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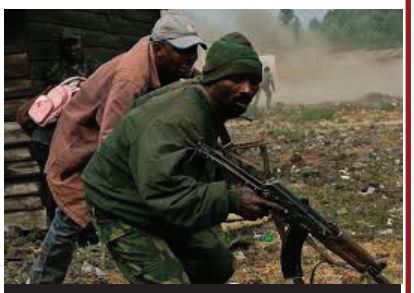

The ADF rebel threat

UGANDAN REBEL MOVEMENT REEMERGES ALONG THE OIL-BEARING UGANDAN/CONGOLESE BORDER

Andrew McGregor

The once moribund Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel movement now operating out of remote bases in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has returned to life by taking a series of small towns in the region near the border with Uganda before launching an assault on the larger center of Kamango that displaced over 60,000 people (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 13). The sudden rebirth of the ADF is concurrent with the rapid decline in Ugandan-Sudanese relations since January, when Kampala hosted a conference of Sudan's political opposition and armed rebel movements. Khartoum countered by claiming it is in contact with various Ugandan opposition groups, though it declined to name them. Conflict in the region is further complicated by the fact it is close to oil-bearing areas near the western border of Uganda that Kampala is eager to develop, potentially shipping its production east to Kenya's Lamu Port by connecting to a planned new pipeline that will divert South Sudan's oil production from Port Sudan with a concurrent loss to Khartoum of valuable and much needed oil transit fees.

The ADF made an earlier and ill-fated attempt to destroy the new oil facilities in western Uganda in March 2007. The attackers were driven off with heavy losses (including senior commander Bosco Isiko) and in the following three months nine ADF commanders were killed by the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), rendering the group largely leaderless and dormant until recently (Radio Uganda, April 3, 2007; Daily Monitor [Kampala], November 20, 2007).

The ADF is only one of ten major militant movements and a number of smaller armed groups active in North Kivu Province, a poorly developed region rich in various

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minerals such as gold and Coltan (a.k.a. Tantalite), an ore containing two elements widely used in modern electronic products. The region is currently the scene of heavy fighting using tanks and heavy artillery between the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) rebel movement (a.k.a. the Revolutionary Army of the Congo) and the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC, the DRC national army) that saw at least 130 people killed in mid-July (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 16; for the M23, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, July 26, 2012; Terrorism Monitor, November 30, 2012; Militant Leadership Monitor, August 31, 2012). The UPDF says it is supplying intelligence to FARDC regarding the activities of the ADF, which the Ugandan army claims is busy recruiting and training for new attacks on Uganda (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 12).

After the clash at Kamango (which was retaken by the FARDC on July 12), the UPDF sent reinforcements to the border region to prevent ADF infiltrators from entering Uganda disguised as refugees. An estimated 60,000 refugees crossed from the DRC into Uganda's remote Bundibugyo regon following the ADF seizure of Kamango, 15 kilometers from the border. The severely impoverished Bundibugyo region in western Uganda at the foot of the Rwenzori mountain range became the main theater of operations for the ADF in 1991 after the group was driven from the Muslim districts of Kampala and the towns of central Uganda. In the wilderness of western Uganda, the ADF absorbed a number of poorly organized militant groups in the region with grievances against the Museveni regime, including the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), remnants of the shattered Rwenzori separatist movement and even former Idi Amin loyalists based in South Sudan.

With an estimated strength of 1,200 to 1,600 fighters operating from several bases in the DRC, the ADF continues to build its numbers through the abduction of young people and children as it has never established the popular appeal necessary to entice voluntary recruitment in significant numbers (Xinhua, July 15; *Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 16). The result is that the DRC-based ADF, despite being described in Kampala as a Muslim extremist group, is in fact largely non-Muslim and to a significant degree, even non-Ugandan (for the development of the ADF, see Terrorism Monitor, December 20, 2007). Muslims are a minority in Uganda, forming about 15 percent of the total population. The UPDF has described the ADF as a "real threat" to Uganda with ties to Somalia's extremist al-Shabaab movement (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 12). According to UPDF spokesman Paddy Ankunda, "The link to al-Shabaab could give [the] ADF new skills and explosives might sneak into the country. They have been opening up new camps in Bundibugyo and they are training; this might cause insecurity" (*Observer* [Kampala], July 14).

A recent Ugandan intelligence report indicates that the ADF headquarters is located in Makayoba, in the Eringeti District of North Kivu Province, with principal bases in Mwalika (Isale District) and Kikingi, close to the Rwenzori mountain range. The report says the group is largely armed with light infantry weapons suitable to use in the region, such as sub-machine guns, light and medium machine guns and mortars of the 60mm and 82mm varieties (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], July 16).

The political and overall leader of the ADF is Jamil Mukulu, with military affairs coming under the command of Hood Lukwago, Amis Kashada and Muhammad Kayira. The rarely-seen Mukulu, a convert to Islam from Catholicism, was part of Osama bin Laden's group in the Sudan in the 1990s and is believed to have obtained training in Pakistan and Afghanistan before launching his first attack on Uganda in 1996. Attempts to obtain Iraqi support for the ADF as the core of an "African mujahideen front" prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion of that country appear to have been a failure (*Christian Science Monitor*, April 18, 2003; *Daily Telegraph*, April 17, 2003). Ugandan authorities have subsequently claimed that the ADF has been trained and financed both by al-Qaeda and Sudanese intelligence. Al-Qaeda's involvement in the ADF remains unconfirmed by evidence and the description of Mukulu as "the African Bin Laden" seemed calculated to draw U.S. military and financial assistance, but there are stronger indications that Khartoum supported the group prior to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with South Sudan that brought an end to the proxy war being carried out in the region by Khartoum and Kampala.

The UPDF leadership is currently in a state of flux since Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni made sweeping changes in the UPDF command in May after delivering a speech highly critical of many of his military commanders but heavy in praise of his son, Brigadier Muhoozi Kainerugaba, whose spectacular rise through the ranks and command of Uganda's Special Forces has done little to alleviate Ugandan concerns that Museveni is preparing a dynastic succession. The Ugandan president used the opportunity to condemn criticism of his son: "To vilify, demonize, castigate, or harangue in a demented way against such an officer is sickness in a metaphorical sense. If you have no objectivity to see value, then your [own] leadership qualities are in question" (*Independent* [Kampala], June 21; for Muhoozi, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, May 2).

With a full understanding of the intractability of insurgencies in the lawless and inaccessible region where the borders of

Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC meet, Kampala has indicated its willingness to keep the option of a negotiated settlement open: "The Government is ready to talk to anybody who has grievances, including the ADF. If there is any genuine political group that wants dialogue, we are ready to do so because war is not an option" (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 16). Some 50 ADF fighters, including Hassan Nyanzi, the son of the ADF leader, have taken advantage of an amnesty offered by the Ugandan government over the last five years.

A new UN Intervention Brigade formed mainly by troops drawn from Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa has been deployed to the North Kivu region but has not yet participated in the fighting (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 16). Rwanda has accused the UN Intervention Brigade of seeking to form an alliance with Hutu rebels of the Kivu-based Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) to combat the allegedly Rwandan-supported M23 rebels of the northern Kivu region (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 16). Otherwise, the UPDF has declared it will not cross the border to attack the ADF without permission from the DRC (*New Vision* [Kampala], July 12).

NIGERIAN ARMY ABANDONS PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS IN MALI AND DARFUR TO COMBAT BOKO HARAM

Andrew McGregor

Nigeria has begun to pull back troops from peacekeeping missions in Mali and Darfur as its two-month-old offensive against Boko Haram militants begins to falter even as northern Nigerian extremists turn to soft targets to disrupt the efforts of security forces. Launched on May 14, the offensive has proved controversial from the start, with critics describing it as ineffective and shockingly casual in its regard for civilian lives.

Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan's order to withdraw Nigerian troops from Mali was attributed in some quarters to the replacement of a Nigerian by a Rwandan as the force commander of the peacekeeping force in Mali now that it has passed under UN control. [1] A Nigerian military source told a French news agency that the withdrawal was in response to the UN's change of command for the Malian peacekeeping force: "A non-Nigerian was appointed as force commander while we are putting so much into the mission. So we think we can make better use of those people [i.e. Nigerian troops] at home than to keep them where they are not appreciated" (AFP, July 18). The leader of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) since the formation of the force in January was Major-General Shehu Abdulkadir, who was joined by seven staff officers of the Nigerian Army in the AFISMA command (*Leadership* [Abuja], February 18; June 7). Last month, however, the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, announced the appointment of Major General Jean Bosco Kazura of Rwanda as the new force commander of the UN's Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali (MINUSMA), sidelining Nigeria's Major-General Shehu Abdulkadir, who was the force commander of AFISMA from its inception in January 2013 (PANA [Dakar], July 19). Nigerian officers were also excluded from the MINUSMA posts of deputy force commander, head of mission and deputy head of mission.

However, Côte d'Ivoire president and ECOWAS chairman Alassane Ouattara said he had received a letter from President Jonathan saying the withdrawal was in response to the need for infantry to cope with the domestic situation in Nigeria (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], July 19; *Nigerian Tribune*, July 19). A Nigerian Senate committee report on the April violence in Baga (Borno State, close to Lake Chad) stated that Nigeria's military had become dangerously overstretched between its campaign against Boko Haram and its international commitments. The committee urged the president to direct the armed forces to begin the urgent recruitment of large numbers of new officers and soldiers (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], June 26). According to the Nigerian chief-of-army-staff, Lieutenant Azubike Ihejirika, the Nigerian Army has recruited over 16,000 officers and men in the last two years, a figure that does not seem to agree with the Senate committee's assessment of the Army's recruiting efforts (*Vanguard* [Lagos], July 17). The exact number of men being pulled out of the roughly 1,200 man Nigerian peacekeeping deployment in Mali was not stated, but it is understood that nearly all the combat infantry will be pulled out, leaving behind only some engineers, signalers and other military specialists.

The JTF has warned that some Boko Haram elements would flee the operations in northeast Nigeria and seek refuge in quieter parts of the country, such as Jigawa State, where three Boko Haram members were killed in a pre-dawn raid on July 17 (*Vanguard* [Lagos], July 17). Many Boko Haram fighters also appear to have evaded the destruction of their bases in northern Borno by backtracking into Maiduguri, leading the JTF to begin operations in that city.

On July 3, the JTF began a major operation designed to clear out Boko Haram strongholds in the Bulabulin, Nganaram,

Aljajeri and Falluja wards of Maiduguri. Over the last year, many residents of the wards had been forced from their homes by Boko Haram members, who then consolidated the residences into well-connected compounds (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], July 8). An estimated 100 people were killed in the operation, which by July 8 had successfully cleared the militants from their compounds, liberated scores of abducted women and children and eliminated the Boko Haram Amir of Bulabulin and Nganaram, who was wanted for the murder of a teacher and three children in Maiduguri. The compounds contained a complex system of tunnels and bunkers that concealed large caches of arms and ammunition. Most disturbing were the mass graves and decomposing bodies stuffed down sewer pipes. (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], July 15; *This Day* [Lagos], July 16).

Though it once focused on security targets and Nigerian Christians, Boko Haram appears to be increasingly influenced by *takfiri* tendencies that have led it to target Muslims whose approach to Islam does not meet the approval of the movement's leadership. These tendencies were recently recognized by the Shehu of Borno, Abubakr ibn Umar Garbai al-Kanemi, the traditional ruler of Nigeria's Muslim Kanuri community (Boko Haram is estimated to be 80 percent Kanuri): "Boko Haram is not a deliberate attempt by Muslims to attack Christians; if it is, they would not have attacked me. If it is a question of targeting only Christians, 13 of my district heads, two council members and many other Muslims would not have been killed. The Amirs of Fika and Kano are Muslims, yet they were attacked by the sect, who also killed many other Muslims leaders" (*This Day* [Lagos], July 19; see also Terrorism Monitor Brief, February 8). The Shehu urged Nigerians to view Boko Haram as a common enemy and not as an attempt by Muslims to Islamize Nigeria.

Boko Haram appears to have responded to the government offensive by switching to soft targets such as schools. Using firearms and bombs, unidentified attackers recently struck a boarding school in Yobe State, killing 42 students and staff (AFP, July 13). The massacre in Yobe is the latest in a series of attacks on primary, secondary and university students and staff believed to have been carried out by Boko Haram since the government offensive began.

Boko Haram leader Abubakr Shekau explained his movement's position in a video released shortly after the Yobe attack: "We fully support the attack on this Western education school in Mamudo… Teachers who teach western education? We will kill them! We will kill them in front of their students, and tell the students to henceforth study the Qur'an." Shekau, however, did not go so far as to claim responsibility for the attacks, saying: "Our religion does not permit us to touch small children and women, we don't kill children" (AFP, July 13; Guardian [Lagos], July 15). Despite Shekau's insistence on Quranic education, even certain Quranic schools have been targeted for closure by the *takfiri* Boko Haram militants for minor religious differences, such as the use of prayer beads by religious teachers (Guardian [Lagos], July 15).

The mayhem and slaughter that follow in the wake of Boko Haram operatives has led to the creation of vigilante committees in Nigeria's Muslim north, including the most effective, the Borno Vigilance Youth Group (BVYG). Armed with sticks, knives and machetes, the BVYG has been conducting door-to-door searches for over five weeks in their hunt for Boko Haram gunmen, achieving enough success to be congratulated for their efforts by JTF spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Sagir Musa (*Guardian* [Lagos], July 19). On July 18, the BVYG culminated a three-week search for an elusive Boko Haram commander known as "Two-Face" (no other known name) by seizing him as he attempted to flee the manhunt in Maiduguri and handing him over to the JTF (*Guardian* [Lagos], July 18).

BVYG chairman Abubakr Mallum described the methods used by the vigilantes to uncover the hiding places of Boko Haram operatives: "We rely on informal information provided by some residents, including relatives of the fleeing Boko Haram members. Besides that, some of the youths in this massive manhunt had monitored how the attacks and killings were perpetrated by the gunmen in the various wards and communities" (*Guardian* [Lagos], July 19). In contrast, a senior official at the Nigerian Defense Ministry described the difficulties being experienced by the Nigerian military in coping with an asymmetric insurgency: "Our structure has never been geared towards the current challenges – suicide attacks, IED attacks. These are tactics that until very recently we only saw on television, just like the U.S. was rudely awakened by planes entering into buildings… It's not just about training Nigerians how to shoot. We need to look at what terrorism will look like in 20 years from now" (*Guardian* [Lagos], July 15).

Nigeria has also decided to withdraw two battalions from the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (still using the acronym of its predecessor, UNAMID) just as the security situation in the western region of Sudan begins to deteriorate once more (*Premium Times* [Abuja], July 19). UNAMID peacekeepers in Darfur have lately found themselves under attack, with seven peacekeepers killed and 17 wounded on July 13 near Nyala. Most of the casualties in the attack, the worst since UNAMID was formed in 2008, were from the Tanzanian contingent (Reuters, July 13). The

attack followed a July 3 ambush of Nigerian troops near Nyala that wounded three Nigerian peacekeepers (Reuters, July 4). A force of several hundred men will apparently remain in Guinea Bissau as part of the ECOWAS Security Mission to Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB), a 620-man contingent drawn from Nigeria, Senegal and Burkina Faso that has just extended its mandate to May, 2014 (Nigerian Tribune, July 19).

The Nigerian pullback will undoubtedly affect a number of UN peacekeeping operations, with Nigeria currently being the fourth largest contributor of troops to such missions. Nigerian military and police personnel are also deployed on peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Liberia, South Sudan, East Timor, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Note

1. For the Nigerian peacekeeping contingent in Mali, see Andrew McGregor, "Chad and Niger: France's Military Allies in Northern Mali," Aberfoyle International Security Special Report – February 15, 2013, http://www.aberfoylesecurity.com/?p=186.

Kurdish Rebels Look to Form Transitional Government in Syria

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

It has recently become clear that the Kurdish nationalist Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD - Democratic Union Party) wants to form an interim government in the Kurdish regions of Syria on the basis of imprisoned Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan's concept of "democratic confederalism," first announced in March, 2005. [1] The PYD is a member of the Koma Civaken Kurdistan (KCK - Kurdistan Communities Union), a Kurdish nationalist umbrella group that aims to create "federal structures in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq that are open for all Kurds and at the same time form an umbrella confederation for all four parts of Kurdistan." The PYD's decision to pursue a transitional government was backed by the 9th Assembly of the People's Congress of Kurdistan (KONGRA-GEL) held from June 30 to July 5. The KCK then took the decision to "advance the present politics in Rojava [a reference to Kurdish areas of Syria], to declare interim governance and to achieve the level of building a Kurdish local government" (Firat News Agency, June 12; July 10).

Abdullah Öcalan describes "democratic confederalism" as:

> a pyramid-like model of organization. Here it is the communities who talk, debate and make decisions. From the base to the top, the elected delegates would form a kind of loose coordinating body… Democratic confederalism is a system which takes into consideration the religious, ethnic and class differences in society… For Kurdistan, however, democratic confederalism is a movement which does not interpret the right to self-determination to establish a nation state, but develops its own democracy in spite of political boundaries. A Kurdish structure will develop through the creation of a federation of Kurds in Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq. By uniting on a higher level they will form a confederal system. [2]

The KCK's focus on Kurdish self-governance in Syria shows that the PKK thinks that this status is more achievable in Syria than in Iran or Turkey. The Kurds of northern Iraq are already effectively self-governed through the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The PYD plan is to create a draft constitution and to form "an interim transitional administration and get ready to prepare the suitable environment for free elections which would result in forming a legitimate, comprehensive and democratic administration." [3] Salih Muslim, the co-chair of the PYD, said the Syrian self-governance project was first planned in 2007 (AFP, July 19).

On July 20, the PYD discussed its self-governance plan with Syria's largely left-wing opposition front, the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCB), a political bloc that is unrecognized by the larger Syrian National Council (SNC). The PYD is the lone Kurdish member of the NCB, which said it would support the PYD's project only if it was a temporary measure and did not affect the unity of Syrian territory (Yekiti Media, July 24). According to PYD spokesperson Alan Semo, the transitional administration would be integrated into a future Syrian government (al-Monitor, July 19). The PYD also held meetings on the issue with the KRG's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), various opposition groups in northern Iraq and other Kurdish parties from Syria in order to hold a dialogue with most of the Kurdish groups that will be stakeholders in the Syrian project.

The Kurdish parties in Syria are roughly divided into two blocs that compete over influence inside the Kurdish-dominated areas of northern Syria:

- The first is the Qandil, or Sulaymaniya, bloc that unites the Syrian Kurdish parties close to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), whose headquarters are in the northern Iraq city of Sulaymaniya, and the KCK, whose main headquarters are in the Qandil mountains

of northern Iraq. The bloc includes institutions set up by the PKK such as the Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG - People's Defense Units), which acts as an unofficial Kurdish army, the Asayish, which acts as unofficial police force, and Jahbat al-Akrad (Kurdish Front), a pro-Kurdish Free Syrian Army (FSA) brigade that operates in the mixed Arab-Kurdish areas of al-Bab, Aleppo and Raqqah, where it shares power with other combatant groups.

- Another bloc is the Erbil bloc, which is unofficially led by Massoud Barzani's KDP and includes four parties that are members of the Democratic Political Union (Kurdwatch, January 7). These four Kurdish parties are also part of the bigger Kurdish National Council (KNC) formed on October 26, 2011 with the support of Barzani and PUK leader and Iraqi president Jalal al-Talabani.

The Erbil bloc is perceived to be close to Turkish policies, while the Qandil/Sulaymaniya bloc is seen as being closer to Russian and Iranian policies. Despite this, the KCK and the PYD say that they follow a neutral third line (not for or against the Syrian opposition), while the KDP doesn't support Kurds who join the main Syrian opposition bloc supported by Turkey.

These internal Kurdish divisions could pose a problem for the KCK's plan for self-governance since the Erbil bloc parties are afraid that in a future self-governed Kurdish region they will still be dominated by the KCK/PYD. Thus, it might be difficult to ensure the full participation of other Kurdish parties.

Moreover, there is opposition to the self-governance project from anti-Assad groups, Turkey and the West. The Syrian National Council (SNC) is opposed to the formation of a Kurdish interim government before the fall of Assad, a position shared by Turkey (al-Monitor, July 22). The U.S. State Department also expressed its opposition towards the plan (World Bulletin, July 23). Although the Syrian government seemed to have accepted temporary de facto Kurdish autonomy since 2012 in order to focus on fighting insurgent groups, Russia seems to be sympathetic to the PYD and enjoys good contacts with both the PYD and the left-wing Syrian NCB opposition coalition (al-Monitor, June 8).

The biggest challenge to a transitional government may lie in controlling the three Kurdish enclaves in northern Syria since these Kurdish areas are interspersed with Arab areas that are controlled by anti-Assad armed groups. The PYD needs a presence in these areas for easier access from Hassakah governorate to Ayn al-Arab and Afrin. Moreover, these mixed areas have increasingly come under the control of al-Qaeda linked proxies such as Jahbat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that aim to create an Islamic emirate and thus oppose Kurdish autonomy.

Clashes erupted on July 16 between Jabhat al-Nusra/ISIS and the YPG in Hassakah governorate (al-Monitor, July 16). On July 23, Jabhat al-Nusra/ISIS announced they had undertaken a decision to oppose the PKK's separation project, saying it could lead to an Arab-Kurdish war in Syria (Media Center Raqqah, July 23).

Since the autonomy plan does not have full local, regional or international support, it could face difficulties in implementation. Even though the PYD tries to make it clear to other rivals that they support the territorial integrity of Syria rather than its division, these rivals do not believe these assertions and often claim they are nothing more than a ploy by Assad. Thus, it is likely that fighting could increase and that the PYD will try to obtain more support from the West as it tries to include other Kurdish parties of the Erbil bloc in the self-governance project.

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Notes

1. Abdullah Öcalan, "The Declaration of Democratic Confederalism", KurdishMedia.com, April 2, 2005, http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=10174.
2. Ibid.
3. Statement of the Executive Committee of Democratic Society Movement (TEV-DEM), Qamishlo, July 18, 2013, http://rojhelat.info/en/?p=6162.

Can the Lebanese Military Ensure Domestic Security After the Battle at Abra?

Nicholas A. Heras

The Lebanese Armed Forces' recent battle against the Salafist Free Resistance Brigades in the Abra district of the southern coastal city of Sidon has increased scrutiny of the military's ability to maintain stability in Lebanon in the context of heightened political and sectarian tensions caused by the conflict in neighboring Syria (see Terrorism Monitor, July 12). Disputes over how best to support the armed Syrian opposition within the Lebanese militant Salafist community—of which Free Resistance Brigades leader Shaykh Ahmad al-Assir is a prominent member—are leading to renewed calls for jihad against the Assad government, its military partner Hezbollah and, among the most extreme Lebanese militant Salafists, against the Lebanese state and

military (see Terrorism Monitor, March 8; May 17).

The conflict at Abra was the second high-profile clash between the Lebanese military and Salafist militants this year, with the first occurring on February 2 in the Sunni majority, pro-Syrian opposition border town of Arsal (see Militant Leadership Monitor Brief, February 27).

The Lebanese military's 2013 budget allocation of $1.2 billion is inadequate to fund the wide range of roles that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have been asked to assume (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], July 10). Providing the Lebanese military with advanced weapons to confront regional opponents, such as Israel, and to fulfill its political mandate to confront internal challenges, including that posed by sectarian militias incensed by the conflict in Syria, has been supported by all of Lebanon's major political actors since the start of the Syrian civil war (*Daily Star* [Beirut], August 1, 2012). Lebanese politicians from both the nominally anti-Assad March 14 political bloc and the nominally pro-Assad March 8 political bloc reiterated their support for the Lebanese military after the fighting in Arsal and Abra and sectarian clashes in Tripoli (*al-Nahar* [Beirut], July 8). The Lebanese military reacted to Abra with an unusually direct condemnation of groups "determined to stoke sectarian tensions against the backdrop of the political divisions in Lebanon over military developments in Syria" (AFP, July 7).

The Lebanese military's statement followed the fighting at Abra and Shaykh al-Assir's call for Sunni Lebanese soldiers to defect and join a Lebanese Sunni rebellion. [1] Sunnis are believed to constitute a majority of the military (*Executive Magazine* [Beirut], August 3, 2010). Shaykh al-Assir's rhetoric deliberately echoes the Syrian civil war, where a larger number of Sunni Syrian soldiers turned their weapons against the Assad government. His exhortation is one of the most public expressions of a Lebanese militant Salafist narrative that all Lebanese government institutions are *kuffar* (infidel) in origin, even those such as the military that provide much-needed income and career prospects for youth from economically depressed Sunni communities.

The LAF's confrontation with Shaykh al-Assir's Free Resistance Brigades at Abra was noteworthy for the military's alleged collaboration with local militiamen sympathetic to Hezbollah and its reported torture of a member of al-Assir's group that it held in detention (see Terrorism Monitor, July 12). Responding to the March 14 bloc's criticism of the LAF, President Suleiman defended the military's role in Lebanon, reproaching March 14 politicians for exaggerating claims that the military was sympathetic to Hezbollah and issuing a call for armed groups, including Hezbollah, to remove themselves from Sidon (*as-Safir* [Beirut], July 8). The combat at Abra demonstrated that while the LAF has the capability of acting decisively against the challenges posed by armed militias, it was still forced to overcome severe institutional and operational limitations, even against a far weaker opponent like the Free Resistance Brigades.

Lebanese military intelligence, under the authority of the Ministry of Defense, is weakened by diminished resources and persistent institutional antagonism with the Ministry of the Interior's information branch. Due to its need for better intelligence gathering and operational reconnaissance, the Lebanese military is in many circumstances forced to rely upon local informants for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, including members of local militias or antagonistic political parties. This type of local engagement opens the Lebanese military up to criticism for being a biased actor in Lebanon's political and sectarian feuds. [2]

The fighting in Sidon, linked closely to the escalating impact of the Syrian conflict on certain segments of Lebanon's population, appears to have increased the urgency of support to the Lebanese military provided by anti-Assad Western countries. Moved to renew their pledge of support for the Lebanese armed forces, the governments of the United States, the UK and France are seeking to increase the capacity of the Lebanese military to police its borders and fight internal antagonists through continued support for training programs and accelerated sales of military hardware (*al-Nahar* [Beirut], June 28; *Daily Star* [Beirut], July 17; July 18).

Of these nations, the United States has paid special attention to building the capacity of the Lebanese military, particularly in providing training for urban combat and special operations, including counter-terrorism. [3] The U.S. Army and Marine Corps trainers have worked with Lebanese soldiers to improve their marksmanship skills and urban combat techniques in U.S.-based training courses. [4] Improving urban warfare skills at the company and regiment level and the establishment of advanced command-and-control technology to direct large-scale operations, are pressing needs for the Lebanese military. [5]

Lebanon's military is limited in its effectiveness by the conflicts and disagreements between the country's political blocs and this state of affairs is unlikely to be reversed without the formation of a new Cabinet and the development of a cohesive national strategy on how to respond to the Syrian conflict, including the growing presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. At the present time, the Lebanese military is an organization that has the capacity to act in limited operations

within the country but will need increased funding from the Lebanese government and foreign sources, more robust training partnerships with foreign militaries and a stronger political mandate to operate forcefully within the country when evidence is provided that such action is necessary.

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Notes

1. "Ahmad al-Assir Calls Everyone to the Roads to Jihad against the Lebanese Army and to Schism with It," June 23, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aq2NClmKIuc.
2. Information in this paragraph is based on interviews conducted by the author with a Lebanese army source with extensive operational experience throughout Lebanon who requested anonymity due to being on active duty. Interviews conducted on June 30 and July 10, 2013.
3. Michael Foote, "Operationalizing Strategic Policy in Lebanon," Special Warfare 25(2), April-June, 2012, pp. 31-36.
4. Michael Stevens, "FAST Marines Train with Lebanese Armed Forces," United States Central Command, April 30, 2010, http://www.centcom.mil/news/fast-marines-train-with-lebanese-armed-forces; "Guard Scouts Teach Tactics to Lebanese Counterparts." Georgia National Guard. June 30, 2011, http://gadod.net/index.php/news/ga-dod/archives/445-guard-scouts-teach-tactics-to-lebanese-counterparts; Teresa Coble, "U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers Graduate Qualification Training," March 13, 2012, http://www.army.mil/article/75618/.
5. Information based on interviews conducted by the author with a Lebanese army source with extensive operational experience throughout Lebanon who requested anonymity due to being on active duty. Interviews conducted on June 30 and July 10, 2013.

Syrian Jihadists Struggle for Supremacy in the Armed Opposition

Jamie Dettmer

Infighting in recent weeks between jihadists and other rebels in northern Syria that led to the assassination of two Free Syrian Army commanders is likely to worsen, compounding a power struggle within rebel ranks at a time when an emboldened Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is gaining major battlefield advances with the backing of Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and is threatening to retake the crucial city of Homs.

In order to confront the FSA with a common jihadist front, al-Qaeda affiliates Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) appear to be shelving their own highly public disagreement over leadership authority. "They have managed their dispute," says former Libyan jihadist Norman Benotman. "Their disagreement is still there but I think because of pressure from other jihadists and key al-Qaeda figures they have reached a way of working together and the jihadist forums are now playing down any divisions." [1]

ISIS was formed officially in April when the leader of al-Qaeda's Iraq branch, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced that his group would be merging with Jabhat al-Nusra. The new combined group, he said, would expand its activities across the area of the eastern Mediterranean (AP, April 10; June 15). His announcement prompted an open dispute with al-Nusra leader Abu Muhammad al-Golani, who, along with some other fighters, refused to operate under the ISIS banner.

In what appears to be a strategy designed to encourage both jihadist groups to come under the greater sway of core al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban has dispatched scores of fighters and is establishing camps in northern Syria (Reuters, July 14). According to Taliban commanders in Pakistan, the men were sent because: "our Arab brothers have come here for our support, we are bound to help them in their respective countries and that is what we did in Syria" (Reuters, July 14). The presence of the Taliban will likely help the top al-Qaeda leadership resolve lingering differences and mediate future quarrels between their two affiliated groups in Syria, said a senior Lebanese intelligence officer. [2]

The Taliban are not the only foreign jihadists arriving in a new surge reinforcing al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria to fight Assad or strengthen the jihadists in any future confrontations with FSA-loyal rebels or Syrian Kurds. According to Jordanian jihadist leader Muhammad Shalabi (a.k.a. Abu Sayyaf), more than 700 experienced Jordanian fighters have been sent to Syria in recent months (*al-Hayat*, July 14).

Abu Sayyaf blames the FSA for the infighting that led to the July 11 slaying by ISIS militants of Kamal Hamami (a.k.a. Abu Basir), a member of the FSA's Supreme Military Council. Hamami's shooting was carried out in front of other members of the FSA's Supreme Military Council and according to FSA sources the trigger was pulled by Abu Ayman al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State's Amir of Syria's coastal region. The flagrancy of the shooting suggests ISIS leaders

feel they can act with impunity or have confidence they are strong enough to confound any retaliation. [3] A few days earlier, other ISIS militants beheaded Fadi al-Qish, a rebel commander in the northern province of Idlib. In the case of al-Qish his severed head—along with the head of one of his men—was left on the ground as a crude warning to others not to cross the jihadists.

The motives for Hamami's shooting remain murky as it is still unclear whether it was a preplanned revenge for an operational disagreement or a killing prompted by Hamami's refusal to lift a checkpoint blocking his killer's path. Abu Sayyaf argues it was the former, saying that the FSA started the fighting (*al-Hayat*, July 14). That is not the viewpoint of FSA commanders, who are demanding Hamami's killer be handed over to face trial before a Shari'a court in Aleppo. Insisting that "We do not instigate battles with anyone," FSA spokesman Louay Almokdad says that the FSA has still not been informed as to why Hamami was killed, although he and other FSA commanders harbor suspicions that it was premeditated and sparked by differences over anti-Assad military operations in the area. [4]

Preplanned or not, Abu Sayyaf offers a clear line in on why jihadists and the FSA have clashed and why the intra-rebel violence is bound to increase: "There is a big difference between secular and Islamist fighters in terms of vision and purpose. For instance, the FSA wants a democratic secular regime to be imposed, and it does not have any problem with linking its positions to Western dictates once the regime falls." The jihadists "want to implement the law of God, which will lead to an inevitable clash… we arrived in Syria to rule by God Almighty's law. Many of those affiliated with the FSA were with the regime, and many have refused so far to cleanse themselves of the filth of Ba'athist rule; they declare that [the Ba'ath party] is secular. There are battalions in the FSA that ardently refuse to apply the Islamist system of government" (*al-Hayat*, July 14).

This latest bout of jihadist violence targeting the FSA comes after months of sharp rivalry between mainly foreign jihadists and more secular or religiously moderate Syrian-born rebels. It also foreshadowed the clashes in July that risk the development of a civil war within a civil war—a situation that will only strengthen Assad's hand and further complicate the delivery of U.S. or Western arms to the uprising.

Since the killing of al-Waqqas the al-Qaeda influence on the Syrian rebellion has grown and not just on the battlefield, where the jihadists have demonstrated better fighting skills and greater expertise in strategy and coordination. Both the smaller al-Nusra and the larger ISIS have sought to exert more power when it comes to the local governance of rebel enclaves in northern Syria. This seems to have aggravated already tense relations between local FSA fighters and jihadists as they jostle for control over the civilian population and compete for grain stocks, flour production facilities and other government property, including oil wells that can generate significant revenue.

Nearly 400,000 barrels of crude oil were produced by wells around the city of Raqqa and in the desert region to the east before the civil war and the jihadists have been quick to seize control of them. The oil is typically sold to local entrepreneurs for refining in home-built mini-refineries that produce usable albeit poor quality petrol and kerosene for cooking and heating stoves. General Salim Idriss, the head of the FSA's Supreme Military Council, has bristled at the jihadist control of the oil wells and recently asked for help from Western powers to seize the oilfields—an appeal likely to go unheeded (*Daily Telegraph*, May 18). The FSA, heavily divided, lacking funds and short on weapons, does not have the power to try to grab the oilfields itself, allowing the jihadists to continue to benefit economically and politically from the oil revenue.

The two jihadist groups have a different style when it comes to local governance, one of the root causes of the dispute between them. Al-Nusra has been less harsh in the city of Aleppo and some outlying towns than ISIS has been in the northeastern province of Raqqa, where locals complain of floggings and public executions of those jihadists deemed to be in breach of Islam.

In Aleppo and some northern villages, al-Nusra has limited its jihadi messages when interacting with locals in rebel-held territory and has talked more in terms of assisting the poor. In Aleppo, German filmmaker Marcel Mettelsiefen, who spent several weeks in the city, says: "You see streets being cleaned by al-Nusra and schools organized by al-Nusra… radical Islamists are doing well; they are very efficient and have more funds." [5]

However, much of the al-Nusra work that attracted the praise of civilians – social outreach and distribution of war spoils and the contrast between the discipline of its fighters and the corruption of many in the FSA ranks (notorious for plundering and selling humanitarian aid for profit) is now being overshadowed by the less nuanced and far harsher ISIS interaction with locals. The conduct of ISIS in Syria is a reflection of the style of its commander, al-Baghdadi, a highly competent, if brutal, leader who is immersed in the tactics pursued by al-Qaeda in Iraq, where suicide bombings, the targeting of collaborators and beheadings of hostages have

been standard tactics.

The ISIS regime has prompted a backlash, with occasional civilian protests in Raqqa and Deir al-Zor. According to a senior U.N. official, jihadists have also been interfering with the distribution of humanitarian aid. They have "gotten much more strident in diverting our convoys in the Deir al-Zor area where we have actually had commodities taken," says the executive director of the World Food Program, Ertharin Cousin. "We cannot afford to have any political group—whichever side they are on—impacting humanitarian assistance and politicizing it." [6]

Some FSA commanders say they will retaliate for the recent jihadist killings of their comrades. They say they have little alternative as the jihadists have been boasting they will kill more members of the FSA's Supreme Military Council. While FSA leaderas command many more fighters, the jihadists are often better equipped and benefit from funding and supplies provided by wealthy ideological sympathizers in the Gulf and from the revenue they can generate from the oilfields. External support, overall discipline and the battlefield supremacy gained by the skills al-Qaeda learned in post-invasion Iraq have given the jihadists the edge in their struggle to take the leading role in the rebellion against the Assad regime.

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Notes

1. Author's phone interview with Noman Benotman, July 11, 2013.
2. Author's interview with a senior Lebanese intelligence officer who requested anonymity, Beirut, Lebanon, July 17 2013.
3. Author's phone and Skype interviews with several FSA commanders who requested anonymity, July 12, 13 and 14, 2013.
4. Ibid.
5. Author's phone interview with Marcel Mettelsiefien, April 1, 2013.
6. Author's interview with the executive director of the World Food Program, Ertharin Cousin, Beirut, Lebanon, June 26, 2013.