unsuccessful so far, but Turkish rescue units tend to be a frequent target of PKK attacks; in fact the clash that ended MIT-PKK negotiations in July 2011 erupted during a hostage search and rescue operation in Silvan, a district of the Diyarbakir province. The PKK might then be using hostage-taking as a tactic to generate clashes with Turkish troops. The terrorist group also seems careful to avoid attracting unwanted international attention. Some of the recent kidnapping operations happened to involve foreigners, namely two Azeri and one British citizen. While the latter was kidnapped and released the following day, the Azeris were left untouched while the Turks travelling with them were abducted (*Today's Zaman*, June 4; *Hurriyet*, May 30).

Different considerations prevail with regards to the more radical TAK. The group is known for targeting tourist areas during the summer period, as occurred between 2005 and 2006, when TAK bombings killed about 10 people (including foreign tourists) and injured more than 70. As their attacks have shown, TAK operatives use improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as their weapon of choice. After a period of apparent inactivity, the TAK claimed responsibility for a series of bombings carried out between the summer of 2010 and September 2011, in which some ten people were killed. In March 2012, the TAK published a statement on its website, criticizing Turkey's attacks "against the Kurdish people." [1] The communiqué continues by denouncing the Turkish Air Force's December, 2011 airstrike in Uludere, where 34

civilians were killed, and claims that the TAK is planning to avenge every attack carried out by the Turkish state by hitting tourism. [2] Turkish police recently arrested a man who was carrying two kilograms of C4, a type of plastic explosive, in the outskirts of Izmir. After being arrested, the man cooperated with security forces, who managed to locate 22 more kilograms of C4 he buried in different locations. The suspect appears to have links with Fehman Huseyin (a.k.a. Bahoz Erdal), considered one of the senior operational commanders of TAK, while the presence of a large quantity of explosives in a city like Izmir seems to be a sign that the TAK is planning major attacks against tourist areas (*Today's Zaman*, June 20).

As Turkey's main parties try to address the Kurdish issue from a political perspective, the PKK and TAK are committed to hijacking the process and dragging it back to a purely security-centric dimension. PKK cadres know that any step forward on the Kurdish issue that does not include them as a main actor is a blow to the organization's image and political power; they are similarly aware that every attack carried out by PKK operatives is a blow to the political dialogue that the AKP and CHP are trying to kick start. By keeping the tension high while trying to disrupt the current attempt at multi-party dialogue, the PKK aims to reclaim its status as an indispensable player in any effort to resolve the Kurdish issue.

Francesco F. Milan is a PhD Candidate in the Department of War Studies at King's College in London.

Notes:

1. <http://teyrenkurdistan.com/2012%20aciklamalar.html> (in Turkish).
2. Ibid

Intervening in Mali: West African Nations Plan Offensive against Islamists and Tuareg Rebels

Andrew McGregor

As Tuareg rebels battle radical Islamists with heavy weapons for control of the northern Mali city of Gao, Mali and the other 15 nations of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are planning a military offensive designed to drive both groups out of northern Mali in an effort to re-impose order in the region and prevent the six-month old conflict from destabilizing the entire region. So far, however, operational planning has not been detailed enough to gain the approval of the UN Security Council for authorization of a Chapter Seven military intervention, leaving ECOWAS and the African Union with the option of delaying the campaign or proceeding without UN approval.

An ECOWAS Intervention Force

ECOWAS maintains that a military intervention would be a last resort if talks hosted by the ECOWAS-appointed mediator (Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore) should fail, but with negotiations in Ouagadougou going nowhere and divisions between the formerly allied rebel groups erupting into open conflict in northern Mali, there will be inevitable pressure to step up preparations for a military intervention. One obstacle to deployment so far has been the absence of a formal invitation from Malian authorities, though there has been discussion within ECOWAS of launching a military intervention without Mali's consent (PANA Online [Dakar], June 9; *Le Combat* [Bamako], June 20).

ECOWAS has explicitly rejected the rebels' "so-called declaration of independence" and has stated that it will "never compromise on the territorial integrity of Mali" (PANA Online [Dakar], May 30). Though the Islamists have agreed to talks, the mediators in Ouagadougou have insisted the largely Tuareg Islamist Ansar al-Din movement of Iyad ag Ghali sever all ties with al-Qaeda before talks can proceed, a move that seems most unlikely at this point (AFP, June 18; for a profile of Ag Ghali, see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, February 2012). Ansar al-Din spokesman Sena Ould Boumama has warned that his movement "will fight ECOWAS if it engages us in northern Mali" (*al-Akhbar* [Timbuktu], n.d., via *Le Politicien* [Bamako], June 7).

Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Niger and Nigeria are all expected to contribute troops to the mission if it receives authorization. Mauritania, which has conducted cross-border counter-terrorist operations in Mali in the past but is not a member of ECOWAS, has only expressed its "availability to join common efforts" to resolve the crisis (AFP, June 4). The ECOWAS intervention, which is projected to consist of 3,270 men, will have to stabilize southern Mali before it can effectively restore control of the north to the Bamako government.

Algeria, with a capability for desert operations and a powerful military with decades of combat experience, has been urged by some Western and regional nations to take a leading role in any intervention, but appears reluctant to provide ground forces. Algeria's participation is widely viewed as the key to success for any military intervention. Earlier this month, Algerian intelligence chief General Muhammad "Toufik" Mediène described a potential Algerian role consisting of intelligence provision and airlifts of necessary materiel from Tamanrasset and Reggane (*Jeune Afrique*, June 14). Algeria's main condition for participation will likely be the complete absence of Western troops from the campaign, particularly French forces.

Niger's president Mahamadou Issoufou is a strong supporter of the intervention and claims to have information regarding the presence of Afghan and Pakistani instructors working with the Islamists in northern Mali, but has not shared the details publicly (France 24, June 7). With a large and often restless Tuareg minority in northern Niger, Issoufou has much to lose by allowing the creation of an independent state in northern Mali. The Niger Foreign Minister has stated that "the military option is the only one" for Mali (*Le Politicien* [Bamako], June 7).

The Government in Bamako

In post-coup Bamako, the lack of political leadership remains a major stumbling block to resolving the crisis. Dissatisfaction is growing in many quarters with the prevarications of Transitional Government Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra and his continued opposition to a foreign military intervention (22 *Septembre* [Bamako], June 19). Mali's 70-year-old transitional president, Dioncounda Traoré, was attacked by pro-coup demonstrators in Bamako on May 22, enduring injuries that forced his evacuation to a Paris hospital (AFP, June 5). Complicating matters is

the continued presence of coup-leader Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, despite the ECOWAS-ordered dissolution of Sanogo's Comité National pour le Redressement de la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'Etat (CNRDRE) on June 7.

In return for ending his destructive putsch and agreeing to step aside for a transitional government, Sanogo has been rewarded with official former head-of-state status, a generous monthly allowance, a prominent residence and two vehicles. This decision came despite the opposition of ECOWAS, which wanted to return Sanogo to a subordinate position in the military (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], May 23; *Le Combat* [Bamako], June 12). The 39-year-old American-trained Sanogo is reported to rarely leave his well-guarded residence inside the Kati military base outside of Bamako. In a recent interview, Sanogo insisted that if the Army were given the means, it "would recover the north in a few days" (*Jeune Afrique*, June 9). Members of the CNRDRE, including Sanogo, continue to wield influence by having formed the Comité militaire de suivi de la réforme des forces de défense et de sécurité (CMSRFDS) on June 12 to absorb the CNRDRE, though the new committee will allegedly act in only an advisory role (*Le Pays* [Ouagadougou], June 14; *L'indicateur du Renouveau* [Bamako], June 18).

Supporters and opponents of the March military coup have organized themselves into two fronts: the pro-putsch Coordination of the Patriotic Organizations of Mali (COPAM) and the anti-putsch Front for Safeguarding Democracy and Republic (FDR), though in a positive sign, the two groups have been meeting for discussions of Mali's political future (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], June 18). COPAM took advantage of the attack on Dioncounda Traoré to hold a convention to advance the name of Captain Sanogo as the new transitional president, which only created further suspicion as to the motives and identity of those behind the attack on the transitional president (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], May 23, May 25; *Le Combat* [Bamako], June 2; *Info Matin* [Bamako], June 7). Since then, several leaders of COPAM have been jailed while others appear to have left the country. Nonetheless, a pro-Sanogo radio station, Raio Kayira, urges opposition to ECOWAS "meddling" in Malian affairs and hosts regular calls for the death of Dioncounda Traoré and former members of the government (*Jeune Afrique*, May 30).

Clashes between the MNLA and Ansar al-Din

On May 26, Ansar al-Din and the secular Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) announced their merger as the Transitional Council of the Islamic State of Azawad (*L'Essor* [Bamako], May 30). However, by June 1, the MNLA had issued a new document declaring all provisions of the May 26 merger agreement "null and void" (AFP, June 1). Mossa ag Attaher, a MNLA spokesman, admitted that the group had made a mistake in drafting the agreement: "[We] accepted the idea of an Islamic State but it should have been written that we will practice a moderate and tolerant Islam, with no mention of Shari'a" (AFP, June 1).

A June 8 statement from Ansar al-Din expressed the movement's disappointment with the MNLA's withdrawal from the Gao Agreement, but stated the movement would continue alone if necessary: "Unfortunately we were surprised with the Nouakchott statement issued by the Political Bureau of the movement which stated its clear refusal of the project of the Islamic state... therefore the Jama'at Ansar Al-Din declares and ensures to the sons of its Islamic *ummah* [community] its adherence to the Islamic project." [1] Clashes between the two movements were reported the same day in Kidal, resulting in the city being roughly divided between the two armed groups (AFP, June 8).

Though the short-lived agreement spoke of an "independent Azawad" nation, Ansar al-Din leader Iyad ag Ghali has since returned to his opposition to the establishment of a new state: "We are not asking for much: just the application of Shari'a law in the northern and southern regions. We are Malians and we are against the division of Mali... Anyone who does not lead the fight under our flag is our enemy and will be fought. Secularism is disbelief. Whoever is for a secular state is our enemy and will fought by all means" (Reuters, June 16).

While the MNLA were willing to agree to an Islamic State, their conception of a moderate and tolerant Islamic base quickly proved at odds with the Islamists of Ansar al-Din and the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) splinter group, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), whose eagerness to begin lashing people for trivial offenses threatens to dissipate even the small popular support they may have enjoyed several months ago. Their numerous prohibitions and severe punishments have defied even the advice of the AQIM Amir, Abu Musab Abdul Wadud (a.k.a.

Abdelmalek Droukdel), who used a May 23 audiotape release to warn the Islamists: “It is a mistake to impose all the rules of Islam at once on people overnight... So, for example, shutting down places of drugs, liquors and immoralities is something that they can seek to do now without delay, but the implementation of the just punishment is the responsibility of the Shari’a legislators and should come gradually” (Sahara Media [Nouakchott], May 23).

Face-to-face negotiations between Iyad ag Ghali and MNLA leader Muhammad ag Najim in Gao have had little success, as the gulf between the freedom and independence sought by the Tuareg of the MNLA and the strictly regulated future offered by the Salafists of Ansar al-Din is too great (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], May 30). Ag Ghali, who is reported to now speak only Arabic and wishes to be known by the Arabic name of Abu Fadil, is insistent on giving space to AQIM in the new state of Azawad, a breaking point in negotiations with the MNLA (*Jeune Afrique*, June 9).

Prior to the current fighting in Gao, a major clash between the MNLA and Ansar al-Din occurred in Timbuktu on June 13. Other confrontations have been reported in northern towns where residents have demonstrated in favor of the MNLA and against the Islamists (*L’Essor* [Bamako], June 19; AFP, June 13). The Malian government is also preparing a file for submission to the International Criminal Court (ICC) concerning the slaughter of disarmed prisoners at Aguelhok in late January, an action claimed by Ansar al-Din during a joint operation with the MNLA (*Le Combat* [Bamako], June 12). In its public statements and attitudes, it is clear the MNLA is now trying to distance itself from the Islamist factions, particularly with possible ICC prosecutions looming if ECOWAS is successful in retaking northern Mali (*Info Matin* [Bamako], June 12).

Dissension in the North

There are many indications that those northern Malians who have not fled the country outright have already tired of Islamist rule. By some reports, the situation in Gao (co-administered by the MNLA) is becoming critical, with a lack of food, water, electricity and currency (*L’Essor* [Bamako], May 23). In Kidal, youth and women tired of Ansar al-Din’s social restrictions gathered to display their opposition to the movement with slogans, public smoking in defiance of the ban on

tobacco use, and stone-throwing by the women, who removed their Islamist-decreed veils after Ansar al-Din elements retreated in damaged vehicles (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], June 7; *Le Combat* [Bamako], June 7).

In the town of Bourem, MUJWA outraged local residents by opening three prisons for those “caught doing sin,” one for men, one for women and one for children. In Douentza (Mopti Region), the power supply has been shut down for lack of fuel and MNLA fighters are reported to be looting local homes (*L’Essor*, June 12, June 19). In the town of Goundam, two-thirds of the population of 12,000 has left, while the remaining young men often have verbal confrontations with the rebels that result in their arrest (*L’Essor* [Bamako], June 7).

The Malian Army

Since 1991, the Malian military has suffered from underfunding, nepotism, corruption, under training, poor pay and a failure to maintain its aircraft and armor. Chronic demoralization is the result of purges of the officer corps, attempts to integrate former Tuareg rebels with loyalist troops and being required to operate in unfamiliar desert terrain with a lack of intelligence, equipment or ammunition (*Jeune Afrique*, June 17). Malian troops suffered greatly in the northern campaign earlier this year from an almost total lack of air support from the much-decayed Malian air assets.

On a recent visit to the Amadou Cheickou Tall military base, Malian Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra told government troops: “If God gives me the time and strength to liberate the country, I promise that my government will not spare any effort to create a strong, modern, efficient and effective army, an army that frightens, an army that brings peace” (*L’Essor* [Bamako], June 5). Where the money will come from to support a revival of the military is uncertain; the economic disaster that followed the coup d’état has resulted in the state budget being reduced from FCFA 1400 billion (2600 million USD) to FCFA 870 billion (1653 million USD) (*Le Combat* [Bamako], June 4). Even the removal of ECOWAS sanctions has failed to renew capital flows into Mali until the army returns to its barracks and a new, elected government is formed.

Malian fortunes in the north will rest in the hands of three senior officers known for their fighting skills and distaste for barracks life: Colonel al-Hajj Gamou, a

Tuareg, Colonel Ould Meydou, an Arab, and Colonel Didier Dakuo, a southerner. Gamou and Meydou met with Algerian authorities last month regarding future operations in northern Mali (AFP, May 24). Colonel Meydou narrowly escaped the military revolt at the Kati military base that started the coup and took refuge in Mauritania, where he says he is prepared to return to the field with 1,000 men of the Arab militia he commands (*Jeune Afrique*, June 17).

Using deceit, Colonel Ag Gamou was able to escape from northern Mali into Niger with his command intact when the rest of the Malian Army collapsed. Though presently disarmed, some 600 pro-state Tuareg fighters under his command are awaiting redeployment into northern Mali at a military base near Niamey (*Independent* [London], May 10; *L'Indépendant* [Bamako], June 18).

In addition to the desert-fighting skills of these militias, roughly 2,000 regulars with ten armored vehicles under Colonel Dakuo are available in the Mopti Region town of Sévaré, close to the southernmost area occupied by the rebels. For now, this total group of roughly 3,000 to 4,000 men represents all the forces the Malian Army can count on. They will face rebels equipped with superior Libyan arms supplemented by vast stocks of military materiel seized from the Malian Army earlier this year. Nearly all the Army's Russian-made assault tanks have been destroyed or disabled.

Mali's military will be handicapped in their re-conquest of the north by the absence of its elite unit, the "Red Beret" parachute commando regiment of some 600 men under the command of Colonel Abidine Guindo. The regiment, which doubled as the presidential guard, was officially disbanded by the putschists after it remained loyal to ex-President Amadou Toumani Touré and succeeded in spiriting Touré out of the country before he could be arrested. A failed counter-coup led by the "Red Berets" on April 30 complicated matters further, with members of the regiment now being put on trial for opposing the new government.

The Role of Militias

The Arabs of northern Mali have largely remained loyal to the concept of a secular and unified Malian state and have no wish to come under Tuareg rule, whether secular or Islamist. An armed branch of the Arab opposition, the Front national de libération de l'Azawad (FNLA, also known as al-Jabhah al-Arabiya, "the Arab Front"), has

vowed to wage war "for the liberation of Timbuktu and the independence of our territory," while maintaining a secular, non-secessionist and non-Islamist identity (AFP, June 5; *L'Essor* [Bamako], June 7).

Another group is the Front de libération du Nord-Mali (FLNM - National Front for the Liberation of Northern Mali), formed on May 28 as an umbrella group for the largely Black African Songhai and Peul/Fulani Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso militias, which have a strong anti-Arab and anti-Tuareg character (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], May 30; for the Ganda Koy, Ganda Iso and other Malian militias, see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 20). The militias, which have a notorious reputation for violence against civilians, say that the peace talks in Burkina Faso do not concern them as negotiations should follow military action (VOA, June 26).

A Timbuktu militia allegedly formed from the Songhai and Tuareg ethnic groups has vowed to expel the Islamists from that city. According to Hamidou Maiga, a former officer in the Malian Army, the Mouvement patriotique de résistance pour la libération de Tombouctou (MPRLT) "will engage in military action against the invaders until they leave" (AFP, June 7).

Retaking Northern Mali

Malian military sources have indicated a plan to retake the north would begin with the liberation of Douentza in Mopti region. Military operations are projected to employ irregular but unreliable units such as the Ganda Iso and Ganda Koy militias (*Le Politicien* [Bamako], June 7). A drive from the south could be accompanied by the reinsertion of Colonel Ag Gamou's Tuareg militia from the southeastern border with Niger. The number of rebels is uncertain, but the MNLA claims to have 10,000 men under its command, while the Ansar al-Din is estimated to have 500 and MUJWA to have some 300. Driving these groups out of the cities of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu might require challenging urban warfare, but dealing with a guerrilla campaign in the desert wilderness could prove even more difficult.

Washington and Paris would undoubtedly be called on to provide intelligence (particularly aerial surveillance), logistical support and financial support. If Algeria prevents the use of American or French special forces for gathering operational intelligence on the ground, it might deploy its own Groupe d'Intervention Spécial (GIS) for this purpose.

The deployment of air assets, whatever their source, will be complicated by the possible rebel possession of anti-aircraft weapons from Libya's armories. Such weapons appear to have been used by Ansar al-Din on June 15 against two unmarked planes (likely American surveillance aircraft) flying over Timbuktu (AFP, June 17).

Conclusion

While both Ansar al-Din and the MNLA are engaged in talks in Burkina Faso, it is safe to say that time is running out for a negotiated solution. The crisis in Mali and the outflow of refugees is destabilizing the entire region. There is also no desire either regionally or internationally to allow the further entrenchment of terrorist groups in the area such as AQIM or MUJWA, neither of which are involved in negotiations or any other effort to restore order to northern Mali. However, the opposition of Algeria to the involvement of Western militaries (on the ground at least) and a general Western reluctance to become heavily involved in such efforts after the Libyan debacle will ultimately leave such efforts in the hands of ECOWAS. However, this organization can deploy only a limited number of troops from a handful of countries with a limited history of cooperation in the field. The use of different languages, arms and communications systems will not enhance the efficiency of a West African intervention force, and the absence of accurate intelligence could prove fatal in a confrontation with experienced, determined and well-armed rebels on their home turf. Without substantial cooperation and support from Algeria or Western militaries, the small composite force of roughly 3,300 men envisaged by ECOWAS may experience many of the same setbacks experienced by the shattered Malian military earlier this year. While growing divisions amongst the Malian rebels may seem to present an opportune time for intervention, any military defeat suffered as the result of an over-hasty deployment could rock the political foundations of West African nations such as Nigeria that are enduring bloody insurgencies of their own.

Andrew McGregor is the Managing Editor of the Jamestown Foundation's Global Terrorism Analysis publications and the Director of Toronto-based Aberfoyle International Security.

Note

1. Sanda Ould Bouamama, Spokesman of Jama'at Ansar al-Din, "Statement from Jamaat Ansar Al-Din about the MNLA repealing of the Gao agreement," Timbuktu, June 8, 2012.