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KENYAN NAVY SOFTENS UP KISMAYO PRIOR TO AMISOM ATTACK

Kenya’s navy continues to play an important role in the multi-national struggle against Somalia’s al-Qaeda affiliated al-Shabaab movement by shelling the Shabaab-held port of Kismayo in southern Somalia. These operations come at a time when Kenya is making significant upgrades to its naval capacity through purchase or donation. These upgrades are intended to enhance Kenya’s ability to carry out anti-piracy and counter-terrorism operations in the Indian Ocean.

Kismayo’s port operations and lucrative charcoal trade are the main source of revenue for al-Shabaab since it pulled out of Mogadishu last year. Other forces that have gathered around Kismayo in preparation for the final assault include Ugandan and Burundian AMISOM troops, Somali government forces and the local Ras Kamboni militia of Ahmad Muhammad Islam “Madobe,” which were expelled from Kismayo by al-Shabaab in 2009. British experts are reported to have played a facilitating role in planning sessions for the assault on Kismayo held in Nairobi and attended by AMISOM commander Lieutenant General Andrew Gutti (Ugandan) (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], September 4).

Since Kenya joined the campaign against al-Shabaab with Operation Linda Nchi in October, 2011, the Kenyan navy has participated in naval operations designed to restrict al-Shabaab supplies of arms and fuel, secure Kenyan waters from terrorist infiltrators and deter piracy (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 11, 2011). While the Kenyan Army deployment in Somalia formally joined the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on June 11, the Kenyan Navy and Air Force (which has also carried out bombing operations over Kismayo) were not included in the agreement and thus do not come under the Ugandan-dominated AMISOM command structure.

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Kenyan warships are now playing an important role degrading the defenses and military capacity of those al-Shabaab militants who have not seized the opportunity to join the civilian flight out of Kismayo. There are reports that al-Shabaab has attempted to stiffen its resistance by bringing in hundreds of reinforcements in armored vehicles (Jowhar.com [Mogadishu], September 7). Even if al-Shabaab is forced to make a strategic withdrawal from Kismayo, occupying AMISOM forces are almost certain to be met by improvised explosive devices, land-mines and ambushes by hidden militants (after the pattern of Mogadishu).

After reportedly being provoked by an al-Shabaab gunboat, a Kenyan navy ship fired ten rounds on Kismayo on September 3, while the port area and airport were shelled the next day (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], September 5; VOA, September 4; BBC, September 4). Kenyan ships fired on what they believed to be a Kismayo arms cache on September 5, killing a reported seven Shabaab militants and destroying a stockpile of “technicals” [armored battle wagons], arms and munitions (RFI, September 6). Residents of the town said the attack began shortly after the militants had dragged the bodies of four Kenyan soldiers killed in the battle for Afmadow into the town square for public display (RFI, September 6). A Kenyan ship fired on a Shabaab anti-aircraft emplacement on September 11.

In the last few months Kenya has added two ships to its fleet that will significantly enhance its naval strength. In June, France donated the 1976 vintage patrol boat *La Rieuse*, one of ten ships of the P400 class used to patrol the waters of its overseas possessions. Equipped with a 40mm cannon, *La Rieuse* operated in the Indian Ocean from the French base at Réunion. Most of the P400 class are now being decommissioned, but *La Rieuse* (now renamed *KNS Harambee II*) was donated in the interests of helping Kenya carry out high seas security operations (Meretmarine.com, June 7; Defenceweb.com, June 10).

Kenya has also finally taken possession of the 140-ton *Jasiri*, a Spanish-built oceanographic survey vessel that has been fitted with naval guns, missiles, machine-guns and radar and communications systems, making it the most powerful ship on the East African coast (*Nairobi Star*, August 30). The ship was supposed to be delivered in 2005, but the purchase became entangled in Kenya’s Anglo-Leasing corruption scandal. As a result, the ship sat without maintenance in a Spanish dock for seven years. A Kenyan delegation arrived to complete the deal in February but instead rejected the ship on the grounds that much of the equipment was outdated and no longer functioning. After an unsuccessful attempt to sell the ship to the Nigerian Navy, Kenya finally negotiated a deal

with the *Jasiri*’s builders, Euromarine Industries (*Nairobi Star*, April 27).

Mombasa, the Kenyan Navy’s main port, was consumed by deadly street riots when the *Jasiri* arrived following the assassination of Muslim preacher Aboud Rogo Muhammad, a well-known supporter of al-Shabaab. A statement issued by al-Shabaab urged Kenyan Muslims to “take all necessary measures to protect their religion, their honor, their property and their lives from the enemies of Islam” (AFP, August 29).

Nonetheless, Kenyan Chief of Defense Forces, General Julius Karangi, warned that the arrival of the *Jasiri* had shifted the power equation on the East African coast: “*Jasiri* has capabilities and capacities that we did not have. If there are some people out there thinking they can come to our waters and worry us, let them know that things can get very tough for them” (*Africa Review* [Nairobi], August 31). The Navy has not yet announced whether the *Jasiri* will participate in the Kismayo operation, but its deployment there seems likely after trials are carried out.

SOUTH SUDAN’S YAU YAU REBELLION CREATING INSECURITY IN JONGLEI STATE

Rebellions in remote regions of South Sudan continue to plague efforts to restore security in the new nation and further a disarmament process that is ironically being cited as one of the primary causes of the latest disturbance in South Sudan’s Jonglei State. The so-called Yau Yau Rebellion, named for its leader, failed politician David Yau Yau, has brought many youth belonging to South Sudan’s Murle tribe into direct conflict with troops of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the former rebel group that now forms the national army of South Sudan.

A former theology student, Yau Yau was defeated by a SPLM candidate in the April 2010 elections. Rather than accept defeat, Yau Yau gathered disaffected youth of the Jonglei-based Murle tribe and launched an attack on Pibor in May, 2010, killing several SPLA soldiers. He continued to mount ambushes on SPLA troops and South Sudan wildlife rangers until 2011, when he agreed to a ceasefire. [1] During his reintegration with the SPLM government, Yau Yau received the usual reward for rebels who have given up their struggle—a general’s rank in the SPLA, despite Yau Yau’s utter lack of military experience.

The SPLA reported in April that Yau Yau had fled to

Khartoum, presumably to obtain aid for a new rebellion from the government of Omar al-Bashir, which has been engaged in a proxy war with the South for several years (Sudan Tribune, April 8). Yau Yau has since enjoyed some success in fighting on his own turf in Pibor County (south-west Jonglei State). On August 23, Yau Yau's men were joined by armed civilians in killing as many as 40 SPLA soldiers looking for the rebel leader in the Lekuangle Payam district of Pibor (Miraya FM [Juba], August 27; *Upper Nile Times*, August 27). In the aftermath of the attack, the commander of the SPLA's Division 8, Major General Botros Bol Bol, vowed that "Yau Yau will die like [George] Athor... they will not escape from our hands," while Governor Manyang said the army had been instructed to teach the rebels "a lesson they will never forget" (Sudan Tribune, August 28). [2] That lesson was postponed when Yau Yau's men attacked SPLA troops again on August 30 (Sudan Tribune, August 30).

SPLA troops involved in disarming the Murle (who fought in pro-government militias against the SPLA during the civil war) have been accused of committing numerous rapes and using various methods of torture and coercion to get Murle tribesmen to reveal where their weapons are hidden during the disarmament campaign, though an SPLA spokesman described such reports as "lies" (Sudan Tribune, August 27, August 30; BBC, May 25).

However, Jonglei governor Kuol Manyang played down the possibility the violence was connected to SPLA excesses in the disarmament process: "It is not revenge, it is a rebellion." The governor suggested that human rights violations amongst the Murle could be the work of "individuals" amongst the 8,000 SPLA soldiers deployed in the Pibor region (Sudan Tribune, August 27). Manyang has stated that Khartoum is the sole source of arms for Yau Yau's forces and claims that helicopters are hidden in the bush that are used to resupply the rebels (Sudan Radio Service, August 31; Sudan Times, August 30).

Most of the Murle live in the Upper Nile lowlands, though smaller groups live in the highlands of the Boma Plateau and across the border in southern Ethiopia, from whence they came in the 19th century. Their pastoral lifestyle has often brought them into conflict with other pastoralists in South Sudan over scarce resources. There are also residual tensions from the civil war, in which many Murle fought against the SPLA in Major General Ismail Konyi's pro-Khartoum Pibor Defense Forces (South Sudan News Agency, March 18). Cattle-raiding is endemic amongst the tribes of Jonglei State and has grown worse with the proliferation of automatic weapons during the civil war, but it is the Murle proclivity for abducting hundreds of children annually that has enraged

their neighbors. The cause of the abductions appears to be widespread infertility amongst the Murle, which is commonly believed to be caused by an epidemic of syphilis, though very little serious research has been carried out to discover the precise reasons for the problem, which appears to be long-standing—some Nuer claim the abductions began in the 17th century (Bor Globe, April 9; South Sudan News Agency, January 5).

In late December, 2011, a Nuer militia of over 6,000 men known as the Nuer White Army (NWA) launched "Operation Ending Murle Abductions" with the assistance of some 900 Twic-Dinka youth eager to end the pattern of Murle child-abductions and who were credited with providing the intelligence behind the successful rescue of 35 abductees. [3] A NWA statement issued during the January campaign against the Murle offered a novel solution to the Murle infertility problem:

[The] Murle cannot increase their population by abducting Nuer, Anuak and Dinka's children. If Murle's women have fertility problem, the Nuer and Dinka are willing to accept intermarriage with Murle. The Dinka, Nuer and Murle's chiefs can sit down and talk about intermarriage to assist our Murle brothers to increase their population if their women are not procreating. The chiefs can decide the number of cattle a Murle man should pay as dowries to marry a Dinka or Nuer girl (South Sudan News Agency, January 5).

The NWA was formed by Riek Machar (current vice-president of South Sudan) during the 1991 split within the SPLA, which saw many Nuer under Machar's command join Khartoum's loyalists in South Sudan in reaction to perceived Dinka dominance of the independence movement. The NWA, composed largely of young Lou Nuer civilians, used their official sanction to turn their arms against traditional regional enemies, such as the Bor Dinka and the Murle. Machar found it difficult to disband the youth after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005. The battle-hardened veterans of the SPLA were more persuasive, slaughtering over a hundred of the NWA in May, 2005, bringing a temporary halt to the movement's activities. [4]

The NWA today reject Riek Machar as a Nuer leader and hold him responsible for arming the Murle after siding with Khartoum in the civil war. The NWA operates outside the traditional tribal power structure, which has created friction with the community it purports to represent. In a statement released earlier this year, the NWA suggested the UN not waste its time talking to a "tiny minority, like chiefs, elders, pastors and politicians," and further warned that if South Sudanese President Salva Kiir "wants to avoid what

happened to Muammar Qaddafi, he should not mess with the Nuer White Army.” [5]

One of the organizers of the December-January raids on the Murle was Dak Kueth, a Lou Nuer “magician” who headed for the Ethiopian border with 200 armed men rather than submit to SPLA disarmament, committing further attacks on the way. In late June, Dak Kueth’s group became trapped between SPLA forces and Ethiopian troops, forcing the entire group to surrender to the Ethiopians. Some of those detained were Ethiopian nationals from the Nuer community of western Ethiopia’s Gambela district, but Dak Kueth and the Sudanese Nuer were turned over to the SPLA (Sudan Tribune, April 17; June 27).

Led by Lieutenant General Kuol Deim Kuol, the disarmament campaign that began in March has been hampered by difficult terrain, a lack of roads and Murle fears that they will be defenseless in the face of further attacks from the Nuer and Dinka (Sudan Tribune, April 17). As many as 100,000 people remain displaced after the tribal clashes of December 2011 and January 2012, in which 1,000 to 3,000 people were killed.

Notes:

1. “David Yauyau Rebellion, Jonglei State,” Small Arms Survey, February 2011, <http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/HSBA-Armed-Groups-Yauyau.pdf>.
2. For the rebellion and death of Lieutenant-General George Athor, see Terrorism Monitor, May 20, 2010 and Militant Leadership Monitor Brief, December, 2011.
3. “The Nuer White Army Ended Operations against Murle Tribe in South Sudan,” Media Release, Nuer White Army, Akobo, South Sudan, January 5, 2012: <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/news/press-releases/the-nuer-white-army-ended-operations-against-murle-tribe-in-south-sudan>.
4. John Young, “The White Army: An Introduction and Overview,” Small Arms Survey, June 2007, <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/HSBA-SWP-5-White-Army.pdf>.
5. Ibid

Dual Blows Imperil the Future of the Cross-Border Haqqani Network

Arif Jamal

Two recent events seem to have shaken the Haqqani Network to its core—the death of Badruddin Haqqani and the group’s designation as a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” (FTO) by the United States. According to a Pakistani journalist based in the Tribal Areas, the death of Badruddin Haqqani was more of symbolic and psychological impact while the FTO designation by the United States hit the group’s soft financial underbelly. “There is no shortage of people who can replace Badruddin Haqqani but there are no countries that can replace the lost [support from some] countries as a consequence of the FTO designation.” [1] Though reports of Badruddin’s death were initially denied by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, they were later confirmed by Badruddin’s family (Ansar1.info, August 26; Khaama Press [Kabul], August 27).

The cross-border Haqqani Network keeps its identity intact within the Taliban Movement. It also has independent ties with other terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba. According to Pakistani journalist Wajahat Khan: “The network is, literally, a bit like a crime family. Lots of cousins and uncles dominate the top tiers of leadership, specializing in different roles, skills, regions and formations” (Express Tribune [Karachi], September 8).

Although Badruddin’s brother Sirajuddin was considered senior to him in the network hierarchy, Badruddin was heavily involved in kidnappings, extortion and military operations in Afghanistan. According to a security official based in the tribal areas, Badruddin was in-charge of day-to-day operational details such as recruiting and training suicide bombers for southeastern Afghanistan (including Kabul). [2]

The Haqqani Network is known to have a wide range of legitimate business interests in Pakistan as well as some Middle East countries. There is no immediate threat to their business interests in Pakistan as Islamabad is determined not to abandon them. Although it became quite clear more than a month ago that the United States was about to take action against the Haqqani Network, Pakistan did not take any action against the group itself. Neither were the Haqqanis worried. According to a Pakistani official, “They felt fairly assured about their business and financial interests in Pakistan. However, they have taken some preliminary steps to secure their interests and accounts in some Middle East countries.” [3]

Pakistan believes that the FTO designation in the wake of Badruddin Haqqani's death is meant to send a clear message. It is commonly believed in Pakistan that high profile actions against the Haqqani Network are basically aimed at entrapping Pakistan. According to a civilian official working on terrorism-related matters, the United States "could have taken these steps a long time ago but did not." The reason for the delay was that the United States "wanted to work with Pakistan. Now, it makes it a lot easier for the United States to designate Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism." [4] Some officials predict that bad days are ahead for Pakistani-American relations in the wake of the FTO designation: "Frankly speaking, any decision by the U.S. to declare the Haqqani network a terror group will not be a good sign for future Pakistan-U.S. relations. Any such decision will take the relationship back to square one, ruining the improvement seen in ties between the two countries during the last couple of months" (AFP, September 7).

The FTO designation is likely to make any talks between the United States and the Haqqani Network more difficult, if not impossible. Combined with the alleged killing of Badruddin, hopes have dimmed of any talks between the Haqqani Network and the United States. According to a Pakistani official, there was a section in the network which was supportive of the talks with the Americans and the Afghan government, but these hopes have now been dashed. [5] The public statements of the Haqqani Network also show that the group is ready to carry out reprisals. Haqqani Network commanders said that the FTO designation is likely to endanger a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict before the end of 2014 (Reuters, September 7).

The dual blows will shrink the space for the Haqqani Network as it will not be able to operate outside Pakistan with impunity as it does in some countries. The blows are likely to have a significant impact on its legitimate and illegitimate businesses, particularly in some Gulf countries. At the same time, it is also likely to harden its posture vis-à-vis America. At a time when some Taliban groups are reportedly ready to accept a limited US presence in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, the Haqqani Network is more likely to oppose it.

Notes:

1. Author's telephone interview with a FATA-based journalist who requested anonymity, September 7, 2012.
2. Author's telephone interview with a mid-ranking security official who requested anonymity, September 5, 2012.

3. Ibid

4. Author's interview with a civilian security official who requested anonymity, September 8, 2012.

5. Author's telephone interview with a security official in Peshawar who requested anonymity, September 8, 2012.

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Foreign Fighters Bring a Global Agenda to Syria

Chris Zambelis

Great uncertainty continues to shroud the ideological composition of the insurgency that is raging across Syria. The motivations of the rank-and-file of the Free Syrian Army (FSA - the armed wing of the Syrian National Council [SNC] opposition movement) and the constellation of factions that claim to be fighting under its auspices, are provoking serious concern. Displays of sectarianism, expressions of Salafist dogma and a spate of improvised explosive device (IED) and suicide attacks redolent of al-Qaeda that are occurring with growing frequency in Syrian cities, validate fears of the presence of radical Islamists within the armed opposition. Islamist militants fighting under the FSA banner or with Syrian organizations harboring expressly radical Islamist agendas such as Jabhat al-Nusrah and Kataib al-Ahrar al-Sham are making their presence felt in the insurgency (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], August 6). [1]

Allegations that foreign-born radical Islamist militants hailing from around the globe are streaming into Syria, are appearing with increasing regularity in media accounts of the conflict in Syria (*al-Jazeera* [Doha], August 23; *al-Akhbar*, July 26). Since the start of the uprising, influential radical Islamist ideologues as diverse as al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, exiled Syrian Salafist cleric Sheikh Adnan al-Arour and Lebanon's Dai al-Islam al-Shahhal have appealed to Muslims to travel to Syria to fight the Ba'athist regime (*al-Arabiya* [Dubai], February 12; *Daily Star* [Beirut], April 16). Al-Qaeda's Iraq-based affiliate, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and the Algeria-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have also interjected themselves into the campaign

by publicly declaring their solidarity with the insurgency. AQIM commander Abu Musab Abd al-Wadoud (a.k.a. Abdelmalek Droukdel) issued a video statement in August lamenting the Algerian government's position on the crisis in Syria and the predicament of Syrian refugees in Algeria (Al-Andalus Media Foundation, August 27) Abu Hussam al-Shami (a.k.a. Abd al-Aziz al-Kourkli), the commander of the Khilafah Brigades of Lebanon's Fatah al-Islam militant group, was killed near Damascus earlier this month (OnlyLebanon.net [Beirut], September 8).

Foreign fighters from Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Kuwait who have been killed on the battlefield have been lionized on radical Islamist websites and chat room forums as martyrs (al-Jazeera, September 4; Al-Arabiya, February 12). Despite his movement's formal renunciation of violence, a spokesman for Egypt's al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya admitted that three of its members have been killed in fighting in Syria in September and that other Egyptians are eager to join the insurgency (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], September 11). The insurgent al-Furqan Battalion that is operating in Syria's northern Idlib Province announced that a number of Algerians and Moroccans have been killed in the violence (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], September 10). There are also indications that a cohort of non-Arab fighters has made its way to Syria that includes Turks, Pakistanis, Afghans, and Somalis (*Radikal* [Istanbul], August 22). Europeans, including British-born militants of South Asian extraction, are also said to be fighting in Syria (*Daily Times* [Lahore], July 30). While providing critical medical treatment to victims of the conflict during a secret humanitarian mission in Syria's northern city of Aleppo, Dr. Jacques Beres, co-founder of the medical charity Doctors Without Borders, observed that about 60 percent of his patients were insurgents, and that at least half were foreign fighters (Reuters, September 8; *Daily Star*, September 10).

Much like Afghanistan and Iraq before it, Syria is emerging as a jihadist battlefield for both aspiring and hardened militants. The Liwa'a al-Ummah movement, a band of largely Syrian militants led by Libyan veterans of the anti-Qaddafi campaign, has been active in Syria since May. [3] Mahdi al-Harati, one of Liwa'a al-Ummah's commanders, is a Libyan-born Irish citizen who helped lead the Tripoli Brigade in Libya. Liwa'a al-Ummah, which claims no affiliation with the FSA, has enlisted the support of a number of Libyan and other foreign volunteers in its drive to topple the Ba'athist regime in Syria (*al-Akhabar*, August 6; *Irish Times* [Dublin], August 1).

Despite the presence of foreign fighters in Liwa'a al-Ummah, most of the foreign fighters that fill the ranks of the insurgency appear to be attaching themselves to various disparate factions, including ones that profess to operate as part of the FSA. FSA leaders categorically reject all charges that implicate the armed opposition with radical Islam. [4] Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to indicate that a number of FSA-

affiliated factions adhere to ultraconservative Salafist or similarly hardline worldviews. Led by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Islamists of various persuasions also occupy a dominant role within the SNC. The leading role played by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (the GCC is a leading supporter of ultraconservative Salafist movements globally) in sustaining the opposition to the Ba'athist regime is also illustrative of the ideological trajectory of the insurgency. The sectarian makeup of the insurgents – the FSA is overwhelmingly composed of Sunni Arab defectors and civilian volunteers from Syria's Sunni Arab majority – is also cause for consternation. The dominant role played by the Alawite minority in Syria's existing power structures is a source of bitterness among conservative Sunnis opposed to the Ba'athist regime. Many orthodox Muslims, especially Salafists, consider Alawites to be heretics, a perspective that is aggravating sectarianism in Syria.

Reliable assessments of the numbers of foreign fighters active in Syria do not exist. At this stage, their overall numbers are likely to be relatively small in relation to the broader insurgency. Nevertheless, the implications of the emergence of foreign fighter movements in Syria extend beyond quantitative estimates. As the experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated, foreign fighters tend to be among the most ideologically determined actors on the battlefield. Seasoned militants often provide invaluable tactical and operational expertise in critical areas as varied as constructing and deploying IEDs to engaging in light arms skirmishes, skills possibly learned while fighting U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq or participating in other campaigns. Foreign fighters typically serve as force multipliers on the battlefield by offering veteran leadership and confidence to struggling insurgencies; alternatively, the presence of foreign fighters can also undermine the legitimacy of political and armed opposition movements while acting to further destabilize fragile polities. In light of mounting reports of foreign support for the insurgency, it is these same factors that raise troubling concerns over the presence of foreign fighters in Syria. Considering the avowed Salafist and radical Islamist orientation of the majority of the foreign fighters in Syria, including many with allegiances to al-Qaeda, their presence in that country most certainly signals an attempt to exploit the conflict to serve a broader, global agenda that extends beyond controlling Damascus.

Notes:

1. The official website and Twitter page of Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham min Mujahedeen al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad (The Support Front for the People of the Levant by the Levantine Mujahedeen on the Battlefields of Jihad) are available at: <http://ansaralsham.blogspot.com/> and <https://twitter.com/JbhatALnusra>, respectively. The official website, Facebook, and Twitter pages of Kataib al-Ahrar al-Sham (Battalion of Free Syria) are available at: <http://www.ahraralsham.com/>,

<http://www.facebook.com/A.Alsham.Army>, and <https://twitter.com/Ahraralsham>, respectively.

2. Sheikh Adnan al-Arour's regular public appeals to Syrians and Muslims in the Middle East to support the insurgency can be viewed on his official YouTube channel, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/AdnanAlarour>.

3. The official Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter pages of Liwaa al-Ummah (Banner of the Islamic Nation) are available at: <http://www.facebook.com/Lewa.Alamah>, <https://www.youtube.com/user/Liwaalumamah>, and <https://twitter.com/liwaalumamah>, respectively.

4. The FSA has become so concerned with its poor reputation that it has recently announced that it will be changing its name to the Syrian National Army.

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Kazakhstan Struggles to Contain Salafist-Inspired Terrorism

Jacob Zenn

Kazakhstan has experienced a rise in militant activity carried out by Salafist groups on its territory and periphery since late 2011. The Salafists' rejection of secularism and other types of Islam and their call for a return to the ways of the *Salaf*, or pious ancestors who lived at the time of Muhammad and the first four Caliphs, are regarded by the Kazakh government—and most Kazakhs—as incompatible with the country's political and social institutions and the native brand of Islam that is strongly flavored by Kazakh customs and traditions. [1] For this reason, Kazakhs often refer to Salafists as Wahhabis, denoting the puritanical form of Sunni Islam prevalent in Saudi Arabia that has made inroads into Central Asia in the post-Soviet era.

In the words of Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, "radical and extremist elements" in Kazakhstan have "put enormous pressure on the state and on society as

a whole" (Astana Times, July 13). This article tracks recent developments in Salafist militancy in Kazakhstan and the Central Asia region and reviews Kazakhstan's "counter-Salafism" strategy, the long-term impact of which will likely be diminished by forces beyond Kazakhstan's control.

Jund al-Khilafah and Domestic Militancy

In the last three months of 2011, three Jund al-Khilafah (Army of the Caliphate) cells carried out the first terrorist attacks in Kazakhstan's history, targeting government buildings and personnel in Atyrau, Taraz and Almaty. According to sources in Kazakhstan, one of Jund al-Khilafah's founders from Atyrau became a Salafist militant when he was arbitrarily denied permission by Kazakh authorities to study Islam in Saudi Arabia. With two companions from Atyrau, he then fled to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, where they established Jund al-Khilafah while maintaining networks with Salafists in Kazakhstan who could carry out attacks on the home front. [2] Jund al-Khilafah also heightened its profile through posts on online jihadi forums, such as al-Qaeda's Ansar al-Mujahideen forum, claiming responsibility for each of the three attacks. The movement also issued video statements denouncing the 2011 "massacre" of striking oil workers in Zhanaozen and President Nursultan Nazarbayev's religious policies, which Jund al-Khilafah claims prohibits government officials from praying in state institutions, men from growing beards and women from wearing the *hijab*. [3]

Jund al-Khilafah has not carried out attacks in Kazakhstan in 2012, but another Salafist group in Kostanay (northern Kazakhstan) was uncovered facilitating the travel of Salafists to Afghanistan by providing them with fraudulent documents. Elsewhere, members of a group in Atyrau, possibly related to Jund al-Khilafah, were caught sending money to Kazakh militants abroad through bank transfers to Pakistan (Interfax, July 3). In addition, a group in Tausamaly (a village outside of Almaty) set off a gas explosion in a safe-house on July 11, while creating a home-made bomb, killing 8 persons. A search of the premises uncovered guns, ammunition, religious literature and police and SWAT team uniforms (Kazakhstan Today [Almaty], July 17). In an August 17 follow-up operation to arrest the leaders of that cell, Kazakh security forces killed nine people who reportedly refused to surrender (Regnum.ru, August 17). During the investigation it was revealed the suspects kept their wives locked up in apartments to prevent them from communicating with the outside world. Most recently, on September 12, a special forces operation in Atyrau raided a flat where suspected terrorists who set off an accidental explosion that killed one person on September 5 were

believed to be residing (Interfax [Atyrau], September 12).

Salafism on Kazakhstan's Periphery

The rise of militancy north of Kazakhstan, in the Russian republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, may be connected to the rise of militancy in Kazakhstan. Ravil Kusainov, one of the founders of Jund al-Khilafah, declared in an interview to the jihadi media outlet Minbar Media that Jund al-Khilafah consists of nationals from different countries (www.vesti.kz, November 10). His name and the name of another founder, Rinat Habiulla, are also distinctly Tatar.

On July 19, a Salafist militant group injured Tatarstan's chief mufti, Idrus Faizov, in a car-bomb assassination attempt in Tatarstan's capital, Kazan. One hour before that attack, different members of that group succeeded in killing the chief of the education department of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Tatarstan, Valiulla Yakupov, in a shooting outside his residence. Both religious leaders were known for their efforts to cleanse Salafism from Tatarstan's religious institutions. The "Mujahideen of Tatarstan" issued a pair of videos on YouTube, the first of which announced the formation of the group on the morning of the attacks. In this video, "Muhammad," the military *amir* of the group, said that the Tatarstan Mujahideen were prepared to carry out attacks on the orders of Caucasus Emirate leader Dokku Umarov, who has sought to establish a front in Russia's Volga and Far East regions for nearly a decade (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, August 12). [4]

According to Russian officials, there is an entire generation prepared to carry out extremist activity in Tatarstan, with well over 100 people having been arrested for extremist activity there since 2006. These include the owner of a company that organizes pilgrimages, the head of a mosque in Tatarstan and an Uzbekistan national who are all suspects in the recent shootings of two religious leaders (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 3, 2011; Kommersant, July 20).

Tatarstan's neighbor Bashkortostan has also seen growing signs of militancy. Bashkortostan's southern border is only 300 kilometers from the northern Kazakhstan city of Aktobe, where four members of a Salafist militant cell were convicted in October 2011 for carrying out police shootings. In June 2012, five members of a Hizb ut-Tahrir cell were arrested in Bashkortostan for preparing and distributing leaflets, books, brochures and videos propagandizing "extremist views" (Perviy Kanal, May 25). In addition, an eight-person cell was arrested in late 2011 while preparing experimental explosions for an attack on Bashkortostan's district headquarters. Like Jund al-Khilafah's founders, the suspects were alleged to have planned an escape to Afghanistan through Kazakhstan

(MediaKorSet, December 16, 2011).

Other Regional Developments

To Kazakhstan's south, the Salafist-influenced group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) has taken advantage of Kyrgyzstan's weak internal security. HuT was founded by diaspora Palestinians in 1952 and believes it is obligatory for every Muslim to work toward the reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate; that no other system of law but Sharia is permissible; and that it is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslim states to seek protection from America or other *kufir* (non-Islamic) states. [5] HuT has been repressed to near extinction in Uzbekistan, where it first gained popularity in Central Asia in the 1990s, and most of Kazakhstan, but in Kyrgyzstan HuT has reemerged with an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 members. [6] Moreover, after the ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, HuT made inroads into northern Kyrgyzstan and areas near the Kazakhstan border, especially among the internally displaced people from the south now living near Bishkek, where Kazakhs have been among those arrested for proselytizing for HuT (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 16). Although HuT members profess non-violence, some of them have been radicalized by way of their increased contacts with Afghanistan. Notably, Kyrgyz fighters are believed to comprise the majority of fighters in Jund al-Khilafah. [7]

In the North Caucasus, where Dokku Umarov's Caucasus Emirate is based, Kazakhs have been found among captured or killed militants more frequently than any other Central Asian nationality, although it might be possible that many of these "Kazakhs" are ethnic Chechens who have returned to their homeland more than half-a-century after Stalin deported the entire Chechen population to Kazakhstan in the 1940s (RFE/RL, April 20, 2011). The proximity of the North Caucasus to Atyrau and Western Kazakhstan and the trade and transportations links that connect the two Caspian Sea coastal areas may also explain the rise of Salafism in Western Kazakhstan. Religious extremist groups were historically only found in southern Kazakhstan's Shymkent and Kentau regions, which are home to Kazakhstan's more religiously conservative Uzbek minority, but the estimated 5,000 Salafists between the ages of 13 and 30 in Atyrau is a sign of Salafism's spread to ethnic Kazakh regions of the country (Tengrinews, November 17). In addition, Jund al-Khilafah and other Central Asian Salafist groups continue to propagate the militant ideas of Aleksandr Tikhomirov, an ethnic Buryat Russian who converted to Islam with an adopted name Said Buryatsky and was killed in battle in the North Caucasus in March 2009.

Further abroad, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

and the emergence of Salafist political parties in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia provide newfound legitimacy for political Islam—a challenge to the secular, Nazarbayev-centric regime in Kazakhstan. Salafists in the Middle East have shown strong opposition to the Kazakhstan government, including the radical Mauritanian Sheikh Abu-Mundhir al-Shinqiti, who issued a fatwa in March 2011 saying that it is legal for Muslims to attack police in Kazakhstan and that there is an obligation for the Muslims of Kazakhstan to not be patient, but rather to engage in jihad (Kavkaz Tsent, March 19, 2011). The revolutions in the Arab world have also emboldened groups like Jund al-Khilafah, which has urged Kazakhs to “to draw lessons from the Arab Spring and get rid of their governments” and sent a message to President Nazarbayev in a video statement saying that his regime would follow the same path as those in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya because of its “anti-Muslim” policies (www.vesti.kz, November 10). Leading Kazakhstani political analysts who contributed to a report in late August 2012 called “Central Asia-2020: An Inside View” have estimated that the probability of Islamists coming to power in Central Asia through revolution or mass protests, such as those in the Arab World, is as high as 30% in the mid-to-long term (Interfax, August 20). Similarly, Maulen Ashimbayev, the chairman of the Committee for International Affairs, Defense and Security of the Majlis (the Kazakh Parliament’s lower house) says that:

Kazakhstan is probably interesting to [Salafists] by the fact that we are situated relatively not far from such complicated regions as the North Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Our territory is a transit one for movements between southern and northern ‘hot spots.’ Therefore, the radical forces have the wish to entrench themselves here. They are purposefully working on recruiting supporters from within the country, attracting, first of all, young people to their ranks (Kazakhstan Today [Almaty], September 10).

Countering Salafism

Although Kazakhstan has a reputation for dealing out harsh punishments with insufficient due process to terror suspects, the country has taken a more calibrated approach to countering Salafism. The Kazakh approach recognizes the role of the intelligentsia, religious leaders, NGOs, public organizations and the mass media in preventing isolated Salafist groups from becoming a large-scale problem in the country (Kazakhstan Today [Almaty], September 10).

One way in which Kazakhstan has sought to prevent youths from being recruited into extremist organizations is through educational initiatives. For example, the Astana mayor’s Domestic Policy Department established a “Center

for Research on Religious Problems and for Psychological Rehabilitation” in October 2011 to provide alternative religious education for youths whose parents or teachers believe they have been influenced or “brainwashed” by “non-traditional religiosity,” such as Wahhabism (Central Asia Online [Almaty], October 13, 2011). Similarly, in southeastern Kazakhstan’s Zhambyl province, the Department of Religious Affairs has begun holding roundtable discussions, debates, seminars and public opinion polls to help youths distinguish “between traditional religion and the harsh rules of destructive cults” (Central Asia Online [Taraz], May 12, 2011). The Zhambyl city of Taraz also unveiled a memorial depicting the famous Kazakh folk couple Kozy-Korpesh and Bayan-Sulu after the November 2011 terrorist attack in the city “to symbolize the struggle against terrorism and to promote love” (Central Asia Online [Taraz], February 15).

Other strategies to counter the Salafist ideology include:

- Opening the new Nur-Astana mosque, one of Asia’s largest, in Astana in July 2012. The mosque can seat up to 5,000 worshippers and is designed to buttress the government’s religious credentials.
- Efforts to shut down religious facilities where Salafists have been reported preaching, including the Saudi Arabian cultural center in Almaty.
- Placing theologians and psychologists on the military draft boards to check for signs that indicate whether new recruits have been influenced by Salafism.
- Monitoring more than 10,000 websites for extremist content and blocking access to more than 100 such websites.

Conclusion

Some of Kazakhstan’s approaches to addressing the spread of Salafism may be effective in preventing youths from falling into the trap of an inflexible ideology which has a tendency towards militancy. Nonetheless, with Salafism’s success in winning recruits on Kazakhstan’s periphery, it will be difficult for Kazakhstan to succeed in containing the ideology without the successful efforts of neighboring states such as Russia and Kyrgyzstan, both of which have seen Salafism spread in recent years. For this reason, Kazakhstan has hosted regional forums to address Salafism, including a conference in Astana where anti-extremism cooperation between Turkic-speaking countries was discussed on September 6 (Interfax [Astana], September 6).

However, one of the key domestic issues Kazakhstan will need to address is the country’s political future and whether religious groups will be able to openly and freely partake in

politics in a post-Nazarbayev Kazakhstan as in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia now. If Salafist-influenced groups were allowed to participate in politics, the Kazakh government would have to develop a political model that is more attractive to the country's citizens than the religious model that has won Salafist political parties votes in formerly secular countries like Egypt and Tunisia. It is not yet clear what ideology will guide the next generation of Kazakh leaders who do not have the legitimacy of Nazarbayev, the country's first ever president

Finally, there is also the issue of the hundreds of Central Asians fighting in Afghanistan who may eventually return home and bring with them not only the ideology of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but also fighting expertise that could make the militancy of Jund al-Khilafah today seem small in comparison.

Notes:

1. Andrew McGregor, "Ambivalence or Radicalism? The Direction of Political Islam in Kazakhstan," *Modern Kazakhstan: Between East and West*, Conference at the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, December 5, 2003.

2. Author's discussion with Kazakhstani official, September 2012.

3. See Statement of Jund al-Khilafa regarding the events of Zhanaozen: "Overthrow the tyrant," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBy0CBFKyxA>, December 18, 2011.

4. The two videos may be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH0_CVDy8oQ&feature=youtu.be, July 27, 2012; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4xEvysQZVw>, August 4, 2012 (summary of the latter at Umma News, August 4).

5. McGregor, *op cit*.

6. Statistics according to Saule Mikhametrakhimova of the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). See Aleksandr Shustov, "Radical Islam Attacks Central Asia," Strategic Culture Foundation, <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2010/11/26/radical-islam-attacks-central-asia.html>

7. See endnote 2.

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