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MUSLIM BROTHERS' SPIRITUAL LEADER YUSUF AL-QARADAWI CONDEMNS HEZBOLLAH

Andrew McGregor

There are few more prominent preachers in the Islamic world than Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian Islamic scholar now based in Qatar, where he hosts a religious issues program on al-Jazeera with a viewership of 60 million and acts as the senior scholar for the popular website Islam Online. Often viewed as the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaradawi, like many Sunnis, was deeply impressed by the resistance the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah movement offered to an Israeli invasion force in 2006. However, Hezbollah's decision to aid the Syrian regime, its military ally, in repressing Syria's largely Sunni armed opposition, has seen its support in the Sunni community largely evaporate. Most damaging has been the reversal in opinion of al-Qaradawi, who has abandoned his former support for the movement to publicly denounce Hezbollah as the servants of Satan.

For al-Qaradawi, the last straw was Hezbollah's successful 17-day assault on the town of Qusayr, near the Syrian border with Lebanon. The recapture of Qusayr was a devastating blow to Syrian opposition forces that, while not necessarily decisive, may still represent a turning point in Syria's internal struggle as it restores government control of the Damascus to Aleppo highway and access to the Alawite heartland on the Syrian coast. Hezbollah deputy leader Shaykh Na'im Qassim described the battle as "a severe blow to the American-Israeli-Takfiri scheme," reflecting Hezbollah's belief that anti-Shi'a Sunni extremists are being funded and armed by Israel and the United States as part of an effort to topple the Syrian regime and thus weaken resistance to a renewed Israeli assault on Lebanon and the destruction of the Palestinian cause (Naharnet [Beirut], June 6).

In a May 31 sermon at the Umar bin al-Khattab mosque in Doha, al-Qaradawi called on all Muslims with military training to make themselves available to the Syrian opposition. Describing Hezbollah ("the Party of God") as Hizb al-Shaytan ("the Party of Satan"),

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al-Qaradawi suggested that the Lebanese Shiite movement was acting as a proxy for Iran, which desired “continued massacres to kill Sunnis.” The Egyptian preacher went on to ask the Sunni community: “Iran is pushing forward arms and men [in support of the Assad regime], so why do we stand idle?” Al-Qaradawi went on to acknowledge he had made a critical mistake in defending Hezbollah against attacks against it by the religious leadership of Saudi Arabia after 2006 in the belief that Shiites and Sunnis must present a unified resistance to Israel: “It seems that the clerics of Saudi Arabia were more mature than me” (Naharnet [Beirut], June 2; al-Arabiya/AFP, June 2).

Saudi Grand Mufti Shaykh Abd al-Aziz al-Ashaykh thanked al-Qaradawi for his public reversal of opinion and adoption of the approach taken to Hezbollah (“this detestable sectarian movement”) by the Saudi religious leadership, noting that Hezbollah did not respect “ties of kinship or the covenant with the believers [i.e. Sunni Muslims]” (Arab News [Jedda], June 7).

The contradictions inherent in al-Qaradawi’s simultaneous support of Hezbollah and the Syrian opposition had gradually become apparent as the Syrian crisis worsened. On May 4, the Egyptian preacher denounced Hezbollah and Shiite Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for their support of al-Assad and called on the Syrian army to defect to the opposition Free Syrian Army (al-Sharq Online [Doha], May 4). Though he did not mention Hezbollah by name, al-Qaradawi had warned supporters of the Syrian regime of the consequences of their actions later in May during a controversial visit to Gaza: “Those who are arrogant on this earth, Bashar al-Assad, his followers and all those who support him with funds, weapons and men, from all countries, will be taken by God” (al-Aqsa TV [Gaza], May 10).

However, al-Qaradawi’s about face on the relationship with Hezbollah appears to have put him at odds with the leadership of the Izz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Sunni HAMAS movement that rules Gaza. According to reports carried in an Islamist-sympathetic daily, the HAMAS military command sent a message to the movement’s Political Bureau rejecting al-Qaradawi’s approach, saying that the movement had benefited from the arms and military support it had received as a consequence of its alliance with Hezbollah and Iran, while “Arab money” from Saudi Arabia and Qatar had done nothing to advance the liberation of Palestine in comparison (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, June 6).

In April, the Syrian Ba’athist Party’s website denounced “the devil of sedition in Egypt, the named Yusuf al-Qaradawi” for issuing a fatwa calling for jihad in Syria and allegedly

inciting assassins to kill Dr. Muhammad Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti, a noted ethnic-Kurdish pro-regime religious scholar who opposed Salafist ideology and was a noted critic of al-Qaradawi. Al-Buti was killed in a March 21 suicide bombing that left at least 41 other people dead inside a Damascus mosque (al-Ba’ath Online [Damascus], April 10).

In his May 31 Friday sermon in Doha, al-Qaradawi, using a pejorative term for the Syrian Alawites, described the “Nusayris” as non-Muslims, referring to the 1318 *fatwa* issued by the controversial Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328), who said:

These people named “al-Nusayriya”... are greater disbelievers than the Jews and Christians. Nay, they are greater disbelievers than most of the polytheists, and their harm to the Umma (community) of Muhammad is greater than the harm of the disbelievers who are at war with Muslims, such as the Tartars, disbelieving Europeans and others” (Fatwa 35/145). [1]

In making this statement, al-Qaradawi chose to overlook the 1936 fatwa issued by Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, which ruled that Alawis were indeed Muslims, though there are indications this ruling was politically motivated rather than the result of research into the beliefs of the Alawis, a minority sect that has dominated the Syrian government and military since independence.

Last October, al-Qaradawi included Hezbollah in a list of “enemies” who threatened Syria and the “Arab nation” as a whole: “Iran is also our enemy, the enemy of the Arabs. Those killed in Syria have been killed by the Iranians, the Chinese, the Russians, and the Syrian army. The Iranians stand against the Arabs in order to establish a Persian Empire... The same applies to Hezbollah, which sends its men to fight in Syria, and come back in boxes” (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, October 18). Al-Qaradawi repeated his description of Russians as “enemies to Muslims” in his May 31 Friday sermon delivered in Doha (*al-Arab* [Doha], June 1).

These remarks brought condemnation from Iranian and Shiite sources, in which al-Qaradawi is routinely described as “the NATO Mufti.” Further criticism came from leading pro-Kremlin members of Russia’s Muslim community, including Mufti Mukhammedgali Khuzin, who said: “It is no secret that this man is a puppet in the hands of reactionary political circles displeased with Russia’s foreign policy” (Interfax, November 30, 2012). Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov suggested that “Qadarawi, as a scholar, would be well-advised to take up educational activities and not dabble in politics, leaving it to professionals” (Interfax, November 12, 2012).

Notes

1. Yvette Talhamy, "The Fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawis of Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46(2), 2010, pp. 175–194.

SOUTH AFRICA MAY DEPLOY SANDF "PEACEKEEPERS" IN URANIUM FIELDS

Andrew McGregor

As rising insecurity in South Africa's lucrative platinum mining sector begins to have a significant impact on the national economy, South African Labor Minister Mildred Oliphant has proposed deploying "peacekeepers" (likely drawn from the South African National Defense Force [SANDF]) to restore order. South Africa's mining industry, which represents 20 percent of the national economy and 60 percent of its exports, has been riven by assassinations and bloody battles between rival unions and security forces, all fueled by the deep involvement of South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) in the mining sector's labor strife. The proposal to deploy South Africa's unionized military as an intervention force comes at a time when the SANDF is struggling to meet internal obligations and multiple foreign deployments on a shrinking budget (see *Terrorism Monitor Brief*, January 25). The violence at the platinum mines is partly responsible for a decline in South Africa's economic growth, which hit a new low of 0.9 percent in the first quarter of the year (AFP, June 4). Some 80 percent of the world's platinum reserves are found in South Africa.

At the heart of much of the strife in the platinum mines is a struggle for control of unionized workers between the ANC-associated National Union of Miners (NUM) and the upstart Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which has made impressive inroads on the membership of the NUM, a traditional source of funding and support for the ANC. The mining sector is the largest private employer in South Africa and many of the mining unions have, until this point, been tightly tied to the ANC. AMCU members increasingly see South Africa's police as allies of the NUM, creating an atmosphere in which labor tension could easily degenerate into political violence.

According to Mamphela Ramphele, a former managing director of the World Bank and a former chair of Gold Fields Limited (a major South African gold mining company), the crisis in the platinum fields is exacerbated by the ANC's alliance with the NUM, a relationship that is manifest in an NUM office doubling as the local headquarters of the

ANC: "How do you become an honest broker when one of the parties is your ally? It's very difficult to be unbiased... That for me is a violation of good governance..." (AFP, June 6). Ramphele has recently formed a new political party to challenge the ANC called Agang ("Build").

Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu clearly identified ANC and NUM interests as identical in a May 24 speech in which she likened the pressure on the NUM to the conservative forces that destroyed the British mining unions in the Margaret Thatcher era:

You are under siege by forces determined to use every trick in the book to remove you from the face of the earth. [They want to make sure] that no progressive trade union will be permitted in the mining sector. It is only those who are willfully blind who cannot see that the agenda is to defeat and drive the African National Congress from power and reverse the gains of the national democratic revolution (*Business Day* [Johannesburg], May 24).

The NUM has already lost its majority status at works belonging to Anglo American Platinum and Impala Platinum and is now in a bitter and increasingly violent fight to retain its status at the Lonmin mines, where 70 percent of the workers now belong to the AMCU. With the AMCU now demanding recognition as the majority union at the Lonmin mines in Marikana and the expulsion of the NUM from local union offices, a South African labor court has given the NUM until July 16 to prove it is still the majority union or be expelled from their offices at the Lonmin works (majority status is defined as 51 percent) (AFP, June 4). AMCU leaders have complained for months that the NUM has been fraudulently listing AMCU members on NUM rosters to restore their membership and claim membership dues, a position seemingly validated by Lonmin's June 4 announcement that it had suspended eight employees, some of them NUM shop stewards, for alleged union membership fraud (SAPA, June 5).

The AMCU's aggressive recruitment campaign has been led by Joseph Mathunjwa, an emotional leader who frequently resorts to dramatic gestures and biblical allusions to promote his union in the face of what he regards as an alliance between the NUM and the ANC (*Business Day* [Johannesburg], June 7). South African platinum miners are looking for major increases in their wages and have turned to the AMCU to deliver on these demands rather than the more conservative NUM, which is perceived to be more cooperative with management. In the meantime, the turmoil in the mines has led to frequent and debilitating work stoppages.

A high-profile inquiry is ongoing in Pretoria to discover the facts behind the massacre of 23 striking mineworkers by security forces at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana on August 16, 2012. The deaths followed a week of violence that saw an additional ten people killed, including two policemen and two security guards (SAPA [Johannesburg], June 7). Testimony was heard recently from Major General William Mpmbe, who was in charge of security operations at the time and has been blamed by many in the security sector for the deaths of the two policemen (SAPA [Johannesburg], June 7). Police have since been withdrawn from the Marikana region for their own safety, leaving a security vacuum in the area.

After a NUM shop steward was murdered and a NUM treasurer wounded on June 3, a spokesman for the Congress of South African Trade Unions noted that 60 people had been killed over the last year as a consequence of disputes at the Lonmin and Impala platinum mines (SAPA [Johannesburg], June 4). The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a powerful government-allied trade union federation representing nearly two million workers, warned that the “anarchy” in the platinum mining region had created a “prevailing sense of insecurity... No one is being arrested and not a single person has been convicted for any of these [most recent] murders” (AFP, June 4).

With only three to four months left before South Africa’s major platinum producers are required to finish negotiations on new contracts for their employees, it seems essential that the dispute between the rival labor unions must be resolved quickly to avoid further violence and the possible shutdown of a large part of South Africa’s platinum-mining industry. While the deployment of “peacekeepers” from the hard-pressed SANDF may be able to put a temporary damper on the violence at the mines, it will not be able to address the union rivalry that is at the core of the crisis, particularly if they are seen as favoring the government-allied NUM. Even if the AMCU succeeds in displacing the NUM, it will have to satisfy the considerable expectations of its membership if it is to avert a NUM comeback or challenges from new labor groups claiming to be able to satisfy workers’ demands.

Tunisia’s Elusive Jihadist Network

Stefano M. Torelli

Over the last month, Tunisia has seen an escalation of the violence and tensions between security forces and the Islamist movements that emerged after the fall of President Zine al-Abdin bin Ali in January, 2011. Attention focused primarily on the violent May 19 clashes in Tunis that followed the government’s decision to ban the annual rally of the Salafist Ansar al-Shari’a movement. The extremism of Tunisia’s Salafist groups, the best known of which is Ansar al-Shari’a, have tended to divide Tunisian society, though Ansar al-Shari’a has declared Tunisia a land of *da’wa* (proselytization) rather than a land of jihad. While Ansar al-Shari’a can be defined as a radical Islamist movement, it is not necessarily focused on jihad. There is, however, evidence that more radical groups in Tunisia are dedicated to jihad.

Fears of Tunisian infiltration by North African jihadists and a proliferation of jihadist activities were first realized in May 2011, when a Tunisian army colonel and two militants were killed in an exchange of gunfire in the town of Rouhia in the Siliana governorate. The two gunmen held Libyan passports and were believed to have been involved in a series of earlier clashes between security forces and a militant group known as the Brigade of Assad ibn al-Furat in Soliman between December 2006 and January 2007 (Tunisie Numerique, May 18, 2011). The incident was followed in February, 2012 with the killing of two suspected jihadists near Bir Ali bin Khalifa by security forces. One of the two militants was believed to have participated in the jihad in Iraq (Tunisie Numerique, February 3, 2012). A year later, large quantities of arms, including Kalashnikov assault rifles and grenade launchers, were discovered in the cities of Medenine and Mnihla. According to Tunisian authorities, these arms were tied to jihadist activities, though one local politician suggested the weapons belonged to an arms smuggling network rather than a jihadist group (Tunisia Live, January 18).

In reality, the jihadist phenomenon in Tunisia continues to present contradictions and elements of uncertainty. May witnessed a major escalation in the confrontation between the Tunisian armed forces and groups allegedly tied to the jihadist network, with the Tunisian press and government giving prominence to some incidents that occurred in the Jabal Chaambi region on the border with Algeria. According to sources from the Ministry of the Interior, the area may have become the refuge of Uqba ibn Nafaa, an armed group associated with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). On December 21, 2012, 16 people accused of being part of this Tunisia-Algeria jihadist network were arrested. According to then-Minister of the Interior Ali Laarayedh, members of Uqba ibn Nafaa were trained by three Algerians reported to be in contact with AQIM leader Abd al-Malik Droukdel (Mag14.com [Tunis], December 21, 2012). Uqba ibn Nafaa

is believed to be led by two Tunisians and an Algerian whose names have not been disclosed by authorities.

The number of attacks in the last month suggest that the militants alleged to be in the Jabal Chaambi area are well organized and have received logistical support and supplies from abroad, possibly from Algeria and Mali. According to ministerial sources, this jihadist group is composed of about 50 members, but its existence has yet to be proven by direct encounters (Kapitalis.com [Tunis], May 25). The group places anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines in the area surrounding their alleged bases, with the following incidents having been recorded in the Jabal Chaambi region in the past two months:

- Between April 29 and April 30, three mines exploded, injuring a dozen soldiers from the Tunisian Army and the National Guard.
- On April 30, a Tunisian military operation discovered a cache of grenades and explosives, as well as instructions for the assembly of homemade explosives, maps of the area and mobile phones.
- On May 6, a fourth mine caused serious injuries to two soldiers, one of whom was blinded, while the other required the amputation of both legs.
- On May 20, a fifth mine went off without causing casualties.
- On June 6, two soldiers were killed by an anti-personnel mine.

It is important to note that while the use of mines can be confirmed, there has yet to be a confirmed exchange of fire between the army and jihadist militants. An exchange of fire in the region on June 1 appeared to confirm the presence of jihadists, but on closer inspection it turned out that the alleged terrorist was actually Chief Warrant Officer Mokhtar Mbraki, who was confused for a terrorist and killed by fire from his military colleagues (Tunisia Live, June 3; Mosaique FM [Tunis], June 3). Thus, the mine explosions remain the only confirmed evidence of a jihadist presence, but it is not clear exactly who placed the land-mines in the absence of direct clashes with Tunisian security forces. Given the lack of evidence, some local sources are suspicious about the existence of a Tunisian jihadist network despite the Ministry of the Interior's announcement of new counter-terrorism operations. [1]

The Ministry of the Interior announced the arrest of 37 men between Kef and Kasserine on May 7, who were formally accused of having links with Uqba ibn Nafaa and militants close to AQIM. The Minister of the Interior held a press conference on May 31 in which he stated that the number of arrested suspects associated with the Tunisian jihadist network was 44 so far and announced a further list of 31 criminals wanted in relation to the mine-laying at Jabal Chaambi, six of whom were identified as Algerian nationals (African Manager [Tunis], May 31; Kapitalis.com [Tunis],

May 31). The list includes Abu Iyad al-Tunisi (a.k.a. Sayfallah bin Hussein), head of the Salafist Ansar al-Shari'a movement and the suspected organizer of the September 14, 2012 assault on the American Embassy in Tunis (for Abu Iyad, see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, April 2013). This is the first time that the Tunisian government has directly connected Ansar al-Shari'a to the transnational jihadist network alleged to be operating on the border with Algeria. At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior – whose statements have at times conflicted with those of the Ministry of Defence – has failed to show transparency, as demonstrated by a failure to present sufficient evidence to confirm the ties between Ansar al-Shari'a and the militant jihadists at Jebel Chaambi. Furthermore, some sources accuse the Ministry of the Interior of providing false evidence; for example, two wanted suspects, Noureddine Ben Haj Tahar Ben Belgacem and Makram Ben Ali Ben Larbi Mouelhi, were shown to have the same ID card number (News of Tunisia, June 4).

The Ministry of the Interior produced a report in May that estimated the number of Tunisian jihadists abroad at 1094, 566 of whom are currently in Syria, while others may be found in training camps in Libya, Algeria, Mali and Yemen (al-Sharq al-Awsat, May 22). In order to face the supposed threat from the presence of Uqba ibn Nafaa, the Tunisian government announced the launch of a series of counter-terrorist operations with Algeria and Libya. Algeria has deployed approximately 6,000 soldiers to the Tunisian border in an attempt to further secure the mountainous border between the two countries.

While the presence of an active jihadist network in Tunisia has yet to be decisively proven, it is likely that AQIM is trying to expand its activities into Tunisia. It can also be taken for granted that there are Tunisian militants in some arenas of the international jihad, such as Syria and Mali. Two issues, however, remain to be proved: whether or not we can speak of a real jihadist network dedicated to the overthrow the Tunisian government, and whether there are effective ties between various Salafist movements and the jihadists alleged to be operating in Tunisia.

Notes

1. These elements are based on talks that the author had with Fabio Merone, a Tunis-based Italian researcher of Salafist movements in Tunisia.

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Mogadishu's Dilemma: Who's in Control?

Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

Over the past two years, Somalia's fragile security has improved slightly following the retreat of the al-Qaeda-associated insurgent group al-Shabaab from the Somali capital of Mogadishu and other urban areas of south and central Somalia.

Because of the pressure coming from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somalia's national army, al-Shabaab has chosen to switch to a guerrilla-style warfare that is better suited to the movement's strengths than attempts to seize and hold territory at a time when the movement is experiencing a military decline and growing divisions in its leadership.

Though Somali government officials heralded the group's withdrawal from Mogadishu as the end of an era, the reality remains different. Al-Shabaab has evacuated its known military bases but continues to maintain a presence there. Control of the city is divided between two shifts in which government soldiers and al-Shabaab alternate as the dominant force according to the time of day.

Speaking to a pro-Shabaab radio station in Somalia on May 9, senior al-Shabaab leader Shaykh Abdulkadir Ali Mumin mocked the Somali government's calls for foreign investment and the return of diaspora Somalis, both based on the government's alleged control of the capital. Shaykh Mumin claimed that his group still controls Mogadishu's southern districts of Huriwaa, Yaqshid and Dayniile during the night (Somaliweyn.org, May 9). This is not just a claim; it is a fact that residents in these areas will affirm. When the sun goes down, government soldiers in these districts rush to their bases to avoid taking casualties in the dark from al-Shabaab's fighters.

During al-Shabaab's "nightshift," members of the group who were present in the streets of these districts as ordinary people during the day punish those who assisted government soldiers during the "government's shift." For instance, Somali president Hassan Shaykh Muhammad's May 5 visit to the southern district of Dayniile only increased the number of people who were punished by al-Shabaab during the night. Two days after the president's visit, al-Shabaab fighters attacked the house and took the life of a traditional elder who was among the people who welcomed the president. His body was recovered in the morning (Somaliweyn.org,

May 9).

The Dayniile district is a home turf of al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Ali Muhammad Raage and remains one of the group's strongholds in the capital. A number of people, including government soldiers and young residents thought to be members of al-Shabaab, have been killed in the district since the militants' withdrawal from Mogadishu. District chief Muhammad Abdi Yusuf confirms al-Shabaab's presence in Dayniile and their intention to use the district as a base from which to plan suicide attacks and bombings in the capital (warqabad24.com, December 18, 2012).

There are clear indications that al-Shabaab is still capable of destabilizing Mogadishu and providing a significant challenge to the government's efforts to restore security in the capital. In April, al-Shabaab fighters seized the country's Supreme Court complex in Mogadishu for several hours in a surprise attack before blowing themselves up, killing more than 35 people, mostly civilians (Hiraan.com, April 14). The attack happened just days after British intelligence agencies warned of a possible terror attack in the capital, but Somalia's government downplayed the warnings through its minister of information, Abdullahi Hersi Elmoge, who said the Somali security forces had not identified any threats out of the ordinary (*Africa Review* [Nairobi], April 7).

In another attack, eight people were killed on May 5 when an al-Shabaab suicide bomber crashed into a government convoy transporting a Qatari aid delegation on Mogadishu's busiest road, the KM4 leading to the airport. One of the vehicles belonged to Somali Interior Minister Abdikarim Hussein, though the minister was not in his car at the time. The attack happened one day after the city's main roads were reopened after a four-day closure by government soldiers due to a high level security alert (Garowe Online, May 5).

The recent attacks have raised questions regarding the government's ability to provide security, a task the Somali president said was his government's "first, second and third priority" during his inauguration last year (Hiraan.com, September 16).

The Somali government is now planning to launch a special military operation in the capital's southern parts, where the militants are believed to have hideouts. According to military sources, a recently trained 1,000-strong elite force is expected to deploy in the capital this month in 120 distinctively colored military vehicles equipped with advanced radio and alarm equipment (Sabahi Online, April 18; May 2). Efforts have been made to ensure that the new Somali army is free of tobacco use, alcohol use and the use of

drugs, particularly *qat*, a chewable plant popularly used as a stimulant in Somalia, Yemen and parts of the Horn of Africa. Addressing the army at their base in southern Mogadishu on April 18, President Mohamud urged the troops to defeat al-Shabaab, saying the future of the nation is in their hands. There is, however, another foe that must be defeated first – the continuing indiscipline of the Somali armed forces. The former militiamen, who often go unpaid for months, routinely take to the estates and streets of Mogadishu to rob the people and city they are supposed to protect, thus becoming yet another element of Somalia's security challenges.

Some members of the army have gone so far as to construct illegal roadblocks in Mogadishu to extort vehicles moving through the capital. Just last year, there were more than 60 illegal roadblocks in and around Mogadishu run by government soldiers, pro-government clan militias and freelance militias. A few months after being dismantled, some of these checkpoints are now back in place. In November, the president himself noticed that most rape cases in Mogadishu involve government soldiers who often kill their victims and witnesses to their crimes (Hiiraan.com, November 25, 2012; *Daily Nation* [Nairobi], February 22).

The indiscipline of Somalia's security forces may be one reason that some residents of Mogadishu prefer al-Shabaab fighters over government soldiers. Under al-Shabaab control, residents might only feel insecure if they had links with the government or disobeyed the militants' orders, but in the government controlled areas there are hundreds of reasons to be insecure, including fear of being caught in an exchange of bullets between factions of the government army. As long as government troops remain undisciplined, al-Shabaab will remain a preferred choice for some people. What matters most now is not necessarily the numbers and tactics of the military, but rather the government's ability to impose discipline over the security forces and provide salaries in a timely fashion that would help discourage alternative and illegal methods of obtaining funds needed to survive.

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The Mobile Threat: Multiple Battlefields Ensure Instability in the Sahel/Sahara Region

Andrew McGregor

There are signs that the scattered remnants of the Islamist coalition that occupied northern Mali for nine months are beginning to use their financial resources and pre-planned alternative bases to regroup in the Sahel/Sahara region in order to carry out new operations against their targets – the “apostate” governments of the region, local security infrastructure and the considerable French economic interests and personnel found in the region. Though the Islamists took heavy losses in the French-led intervention that drove them from northern Mali, the extremist groups were not trapped and destroyed in the hastily conceived operation. Rather, they have been relieved of a strategic disadvantage, the fixed occupation of certain territories, and regained their number one tactical asset – mobility.

An examination of the regional and international aspects of the ongoing struggle in the Sahel/Sahara helps shed some light on the direction the battle between the Islamists and African states is taking at the half-way point of 2013.

Southern Libya: A Hub for Terrorism?

Southern Libya remains in turmoil, with frequent clashes between African Tubu nomads and Arab tribes preventing effective security measures from being implemented. According to Jouma Koussiya, a Tubu activist, one of the main problems is the government's reliance on northern militias and northern commanders to provide security in the region, a policy that is actually weakening government control in southern Libya: “They know nothing about the region and they ultimately fail. Now tribes are working together to form a unified military council in order to secure the region, instead of the government” (AP, June 3).

There are also unforeseen dangers to be encountered; on Libya's southern border with Chad, five members of the Martyr Sulayman Bu-Matara Battalion doing border patrols were recently abducted during a prolonged firefight by gunmen believed to be from Chad (*al-Hurra* [Benghazi], June 2; *al-Tadamus* [Benghazi], June 1; May 30). One of the main problems in securing the south remains the unwillingness of northern troops and militia members to serve in the harsh and unfamiliar conditions prevailing in the Libyan Desert. To remedy this, Prime Minister Ali Zeidan has announced that bonuses of \$1,200 will be paid out to soldiers and militia

members willing to work in the region. The announcement is part of a new government strategy to secure the towns and cities of the region first before beginning a second phase of operations to secure and monitor the vast border regions of the south (AFP, June 2).

Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan insists claims that the attackers who struck a military barracks in the Nigérien city of Agadiz and a French uranium facility near the Nigérien town of Arlit on May 23 came from southern Libya are “without basis,” saying that the export of terrorism was a practice of the Qaddafi regime but would not be tolerated in “the new Libya” (AFP, May 28). Defense Minister Muhammad al-Barghathi also denies that there is any security crisis in Libya, suggesting the situation is “stable,” asserting that the militias are doing important work under the control of the Defense Ministry and refuting reports that French security services are tracking al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) elements in southern Libya by claiming that “the al-Qaeda organization does not exist in Libya” (*al-Jadidah* [Tripoli], May 28; June 2).

Prime Minister Zeidan’s “no problems here” approach to the security crisis in southern Libya has been strongly criticized by some observers within Libya who maintain terrorists have created bases in southern Libya (*al-Watan* [Tripoli], May 28). Usama al-Juli, the defense minister in the Libyan Transitional National Council that preceded the current General National Congress (GNC) government, has expressed a different view of the security situation in the Libyan south:

The terrorists who had been moving from Libya toward Mali are currently reversing course. Which is to say that they are now heading from Mali toward Libya. So I am not astonished that southern Libya has been turned into a new sanctuary for the terrorists fleeing north Mali. Algeria was right when the country spoke out against the war in Mali. It knew the consequences of it. Algeria, though, has the resources to cope with a new geographic reconfiguration of terrorism after the military offensive in north Mali. As for Libya, it does not have these resources... Closing borders is something useless (*Le Temps d’Algerie*, June 13).

The disarray in the Libyan security structure prevents effective measures from being taken to secure the south, with the anomalous inclusion of largely independent militias within the security structure creating confusion and insecurity throughout Libya.

Libyan army chief-of-staff General Yusuf al-Mangush,

generally viewed as a supporter of the militias, resigned under popular, military and governmental pressure following the June 8 massacre of protesters calling for the disarmament of the Libyan Shield militia that left 31 killed (including four members of the army’s Thunderbolt Special Forces unit who arrived to quell the violence) and 60 wounded. The new acting chief-of-staff, General Salim al-Qnaidy, has warned that “patience is running out with the militias” as he attempts to implement a GNC decision to “end the presence of all brigades and illegal armed formations in Libya even if the use of military force is required” (*Quryna al-Jadidah* [Benghazi], June 12; Libya News Network, June 9). The Libyan Shield-1 headquarters in Benghazi has since been occupied by government troops belonging to the al-Sa’iqah Special Forces and their heavy weapons seized (*al-Watan* [Tripoli], June 9). The Libyan Shield-1 commander, Wissam bin Hamid, has taken to the airwaves to denounce the protesters as Qaddafi loyalists and traitors to Libya even as other Libyan Shield bases are scheduled to be occupied by units of the national army (*al-Tadamun* [Benghazi], June 9; *al-Watan* [Tripoli], June 9).

The approach of the Libyan political leadership reflects the difficulty of the new Libyan government in asserting its writ in that nation – acknowledging that the government is incapable of controlling its own security situation is to admit the government does not have sovereignty over Libya and is in need of foreign intervention.

A French Role in Libya?

French foreign minister Laurent Fabius indicated two weeks ago that France must “make a special effort on southern Libya,” presumably in excess of the modest Libyan requests for advice and training and equipment for border guards (*Libya Herald*, June 2). Despite Libyan signals that it intends to grapple with its deteriorating security situation by itself, French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian appeared to hold out the possibility that French forces could be available for a mission in southern Libya if Tripoli desired it: “Libya is a sovereign country that is responsible for its own borders. It has to decide whether it wants extended support from the French or any other European country to secure its borders” (AFP, June 2). Rumors in Libya of an imminent French military intervention in the south prompted a denial from French President François Hollande, who cited the absence of a UN mandate or a request from Libyan authorities for military assistance (AFP, May 31).

President Hollande, who is struggling to gain control of a French African foreign policy that has traditionally been in the hands of a select group of military and business interests,

has described a new three-track policy in Africa that will include military training and support, environmental preservation and an emphasis on development that could involve opening European markets to African exporters (*Fraternite Matin* [Abidjan], June 6). Hollande has also signaled French willingness to provide military assistance at the request of regional governments.

However, a growing military commitment in Africa does not necessarily fit with new cuts to the French military budget that will see a reduction in the number of troops, reduced helicopter capability and a cut in the number of armored vehicles amongst other measures. General Jean-Philippe Margueron, the army second-in-command, has warned that a planned reduction in training raises the possibility of mission failure and the production of “cannon fodder” rather than combat-capable troops (*Le Monde* [Paris], June 11).

France is now looking to purchase 12 MQ-9 Reaper drones from the United States, with two of these to be permanently deployed in Africa to replace the aging Harfang drone systems currently based alongside U.S. drones in Niamey (AFP, June 11). While the Reapers are the choice of the French Air Force, the defense ministry has said Israel will be looked at as an alternative provider if a deal cannot be made with the United States. France is certain to seek weaponized versions of the Reapers, though Washington has so far been reluctant to provide armed drones to any purchasers, including its NATO allies (Defense Industry Daily, May 31).

Niger – The Latest Target

According to Nigérien President Mahamadou Issoufou, there is little doubt that the suicide bombers that struck a military base in Agadez and a French uranium plant in Arlit on May 23 came from southern Libya: “For Niger in particular, the main threat has moved from the Malian border to the Libyan border. I confirm in effect that the enemy who attacked us... comes from the (Libyan) south, where another attack is being prepared against Chad” (AFP, May 28; RFI, May 27). [1] The Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to Issoufou’s statement by saying it “did not serve the interests of the two countries” and there was “no evidence of the participation of Libyan elements” (al-Manara, May 27).

Malian security officers say the attacks may actually have been planned by radical Islamists in Tarkint, a town in the remote Tilemsi Valley, which has served as a stronghold for the extremists (RFI, May 31). However, there are also reports from sources in Niger that the May 23 attacks were planned in Derna, a Cyrenaican Islamist stronghold on the Mediterranean coast (*Jeune Afrique*, June 9). The Nigérien

intelligence service claims that the jihadists who escaped from Mali are now concentrated in the Ubari and Sabha Oases region of southwest Libya (*Jeune Afrique*, June 9; for the situation in Sabha, see Terrorism Monitor, April 19).

Rhissa ag Boula, formerly a leading Tuareg rebel in northern Niger and now a special adviser to the Nigérien president, says that: “The south of Libya, where anarchy reigns, has become a safe haven for the terrorists hunted in Mali” (AFP, June 1). Another veteran Tuareg rebel leader and current MNLA spokesman Hama ag Sid’Ahmad confirmed the Malian and Libyan origin of the attackers, who belonged to the AQIM-related Movement for Unity and Justice in West Africa (MUJWA) and operated under the coordination of Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s al-Muaqī’un Biddam Brigade (“Those Who Sign in Blood”):

The terrorist groups got to that region through the Malian and Libyan borders. It’s not complicated; the borders are real sieves. Since [Mokhtar] Belmokhtar is the main organizer, without his presence and that of certain drug barons, MUJWA would not exist... Even if the terrorist leaders no longer have major military resources and they are having mobility difficulties, they have money. They are quietly trying to reorganize, forget the leaders’ quarrels, and unite in order to fight together. It’s the presence of the French Special Forces that is preventing them from reorganizing quickly... (*Le Temps.d’Algerie*, May 27).

So long as Niger refuses to meet Libyan demands for the extradition of Mu’ammar Qaddafi’s son Sa’adi (who lives under house arrest in Niamey) and several other ex-members of the Qaddafi regime, little can be expected in the way of security cooperation between the two nations. Tripoli has indicated its unhappiness with the Nigérien approach by repatriating thousands of Nigériens working in Libya whose remittances helped support many citizens of this deeply impoverished nation. With nothing in the way of employment waiting for them in Niger, these returnees may eventually pose a new security threat in Niger.

Niger is also having trouble hanging on to terrorists it has under detention; on June 1, 22 prisoners, including several convicted terrorists, were freed from a high-security prison in Niamey by three gunmen. One of those who escaped was Alassane Ould Muhammad “Cheibani,” a Gao region Arab with a history of prison escapes. Cheibani was serving a 20-year sentence for the December, 2000 assassination of William Bultemeier, a U.S. Embassy defense official in Niamey and the 2009 murder of four Saudi Arabians in northern Niger. Cheibani is also a prime suspect in the 2008

kidnappings of Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler and Louis Guay (RFI Online, June 4). [2]

Mali – Between Stabilization or a New War

In northern Mali's Kidal region there is still no resolution to the differences between the Tuareg rebels of the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA – a secular separatist movement) and the central government in Bamako. The situation is growing critical as Malian troops continue their slow progress towards Kidal, which they have announced they are determined to enter despite the MNLA's promise to oppose their entry. Mahamadou Djeri Maiga, the vice-president of the MNLA's political wing, has promised that: "If we are attacked, it will be the end of negotiations and we will fight to the end" (AFP, June 4).

With the Malian army looking for revenge against the MNLA and their supporters for the January 2012 massacre of Malian troops taken prisoner in Aguel Hoc, there are signs that renewed clashes are inevitable. Most notable of these indications was the heavy fighting between MNLA rebels and Malian government troops that took place near the village of Anefis on June 5. This time, the MNLA withdrew, but once they are pinned up against the Algerian border in Kidal they will have to choose between further resistance or the abandonment of their cause (and the consequences that will follow). The Malian troops, under the command of two of Mali's most capable officers, Colonel Didier Dacko and Colonel Hajj ag Gamou, were accompanied by roughly 100 French troops, though it was uncertain whether they were there to aid the Malian army or to impede the outright defeat of the MNLA, which worked closely with French forces in finding and destroying Islamist elements hiding in the Idar des Ifoghas mountains.

A Malian government spokesman denounced what he described as "ethnic cleansing" in Kidal on June 4, promising that Malian troops would enter Kidal soon (*L'Essor* [Bamako], June 4). The charge of "ethnic cleansing" was in response to the MNLA's arrest of dozens of Black Malians (mostly Peul/Fulani and Songhai) in Kidal during a hunt for "infiltrators" sent to the city by Malian military intelligence (RFI, June 3; AFP, June 3). Tensions in the city were reflected in a suicide bomber's attempted assassination on June 4 of an MNLA colonel believed to have close ties to the French military (AFP, June 4).

The MNLA and the Malian government are once more at the negotiating table in Ougadougou, with Bamako working from the position presented in a UN Security Council resolution that the MNLA must lay down its arms and allow

the Malian military to enter Kidal in return for negotiations by the next president regarding the status of Azawad. The MNLA believes it has already made sufficient concessions by abandoning its demand for independence and accepting the July elections (RFI, June 8). There is internal pressure in Bamako to press the administration to carry on the return of the Malian army to Kidal. Malian members of parliament declared in early June that they would not participate in the July elections if the Malian army was not present in Kidal (*Info Matin* [Bamako], June 4). The High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), founded in Kidal on May 19, largely from former members of rebel groups, has joined the MNLA in presenting a single position in the Ouagadougou negotiations.

Tuareg negotiators have indicated they are ready to sign a document advanced by the Burkina Faso mediators that would allow Malian troops to enter Kidal in advance of the planned July elections, but Bamako's representatives have indicated they have reservations about the agreement, which would see rebels be confined to cantonments with their weapons in return for a "special status" for Azawad (northern Mali – a term Bamako does not wish to see in the document). Bamako is seeking complete disarmament and the pursuit of the arrest warrants issued for many Tuareg rebel leaders accused of various crimes before and during the Islamist occupation of northern Mali (AFP, June 13).

The African troops currently deployed in Mali are expected to be absorbed in several months by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), a 2,600 man force under the command of General Jean-Bosco Kazura of Rwanda, with a second-in-command from Niger and a French chief-of-staff. Though Chad was looking to take command of the mission, a poor interview by the Chadian candidate for command appears to have precluded this possibility and with it, the possible participation of Chadian forces (RFI, June 11). Additional troops may come from China, Bangladesh, Burundi, Honduras, Norway and Sweden, with a 1,000 man French rapid reaction force (*Jeune Afrique*, June 13).

Conclusion

Chadian president Idriss Déby has warned of the threat posed by terrorist groups now based in southern Libya, not only to his own country, but also to Europe, and has called for an international intervention to enable Libya to form a secure and functioning state that is not a threat to its neighbors. There is a danger of seeing this struggle as consisting of several different theaters defined by national boundaries, when this is contrary to the jihadist conception of this conflict, which is essentially borderless. AQIM, which

was once largely restricted to activities within northern Algeria, has expanded into a number of related movements with operatives in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Libya and the potential to ally with other groups such as Boko Haram and Ansar al-Shari'a. With their mobility restored, the Islamist Jihadists of the Sahel/Sahara will continue to take advantage of regional political rivalries, underequipped militaries and fears of neo-colonialism to rebuild their movement. Libya's inability to secure its restless south and its readiness at the highest levels of government to ignore terrorist infiltration present the most immediate and most important challenges in restricting jihadist operations. Unless real international security cooperation can be established, the Islamist extremist groups may soon emerge with the upper hand in the struggle for the vast territories of northern Africa.

Notes

1. For the attacks in Arlit and Agadez, see Andrew McGregor, "Niger: New Battleground for North Africa's Islamist Militants?", Jamestown Foundation Hot Issue, May 29, 2013, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/hotissues/single-hot-issues/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=40932&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=61&cHash=7c12e2e7bda14085101f67dc09adf5fa](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/hotissues/single-hot-issues/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=40932&tx_ttnews[backPid]=61&cHash=7c12e2e7bda14085101f67dc09adf5fa)
2. U.S. Embassy Bamako Cable 09BAMA KO106, February 23, 2009.

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