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MALI’S SELF-DEFENSE MILITIAS TAKE THE RECONQUEST OF THE NORTH INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

With the Malian Army still in disarray, the United States urging caution and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) demanding the formation of a government of national unity before taking military action, a handful of “self-defense” militias from northern Mali are preparing to launch their own reconquest of the regions now controlled by Tuareg rebels and Islamist groups including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The formation for this purpose of a militia coalition known as the Forces Patriotiques de Résistance (FPR – Patriotic Resistance Forces) was announced at a news conference in Bamako on July 21 (*Nouvel Horizon* [Bamako], July 23).

The militias forming the FPR include Ganda Koy (Lords of the Land), Ganda Iso (Sons of the Land), the Forces de Libération des Régions Nord du Mali (FLN – Liberation Forces of the Northern Regions), the Alliance des Communautés de la Cégion de Tombouctou (ACRT - Alliance of Communities from the Timbuktu Region), the Force Armée Contre l’Occupation (FACO - Armed Force Against the Occupation) and the Cercle de Réflexion et d’Action (CRA - Thought and Action Circle). The largest of the groups are believed to be the Ganda Koy, with some 2,000 members, and Ganda Iso, with an estimated 1300 fighters (*L’Essor* [Bamako], July 26). Ganda Koy militia leader Harouna Touré recently declared; “This war must begin as early as tomorrow with or without the national army” (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], July 23). Most of these militias are centered in the Gao region of northern Mali, and are predominantly Songhai,

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though they also include Peul/Fulani members. After the announcement of a new coalition of militias was made, however, Ganda Iso chairman Muhammad Attaib Maiga issued a statement saying “We do not recognize ourselves as a member of this coalition... We decline any responsibility for the actions that the said coalition will take” (*Info Matin* [Bamako], July 26).

Another self-defense militia, the Popular Movement Soni Ali Ber, has been created in Gao by Al-Hadj Tandjina. The movement is named for the first king of the Songhai Empire (c.1464 – 1492) and is intended to “wash [away] the affront of the occupation and recover the flouted dignity and honor of the people of Gao” (*L’Observateur* [Bamako], July 25). Just outside Bamako, several hundred would-be fighters are training as part of Bouyan Ba Hawi (Songhai for “Death is Better than Shame”), a militia led by Mahamadou Dioura (*Jeune Afrique*, August 2; *Independent* August 7).

An officer of Algeria’s Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS – Department of Intelligence and Security) has suggested that the defeat of the largely Tuareg Mouvement National de Libération de l’Azawad (MNLA) by the Islamists in Gao is a good development as it will send the Tuareg rebels into the arms of the Malian Army (*Jeune Afrique*, July 14). However, while MNLA spokesman Moussa ag Assarid recently indicated that the Tuareg rebel movement was ready to fight the “terrorist groups” alongside ECOWAS forces, he was also adamant that they would not fight alongside Malian troops (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], July 26).

For the Ganda Iso movement of Ibrahim Dicko the real enemy is the MNLA, “which wanted to create a state that we did not recognize. The Islamists, on the contrary, are Muslims like us” (*Jeune Afrique*, August 3). The Islamists appear to be seeking to divert the anger of the self-defense militias towards the Tuareg of the MNLA by exploiting racial tensions and offering the militias arms to use against the Tuareg. Modern arms appear to be in short supply for the militia fighters, some of who are training with cudgels rather than Kalashnikovs (*L’Essor* [Bamako], July 25). The strategy may be working; there are reports (confirmed by both Ganda Koy and Ansar al-Din) that some 400 Ganda Koy fighters based in Douentza have already joined the Islamists of Ansar al-Din (AP, July 15). Ganda Iso took control of Douentza (170 km north of Mopti) on July 13 when it was abandoned by the Islamists but the Malian Army, which has been ordered not to advance beyond Konna, failed to move in to take control at that time.

With the Malian Army having suffered several defeats, the loss of large numbers of defectors to the rebel forces, the staging an unpopular coup and a fratricidal conflict between the

“Green Beret” putschists and the “Red Beret” [paratrooper] counter-coup units, desertion has become a major problem in the demoralized military. The Ministry of Defense and Veterans has warned that deserters may be brought before the military courts in accordance with the code of military justice” (*L’Essor* [Bamako], July 23; *L’Indépendant* [Bamako], July 23; *Nouvel Horizon* [Bamako], July 23). According to a member of Special Unit Etia2 (Joint Tactical Echelon) commanded by Colonel al-Hadj Gamou (a Tuareg loyalist); “After the coup, the chain of command gave out. Some subordinates no longer obey their superiors. But it should also be noted that even before the coup, at the command level, there were leadership problems” (PressAfrik.com, July 30). Some Malian troops, rather than focusing on an upcoming campaign against northern extremists and rebels, are using their uniforms to extort money at the Mopti Region checkpoint at Konna from refugees fleeing the Islamist occupation, leading to frequent verbal clashes and further loss of faith in the armed services (*L’Essor* [Bamako], July 25).

The FPR coalition does not appear to have any official support from the Malian military, but are being sponsored by coup leader Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, who has been given “former head-of-state” status in return for stepping aside for a new interim government and is alleged to be providing the militias training facilities and instructors, raising the disturbing possibility he intends to form his own private army (*Le Temps d’Algerie* [Algiers], July 23; *Jeune Afrique*, August 2). Both Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso are training close to Sévaré (Mopti Region), where the Malian Army is regrouping. FLN official Amadou Malle asserts that the militia fighters are strictly unpaid volunteers, though it appears some may have been offered places in the Malian military after the northern region has been retaken (*L’Essor* [Bamako], July 25).

Ganda Koy leader Harouna Touré declared last month that “We are not afraid of death, but we dread shame” (*L’Indépendant* [Bamako], July 5). Touré insists that the militia coalition was formed without consulting anyone and will not wait for anyone’s permission or collaboration to take action. The main objective of the coalition will be to bring a permanent end to the cycle of Tuareg rebellion and reconciliation that places northern Mali in a permanent state of instability (*Septembre 22* [Bamako], July 5).

Though the present state of the Malian military would seem to preclude the possibility of bringing the self-defense militias under control, the government is nevertheless concerned that their impulsiveness will precipitate another round of civil war before the new government is prepared. While a government

communiqué cited the “highly courageous initiative of the youth,” it also affirmed that recovery of the occupied territories in the north is a “task of the state and its divisions” (*L’Indépendant*, July 25).

Militias such as Ganda Koy have notorious reputations for human rights abuses targeted at specific ethnic groups such as the Tuareg, Arabs and Mauritians of northern Mali (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 20). Unleashing them in the north rather than organizing a multinational response to the Islamist occupation is likely to aggravate the security situation rather than stabilize it and may create a poisonous legacy that will ensure years of retributive violence.

BOMBS, ASSASSINATIONS AND KIDNAPPINGS BECOME DAILY EVENTS AS THE BATTLE FOR BENGHAZI CONTINUES

Though incidents of urban violence continue in a number of Libyan cities, it is the former rebel capital of Benghazi where such attacks have been most intense. Bombings are common, with the central intelligence headquarters in Benghazi being a favorite target. An August 1 blast that caused damage but no casualties was only the latest in a string of attacks on the facility this year (Reuters, August 3). The carnage would be even greater if a large number of powerful bombs had not been discovered and disarmed by security officials in the last week. Many of the bombs carried a charge of 40 kilograms and have been found in places such as a school, the Criminal Investigation Department, the National Security Patrols Department and under a bridge leading to the Tibesti Hotel (Tunisa Live, August 7). Three armed men suspected of responsibility in a string of failed bombings in Benghazi were killed by security forces in a gun-battle that wounded five members of the Interior Ministry on August 5 (AFP, August 6; Reuters, August 8). Before stepping down when the new General National Congress took over from the Transitional National Council on August 8, interim Prime Minister Abd al-Rahim al-Keib said that the bombings were the work of Qaddafi loyalists and claimed that one such cell was discovered that was “presided over by persons abroad” (Sky News Arabia, August 6).

Assassinations have also become commonplace in Libya as the armed groups controlling the Libyan streets eliminate rivals and dispose of challenges to their influence. Some of these attacks seem to be a settling of accounts for grudges nursed since the Qaddafi era, particularly against those who were part of the security structure. One such assassination was that of Colonel Sulayman Bouzridah, a former official

in Qaddafi’s central intelligence office who was killed in Benghazi on July 28 despite having joined the rebels during the revolution (Tunisia Live, August 7). Bouzridah was the thirteenth Qaddafi-era security official to be murdered in Benghazi in the past few weeks. Rumors circulate that the murders are being carried out by an unknown group with a death-list of 106 individuals (Libya Herald, July 31).

On July 29, gunmen attacked a convoy escorting Soviet-trained and CIA-supported Major-General Khalifa Haftar, who was nearly killed in a firefight with the Zintan militia at Tripoli Airport in December, 2011. [1] Haftar, who was unhurt, blamed pro-Qaddafi groups for the attack, which occurred shortly after the General had urged Benghazi’s rogue militias to cooperate more closely with the new National Army (Libya Herald, July 31; Magharebia, August 2).

Seven Iranian aid workers were kidnapped on their way to Benghazi’s Tibesti Hotel on July 31 and are still being held by their captors (Fars News Agency [Tehran], August 6). The delegation was in Libya at the invitation of the Libyan Red Crescent. According to Libyan Deputy Interior Minister Wanis al-Sharif, the Islamist kidnappers have demanded Iran mediate the release of Libyan prisoners held in Iraq, while some security officials claim the captives are being questioned by their abductors to determine whether their presence in Benghazi was intended to spread Shi’a Islam in the region (AFP, August 1). Iranian officials have criticized their Libyan counterparts for failing to provide adequate security to the Iranian delegation (Fars News Agency, August 2).

In a brazen raid on July 31, gunmen entered a Benghazi prison and freed one of their comrades being held in the murder of General Abd al-Fatah Yunis and two of his aides on July 28, 2011 (AP, August 1; for the murder, see Jamestown Foundation Brief, August 4, 2011). The prison had already been attacked by rocket fire on July 27, the same day a grenade was tossed at the Benghazi Appeals Court (AFP, August 1).

The violence has also spread to Misrata and Tripoli, where attacks with grenades and RPGs have targeted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the military police headquarters respectively. As in the attacks in Benghazi, the identity of the perpetrators remain unknown. The ICRC attack was the fifth of its kind in Libya in the last three months and has resulted in the humanitarian organization shutting down operations in both cities (AFP, August 5; IRNA, August 7). Some uninformed Islamist militants are under the mistaken impression that the ICRC

is a Christian religious organization intent on converting Muslims.

The violence in Benghazi seems to be a mix of a settling of accounts, an attempt to rearrange the existing power structure and a demonstration by religious extremists of their determination to bring Libya under an Islamist regime regardless of the outcome of the Libyan elections. With a host of well-armed parties with varying agendas responsible for the ongoing violence, it will be extremely difficult for authorities of the new government to bring the situation under control.

Note

1. See Dario Cristiani, “The Zintan Militia and the Fragmented Libyan State,” Jamestown Foundation Hot Issue, January 19, 2012; for the attack, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, December 16, 2011; for a profile of Haftar, see Militant Leadership Monitor, March 31, 2011.

Repression Begets Rebellion in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province

Chris Zambelis

Against the backdrop of ongoing simmering dissent in the Arab world, growing unrest in Saudi Arabia, in contrast, has gone virtually unnoticed. In a climate of increasing political openness, popular Arab demands for the fall of longtime dictatorships have served as vehicles for airing deeply embedded resentments. In this context, narrow segments of Arab societies that have traditionally been subject to targeted discrimination, including ethnic and religious minorities, have become encouraged to articulate their grievances. The mobilization of Saudi Arabia’s Shi’a Muslim minority in the Kingdom’s Eastern Province (al-Mintaqah al-Sharqiyah) since 2011 and the resulting crackdown by Saudi security forces attests to the fact that the Kingdom is not impervious to the kind of unrest being seen in fellow Arab countries (*al-Jazeera* [Doha], July 28).

The fallout from the July 8 arrest of Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr on charges of sedition by Saudi security forces is demonstrative of the sectarian tensions percolating inside the reclusive Kingdom and the broader geopolitical currents driving Saudi behavior. Al-Nimr, a prominent Shi’a cleric

and outspoken critic of the Saudi royal family and the regime’s persecution of its Shi’a citizens, was reportedly shot in the leg during his arrest while driving near his home in the village of al-Awamiyah in Eastern Province. Al-Nimr, who is regarded as the spiritual leader of Saudi Arabia’s Shi’a community, remains in Saudi custody at a military hospital where, according to members of his family, he has endured torture. Al-Nimr has since gone on a hunger strike to protest his detention (al-Akhbar [Beirut], July 12; Press TV [Tehran], July 19). The sheikh’s arrest has sparked protests across Eastern Province, including in Qatif, al-Awamiyah, al-Hasa, and Safwa. The protesters are demanding justice and equality, the release of all political prisoners, and the initiation of political reforms in the Kingdom. Demonstrators have also called for the Saudi royal family to step down (Press TV, August 1). Saudi security forces have used live fire and other repressive tactics to suppress the protests, killing and injuring a number of demonstrators in the process. Scores of protesters have also been detained throughout Eastern Province (*al-Jazeera*, July 28). The Saudi regime has blockaded major centers of dissent such as Qatif and other locations to collectively punish residents by inhibiting freedom of movement and economic activity (*Jadaliyya*, June 21).

Al-Nimr’s latest arrest – the sheikh was arrested previously in 2004 and 2006 on similar charges – has emboldened Shi’a activists in Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has scoffed at al-Nimr’s scathing denunciations of the Saudi royal family and demands for greater rights for the Shi’a. For its part, the Saudi regime sees al-Nimr as a dangerous subversive and accuses him of calling for the secession of the Eastern Province. Saudi Arabia also frequently labels al-Nimr as an instrument of an aggressive Iranian foreign policy that aims to undermine unity and stability in the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia’s reaction to dissent among its Shi’a population provides insight into the way it interprets its evolving geopolitical position in a rapidly changing Middle East. In a broad sense, the Saudi regime perceives the popular demands for freedom and democracy being voiced by Arabs as a serious threat to its long-term sustainability. Saudi Arabia also sees an Iranian hand behind Shi’a-led activism in the region. As evidenced by its decision to deploy security forces in neighboring Bahrain in March 2011 to crush an uprising led largely by a marginalized Shi’a majority that is agitating for greater freedoms under a Sunni-led, pro-Saudi monarchy, the Kingdom worries that its own Shi’a community will rise up in turn. Saudi Shi’a, many of whom maintain tribal and familial links with their Bahraini counterparts, organized protests in solidarity with Bahrainis while calling on

Riyadh to remove its military from Bahrain (see Terrorism Monitor, June 15). In this regard, Saudi Arabia views the organized and sustained political opposition among its Shi'a community in the context of its regional rivalry with Iran. To further malign al-Nimr's reputation, Saudi Interior Minister Prince Ahmad bin Abdelaziz went so far as to question the cleric's mental health. In a report issued by the Saudi Press Agency, the prince declared that "Nimr is someone who stirs sedition... The way he speaks reflects a mental deficiency and imbalance" (*al-Akhbar*, July 30). Al-Nimr's supporters deny these accusations and accuse the Saudi royal family of seeking to avert attention from the most salient issues at hand, namely, the institutionalized marginalization of Shi'a in Saudi society and the persistence of authoritarianism in the Kingdom (*al-Akhbar*, July 12).

Saudi Arabia is well known for its status as the world's top exporter of crude oil and its strategic alliance with the United States. It is also one of the world's most culturally and politically repressive countries. The rigid brand of ultraconservative Sunni Islam espoused by the Kingdom treats Shi'a Muslims as apostates and differing schools of Islam as heretical. The Saudi clerical establishment regularly refers to Shi'a Muslims, for instance, with the pejorative label of *rafidah* (rejectionists). Estimated to represent approximately 10 to 15 % of Saudi Arabia's population of around 28 million, the Shi'a minority is concentrated in Eastern Province, a region where the majority of the Kingdom's oil reserves are located. The Eastern Province has been fertile ground for organized opposition to the Saudi monarchy extending back decades. Despite the widely acknowledged social and economic problems endemic to Saudi society, the Kingdom continues to be seen as relatively immune to the political turbulence on display in other Arab countries. This assessment is derived from Saudi Arabia's strategic importance as an oil producer, which provides the Kingdom with the ability to ward off internal rebellion by doling out social services and other benefits as well as its alliance with the United States. However, the recent events in Eastern Province indicate otherwise.

Riyadh has gone to great lengths to suppress the outflow of information from the Eastern Province. Activist groups in the region, such as the Eastern Province Revolution, however, continue to broadcast information from the scene on online social media outlets, including footage of public demonstrations, violent responses by Saudi security forces and evidence of human rights abuses allegedly perpetrated by the Saudi regime. The Eastern Province Revolution seeks to create "a consultative and electoral ruling system that represents the will of the people." The movement

also aims to "end dictatorial rule through organizing revolutionary and legal activities and popular protests" in Saudi Arabia (*Jadaliyya*, June 21). [1] Despite the Saudi regime's oppressive reaction to the displays of opposition, the demonstrations to date have remained largely peaceful. Reports that a Saudi security patrol in Qatif came under fire by protesters following a demonstration on August 3, however, indicates there is potential for an escalation in hostilities. At least one protester was reportedly killed in the ensuing clashes, while one Saudi soldier was killed and another wounded (*al-Jazeera*, August 4). In light of recent events, public demonstrations of dissent appear poised to persist in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Note

1. See the official YouTube channel of the Eastern Province Revolution, available at: http://www.youtube.com/user/revolution2east?feature=results_main. The official Facebook and Twitter pages of the Eastern Province Revolution are available at: <https://www.facebook.com/rev.east> and <https://twitter.com/sharqiyah> respectively.

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Assessing the Threat to Turkey from Syrian-Based Kurdish Militants

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Kurdish militias recently took control of several towns in northern Syria, raising fears in Turkey that in addition to their camps in the mountainous border areas in Iraq, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK) could also now operate against Turkey from Syria. It is however, unlikely, that the PKK could operate from Syria against Turkey. Even when former Syrian president Hafez Assad supported them before 1998, the PKK carried out few operations in areas near the Syrian border.

The Syrian Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the PKK-affiliated Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD -Democratic Union Party), signed an agreement in the Iraqi Kurdistan

capital of Erbil to shelve their political differences and prevent an armed dispute (Rudaw.net, July 17). This agreement resulted in the establishment of a Supreme Kurdish Council, and the sharing of power between the two signatories in the Kurdish cities of Syria until elections can be carried out (Rudaw.net, July 25).

After this agreement, the armed wing of the PYD, the People's Defense Corps (consisting of 2,000 armed militia members) took control of some Kurdish areas without much resistance from Syrian security forces (Taz.de, July 26; IRIN, August 2). Syrian president Bashar Assad admitted that the PKK could move more freely, due to a "neighbouring area being in chaos" (Syrian Arab News Agency, July 7). Still he denied that he supports the PKK, and emphasized that the PKK does not need Syria to fight against Turkey.

It is clear that the PYD now controls (to some degree) Kobani, Efrin, the Kurdish dominated neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsood and Ashrafiye in the city of Aleppo and parts of the border areas but not the strategic city of Qamishli (Firat News Agency, August 2). Sources such as the defected Syrian Brigadier Fayiz Amr, the KNC's head of Foreign Relations and a member of a Kurdish Youth Group suggest Syrian security forces are still present in the region, and even control most vital locations in Kurdish areas (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 28; Rudaw.net, August 1; Kurdwatch.org, August 5). [1] Assad might want to prevent a clash with the Kurds, but does not want to give them too much control over Kurdish areas because in some cases they have already worked together with the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

The PYD says it does not want to fight with Assad or the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA) and wants to prevent the war from coming to Kurdish areas while Assad does not want to fight the Kurds in order to focus on the FSA. The PYD is waiting till the Ba'ath-regime grows weaker and hopes it can take over Kurdish areas if Syrian security forces withdraw from parts of northern Syria to protect Damascus and Aleppo. [2]

However, after the PYD took over some Kurdish areas, alarm bells went off in the Turkish media about a PKK-state in "Syrian Kurdistan." Turkish analyst Nihat Ali Özcan wrote that the worst result would be if the PKK were to obtain surface-to-air missile and chemical weapons, but this seems to be unlikely (*Hürriyet*, July 26). So far, the PKK only has AK-47 assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and heavier, vehicle mounted weapons taken over from Syrian security forces, such as 106 mm recoilless rifles (*Egypt Independent*, July 28).

Some critics have blamed the Turkish government for being responsible for the PKK taking over areas of Syria due to Turkey's support of the Syrian opposition, support which has weakened Assad and opened the door for the PKK. Yalçın Akdoğan, chief advisor to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, declared that more PKK bases would not be permitted by Turkey and other AKP officials indicated Turkey could intervene if the PKK used Syria as a base for operations against Turkey (Star Gazete [Istanbul], July 27) Reuters, August 8). Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu headed to the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq on August 1 to talk with Syrian Kurdish parties and the Kurdistan Region's president Massoud Barzani about the PYD's activities.

The acting PKK leader Murat Karayılan claimed the PKK does not need rebel camps in Syria and that Kurds would fight Turkey if they invaded "Syrian Kurdistan" (northern Syria) (Firat News Agency, August 2). PYD chief Salih Muslim and KNC head Ismail Hama both oppose Turkish intervention and, in a reference to Turkey, emphasize that Syrian Kurds would not pose a threat to neighbouring countries, [3] According to a leading KNC member, Abd al-Hakim Bashar: We will be the guarantee of Turkey's interests in Syria. Turkey's interests have always conflicted with its neighbors. In this region, it is necessary to find friends for Turkey. The Kurds are the best candidate for this friendship... We will never allow a threat that would be directed toward Turkey in Syrian Kurdistan. We have issued a statement that the PYD also signed. This is a statement confirming that no threat will be directed toward neighboring countries from the Kurdish regions of Syria (*Hürriyet*, August 3).

At the same time, Syria is of limited military value for the PKK due to unfavorable geography. [4] Unlike the rugged Turkish-KRG border in the Botan-Behdidan area, the Turkish-Syrian border is mostly flat and easy to control. Even during the zenith of the PKK insurgency in the early 1990s, PKK activities remained limited near the Syrian border. [5] Without mountainous terrain or support from a super-power, the PKK is very vulnerable to Turkish incursions and this is one of the reasons why the PYD is heavily opposed to foreign intervention in Syria and seeks Russian support to prevent it. [6] Moreover, the Adana agreement signed in 1998 after Syria stopped its support for the PKK gives Turkey the right to pursue the PKK inside Syrian territory (*Egypt Daily News*, July 26).

According to the PYD, the PKK is not militarily active in Syria nor can it use the non-mountainous Syrian Kurdish areas against Turkey. [7] The only mountainous region in

Syria occupied by the Kurds is the Kurd Mountain (Kurd-Dagh) near Alawite-dominated Latakia. Moreover, it is impossible for the PKK to move within the border areas due to precautions taken by the Turkish state. [8] The border region is heavily fortified with military outposts, minefields, barbed wire, cameras and night-time illumination. Furthermore, Turkey has moved tanks and more troops near the Syrian border close to PYD-strongholds (Reuters, August 1).

The PKK will therefore continue to use its camps in northern Iraq and only the FSA can operate in areas near the Turkish border. It seems that Turkish concerns over a PKK state are exaggerated; the PKK cannot use the Syrian Kurdish areas as a launching pad against Turkey and only controls limited areas where Syrian security forces are still present to some degree. The PKK may aim to gain more legitimacy by playing a role in Syria, but not to use their presence there against Turkey militarily.

Notes:

1. Author's interview with Bedir Mustafa of the Kurdish Youth Movement (Tevgera Ciwanên Kurd - TCK), August 2, 2012.
2. Author's interview with the PYD's Foreign Representative Alan Semo, July 31, 2012.
3. *Ibid*
4. Author's interview with Kawa Rashid, Foreign Spokesperson of the Movement of Syrian Kurdistan, July 31, 2012.
5. Author's e-mail exchange with Associate Professor of Political Science Gunes Murat Tezcur, Loyola University, Chicago, August 2, 2012.
6. *Ibid*
7. Author's interview with PYD Foreign Representative Alan Semo, July 31, 2012.
8. Author's interview with German photojournalist Benjamin Hiller, August 2, 2012.

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Targeting al-Shabaab's Leadership as Government Offensive Gains Ground

Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

After twenty years of anarchy, Somalia's Constituent Assembly approved a new draft constitution on August 1, paving the way for the replacement of the transitional government by an elected president with a new cabinet and parliament on August 20, a year after the withdrawal of the militant Islamist al-Shabaab movement from Mogadishu (Radiomuqdisho.net, August 7). A reminder of al-Shabaab's determination to disrupt these plans was given the same day as two suicide bombers with false identification attempted to enter the proceedings, but were instead shot by security forces, setting off their explosives (AP, August 1).

As conditions in Somalia slowly improve, the al-Qaeda-associated al-Shabaab movement is dramatically losing its influence. The strategic decision to formally align with al-Qaeda has contributed to its growing unpopularity and has resulted in the United States offering a total bounty of \$33 million on the group's seven top leaders. This is the first time the movement's leaders have found themselves listed as part of the Rewards for Justice Program, an American counterterrorism project in which the U.S. State Department pays for information leading to the arrest and conviction of terrorists (Reuters, June 6).

The bounty is a clear signal that the United States takes al-Shabaab seriously as a threat to both regional and international security. For Somalia's transitional government, it was a wisely timed psychological move that supports the ongoing physical war against the Islamist movement (Gedoonline.com, June 8).

- Shaykh Ahmed Abdi Godane (a.k.a. Shaykh Mukhtar Abu Zubayr; a.k.a. Ahmed Abdi Aw Mohamed), the group's supreme leader, is the most-wanted individual on the list with a bounty of \$7 million on his head. Godane was nominated as amir of al-Shabaab following the death of movement founder Adan Hashi Ayrow in a U.S. airstrike in May, 2008. Born in 1977 in Hargeisa, the capital of the northern Somali breakaway state of Somaliland, Ahmed Abdi Godane studied at universities in Sudan and Pakistan. He received military training in Afghanistan and returned to Somalia when the anarchy started in the 1990s, changing his name to Mukhtar Abu Zubayr to hide his identity.
- Godane, who often masks his face, began advocating extremist ideologies in Somaliland, where he failed to overcome the traditional religious leaders. He left

Hargeisa disappointed and then robbed a vehicle which was carrying a large sum of tax revenues from the port of Berbera in northern Somalia. He and other militants escaped with the money into Mogadishu, where they paid for military vehicles and arms (Radiomuqdisho.net, June 7).

- Ahmed Abdi Godane is a very suspicious and vigilant man who remains little known even within al-Shabaab, where only a special unit has contact with him. He typically communicates with other al-Shabaab officials through audio-taped messages posted on the internet or broadcast by the movement's radio stations in Somalia.
- Godane is rarely seen in public and has never held a press conference or given a public speech. He doesn't allow himself to be photographed and sometimes wears female clothing to conceal himself. Godane frequently changes his location and sleeping place, which will make it harder for the Rewards for Justice program to find any reliable information indicating his location.
- Ibrahim Haji Jama "al-Afghani" is a very close relative of Godane and shares his secretive ways. As his name suggests, Ibrahim is an Afghan war veteran and co-founder of al-Shabaab (Radiomuqdisho.net, June 7). He is active as a recruiter and is the leader of the movement's Amniyaat special force responsible for assassinating government officials and people considered to be working with it (Raxanreeb.com, June 7).
- Shaykh Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur" is one of the founders of al-Shabaab and has served as the group's spokesman as well as a spiritual leader and military commander in parts of southern Somalia. Abu Mansur is a much more public figure who is comfortable being photographed with his AK-47 assault rifle.
- Abu Mansur is often differentiated from the rest of the Shabaab leaders as an Islamist-nationalist who encourages and respects the clan system in the Somali community. This has made him popular with the clan elders in southern Somalia. Abu Mansur fought alongside Taliban fighters during the U.S. invasion and returned to Somalia when the Taliban government collapsed (Raxanreeb.com, June 7). The senior Shabaab leader responded to the bounty announcement by saying "I am in Buurhakabo [near Baidoa] where I prayed Friday prayer. Last Friday I prayed in Tiyeeglow... I do not fear" (Saadal.com, June 22).
- Shaykh Fu'ad Mohamed Qalaf (a.k.a. Fu'ad Mohamed Shongole) is a fundraiser and recruiter. He holds dual Somali and Swedish citizenship and taught Islamic studies in mosques in Sweden. Qalaf is also considered a respected religious leader within al-Shabaab, where he releases fatwa-s [religious rulings] related to the activities

of the group's fighters. He has appeared publicly at al-Shabaab gatherings around and inside Mogadishu. Fu'ad's voice is familiar to the Somali community from local broadcasts.

"I can assure you that these kind of things will never dissuade us from continuing the holy war against them... There is nothing new in the fact that infidels pay to have Muslim leaders killed. They already did that by offering camels for the head of Prophet Mohammed, and the dollar is the camel of today... Whoever informs the mujahideen fighters of the place where Obama can be found will get ten camels and for [U.S. Secretary of State Hillary] Clinton, we will offer ten roosters and ten hens" (AFP, June 9; HorseedMedia.net, June 9).

- Bashir Mohamed Mahamoud (a.k.a. Qoorgaab) is little-known to the Somali community but is a dangerous man who specializes in bomb-making, roadside bombs and assassinations. He is a military commander in al-Shabaab and is believed to be among the ten members of the group's leadership council. He is also a close friend of Godane (Raxanreeb.com, June 7).
- Zakariya Ismail Ahmed Hersi, al-Shabaab's intelligence chief, is a highly trained young assassin and is very close to Godane. He is not well known within the movement and is never seen in public (Raxanreeb.com, June 7).
- Al-Shabaab head of media Abdullahi Yare (a.k.a. Shaykh Nadir; a.k.a. Abdullahi Haji Da'ud) previously worked with al-Shabaab's secret service as a senior officer. Computer savvy and fluent in Arabic, Abdullahi records and distributes Godane's messages to al-Qaeda or other al-Shabaab leaders (Radiomuqdisho.net, August 7; Raxanreeb.com, June 7).

The biggest surprise of the U.S \$33 million bounty on the Somali militant leaders is the omission of Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, the former leader of the Hizb al-Islam militia and now a senior figure in al-Shabaab. The reason seems to lie in Aweys' current lack of influence in al-Shabaab. Aweys' absence on the list also supports recent rumors that Shaykh Aweys' has entered into secret negotiations with the Somali government regarding his defection from the militants. There are suggestions that Aweys is already under house arrest by al-Shabaab and is being watched closely (Wadanka.com, June 11). Even if the U.S. bounties do not have the expected effect on al-Shabaab they will at least create a climate of suspicion among its leaders at a time when the movement is suffering military setbacks.

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Al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood: Alternative Visions of an Islamist Egypt

Andrew McGregor

In late July, Sheikh al-Mujahid Hussam Abd al-Raouf a prominent al-Qaeda ideologue, member of its strategy committee and editor of *Vanguards of Khurasan*, the magazine of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, presented a lengthy examination of the steps Egyptian president Muhammad al-Mursi should take in transforming Egypt into an Islamic state. In an article carried on jihadi websites entitled “If I was in Mursi’s place and sat on the Throne,” Abd al-Raouf suggests the new Egypt should be a self-sufficient state based on social justice and preparation for jihad, both defensive and offensive (Ansar1.info, July 25). According to the sheikh’s austere vision of a “New Egypt”:

- The Islamic Shari’a must form the constitution of the country. It is a powerful force that can overcome any obstacle or challenge to comprehensive reform. Its implementation and progress should be explained in a monthly public broadcast. Senior figures of the old regime should be prosecuted “in all fairness and efficiency” and the funds that were looted in the past three decades should be recovered and deposited in the state treasury, “a battle that will not be easy or short.”
 - There must be a comprehensive change in the lifestyle and behavior of the Egyptian President. This should begin with a move from the opulence of the presidential palace in Heliopolis to much more modest quarters in the suburbs as a first sign that the president intends to follow “a policy of austerity, justice and humility.” The presidential palaces, grounds and furnishings should be put up for rent or sale, as should most of the fleets of cars and aircraft, leaving only what is essential for the operations of the president. Further austerity measures should include the abolition of Egyptian embassies in countries that do not have direct political, economic or military ties to Egypt as well as the cancellation of official celebrations and festivals.
 - All international conventions must be reviewed, according to the rule of law, with an eye to eliminating those conventions and treaties that have created in Egypt a cycle of poverty, underdevelopment and defeatism. Payments on enormous international debts created through usury should be canceled “on the spot.”
- Alternatives to such borrowing should be examined, including interest-free short-term loans, relying on Arab and Islamic solidarity for their provision.
- Investment from domestic capital and Arab and Islamic countries should be encouraged to exploit the business advantages offered by Egypt, including security, cheap labor, technical competence and low wages for professionals in comparison to those of Western or Asian countries.
 - All Islamist political prisoners should be released immediately and the Ministry of the Interior cleansed of all those officials still loyal to the former regime. These steps should be accompanied by a review of the judicial system as a whole, including the qualifications of judges and amendments to the curricula of law schools and colleges.
 - Rather than be appointed by the president of the republic, the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar should be elected directly by religious scholars. The *awqaf* system (religious endowments) and its control by a government ministry should be reviewed and reformed, while salary increases and bonuses to improve the social status of scholars and preachers will encourage academically outstanding students to study Islamic law and the Arabic language.
 - The Culture and Information sectors should be cleansed of corrupt officials and those promoting apostasy, immorality and vice.
 - Immorality fostered by tourism is linked to corruption and decadence in Egypt. Given the impossibility of cancelling this sector due to the employment and hard currency it provides, tourism should be “Islamized” by encouraging domestic tourism and visits from other Arabs and Muslims. “Foreigners” would be welcome if they agreed to abide by community ethics and behavior consistent with Islamic law.
 - Citizens should be held accountable in their observance of the pillars of Islam, such as the performance of prayers, fasting and pilgrimage for those who can afford it. Of special concern should be employees of the state who do not perform prayers or who break the fast during Ramadan.
 - The problem of male youth unemployment and resultant issues of crime could be eliminated by removing women from the work force. Working women may spend more than their salary on transportation to and from work,

nursery fees, meals, clothing and accessories while their children develop mental and physical health issues in their absence. Why not then return women to their homes where they are protected and can avoid mixing with men? In a reversal of the modern assembly-line technique of mass production, the sheikh suggests that women who seek to supplement their husband's income can be trained by television in home production techniques and have raw materials delivered to their homes and finished products picked up later. Uneducated women can pursue sewing, embroidery, knitting and carpet production while educated women can assemble products such as watches and electronic devices.

- The performance of government departments and state facilities must be improved, especially government hospitals.
- Sectarian conflict must be extinguished in Egypt. According to Abdul-Raouf, the current leaders of the Coptic Church in Egypt continue to follow policies of the late Pope Shenouda III that fuelled sectarian disputes by attempting to create a Christian “state within a state.” Christians must not form part of the nation's senior leadership as there are a sufficient number of Muslims with “experience and competence.”
- All citizens must be provided with food security and adequate housing. Agricultural scientists and scholars of animal production must be employed in efforts to bring self-sufficiency in food to Egypt, which currently relies heavily on foreign imports. With many Egyptians living in slums, shanty houses and tents, the state must dedicate itself to creating new urban communities where borrowing from “Arab and friendly countries” can be used to provide housing to Egyptians with interest-free and affordable payments.
- Working from the axiom that people who do not have guns do not have freedom, Egypt should abandon military assistance from the United States “which it does not need” and instead focus on becoming self-sufficient in arms production, even if this means an immediate decline in the quality of available arms. Abd al-Raouf points to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as proof that “miracles” can be achieved with even backwards arms and limited ammunition against the most powerful military forces if Egyptians “put their trust in God.” The state must become militarized in preparation for the “epic battles” to come between Muslims and infidels, with military service binding on “every sane adult.” As Islam does not acknowledge only defensive jihad, but must sometimes attack in a pre-emptive war “to nip

aggression in the bud,” the responsible government department must change its name from “the Ministry of Defense.”

While new Egyptian President Muhammad al-Mursi is likely to take his advice from the Muslim Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau rather than al-Qaeda, the document is nevertheless interesting as a detailed proposal of how an Islamist state should be formed and organized according to al-Qaeda, which has been especially weak in dealing with such issues in the past, preferring to devote most of its ideological production to the conduct, aims and methods of global jihad.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Reformation

Sheikh Ibrahim Munir, the Secretary General of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood (and a close friend of al-Mursi) has identified Egypt's entrenched bureaucracy and the still extant “deep state” power structure as major obstacles to the new president's reform mission:

President Mursi has to overcome obstacles, obstructions, and corrupt concepts that have accumulated during decades of individual pharaoh rule during which loyalty for the person of the ruler was put before loyalty to the country and the people. Thus, what are now called “deep state” practices, which do not distinguish between what is allowed and what is prohibited in dealing with the money, honor, or blood of the subjects, have been formed together with a terrifying backward bureaucracy that destroys any progress and efficiency, and that does not know the meaning of transparency, and regression has taken place in all the state institutions and their cultural, financial, medical, educational, services, and foreign policy actions that are related to the independence and interests of the country (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 11).

To overcome these obstacles, Sheikh Ibrahim suggests al-Mursi must do three things – surround himself with “a good entourage,” overcome the bureaucracy by correcting the culture of those working in it and subject every member of the government at every level to the statutes of the law and constitution.

Internal Dissent

As Egypt's new leaders struggle to form a government, a vast post-revolutionary social upheaval continues. Labor strife persists; the 870 protests and strikes on the nation's railway system alone have cost the state an estimated \$120 million (*al-Masry al-Youm*, August 2).

Al-Mursi will also have to deal with different visions of the New Egypt even within the Muslim Brotherhood movement, whether from “liberal” Islamists like Dr. Abd al-Moneim Aboul Fotouh (a former member of the movement’s Guidance Bureau who resigned to contest the presidential election) or voices like former Brotherhood spokesman Kamal al-Halbawi, who denounced al-Mursi’s July 12 visit to Saudi Arabia (his first official visit abroad as president), which he described as “an enemy of the Egyptian Revolution” (El-Balad TV, July 31; Fars News Agency [Tehran], July 31). Al-Mursi, who taught at California State University in the 1980s, is often regarded as a protégé of Khairat al-Shater, the wealthy chief strategist of the Muslim Brotherhood, who sponsored his rise through the ranks of the Brotherhood. His detractors regard al-Mursi as a stand-in for al-Shater, who promoted al-Mursi as a presidential candidate only after his own candidacy was disqualified by the military in April on the grounds that he had recently been in prison, a violation of the election rule that a candidate must not have been imprisoned in the previous six years (*Egypt Independent*, June 22).

Tourism

With the vital tourism industry off by a third since the revolution, Egypt is scrambling for ways to restore the nearly 15 million visitors it hosted in 2010. Important tombs of the ancient period that have not been open to visitors for decades are being made available to tourists and a new Egyptian Museum is scheduled to open in 2014. Though the Muslim Brotherhood appears to understand the importance of Egypt’s ancient monuments to the national economy as a source of foreign currency, Egypt’s Salafists regard all such sites as products of the pre-Islamic *jahiliya* (time of ignorance) and would just as soon eliminate “idolatrous” visits to Egypt’s ancient monuments (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, December 22, 2011). Fortunately for the industry, Salafist efforts to obtain the post of Minister of Tourism were unsuccessful, with the post going to an experienced technocrat, Hisham Za’azou. Nevertheless, efforts are underway by Islamist businessmen to promote Egypt as a center of “Halal Tourism” for families “committed to Shari’a.” Approved hotels and tourist facilities would not serve alcohol, would provide *halal* meat and offer segregated facilities for men and women. [1]

Islamization

Egypt’s Dar al-Ifta, an institution responsible for issuing *fatwa*-s [religious rulings] under the supervision of Egypt’s

Grand Mufti, Ali Goma’a, issued a *fatwa* earlier this month declaring it was unacceptable for Muslims to eat or drink in public during Ramadan, calling such activity “a violation of public decency” (*Daily News Egypt*, August 2; *Bikya Masr*, August 2). Should the government decide to enforce the *fatwa* it will mark a major change in Egyptian society, where restaurants and cafés typically remain open during Ramadan.

On July 30, al-Mursi released and pardoned over a dozen Islamists imprisoned for trying to kill leading Egyptian officials (Ahrum Online, August 1). Al-Mursi has pledged to obtain the release of Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman from an American prison, where he is serving a life sentence for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Egypt has also asked for the release of Egyptian jihadi Tariq al-Sawah, who has been imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay since he was captured in the battle for Tora Bora (AFP, August 2).

Egypt’s New Cabinet

The composition of the new cabinet reveals that several of the most important ministries remain in the hands of the pre-revolution power structure. In the Interior Ministry, responsible for internal security, Major General Ahmad Gamal al-Din has been appointed as minister despite being a former aide to the previous and much criticized interior minister, Muhammad Ibrahim (Ahrum Online, August 1). The general will have to deal not only with an internal security service that has largely collapsed since the revolution, but one that has been trained for decades to regard Islamism as a major internal security threat to Egypt.

The Nour Party, the most successful of the Salafist groups to take part in the parliamentary elections, has refused to join the new cabinet, rejecting new Prime Minister Hisham Qandil’s offer of the Environment Ministry as being “unworthy” of the party (Ahrum Online, August 2; *al-Masry al-Youm*, August 1). Until parliament is reconvened or new elections are held, this effectively leaves the Salafists on the outside of the new government, a situation they are unlikely to tolerate for long. Al-Nour had sought the Ministry of Public Enterprise, which would have given it effective control of nearly 150 state-owned corporations.

Field Marshal Muhammad Hussein al-Tantawi will retain the post of defense minister, which he has held since 1991, thus ensuring there will be little civilian oversight of the armed forces. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has suggested creating a National Defense Council that would include both military and civilian leaders to work out legislation regarding the military and its budget before

its presentation to parliament. The president would only have the power to declare war after obtaining the approval of the National Defense Council and parliament, effectively limiting the president's ability to control foreign policy and command the national armed forces (*Egypt Independent*, August 2).

Reports that Muhammad Yousri Ibrahim, a leading Salafist and failed parliamentary candidate for the Salafist al-Asala Party, was al-Mursi's choice to take over the role of Ministry of Religious Endowments created immediate controversy at all levels in Egypt. Though educated at al-Azhar University, Muhammad Yousri is a noted critic of the institution and his candidacy was quickly opposed by the Grand Sheikh of the Islamic university, Ahmad al-Tayeb, on the grounds that the Minister of Endowments is traditionally chosen by the Grand Sheikh (*Daily News Egypt*, August 2). Muhammad Yousri is a close associate of Khairat al-Shater and it seems likely that the deputy leader of the Muslim Brotherhood was behind the appointment. The ministry is central to the religious direction of the nation as it is responsible for mosques, licensing imams and regulating the substantial endowments of property that fund the religious establishment. The announcement was widely condemned as a sign that Saudi-style Salafism had arrived with the approval of the Muslim Brotherhood and was loudly opposed by the nation's still influential Sufi leadership, which has endured attacks on its shrines from Salafists since the Revolution (*Egypt Independent*, May 17; *al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], March 30, 2011). Muhammad Yousri is also well-known for leading demonstrations against the Coptic Church. Amidst a deluge of criticism, al-Mursi's decision was quickly reversed and the ministry given into the hands of Osama al-Abd, the vice-chancellor of al-Azhar.

The Coptic Question

Despite early protestations of Coptic-Muslim cooperation in the early days of the Revolution, tensions between the Coptic and Muslim communities are now at an all-time high, requiring only a tiny spark to set off street violence that security forces show little interest in controlling. Most recently, major clashes erupted in the Dashour district of the Giza Governorate after a Coptic launderer accidentally burned a Muslim customer's shirt with his iron. The incident soon developed into street riots, looting of Coptic-owned shops and even the attempted arson of the Mary Guirguis Church, which was only narrowly prevented by security forces using tear gas (*Ahram Online*, August 2; *al-Masry al-Youm*, August 2; *Bikya Masr*, August 2). As many as 150 Coptic families may have fled the district. Following the clashes, Christian demonstrators who claim sectarian

violence has intensified since al-Mursi became president appeared outside the Presidential Palace in Heliopolis bearing signs that said "Down with the rule of the Supreme Guide [i.e. of the Muslim Brotherhood]" (*Ahram Online*, August 2).

The interim leader of the Coptic Church, Bishop Pachomius, was critical of the cabinet appointments, which included only one Copt in the Ministry of Scientific Research, which Pachomius referred to as "a semi-ministry." The Bishop, who is filling in as leader until a new Pope can be elected after the death of Shenouda III, also denounced the security services for standing by "with arms crossed" during the sectarian riots in Dahshour (AFP, August 4).

Conclusion

The election of al-Mursi is just the beginning phase of the Brotherhood's 25-year Renaissance Project, a comprehensive effort to bring Egypt's administration, business sector and society in line with Islamic values. The chairman of the project's steering committee is Khairat al-Shater, who appears to be emerging as the real power behind the Egyptian throne.

The Brotherhood's Renaissance Project will inevitably collide with the interests of SCAF and the rest of Egypt's "Deep State" apparatus, which will be exceedingly difficult to dislodge. SCAF still holds supreme power in Egypt and controls all decisions regarding the military. The determination of the Renaissance Project to make the military's large share of the Egyptian economy abide by free-market rules rather than continuing to use free labor (military conscripts) and free natural resources in its industries is certain to create friction (*Egypt Independent*, July 31). An antagonistic relationship was worsened in mid-June with the implementation of the Supplement to the Constitutional Declaration, which limited the president's powers and increased those of SCAF, including the right to intervene in the drafting of the new constitution (*Egypt Independent*, August 1). The ongoing political struggle has convinced many experienced technocrats and secular politicians to turn down government appointments, leaving al-Mursi with an inexperienced Prime Minister, no parliament, no vice-president, no power over the military and a corps of advisors with ties to Khairat al-Shater. Control of the most important ministries (Defense, Justice, Finance) remain outside the hands of the Brotherhood and promises of greater representation in the cabinet for women and Christians have been thoroughly dashed. The secular and progressive forces that filled Tahrir Square 18 months ago see too many familiar faces from the old regime in the "new" government and are unlikely to be inspired by the relative unknowns who are new appointments. Though al-

Shater denies exerting influence over al-Mursi, Egypt's new president has so far made some questionable decisions in forming his new government and has generally been unable to attract Egypt's most talented and experienced leaders to the new regime. Further decisions of this type risk alienating large numbers of Egyptians, which could make a repeat of the Brotherhood's parliamentary victory earlier this year difficult when Egyptians return to the polls, possibly in December.

Note

1. See, for example: <http://www.shouqtravel.com/index.php/en/>

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