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IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....1

IF SYRIA IS ATTACKED, WILL IRAN RETALIATE?
By Nima Adalkah4

GAZAN JIHADISTS UNITE TO CREATE NEW OPERATIONAL BASE
IN SINAI
By Murad Batal al-Shishani5

RED BERETS, GREEN BERETS: CAN MALI'S DIVIDED MILITARY
RESTORE ORDER AND STABILITY?
By Andrew McGregor7



Hamadi Jebali Resigned on February 20

ASSASSINATION SPARKS POLITICAL CRISIS IN TUNISIA

Andrew McGregor

Tunisia's political crisis deepened this week with the emergence of a split in the ruling Islamist Ennahda Party and the subsequent resignation of Ennahda Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali on February 20. The split was the consequence of Jebali's attempts to form a new government of technocrats in the wake of the February 6 assassination of Chokri Belaid, the 48-year-old secretary general of opposition party al-Watad (the Movement of Democratic Patriots - MDP).

The assassination and the announcement soon after that Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali intended to form a new "apolitical government" of technocrats to replace the existing government created a rift within Ennahda, which had the most to lose from the proposal. Jebali is Ennahda's secretary-general, but admits he did not consult the party before deciding on a new government: "The situation is difficult and urgent; there is a danger of violence. What can I consult about? I'm the head of the government. I could not wait" (*Le Monde*, February 11). Jebali, like Ennahda party leader Rachid Ghannouchi, was set on fast-tracking the new constitution in order to begin the first round of elections in July. At the time of his resignation it is estimated that Jebali had the loyalty of less than 25 percent of Ennahda (*Jeune Afrique*, February 17).

Ghannouchi denounced the proposed new government as being a way to "circumvent the legitimacy" of the electoral "victory" won by Ennahda (Tunisian Press Agency, February 17). Ennahda took 89 of the 217 seats in Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly in the October, 2011 election. The Islamist party was far from forming a clear majority in the elections, but succeeded in forming a government as senior partner in a coalition with Mustapha ben Ja'afar's Ettakatol party and President Moncef Marzouki's Congress for the Republic. The three-party coalition is popularly known as "the troika." Ettakatol supported the formation of a government of technocrats (Tunisian

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Fax: (202) 483-8337

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Press Agency, February 17). Ennahda's insistence on holding all ministerial positions of importance is one of the most important factors behind Tunisia's current political turmoil. The party is now seeking an Ennahda member to serve as a replacement for Jebali but has hinted it might be willing to open up senior ministries to members of other parties.

The current crisis was sparked by the death of Chokri Belaid, who was assassinated by two gunmen outside his home on the morning of February 6 (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, February 8). Belaid's colleagues claim that the well-known critic of the ruling Islamist party was preparing to make public on February 15 various files he had built on the corruption of a number of top government officials (*Jeune Afrique*, February 17). Though no evidence has been provided to substantiate the allegations, Ennahda has been widely accused of orchestrating Belaid's murder. Belaid's family has been especially vocal in its accusations of Ghannouchi and Ennahda, and on February 11, Belaid's widow joined thousands of demonstrators outside the National Assembly in calling for the resignation of the government (*Jordan Times*, February 13). Ghannouchi and other Ennahda leaders were told by Belaid's family to stay away from the political leader's funeral, as were representative of the other two parties in the coalition government.

Ennahda responded by organizing marches of their supporters on February 15 and 16 to support the "legitimacy" of the government and "express the unity of the movement" (Tunisian Press Agency, February 16). Speaking to a rally of Salafists and Ennahda members on February 16, various Islamist leaders denounced the formation of a government of technocrats, claiming it was a "conspiracy against the electoral legitimacy" of the government (Tunisian Press Agency, February 17).

Perhaps unconvincingly, Ghannouchi has attempted to portray Ennahda as the real victim in the Belaid assassination: "We believe that Belaid's assassination is part of the conspiracy against the revolution and the coalition government led by Ennahda. We believe that these bullets were aimed at the Ennahda party, the revolution, and all those fighting for the revolution... There is a force that does not want any overlap between democracy and Islam, or modernity and Islam, but this will not affect us." (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 13). In a recent interview with a German daily, Ghannouchi painted the murder as a "coup" designed to force Ennahda from power:

The key question is: 'Who profits from this crime?' We, the Ennahda party, are the biggest loser because we are responsible for Tunisia's security. Why should we harm

the security while we are governing? ... This attack is an attempt to destroy the image of Ennahda, destabilize the government, and bring Tunisia to the brink of civil war. The attack is equivalent to a coup... The coup aimed to drive the elected Ennahda ministers from the cabinet. On the very day of the attack the prime minister suggested appointing a government of technocrats. He has been driven into a corner by Belaid's murder (*Sueddeutsche Zeitung* [Munich], February 17).

As Islamists pilloried Belaid before his death as a "saboteur of the revolution" and "an agent of foreign powers," the Wataad leader was personally warned of plots on his life by Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki, who has frequently warned of violence by Islamist extremists in Tunisia (see Terrorism Monitor, November 30, 2012). Belaid's assassins were not interfered with by the Interior Ministry, which had been warned of the threats, or the secret service, which was similarly alerted and has responsibility for protecting opposition leaders as well as government leaders (*Jeune Afrique*, February 17). A memorial dedicated to Belaid was destroyed by unknown parties earlier this week (TunisiaLive, February 18).

Only days before his death, Belaid had pointed out that the regime had given its approval to political violence by calling for the release from prison of members of a pro-Ennahda militia (the League for the Protection of the Revolution) that were involved in the death of leading Nida Tounes party activist Lotfi Naqdh (*Jeune Afrique*, February 17). The same militia is perceived as a prime suspect by many Tunisians in the murder of Belaid (al-Jazeera, February 16).

Economic stagnation has helped provide a recruiting pool for extremists amongst Tunisia's youth, who are typically well-educated but suffer from over 30% unemployment. Recruitment bonuses of as much as \$27,000 for young men willing to perform jihad in Syria are very enticing compared to the absence of prospects at home (*Jeune Afrique*, February 13). A local report recently claimed that dozens of young Tunisians had been killed fighting for the Islamist Jabhat al-Nusrah and other insurgent groups when a Syrian government airstrike hit a concentration of Islamists near the Aleppo airport, killing 132 fighters (Shams FM [Tunis], February 13; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 15).

WAVE OF BOMBINGS FOLLOWS AL-QAEDA CALL FOR ATTACKS ON IRAQ'S SHIITE MAJORITY

Andrew McGregor

Following an appeal from an al-Qaeda front organization calling on Iraqi Sunnis to take up arms against the nation's Shiite majority, a series of devastating car bombings and roadside explosions targeted the Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad on February 17, killing 26 people and wounding 119 others. Four more car-bombs were discovered and defused by Baghdadi police the next day (al-Bayan [Baghdad], February 18; al-Sabah, February 18).

The blasts came a day after the February 16 assassination of a senior army intelligence officer, Brigadier General Awuni Ali, and two of his aides by a suicide bomber in Mosul, one of ten such attacks so far this year (*al-Sabah al-Jadid* [Baghdad], February 17). Daily political violence is clearly on the increase again in Iraq; on the same day General Awuni Ali was killed, a police colonel was murdered at a checkpoint in Mosul, a police officer killed and three wounded by a roadside bomb in al-Anbar province and a judge killed by a "sticky bomb" in Kirkuk (AFP, February 16; *al-Sabah al-Jadid* [Baghdad], February 18). 246 people were killed in Iraq in January alone as the violence proliferates (AFP, February 1).

Since last December, thousands of Sunnis have participated in daily demonstrations in heavily Sunni western Iraq (particularly in al-Anbar province), complaining of sectarian-based discrimination and calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki (al-Jazeera, February 2). The initial demonstrations were sparked by the December 20 arrest of at least nine guards of Finance Minister Rafa al-Issawi, a top Sunni leader.

Similar marches have been carried out by the Sunnis of Baghdad, Mosul and Samarra. Massive anti-government protests in Fallujah were further inflamed by the death in late January of seven young protesters in clashes with security forces (al-Jazeera, February 2). The deaths presented an immediate obstacle to attempts by the Maliki government to appease the growing hostility of the Sunni community. In recent weeks, the government claims to have released 900 prisoners, raised the salaries of Sunni militiamen fighting al-Qaeda and apologized for holding detainees without charge for long periods (AFP, February 1). Many of the Sunni detainees were arrested on the basis of information received from secret informers, a practice the prime minister has promised to stop. Massive unemployment, government corruption and a failure to provide basic services are all additional factors aggravating Sunni alienation from the

post-Ba'athist state.

A statement of responsibility for the attacks was issued by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an al-Qaeda-led coalition of Sunni jihadists. The statement assured Iraqis that the attacks were carried out by *muwahidin* (monotheists), as opposed to the Shiite "polytheists," as they are known to Sunni extremists. The statement tries to tie the ISI to the broader and generally peaceful Sunni anti-government demonstrations by claiming the bombings were carried out in response to Shiite efforts to "stop the spread of the protests, terrorize those participating in them and prevent [the protests] from reaching Baghdad and its Sunni belt." [1]

The ISI's appeal to Iraq's Sunnis was issued under the name of Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the official spokesman of the Islamic State in Iraq. [2] Al-Adnani's message was primarily dedicated to convincing former al-Qaeda fighters who had joined the anti-terrorist Sahwa (Awakening) militias to return to al-Qaeda without fear of retribution. To do this, al-Adnani presented "Seven Facts" regarding the sectarian and political situation in Iraq today:

1. Rebellion against the "Safavid" (Shiite) government is "the beginning of the end of your crises" and the means of retrieving dignity, rights and sovereignty. [3]
2. Sunni politicians are unable to achieve any of the Sunnis' legitimate demands or protect their rights. They are incapable of even protecting themselves "if the Safavids turn against them."
3. Sunni politicians have never been bothered by the desecration of Sunni holy places, the violation of Sunni women or the imprisonment of "hundreds of thousands of prisoners and detainees." They are concerned only with preserving Iranian sovereignty over Iraq.
4. Iraq's "Rafavid" (lit. "defectors [from Islam]"; i.e. Shi'a) leaders have nothing but hatred for the Sunni community. Al-Adnani singles out leading Shi'a politician Baqir Jabr al-Zubaydi as a particularly egregious example of these attitudes (al-Zubaydi has in the past described the Arab Spring as a Zionist-inspired movement and accused Qatar and Saudi Arabia of financing terrorism in Iraq – see *al-Bayyinah al-Jadidah* [Baghdad], October 22, 2012). Even though "the idiot dog of Iran" (i.e. Prime Minister Malik al-Nuri) has "shown his teeth," other Shiite politicians retain the image of sheep to trick Sunni politicians into forming alliances with them. Sunnis must especially beware "the lunatic Muqtada" (i.e. leading Shiite cleric and political

leader Muqtada al-Sadr), “who prayed with you and gave you sweet talk while his militias are now killing Sunnis in al-Sham (Syria).”

5. The Safavid government won't hesitate to shed Sunni blood and has already begun to do so. Nuri al-Maliki has borrowed his belittling rhetoric from the Nusayriyah (Alawites, i.e. the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad). The Safavids don't have a chance to rule Iraq, so they will “fight to the death” to maintain their temporary political superiority. In these circumstances, what has already been endured by Sunnis in Iraq and Syria will not be “one-tenth what they will receive from the Rafida of Iraq when they show their full reality.” At that point, Iraqi Sunnis will be faced with a choice; bow to the Rafida and be humiliated, or take up arms and seize the upper hand.
6. There is “no use” to having peace with the Rafavids, as the people of al-Shams (Syria) can testify.
7. Gaining dignity and freedom has never been accomplished without “a barrage of bullets and spilling blood.” Iraq's Sunnis must choose between elections and Safavid-imposed humiliation or “arms, jihad and the tribute of pride and dignity.”

As al-Qaeda bombs continue to target Iraq's Shiite majority, there is the danger that Shiite “self-defense” militias will return to the streets, reviving the bitter and bloody sectarian warfare that prevailed in Iraq in the mid-2000s. The recent announcement of the creation of a new Shiite militia called the Mukhtar Army “to help security forces” in the battle against extremism brought a government reminder that only state security forces are allowed to carry arms in the streets (Xinhua, February 10).

Note

1. Ministry of Information / Islamic State of Iraq, “Statement about the attack of the Muwahidin in Baghdad in response to the recent crimes of the Safavid government,” ansar1.info, February 17, 2013.
2. Speech by Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “Seven Facts,” Islamic State of Iraq, January 2013, released by al-Furqan Media, February 1, 2013.
3. “Safavid” is used here in a pejorative sense to refer to Iraqi Shiites while implying their subservience to Iran. The Persian Safavid Dynasty (1501-1736) controlled much of modern-day Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Caucasus region.

If Syria is Attacked, Will Iran Retaliate?

Nima Adolkah

A stark warning to the West that Tehran would retaliate if Syria was attacked came on January 26 from Ali Akbar Velayati, a close advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. According to Velayati, Syria is the “resistance front” and any attack on Iran's strongest ally in the region would be considered an attack on Iran (Mehr News Agency [Tehran], January 26; IRNA, January 26; Shafaq.com [Baghdad], January 26). The Assad regime, Velayati argued, has played a critical role in logistical support to Hamas and Hezbollah, also key allies of Tehran, and its protection is necessary for confronting the United States (Mehr News Agency [Tehran], January 26). This is the most serious reminder yet by a major Iranian official that Iran is pledged to protect the embattled regime of President Bashar Assad. Velayati's comments also hint at the growing tensions between Tehran and Washington following the escalation of economic sanctions in recent months aimed at impeding Iran's controversial nuclear program.

Just four days after Velayati's remarks, Israel launched air strikes on a Syrian convoy alleged to be carrying SA-17 surface-to-air missiles headed to Hezbollah at a point near Syria's border with Lebanon (al-Jazeera, January 30; al-Arabiya, January 30). According to Damascus, the target was actually a weapons research center northwest of the capital city (al-Alam, January 31; al-Jazeera, January 31). The Syrian government quickly condemned the Israeli air strike as a violation of the 1974 military disengagement agreement (al-Jazeera, February 1; Jadaliyya.com, February 5). It also warned of possible surprise retaliation against Israel (al-Arabiya, January 31).

Iran's response was also confrontational. Saeed Jalili, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, vowed that the Islamic Republic will stand by Syria and that Israel will eventually regret its recent military action (IRNA, February 4; al-Arabiya, February 4). Ali Larjani, the Parliamentary Speaker, also warned Israel of retaliation in the future (IRNA, February 4). The most significant warning came from the highest-ranking member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, who identified “confrontation” as the only way to resist “the Zionist aggression” that has supported anti-government militias since 2011 (IRNA, February 4). The comments echoed General Jafari's earlier remarks in September 2012 that the IRGC has been supporting Syria

since the uprising by providing logistical assistance and “transfer of experience” to Syria to maintain internal security against the rebel forces (Fars News, September 19, 2012).

How credible are the Iranian threats? In reality, such bellicose rhetoric overshadows Iran’s more cautious operational activities in Syria. The most significant aspect of Iran’s relations with Syria is Iran’s growing influence over the Syrian economic and military sectors since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The most momentous step in this development was marked by the 2006 agreement for military cooperation between the two countries against a possible attack by Israel and the United States (IRNA, June 16, 2006). Military cooperation has expanded since the popular uprising that began in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring. In the economic sector, Iran has signed a number of key bilateral agreements (the latest in January) to expand Iranian energy, technology and auto industries in Syria (Press TV [Tehran], January 17). There is also the presence in Syria of semi-civic organizations like the Imam Khomeini Foundation, which provides social welfare and public services (especially hospitals) for the poor and needy in Syria (BBC Persian, January 29). Along with these soft tactics, the IRGC has also been playing an increasing role in the Syrian energy sector, with plans to export natural gas to Syria through Iraq by the summer of 2013 (Fars News, January 31).

These developments indicate Iran is vigorously seeking to make Syria dependent as the civil war weakens the Assad regime. Yet Iran’s single objective in Syria is stability for the purpose of expanding both Iran’s soft and hard capabilities in a country which is not only in close geographic proximity to Israel but also acts as a bridge for the provision of logistical and military support to Hezbollah. An Iranian retaliation to a possible Israeli attack on Syria carries the risk of a major U.S.-led military assault in response. Hezbollah could be left vulnerable in such a scenario, something that has gravely concerned Tehran in recent months (Mehr News, February 3). There is also the problem of the ailing economies of Iran and Syria, both undergoing major financial crises while facing U.S.-led sanctions. A conventional military retaliation by Iran could put both countries at risk of economic destabilization, further undermining Iran’s support of the Syrian economy.

Ultimately, for Iran, the best military option remains asymmetrical warfare. The arrest of 48 IRGC members by Syrian rebels in August and the death of IRGC commander Hasan Shateri (a.k.a. Khoshnevis) during Israel’s attack on Syria’s military compound indicate Iranian involvement in Syria in terms of intelligence and possible training of militia groups (IRNA, February 16). As in the conflicts in Lebanon

and Iraq, such militias can preserve Iranian interests in a country that will most certainly become a battlefield for proxy wars between the West, Saudi Arabia and Iran in the event of the Assad regime’s collapse. The militias could also pose a major security threat to Israel, similar to the threat posed by Hezbollah since 1982.

As Syria enters a new phase in the nearly two-year-old civil war, a phase that includes major gun battles in the suburbs of Damascus between government forces and rebel forces, Iran’s long-term goals in the region are also coming under threat. Tehran is fully aware that with the loss of Syria, a new balance of power would shift away from Iran. With tensions brewing between Iran and the United States, Tehran will act cautiously, even if Syria is sporadically attacked by their common enemies. In terms of a large-scale war against Syria, however, Iran and Hezbollah will certainly retaliate, but not in a conventional military sense.

Nima Adelkah is an independent analyst based in New York. His current research agenda includes the Middle East, military strategy and technology, and nuclear proliferation among other defense and security issues.

Gazan Jihadists Unite to Create New Operational Base in Sinai

Murad Batal al-Shishani

After Hamas seized power in Gaza in 2007, jihadist groups began to emerge in the small Palestinian-controlled strip along the Mediterranean. The emergence of these groups was neither in the favor of Hamas nor the main regional actors, Israel and Egypt. Jihadist groups were responsible for various attacks against Israel and started to expand ties to sympathetic groups in Egypt’s security weak-point - the Sinai Peninsula.

Until recently, Gaza’s jihadists did not work under one umbrella. Various groups have been active in Gaza such as Jaljalt, Jaysh al-Islam, Jund Ansar Allah, al-Tawhid w’al-Jihad and Jaysh al-Ummah. These groups were formed by individuals who left Hamas and its affiliated Qassam Brigades after Hamas turned from armed resistance to political participation (al-Jazeera, April 21, 2011). Traditional Salafist groups that used to oppose political and military activism now act as recruitment bases for the emerging jihadi formations.

Hamas has cracked down on the jihadists several times, most famously in August, 2009, when Hamas forces attacked

the Ibn Taymiyah mosque in Rafah, killing its imam, Abd al-Latif Moussa and 21 others (Ma'an, August 16, 2009). The attack followed a Friday sermon in which Moussa, the leader of jihadist group Jund Ansar Allah, had proclaimed an Islamic Emirate in Gaza. The incident is frequently cited in Salafist denunciations of Hamas.

The unification of Gaza's many Salafist-Jihadist groups has been a major issue for the region's jihadist ideologues. Before he was killed by an Israeli missile in October 2012, Hisham al-Saidini (a.k.a. Abu Walid al-Maqqdisi) was among those ideologues that pushed for the jihadists' unification. While still imprisoned by Hamas authorities, al-Saidini's ambition was fulfilled in June, 2012 when jihadists announced the formation of the Majlis al-Shura al-Mujahideen fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqqdis (Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem) (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, October 14, 2012). According to a Gazan jihadist, al-Saidini was among the founders of the newly emerged group and many of the jihadist movements in Gaza are now under this new umbrella. [1]

Al-Saidini's unification concept was inspired by his mentor, imprisoned Jordanian jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqqdisi, who defended the idea of spreading the Salafi-Jihadist ideology "west of the [Jordan] river" (for al-Maqqdisi, see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, July 30, 2010). Al-Maqqdisi wrote an article in April 2009 urging jihadists in Gaza to unify under a clear jihadist banner similar to "Iraq and Afghanistan" and to "form a single group under one name, or at least to create one Shura council that expresses the ideas and aspirations of the Salafi-Jihadist movement in Palestine and the world." [2]

The unification also has strategic purposes. According to an informed journalist in Gaza who spoke to Jamestown on condition of anonymity, the pressure imposed by Israel and Hamas has forced Gaza's jihadists to move to the Sinai Peninsula in order to give themselves more room to operate against Israel: "Instead of operating on a 40 kilometer border with Israel they can operate on a 250 kilometer long border in Sinai. Additionally they have about 61,000 square kilometers to move freely." [3]

The Sinai Peninsula, always a security weak-point for the Egyptian state, used to be controlled by the Mabath al-Amn al-Dawla (MAD - State Security Investigations Service); however, after the January, 2011 revolution, this control loosened with the dissolution of MAD in March, 2011. Since then, the area has witnessed an increase in the number of violent incidents (both criminal and terrorist in nature), including the bombing of gas pipelines, firing of rockets into Israel and the kidnapping of tourists and foreign workers. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, has several times praised the targeting of Sinai pipelines carrying gas to Israel and Jordan. [4]

The jihadists in Sinai, including the biggest jihadist group in the area, Ansar Bayt al-Maqqdis, appear to now be operating

under the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem umbrella and are influenced by Salafist-Jihadists in the Gaza Strip. This influence is strictly ideological as Gaza's jihadists are unable to fund their colleagues in the Sinai.

The Gaza-Sinai nexus was explained by a Sinai jihadist in an interview with a Cairo news agency:

The interdependence [between jihadists from Gaza and Sinai] certainly exists organizationally and ideologically. Salafi-Jihadist groups in the Sinai and Gaza do not recognize borders; they are dealing with the Palestinian issue in terms of religious understanding. Even before the fall of the Mubarak regime, jihadists in the Sinai supported Gaza by weapons, supplies and military missions through the tunnels. [We have] also sheltered some of them who are wanted in Israel... On the other hand, Sinai jihadis have benefited from the expertise available in the [Gaza] Strip, some were sent there to receive training or to hide (Elkhabar.com [Cairo], September 21, 2012).

Apart from the mysterious incident in August 2012 in which no claim of responsibility was made after militants attacked Egyptian Army personnel and killed 16 soldiers, the jihadists' ultimate goal and priority is to fight against Israel. However, as the Salafist-Jihadists do not consider Hamas or the Egyptian regime to be legitimate powers, Sinai can serve as a launching pad and safe haven for jihadists posing a threat to Hamas, Egypt and Israel alike.

Egyptian cooperation with Hamas could conceivably limit the influence of the jihadists due to Cairo's peace agreement with Israel; however, the jihadists are still increasing their influence in Sinai for four reasons:

- Local young men are involved in the jihadist activities, making it difficult for local tribes to turn against their own sons;
- Tribal traditions of carrying arms can be exploited by the jihadists;
- Long-standing local grievances can be manipulated in the jihadists' favor;
- The on-going political turmoil in Cairo limits the ability of the Islamist-led government to carry out counterterrorist operations in the Sinai Peninsula.

The conditions on the ground indicate that the influence of Gaza's Salafi-Jihadists in the Sinai will continue to increase in the near future.

Notes

1. Interview with a Gaza-based jihadist, al-Quds (West Bank), October 15, 2012.

2. <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=0504095p>

3. Phone interview with a Gaza-based journalist, London, February 14, 2013.

4. Ayman al-Zawahiri, "A Message of Hope and Glad Tidings to Our People in Egypt (pt. 10)," As-Sahab Media, <http://asansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=64293>.

Murad Batal al-Shishani is an Islamic groups and terrorism issues analyst based in London. He is a specialist on Islamic movements in the Middle East and North Caucasus.

Red Berets, Green Berets: Can Mali's Divided Military Restore Order and Stability?

Andrew McGregor

With Paris insisting that the 4,000 French troops involved in the counter-terrorist operations in northern Mali will leave Mali sometime in March, it is worth taking a look at the Malian military that will be called on to secure northern Mali despite the continued presence of armed Islamists in the region. Mali's interim political administration is still in turmoil, as is the army, which has been at war with itself ever since the March 22, 2012 military coup led by American-trained Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo. The two main factions in the army, broadly described as the pro-junta "Green Berets" and the anti-coup "Red Berets," have each in their own way hampered the reestablishment of security and national unity in Mali.

During the March coup, the "Red Berets" of the 33rd Paratroop Regiment, who doubled as the presidential guard, rescued President Ahmadou Toumani Touré and successfully concealed him from the putschists, eventually smuggling him out of the country to safety in Dakar, Senegal. President Touré was himself the former commander of the Red Berets and used the access this gave him to mount his own coup against President Moussa Traoré in 1991. President Touré, who was scheduled to give up his post after the national elections scheduled for May, 2012, resigned in exile on April 8, 2012, allowing the formation of a new interim government in Bamako.

The Counter-Coup

Sanogo's junta took the name of the Comité National pour le Redressement de la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'État (CNDRE) and appeared to have a firm grip on Mali's power structures when the Red Berets under their commander

Colonel Abidine Guindo mounted a counter-coup attempt on the night of April 30 – May 1, 2012 (*Le Republicain* [Bamako], May 1, 2012).

Fighting continued through the night, with a focus on the airport, the barracks of various security forces in Bamako, the national TV and radio stations and Sanogo's headquarters at the Kati military base 15 kilometers outside Bamako. The counter-coup came to an end when pro-junta forces overran the Red Beret base at Djicoroni (outside Bamako) and Colonel Guindo went into hiding. Fourteen soldiers were killed in the fighting and at least 40 wounded.

After the failure of the counter-coup, a number of Red Berets went missing after being detained by security forces, while others were reassigned to other units. Some 400 members of the regiment are now believed to be on active operations with other units in northern Mali, while most of the remaining 800 paratroopers refused to take up their new assignments, insisting that the paratroopers be retained as an operational group.

Captain Sanogo blamed the counter-coup on "one single person who made an erroneous assessment of the situation. Colonel Abidine Guindo, head of the parachute regiment, leader of the presidential guard made up of elite troops, thought he could change the political situation and made it a personal problem. He convinced his men I bore them a grudge. It is false" (*Jeune Afrique*, June 9, 2012).

Arrests and Disappearances

Pro-junta troops swept through Bamako in the days following the failed counter-coup, searching for members of the Red Berets and making 140 arrests, including 40 senior officers (*L'Essor* [Bamako], May 3; *Info Matin* [Bamako], May 7, 2012). General Ibrahim Dembélé Dahirou (at the time a Colonel-Major, a French rank between Colonel and Brigadier) met with the 33rd Regiment in late June, 2012 to explain the decision to scatter the unit throughout other formations of the army, but promised to reconstitute the regiment after the liberation of the north was completed (*L'Essor* [Bamako], June 27).

The families of Red Berets who had been captured or detained before going missing published a list of 21 officers and men who had not been heard from since their detention (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], June 29, 2012). According to various human rights organizations, many of the missing appear to have been tortured to death (ANP/AFP, August 10, 2012). As it became clear that many of the arrested Red Berets were disappearing, new attempts to detain members

of the regiment began to meet opposition from the women at the Djicoroni camp, who defied teargas and bullets to prevent the entry of security forces seeking to arrest Red Berets (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], August 4, 2012).

Nearly a score of paratroopers were reported to have deserted in July, 2012 as officers of the regiment continued to be abducted from their homes (*Les Echos* [Bamako], July 10, 2012; *L'Indépendant* [Bamako], July 31, 2012; August 1, 2012). There was a proposal at the time to disband the 33rd and replace it with a new regiment of 1,200 men drawn from the police, the National Guard and the National Gendarmerie (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], July 12, 2012).

Colonel Guindo was found and arrested on July 11, 2012 (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], July 12, 2012). On October 19, 2012, it was reported that Colonel Guindo had agreed to implicate leading Malian politicians and other figures in the attempted counter-coup, which had come to be known as “the Red Beret affair.” Guindo was also reported to have sought the personal protection of Captain Sanogo (*Le Combat* [Bamako], October 19, 2012).

The Attack on the Red Beret Base

Tensions within the Malian military peaked when General Dembélé (now army chief-of-general-staff) took to national television to order the recalcitrant paratroopers to the front: “As we have this problem in the north on our hands, you will go and fight with your brothers-in-arms” (AFP, February 8). The fact that these orders were issued via television would seem to indicate the degree to which the command structure in Mali has broken down. Only days before Dembélé issued his new order there had been a glimmer of hope in the paratroopers’ camp that a resolution to their case was near. On January 30, 28 paratroopers and policemen charged with joining in the attempted counter-coup were released from detention. Among those released was former chief-of-staff General Hamidou Sissoko and Squadron Leader Mahamadou Lamine Konaré, the son of deposed president Amadou Toumani Touré (Radio France Internationale, February 2). The release was followed by a rally at the Djicoroni camp calling for the Red Berets to be sent to the front as a unit.

The refusal of the Red Berets to disband and take up new duties in northern Mali was seen as a personal challenge to the authority of General Dembélé, who was determined to take action against them. In the early hours of February 8, a security team composed of armed members of the army, air force, police and the National Gendarmerie equipped with a BRDM combat reconnaissance vehicle rolled up to

the camp of the 33rd Regiment of Paratroopers at Djicoroni, about halfway between Bamako and the headquarters of the Green Beret putschists at Kati. The security forces attempted to enter the camp, claiming they needed “to secure it,” but were instead faced by a group of angry women and children, the wives and offspring of the Red Beret detainees. Shouting that the security team would need to enter the camp “over our dead bodies,” the women and children initially turned the armed men back with sticks and stones (*Le Combat* [Bamako], February 14). At this point, the clash turned deadly as the security forces opened fire on the women and children with teargas and live ammunition. Two teenagers were killed and 13 wounded. An exchange of gunfire around the camp continued throughout the morning.

Shortly after the firing stopped, President Dioncounda Traoré called on both factions “to permanently stop these repeated clashes in the Malian army...” (AFP, February 8). The incident was widely regarded as a national embarrassment, with the Malian military apparently pursuing a private feud well behind the lines as soldiers from France, Chad, Niger and elsewhere were fighting to retake northern Mali on behalf of the Bamako government.

The first group of what will ultimately be a force of 500 European Union military trainers arrived on the same day as the confrontation between two factions of the Malian military, providing the trainers with a good indication of the challenges they will face. The leader of the EU mission, French General François Lecointre, noted that the Malian army was “in a state of advanced disrepair... the soldiers are badly trained, badly paid and under-equipped,” and lack arms, transportation and communications equipment (AFP, February 8). The EU training program is scheduled to begin in April and is designed to train four new battalions of 640 men each, with personnel drawn from new recruits and existing units of the Malian military (Reuters, February 20). General Lecointre made it clear that the EU mission was working through contacts with General Dembélé and Mali’s Minister of Defense and Veterans’ Affairs, Brigadier General Yamoussa Camara and had no intention of collaborating in any way with Captain Sanogo.

A wave of arrests, mainly of politicians, followed the confrontation at Djicoroni (JournalduMali.com, February 12). On February 11, General Camara assailed the men still at Djicoroni as “deserters” who should be treated as such while their comrades move up to the front in northern Mali: “This decision has no political connotation. The army has a moral contract vis-à-vis society. All those who stand in the way of this contract will be excluded ... There are more than 400 men of the 33rd regiment at the front, and some are even

heads of operations” (*L’Annonneur* [Bamako], February 14; *L’Express* [Bamako], February 13).

Resolution of the dispute within the Malian military has fallen to Prime Minister Diango Cissoko, who at times appears to be working at odds with his Defense Minister, General Camara, who appears to be seeking the military solution also favored by Captain Sanogo. Cissoko received a delegation of Red Berets led by Colonel Seydou Moussa Diallo on February 12 in hope of reconciling the army’s factions. Cissoko assured the delegation that the regiment had not been dissolved, but notable in his absence from the meeting was the Minister of Defense (*Le Pretoire* [Bamako], February 14).

Sanogo’s “Honorable Exit”

There is also a question of security for Sanogo and his coup partners, who fear retribution from the friends and families of those who have been killed or disappeared while in the hands of the Green Berets. Getting Sanogo and his comrades out of the Kati military base will depend on a combination of security guarantees, amnesties and personal incentives. Sanogo claims he has no political ambitions while doing everything possible to keep his hands on the reins of power.

As an incentive to step down in favor of a new interim prime minister, Sanogo was granted the status of former head-of-state in April, 2012 with all its perks and benefits, though this status was later withdrawn after a public outcry. The captain was instead confirmed as the head of the newly-created “Committee of Army Reform” on February 15. Though Sanogo gave way to the new government of Cheik Modibbo Diarra, the junta held on to the vital ministries of the interior, defense and territorial administration. After Diarra showed too much independence, Sanogo showed where the real power still lay in Mali by ordering the arrest of the prime minister on December 11, 2012, forcing his resignation a short time later. In May, 2012, Sanogo supporters fought their way past a Red Beret guard detail to assault interim president Dioncounda Traoré, who was stripped naked, beaten and left for dead before he was rescued and sent to France for emergency medical treatment.

Sanogo, who once boisterously claimed he would “fight with his last breath” to retake northern Mali, has instead been sidelined by the conflict as foreign troops mount the campaign without him. Informed that he can join Malian forces operating behind French and Chadian troops as a captain, Sanogo has instead chosen to remain in his newly-constructed and well-guarded house at Kati with other members of the junta who have failed to report for duty in northern Mali (Mali Actualites, February 8). The steady

procession of politicians, businessmen and administrators seeking his favor has dried up, however, as the captain finds himself outside of the decision-making process since the arrival of the French. The former putschists are reported to be seeking diplomatic positions abroad or well-financed retirements in Bamako in their discussions with ECOWAS negotiators (Radio France Internationale, February 6).

Conclusion

The Malian army’s humiliation was made complete when French and Chadian forces took the Tuareg stronghold of Kidal on February 9. Malian troops were deliberately excluded from the re-occupation force at the insistence of Tuareg separatist rebels and Tuareg Islamists who recently left Ansar al-Din. Units from these rebel groups, considered to be the enemy by Bamako and the Malian army, are now working alongside French forces while Malian troops are urged to keep out of Kidal. Colonel al-Hajj ag Gamou and his pro-Bamako Tuareg militia are the only Malian troops operating in Kidal, having come into northern Mali from Niger alongside Chadian and Nigérien troops. According to Ag Gamou: “The French have to continue their mission until the threat is neutralised... and Mali’s army is able to control the whole country” (Radio France Internationale, February 15). When asked about the absence of Malian troops in Kidal, the Minister of Defense, General Camara, explained that “the Malian army cannot keep pace with the maneuvers of the French army... because we have an army reconstruction” (*Le Républicain* [Bamako], February 18).

The paratroopers of the 33rd Regiment insist they are ready to fight for Mali, but will do so only as a unit, declaring on January 31: “We are at the disposal of the nation which will make of us what she wants” (*L’Indicateur du Renouveau* [Bamako], February 14). Prime Minister Cissoko took to national TV on February 15 to announce that the 33rd would be “restructured” rather than disbanded. One company would act as instructors in Bamako while the other two companies would be sent to Gao and Timbuktu, where they would receive training before being deployed in active operations in northern Mali. These measures are scheduled to take place by March 1 “at the latest” (AFP, February 16).

Before Paris apparently mistook a probing effort by Islamist rebels as a full-fledged attack on the Malian capital and launched a massive military intervention in January, there was a general consensus in the international community that the inevitable military drive through northern Mali had to be preceded by a restructuring and retraining of the Malian military that included the removal of soldiers from the levers of power in Bamako. The hasty intervention has

instead left elements of the Malian military still meddling in politics and many of its best troops as virtual prisoners in a military base outside Bamako. At the moment, there seems little possibility that Mali's army will play anything more than a marginal role in the re-conquest of the north. If military success by the international forces in northern Mali is not accompanied by political restructuring and military reform, the ongoing intervention will likely have little long-term impact on regional security.

Andrew McGregor is the Managing Editor of Global Terrorism Analysis and the Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world.