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Egyptian State Television shows members of the Egyptian security forces after their release by kidnapers, in Cairo, Egypt,

ARMED CLASHES NARROWLY AVERTED IN THE SINAI AFTER ENIGMATIC ABDUCTION OF EGYPTIAN SECURITY PERSONNEL

Andrew McGregor

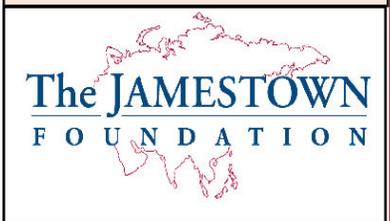
A potentially explosive situation in Egypt’s volatile Sinai Peninsula appears to have been averted with the May 22 release of seven members of Egypt’s military and security forces after a six-day abduction by what is believed to be an armed Islamist faction. The circumstances of the release remain unclear and have fostered a variety of claims and accusations.

The kidnapers were identified as members of Tawhid wa’l-Jihad by Shaykh Nabil Naim, a leading member of the Egyptian Jihad organization and former associate of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Shaykh Nabil was freed during the Egyptian Revolution after two decades in prison (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 23). According to Shaykh Nabil, Tawhid wa’l-Jihad’s denial of involvement was “a deception” designed to avoid a military campaign against the movement. Noting that Tawhid wa’l-Jihad has aligned itself with al-Qaeda, Shaykh Nabil suggests that al-Qaeda serves Israeli objectives “in an ignorant and foolish way” that promotes an alleged Israeli plan to resettle Gazans in the Sinai: “At present, the West and Israel look at Sinai as a land that has no owner in which al-Qaeda is running wild, and this is something dangerous.” The shaykh described Tawhid wa’l-Jihad as a *takfiri* organization (one that declares Muslims who oppose its agenda to be apostates): “They are ignorant about the Islamic Shari’a – we have lived with them and know them well.”

Egyptian Interior Minister Muhammad Ibrahim confirmed that the kidnapping was part of an effort to obtain the freedom of Shaykh Hamadah Abu Shita, a leader of Tawhid wa’l-Jihad who was reported to have been tortured in Turah Prison after attacking a prison guard (MENA, May 21; Ahram Online, May 23). The kidnapers were also alleged to

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have demanded the release of a number of prisoners being held at the police station in the North Sinai town of al-Arish (MENA, May 22). The search for the hostages prompted a major military incursion into the politically sensitive Sinai – aside from ground and aerial security sweeps over the North Sinai, Egyptian troops were deployed in large numbers in the capital of al-Arish, the town of Shaykh Zuwayid and the border town of Rafah (MENA, May 21).

The kidnapping proved unpopular with most parties active in the Sinai, including North Sinai's tribal chieftains, who called for the immediate discovery and arrest of those responsible (MENA, May 25). Not all the Sinai Salafists were content with the kidnapping; the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a group condemned the action (MENA, May 22). Cairo's al-Azhar University, the world's leading center of Islamic studies, issued a statement describing the abductions as a contradiction of the teachings of Islam and a violation of internationally understood norms of personal freedom (MENA, May 20). According to Shaykh Muhammad Adli, "Everybody was searching for the soldiers, even Salafist Jihadists. Everybody condemned this act... If the soldiers had not been released, a war would have flared up in the area" (Dream 2 Satellite Television [Cairo], May 25).

Various theories were advanced to explain the incident and its resolution; one such, attributed to secular sources, suggested that Gaza's HAMAS had engineered the entire abduction and then deliberately yielded to President Muhammad Mursi's delegation without a shot fired in order to make the Egyptian president look good (Xinhua, May 22; Egyptwindow, May 25). Reports from the Sinai that Mursi had played no role in liberating the hostages contrasted with claims the president had agreed to release a certain number of prisoners in exchange for the release of the hostages (Amal al-Ummah [Alexandria], May 23). Some of the detainees were said to have been in custody for four years without charge. A military source told a Cairo daily that it was the tribal leaders who convinced the kidnappers to release their captives, partly because they sympathized with the kidnappers' cause, if not their actions: "Tribal leaders coordinated with military intelligence. They refused to cover for the kidnappers and informed them that they will not support them" (Ahram Online, May 22).

The main mediator in the negotiations has been identified as Shaykh Muhammad Adli, a renowned Egyptian *qari* (one who recites the Quran from memory) with experience in mediating problems in the Sinai. Adli reported his help was requested by the kidnappers, who were willing to release the hostages but feared being attacked during the handover. The shaykh praised the efforts of the commander of the Second

Field Army, Major General Ahmad Wasfi, and contrasted the more patient approach of the security forces with their reaction to the 2004 bombing of a Sinai resort, when "everybody was arrested and tortured, including me" (Dream 2 Satellite Television [Cairo], May 25).

HAMAS denied any role in the abductions and said the movement has become a subject of suspicion in Egypt due to an Israeli proposal to resettle Gazans in the Sinai, a proposal that has failed to find support in the Palestinian population. Dr. Musa Abu-Marzuq, a senior HAMAS member, noted that the movement has no interest in antagonizing Egypt: "The Gaza Strip and HAMAS are not a superpower that puts itself on an equal footing with Egypt" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 22).

In some quarters, suspicion of responsibility for the abductions fell on Palestinian Fatah strongman Muhammad Dahlan (a.k.a. Abu Fadi), a bitter enemy of HAMAS who has been accused by many Palestinians of corruption and collaboration with Israeli intelligence services. HAMAS claims to have obtained confessions from a number of Dahlan's supporters implicating the Fatah leader in organizing the kidnappings to advance a three-fold agenda involving the creation of instability in Sinai to benefit Israeli interests in the region, the provocation of confrontations between the Egyptian army and Sinai-based jihadi groups and an attack on the reputation of HAMAS that would complicate its relations with Cairo (*al-Akhbar* [Cairo], May 27). Dr. Essam Muhammad Hussein al-Erian, the vice-chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, the Hizb al-Hurriya wa'l-Adala (Freedom and Justice Party), accused Dahlan of playing a role in the abductions through Dahlan's deployment of over 500 gunmen in the Sinai with financing from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has accused the Muslim Brotherhood of attempting to create a cell in the UAE dedicated to the overthrow of the UAE government (*al-Hayat*, May 25). Dahlan responded by accusing the Muslim Brothers of acting as the agents of the United States and Israel: "This is not the first time the rumor-mongering bats of the Muslim Brotherhood circulate lies and illusions to cover up their failure and crimes of their militant gangs against Egypt and Palestine... You have been the genuine allies and loyal associates of the U.S. and Israel. Your lies no longer fool anyone" (Ahram Online [Cairo], May 27).

According to a Salafist source within the Sinai who was involved in the negotiations, the presidential delegation failed in its efforts before military intelligence negotiated an end to the hostage-taking without making any specific deals (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], May 26). Interior Minister Muhammad Ibrahim insists that no negotiations were

conducted with the kidnappers, though he acknowledged the efforts of tribal chieftains in helping avoid a military operation against the abductors (MENA, May 21). Despite this, tribal leaders were still angered that they were left out of the final resolution and were unable to obtain the identities of the kidnappers from the security forces. According to Naim Gabr, head of the Coalition of Sinai Tribes, “If security authorities don’t inform us of what happened, we will convene a meeting of all tribes to mull a joint response... If the intelligence apparatus and military lose the tribes’ trust, the consequences for Sinai – and Egypt’s national security in general – will be dire” (Ahram Online, May 26).

For some Egyptians, the quiet resolution to the abductions leaves too many unanswered questions. After a government statement said the identities of the abductors was known to the Interior Ministry, it is difficult for many Egyptians to understand why no arrests have been made, especially when the government continues to maintain that no deal was made for the release of the hostages. To combat the growing Islamist militancy in the Sinai, President Mursi has ordered the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*awqaf*) to send moderate preachers and well-known imams to Sinai to challenge the religious extremism of the jihadis (*al-Masry al-Youm* [Cairo], May 26).

President Mursi has publicly urged his security chiefs to finish their counter-terrorist operations in the Sinai before returning to base and General Wasfi has pledged that the Army will remain in the Sinai until it restores law and order to the region (MENA, May 23). There are, however, suspicions that the army will draw down sooner rather than later to permit the President to avoid alienating Salafist politicians who are sympathetic to the aims of Islamist factions operating in Sinai.

YEMEN’S PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER VIEWS AL-QAEDA’S ROLE IN YEMEN

Andrew McGregor

Salim Salih Muhammad, a veteran of Yemeni politics and an adviser to Yemen’s president, Abd-Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, recently offered his views on al-Qaeda’s current role in Yemen and the ongoing security crisis in that country during an interview with a pan-Arab daily (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 25).

Salim Salih is a member of the Yafa’a tribe of southern Yemen’s Lahij governorate and was for a time foreign minister of the

People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY – 1967-1990) before going into exile after the 1994 civil war. Salim Salih was also a presidential adviser on counterterrorism issues to deposed president Ali Abdullah Salih after his return from exile in 2002. [1]

Describing last year’s al-Qaeda occupation of several urban areas in the Abyan Governorate as “a catastrophe by all standards,” Salim Salih notes that the growth of Salafist religious trends in Yemen support the growth of al-Qaeda:

In my assessment, what is demanded is to stop the *fatwa*-s which some clerics issue in a way that leads to extremism and violence and help Yemen, its south and north, to carry out projects, employ the youths, combat poverty, and open the door for conscription in the areas stricken by the 1994 war and the Saadah [Houthist] war... Dealing and handling this issue requires that all means be employed, including closing the sources of ideological extremism, ending poverty and unemployment among the young men, and constant dialogue with the youths and giving them the chance in their capacity as the pillar of the future. The security or military side should not be used as a sole solution to confront al-Qaeda or the groups that carry weapons.

In response to Yemeni government claims that Iran is interfering with Yemen’s internal politics by providing arms and other support to the Shiite Houthist rebels of northern Yemen, Salim Salih says that “some Iranian establishments export the ideas of the revolution on a sectarian basis, and this does not serve Iran or the its interests in the Gulf, Bab al-Mandab, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Arabian Sea. We advise the wise men in Iran and their moderate authorities to revise the issue and enter from the doors and not from the windows...” Iran’s Foreign Ministry issued a firm rejection of the Yemeni claims on May 28 (Yemen Post, May 28).

Yemen’s security forces continue to battle units of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and an associated group, Ansar al-Shari’a, which has proven adept at assassinating senior Yemeni security officials. Ansar al-Shari’a attacks continue in several areas, most notably in al-Baydah Governorate, where the movement’s fighters have besieged a military base at al-Tha’alib for a week, cutting off all food and supplies in an attempt to take the base. Gunmen believed to be affiliated with Ansar al-Shari’a also attacked military facilities in Lahij Governorate on May 29 (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 30; *Akhbar al-Yawm* [Sana’a], May 30). In eastern Yemen, several villages were occupied by al-Qaeda elements this week in the Hadhramawt Governorate (Yemen Post, May 27).

Yemenis are also enduring the consequences of a prolonged campaign of sabotage against the nation's energy and communications infrastructure. In recent days alone, fiber optics cables have been cut in three southern governorates and an oil pipeline blown up in Ma'rib Governorate (*al-Umana* [Aden], May 28; *al-Masdar* [Sana'a], May 28). Most troublesome, however, is the devastating effect on the Yemeni economy and general quality of life created by a constant stream of attacks by tribesmen and Islamists on the nation's power supply infrastructure. The government's inability to ensure electrical power has led to a series of angry demonstrations that have a tendency to break out into violent clashes with security forces. President Hadi's promise to strike saboteurs with "an iron fist" has failed to deter the sabotage (Ma'rib Press, May 28; *al-Sahwah* [Sana'a], May 28; *al-Wahdawi* [Sana'a], May 28). There are reports that President Hadi is about to order a military assault on Ma'rib tribesmen who have continued to cut power lines and pipelines (Yemen Post, May 30).

Note

1. U.S. Embassy Sana'a Cable 03SANAA225, September 10, 2003, Available at: <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=03SANAA2251>.

Syrian Turkmen Join Opposition Forces in Pursuit of a New Syrian Identity

Nicholas A. Heras

Syria's Turkmen community is becoming increasingly involved in the country's opposition movement. The mostly Sunni Turkmen of Syria represent a significant ethnic minority community that is located throughout the country, particularly in diverse and highly strategic areas that are currently the sites of significant conflict. The Turkmen community in Syria is charged by the Assad government of being militantly pro-Turkey, pro-opposition, and in support of the re-imposition of Turkish dominance over Syria (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], August 28, 2012).

Syria's Turkmen communities are descendants of Oghuz Turkish tribal migrants who began moving from Central Asia into the area of modern-day Syria during the 10th century, when the Turkic Seljuk dynasty ruled much of the region. Under the Ottomans, Turkmen were encouraged to establish villages throughout the rural hinterlands of several Syrian cities in order to counter the demographic weight

and influence of the settled and nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab tribesmen that populated the region. Syrian Turkmen were also settled to serve as local gendarmes to help assert Ottoman authority over roads and mountain passes in diverse regions such as the Alawite-majority, northwestern coastal governorate of Latakia (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], August 28, 2012). After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, communities of Turkmen continued to reside in the country.

Syrian Turkmen opposition leaders, many of who are in exile in Turkey, assert that while Turkey is a cultural "Father" country to their communities, Turkmen are committed to a pluralistic, territorially intact Syria, with a polity that is representative of all of its ethnic and sectarian groups and is no longer ruled by the largely Arab Ba'ath Party (Anadolu News Agency [Ankara], July 4, 2012; *Hurriyet Daily News* [Istanbul], March 22, 2012; *Today's Zaman* [Istanbul], December 8, 2011). Citing strong historical and cultural ties and his country's deep affinity for their ethnic compatriots, Turkey's President Abdullah Gul stated that: "The Syrian Turkmen people are integrated parts of our nation, and they are the strongest bridge of humanity between Turkey and our Syrian brothers and sisters." [1] Syrian Turkmen leaders report that their efforts to win the support of anti-Assad Arab states were rebuffed because their community was seen by those states as already having a sponsor in the Turkish government. [2]

Turkmen leaders assert that their community suffered discrimination and repression under Ba'athist rule. Turkmen were unable to teach the Turkish language and Turkmen cultural and historical subjects in schools, Turkmen villages were given Arab names and Turkmen land was appropriated for the use of Arab peasants (AFP, January 31). These factors, as well as tribal divisions within the community and the lack of a large contiguous area within the country where Turkmen are a plurality of the population are blamed by Syrian Turkmen leaders for their community's lack of participation in the country's political opposition prior to the uprising. [3]

Turkmen leaders also assert that under the Hafez al-Assad government, their community was viewed as a potential "fifth column" for Turkey, which had a hostile relationship with the Syrian government for much of Hafez al-Assad's rule. They also state that Hafez al-Assad's position on the Turkmen was adopted by his son Bashar al-Assad after the onset of the Syrian uprising and the Turkish government's consequent support for the Syrian opposition. As a result of this history of dispossession, Syrian Turkmen opposition leaders are seeking the recognition of their community as an integral part of the country and their cultural and linguistic rights guaranteed in a post-Assad Syrian constitution (*Today's Zaman* [Istanbul] December 17, 2012).

The demands of the Syrian Turkmen community are not dissimilar from those of Syria's Kurdish community, which

also suffered from repression of its cultural and political rights. Kurdish and Turkmen communities are reported to have a tense relationship in contemporary Syria because of Syrian Turkmen ties to Turkey and the desire of some Syrian Kurds for a Kurdish-ruled autonomous region. Syrian Turkmen leaders assert that any Kurdish attempt to create an autonomous “Western Kurdistan” within Syrian territory would threaten to displace tens of thousands of Turkmen (*Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul] July 23, 2012; August 12, 2012).

Turkmen communities coexist within Kurdish majority areas in a geographic region near the Syrian-Turkish border that runs from the northwestern governorates of Idlib and Aleppo to the northeastern governorate of Raqqqa. Fearing the displacement of a claimed 290 Turkmen villages in this area if an autonomous Syrian Kurdish region were to emerge, Syrian Turkmen leaders state they experience “anxiety” at this prospect and reiterate their desire to work with Syrian Kurds as siblings (*Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul] August 12, 2012; *Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul], July 23, 2012). Of particular concern to Turkmen leaders is the widespread conflict between Turkmen opposition fighters and Kurdish fighters of the aggressively pro-autonomy Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD - Democratic Union Party), reported to be an ally and ideological offshoot of the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK - Kurdistan Workers’ Party) (*Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul] July 23, 2012; August 12, 2012).

Syria’s Turkmen communities are located in several strategic areas, including the Jabal al-Turkman region near the city of Latakia, the city of Aleppo and its northern suburbs stretching towards the Turkish border and in villages north and north-west of the city of Homs near an important highway linking Damascus to the generally pro-Assad coastal governorates of Tartus and Latakia. There are also important populations of Turkmen in the southwestern governorates of Dera’a (bordering Jordan) and Quneitra (in the Golan region bordering Israel), the northwestern governorate of Idlib near the Turkish border and in the northeastern governorates of Raqqqa and Deir ez Zor (*Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul], December 8, 2011). The total population of Turkmen communities in Syria is believed to be approximately 200,000, or 1 percent of the country’s population, although this figure is a matter of controversy and is disputed by Syrian Turkmen leaders who claim there are more than 3.5 million Turkmen in Syria, though some two million speak only Arabic as a result of state “Arabization” policies (AFP, January 31; *Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul], August 12, 2012). This figure is not only much greater than what is commonly believed to be the Syrian Turkmen community’s population, it would make the Turkmen one of Syria’s largest minority groups on par with Syria’s Christian, Alawite and Kurdish communities.

Syrian Turkmen communities are active in the opposition, although some Turkmen opposition leaders assert that the Syrian opposition movements, particularly the Syrian

National Council (SNC), were slow to recognize Turkmen as “Syrians” and only included Syrian Turkmen in their membership after the intervention of Turkish diplomats (*Hurriyet Daily News* [Istanbul], December 17, 2012). Several Turkmen opposition parties have been formed over the course of the uprising, both within Syria and in exile, primarily in Turkey, including the Syrian Democratic Turkmen Movement, the Syrian Turkmen National Bloc and the Syrian Turkmen Platform. Currently, Turkmen are reported to hold 16 seats (of 310) within the SNC and three seats (of 60) within the larger opposition conglomerate of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. [4]

In late March, the Turkish government hosted several Syrian Turkmen opposition parties and assisted the formation of a new Syrian Turkmen opposition coalition called the “Syrian Turkmen Assembly” The Turkish Foreign Ministry and Syrian Turkmen leaders state this coalition was organized in order to provide a unified “Turkmen” front to engage in a transitional process in a potential post-Assad Syria (Anatolia News Agency [Ankara], April 1). [5] Syrian Turkmen Assembly members, representing both Syrian Turkmen opposition parties and armed groups, are seeking at least one Cabinet seat to be devoted to Syrian Turkmen in a post-Assad government (*Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul], April 1). This political maneuvering is occurring as several Syrian Turkmen armed opposition groups, either as part of or in cooperation with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) continue to engage in combat against the Syrian military and its allied paramilitary forces throughout the country (Reuters, February 15).

Syrian Turkmen armed opposition groups are especially active in the Jabal al-Turkman region in Latakia and in Aleppo and its suburbs, such as the district of Hanano. It is reported that more than 10,000 Turkmen fighters are mobilized in armed opposition groups throughout Syria, with the greatest number of groups concentrated in Aleppo and its immediate suburbs. Some of the Syrian Turkmen armed opposition groups in Aleppo carry names that evoke the memory of the Ottoman Empire, including the “Sultan Murat” and “Abdul Hamid I” brigades (*Today’s Zaman* [Istanbul], April 1).

In Latakia governorate, the Syrian military is accused of shelling and striking Turkmen villages from the air in the Jabal al-Turkman region, which is now considered to be firmly under the control of the opposition (al-Jazeera (Doha), August 31, 2012). Current fighting in and around the southern regions of the Jabal al-Turkman is reported to be fiercely contested, with overtones of communal animosity between Alawites and Turkmen (AFP, April 4; *Hurriyet Daily News* [Istanbul], July 31, 2012). Turkmen opposition leaders allege that the Syrian government has a policy of forcing Turkmen communities out of the area in order to create an autonomous Alawite region in the event

of the collapse of the al-Assad government (*Today's Zaman* [Istanbul], August 12, 2012).

Syria's Turkmen communities are active participants in the Syrian opposition and stand to benefit from this participation in any post-Assad Syrian state. The political and diplomatic support of the Turkish government, in the context of weakened al-Assad government control over many regions of the country, provides Syrian Turkmen opposition groups with a benefactor as they position themselves to participate in a potential post-Assad transition period. Syrian Turkmen leaders appear to be pursuing citizenship-based representation in a future Syrian government and thus far appear to be carefully seeking to legitimize their community's status as "Syrians" in a diverse Syrian polity. This narrative of inclusion, politically important for the community as a minority without a distinct political or geographical base, may be tested in the event of a bitter communal conflict between Turkmen and other Syrian communities particularly Alawites and Kurds. In the context of potential widespread conflict in a post-Assad Syria, Turkmen armed opposition groups, relatively small in number and geographically dispersed, may be limited in their ability to protect the property and lives of their community and can not necessarily depend on the intervention of the Turkish military to support it in its interests. A pluralistic, post-Assad Syrian state that can guarantee the physical security of all its communities, and that considers Turkmen to be "Syrian," is thus an important objective of the current Syrian Turkmen opposition.

Notes

1. "H. E. President Abdullah Gül's Message on the Syrian Turkmen Platform," Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, December 15, 2012, Available at: <http://www.tccb.gov.tr/speeches-statements/344/84743/h-e-president-abdullah-guls-mebage-on-the-syrian-turkmen-platform.html>.
2. "An Interview with Tarik Sulo Cevizci, Deputy Chairman of the Syria Democratic Turkmen Movement," ORSAM, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, Ankara, January 25, Available at: <http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/showOrsamGuest.aspx?ID=405>.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. "Foreign Minister Davutoğlu received the Syrian Turkmen Assembly delegation," Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 2, Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-received-the-syrian-turkmen-assembly-delegation.en.mfa>.

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East Indonesian Islamist Militants Expand Focus and Area of Operations

Jacob Zenn

The rise of Santoso (a.k.a. Abu Warda, a.k.a. Abu Yahya) as Indonesia's most wanted militant is forcing the country's elite counterterrorist unit, Densus 88, to focus on his Sulawesi-based network – Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (MIT) (Jakarta Globe, November 5, 2012). Since 2012, MIT has targeted Indonesian government officials and security forces, but there are concerns that MIT could follow the path of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), especially because Santoso was previously a commander in Jamaat Ansaru Tawheed (JAT), the successor group to JI.

The most recent incident highlighting MIT's expanding reach occurred on May 9, when Densus 88 carried out a series of raids in Bandung, Kebumen and Batang on Java, the country's most populous island (for Densus 88, see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 12, 2011). According to police, the seven militants who were killed and the 13 who were arrested had explosives prepared for attacks and had robbed banks to raise money for Santoso (*Jakarta Post*, May 10, 2013).

The Javan connection to Santoso shows that the legacy of JI and JAT founder Abu Bakr Ba'asyir, even as the 73-year old Ba'asyir serves a 15-year prison sentence for sponsoring a terrorist training camp in Aceh that Densus 88 raided in 2010. Santoso commands approximately 50 MIT fighters in the jungle area of Poso and Palu in Central Sulawesi (*Straits Times* [Singapore], February 13). The extent of the MIT's network, however, is much larger and was exposed when two of Santoso's men who murdered two police officers in May 2011 were arrested and revealed information about MIT to interrogators. Despite those two militants' revelations, MIT's attacks in Sulawesi continued in 2012, including:

- The murder of two police officers in Poso in August
- A bomb attack in North Poso, also in August
- A September bomb attack at a police station in Poso
- The November shooting of the North Poso Police station chief
- The shooting of four police Mobile Brigade members in North Poso in December, which Santoso claimed under the name of "Batalyon Abu Warda." The attack was in revenge for the police closing a girls' pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in Poso two months earlier (*Jakarta*

Post, January 13).

As demonstrated by MIT's attacks in Poso, the group tends to avoid operations that leave civilians dead, a contrast with JI's former style. MIT is locally funded, in part through bank robberies and other criminal activities, including hacking foreign exchange trading websites (*Jakarta Globe*, December 24, 2012). JI, in contrast, was funded by al-Qaeda and beholden to al-Qaeda's modus operandi of targeting foreign citizens and foreign interests, including attacks that killed more than 200 people, mostly foreigners, in the tourist district of Bali in 2002 and 2005 and in Jakarta in 2009.

JI was also different from MIT because JI's members were deeply involved in transnational networks, especially in neighboring Malaysia and the Philippines. Malaysian nationals figured largely in the ranks of the JI, including the planners of the 2002 Bali bombing, Azahari Husin and Noordin Top Muhammad (killed by Densus 88 in 2005 and 2009, respectively), as well as Zilkifli bin Hir (a.k.a. Marwan), who was killed in an airstrike in Mindanao in 2012 (*Zamboanga Times*, May 25, 2012). The Indonesian Umar Patek, who was also a planner of the 2002 Bali bombings, frequently moved between Indonesia and Mindanao, where he joined and trained Abu Sayyaf fighters. He was captured in Abbottabad, Pakistan in 2011 while he was either en route to Afghanistan (according to his defense) or to meet Osama bin Laden to request funding for Southeast Asian militants (according to prosecutors) (*The Nation* [Jakarta], February 21, 2012).

While some MIT members have transnational networks, especially those who trained at Ba'asyir's camp in Aceh before 2010, MIT would be best described as "trans-Indonesian." MIT's name translates to "Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia," and although the group is mostly operational in Java and Sulawesi, it has spread through some of Indonesia's eastern provinces, including:

- The Moluccas (Maluku) Islands, where Santoso reportedly fought in clashes between Muslims and Christians from 1999-2002 (*Jakarta Post*, January 6);
- West Nusa Tenggara, where in 2011 teachers from the Umar bin Khattab Islamic *pesantren* in Bima accidentally set off an explosion while making bombs, prompting Santoso, who was then based in Bima, to return to his native Poso (*Jakarta Post*, January 13);
- East Kalimantan, where in October 2012, computer hackers posted a letter from Santoso on the government's website, in which Santoso adopted the name of the former al-Qaeda in Iraq leader by calling himself "Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi al-Indonesi." The message challenged

Densus 88: "You should not dare shoot and arrest our unarmed members... If you are really men, then face us" (*Borneo Post*, October 18, 2012).

If MIT builds networks with the Harakah Sunni untuk Masyarakat Indonesia (HASMI - Sunni Movement for Indonesian Society) or other Islamist groups that are associated with terror plots on foreign targets, it could be a sign that MIT will expand to foreign targets, just as JI did in the previous decade and HASMI's leader, Abu Hanifa, attempted in 2012 (Salam Online [Jakarta], December 27, 2012).

Abu Hanifa was arrested in Central Java in 2012, while planning an attack on the U.S. Embassy, the Jakarta offices of U.S. mining company Freeport-McMoran and the U.S. Consulate in Surabaya in "retaliation" for the film "Innocence of Muslims," which was produced by an Egyptian resident of California and satirized the life of the Prophet Muhammad (AP, October 27, 2012). Indonesia's national police spokesman suggested that the MIT connected with Islamists interested in foreign targets when he said he suspected that the plotters of an attack on the Myanmar embassy in Jakarta on May 3 and the MIT cells that were broken up in Java on May 9 were connected (Australian.com, May 9). At a minimum, there is concern that members of HASMI and other Islamist groups that are notorious for attacking Ahmadiya mosques, Christian churches and "un-Islamic" institutions, such as alcohol retailers, could become part of the recruiting pool for MIT (*Jakarta Globe*, May 11).

The "networks of intolerance" that are undermining Indonesia's stability are, however, being countered by several forces. First, Indonesia's economy continues to boom and could become the world's sixth or seventh largest economy by 2030 according to some projections (*Jakarta Globe*, November 27, 2011; Mckinsey.com, September 2012). Second, mainstream academic and religious scholars continue to challenge radical views in the public sphere. At conferences in January and March lecturers from the renowned Gadjah Mada University and State Islamic University Bandung discussed the release of Abu Bakr Ba'asyir's new book, *Tadhkirot 2*. In the book, Ba'asyir calls the Indonesian government "apostate" for cooperating with the "infidel" United States. The lecturers argued that Ba'asyir's ideas were too "provocative" and that his call for Shari'a to replace democracy could compel majority-Christian areas and majority-Hindu areas to secede, leading to the disintegration of Indonesia. [1] Finally, the Islamists are hurting their own cause, with many Muslims in the country perceiving Shari'a Law as practiced in the special region of Aceh to be anachronistic, especially for women,

and an example of what not to do in the rest of the country.

The key to defeating MIT and other Islamist groups requires not only Densus 88's aggressive counter-terrorism work, but also a whole-of-society approach, in which Indonesians expose the Islamists' ideology as a false hope that would offset the economic and societal gains the majority of Indonesians have worked for since the country entered the democratic era in 1999.

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Note

1. Author's interviews with lecturers and students in Jakarta, Surabaya and Malang in May 2013.

Directions in North African Jihadism in the Post-Mali Conflict Environment

Dario Cristiani

Operation Serval, the French-led military intervention in Northern Mali brought major changes to the strategic landscape and geopolitical trends in the region, curbing, or at least slowing, the increasing presence and local control that jihadist groups have pursued in the region since 2003. The intervention impeded the southward advance of these groups, pushing them back to their strongholds in the desert and beyond. In this sense, the French-led intervention was extremely successful in meeting its limited strategic aims of restricting the activities of the jihadi groups and driving them from their strongholds in northern Mali. Given the situation on the ground, complete elimination of the militants was unlikely, though their power and influence could be significantly diminished.

What follows is an assessment of the re-organization and changes in AQIM and the other regional jihadist groups in the post-Malian conflict environment with reference to the three major geopolitical and strategic levels that will redefine

the operational existence of these organizations.

The Local Dimension

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its local jihadist allies (such as Ansar al-Din, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa [MUJWA] and Mokhtar Belmokhtar's al-Muwaqifun bi'l-Dima [Those Who Sign in Blood]) exploited the structural situation of weak statehood, political connivance with incumbent elites and rising instability to establish themselves in the region over the past ten years. Eventually they tried to exploit the local instability by imposing Shari'a and creating an Islamist state in the area historically known as Azawad (northern Mali). However, as shown by the substantial disagreement expressed by the Algerian leadership of AQIM regarding the haste of the project and the way it was implemented, building a Shari'a-based state in northern Mali was hardly considered a strategic priority or even a success for AQIM. [1] If viewed historically, the primary focus of AQIM and its predecessors, the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA) and the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) was, and is, Algeria. Northern Mali remains simply a geographical platform for training and organization, a major source of income and a region of jihadist socialization with non-Algerian fighters, but nothing more. AQIM's greater involvement in the Sahelian strip was largely the result of setbacks the movement suffered in Algeria, especially in the north of the country. Although creating an Islamist state would have provided a major asset in advancing its deeper Algeria-centered agenda of destabilization, it was actually more of a means than an aim in itself.

An internal reorganization of men, priorities and operational structure will likely be a major element in the future configuration of the group. Indeed, one of the most notable events concerning the internal structure of the group was the death of AQIM commander Abd al-Hamid Abu Zeid (a.k.a. Muhammad Ghadir) (Mali Web, March 23; *Le Figaro*, March 24; see also Terrorism Monitor Brief, March 8). Abu Zeid was one of the key elements in the operational and geographical shift characterizing AQIM over the past five years. More firmly embedded in the Sahelian environment than in the historical strongholds of Algerian terrorism, Abu Zeid's personal history as a smuggler turned terrorist and the increasing power and freedom of action he enjoyed were essential in what can be described as the Sahelization of the movement, in which the operational primacy of the Sahel over northern Algeria was established and smuggling and other illegal activities took priority over jihad activities. Abu Zeid's death and replacement by Djamel Okacha will likely bring some major changes to the organization.

Okacha can be considered part of a new generation of jihadists: born in the late 1970s, he was a child during the 1980s when many Algerian militants left the country to join the international anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. Although still very young, he was jailed in 1995 for about 18 months by Algerian authorities and his presence in the Algerian jihadist panorama emerged most visibly at the time of the 1998 GSPC split from the GIA (Afrik.com, March 25; *Jeune Afrique*, April 9). He is considered to be extremely close to formal AQIM leader Abd al-Malik Droukdel and believed to be much more focused on pure jihad—with some tactical flexibility—than on making money from illegal activities (*Le Courrier d'Algérie*, March 26).

It is likely that Okacha's presence in the south is a signal of the Kabylie leadership's desire to regain greater influence on the strategic orientation of the organization and rebuild the organization's power structure. As seen during the Islamist occupation of northern Mali, AQIM's Sahelian commanders substantially ignored the suggestions of Droukdel, whose primary aim was to avoid an external military intervention, knowing this would destabilize AQIM and make it more difficult to ultimately achieve the long-term goals of the organization. In this context, it is likely that one of the tasks awaiting Okacha will be the establishment of more meaningful and functional contacts with Mokhtar Belmokhtar and his splinter group, al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam. Although Belmokhtar was announced dead by the Chadian military, he apparently escaped to southern Libya, resurfacing to claim responsibility for the January 16 – 19 In Amenas attack in Algeria and the May 23 suicide attacks in Niger (Ansar1.info, January 16; *Journal du Tchad*, March 5; *Jeune Afrique*, April 16; *Tchad Online*, May 25).

Although of great impact from a symbolic and strategic point of view, these actions do not seem to serve the more long-term interests of AQIM, since they generally provoke a major reaction from the regional governments and their external supporters. The threat posed by Belmokhtar's brigade can be exploited by local leaders to ask for more effective financial and strategic support from outside sources.

The Regional Dimension

The Sahel and the Mediterranean Africa region are characterized by the presence of several social and political cleavages that were further strained by the events of the Arab Spring. In Mediterranean Africa, Libya is under severe pressure, owing to the inability of the government to regain control over the militias, the increasing deterioration of security conditions in the east and south and the permeability of its borders. Tunisia is likewise suffering from

an increasingly polarized domestic environment. Moreover, the uncertainty characterizing Algeria as it faces a complex path toward the next presidential elections (complicated by the thorny issue of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's health) and the persistent fragility of the states belonging to the Sahelian strip make the North Africa region a place where political contradictions and internal rivalries promise years of insecurity.

On a regional basis, the military intervention in Mali and the current political volatility in the region have two major consequences:

- Firstly, the war in northern Mali caused a regional dispersion of the militant groups, but most importantly, it has totally disrupted the trafficking of drugs, weapons and migrants in the region, smashing all the networks transiting through this area and pushing traffickers to find new routes. AQIM and all the other regional jihadist groups are actively involved in this trafficking and, as such, their movement is also changing according to the redefinition of the smuggling net. This bears some strategic consequences, as it will increase further the vulnerability of some Sahelian and Maghrebi states—Libya, Niger and Mauritania climbing to the top of this list—since regional narco-jihadists will likely move to these countries to carry out their mix of smuggling and jihad.
- Secondly, the political situation in some countries—such as Tunisia, but also Libya—offers some opportunities for AQIM to increase their ideological influence on those Salafist groups that do not belong to the Qaedist world but share some features and aims. That is the case in Tunisia, where AQIM is trying to build deeper and more meaningful relations with Ansar al-Shari'a, though the group remains ideologically distant from AQIM (*El Watan* [Algiers], May 5). Having established bases along the Algerian border, AQIM has openly threatened Tunisia's ruling Islamist party, Ennahda, in various messages sent after Ennahda's decision to ban the more radical Ansar al-Shari'a from holding its annual conference in the city of Kairouan (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 20). The overall instability and volatility characterizing the Tunisian transition could push Tunisian Salafists and members of AQIM to promote relations between the two movements, representing a major challenge for the smoothness of the Tunisian political transition and the wider stability of the region.

The Global Dimension

On a more global level, the re-branding of the Algerian militants under the al-Qaeda banner in 2006 partially changed the ideological nature of the group and increased its focus on international and “far enemies,” even though its principal target remained the Algerian state. For AQIM, the far enemy par excellence remained France, the former colonial power, with the movement’s historically-based resentment of France only strengthened by the military intervention in Mali. As such, a video featuring senior AQIM member Abu Obeida Yusuf al-Annabi calling on Muslims to attack French interests worldwide came as no surprise (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 7).

France has suffered from terrorist attacks on its soil related to developments in North Africa, with the Metro bombings of 1995 being the most famous of these attacks. However, what is the nature of the current threat? While the GIA and the GSPC seemed to have some sort of operational networks active on European soil, especially in France, AQIM seems to lack this kind of strategic depth in Europe.

Geographically, AQIM’s focus is in consolidating positions and promoting operations in the Sahel, while Europe is seen mainly as the final market for products smuggled through North Africa. As such, sophisticated, large-scale attacks in Europe that require a robust organizational, operational and strategic capacity seem to be largely unlikely at this stage, although they cannot be entirely excluded. Instead, home-made terrorist attacks carried out by “lone wolves” and homegrown terrorists could represent the most serious concern for France in the wake of AQIM’s threats. Recent trends show how serious these threats have become; the Toulouse attacks in France, the Boston bombing, the Woolwich murder and the recent attack on a Paris policeman all fit this category. This type of threat is particularly elusive since it does not even require an organized sleeper cell; it simply needs a radicalized individual willing to respond to the call of the group and act.

Conclusion

The French-led intervention in Mali changed the strategic environment of the region. For AQIM and other jihadist groups operating in the area, the intervention had several consequences: they had to move elsewhere, reducing their presence in northern Mali, redefine smuggling routes and re-acquire the mobility they partially lost when they started controlling northern Mali. This makes the regional threat more mobile, liquid and fragmented while reducing its actual political impact. Moreover, the overall

volatility in the region opens some maneuvering space for regional groups to initiate operational relations with other organizations. In the case of AQIM, greater attention will be paid on reorganizing its Sahelian units, making them more responsive to the Algerian leadership. Re-balancing the operational profile between armed jihad and smuggling will also be a priority, although smuggling remains fundamental to financing the organization and fostering relationships with local criminal groups. The appointment of Droukdel’s man, Djamel Okacha, as Abu Zeid’s successor signals the willingness of the group to make its leadership structure more stable and effective. The appointment of Okacha, an Algerian, also shows that the chain of power in AQIM remains firmly Algerian despite the increased geographical focus on the Sahel.

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Note

1. Associated Press, Mali-Al-Qaida’s Sahara Playbook, Available at: http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-manifesto.pdf.