



# Terrorism Monitor

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Chadian Soldiers

## CHAD WITHDRAWS FROM NORTHERN MALI AS PLANNING FOR UN FORCE BEGINS

Andrew McGregor

Chad has begun the withdrawal of its expeditionary force of roughly 2,250 troops from northern Mali as the conflict enters a new stage. According to Chadian president Idriss Déby, the “man-to-man fighting” against armed Islamists in the Ifoghas Mountains is over and the Chadian army does not have the ability to conduct operations against guerrilla forces: “Our troops will return to Chad. They have accomplished their mission. We have already withdrawn the heavy support battalion. The remaining elements will return to the country gradually” (TV5 Monde, April 13).

France is also intent on withdrawing most of its forces in the region. A draft resolution before the UN Security Council calls for the creation of an 11,000 strong UN peacekeeping force (aided by 1,440 police) that could relieve French forces and assume responsibility for security in Mali by July 1 if major combat operations were completed by that date (AFP, April 15). The new mission will be known as the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). President Déby has indicated that Chad will respond positively if it receives a request from the UN for participation (AFP, April 14). UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is said to favor an additional Special Forces formation drawn from a single Western nation (the unspoken preference is France) that would be tasked with counter-terrorism operations in parallel with the operations of the UN peacekeeping mission (*Jeune Afrique*, April 8).

The UN force would likely absorb the mostly inactive African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), a force largely drawn from states belonging to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). On April 9, a senior

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Pentagon official warned the existing African intervention force was “completely incapable” and would likely be unable to deter al-Qaeda and its allies from retaking northern Mali once French forces pull out (France24, April 10). Most of the AFISMA units remain in southern Mali due to shortages of transportation, food, equipment and even boots. The troops also lack training in desert warfare, making their deployment highly risky (*Jeune Afrique*, April 8). EU trainers have begun work in Mali but it is expected to be months before training graduates can take the field. A new UN mission may include a deployment from Burundi, whose troops have been honing their combat skills in battles against Somalia’s al-Shabaab for several years now as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Tensions have been reported in northern Mali’s Kidal region between the Chadians and members of the rebel Mouvement National de Libération de l’Azawad (MNLA), a largely Tuareg group that guides French forces operating in the Adrar des Ifoghas mountains and provides security in Kidal in the absence of regular Malian forces, who are prevented from entering Kidal as the price of the MNLA’s necessary cooperation. The MNLA suspects the Chadians are encouraging the arrival of Malian regulars to help facilitate their own withdrawal. The Tuareg separatists have warned they will fire on any Malian regulars who approach the Kidal and Tessalit regions where the MNLA still holds sway. An armed confrontation between the Chadians and the Tuareg rebels was reported to have been narrowly averted on April 13 when a Chadian officer ordered his men to avoid provocations as they were confronted by MNLA protestors in front of the Chadian camp (Xinhua, April 16). The MNLA members said they were angered by the panic of Chadian troops who opened fire on civilians in Kidal immediately after a suicide bombing in the Kidal market that killed three of their comrades and injured four others (Sahara Media [Nouakchott], April 13; RFI, April 12; April 13). The blast brought the number of Chadian dead in the French-led military intervention to 36.

Chadian claims to have killed al-Qaeda terrorist chieftain Mokhtar Belmokhtar during a battle in the Ametetai Valley on March 2 have yet to be verified in the absence of any evidence, but Chadian claims took an odd turn last week when President Déby explained the AQIM leader’s remains had been destroyed in an explosion: “We have proof of [Belmokhtar’s] death. We couldn’t film it because he blew himself up after the death of [AQIM commander] Abu Zeid. He wasn’t the only one. Three or four other jihadists [also] blew themselves up in despair...” (AFP, April 14; for Chad’s original claim, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, March 8). For the moment, the Chadian claim appears to rest largely on the evidence of prisoners taken in the battle.

Chadian troops remain in the Central African Republic (CAR), where Chadian units tasked with defending the capital of Bangui from Seleka rebels stood down when the rebel force advanced in March, allowing them to seize the capital and engage in a two-day firefight with South African troops the rebels believed were helping to prop up the regime of President François Bozizé (for the battle, see Terrorism Monitor Briefs, April 4).

Bozizé now blames Chad for his downfall and claims his security forces observed 40 Chadian battle-wagons reinforcing the Seleka rebels who took the CAR capital of Bangui on March 24-25 (RFI, April 4). A Chadian spokesman denied the claims: “No Chadian special forces were in the CAR. It is only in the imagination of Bozizé ... He is somebody who was in power for 10 years and did not set up an army that could resist that small rebellion which came to seize power in a few hours” (RFI, April 8). By coincidence or otherwise, Seleka’s battle with the South African military forces in Bangui worked in favor of Chad and France, both of whom felt their traditional influence in the region was threatened by Bozizé’s growing relationship with South African business and government interests.

Asked about perceptions that Chad is using its military strength to become a regional power, Chadian Information and Communication Minister Hassan Silla replied: “We do not have any vision of invading Africa. But today, Chad is solicited by the world as a result of its effectiveness, due to its defense and security forces, which proved their mettle against traffickers and terrorism” (RFI, April 9).

## SOMALIA’S AL-SHABAAB TARGETS TURKISH NATIONALS IN MOGADISHU

*Andrew McGregor*

A series of terrorist attacks in Mogadishu on April 14 may represent a last-ditch attempt by the leadership of the Salafi-Jihadist al-Shabaab movement to prove it is still capable of taking the Islamist insurgency to the new federal government in the face of growing internal dissent and expulsion by African Union troops from its lucrative holdings in Mogadishu and the southern port city of Kismayo. The specific targeting of Turkish nationals in one of these attacks also demonstrates al-Shabaab’s rejection of Turkey’s growing influence in the rebuilding state.

The Taliban-style attack on a busy courthouse in downtown Mogadishu on April 14 began with a car bomb exploding at the building's gate, followed by as many as nine men in Somali army uniforms firing automatic weapons as they rushed in. At least three of the gunmen blew themselves up with suicide vests while the remainder were killed in a three-hour firefight with Somali security forces and Ugandan AMISOM troops (Reuters, April 14). Twenty-two others were killed at the scene, most of them soldiers.

At roughly the same time, a vehicle packed with explosives targeted Turkish vehicles in an AU/Turkish Red Crescent convoy on the airport road, killing a Somali driver and injuring three Turkish aid workers (Andalou Agency [Ankara], April 15; Mareeg Online, April 14). A Shabaab spokesman contacted a pro-Islamist website to confirm the attacks in Mogadishu were carried out by al-Shabaab's "Special Forces" (Somali Memo, April 14). Al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage also told a French news agency that the attack on the courthouse was "a holy action which targeted non-believers who were meeting within the court complex. We will continue until Somalia is liberated from invaders" (AFP, April 14).

There are reports that Somali investigators believe the deceased leader of the courthouse attackers was a Canadian citizen who left Canada for east Africa four years ago (*Toronto Star*, April 14; *National Post* [Toronto], April 15). This news follows reports that as many as four young Canadian citizens were involved in the deadly attack by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) on foreign workers at the In Aménas gas plant in January.

The attacks in Mogadishu continued the next day, with a roadside bomb failing to kill the district commissioner of Mogadishu's Heliwaa District as he drove to work (Shabelle Media Network, April 15). Security sweeps on April 15 detained hundreds of young men in the capital on suspicion of being al-Shabaab operatives (Dhacdo.com, April 15; AFP, April 15). Somali president Hassan Shaykh Mohamud described the attacks as "nothing but a sign of desperation by the terrorists, who've lost all their strongholds and are in complete decline right across Somalia" (Mareeg Online, April 14).

Divisions within al-Shabaab became public on April 6, when an open letter to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri from a leading Shabaab member was published on jihadi websites. Penned by Shaykh Ibrahim Haji Jama "al-Afghani" (a.k.a. Abu Bakr al-Zayla'i), the letter reaffirmed the movement's allegiance to al-Qaeda, but outlined growing differences between Somali members of al-Shabaab and foreign fighters

who are accused of failing to abide by the Shari'a code (*Africa Review* [Nairobi], April 18). A veteran of fighting in Kashmir and Afghanistan, al-Afghani also cited the failed leadership of Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane "Abu Zubayr," who has replaced many capable military and religious leaders with members of his own Isaaq clan from northern Somalia. Al-Afghani (himself an Isaaq) asks for al-Zawahiri's guidance as the movement stands to lose everything if the losses endured under Godane cannot be reversed: "We have witnessed an obvious drawback in the achievements of the mujahideen. Ten states were under the rule of the movement four years ago, which came with the possession of huge human resources and the sympathy of our Muslim people. Now, the jihadi spirit has receded and the motives for creation and production have been destroyed" (al-Shorfa.com, April 15). Al-Afghani goes on to complain that the movement's internal divisions are now being exposed on social media such as Twitter.

With al-Shabaab having turned to terrorist methods since being driven from the capital by Somali and AMISOM forces in August 2011, Somali president Hasan Shaykh Mohamud warned that after al-Shabaab was defeated, "they changed their war tactics and we want all Somalis to prepare themselves for a new war against al-Shabaab. I know it will be costly, but we need to exercise our patience until we crush them" (Hiraan Online, April 15).

The attack on the Turkish aid workers appears to imply a rejection of Turkey's growing engagement with Somalia. The attack also confirms al-Shabaab's takfiri ideology and dispels speculation that Somalia's Islamist militants might take a more open view to development assistance from a country with a Muslim majority.

The groundbreaking August, 2011 visit to Mogadishu by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was widely seen as a sign of Somalia's return to the international community and his pledges of Turkish reconstruction assistance represented a show of support from fellow Muslims. Somalis used to ineffectual UN relief and reconstruction efforts run from offices in Nairobi have marveled at what Turkish aid and development workers have accomplished in less than two years on the ground in Mogadishu. Temporary hospitals with Turkish doctors serve the community, schools have been built (which incidentally offer Turkish language courses), the airport reconstructed, streets cleared of debris and students sent to Turkey on scholarships (Reuters, June 3, 2012). Somali police officers are already graduating Turkish police academies and an agreement on military training is in place (*Today's Zaman*, November 9, 2012). Turkey's interests are not related solely to aid, however; strong



efforts have been made to revitalize and legitimize Somalia's business community, much of which has operated without permits, regulation or taxation through years of political chaos. A series of reforms will be required before commerce and financial transactions with Turkey's well-organized business community can begin.

Ottoman contacts with Somalia go back to the mediaeval period and intensified in the 19th century when the Egyptian Khedive sought to expand his empire (under Ottoman suzerainty) into the Horn of Africa, establishing short-lived bases at Kismayo and Barawe (Brava) and going so far as to send an exploratory mission up the Juba River under the command of a British naval officer, McKillop Pasha, and two American Civil War veterans, Colonel Chaillé-Long and Lieutenant Colonel William H. Ward.

Ankara has also pledged increased levels of aid to autonomous Somaliland and is hosting and facilitating a new round of reconciliation talks in Ankara between the unrecognized breakaway state and the rest of Somalia. Turkish investors have initiated a number of economic projects in Somaliland and Turkish oil exploration company Genel Energy PLC is planning to begin operations in the region (*Today's Zaman*, April 14; Anadolu Agency, April 15).

While engagement with Somalia promises access to resources and new markets for Anatolian industries, Turkey's growing involvement in places such as Libya and the Horn of Africa is part of a larger Turkish geo-political offensive in the African continent that is part of Ankara's vision of Turkey as an advanced non-Western state ready to embrace its Ottoman heritage (with conditions) and resume its place as a vital and important international player. However, the targeting of Turkish nationals displays al-Shabaab's determination to impose its own version of a Salafist theocracy on Somalia regardless of economic realities and the desperate conditions endured by many Somalis.

## “Obligated to Unite under One Banner”: A Profile of Syria's Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa'l-Ansar

*Murad Batal al-Shishani*

A video posted on YouTube in the last week of March documented the unification of two Syrian armed groups; the Katibat al-Khattab (Army of Khattab Brigades) and the Katibat Jaysh al-Muhammad (Army of Muhammad Brigades), with the Katibat al-Muhajireen (KaM - the Brigade of Migrants). [1] The video showed armed men giving their *bayat* (allegiance) to the amir of the Katibat al-Muhajireen, Abu Omar al-Shishani, an ethnic Chechen from Georgia's Pankisi valley. The newly unified groups announced their incorporation into a new movement using the name Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa'l-Ansar (JMA - the Army of Migrants and Supporters) and under the command of al-Shishani (“The Chechen”). Like its components, the new movement will continue to be dedicated to helping Syrians topple the rule of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. [2]

Various languages including Arabic, Chechen and Turkish can be heard in the background of the video, as well as various Arabic accents (Saudi, Libyan, etc.). This linguistic variety can also be heard on other of the movement's video releases. [3]

In one video, the group's media arm, Liwa al-Mujahedeen al-Ilami (the Mujahedeen Media Battalion) showed a Han Chinese jihadist speaking in Mandarin. [4] Bo Wang, as the jihadist was identified in the video, apologized to the Syrian people for his country's support to the regime and also “warned the Chinese government to immediately stop all forms of aid to Bashar al-Assad's regime.” He also urged his fellow Chinese Muslims to join the jihad in Syria, though it is rare to find jihadists of Han ethnicity.

The KaM was formed in the rural areas of Latakia (northwest of Damascus) in mid-2012 by Libyan volunteers who joined the Syrian revolution after toppling Mu'ammār Qaddafi's regime in Libya. However, the leadership of the group is currently dominated by Chechens. With a membership of roughly 1,000 fighters, the Muhajireen operate in various areas of Syria and have seen action primarily in the Aleppo area (Kavkaz.tv, March 26). The KaM also coordinated attacks with other armed groups in Syria, especially with the jihadist group Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), which renewed its allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in mid-April (al-Shorfa.com, April 15). One of the best known of these joint attacks was the assault on Air Defense Brigade 602's base in the Handarat district of Aleppo (Jabhat al-Nusra, Statement No. 166, November 21, 2012; as-ansar.com; al-Jazeera Arabic TV, November 6, 2012).

According to the group's media official, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, the Muhajireen have the following beliefs:

- The movement rejects *takfir*-ism (the right to excommunicate Muslims accused of apostasy or other offenses). Excommunication of any Muslim is not allowed even if he commits adultery, drinks alcohol or commits a theft unless he considers such acts permissible. Anyone who does not believe in Islam is a *kafir* (infidel).
- Any land not under Islamic government is part of Dar al-Kufr (Land of the Infidels).
- Secularism with its various flags and ideologies (Nationalism, Communism and Ba'athism) is *kufr bawab* (manifest disbelief) and anyone who believes in it is a non-Muslim.
- The *ummah* (Muslim community) and especially the mujahideen are "obliged to unite under one banner."
- Jihad will continue "to the Day of Judgement." According to Abu Hamza, "This is not Afghanistan or Bosnia or Chechnya, this is the land of al-Sham [greater Syria], Issa [Jesus], peace be upon him, will come down here and the Dajal [false Messiah, or Anti-Christ] will come out here; it is the land of epics and the land of resurrection."
- Harming any Muslim is prohibited.
- Defensive jihad is *fard 'ayn* (individually obligatory) on each Muslim individual.
- It is unanimously agreed that the *kufr* (disbelief) of the *murtadeen* (apostates to Islam) is a greater offense than original *kufr* (i.e. the disbelief of non-Muslims) and it is thus a priority to fight the apostates. [5]

Like most jihadist groups, the leadership structure of the Muhajireen consists of a military leadership, a Shari'a committee, a Shura council and a media arm, Liwa al-Mujahideen al-Ilami. The latter was established during the Bosnian civil war (1992-1995) by foreign mujahideen who joined the fight against Serbian militias. [6] This media arm appears to have been revived for the production of videos on behalf of the foreign fighters in Syria. The videos produced by Liwa al-Mujahideen al-Ilami in Bosnia in the 1990s include influential productions such as "Badr al-Bosna" and "Jihad al-Bosna," which played a major role in attracting young Muslims (especially in the West) to the Bosnian jihad. [7] This media group appears to have the same goals in Syria. The Muhajireen's successful military campaigns and its coordination with other armed groups (jihadists in particular) have played a major role in making the group attractive for foreigners and locals alike.

The Muhajireen have entered into coalitions with other jihadist groups in the northwestern province of Latakia, establishing a branch under the name of Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen in the Jabal Turkman mountain range of northern Syria and opening a "mujahideen operations

room" in Kurd Dagh ("the Kurd Mountain," one of the three "ethnic mountains" in northwestern Syria). The Muhajireen also work closely in a military and administrative sense with Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliated movement that is the strongest single militia in Syria.

Until recently, the Muhajireen appear to have operated under the influence of Jabhat al-Nusra, but have moved on to establish a coherent organization, conduct successful attacks against regime forces and earn the acceptance of locals in their operational areas. The group now continues to operate in coordination with Jabhat al-Nusra but is no longer under its direct leadership. As the conflict continues, it is likely that the Muhajireen will play a more prominent role in the struggle for control of Syria.

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#### Notes

1. The name of the Khatibat al-Khattab refers to the late Saudi leader of Arab volunteers in Chechnya, Amir al-Khattab (a.k.a. Samir Saleh Abdullah al-Suwailem). He was fatally poisoned by Russian security agencies in 2002. The Amir had borrowed his *nom-de-guerre* from Omar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph of Islam (579-644 C.E.).
2. For the statement, see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=2mPyJV5ISN8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=2mPyJV5ISN8). *Muhajireen* is a name commonly used to refer to foreign fighters in various jihadi battlefields such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, Chechnya, etc. The term reflects the Prophet Muhammad's *hijra* (migration) to Madina in 622 to escape persecution in Mecca. In Madina Muhammad created the first Islamic state based on the alliance between *al-muhajireen* (migrants) and *al-ansar* (local supporters).
3. For example, see "Dairy of a Mujahid in the Land of the Levant," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0LWJj4ebpM>.
4. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uI3cxTjmr00>.
5. "Interview with Abu Hamza al-Muhajir [official of Katibat al-Muhajireen's media arm]," Islamic News Agency (Haq), April 14, 2013, <http://www.asansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=84252>.
6. Ibid.
7. These videos available at: [http://www.jarchive.net/categories.php?cat\\_id=9&sessionid=921e999c80d807bef8b2484b4a2ee84f](http://www.jarchive.net/categories.php?cat_id=9&sessionid=921e999c80d807bef8b2484b4a2ee84f).

## PKK Commanders Split with Imprisoned Kurdish Leader on Reconciliation with Ankara

Francesco F. Milan

After an almost 30-year-long struggle, the Turkish government is currently pursuing what could be an historic agreement with the Kurdish separatist Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK). Past attempts at seeking a mutually acceptable solution have failed bitterly, thwarted by the lack of trust between the two sides and the ideological and strategic divergences within them. Two years ago, negotiations ended when the organization's hardliners staged an ambush against Turkish troops and killed 13 soldiers despite PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's orders to abide by a ceasefire. Similarly, the main challenges the ongoing process will have to face come from within the ranks of the two negotiating sides.

Negotiations have become unequivocally intertwined with the government's ongoing constitutional reform project, which both the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP – Turkey's main opposition party) and the nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP – the second largest opposition party) staunchly oppose in its current form. Among other changes, Turkey's new constitution could bring about increased autonomy and political recognition for the Kurdish minority, along with a transition to a presidential (or semi-presidential) system. This latter reform is strongly advocated by Erdogan, who would have a chance to remain in power by running for president and then ruling the country with expanded prerogatives. The constitutional reforms would be a major step towards paving the way for an agreement with the PKK and such an initiative is, in fact, seen favorably by Ocalan himself.

Frustration is growing within the opposition parties, however, as they become more marginal to the whole process. In particular, they fear a convergence of interests between the AKP and the Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP – a pro-Kurdish party with links to the PKK) will effectively bypass them as political interlocutors on such fundamental issues. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli slammed the initiative as an AKP attempt to “write a constitution with the PKK” and would result with Turkey being dragged into a “separatist ambush” ([mhp.org.tr](http://mhp.org.tr), April 5; April 6). MHP members abandoned Parliament last week, protesting against the establishment of a commission designed to keep Parliament updated on the negotiations, while their spokesman sarcastically remarked they were leaving the assembly floor “to the AKP and the

PKK” (*Hurriyet*, April 11).

The CHP's stance is only slightly more moderate. Even though a few months ago party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu declared his support for negotiations and encouraged the government to do whatever it took to end the conflict, this cooperative stance was soon abandoned under the weight of the CHP's internal divisions and the party's subsequent failure to assume an active and autonomous role in the negotiation process. All the CHP MPs have joined their MHP colleagues in boycotting last week's parliamentary session, refusing any involvement with the government's activities (*Today's Zaman*, September 21, 2012; *Hurriyet*, April 11). Under such conditions, the long-term sustainability of a reconciliation process within Turkish society over the Kurdish issue is put into question; with the two main opposition parties seemingly ready for an all-out political war against the AKP-BDP ticket. If the latter succeeds in reforming the constitution, they could translate this into a victory at the polls with the opposition losing their leverage in parliament.

From the PKK's point of view, negotiations have now reached a critical turning point. During last month's Nowruz (Kurdish New Year) celebrations, Ocalan launched a public appeal from his prison cell to all members of the PKK, stressing how the region's current political circumstances provide the opportunity for a transition from “a process of armed resistance to a process of democratic politics.” [1] In his message, Ocalan carefully steered away from calling openly for either a ceasefire or a withdrawal from Turkish soil; still, a ceasefire is *de facto* in place, as no attack against Turkish troops has been carried out since the statement and the focus of attention has promptly moved on to a possible PKK withdrawal.

At the moment, negotiations are getting bogged down over the procedures PKK fighters should follow in scaling down hostilities. While Erdogan insists on an unarmed withdrawal, PKK commanders seem unanimous in wanting their fighters to keep their weapons or to have at least a formal guarantee that Turkish military forces will not carry out any attack during the withdrawal. The reasons behind their position are multiple: firstly, they want to avoid a repetition of what happened in 1999, when around 500 PKK fighters were killed while marching towards Northern Iraq as they followed Ocalan's order to temporarily withdraw from Turkish soil. They also want to preserve some degree of direct power, which they can only maintain by keeping their weapons with them, a sign of the ideological distance between the PKK commanders and their imprisoned leader.



Although Ocalan is still putting pressure on the PKK to withdraw from Turkey, the organization's senior commanders oppose the decision. In a recent interview, Duran Kalkan (a.k.a. Selahattin Abbas), known for being a leading "hawk" within the PKK, conceded that fighters are currently in a "ceasefire and self-defense position," but also stressed that a withdrawal is out of the question until negotiations bring about tangible results (Firatnews.com, April 16).

Murat Karayilan, the organization's field commander, seems to have a more pragmatic stance towards a possible withdrawal, but has also specified that the PKK will only give up its weapons in the very last stage of the negotiation process (KurdPress, March 15). Ocalan and the upper echelons of the PKK, based in the Kandil Mountains of Northern Iraq, are exchanging messages and testing options, but there seems to be a critical difference in terms of the extent to which the two sides trust their Turkish counterparts. After more than 14 years of imprisonment in almost total isolation, Ocalan's personal stakes are high. When minutes of his meeting with BDP representatives were leaked to the press, it emerged that Turkish authorities seem willing to free Ocalan should negotiations succeed (*Today's Zaman*, February 28).

There is also another fracture within the PKK, however. With the 2007 creation of the Koma Civaken Kurdistan (KCK) to bring different Kurdish organizations under a unified structure, the PKK's armed struggle acquired a transnational dimension. Kurdish fighters of Iranian and Syrian origin organized under the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (PJAK) and the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD) respectively, became part of the KCK. While PYD members are currently fighting for the control of the northeast region of Syria, PJAK has not carried out any operations against Iranian military forces since September 2011. For PJAK representatives in particular, dismantling part of the KCK and giving up weapons for a solution within Turkish boundaries is an option with no appeal.

In their current form, negotiations are more an "Erdogan-Ocalan" process than a "Turkey-PKK" process. Both leaders are struggling to generate consensus within their respective circles. For Erdogan, the problem is reaching out to those segments of society that do not necessarily support the ruling AKP in order to transform the process into a genuinely shared "national" effort. The creation of the Wise Person's Commissions, seven regional groups composed of academics, journalists, writers, musicians and actors, is an attempt to fill this gap, as the groups travel to each part of Turkey to promote the negotiation process (*Today's Zaman*, April 7; Anatolia News Agency, April 10). As for Ocalan, there seems to be a degree of cognitive dissonance

between what he perceives as credible long-term offers made by Turkish authorities and the lack of short-term, tangible results that the rest of the PKK laments.

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Note

1. See "Full transcript of Abdullah Ocalan's ceasefire call," BDP Press Office, March 21, 2013, Available at: <http://www.euronews.com/2013/03/22/web-full-transcript-of-abdullah-ocalans-ceasefire-call-kurdish-pkk/>.

## Libya's Sabha Oasis: Former Qaddafi Stronghold Becoming Regional Center of Insecurity

*Andrew McGregor*

During the rule of the late Mu'ammar Qaddafi, Libya's Sabha Oasis was an important regional security center, dominating Libya's remote Fezzan region and the ancient trans-Saharan trade routes that connect sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean coast. The Libyan airbase and garrison at Sabha gave Qaddafi a military presence in a region that contains most of Libya's considerable oil wealth as well as a remote center for nuclear weapons development and rocket testing. The presence of many Qaddafi loyalists in Sabha (including members of Qaddafi's own Qadhadhfa tribe) made it the last major center to be taken by rebel forces in the campaign to depose Qaddafi. Today, roughly a year-and-a-half after Qaddafi's death, Sabha's strategic importance has actually increased due to the insecurity that prevails in southwestern desert.

To cope with the rampant insecurity that allowed the deadly Islamist attack on Algeria's In Aménas gas plant to be mounted from southwestern Libya, Sabha was one of several southern regions declared a closed military zone in December, 2012, with temporary closures to border crossings with Niger, Algeria, Chad and Sudan (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 25).

## Sabha – The Disputed Oasis

Located some 500 miles south of Tripoli, the town of Sabha, with a population of roughly 200,000, is dominated by a massive Italian-built fort (Fortezza Margherita, but now known as Fort Elena), a legacy of Italy's brutal occupation of the Libyan interior in the early 20th century. Most residents belong to Arab or Arab-Berber tribes, but the Tayuri and al-Hijra neighborhoods belong to members of the Tubu, an indigenous Black African tribe following a semi-nomadic lifestyle in what is now southern Libya, northern Chad and northeastern Niger. Though famed for their traditional fighting skills, the Tubu of Sabha occupy cheap fire-blackened cinder block housing that provides witness to the bitter inter-communal battles that have plagued the oasis town since the Libyan revolution. The Tubu make up only 10 to 15 percent of Sabha's population, which also includes a number of Tuareg and migrants from Sudan, Chad and Niger who were encouraged to fill jobs in Libya's oil economy.

Stripped of citizenship by Qaddafi and denied basic services such as medical care and education by Libyan administrators ordered to treat all Tubu as undocumented aliens, the Tubu see an opportunity to normalize and legitimize their historic presence in southern Libya through specific inclusion in Libya's new constitution. Earlier this month, the Tubu attempted to educate other Libyans and foreign delegates about the Tubu by holding the first-ever "Festival for Tubu Heritage and Culture" in Murzuk, southwest of Sabha. While the event was attended by a number of members of the GNC, official foreign representation was limited to the Turkish consul and a UN delegate (*Libya Herald*, April 8). For the Turkish consul, his arrival marked something of a symbolic return to the region: Ottoman troops were beginning to establish posts in the Tubu regions of the Sahara in the early 20th century prior to being withdrawn after the Italian invasion of Libya in 1912.

A group of Tubu fighters under the leadership of Niger-based militant chief Barka Wardougou (who became close to Tuareg rebel groups in Niger in the last decade) took Murzuk from its loyalist garrison in August, 2011 (*Ennahar* [Algiers], August 20, 2011). Wardougou and his militia remained in southwestern Libya after Qaddafi's overthrow (*Jeune Afrique*, May 17, 2012).

### Who Will Control the Borders?

Despite playing a leading role in the expulsion of Qaddafist forces from Libya's southwest and the southeastern Kufra Oasis region, Libyan Tubus continue to be treated with the suspicion normally associated with pro-Qaddafists. When

Sa'adi al-Qaddafi threatened to return from his Niger exile in February, 2012 to lead a new uprising in cooperation with elements of the Libyan military against the "gangs" who controlled Libya, attacks quickly began on Tubu residents of Kufra who were suspected (without evidence) of supporting Sa'adi's plans for counter-revolution (*Jeune Afrique*, May 17, 2012; *al-Arabiya*, February 11, 2012; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 15, 2012). For now, the Tubu continue to guard the border regions of the southwest, though partly out of self-interest – infiltration by Islamic extremists and narco-traffickers would challenge traditional Tubu control of local smuggling routes. The Tubu are already engaged in a struggle for control of these routes with their local rivals, the Awlad Sulayman Arabs. The Tubu and Awlad Sulayman fought a vicious battle using automatic weapons, rockets and mortars in Sabha in March 2012. The clashes left at least 50 dead and over 160 wounded (*Libya Herald*, March 28; *Tripoli Post*, March 29; for the battle, see *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, April 6, 2012).

In Sabha, incendiary rumors that the Tubu minority are about to take over the city often find a ready audience amongst the Awlad Sulayman and Awlad Abu Seif Arabs. Many Tubu are similarly convinced that the Awlad Sulayman intend to take control of the entire southwest region. Operating under the nominal direction of the Ministry of Defense, Tubu militias remain in control of several sensitive areas in southwestern Libya, including the southern al-Wigh airbase and parts of the Murzuk oil-fields. Calls from the militias for funding and equipment to control the borders have largely fallen on deaf ears. The Tubu not only know the physical terrain, they also know the location of unmarked minefields along the Libyan-Chadian border, deadly relics of the prolonged struggle between Chad and Qaddafi's Libya for control of the uranium-rich Aouzou Strip.

### Return of the Qaddafists

The continued presence of Sa'adi Qaddafi across the border in Niger also contributes to the destabilization of the region. A group of armed men attacked a Sabha police post on April 12, killing a police guard and two others before seizing vehicles and arms from the station. The next day, over 20 individuals described as supporters of the Qaddafi regime were arrested. According to the head of Sabha's military council, Ahmad al-Atteibi, the men had confessed to having been infiltrated from abroad with the purpose of setting up a base in the south (SAPA, April 13; *News24*, April 14). Another police source claimed the assailants were veterans of the Libyan Army's 32nd Mechanized Brigade, a well-trained, well-armed and highly loyal unit under the direct command of Khamis al-Qaddafi (a son of the Libyan leader who was



killed in a NATO airstrike in late August, 2012 (*Libya Herald*, April 14). Two vehicles belonging to the attackers were later recovered by the Zawiya Martyrs' Brigade, a militia hailing from the Berber-dominated Nafusa Mountains of western Libya. Libyan border police also reported arresting a group of Libyans entering the country from Egypt with a large quantity of pro-Qaddafi literature for distribution in Sabha (*Libya Herald*, April 13).

Libya has been applying intense pressure on Niger to extradite Sa'adi to Libya to face war crimes charges and it is expected that the former soccer player and Special Forces commander will join other members of the Qaddafi family in Oman rather than wait to be returned to an unhappy fate in Libya (*al-Shabiba* [Oman], March 26; *Times of Oman*, March 26).

### Securing the South

The apparent inability of local security forces to resist attacks on their posts prompted a joint emergency meeting of Libya's government and the ruling General National Congress (GNC). The meeting was attended by the highest levels of Libya's administration and security services in an effort to find a solution to the ongoing challenges to government authority in the south (*Libya Herald*, April 14).

Security forces and militias from northern Libya dislike serving in the south, partly because there are no additional benefits offered to persuade them to serve there. Deployment orders from the Libyan Army command continue to be treated as requests by most of the Libyan militias. Most are unable to cope with the isolation and severe climate of the vast desert expanses south of Sabha, leaving the region largely in the hands of local tribal militias, smuggling bands and roving groups of extremists who may have already established bases in the deserts.

The smugglers, who specialize in arms, fuel, vehicles, subsidized food, narcotics and human trafficking, are usually at least as well-armed and organized as the security forces tasked with their elimination. With under-equipped local security forces often going unpaid for months at a time, it has become much easier to simply purchase free movement through Libya's ungoverned southwest. Efforts to inhibit the smugglers' operations can invite retaliation; on March 30, a well-armed smuggling group angered by attempts to restrict their activities attacked the Sabha headquarters of the southern military region command at the Sabha airbase, killing two officers and wounding three other soldiers (*Libya Herald*, March 30; PANA, April 2).

The Arab-Berber Qadhadhfa, who were regarded as Qaddafi loyalists during the rebellion, have also engaged in deadly clashes with the generally anti-Qaddafi Awlad Sulayman tribe, who experienced rough treatment from the former dictator after he suspected them of planning his overthrow. Libyan army Special Forces units under Colonel Wanis Bukhamada were deployed to stop these tribal battles in early 2012. Bukhamada has since survived assassination attempts in both Sabha and his hometown of Benghazi.

### Conclusion

The task of securing southern Libya from Islamist militants, narco-traffickers and arms-traders depends greatly upon efforts to reform Libya's security services, most notably the National Liberation Army. However, with most former rebels preferring to remain under arms with their rebellion-era militias, such efforts have been painfully slow in obtaining results. Northerners dislike military service in the south and enduring suspicion of Tubu motives prevents the GNA from supplying this group with the arms, funds and equipment they need to secure the borders. As clashes with their Arab neighbors continue, Tubu goodwill towards post-revolutionary Libya is rapidly diminishing, as is the potential for this group to assume security tasks in southern Libya that few others are qualified to carry out. The In Aménas attack is a potent reminder of the necessity of securing the strategic Sabha Oasis and the rest of southwestern Libya before well-armed Islamists fleeing the French-led intervention in Mali can set up new operational bases in the region.

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