



IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS..... 1

AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB CALLS ON NORTH AFRICAN JIHADISTS TO FIGHT IN SAHEL, NOT SYRIA
By Camille Tawil5

FACING THE “PERMANENT ARAB SPRING”: TERRORISM AND RUSSIA’S EVOLVING THREAT ASSESSMENT
By Stephen Blank6

ISLAMIST MILITIAS TAKE TO THE STREETS AS EGYPTIANS LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS TO INTERNAL SECURITY CRISIS
By Andrew McGregor8



SHOCK WAVES CONTINUE FROM MYSTERIOUS SUICIDE BLAST AT U.S. EMBASSY IN ANKARA

Andrew McGregor

In terms of scale alone, the February 1 suicide bombing that killed a Turkish security guard and injured a Turkish journalist outside the U.S. Embassy in Ankara was a relatively minor event that did not succeed in causing any significant damage to the embassy itself. Nonetheless, the attack carried out by left-wing militant Ecevit Sanli has created political and diplomatic reverberations throughout Europe and the Middle East.

Though suicide bombings are most commonly associated with Islamist groups, Sanli was a long-term member of a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group that adopted the tactic of suicide-bombing in 2001, the Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP/C - Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front). After several years of inactivity following the death of founder Dursun Karatas in 2008, the Marxist-Leninist group suddenly renewed activities in September, 2012.

In the embassy attack, Sanli is reported to have used an electric detonator to set off six kilograms of TNT strapped to his body. The suicide bomber had previously been imprisoned for an attack on an Istanbul barracks in 1997. After three years in pre-trial detention, Sanli engaged in hunger strikes with dozens of other prisoners in Istanbul’s Umraniye Prison in 2000 to prevent their transfer to one of Turkey’s feared F-Type prisons, which emphasize social isolation in modern, sterile institutions, an environment that prisoners refer to as “white torture.”

Mass hunger strikes have been common in Turkey’s high-security F-Type prisons. Scores of prisoners have died in these events, while Sanli and hundreds of others

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subsequently suffered from Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, a degenerative brain disease better known as “Wet Brain.” Caused by thiamine deficiency, the syndrome is common in chronic alcoholics and individuals who have engaged in extended hunger strikes. F-Type Prisons are reserved for terrorists, political prisoners and organized crime leaders. The DHKP/C has been prominent in leading prison hunger strikes. Turkish intelligence has suggested that the DHKP/C used militants suffering from terminal illnesses in a number of suicide attacks carried out in the last seven months (*Today’s Zaman*, February 4).

Released on parole after an eight month hunger strike, Sanli eventually disappeared and was sentenced to death *in absentia* in June, 2002 (later reduced to life in prison). Sanli next appeared in Germany in September, 2002, where his application for political asylum was denied after his record of terrorist acts came to light. Germany, however, refused to deport him to Turkey for fear he might be tortured. By 2011 he had lost the right to reside in Germany and was ordered not to leave Cologne (*Der Spiegel* [Hamburg], February 11). German intelligence continued to track Sanli’s whereabouts in Germany but lost sight of him last October. It is believed that Sanli planned the Ankara attack while still in Germany.

Anger is growing in Turkey over the alleged failure of various EU states, particularly Germany, to cooperate with Ankara in bringing an end to the use of European nations as bases for extremist groups carrying out terrorist operations in Turkey (*Today’s Zaman*, February 5). Germany’s reluctance to extradite suspected Turkish extremists was brought up only days after the bombing in talks between Turkish Interior Minister Muammer Guler and his German counterpart, Hans-Peter Friedrich (*Hurriyet Daily News*, February 14).

According to the DHKP/C claim of responsibility that followed the embassy attack, “Our warrior [Sanli] carried out an act of self-sacrifice by entering the Ankara embassy of the United States, murderer of the peoples of the world” (*Today’s Zaman*, February 4). The statement went on to condemn Turkey’s close security relationship with the United States, citing issues such as the installation of Patriot missiles and NATO’s creation of a radar base at Kurecik that Iran claims is intended to defend Israel, not Turkey (*Milliyet*, February 10).

Shortly after the attack, President Abdullah Gul revealed that Turkey’s security services had information in January that the DHKP/C was planning an attack, but “unfortunately it could not be prevented and the attack against the embassy took place” (*Hurriyet Daily News*, February 6). Turkish police are searching for two other DHKP/C members who entered Turkey alongside Sanli from a training camp in Greece.

There are fears the two may be planning further suicide attacks (*Zaman Online*, February 17). A statement issued earlier this month by the Milli Istihbarat Teskilati (MIT – Turkey’s national intelligence organization) warned Istanbul policemen that the DHKP/C was using internet search engines, Facebook and Twitter to obtain the photographs and addresses of police officers (*Milliyet*, March 4).

The Police Intelligence Department revealed at a recent parliamentary hearing that a 2008 DHKP/C plot to attack the home of Prime Minister Erdogan and a 2009 plan to assassinate former justice minister Hikmet Sami Turk had been foiled by electronic surveillance. The information was given during a hearing in which the police defended their use of wiretaps by claiming 284 terrorist attacks had been stopped and 138 “bombers” arrested in the last three years (*Hurriyet Daily News*, February 24). Many Turks are puzzled by the persistence of what one local columnist called “rogue groups with absolutely no foundation in society,” and tend to see the hand of Turkey’s “deep state” structure behind the resiliency of Turkey’s terrorist groups, including movements that appear to be still fighting the Cold War, such as the DHKP/C (*Today’s Zaman*, February 4).

The prior knowledge of an impending DHKP/C attack mentioned by President Gul may have been the reason why Turkish security forces cracked down on the group in the weeks before the bombing, arresting over 80 suspects. After the attack, the crackdown intensified. 167 people were detained in country-wide raids on suspected DHKP/C members on February 18. Many of the detainees were identified as professionals or public servants belonging to the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK), whose offices were also raided. The raids uncovered documents containing the license numbers and identity information of Ankara judges and prosecutors who have worked on DHKP/C-related cases (*Hurriyet Daily News*, February 19, February 20; *Today’s Zaman*, March 11).

A March 14 raid in the Okmeydani neighborhood of Istanbul was resisted by the occupants of a fortified DHKP/C safe-house, who endured tear gas while trying to burn documents. Twelve people were detained, six of whom were reported to be under 18. The occupants of the safe-house were said to have illegally tapped into electricity, water and natural gas supplies. A gathering of socialists protested the arrest later that day and were dispersed by Istanbul police using pepper spray (*Today’s Zaman*, March 14, March 15).

Greece, which has usually refused to extradite suspects to Turkey, appears to have re-examined its approach in the wake of a March 4 meeting between Greek Prime Minister Antonis

Samaras and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. After the meeting, Samaras was reported to have ordered the closing of two DHKP/C training camps in the Lavrion and Oropo regions. The movement is now said to have moved its headquarters to an apartment in Thessaloniki (*Daily Star* [Beirut], March 9; *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 9). Greece has also promised to extradite the elusive Zeki Gurbuz, leader of the Marksist Leninist Komunist Parti Turkiye (MLKP) and a DHKP/C member identified only as “S.E.” (*Today’s Zaman*, March 15).

Various theories have been advanced to explain the motivation behind the attack on the U.S. embassy, some based on the belief that the DHKP/C is a “deep-state” legacy working as a subcontractor for other extremist groups or intelligence agencies in order to raise funds for their own operations. If this is the case, there are three possible clients for the embassy attack:

- Syria, as a covert effort to harm the United States, but with a message attached for Ankara regarding its pro-rebel position on Syria. Turkish security analyst and Jamestown contributor Nihat Ali Ozcan pointed to a possible connection between the bombing and the development of a proxy war between Turkey and Syria: “It is no secret that during the Cold War, Syria hosted Marxist-Leninist movements. When Turkey changed its stance against Iran and Syria, everybody started to look at the old files to see ‘what kind of networks we had’” (*Hurriyet Daily News*, February 18).
- Iran, as part of a larger proxy war against American interests. The attack would also convey Tehran’s dissatisfaction with Turkish policies in Syria.
- Kurdish rebel commanders belonging to the Parti Karkerani Kurdistan (PKK), as a message to Ankara that they will continue operations even as the government enters talks with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.
- The DHKP/C is rooted in Turkey’s Alevi community, a sectarian affiliation including Turks, Kurds and Arabs and comprising approximately 10 percent of Turkey’s population of 75 million people. Alevism is a syncretic faith that, like Alawism, combines elements of Shi’ism, Christianity and pre-Islamic rites and beliefs. Alevis, who are generally strong supporters of Turkish secularism, have been under pressure from the AKP government for several years to conform to Sunni orthodoxy (EDM, October 12, 2007).

Analyst Nihat Ali Ozcan has suggested that the DHKP/C’s Marxist allegiance is of less importance than its “ethnic-sectarian identity”; “There are some homegrown

organizations in which most members share a common allegiance to the Alevi faith beneath the cloak of Marxism... Accordingly, with the end of the Cold War, the true colors of the DHKP/C were derived not from Marxism, but from this kind of sectarian identity” (*Hurriyet Daily News*, February 7).

NEW ANSAR AL-SHARI’A GROUP ESTABLISHED AS MAURITANIA PONDERS JOINING INTERVENTION IN MALI

Andrew McGregor

The largely desert nation of Mauritania has been engaged in an often deadly struggle against al-Qaeda terrorists and local Salafist militants for several years now. Many local Salafists now populate the prison in the capital of Nouakchott, though even this does not seem to have deterred some of them from carrying out various activities.

Abu Ayyub al-Mahdi (a.k.a. Ahmad Salim bin al-Hassan), an imprisoned Mauritanian Salafist, announced the creation of a new militant group, Ansar al-Shari’a in the Shanqiti [Mauritanian] Country, on February 12, the latest in a series of autonomous but ideologically sympathetic Ansar al-Shari’a groups to spring up across North Africa and the Middle East.

One of the greatest promoters of the Ansar al-Shari’a phenomenon is a Mauritanian ideologue, Abu Mundhir al-Shanqiti, the author of an influential 2012 article entitled “We are Ansar al-Shari’a.” [1] Al-Shanqiti proposed gathering the disparate Salafist-Jihadist movement behind a unified objective – the rejection of democracy and the establishment of Shari’a as the leading principle in the Muslim world. As part of this process, al-Shanqiti maintains the movement must be brought out into the open from its present underground existence (*al-Hayat*, January 3). This may be a difficult task however; many of the Salafists detained in the Nouakchott prison have denied any association with the new branch of Ansar al-Shari’a (al-Monitor, February 19).

Though President Muhammad Ould Abd al-Aziz kept Mauritanian forces out of the current ECOWAS-based African intervention force operating in Mali on the grounds that Mauritania was not an ECOWAS country and that the French-led intervention was launched without prior notice, he has indicated that Mauritania would be ready to provide troops to a UN-backed mission in Mali. The president

added that Mauritania is aware of two problems driving the insecurity in Mali, these being Bamako's tolerance of terrorist groups in northern Mali over the last 12 years and the "sometimes legitimate" demands of the people of northern Mali for "basic infrastructure, health and education" (Sahara Media [Nouakchott], March 4).

Mauritanian military intervention in Mali is opposed not only by the Salafist community, but also by mainstream, secular politicians such as Ahmad Ould Daddah, the main opposition leader and secretary general of the Regroupement des Forces Démocratiques (RFD – Rally of Democratic Forces):

I am afraid we will participate in a war that we have no interest in – a war that poses danger to us and the region in general. What our region and the Sahel region need are building and development efforts to improve conditions; not the destruction of an already worn-out infrastructure... We do not want or accept that our region becomes the Afghanistan of the African Sahel. To remove any confusion, we affirm that we are against terrorists and terrorism. However, each war has two fronts; a fighting front and an internal front, which is more important than the fighting front in my opinion. When the national public opinion is not convinced of the reasons and pretexts of a war, it means that it does not serve the country. This affects the performance of the soldiers and makes them question the sanctity of their mission (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 11).

Ould Dadah initially supported Ould Abd al-Aziz, but now observes the president backing away from democracy to adopt a more military-style of rule and notes the adverse effects on military performance created by involving the military in politics, effects that could hamper the military's ability to mount a campaign in Mali or even effectively guard its 2,237 kilometer border with that country:

We have become certain that he adheres to the mentality of a military rule, which is not proper in for a country that claims to be democratic. The practices of the regime encourage the army to become involved in politics, abandon its noble military mission, and to indulge in luxuries that destroy its combat ability. In my opinion, the army is the first to be harmed by the military regime. It is also dangerous when the army becomes involved in politics, because in this case politics are practiced through guns and weapons, not through reason, thinking, and logic. This is the logic of the military rule that is running the country (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 11).

In Mauritania, 3.5 million people live in a land of well over 1 million square kilometers. Mauritania's security services lack the men and resources to properly patrol and monitor the nation's borders, most of which cross lifeless deserts. This has left Mauritania open to attack by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) several times in the past, despite efforts to set up joint counter-terrorist patrols with the similarly under-equipped Malian army (see *Terrorism Monitor* July 7, 2011; November 11, 2010). On March 17, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the capture of five "Islamist terrorists" from northern Mali who were caught trying to infiltrate the border (Agence Nouakchott d'Information, March 18).

In early February, Mauritania launched a new initiative with its southern neighbor, Senegal, to coordinate military activity along the border with groups of villagers along the Senegal River who will act as the eyes and ears of the security services in identifying suspicious individuals or groups active in the border region (*al-Monitor*, February 6). Senegalese troops recently arrested a Mauritanian al-Qaeda member who had slipped into the country across the border (PANA Online [Dakar], February 15). Mauritania is now hosting more than 150,000 refugees from northern Mali and claims to have intercepted several al-Qaeda militants posing as part of that number.

There are extensive historical and communal ties between the two countries - many of the Arab tribes of northern Mali have relatives across the border in Mauritania, while a significant number of Mauritians have settled in northern Mali over the years. There have been repeated demonstrations in the Mauritanian capital of Nouakchott by Malian Arab refugees protesting human rights abuses by Malian troops following the French intervention force into northern Mali (RFI, March 12; AFP, March 11).

Mauritania hosted this year's Operation Flintlock, an annual training exercise for North African and West African militaries sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense's Africa Command (AFRICOM) (for Operation Flintlock, see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 3, 2010). The exercises, which ended on March 9, saw troops from the United States and various NATO allies provide training in counterterrorist operations and field-craft. Last year's exercises, which were to be held in Mali, were cancelled due to the Islamist occupation of Mali's northern districts. Some of the African troops trained in this year's event could wind up taking part in a possible UN peacekeeping operation in northern Mali.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Calls on North African Jihadists to Fight in Sahel, Not Syria

Camille Tawil

After more than two months of the French-led operation against Islamic militants in northern Mali, there are signs that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is starting to feel the heat. AQIM has not only suffered heavy losses among its top leaders in Mali, but also seems to be suffering from a shortage of North African jihadi recruits, many of whom appear to prefer to fight their jihad in Syria instead of joining AQIM ranks in their own Maghreb region.

What makes the problem even direr for AQIM is the fact that the organization's amir, Abu Musab Abd al-Wadoud (a.k.a. Abd al-Malik Droukdel), is fighting a distant war in Mali. While Abu Musab seems to be stuck in northern Algeria, his fighters are hundreds of miles away, cornered by French and Chadian troops in northern Mali. Abu Musab also seems to be absent when his leadership is most needed; he has neither spoken publicly since the French started their Operation Serval on January 11, nor has he commented on the deadly attack against the In Aménas gas facility in Algeria which was launched by a commander he had just demoted.

The AQIM leader was last heard from in a November 15, 2012 video released by al-Andalus, AQIM's media branch. [1] Abu Musab issued the recording in anticipation of a French military operation in Mali after the UN Security Council gave a green light for a campaign to help the Malian government restore its authority over the northern part of the country. AQIM was not the only player in northern Mali; various groups operated there, such as the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNL), Ansar al-Din and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA). However, AQIM had a major stake in that part of the world, which had generated as much as 100 million dollars in ransom money and provided the militants with a safe haven in which to train recruits from around the world (BBC, February 8).

AQIM's Sahara branch, led by the late Nabil Makhroufi (a.k.a. Abu al-Kama), operated in no less than four brigades: al-Mulathamini (Mokhtar Belmokhtar), Tariq bin Ziad (Abd al-Hamid Abu Zeid), al-Furqan (Yahya Abu al-Hamam), and al-Ansar (Abd-al-Karim al-Tarqi, a local Tuareg militant) (*al-Hayat*, March 2; al-Jazeera, May 1, 2012). Abu Musab must have realized that a French attack in Mali would threaten not only the constant flow of ransom money, but could also jeopardize the safe haven that allowed training on weapons obtained from Libyan arsenals after the fall of Mu'ammarr Qaddafi in 2011.

Sensing that the French were preparing an attack, Abu Musab directed his words to the French president, François Hollande, telling him: "If you want war, we are more than ready." He promised that if the French dared to intervene in northern Mali, AQIM would try to drag them into a long war of attrition, reminding the French president that the Algerian jihadists had fought their government for 20 years with light weapons, whereas today they have "a large arsenal of weapons, ammunition and men." Abu Musab promised the French leader that: "The greater Sahara will be a brave for your soldiers." [3]

Almost two months after Abu Musab's threat, the French started their Mali operation, named Serval ("Wildcat"). By the end of January 2013, all the major towns in northern Mali had fallen into the hands of the French and their allies, mainly Malian and Chadian soldiers. AQIM fighters were forced to withdraw further north, where they seem to have been cornered in the Ifoghas mountains near the Algerian border. Dozens of these fighters are reported to have been killed, including Abd al-Hamid Abu Zeid and Mokhtar Belmokhtar, though only the death of the former is reported to have been confirmed by AQIM so far (*al-Jazeera*, March 3; *al-Hayat*, March 5; see also Terrorism Monitor Brief, March 8).

If Abu Zeid has indeed been killed, AQIM has surely suffered a major setback. At the time of his reported death, Abu Zeid was not only the leader of the Tariq bin Ziad brigade; he had become the deputy leader of the amir of the whole Sahara region, Yahya Abu al-Hammam (a.k.a. Jamal Akasha), who had succeeded Nabil Makhroufi (a.k.a. Abu al-Kama) after his sudden death in a car accident in Mali in September 2012 (Agence Nouakchott d'Information, October 4; see also Terrorism Monitor Brief, October 18, 2012). Abu Zeid was also seen as a major generator of ransom money for AQIM, although it is not clear how much, if any, of that money was sent to the leadership in northern Algeria, where Abu Musab is believed to be based.

In fact, Abu Zeid is reported to have been very strict with the money he was getting from ransom. According to people who have known him, Abu Zeid buried part of the money he was getting – the last payment alone is alleged to have totaled 16 million Euros – in secret places in the vast desert. Only Abu Zeid, equipped with a GPS device, would be able to find the money hidden in the Saharan sands (MarsadPress.net, March 2).

However, if Abu Musab was saddened by the loss of Abu Zeid, his feelings are not totally clear regarding the possibility that Mokhtar Belmokhtar was another casualty of the French and Chadian operations in Mali. It was Belmokhtar who claimed to have launched the first reaction to French operations in Mali: on January 16 he sent a group of his men to attack the In Aménas gas facility in south-eastern Algeria, resulting in the death of dozens of foreign hostages, as well as most of the

attackers (more than 30 in total).

The significance of that attack was not only limited to the high number of foreign casualties. It was also seen as a kind of challenge to Abu Musab's authority, specifically because the latter had already relieved Belmokhtar of his command of an AQIM battalion in the Sahel (the Katibat al-Mulathamini, or "Veiled Brigade"). Belmokhtar's response to Abu Musab's snub was swift: in December 2012 he created his own group, al-Muwaqqi'un bil-Dima ("Those Who Sign in Blood") and was the first to retaliate against the French operation in Mali. In the absence of a response from Abu Musab, it is not clear whether or not he saw Belmokhtar's action as a challenge to his authority. If the former was the case, then the reported death of Belmokhtar in Mali may have meant the removal of a possible challenger. Abu Musab's continued silence could be explained if he is hiding somewhere inside Algeria and is unable to communicate with the outside world for security reasons. It could also be that he is preparing for retaliation against the French operation, as well as avenging the death of his men in Mali.

However, a March 17 AQIM statement shows that the organization is indeed feeling the heat as a result of Mali's war. The statement was meant as a "direction" for North Africans (especially Tunisians) who want to participate in jihad. AQIM's message to those individuals was simple: work with the jihadist cells operating in your own countries, and if you want to fight, do so in the Maghreb and the Sahel, regions that need you more than other countries. This message clearly targeted those North African youths – mainly Tunisians – who are flocking to fight in Syria, as they did a few years ago in Iraq. The AQIM statement plainly says that joining the jihad in North Africa and the Sahel is better than going to fight abroad, an indication that AQIM may be suffering from battlefield losses and a declining number of recruits, a situation exacerbated by the appeal of Syria to potential jihadists.

Will this statement persuade Tunisian jihadists to join AQIM's ranks? The call may be too late for those who have already traveled to fight in Syria, but others who may be contemplating jihad could be swayed. At least some of those may decide to stay and join existing Salafi-Jihadist cells in their own countries or even join the fight in Mali or Algeria. There are already reports that the Tunisian borders with Algeria are seeing an increased level of activity by Islamic militants smuggling weapons and men, an indication that AQIM is preparing to renew operations in northern Algeria.

Notes

1. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHQ_6lJFKS0
2. The Sahara branch of AQIM is officially led by Dawoud Abu Mousa, but his deputy Nabil Makhoulfi was considered its effective leader before his death in September, 2012.
3. The full video can be accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_HLTzpc44M

Facing the “Permanent Arab Spring”: Terrorism and Russia's Evolving Threat Assessment

Stephen Blank

The extensive and ever-proliferating literature on terrorism since 2001 remains overwhelmingly West-centric in character. Much less is written or known about terrorist threats in areas where the West is not engaged, such as the Russian North Caucasus region. Neither has Russia been able or willing to publish a threat assessment or strategic document relating to how it sees and deals with the terrorist threat. Until now, its assessments, though mentioning terrorism, have all been subordinated to the notion of a big conventional and potentially nuclear war incited by the West or (though never identified as such) by China. However, that may be changing.

This change is not a planned one but is clearly being forced by events – civil war in Libya and Syria, terrorist actions in Mali and Algeria, widespread fears about what will happen in Afghanistan and Central Asia when the U.S. military leaves in 2014 and Moscow's utter failure to find a solution to its own “homegrown insurgency” in the North Caucasus. [1] The Russian press has reported a number of developments related to Russia's re-evaluation of existing and potential terrorist threats and responses:

- An increasing involvement of the regular army in the suppression of the North Caucasus insurgency that has hitherto largely been left to the Internal Troops of the Ministry of the Interior (Vnutrenniye Voiska Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del, VVMVD), who clearly have failed in their mission;
- The discussion of a new legislative agenda defining the role of the military in domestic uprisings of this sort;
- The stated intention of the new Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, to transform Russia's Airborne paratroopers (Vozdushno-desantnye voyska - VDV) into a clearly designated rapid-reaction force;
- Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov's open statements that Russian military modernization and exercises are now clearly linked to the experience of combat operations growing out of the Arab Spring. [2]

Exercises like 2011's Operation Tsentr (“Center”) also presented Russian troops with missions growing out of the Arab Spring, namely operations “to stabilize the situation” in Central Asia after a hypothetical uprising had occurred

(RIA Novosti, September 11, 2011). However, the difference between 2011 and 2013 is apparent if one follows Russian defense policy closely. In that literature we have heard very little at all for the last 24 months (except for the aforementioned fears about Central Asia) about the military-political threat posed to Russia from terrorism in the North Caucasus or the lessons presented by the fighting in the Middle East. Although there was much concern in Moscow early on that the Arab Spring might spread to Central Asia, that was a political, not a military threat, and as time went on those fears ebbed as no Central Asian uprisings took place. [3]

Now, however, Russian thinking on terrorist issues has begun to change as the Sochi Winter Olympics draw closer. While this event already shows signs of becoming an epic disaster due to corruption, mismanagement and terrorist activity in the North Caucasus, Russia's security officials also find themselves challenged by the ever-growing brutality in Syria, the consequences of the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan and the spread of terrorism to Algeria and Mali (which Moscow clearly blames on the Western intervention in Libya).

Whereas what we saw in 2011 was merely the addition of a new mission for the troops, we may now be in the early stages of a process of rethinking terrorism and war that will not only affect the armed forces' missions, and training, but also force structure, the procurement of weapons and technologies and, perhaps most importantly, threat assessments and doctrines.

Andrei Novikov, head of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Anti-Terrorist Center, recently warned that the decision to pull U.S. and ISAF troops out of Afghanistan in 2014 had created a new strategic situation in Central Asia and Afghanistan. He warned that terrorist and guerilla activity in Afghanistan once ISAF and the United States leave may devolve into a struggle for control of the nation's raw materials and energy resources to the exclusion of foreign businesses or governments (Interfax, February 12; FBIS SOV, February 12).

Terrorism in Central Asia may thus become rooted in a struggle for the re-division of Afghan and Pakistani natural resources and control of projected pipelines like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. Undoubtedly, such concerns apply with equal force to the possibility of terrorist activity, not only in the North Caucasus, but in the South Caucasus as well. Moreover, Novikov extrapolates more generally from these terrorist campaigns and the ongoing civil strife in Syria and the Middle East to argue that terrorism is increasingly being used as an instrument of policy (i.e. by the United States and its allies), an instrument

for settling problems in large-scale infrastructural projects and as a means of determining economic relations between rival clans in these conflict theaters. Thus terrorists and/or mercenaries attack the infrastructure of sovereign states on a regular basis. But things do not end there. According to Novikov, and no doubt many of his colleagues, "We are dealing with a new type of state crisis whose models and techniques have been tested. These are the permanent "Arab Spring" and crises of the "Syrian scenario;" actually we are witnessing local armed conflicts" (Interfax, February 12; FBIS SOV, February 12).

Thus Novikov implicitly ties together the North Caucasus, Afghanistan and the Arab Spring (in keeping with official Russian statements) as being at the same time terrorist manifestations and the outcome of deliberate actions against Russia or its allies by other states (presumably the United States and its allies).

When we take into account the mounting signs of political unrest in both Azerbaijan and Armenia on top of all these other actual or potential crises, the danger to the Russian heartland becomes clear. [4] Indeed, it has been clear already for several months that the insurgency in the North Caucasus has spread into such core Russian territories as Kazan on the Volga and the Urals, so the danger of insurgencies along Russia's southern periphery spreading into its heartland is hardly negligible. Of course, if a rethinking of the threat assessment and of the proper role of the armed forces in fighting this threat is underway, as we believe, it is only in its first stages and the outcome of the process cannot be determined from here at this precise moment. Nevertheless a discernible and measurable change in Russian threat assessments, characterizations of contemporary warfare and new missions for the armed forces should have profound repercussions for Russia's counter-terrorist efforts, overall defense posture and national security policy. If indeed Russia is rethinking the nature of the threats it faces and of contemporary warfare, that is a process that could have significant implications far beyond Russia's borders. This is therefore a trend that bears careful scrutiny in the immediate future.

Notes

1. See Stephen Blank, ed., *Russia's Homegrown Insurgency: Jihad in the North Caucasus*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October, 2012.
2. Andrei Polunin, "Olympic Unease: With a Year to go Sochi Games Feverishly Attempting to Achieve Stability in North Caucasus," Moscow, *Svobodnaya Pressa*, in Russian, February 18, 2013, Open source Center, Foreign Broadcast

Information Center, Central Eurasia, (henceforth, FBIS SOV), February 18, 2013; Moscow, RIA Novosti Online, in Russian, February 27, 2013, FBIS SOV, February 27, 2013; Roger McDermott, “Gerasimov Links Russian Military Modernization to the Arab Spring,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 5, 2013.

3. Sokhranit’ Stabilnost’ v Tsentral’noi Azii- Uchastniki Parlametnariskikh Situatsii v Gosdume,” www.duma.gov.ru/news/273/71937/print=yes, April 13, 2011.

4. Lili Dobrovolskaya, “Is an Apricot Revolution in Armenia Realistic?” Moscow, *Slon*, in Russian, February 26, 2013, FBIS SOV, February 26, 2013.

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Islamist Militias Take to the Streets as Egyptians Look for Solutions to Internal Security Crisis

Andrew McGregor

Though it lacks the compelling and convenient images produced in Cairo’s Tahrir Square during Egypt’s dramatic January, 2011 revolution, Egypt has been plunged into what has been variously described as a counter-revolution, a continuation of the 2011 revolution or an attempt by Islamist forces to consolidate power by taking advantage of Egypt’s internal security crisis. With police walking away from their duties across the country, Egyptians are seeking solutions to a security collapse that has given free rein to criminals, vandals and political extremists. Solutions such as massive reforms in the Interior Ministry or even privatization of the police have been floated, but Egypt’s Islamist movements have come up with their own solution – the creation and deployment of Islamist militias known as “popular committees.” The inability of the government to deal with the ongoing security crisis and the growing divide between Egypt’s religious and secular communities has many Egyptian politicians and commentators raising the possibility of a civil war.

Public protests have been fueled by economic turmoil, fuel shortages and controversial court decisions such as the acquittal of seven police officers tried for their role in the soccer-related violence that claimed 74 lives in Port Said in

February, 2012 (21 civilians have been sentenced to death for their involvement in the violence) (al-Arabiya, March 11). Ongoing strikes in the industrial sector have paralyzed economic development.

Some demonstrations have involved shutting down public transportation and assaulting railway passengers, behavior that was unthinkable in pre-revolution Egypt (Ahrum Online, February 11). Even the Mugamma building, Egypt’s monument to labyrinthine bureaucracy in Tahrir Square, has been subject to assault by demonstrators as security forces stood by (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], February 24). Cairo’s “Ultra” soccer hooligans have also engaged in vandalism and public violence in their deadly feud with Egypt’s security forces. A Muslim Brotherhood website has claimed that former leading officials of the now dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP – the ruling party of the former regime) are instigating the Ultras to attack the Muslim Brothers (Egyptwindow.net, March 15). Several days later, the same website claimed that former NDP members were alternately bribing citizens to go on strike or forcing them to strike at gunpoint (Egyptwindow.net, March 18).

In a troubling development, weapons appear to be pouring into the traditionally unarmed civilian population of Egypt since the revolution and the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in neighboring Libya. A recent sweep by Egyptian police seized 423 weapons, including machine guns and rifles (Middle Eastern News Agency [MENA – Cairo], March 17).

In what could be an embarrassing challenge to Egypt’s pretensions of leading the Arab world, reports have emerged that the Arab League is considering moving its headquarters out of Cairo due to continued violence that has forced the group to relocate many of its meetings (Ma’an News Agency [Bethlehem], March 18). Foreign investment is in steep decline and Egypt’s tourist industry, a vital source of hard currency, is floundering as Western tourists look for more secure places to vacation. For Egypt’s Islamists, however, this is not necessarily a bad thing, as they seek to replace Western tourists with Muslim tourists from the Gulf States, though the latter seem to be avoiding Egypt as well.

Citizen’s Arrests or Privatization?

Egypt’s prosecutor-general Talat Abdullah (an appointee of Egyptian president Muhammad Mursi) created a storm of controversy by urging “all citizens” to combat the destruction of private and public property and the creation of roadblocks by exercising “the right afforded to them by Article 37 of Egypt’s criminal procedure law to arrest anyone found committing a crime and refer them to official personnel”

(Ahram Online [Cairo], March 10; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 12). A later statement from Abdullah's office tried to back away from advocating citizen arrests, but had little impact.

Article 37 is an existing but little-used piece of legislation that allows citizens to arrest defendants for offenses that can be punished by no less than one year in prison – making an arrest on lesser offences could result in a charge of illegal arrest. These provisions are clearly designed to limit the use of Article 37, but these details are likely to be overlooked in the current heated environment. According to a military source cited by a major Cairo daily, “The statements of the prosecutor-general regarding granting citizens arrest powers are a clear attempt to legalize the militias of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists on the streets and to give them the right to arrest citizens, which puts Egypt on the verge of a civil war and ends the state of law” (Ahram Online, March 11).

While secular opposition parties denounced the prosecutor-general's statement as an attempt to legitimize Islamist militias and a violation of the constitution, the secretary general of the Islamist Hizb al-Bena' wa'l-Tanmia (*Building and Development Party*) Ala'a Abu al-Nasr, hailed the announcement, saying “The decision of the prosecutor-general to grant citizens the right to arrest vandals is a correct decision based on the law... The decision comes as a first step to confront systematic violence in Egypt” (Ahram Online, March 11).

The dismissal of prosecutor-general Abdullah and the resignation of the government of Prime Minister Hisham Qandil are among the demands an opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front, has said must be met before they will participate in forthcoming parliamentary elections (Ahram Online, March 14). Talat Abdullah has submitted his resignation once already since his November 2012 appointment after hundreds of public prosecutors staged a sit-in outside his office (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 12). The largest of Egypt's Salafist parties, the Nur Party, is also backing calls for the replacement of the Qandil government.

On March 9, Sabir Abu al-Futuh, a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, Hizb al-Hurriya wa'l-Adala (FJP – Freedom and Justice Party), announced that the party was considering legislation that would give private security firms the right to bear arms, make arrests and be engaged by the state to provide domestic policing functions. Abu al-Futuh also recommended the establishment of armed “popular committees “in the event that police continue their strike action.” Ahmad Fawzi of the Egyptian

Social Democratic Party called Abu al-Futuh's proposal “a continuation of the Islamist group's ongoing endeavors to monopolize power in all of its forms, whether it be police, army or judiciary” (Ahram Online, March 10). Some Egyptians warn that privatization of the domestic security services would open the way for U.S. security firms to set up shop in Egypt with the approval of their “friends” in the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], March 16).

The Interior Ministry

Striking police oppose what they describe as the “Brotherhoodization” of the Interior Ministry and call for the dismissal of another Mursi appointee, Interior Minister Muhammad Ibrahim (Ahram Online, March 15). Scores of police stations and Central Security Force (CSF) camps across Egypt (including those in the main cities of Cairo and Alexandria) have joined the strike that began March 7 when security forces in the Suez town of Ismailiya refused to deploy to Port Said, where several police officers have been killed in ongoing unrest. Egypt's security services are still reeling from the public contempt that followed their brutal response to the anti-Mubarak revolution and fear that association with the ruling party will only further alienate the security forces from the public. According to one striking policeman, “We don't want to be hated and feared by the people; we don't want to be treated as the enemies of the people and the servants of the regime” (*Daily News Egypt*, March 9). The striking policemen are also calling for better arms to tackle the wave of lawlessness sweeping Egypt.

Many policemen have been suspended after growing beards to express their affiliation with Islamist movements. Though an Administrative Court ruled in favor of the “bearded policemen” on the grounds of religious freedom, the Interior Ministry has refused to follow the court's ruling, leading to further demonstrations and the creation of an official Facebook page: “I am a bearded policeman” (Ahram Online [Cairo], March 14). There are now also demands from some members of the army that they be allowed to grow beards, demands that have been interpreted in some quarters as an attempt to turn the army into an armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Watan* [Cairo], March 17).

One of the early victims of the police strikes was the CSF commander, Magid Nouh, who was replaced on March 8 by CSF veteran Ashraf Abdullah after he failed to persuade the security services to return to work (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], March 8; *al-Jazeera*, March 8). The Egyptian president followed this move by making a personal visit to the Cairo headquarters of the CSF where he returned to

the familiar language of “external threats” by warning the officers: “Beware, our outside enemy is seeking to create division among us, and we must not allow it” (Ahram Online [Cairo], March 15).

Al-Gama’a al-Islamiya

Leading the effort to form “popular committees” is al-Gama’a al-Islamiya (GI), a Salafist group that turned to non-violence after a long record of terrorist attacks through the 1980s and 1990s. Many leading members of the GI and BDP are former militants released from prison during the 2011 revolution.

According to a spokesman for the BDP, the GI’s political wing, “community police groups would step in under the supervision of the Interior Ministry,” while claiming that “this system is applied in other countries” (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], March 12). Another BDP spokesman has complained the police are forcing the people to choose between torture or a lack of security: “We call on the police to meet their duty in protecting state institutions and not to give up the country’s security and stability in such critical times” (Ahram Online, March 9).

Asim Abd al-Magid, a senior GI member, has been given the job of organizing the GI’s “popular committees.” Besides calling on Egyptians to gather at mosques to form militias, Abd al-Magid has shown only slight respect for the security services: “Any policeman who wants to leave his position can do so, but he will not be allowed to come back... We want to purge the ministry of such elements anyway” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 12).

Satellite television has carried footage of the “Gama’a al-Islamiya police” parading in the streets of Asyut in cars and motorcycles despite warnings from the police that their activities are illegal (al-Hayat TV, March 12). In the city of Minya, the BDP has joined with the Salafist Nur Party to form “popular committees” to restore order in the streets (Ahram Online, March 9).

The Muslim Brotherhood

The vice-president of the FJP (the Brothers’ political wing), Dr. Rafiq Habib (a Coptic Christian), believes that the chaos in Egypt’s streets is the work of secular forces and representatives of the old regime who see the violence as a means of preventing the Islamists from governing the country effectively, thus opening an opportunity for the restoration of the old regime (*sans* Mubarak) (Egyptwindow.net, March 15).

The Brotherhood has been unnerved by a series of arson attacks on its offices throughout Egypt that began last December. At times, these attacks have resulted in pitched street battles between anti-Brotherhood protestors and Brotherhood self-defense groups (Amal al-Ummah [Alexandria], March 19). In an effort to come to grips with the spiraling violence, the leader of the Muslim Brothers, Dr. Muhammad Badi, launched an initiative on March 16 that calls for all the various political factions to remove their supporters from the streets for a specific period of time so that maximum efforts can be made to re-build the country (Egyptwindow.net, March 17).

The possibility of Islamist militias taking to the streets reminded many Egyptians of the shocking photos published in 2006 that showed a military display at Cairo’s Islamic al-Azhar University put on by a Muslim Brotherhood student group known as “the Hawks,” though the event was later dismissed by the Brotherhood as nothing more than “a theatrical display” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 13, 2006). More recently, Cairo’s *al-Dustur* daily reported on March 20 that Muslim Brotherhood members had received military training at CSF camps in preparation for fielding militias, though the Interior Ministry has denied these claims.

The Army

Demonstrations in Alexandria have called for the resignation of President Mursi, the trial of Interior Minister Muhammad Ibrahim on charges of killing demonstrators in the Suez region and the return of the army to run the country until new elections can be held (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], March 8). A recent poll by Cairo’s Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies showed a surprising 82 percent of Egyptians want the army to take control of the country on a temporary basis (*al-Masri al-Youm* [Cairo], March 18). The poll results were released days after residents of al-Nasr City took to the streets on March 15 to demand a return to military rule (MENA, March 15). Calls for the return of the army are also beginning to appear with frequency in the non-Islamist Egyptian press.

Defense Minister General Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi maintains that the “Brotherhoodization” of the military is a near impossibility, but has warned recruits to abandon sectarian or political allegiances when they enter the military (*al-Ahram* [Cairo], March 15). Whether they form the government or not, the Muslim Brotherhood cannot easily transform the leadership of an institution that has spent decades purging all officers suspected of being sympathetic to the Brothers. While the situation could be changed very gradually through loosening restrictions on officer-candidates, command of the military cannot be simply handed over to a group of

inexperienced Islamist subalterns. The Islamization of the military could more realistically take one or two decades – any sudden attempt to transform the military would inevitably result in yet another coup d'état and a return to military rule. The military's surprising cooperation with the Brotherhood so far has raised the possibility that the command has simply given the Islamists enough rope to hang themselves in trying to transform a deeply entrenched social and political system. When popular opinion cries out for a return to the stability of military rule and foreign governments begin to give indications they are ready to look the other way, the military will be in a prime position to return to government or install a more pliant regime. The Army still controls a large but undefined section of the national economy, making it a necessary partner in any shift in political direction.

Conclusion

Before his death last year, former Egyptian intelligence chief General Omar Sulayman warned of the creation of Islamist militias in Egypt and the consequent threat of a civil war: "The Muslim Brotherhood group is not foolish, and hence it is preparing itself militarily, and within two to three years it will have a revolutionary guard to fight the army, and Egypt will face a civil war, like Iraq (*al-Hayat*, May 22, 2012; see also Terrorism Monitor Brief, June 1, 2012).

The Egyptian Army has indicated that the creation of private militias is a "red-line" for the military that could bring on military intervention to restore state control (Ahrum Online, March 11). Interior Minister Ibrahim has insisted there is no role for vigilantes or militias in Egypt: "From the minister to the youngest recruit in the force, we will not accept having militias in Egypt. That will be only when we are totally dead, finished" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 12). For Egypt, however, the greatest challenges to internal security may be yet to come, as Egyptian jihadists return from the battlefields of Syria and exiled Egyptian members of core al-Qaeda take advantage of the security collapse to re-infiltrate the country and resume the type of bloody operations that marked the struggle between Islamist terrorists and security forces in the 1990s.