



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XI, ISSUE 3 ♦ FEBRUARY 8, 2013

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SALAFISTS AND SECULARISTS CHALLENGE THE AUTHORITY OF TUNISIA'S ISLAMIST RULERS

Andrew McGregor

Growing tensions in Tunisia between that nation's Islamist government, secular political forces and radical Salafists exploded on February 6 following the assassination of a leading Tunisian secularist politician, Chokri Belaid. Within hours, the Tunis headquarters of the ruling Islamist Ennahda party was set ablaze, thousands of protesters gathered outside the Interior Ministry demanding the fall of the regime and major protests erupted in cities across Tunisia (Reuters, February 6; Tunisia Live, February 6). Though the perpetrators have yet to be identified, popular suspicion has fallen on both the Salafists and Ennahda. Elements of both groups were accused by Belaid (a forceful critic of the government) of attacking a conference of Belaid's Democratic Patriots party on February 2 (AFP, February 2). The murder took place in the midst of a political crisis generated by Ennahda's need for a coalition government to remain in power but its unwillingness to share important cabinet posts (Agence Tunis Afrique, February 2; AFP, February 2).

Tunisia is also facing a growing jihadist movement within its borders. On February 1, Tunisia renewed its two-year-old state of emergency for another month in reaction to recent confrontations between security forces and armed jihadists seeking to create an Islamic state. Security was also stepped up with "special units" being posted at oil facilities in southern Tunisia in the aftermath of the In Aménas terrorist attack in neighboring Algeria.

According to Interior Minister Ali Larayedh, 16 militants were arrested in December after accumulating arms with the intention of imposing an Islamic state in Tunisia (*al-Abram* [Cairo], January 29). The cell was tracked down in the mountainous pine forests

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of Jaball Chambi National Park in Kasserine governorate after a Tunisian National Guard patrol was attacked by gunmen near the Algerian border, with the loss of one NCO and four wounded guardsmen. The gunmen were identified as members of the Uqbah ibn Nafa'a group and were said to be equipped with arms, explosives, maps, communications equipment and uniforms (*al-Hayat*, January 22; *Jeune Afrique*, February 4, 2013; Tunis Afrique Presse, December 11, 2012; *al-Watan* [Algiers], January 30). [1]

According to a major pan-Arab daily, Tunisian jihadists are reported to be training in camps run by the Libyan Ansar al-Shari'a in the Abu Salim district of Tripoli, Zintan in Jabal al-Gharbi (western Libya) and Jabal al-Akhdar (eastern Libya) (*al-Hayat*, January 22). In Tunisia's west, trafficking of all sorts has increased along the Algerian-Tunisian border since the Tunisian revolution two years ago. Border controls are much diminished with bribes or the threat of retaliation usually being enough to ensure smooth passage for smugglers. Algerian Prime Minister Abd al-Malik Sellal identified 11 Tunisians among the terrorists who seized the natural gas facilities at In Aménas in January (*Tout sur l'Algérie*, January 23).

Tunisia's Salafi-Jihadists received a declaration of support in late January from Sanda Ould Bouamama, the spokesman of the militant Ansar al-Din organization of northern Mali, now engaged in fighting with French-led international forces:

As for the brothers in Tunisia, we really cannot but stand up and say out loud: 'May God salute you and make more people like you.' Tunisia is restored to its nation and leads the rejection of aggression as it led the revolution. It also leads the rejection of the Crusader projects... France is gasping behind its economic greed and is drowning in its debt. All the French interests all over the world should be targeted. France came up with these interests to slaughter your brothers in Azawad [northern Mali] and others. All these interests should be targeted (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 25).

Like their counterparts in Libya, Egypt, Somalia and elsewhere, the Salafists have launched a campaign against the "idolatry" of traditional Sufist Islam, largely by a series of fire-bomb attacks against over 40 Sufi shrines and mausoleums in Tunisia since the revolution. This campaign has stepped up recently, with the perpetrators seemingly emboldened by a systemic failure of security forces to prevent such attacks.

After trying unsuccessfully to persuade their fellow Tunisians to abstain from celebrating the Mawlid al-Nabi (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday) in January, Salafists marked the

occasion by torching the 300-year-old mausoleum of Sidi Muhammad al-Ghouth in the oasis town of Douz (site of a major firefight between militants and police in August, 2011), the mausoleum of Sidi Ali Ben Salem al-Hamma in Gabès and the mausoleum of Sidi Knaou in the small Berber town of New Matmata in southern Tunisia (Shems FM [Tunis], January 24; Webdo.tn, January 24). This was followed a few days later by an arson attack on the mausoleum of Sidi Boughanem in Kasserine governorate, a sparsely inhabited region in the Tunisian interior where Salafist militants appear to have set up operations (Shems FM [Tunis], January 31). Kasserine is useful as it borders Algeria, allowing the possibility of direct contact with Algerian militants of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. There are allegations that Libyan arms are now passing both ways across the border in this region (*al-Hayat*, January 22).

A blow was struck against both traditional Islam and a tourist industry that relies heavily on European visitors when Salafists destroyed the mausoleum of Sidi Bou Said on January 12 in the town named for him on the Tunisian coast. A famous artists' colony entirely repainted in blue and white in the 1920s at the behest of artist and resident Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger, Sidi Bou Said is a cornerstone of the Tunisian tourist industry. The famed mausoleum of 13th century Islamic saint Sidi Bou Said (a.k.a. Abu Said ibn Khalif ibn Yahya Ettamini al-Beji) was of special interest to historically-minded visitors due to its legendary association with Saint Louis (King Louis IX of France, 1214-1270), who died in Tunisia after a lifetime of crusading in the Middle East. Local Berber legend maintains that Louis IX adopted Islam and married a Berber princess before his eventual death in the town, though there is little in the historical record to support this legend. [2] A number of rare manuscripts containing the teachings of Sidi Abu Said were also destroyed in the fire (France24, January 18).

Such attacks have brought strong criticism from traditional Islamic leaders in Tunisia such as Mufti Uthman Batikh: "[The Salafists] accuse people of being infidels; they don't accept dialogue. Such stiffness is what made people reject them. This is all a result of their ignorance of the reality and the history of Islam" (NPR, January 29).

Unexpectedly, fugitive Tunisian jihadist leader Abu Iyadh described those responsible for burning mausoleums and other shrines as "stupid," saying that such monuments must first be "burned in the minds of the people before begin burned in reality," an allusion to the need for religious education before undertaking such acts (Mosaique FM [Tunis], February 3; *Tunisie Soir*, n.d.). Abu Iyadh (a.k.a. Sayfallah bin Hussein), is the leader of the Tunisian Ansar al-Shari'a movement and is believed to have organized the

September 14, 2012 attack on the U.S. embassy in Tunis in which four attackers were killed. The veteran jihadist fought in Afghanistan and was sentenced to 43 years in prison in Tunisia after being arrested and extradited by Turkish authorities in 2003. After receiving a presidential pardon from the new Islamist regime, Abu Iyadh dedicated himself to the furtherance of Salafism and Shari'a in Tunisia (for Abu Iyadh, see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, May 1, 2012). The Salafist leader claims to have no connection to the growing violence in Tunisia, saying the West only fears Ansar al-Shari'a "because of its charitable work." Abu Iyadh also regrets the departure of young Salafi-Jihadists for the battlefields of Syria and Mali, as the young Salafists are needed at home (Mosaique FM [Tunis], February 3; Middle East Online, February 5).

Besides attacking concerts, bars and individuals on the street who are deemed to be wearing "un-Islamic" clothing, Tunisia's Salafists have also staged anti-government rallies and hunger strikes designed to obtain the release of the roughly 900 Salafists detained for various acts of violence.

Another of Tunisia's leading Salafist radicals is Shaykh al-Khatib al-Idrissi, a blind Islamic scholar who advocates the return of a Caliphate in Ifriqiya (Tunisia) that will eventually extend to all the world's Islamic communities. He rejects the participation of Salafist political fronts like Jabhat al-Islah in the political process, asserting that anything short of full and immediate implementation of Shari'a is unacceptable. According to Shaykh al-Khatib, "Today, it is the West that governs economically, politically, militarily and in the media, but everything is collapsing and Islam is strengthened. The economic crisis has weakened the West, so this [political] model is vanishing. It is then that the Caliphate reappears" (*Le Figaro* [Paris], May 31, 2012).

Notes

1. The group is named for Uqbah ibn Nafa'a al-Fihri, the 7th century Arab general of the Quraysh tribe who defeated Berbers and Byzantines to seize Ifriqiyah (modern Tunisia) for Islam. For the growth of radical Salafism in Tunisia, see *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, November 30, 2012.
2. See Afrodesia E. McCannon, "The King's Two Lives: The Tunisian Legend of Saint Louis," *Journal of Folklore Research* 43(1), January-April 2006, pp. 53-74.

CEASEFIRE OFFER PUTS BOKO HARAM LEADERSHIP IN QUESTION

Andrew McGregor

A late January offer of a unilateral ceasefire from the self-identified second-in-command of Nigeria's Boko Haram militants has raised hopes of a negotiated peace in some quarters but has raised questions over the current state of the group's leadership and the legitimacy of the ceasefire offer.

The offer came in the aftermath of two highly unusual meetings between Borno State government officials (including Governor Kashim Shettima) and Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Aziz ibn Idris, the self-identified "second-in-command" of Boko Haram and regional commander of the movement in north and south Borno (*Osun Defender*, February 4). The unilateral ceasefire is supposedly intended as a first step towards a dialogue between the movement and the government, but so far, there have been no comments on the initiative from Boko Haram leader Imam Abubakr Shekau.

Nigerian security officials reported that the Boko Haram leader was badly wounded when he tried to pass through a Joint Task Force (JTF) checkpoint posing as a Fulani tribesman. Shekau and two wounded companions escaped after a firefight with JTF members, while two other gunmen were killed in the exchange (*Vanguard* [Lagos], January 19). Nigerian security officials traced Shekau to Islamist-held Gao in northern Mali, where he was reported to be receiving medical treatment before the city fell to a French-led offensive.

In a Hausa language statement, Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Aziz described the motivation behind the ceasefire offer:

We, on our own, in the top hierarchy of our movement under the leadership of Imam Abubakar Shekau, as well as some of our notable followers, agreed that our brethren in Islam, both women and children are suffering unnecessarily; hence we resolved that we should bring this crisis to an end. We have also told the government to try to live up to our demands that our members in detention should be released. We hope the government will not betray us this time around, because we all know that it was because of the continued detentions of our members that this crisis continued for this long. And if the government fails to do as it now promised, then this conflict will never have an end (Radio Nigeria [Abuja], January 29).

Less than a day after the January 28 ceasefire was declared, a

Lagos news agency interviewed a self-identified Boko Haram leader by telephone in Bauchi State. The alleged leader, calling himself Mujahideen Muhammad Marwana, disclaimed any knowledge of a ceasefire, saying such a move would be impossible so long as Boko Haram members continue to be “unjustly” held in prison. Marwana further claimed that the movement had met with government officials he cited by name, but that the talks had gone nowhere because the delegations had been slaughtered by the security services (Sahara Reporters [Lagos], January 29).

The ceasefire did not seem to be respected by all elements of Boko Haram; a January 28 attack by suspected Boko Haram members on the village of Gajiganna (north of Maiduguri) left at least eight people dead (Xinhua, January 28). Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Aziz claimed the attack was the work of criminals rather than Boko Haram, complaining that “some criminals have infiltrated our movement and continued attacking and killing people using our names” (*Vanguard* [Lagos], January 29).

There are fears in Nigeria that Boko Haram members might flee the French offensive in northern Mali to engage in new attacks in northern Nigeria. An army spokesman outlined the approach of Nigerian Chief of Defense Staff Admiral Ola Sa’ad Ibrahim, who will consider the ceasefire legitimate only if Boko Haram refrains from attacks for a one month period: “The Boko Haram members are Nigerians and by now they must have seen the futility in their agitation and by now, with the situation in Mali, they should listen to the voice of wisdom coming from the Chief of Defense Staff asking them to stop their attacks for one month if they are sincere in their call for a ceasefire. This is the best option left to them” (*Leadership* [Abuja], February 4).

Nigeria’s 1,200 man deployment in northern Mali has been urged to watch for Boko Haram members operating in the region and border security has been stepped up with the deployment of the Nigerian Army’s First Mechanized Division and Third Armored Division to prevent the infiltration of terrorists fleeing northern Mali (*Vanguard*, January 19). According to Nigerian Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant-General Azubuike Ihejirika, many of the Boko Haram militants operating in Nigeria received training from Islamists in northern Mali (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], January 18). Nigerian security forces also claim that weaponry recently seized from Boko Haram cells originated in Libya. The movement is alleged to have obtained advanced weapons from Libyan sources, but members lack the training to use them (*Vanguard*, January 19).

There have been numerous incidents of violence over the

last month in Kano, a northern stronghold of the movement. Most shocking to Nigerians was the January 19 attempt by suspected Boko Haram gunmen to kill the Amir of Kano, Ado Bayero, a highly influential traditional leader. Though the Amir survived, five people were killed and at least ten wounded, including two of the Amir’s sons. If the attack had been successful it might have ignited an explosion of violence across Nigeria, hardly the work of an organization preparing for a dialogue on peace. The attack was the latest in a series of attempts to kill traditional Islamic leaders in northern Nigeria, including the Shehu of Borno and the Amir of Fika, both of whom were targeted by suicide bombers.

The influential Borno Council of Elders has encouraged the government to seize the opportunity for dialogue, saying that the legitimacy of the ceasefire was only a secondary concern: “The idea of whether it is a faction [that declared the ceasefire] or not should be discarded so that we can make progress. In this direction, we are calling on the government to commence the process of dialogue without any delay” (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], February 1). The Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa’ad Abubakar III, also urged Lieutenant General Ihejirika to pursue the opportunity for dialogue with Boko Haram. The Sultan, who is considered the spiritual leader of Nigeria’s Muslims, was also a professional soldier, seeing service in Nigerian deployments to Chad and Sierra Leone.

Despite the ceasefire offer, Nigerian security forces have not let up in their struggle against the movement, announcing on February 1 that JTF forces supported by helicopter gunships had destroyed Boko Haram training camps over two days in the Sambisa Game Reserve and Ruwa Forest, killing 17 suspected insurgents (AFP, February 1; *Vanguard* [Lagos], February 2).

Unfortunately, optimism that nearly four years of brutal violence could be coming to an end may be misplaced. Muhammad Abd al-Aziz ibn Idris was nearly unknown prior to his remarkable meeting with officials of the Borno state government, though he issued statements twice in the past year indicating Boko Haram was interested in peace talks (Reuters, January 29). In previous telephone contacts with the media he has been unable to verify his identity as a Boko Haram leader (*Osun Defender*, February 4). His claim to be second-in-command of Boko Haram is not consistent with what is known of the group’s leadership structure, which consists only of an Amir (Shekau) and a 30-member Shura (consultative) council.

By declaring a unilateral ceasefire, Boko Haram’s leadership has received nothing in return, an unlikely move for

a movement that is typically inflexible in its demands. Continuing silence from Imam Shekau regarding the ceasefire has done nothing to clarify its legitimacy. Though it is possible the offer represents the emergence of a faction within Boko Haram that is ready to step back from the spiraling levels of violence in northern Nigeria, it is also possible that Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Aziz has no credibility within the movement, or that the initiative is simply a covert attempt by Nigeria's security services to create confusion within Boko Haram during the absence of Imam Shekau.

Nigeria's federal government is approaching the ceasefire offer with greater wariness than the enthusiastic welcome the announcement has received in some quarters of northern Nigeria. Even if the ceasefire offer is credible, it is still uncertain whether the offer extends to the newly formed Ansaru movement, which claimed responsibility for a January 19 attack on Nigerian troops headed to northern Mali and an earlier attack on a police headquarters in Abuja (for Ansaru, see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 10).

Taking Kashmir to the Brink: Provocations and Insecurity Along the Line of Control

Animesh Roul

Since the beginning of the New Year, fears of a dangerous border conflict have returned to haunt India and Pakistan as a spate of ceasefire violations and terrorist incursions continue to take place at the Line of Control (LoC) border between Indian and Pakistani-held Kashmir. Cross-border incidents are not at all uncommon, but what has sparked a deterioration in the situation lately was the brutal beheading and mutilation of two soldiers of the Indian Army's Rajputana Rifles on January 8 in the Poonch sector of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K, the former name of the pre-independence princely state, now used for the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir). Adding salt to the injury, the perpetrators, allegedly Kashmiri militants backed by Pakistan Army regulars, took away the head of one of the slain soldiers and both service rifles as war trophies (*Times of India* [New Delhi], January 10; *Daily Excelsior* [Jammu], January 14). Pakistan has denied that its troops had any role in the beheading (AFP, January 16).

Since November 2003, India and Pakistan have observed a ceasefire agreement along their borders as part of confidence building measures in the disputed territories of Kashmir. However, the number of ceasefire violations has been steadily increasing, with one of the worst taking place last October, when Pakistani mortar fire killed three civilians in Barmulla district (Press Trust of India, October 16, 2012). Pakistan has also accused India of periodic military aggression on the border, most recently claiming that unprovoked Indian fire on mountain villages killed a Pakistani soldier near Kundi Post (AFP, January 16).

Shelling from the Pakistani side of the LoC is common when simultaneous attempts are made to push militant infiltrators into Indian Territory. Since early January, Pakistani troops have turned to heavy shelling at Indian forward posts as covering or diversionary fire, especially in the Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch district. A prior intelligence report indicated that over 200 militants were waiting at the time to enter into India across the LoC (*Daily Excelsior* [Jammu], December 28, 2012).

India's military intelligence report on the January 8 killings and beheading indicates that the incident was the handiwork of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (*Times of India*, January 31). According to that report, a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist identified as Anwar Khan was responsible for the beheading. Anwar, who had earlier decapitated another Indian Army officer in 1996, was part of the ISI's Border Action Team (BAT). This team was comprised of at least 15 LeT and Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorists led by Subedar Jabbar Khan, who is affiliated to the ISI unit in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa village of Tattapani. The intelligence report also said that Anwar was rewarded with \$5,000 by the ISI (CNN-IBN, January 29; *Times of India*, January 31). An alternative source claims that another BAT member named Mohammad Ismail (a.k.a Ismail Langda) carried out the beheadings at the behest of the LeT and ISI (*India Today* [New Delhi], February 1).

The beheading triggered widespread discontent within India's political and military circles as well as enraged public sentiment against what is viewed as the Pakistan Army's brutal behavior and its alleged collusion with the Kashmir terrorists. Official denials have poured out of Islamabad, terming the Indian accusations "baseless and malicious" (*Dawn* [Karachi], January 9; Inter-Services Public Relations Press Release [Rawalpindi], January 14). Progress on bilateral trade and visa issues was put on hold as the killings brought both sides to the brink of war. An atmosphere of distrust was inflamed when the Indian J&K state government issued a nuclear disaster advisory that urged residents to build underground bunkers to protect themselves from a possible

nuclear event in the region, a step that succeeded in catching Islamabad's attention (*Greater Kashmir* [Srinagar], January 22).

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement that "there can be no business as usual between the neighbors" was matched by the Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar's description of "warmongering" Indian leaders (AFP, January 16). While the Pakistani foreign minister's remarks were predictably criticized by India's political and military elites, it was the reaction of Pakistan's "non-state actors" that came as a surprise. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, founder of the dreaded LeT and the present chief of its charity wing, Jama'at-ud-Da'awa (JuD), suddenly became a pro-state voice, coming to the rescue of the Islamabad administration while hugging the limelight at this hour of crisis. Saeed used every available media source to air his anger, even using Twitter to send the message: "Kashmir and Pakistan are blessings of Allah, We will remain united in the struggle... Kashmir is indeed the jugular-vein of Pakistan – We have to re-capture this vein from the enemy." [1]

Saeed reportedly urged Pakistani soldiers to fire on Indian security personnel guarding the line of control (LoC) a week before the beheading incident (Samay Live, January 10). Citing intelligence sources, India's interior minister confirmed the presence of Hafiz Saeed in Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK) a week before the January 8 killings (*Daily Excelsior* [Jammu], January 10). However, Saeed rebutted India's accusations and squarely put the blame on India for not resolving the Kashmir issue. He also threatened that the ongoing border tension in Kashmir could "turn into an ugly situation like a war" (Reuters, January 11). Hafiz Saeed and the JuD openly organized huge anti-India protests in Islamabad after the January 18 Friday prayers.

Evidently, there is a plan to revive Kashmiri militancy, which has been at a low ebb in recent years. At a mid-December meeting of Kashmiri separatist leaders hosted by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), Syed Salahuddin of Hizbul Mujahideen/United Jihad Council (HM/UJC) and Hafiz Saeed of the LeT/JuD both expressed their desire to intensify Kashmiri militancy after the 2014 departure of the U.S.-led alliance in Afghanistan (Tehelka.com, January 9; *India Today*, January 11). Salahuddin is reportedly trying to convince the two factions of Hurriyat to unite, with the sole purpose of reviving the Kashmir militant struggle (*Daily Excelsior* [Jammu], October 31, 2012).

The disturbing situation at the border could be an act of desperation on the part of the Pakistani army and its jihadi proxies who have failed to boost Kashmir militancy for a

fourth consecutive year. To be ready for 2014, the Kashmiri militants need to begin infiltrating cadres across the LoC now to begin recruitment and training, as well as political work to lay the groundwork of a new insurgency amongst the Muslim communities of Indian-controlled Kashmir and Jammu. According to a J&K state government report, the region experienced the lowest level of terrorist violence last year in over two decades of militancy (Press Trust of India, December 27, 2012). Arguably, the increasing frequency of border violations indicates that Pakistan is refocusing on the Kashmir issue even as the border incidents threaten the fragile peace between the two nuclear-armed countries. With possible support from the state establishment, terrorist proxies like LeT/JuD, are taking the reins into their own hands by deliberately provoking India to initiate military action in Kashmir.

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Note

1. See Hafiz Saeed's micro-blogging Twitter Site which is handled by his son and the media department of the JuD: <https://twitter.com/HafizSaeedJUD/status/294679663383572481>.

Egyptian Shift on Hezbollah Reflects New Geopolitical Realities in the Middle East

Chris Zambelis

The course of Egyptian politics and society in the post-revolution era hangs in the balance between stability and chaos. With a democratic transition process mired in turbulence and violence, observers of Egyptian affairs remain fixated on the internecine competition between rival and overlapping factions – liberal, secular, leftist and Islamist – angling to challenge the fledgling Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)-led government of President Muhammad Mursi and its Muslim Brotherhood progenitor. Lost amid the caustic rhetoric and heated street battles are indications that a significant shift is afoot related to Egypt's foreign policy toward Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The fall of Hosni Mubarak has raised a number of questions regarding the future of Egyptian foreign policy. An avowed strategic ally of the United States and a quiet friend of Israel, the Mubarak regime had served as a mainstay of a regional alliance system shepherded by Washington. Despite popular opposition to its foreign policy orientation, Mubarak's Egypt toed the U.S. and Israeli lines with respect to Hezbollah, which was regarded as an enemy of Egypt that needed to be contained and defeated.

In a December, 2012 interview, Egyptian ambassador to Lebanon Ashraf Hamdy revealed that Cairo was eager to engage with Hezbollah. Referring to it as a "real political and military force" in Lebanon, Hamdy's words portend a marked departure in Egyptian foreign policy. Hamdy also acknowledged the indispensability of engaging Hezbollah due to its preeminent position in Lebanon: "You cannot discuss politics in Lebanon without having a relationship with Hezbollah" (*Daily Star* [Beirut], December 29, 2012).

While alluding indirectly to Hezbollah's international reach and foreign relationships, namely its alliances with Iran and Syria – its partners in the Axis of Resistance – the Egyptian ambassador called on the group to act within the confines of Lebanon and Lebanese national interests as opposed to what he referred to as the interests of "others." At the same time, Hamdy recognized the legitimacy of Hezbollah's role as a resistance force in defense of Lebanon against Israel: "Resistance in the sense of defending Lebanese territory ... That's their primary role. We think that as a resistance movement they have done a good job to keep on defending Lebanese territory and trying to regain land occupied by Israel is legal and legitimate." While refuting allegations that a Hezbollah delegation travelled to Egypt for talks, Hamdy did confirm meeting with representatives of the group in Lebanon (*Daily Star*, December 29). The diplomatic praise and respect for Hezbollah coming from Egyptian officialdom today stands in stark contrast to the hostile language reserved for the group in the Mubarak regime.

Following the 2009 arrest of Hezbollah operatives by Egyptian authorities who were allegedly dispatched to Egypt to lend support to the Palestinians in Gaza, media outlets closely tied to the Mubarak regime referred to Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah as the "monkey shaykh" and described the group as the "Devil's Party."

Hezbollah was always treated as an appendage of Iran, a longtime foe of the Mubarak regime. For its part, Hezbollah responded by defending its record in defense of the Palestinians while admonishing Egypt's abandonment of the revolutionary and pan-Arab nationalist ideals it once advocated during the tenure of President Gamal Abd al-Nasser (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 28, 2010).

The factors underlying the FJP's apparent rapprochement with Hezbollah must be considered in their ideological,

diplomatic, and geopolitical contexts. The FJP expressed early on its commitment to forge a new path for Egypt in the international arena. Much of the attention surrounding the motivations behind the uprising that overthrew Mubarak in 2011 emphasized the domestic grievances and hardships endured by the Egyptian public. The widespread discontent felt toward a despotic and corrupt regime that failed to meet the most basic demands of Egyptians cannot, however, be disentangled from the popular disapproval of Egypt's international posture under Mubarak.

During the uprising, anger over Egypt's perceived complicity in advancing U.S. and Israeli regional aims figured prominently, especially in regards to the preservation of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and Cairo's participation in the Camp David peace accords, which was widely seen as coming at the expense of Egyptian, pan-Arab, and Islamic interests. In this regard, the FJP's foreign policy platform contains numerous references to its intention to reassess Egypt's approach to foreign policy. This includes restoring Egypt's prestige as an influential actor in regional and international affairs and advocate of Palestinian self-determination. [1]

To help promote these aims, Egypt has declared its determination to reach out to a broad array of actors, a point emphasized by Hamdy in Beirut: "We are stretching our hand out in the proper, balanced way to all regional powers" (*Daily Star*, December 29, 2012). From an ideological perspective, Egypt's engagement of Hezbollah signifies an attempt on the part of Cairo to reassert its independence and freedom of maneuver in international affairs. Because Hezbollah enjoys legitimacy amongst a wide segment of Egyptian society, engaging the group bolsters the FJP's claim to have discarded key facets of Egypt's Mubarak-era foreign policy. In a related move, Egypt's careful opening toward Iran under the FJP also reflects a new outlook on foreign affairs in Cairo (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], January 23).

Determined to shape Egypt's behavior in ways amenable to their respective interests, the United States, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular have each used economic aid and other levers in varying degrees to pressure Egypt to remain within the parameters that governed their relations in previous years. Egypt's dire economic predicament and domestic instability have left it vulnerable to economic and other forms of diplomatic pressure. In spite of these obstacles, Egypt has nevertheless been able to leverage its geopolitical weight to forge ahead with its goal of diversifying its foreign relations. This includes engaging previous enemies such as Hezbollah and Iran on its own terms while at the same time maintaining ties with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel as it sees fit. The turmoil in Syria is also weighing heavily on Egypt's geopolitical calculus. Egypt continues to lend moral and diplomatic support to the Syrian opposition in its struggle against the Ba'athist regime, but also remains vocally opposed to any sort of foreign military intervention

in Syria (al-Hayat, January 23). Just as important, Egypt's stance on the crisis in Syria has not impeded its efforts to engage with Hezbollah and Iran, the strongest advocates of the Ba'athist regime.

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Note

1. For more details about the Freedom and Justice Party's foreign policy objectives, see "Foreign Policy in Morsi's Presidential Election Platform," Freedom and Justice Party, May 21, 2012, available at: <http://www.fjponline.com/article.php?id=727>.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Looks to Benefit from a Resumption of North-South Hostilities in Yemen

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The recent offensive launched by the Yemeni Army in the Rada'a district of al-Baydha governorate marked the second phase of a broad military campaign started last summer to drive al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Ansar al-Shari'a militants out of their strongholds in southern Yemen (Barakish.net, January 28). This extensive effort, backed by an increasing number of American drone airstrikes, has included air and ground operations carried out by the Yemeni Army with support from local militias, preventing AQAP from retaking its former positions and forcing the group to retreat to its traditional sanctuaries in Hadramawt and Shabwah governorates. However, AQAP's presence extends to other southern provinces. Coupled with the security challenges posed by southern secessionists and the growing local resentment towards the Sana'a government, this presence is turning southern Yemen into a testing ground for the administration of President Abd Rabbu Mansur al-Hadi.

The Second Phase of the Army's Offensive

On January 28, the Yemeni Defence Ministry ordered an air and ground attack against AQAP positions in Rada'a and al-Manaseh (al-Baydha governorate) after the failure

of negotiations to secure the release of three European hostages held by AQAP (*Yemen Post*, January 29). The three foreigners (two Finns and an Austrian), had been kidnapped in Sana'a on December 21, reportedly by tribesmen who consigned the three hostages to AQAP in Rada'a in January in exchange for approximately \$28,000 (al-Masdar Online, January 16).

Yemeni security forces claimed that more than 40 AQAP and Ansar al-Shari'a militants were killed in the fighting, which ceased two days after the tribal leaders mediated a ceasefire between the Army and the militants to allow the resumption of negotiations (*Yemen Post*, January 30; *Saudi Gazette*, January 31). Although Yemeni officials stated that securing the liberation of the hostages was the main goal of the attack, an air and ground operation that included the deployment of 7,000 soldiers and 50 tanks suggests that the overall aim was indeed broader (*Yemen Post*, January 23). Security sources later confirmed that the military escalation against AQAP positions in al-Baydha was part of a global effort to eradicate jihadi militants from Yemen, while a Colonel at the Presidential Palace anticipated similar operations in the coming months, coinciding with "an extensive drone campaign" (*Yemen Post*, January 29; *Yemen Times*, January 31).

The al-Baydha offensive represents a strategic move in the Army's overall campaign against AQAP, since the governorate's location in the middle of the country and its shared borders with Shabwah and Abyan provinces (where AQAP has a strong presence) would offer AQAP militants a relatively easy passage towards the capital, Sana'a. With the support of U.S. drone strikes, this military pressure has achieved some significant results. Yemeni officials reported that security forces killed approximately 460 AQAP militants in raids, airstrikes and other military operations in 2012, the majority as a consequence of the Army offensive that began last summer (Barakish.net, January 3).

It remains uncertain whether AQAP's Saudi deputy leader, Sa'id al-Shihri, was among those killed in the government offensive. According to Yemen's High Military Committee, al-Shihri died from injuries sustained during an operation conducted in November in Sa'ada governorate (*Yemen Observer*, January 26). Although Saudi sources confirmed al-Shihri's death, they claimed al-Shihri died in a U.S. airstrike in December 2012 (al-Arabiya, January 22). AQAP has yet to issue a statement regarding these reports, adding some mystery to the fate of a militant who has been declared dead three times previously.

Despite the severe blows inflicted to AQAP so far, the open

question remains whether the army is able to consolidate its progress, or whether its military drives are just forcing AQAP militants to relocate to other areas. The group is still displaying resilience even after the loss of its positions in Laji and Zinjibar last summer and in al-Baydha it has not been completely defeated despite suffering a high number of casualties. AQAP militants presented strong resistance during military operations in Rada'a and al-Manaseh, launching retaliatory assaults against military checkpoints with car bombs and suicide bombers, killing 18 soldiers in the process (Barakish.net, January 28). Moreover, security sources stated that several hundred militants arrived in Rada'a from Abyan to reinforce the group's defences (*Yemen Post*, January 29; Barakish.net, January 28).

In Abyan governorate, AQAP militants began relocating from Ma'rib and al-Jawf last December with the alleged support of local tribal shaykhs who sold them arms and ammunition (Aden al-Ghad, December 20, Barakish.net, January 28). The Yemeni Army, in cooperation with the pro-government Popular Resistance Committees, announced its success in expelling jihadists from the governorate in January, but the flow of militants from Abyan to al-Baydha has demonstrated the fragility of the Army's claims (Barakish.net, January 6). AQAP's continued presence in the South has forced military commanders to order another offensive in Abyan just a few weeks after the conclusion of the last one (Saba.net, January 31).

The Security Challenges in the South

The main challenge for the Yemeni government lies precisely in the south, where there is a risk of AQAP exploiting the deteriorating security and political situation in the southern provinces to reinforce its presence there. Regular reports about clashes between armed elements of Yemen's "Southern Movement" and security forces in the governorates of Lahij, Abyan, Al-Dali, Shabwah and Hadramawt are giving the impression that the so-called "southern question" is turning into a growing security problem for the central government, challenging the unity of the country. Yemen's Southern Movement (al-Harakat al-Janubiyya, also known as Hiram) is an amorphous umbrella group that includes several southern factions that trace their formation to the 1994 civil war between North and South Yemen that followed Yemen's 1990 unification. The current southern liberation movement began in 2007, when disenfranchised southern military officers started a protest movement against the government to demand their reinstatement and guarantees for their pensions. [1] The movement rapidly gained the support of broad segments of southern civil society, canalizing their resentment of the North/South economic and political divide.

Gradually, the demands for social change have been replaced by more vocal requests for secession and independence.

Thus far, the Southern Movement has not conducted a violent struggle against the central government and the majority of southern activists have distanced themselves from violent methods in favour of mass demonstrations. The 2011 Yemeni uprising against the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh presented an opportunity to ease secessionist sentiment and create new bonds of solidarity between southerners and northerners who saw a common enemy in the Saleh regime. However, tensions escalated over the last year as discussions over the National Dialogue – a forum intended to include all Yemeni political parties and factions and designed to result in a new constitution prior to the 2014 elections – began to fragment the southern political landscape.

Though all the southern factions generally agree on their desire to see more autonomy for the south, they differ on the shape of this autonomy and on the process needed to achieve it. One faction may call for federalism and self-determination; another may support full secession from the north through participation in the National Dialogue, while yet another may call for complete disengagement from the north and a boycott of the National Dialogue (al-Khaleej, December 17, 2012). These differences prompted Muhammad Ali Ahmad, a prominent leader in the Southern Movement, to convene the first conference for the southern people last December (*Yemen Post*, December 20, 2012). This move, however, only created a new rift when the faction of Ali Salim al-Beidh, the former general secretary of the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) and the most important figure of the separatist movement, refused to take part (*Yemen Post*, January 26).

In mid-January, nearly one million people mobilized in Aden to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the Yemen Civil War of 1994. Many in the crowd called for secession and waved al-Beidh's picture (al-Masdar Online, January 13). The fact that al-Beidh's faction is the strongest one in the south today was confirmed in late January, when tens of thousands of protesters demonstrated for two days in Aden, calling for southern secession and refusing to participate in the National Dialogue Conference (Alomanaa.net [Aden], January 28).

After violent clashes between separatists and security forces in al-Dali governorate resulted in 4 soldiers killed, Yemeni politicians accused al-Beidh of supporting armed factions to obstruct the National Dialogue (*Yemenfox.net*, January 31). Although al-Beidh's role in supporting such groups is still to be proven, the increasing number of violent incidents involving armed separatists in the southern governorates

represents a troubling development. These incidents include armed assaults against army units, such as the attack on a patrol in al-Kibar in which two soldiers were killed, and a number of political assassinations, such as the killing of the deputy security chief of Dhamar governorate, Brigadier General Abdullah al Mushki (Barakish.net, January 11; *al-Ahale*, January 16). These types of attacks are often indistinguishable from those carried out by jihadi militants.

Those participating in violent attacks against government symbols and targets have often been accused of being affiliated with the faction of Tariq al-Fadhli, the veteran mujahideen who fought in Afghanistan and is today a controversial figure in the Southern Movement due to his militant past (*Yemen Observer*, July 23, 2009; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 2, 2010; for al-Fadhli, see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 10, 2009; *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, March 19, 2010). Last year, al-Fadhli has also been accused of facilitating the entry of AQAP militants to Abyan (*Yemenfox.net*, November 6, 2012).

The Yemeni government might have some interest in discrediting al-Fadhli by associating his southern credentials with his supposed AQAP affiliation and there is little, if any, evidence that jihadi militants and armed secessionists are coordinating their efforts against the government. A further deterioration of the security situation in the south could, however, create an environment even more favourable for AQAP, providing the group with the necessary territory to contain future army offensives.

Conclusion

South Yemen is becoming a real testing ground for both the national counter-terrorism strategy and the political future of President Hadi's administration. The strong presence of jihadi militants in the southern provinces suggests that the army's offensive, though successful in removing some governorates from the control of AQAP and Ansar al-Shari'a, has yet to consolidate its territorial gains. At the same time, the failure of the National Dialogue in addressing southern grievances and its likely boycott by a strong faction of the Southern Movement risks inciting secessionist sentiments among southerners and endangers Yemen's political transition, which depends strongly on the conference's success. These simultaneous developments present new security challenges in the south, most notably by potentially opening a new second front that would facilitate AQAP activities and be difficult for the government to contain.

Note

1. Nicole Stracke and Mohammed Saif Haidar, *The Southern Movement in Yemen*, Sheba Center for Strategic Studies and Gulf Research Center, October 2010, Available at: http://www.grc.net/data/contents/uploads/The_Southern_Movement_in_Yemen_4796.pdf.