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AL-QAEDA SUPPORT IN NORTHERN MALI BEGINS TO CRUMBLE AS ALLIES PULL BACK

It was an alliance that shocked security professionals and political observers—a coalition of Tuareg military veterans, Muslim militants from West Africa and one of al-Qaeda’s most active and vicious regional chapters, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). This grouping was able to force Tuareg nationalist rebels from the urban centers of northern Mali earlier this year and has since been engaged in applying its own crude version of Islamic law in the region in defiance of both local and international opposition. Now, however, in the face of growing plans for an international military intervention to take back northern Mali, al-Qaeda appears to be in danger of losing the support of many of the allies in the region that have enabled AQIM to be the first branch of al-Qaeda to establish its own proto-state.

The largely Tuareg Ansar al-Din movement has discovered that while it is possible to seize territory in remote northern Mali, it still lacks the authority to impose Shari’a without some type of recognition by the international community. There is speculation that movement’s leader Iyad ag Ghali is now seeking to escape this dilemma by transforming Ansar al-Din from an armed movement to an Islamist political party (*Le Combat* [Bamako], November 5). The movement is trying to distance itself from its Islamist partners in northern Mali by asserting its independence “from any other group” and its willingness to enter negotiations (*L’Essor* [Bamako], November 6).

Ansar al-Din even appears to have backed off, at least temporarily, from its demands for the nation-wide implementation of Shari’a in Mali. According to movement negotiator Muhammad ag Aharid, “It is not the moment to talk of the Shari’a; it will be perhaps later when we shall have reached a compromise to restore peace to the country” (*Jeune Afrique*, November 8).

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The movement now has separate negotiating teams in the official peace talks in Ouagadougou and in unofficial but possibly more significant talks in Algiers, reportedly being attended by Ag Ghali himself (*Jeune Afrique*, November 4; *Le Républicain* [Bamako], November 7; al-Hayat, November 9).

The negotiating group in Ouagadougou has committed to a process of political dialogue with the transitional government in Bamako, as well as a cessation of hostilities and the free movement of people, goods and humanitarian assistance in northern Mali. Most importantly, the movement's negotiators say Ansar al-Din rejects all forms of extremism and terrorism (PANA Online [Dakar], November 8).

An Algerian source involved in the negotiations claimed that the Ansar al-Din delegation had issued a statement in which the movement declared it was not ideologically associated with al-Qaeda, with one member of the delegation claiming that accusations of terrorism leveled at the movement were designed to prevent the group's participation in dialogue (*al-Hayat*, November 9). The statement would seem to open the way to direct negotiation with transitional authorities in Bamako. However, the existence of the Ansar al-Din statement was immediately questioned by movement spokesman Sanda Ould Boumama, who insisted that if Ag Ghali had decided to distinguish the movement from AQIM, he "would normally have been in the know" (*Tout sur l'Algérie*, November 4). A day later, though, Boumama sounded more positive about the Algiers negotiations, telling an Algerian newspaper that "the solution will be reached through the gate of Algeria" (*el-Khabar*, November 5).

Algeria's position on the crisis in northern Mali has gradually grown closer to the "double approach" favored by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); a process of dialogue that does not rule out the use of armed force. Diplomatic efforts are underway to persuade Algeria to contribute to the planned military intervention, at the very least in the context of giving authorization for flyovers and the use of the military airport at Tamanrasset. Even if Algeria chooses to opt out of the intervention, it will still need to increase its deployment of troops along the 1,200 mile border with Mali to prevent the infiltration of militants trying to escape the intervention (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], November 5).

Burkinabe Foreign Minister Djibril Bassole says that he went to Kidal (the home province of Ag Ghali in northern Mali) in August to advise the movement that "the atrocities that were being committed in their name were prejudicial to them and were likely to drown completely the demands of the

Tuareg community and that it was high time they distanced themselves from them." Bassole went on to describe Burkina Faso's approach to the Tuareg role in the conflict:

We, as a neighboring country [to Mali] and member of the same regional community, do not want to declare war on a given community. We have Tuaregs in Burkina Faso, Niger has them, and Algeria also has them. There are Tuaregs almost everywhere, we do not want to give the impression that we are going to war against the Tuaregs. We want to wage war on scourges, on terrorism, and on organized crime. That is why we want to give a chance to the Tuareg movements to get a grip on themselves, to distance themselves from what has completely changed the nature of their demands—crime and terrorism (*Jeune Afrique*, November 10).

There are still questions regarding the sincerity of Ansar al-Din's renunciation of al-Qaeda and its commitment to participating in military efforts to drive the organization out of northern Mali. According to movement spokesman Muhammad Ag Aharib, "AQIM is made up of Muslims like us. It is not part of our ethics to fight other Muslims" (*al-Watan* [Algiers], November 9). Anything short of such action, however, is unlikely to erase the suspicions of the authorities in Bamako.

Besides Ansar al-Din's wavering, AQIM may have lost the support of one of its senior commanders, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who was notably overlooked for promotion in a recent shake-up of the AQIM leadership in the Sahel (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, November 1). Algerian security sources now claim that the Mali-based Belmokhtar is convinced AQIM leader Abd al-Malik Droukdel is after his head and is preparing to go to war against his former comrades. The dispute supposedly began once the AQIM leadership learned Belmokhtar was in regular contact by telephone with two former AQIM leaders, Hassan Hattab and Abd al-Haq Layada, who have passed on government assurances to Belmokhtar that he will not be handed over to an international court if he defects from the movement. Having lost the trust of the rest of AQIM, Belmokhtar is said to be in a perilous position that can only be remedied by turning himself in to Algerian authorities as soon as possible (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, October 22).

Elsewhere, al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Hafis al-Mauritani (a.k.a. Mahfouz Ould al-Walid) has announced his opposition to the means being used by Ansar al-Din and its allies to create an Islamic state in northern Mali, going so far as to offer himself as a mediator in negotiations (*L'Indicateur du Renouveau* [Bamako], October 30).

Even the recently established Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) is reported to be suffering desertions as preparations for an ECOWAS military intervention intensify. Members of terrorist groups like MUJWA or AQIM can expect little mercy from international African forces or Malian troops eager for retribution for the massacres of Malian troops at Aguelhoc and elsewhere in the early months of the year. The MUJWA commander in Gao, Abd al-Hakim, has warned that further desertions will not be tolerated: “Any element who tries to take flight will be executed, and any suspected elements will be gunned down... All those who have accepted recruitment will wage this war... We will wage this war together, whether we win or lose it” (*Le Combat* [Bamako], November 7).

SUDANESE ISLAMIST HASSAN AL-TURABI PREDICTS ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT WILL REPLACE MILITARY REGIME

In a recent interview with a pan-Arab daily, Dr. Hassan Abdullah al-Turabi, the former leader of the Sudanese Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) and the nation’s leading Islamist, predicted the sudden and imminent collapse of Sudan’s current military/Islamist regime and its replacement with an Islamist government:

My personal assessment is that [the regime in Khartoum] is going to collapse and fall. The country is torn up, there are threats of severing other parts of it, and there is no freedom. Suppression leads to explosion, and the economic crisis is exerting severe pressure on the people. This kind of tension in most cases brings in revolution. The situation of the regime is very bad; it is abject, hunted down, politically isolated, and criminally accused by the world; and internally it is as you can see. I expect it to collapse suddenly... I beseech God that the opposition is prepared, because if the regime collapses, we will move from an odious regime to chaos, and the situation will be worse than it is in Somalia, because of the lack of something that unites the Sudanese (al-Sharq al-Awsat, November 1).

Al-Turabi is the Sorbonne-educated pioneer of modern political Islam in Sudan and the former sponsor of Osama bin Laden’s presence in that country in the 1990s. Today, he is the leader of the People’s Congress Party (PCP), an Islamist faction that broke away from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), headed by President Field Marshal Omar al-Bashir (wanted by the International Criminal Court) and effectively managed by al-Turabi’s former Ikhwan deputy, Ali

Osman Muhammad Taha.

One of Sudan’s most controversial political figures, al-Turabi is disliked by many Sudanese for his central role in introducing Islamic law in Sudan in the early 1980s as Attorney General in the government of dictator General Ja’afar Nimieri. Turabi’s Islamic legal code, the notorious “September Laws,” were strongly criticized within Sudan for their emphasis on punishments such as amputations and crucifixions and their failure to address issues of social justice, the establishment of which is generally regarded as a necessary precursor to the implementation of harsh *huduud* punishments. Al-Turabi’s push for nation-wide Shari’a is often cited as one of the main causes behind the Sudan’s return to civil war in 1983, a conflict in which over two million Sudanese perished.

Al-Turabi also revealed his fear that he is the potential target of a Western assassination attempt. “The West hated Islam and hence it killed Bin Laden and it only has al-Turabi [left] now. They have hit me in Canada, but it was not yet my time of death” said al-Turabi, referring to a 1992 assault on the Islamist by a Sudanese karate champion in an Ottawa airport that left al-Turabi hospitalized for a month. Though his attacker claimed the assault was a spontaneous reaction to seeing the Islamist leader in the airport, al-Turabi now seems to have woven the attack into a larger Western conspiracy to eliminate him.

The Sudanese Islamic Movement split in 1999, leading to the existence of two wings, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and al-Turabi’s Popular Congress Party (PCP). Since the split, al-Turabi has had a contentious relationship with the regime, leading to several terms of imprisonment, most notably in 2009, when al-Turabi supported the ICC indictment of President Omar al-Bashir on war crimes charges.

According to al-Turabi, the Sudanese opposition has “agreed that this regime is hopeless, and we have to work to remove it completely. Now, our priority is to overthrow the regime, and our methods are peaceful. We have learned a lesson from the military coups d’état, as whoever stages a coup d’état [finds] it is turned against him” (*al-Hayat*, October 19).

Elsewhere, al-Turabi has maintained that of Sudan’s opposition groups, only the Islamists have the organization and grassroots support needed to take power in the aftermath of an impending popular revolution (al-Jazeera, October 14). Reflecting on the 1989 coup that brought Omar al-Bashir into power with the support of al-Turabi and the Ikhwan, the Islamist leader concedes that “with hindsight we have said: ‘This was wrong, wrong;’ change ought to

have happened through a popular revolution.” Al Turabi’s enthusiasm for a popular revolution in Sudan is not shared by all the opposition elite; former prime minister and leader of the Umma Party Sadiq al-Mahdi has warned that such a revolution would lead to the breakup of what remains of the country (Sudan Tribune, October 15).

While al-Turabi foresees an Islamist takeover in Sudan, the ruling NCP is busy replacing Sudan’s transitional 2005 constitution with one that would establish Sudan as an Islamic state, a change promised by al-Bashir in the event that the largely non-Muslim South Sudan voted for separation. The opposition has refused to partake in talks regarding the creation of an Islamic constitution until the NCP is replaced by a more representative transitional government, but the NCP has warned it “doesn’t want any disagreement” over the issue (Sudan Tribune, October 31).

Strategic and Tactical Shift Keeps al-Qaeda Insurgency Alive in Southern Yemen

Adrian Shahbaz

Over the past months, a series of high-profile assassinations in Aden and the capital of Sana’a signaled a strategic shift by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its local affiliate, Ansar al-Shari’a. Over 60 security officials were murdered, with the latest assassination occurring in Sana’a on November 7 (al-Sahwa.net, November 7; see also Terrorism Monitor, October 18). The battle has since returned to Abyan however as sleeper cells in the mountains above Abyan’s coastal plain continue to stage hit-and-run attacks on military targets. Despite the effectiveness of drone strikes and better coordination between locals and military commanders, Islamists remain fixed on retaking the seven “Islamic emirates” they briefly established in the southern region.

From a tactical perspective, the departure of AQAP from urban centers has only changed the nature of the fight. “After [leaving] Jaar and Zinjibar, al-Qaeda turned into sleeper cells,” explained Muhammad Sukain al Jaadani, the former head of a pro-government Popular Resistance Committee (PRC) in Shaqra district. Abyan’s governor, Jamal al-Aqel, has also complained to the Ministry of Interior about the lack

of security (*Gulf News*, October 26). A suicide bombing at a checkpoint in Mudiya district left 3 PRC members dead on October 16 (*Yemen Observer*, October 16). Three days later, AQAP militants drove a military truck laden with explosives into the camp of the 115th Infantry Brigade in Shaqra, killing 18 soldiers and injuring a further 30 (*Yemen Times*, October 22).

AQAP have faced some important setbacks. The army’s 119th Brigade responded immediately to the attack, killing eight suspected militants in cooperation with the PRCs, which are composed of anti-AQAP tribesmen (*Saba News*, October 20). Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or “drones”) have also succeeded in targeting AQAP members, particularly in remote areas. The attack on the military camp was retaliation for a U.S. drone strike that killed eight AQAP members, including Nader al-Shaddadi, a prominent figure who headed the “Islamic emirate” in Jaar (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 19; *Gulf News*, October 26). State media credits the army for the successful attack (*Saba News*, October 20).

In a departure from his predecessor, Yemen’s President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi has openly praised U.S. drone capabilities, even claiming that he personally approves each strike before it takes place (*Yemen Observer*, October 1). A former army officer, Nasser al-Noba, noted that “since [former president Ali Abdullah] Salih’s fall, the drones have started to have an effect” (*Gulf News*, October 26). Nonetheless, drone strikes remain unpopular among many Yemenis due to concerns over sovereignty and human rights (*Yemen Times*, October 1). “These air strikes prepare the ground for al-Qaeda and terrorism,” said parliamentarian Abd-Rabbu al-Qadi, referring to how anger over civilian deaths can lead to the radicalization of locals (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 17). Drone strikes have killed a minimum of 173 people in 2012, of which an estimated 36 to 56 are believed to have been civilians. [1]

Marking further changes from the previous regime, President Hadi has sought to restructure the country’s military command in compliance with the GCC-brokered transition deal that brought him to power. [2] Many of Salih’s family members remain in prominent positions atop the hierarchy, such as his son Ahmed (head of the Republican Guard and Special Forces) and nephews Yahya (Chief-of-Staff of the Central Security Forces) and Amar (Deputy Director of National Security) (*Yemen Post*, October 23). The leaders of Yemen’s seven different security apparatuses have a tendency to compete with one another, as witnessed during the inter-tribal shootouts in Sana’a that eventually forced Salih to flee to Saudi Arabia (*Yemen Times*, October 11).

Opposition parties and the revolutionary youth maintain that all members of the Salih clan must be removed in order to achieve national unity and security. Hadi's great challenge however, will be to convince members of the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM or "al-Hirak") to participate in the upcoming National Dialogue to secure the country's political future. The SSM enjoys ample support in the south due to popular resentment over decades of mistreatment and neglect under Salih (*National Yemen*, October 14). Before Salih, a northern tribesman, unified both regions in 1990, the south existed as a socialist state known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). Hadi, a southerner and a longtime vice president under Salih, has replaced many Salih-era appointees in favor of military commanders with greater tribal affiliations to the south. The move has eased tensions and improved coordination between the military and local PRCs (*Gulf News*, October 26). Despite driving AQAP from Zinjibar and Jaar, Nasser Mansari, an official in the Khanfar local council, remains fearful over Abyan's future: "The absence of security units to detain the outlaws makes it easier for al-Qaeda to return" (*al-Shorfa* [Sana'a], October 26).

AQAP has sought to exploit the South's resentment towards Sana'a by proposing a new Shari'a-compliant state. Government officials, including the Defense Minister, have received letters and phone calls from AQAP leaders proposing to govern the south for fifteen years to demonstrate their capabilities (*al-Abram Weekly*, 25 October). Despite the military campaign staged earlier this year, AQAP remains determined to establish an Islamic state in southern Yemen and shows limited signs of weakness. "Al-Qaeda killed the top commander of the southern region, and the leaders of popular committees, and a number of intelligence officers after it withdrew from Abyan," said a source close to AQAP. "Now I wonder how some people say al-Qaeda was defeated" (*Al-Abram Weekly*, 25 October).

Adrian Shahbaz is a freelance Middle East analyst and contributing writer at Fair Observer, an international affairs website.

Notes

1. Casualty data based on figured from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a not-for-profit organization based in London. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/>
2. Articles 16 and 17 of the plan address the need to integrate the armed forces. An unofficial translation of the GCC Implementation Agreement can be viewed at: <http://www.ifes.org/~media/Files/Publications/White%20>

PaperReport/2012/Next_Steps_in_Yemens_Transition_paper.pdf

Economic Security at Risk as Pirates Adapt Tactics in the Gulf of Guinea

William S. van der Veen

The stunning reports of oil tankers hijacked by pirates in the Gulf of Guinea have helped shift attention from the dramatic rise of Somali piracy to West Africa. The figures are not quite as eye-popping as in East Africa. The effects are. Lloyd's of London designated the Gulf, like Somalia, a "war risk" zone in August 2011, boosting insurance rates. The pirates' inclination to violence has helped persuade some oil super-majors that investing in exploration in the region is too risky (*This Day* [Lagos], July 3). With a quarter of U.S. imports projected to come from the Gulf of Guinea by 2015, the dynamics driving West African piracy are too important to ignore.

As of October 26, there were 49 acts of piracy or armed robbery reported to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) this year. However, this number understates the prevalence of maritime crime in the Gulf as attacks often go unreported. Indeed, a comprehensive look at the reported incidents reinforces this assertion. Despite reports of attacks on local fishing trawlers, as well as previous piracy-induced fishing industry work stoppages, the IMB has not reported a single attack on a trawler this year (*al-Jazeera*, June 12). Whether this is indicative of locals' fear of reprisals for reporting or due to a lack of resources to connect to the proper reporting channels, it certainly skews figures and makes it more difficult for regional officials to find solutions.

Of the attacks reported to date this year, there is a clear dichotomy in levels of complexity. Many of the attacks against vessels docked or close to shore are simply thieves looking for an easy target. The lack of security in local ports and inadequate maritime security forces throughout the region make ships an easy target. Such unsophisticated attacks have been seen from Guinea-Conakry to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (<http://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-map>). Violence as intimidation is frequent in these attacks, especially if the crew offers resistance.

While this type of piracy is certainly a threat to trade in the region, it is less virulent than its more sophisticated cousin, a more dangerous brand of piracy that has focused attacks on oil and gas industry vessels, including product tankers.

These pirate gangs, unlike their smash-and-grab brethren, are resourceful, flexible and show a willingness to adapt new tactics. When Nigeria and Benin launched Operation Prosperity in 2011, Nigerian pirates demonstrated dangerous tactical agility. As Nigerian and Beninese waters have become better patrolled, pirates have expanded their operations down the coast, into Togolese, Ghanaian and Ivorian Coast waters. Pirate gangs in the Gulf have also adopted the “mother-ship” tactic used by Somali pirates (Breakbulk.com, April 13). By hijacking local fishing vessels and developing blue water capabilities, pirates decreased the likelihood of being spotted by national naval forces. After finishing with the hijacked ships, pirate gangs often take the opportunity to ransack them, snatching equipment such as radar, echo sounder, SSB and VHF radios (*This Day* [Lagos], Aug 9, 2011).

Once a tanker is hijacked, pirates coordinate a rendezvous with a second ship to transfer a portion of the oil. From here, the oil returns to port, where it can either be refined locally and sold within the region or internationally (News24 Nigeria, October 23). Selling the oil requires connections to international criminal networks to be able to find a buyer. This, as well as the intelligence it takes to coordinate such hijackings—ship names, courses, cargo value, etc.—lead analysts to believe that such operations are actually being financed by international criminal enterprises (REDFour Security Group, March 4). The recent closure of a crude storage facility in the Lagos port of Apapa, alleged to have housed the stolen product from the August 19 MT *Anuket Emerald* hijacking confirms the depth of these connections (Vanguard [Lagos], September 30).

Fortunately, Nigerian military forces have shown a willingness to confront sea piracy. In September, a tanker was hijacked over 90 miles off the coast of Benin. Previously sailing into the waters of a neighboring country has proven an effective means of escape. In this instance, thanks to the call to the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre and a renewed sense of purpose in the Nigerian Navy, the tanker was intercepted with the crew unharmed (<http://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy>). In a land operation, the Joint Task Force (JTF - a military/police group created specifically to combat illegal oil bunkering) spearheaded a multi-agency raid in Ondo State, in the northern Delta region (*PM News* [Lagos], September 26). Fourteen piracy suspects connected to a large “syndicate” were arrested.

Unfortunately, even if the Nigerian military is making strides in combating piracy (though the JTF has been accused of sponsoring illegal oil theft, or “bunkering”), the criminal justice system has not been as effective. From the details released about the piracy gangs as well as previous statements from the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), it becomes clear that pirates are enjoying a degree of cover from government officials. NIMASA’s mission to curb piracy is frustrated by the continual early release of piracy suspects from prison

prior to full investigation, according to NIMASA Director General, Ziakede Akpobolokemi (*This Day* [Lagos], October 19). Analysts surmise oil bunkering and arms trafficking networks, with well-known ties to state governors and federal officers, are behind the complicity (*Africa Confidential*, October 21, 2011).

While regional naval coordination is being stepped up, there are no near-term solutions to stop piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. In the short-term, operators are mostly on their own. It will take time for adequate security forces to be developed. Adhering to the Best Management Practices created for protecting vessels traversing the Somali Basin could help protect against high seas piracy in the Gulf. In reality, though, sustainable solutions to curb piracy and armed robbery will only come through the economic development of the region. Until that happens, piracy will continue to appear to some as an attractive occupation.

William van der Veen previously worked for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Counter-Piracy Program in Nairobi, Kenya. He obtained his masters at the American University in Cairo and currently resides in Arlington, VA.

“Heeding the Call for Jihad”: The Sudden Resurgence of Baloch Nationalist Militancy in Iran

Chris Zambelis

The Islamic Republic of Iran sits in the crosshairs of the United States, Israel, and the Gulf Arab monarchies led by Saudi Arabia. The array of geopolitical threats that face Iran is daunting; Iran is surrounded by states that are threatened by the revolutionary Islamist principles that define its domestic affairs and foreign policy orientation. Many of Iran’s regional rivals also host U.S. military installations. The effectively permanent presence of U.S. military forces in the international waters surrounding its territory, the increasingly rigid economic sanctions regime and the steady stream of covert operations launched by its enemies on its soil to undermine its nuclear program, pose another set of dilemmas for Iran. The aggregate impact of these factors is intensified when considered in the context of the shifting regional landscape brought on by the wave of revolts in the Arab world. With the Iranian economy buckling under the pressure of economic sanctions, its leadership is now facing the return of a challenge once thought to be extinguished—a nationalist insurgency in Iran’s ethnic-Baloch community.

Iran is also contending with internal challenges stemming from disaffected members of a number of ethnic and sectarian minority communities and questions surrounding the character of its national identity. A period of heightened unrest led by ethnic Baloch nationalist insurgents in recent years, particularly an obscure militant group known as Jundallah (Soldiers of God) based in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Balochistan (also known as Iranian Balochistan), was a testament to the extent that these issues permeate Iranian society. Jundallah's campaign of violence and terrorism was ostensibly motivated by its desire to defend the rights of the Baloch, a mostly Sunni ethnic minority that sees itself as the victims of a state-sponsored campaign of cultural and religious subjugation. The capture or death of most of Jundallah's leaders by 2010, however, was supposed to have neutralized the threat of Baloch militancy. An October suicide bombing executed by Baloch radicals claiming to belong to a previously unknown group that calls itself Harakat Ansar Iran (HAI - Movement of the Partisans of Iran) in Sistan-Balochistan, suggests, however, that a resurgence of Baloch nationalist militancy in Iran may be on the horizon (Fars News Agency [Tehran], October 19).

Conflicting Accounts

On October 19 a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vest in the port city of Chabahar, in Sistan-Balochistan province. Two members of Iran's Basij (Mobilization) paramilitary force were reported to have been killed and scores of mostly civilian bystanders were wounded in the ensuing blast (Press TV [Tehran], October 21; Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Tehran], October 19). Several reports issued immediately following the attack claimed that the perpetrator detonated his explosives outside of the Imam Hussein mosque in Chabahar. Subsequent reports containing further details suggested that the alleged attacker, dressed as a police officer, attempted to gain entry into the mosque to detonate his explosives among worshippers, only to be chased away by Iranian security officials on the scene. Having failed to gain access to the mosque, the attacker was then said to have detonated his explosives approximately 400 meters from his intended target (Fars News Agency, October 20; Iranian Students' News Agency [Tehran], October 20; Islamic Republic News Agency [Tehran], October 20).

HAI issued a claim of responsibility for the attack on its network of official English, Persian and Arabic language websites and social media outlets a few hours after the operation. HAI's account of the attack, however, differed markedly from that released by Iran. In addition to the suicide bombing acknowledged by Iranian authorities, which

represented the first in what the HAI called its "Operation Ra'ad [Thunder] 1" series of operations, the movement also claimed to have successfully targeted a detachment of ranking members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), including members of its elite Quds Force, during a secret meeting held at a Basij base in Chabahar. According to its statement, HAI operatives remotely detonated an explosives-laden van parked near the base just as attendees of the meeting were leaving the facility. HAI claims that approximately 20 IRGC members and other security officials were killed in the attack (Ansariran.blog.com, October 19). In contrast to the suicide bombing, Iran has not acknowledged the reported car bombing. HAI's version of the October 19 events has been circulated on media sources known to be antagonistic toward Iran or sympathetic toward the Baloch nationalist cause in Iran.

The confirmed attack in Chabahar represents the first suicide bombing by Baloch militants since December 2010, when Jundallah executed a suicide bombing at the same Imam Hussein mosque, killing 38 and wounding hundreds during a mourning ceremony commemorating the death of Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson and a revered figure among the Shi'a (Press TV, December 20, 2010; al-Jazeera [Doha], December 15, 2010).

Jundallah Reborn?

There is no conclusive evidence to discern whether HAI is formally linked to Jundallah in operational and personnel matters. The capture or deaths of most of its known leadership and other key operatives, including the arrest and subsequent execution of its founder and leader Abdelmalik Rigi, were widely believed to have devastated Jundallah's ability to reconstitute its campaign of violence and terrorism. Jundallah did manage to execute a series of major attacks in Iranian Balochistan following Rigi's arrest and eventual execution (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 14, 2011). A perusal of its political and ideological discourse available online reveals that, at the very least, HAI draws its inspiration from Jundallah. [1] HAI's website is adorned, for example, with pictures of the late Rigi, who is eulogized as the symbolic "Amir [commander] of the Iranian Baloch." In its "Statement of Purpose," HAI once again references Rigi as its commander and outlines an agenda that coincides closely with the one propagated by Jundallah, including its commitment to defend what it refers to as the "oppressed Sunni minorities of Iran" (Ansariran.blog.com, September 22). There are indications, however, that HAI's interpretation of advocacy on behalf of the Baloch community departs drastically from the agenda promoted by Jundallah.

Under the late Abdelmalik Rigi, Jundallah appeared to go to great lengths to rebut allegations leveled against it by Iran and others that it harbored an explicitly sectarian or separatist agenda or any affinities with radical Islamist ideologies. This point is best demonstrated by Jundallah's attempt to reinvent its image by adopting the name People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI). The obvious religious undertones apparent in the name Jundallah, left the group vulnerable to accusations that it was affiliated with transnational radical Islamist organizations, including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Rigi was always adamant that Jundallah never harbored radical Islamist or separatist leanings. The language that appears on HAI's website, however, is imbued with an anti-Shi'a sectarian vitriol reminiscent of the ultraconservative Salafist militancy that is spreading in the Middle East. Salafist militants tend to view Shi'a Muslims as heretics and apostates. Just as important, HAI's discourse also touches on foreign affairs. While HAI portrays itself as the vanguard of Baloch rights in Iran, it is also concerned with events in Syria. In its own words, HAI seeks to "strike a blow against the Shi'a government in their own lands, thus damaging their economic, financial and military capabilities (especially their ability to contribute to the Syrian genocide)" (Ansariran.blog.com, September 22).

In terms of its tactics, HAI's resort to a suicide bombing is very much reflective of Jundallah's operational evolution. Originally concerned with striking military and security targets and other symbols of the Islamic Republic through ambushes, abductions, and other traditional guerrilla tactics, Jundallah eventually added suicide bombings to its repertoire in late 2008. Jundallah also began to strike civilian targets such as mosques with increasing regularity. Its steady resort to suicide bombings, targeting Shi'a houses of worship and other locations imbued with religious symbolism, were reminiscent of the al-Qaeda-style attacks that have become all too frequent in the Middle East after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. [2] In this context, HAI appears to be following closely in Jundallah's footsteps.

Identified by the HAI website as the movement's Amir, Abu Yasir Muskootani, provided further insight into the group's ideology and the identity of the bomber. Muskootani declared that the attacker "showed the enemies of the Ahlus Sunnah [i.e. Sunni Muslims] of Iran that the students of our amir Abdul Malik Baloch are still alive. They showed them that, till now, the people of Balochistan heed to the call for Jihad..." Muskootani extolled the actions of the attacker, a nineteen-year-old man named Hamzah Saravani, as those of a hero and martyr (Ansariran.blog.com, October 21). A video produced by HAI eulogizing Saravani's feat described him as a man who toiled his entire life under the "oppression"

of the "Shi'a government of Iran." This experience prompted him to "join the Mujahideen to wage Jihad against the Shi'a kuffar [unbelievers]" (Ansariran.blog.com, October 21). The style and presentation of the video montage, as well as the accompanying narrative, evoke similar productions released by radical Salafist and al-Qaeda-style militants.

Internal Dynamics

Estimated to number around 4 million, the Baloch of Iran inhabit one of the poorest and most inhospitable parts of the country. Critical socioeconomic indicators in Sistan-Balochistan lag consistently behind other regions of Iran. As a predominantly Sunni community, the Baloch religious identity has often clashed with the Shi'a Islamist character of the Islamic Republic. The Baloch have preserved a sense of ethnic and national consciousness separate from what tends to be viewed as an ethnic Persian-centric cultural and bureaucratic edifice that is embodied by the Islamic Republic. As has often been expressed in their nationalist discourse, Iranian Baloch attribute their difficult predicament to a deliberate policy directed by Tehran that aims to eradicate their religious and ethnic identity and undermine their ability to improve their standing in Iranian society. Iran's harsh approach to governance and security in Sistan-Balochistan has also aggravated matters. Sistan-Balochistan's proximity to Iran's eastern borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan place it along some of the world's most dangerous narcotics, arms, and human trafficking arteries. The prominent role of the Baloch-led smuggling networks in regional trafficking operations that extend into Pakistan and Afghanistan has also influenced Iran's treatment of the region. The specter of Baloch nationalism and the idea of "Greater Balochistan" remain alive as well. Most of the region's Baloch inhabit the Balochistan province of neighboring Pakistan, a region that is embroiled in its own violent insurgency. As a result, Iran is worried about the threat Baloch nationalism poses to its territorial integrity and regional stability. Consequently, Iran tends to view the region through a security prism and its Baloch minority as a national security threat.

Conclusion

For Iran, the return of emboldened Baloch resistance in the form of the HAI comes during a heightened period of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East revolving around the crisis in Syria, Iran's closest ally in the region. Iran continues to blame foreign forces, including the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, for fomenting instability within its borders (Fars News Agency, October 19). The attack in Chabahar occurred shortly after the United States removed the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MeK - People's Mujahideen), an

Iranian opposition movement with a history of violence and terrorism against Iran, from its list of designated terrorist organizations in a decision that infuriated Iran. Reports that Israel may have been behind an attack against an arms factory in Sudan that was said to have been linked to Iran, an act some have interpreted as a possible demonstration of Israel's potential to launch air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, adds another layer of concern to Iran's strategic calculus (al-Jazeera, October 25).

When considered against the larger context of these threatening developments and the activities of foreign intelligence services hostile to Iran over the years, the timing of the Chabahar attack raises valid questions about HAI's possible links to Iran's rivals. In this regard, the appearance of HAI may signal the beginning of a renewed campaign to destabilize Iran from within by provoking a new round of ethnic and sectarian militancy.

The seeming influence of radical Salafist ideology among Baloch militants also raises questions about its potential to gain adherents within the wider Baloch nationalist movement in Iran, as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan. In a telling insight into HAI's philosophy, a Pakistani Baloch insurgent asked about his movement's connection to the Baloch cause in Iran replied: "We know the people fighting in Jundallah [i.e. HAI] are also Baloch but we have no relation with them. Ours is a pure nationalist war, miles away from Jundallah's religious extremism" (Inter Press Service, October 26). At this stage, HAI's Salafist-influenced ideology does not seem to resonate within the broader Baloch nationalist current, even as it is making inroads into Iranian Balochistan.

Chris Zambelis is an analyst and researcher specializing in Middle East affairs with Helios Global Inc.

Notes

1. The official website and Facebook page of Harakat Ansar Iran (HAI) are available at: <http://www.ansariran.blog.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/ansariranen>, respectively.
2. For more background into Jundallah's operational evolution, see Chris Zambelis, "A New Phase of Resistance and Insurgency in Iranian Balochistan," CTC Sentinel 2(7), 2009, pp. 15-18.