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Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and supporters of Mursi attend a sit-in outside the Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in Cairo

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD DISSENTER KAMAL AL-HELBAWY SAYS CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE MURSI THREATENS THE MOVEMENT'S FUTURE

Andrew McGregor

Since his resignation from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in March 2011, Kamal al-Helbawy has been one of the strongest critics of the direction the movement has taken under the leadership of Supreme Guide Muhammad Badie and his associates, Khayrat al-Shater and Muhammad Mursi. As a former member of the all-important Brotherhood Guidance Bureau, al-Helbawy's resignation was a heavy blow to the Brotherhood's entry into electoral politics, though Helbawy says it was brought about not only because of Brotherhood deputy-leader Khayrat al-Shater's aborted attempt to seek the presidency, but also because of the leadership's "wavering and indecision" (*al-Ahram* [Cairo], January 10; for al-Shater, see Militant Leadership Monitor, July 31). During Muhammad Mursi's short-lived presidency as the Brotherhood's replacement candidate for al-Shater, al-Helbawy opposed the Brotherhood's reluctance to incorporate other visions in government institutions: "To pretend to have a monopoly on the truth is wrong. To insult secular people who are known for their piety is also wrong" (*al-Ahram*, November 14, 2012).

The young Helbawy became deeply involved in the international expansion of the Brotherhood, working on its behalf in Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Britain and Afghanistan, where he managed social services for the wives, widows and families of mujahideen fighters battling the Soviet invasion. However, it was this association with the Afghan mujahideen that prevented his return to Egypt, where Egyptian nationals returning from the battle-front were being arrested and imprisoned by the regime of Hosni Mubarak. Al-Helbawy spent the next 23 years in self-imposed exile in London, returning to Egypt only after the overthrow of Mubarak. Though he was greeted at the Cairo airport by some of the Brotherhood's most important members, within months he

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had resigned from the movement over its decision to abandon a carefully considered campaign to Islamize Egyptian society at a grass-roots level in favor of attempting to take political power through participation in the post-revolution elections. Al-Helbawy maintained that the movement should avoid politics and instead become an "academy for developing the character of Egypt's youth to prepare them for their professions, including legislators" (*The Majalla*, July 8). The newly resigned Helbawy threw his support behind fellow dissident and ex-Brotherhood member Abu al-Fotouh, who made a respectable showing as an independent candidate.

In analyzing the movement's ultimately disastrous attempt to enter high-level politics, al-Helbawy insists that the Brotherhood failed to present a vision for Egypt's future:

> [Muhammad Mursi] deepened the society's divisions, increased polarization, relied solely on his constituency, neglected to use those with expertise and experience here in Egypt, ignored requests to amend the constitution and change the government and the attorney general, issued the Pharaoh-esque constitutional declaration in November 2012 and refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Tamarud [Rebellion] campaign and the June 30 revolution. Following the ouster of President Mursi, [the Brotherhood's] mistakes include cutting off main thoroughfares for traffic, wantonly leveling accusations of apostasy, turning political competition into political conflict by using religion and valuing the return of Mursi over national reconciliation (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 26).

The 74-year-old Helbawy is no fan of military rule, but he maintains that "if the country is in peril, there is no institution that could remedy the situation better than the Armed Forces." According to the Brotherhood dissident, Mursi's inability to win a popular election precludes his return to the presidency. In this sense, the ongoing protests by his supporters are a needless incitement to violence that serve only to polarize Egyptian society and threaten the future of the Brotherhood both in Egypt and abroad. Al-Helbawy encourages the movement's youth members to "abandon the current leadership" and avoid tarnishing their reputations with violence, "regardless of what happens or what the clerics command."

Raised in a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated community and a member of the movement since age 12, al-Helbawy is close to the family of movement founder Hassan al-Banna (1906 – 1949) and sees closer adhesion to al-Banna's ideals as the solution to the movement's woes:

> We are seeing a deviation by the Brotherhood leadership of today from Shaykh Banna's vision. If a new, corrective leadership arises that embraces moderation, inclusiveness, understanding and God's word in a peaceful framework, then Banna's message can be restored to its proper place and overcome the current crisis to which the current has led them (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 26).

Al-Helbawy sees a missed opportunity in the Brotherhood's decision to enter the political arena: "[Al-Banna's] teachings could have actually led the Brotherhood to have a leading role in the new world order through intellectual propositions, fighting for justice and against oppression and educating the youth" (*Egypt Independent*, April 12, 2012). Instead of playing this role, al-Helbawy observes that "some of the leaders of the Brotherhood and their Islamist allies act contrary to the teachings of the Qu'ran, despite having memorized it word for word" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 26).

Al-Helbawy warns that the continuing security collapse in Egypt and the incendiary remarks made by leaders of groups such as al-Gama'a al-Islamiya risk American intervention along the established precedents of Iraq and Afghanistan:

> If the Americans come they will have their justifications, saying that Egypt is incapable of repelling terrorism, particularly in the Sinai, and that minority rights are not being protected, evidenced by the attacks on Coptic Christians and their churches or the attack on Shiites and their property, as happened in the village of Abu Nomros (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 26).

However, despite his differences with the current (and largely imprisoned) leadership of the movement, al-Helbawy insists he is still dedicated to making the movement's original ideals a reality: "Even when I criticize publicly, I'm hoping it helps reform them… I can never detach myself completely from the Muslim Brotherhood, even if I wanted to… I agree with having a nation based on Islam, but in so far as it respects Islam's basic values of respecting equality and human rights, providing basic necessities to your communities, and preserving the society's dignity" (*Egypt Independent* [Cairo], April 12, 2012).

TUNISIA BATTLES JIHADISTS ON ALGERIAN BORDER

Andrew McGregor

Even as tens of thousands of protesters take to the streets of Tunis to demand the ouster of the Islamist-led Tunisian government, the nation's poorly-organized military and security forces have launched an offensive against Islamist militants who have established bases in the lightly-populated Jabal Chaambi region of western Tunisia, close to the Algerian border. The military offensive is aided by elements of the Tunisian National Guard and anti-terrorist units of the Interior Ministry.

Political violence is rapidly rising in Tunisia, with homemade bombs targeting National Guard and Marine Guard facilities, and a first-ever car-bombing in Tunis leading to high levels of public anxiety reflected in rumors of new attacks and bombs in public places. Tensions peaked in Tunis after the brutal but unclaimed murder of opposition leader Muhammad Bahmi, who was shot 11 times outside his house in front of his wife and youngest daughter. Public anger led to violent street protests, which led chants of "Down with the Islamists" and the torching of an Ennahda office in Sidi Bouzid (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 26). The assassination came six months after the murder of opposition leader Chokri Belaid, who was believed to have been the target of Islamist extremists. In a situation that is beginning to resemble Egypt's political crisis, regular demonstrations against the Islamist-dominated government in Tunis have been countered by pro-government demonstrations.

Despite the apparent threat, the widespread belief in some quarters of Tunisian society that the "security crisis" is nothing more than a government-engineered fabrication has compelled Interior Minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou to recently address the allegations, describing them as "nonsense" and the work of people who "have no sense of patriotism… The terrorism in the Jabal Chaambi region is real and we are aware of the presence of armed groups in this location. We know every single one of them… They are Tunisian and Algerian nationals, members of the Uqba Ben Nafi Cell, which is affiliated with the so-called al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" (*al-Sahafah* [Tunis], August 1).

The decision to begin military operations was taken after the brutal murder of eight Tunisian soldiers who were ambushed in the Jabal Chaambi region on July 29. The eight were part of a Special Forces unit working out of Bizerte. Those who were not killed in the initial attack on their patrol vehicle had their throats slit and five suffered further mutilations to their corpses as the militants seized their weapons, ammunition, uniforms and other supplies (Tunis Afrique Presse, July 31; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 31).

There is speculation amongst security sources that the attackers were led by an Algerian militant named Kamal Ben Arbiya (a.k.a. Ilyas Abu Felda), who has since been arrested by Algerian authorities in the al-Wadi area near Tunisia's southern border (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 31; *al-Shuruq* [Tunis], July 31; *L'Expression* [Algiers], August 1).

Rumors in Tunis that Algeria had a hand in the deaths of the eight soldiers prompted a condemnation of such accounts by Algeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, followed by a clarification from Tunisia's Ennahdha Party that Algeria was one of Tunisia's most important strategic partners in the region (Tunis Times, August 1; *al-Shahid* [Tunis], August 3). Tunisia's Ministry of Defense said that Algerian intelligence was aiding its operations near Jabal Chaambi and there are reports that a joint 8,000-man Algerian and Tunisian force has been deployed in the southern border region despite Algerian statements saying Algerian forces would not operate on Tunisian territory (Tunisia Live/Mosaïque Radio, August 2; Xinhua, August 2). Algerian Special Forces reported killing three Tunisian militants in an August 3 ambush inside Algeria at Tebessa, some 580 kilometers southeast of Algiers (Xinhua, August 4).

What military spokesmen described as "a huge operation, with ground and air units" was launched in the early hours of August 2. The initial focus of the operation was a group of 10 to 15 militants surrounded by Tunisian regulars and Special Forces in the Mount Chaambi district. Helicopters also launched airstrikes against targets roughly ten miles from the town of Kasserine (Mosaïque FM [Tunis], August 2; AFP, August 2). In tandem with the field operations, Tunisia's Anti-Terrorism Unit arrested 12 "religious extremists" in Kasserine's Ettawba mosque, alleged to be under the control of Salafist groups (Mosaïque Radio [Tunis], August 2). The land operation was preceded by three days of shelling and airstrikes, but ran into trouble when Tunisian armor began to encounter landmines that disabled several tanks and caused a number of casualties (*al-Shuruq* [Tunis], August 5; *al-Safahah* [Tunis], July 30).

The political disarray in Tunisia has worked its way down into the always heavily politicized Tunisian security agencies, impeding effective counter-terrorism operations and intelligence-gathering. Former armed forces chief-of-staff General Rachid Ammar (retired as of June 25) said the Tunisian military no longer carries out intelligence gathering operations, resulting in the failure to identify the militants

and their bases in the Jabal Chaambi area (TunisiaLive, August 2). Even the wide distribution of land-mines in the Jabal Chaambi region appears to have escaped the notice of the military. Members of the civilian internal security services complain of "infiltration" by the Ennahda Party as being responsible for the increasing skepticism with which their activities are viewed in Tunisia and complain that units created to monitor jihadist activities around Jabal Chaambi and attempts to recruit Tunisian youth for jihad in Syria have been dissolved (*al-Sahafah* [Tunis], July 31). Meanwhile, an Algerian daily has reported that the Algerian-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has recruited over 200 Tunisians to fight American forces based in Iraq (*al-Fadjr* [Algiers], July 31).

Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of the Islamist Ennahda Party which has the lead role in the ruling coalition, has accused the political opposition of exploiting the outbreak of terrorism to further its own ends:

> Terrorism is not a phenomenon that is restricted to Tunisia, but it is an international phenomenon which has hit the strongest and most secure countries. Painful blows have been dealt to all the big countries and no official has come after the incidents to call for dissolving the parliament or the government. The moment of disaster is supposed to be a moment of unity and solidarity and not vice versa, but there is a political blackmailing of the government exploiting the developments… to achieve political objectives which they failed to achieve through the ballot boxes… Those who carry out these actions think that the Egyptian scenario can be implemented in Tunisia, but they do not know that the scenes of blood have made Tunisians hate this scenario and detest it (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 1).

In an approach patterned on events in pre-coup Egypt, Tunisia now has its own Tamarud (Rebellion) campaign dedicated to organizing demonstrations and collecting enough signatures to support the dissolution of the government and the National Constituent Assembly (*al-Shuruq* [Tunis], August 1). The failure of the current government to rally Tunisians behind the offensive in Jabal Chaambi and its inability to rein in Ansar al-Shari'a extremists despite an official ban on the organization are contributing to what appears to be the imminent collapse of the Islamist-led government.

Somalia's al-Shabaab Movement Turns on Itself

Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

Once strong and united, Somalia's al-Shabaab militant group is on the brink of self-destruction following a multi-year power struggle and the development of internal divisions within its leadership. At present, the group's amir, Ahmad Abdi Godane (a.k.a. Shaykh Mukhtar Abu Zubayr), is attempting to consolidate his position though a bloody campaign involving the elimination of his rivals within the movement.

Abdi Godane, who took over the al-Shabaab leadership in May 2008 after a U.S. airstrike killed the movement's founder, Adan Hashi Ayro, was victorious in a June 19 battle against his rivals in the coastal town of Barawe (Lower Shabelle region), one of the last remaining al-Shabaab strongholds in the south (Radio Muqdisho, June 20). The battle pitched Godane's faction against another led by Ibrahim Haji Jama (a.k.a. al-Afghani), a co-founder of al-Shabaab and was the first incident to turn al-Shabaab's secret enmity into an open war. The power struggle between the two men, who both hail from the same Isaaq clan prominent in the breakaway northern region of Somaliland, has been underway for the past three years and mirrors the deepening ideological divisions within the group.

Godane's faction is a purveyor of the global jihadi agenda and has close ties with al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, while al-Afghani was allied with the nationalist faction of Shaykh Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur" and Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, both high-ranking Islamist leaders. The foreign jihadists within al-Shabaab were also aligned with al-Afghani's group. However, Godane's specially trained Amniyat fighters, the group's intelligence division, killed both al-Afghani and fellow high-ranking Shabaab commander Shaykh Abdihamid Hashi Olhaye (a.k.a. Moallim Burhaan) in the battle at Barawe, about 110 miles southwest of Mogadishu (Hiiran.com, June 22).

Al-Shabaab's military spokesman, Shaykh Abdiaziz Abu Musab, confirmed the death of the two top leaders on June 29 by saying they were killed in a shoot-out when they tried to resist an arrest warrant from the group's court (Bar-Kulan, June 30). Several other al-Shabaab officers were killed alongside al-Afghani, who earned his moniker from his al-Qaeda training in Afghanistan. Moallim Burhaan was responsible for recruiting and mobilizing young fighters for al-Shabaab.

Al-Afghani, who was the target of a $5 million bounty offered by the United States, was the public face of a growing faction within al-Shabaab opposing the leadership of Abdi Godane

as the movement split into two factions based on ideological differences and clan affiliation.
In April, al-Afghani wrote a letter to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri that was published on various Islamist websites. In the letter, al-Afghani criticized Godane's leadership and the group's mistreatment of American jihadist Omar Hammami (a.k.a Abu Mansur al-Amriki), a well-known propaganda mouthpiece for the movement (Kismaayo News, April 16).

The letter was co-signed by Shaykh Mukhtar Robow (a.k.a. Abu Mansur), a high-ranking Shabaab leader and the group's former spokesman, Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, the former chairman of Hizb al-Islam, an Islamist group that eventually merged with al-Shabaab and Moallim Burhaan, who warned against "blind obedience" to Godane's leadership and orders (Sabahionline, April 12).

The letter was a clear indication of the growing hostility inside al-Shabaab's leadership, but it was unexpected that the group's amir would have the courage to silence al-Afghani, who was widely seen as a successor to Godane. The al-Shabaab leader's action may be seen as a last attempt to maintain power while sending a warning to his remaining opponents – a message that did not fall on deaf ears.

Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former army colonel and a hero of the 1977 Somalia-Ethiopia war, escaped from Barawe by boat on June 22. Aweys went first to the coastal town of Hobyo to seek asylum from his clan and then surrendered to the administration of Himan and Heeb (an autonomous regional state within the Somali federation) on June 25 following the killings of al-Afghani and several other Islamist officials (Mareeg Online, June 24; Jowhar.com [Mogadishu], June 13).

The 78-year-old Shaykh Aweys was initially reluctant to surrender to the UN-backed government of Somalia and to disown al-Shabaab, but later agreed to talks with the government about his fate after receiving assurances from his clan elders' that he would receive a government amnesty. However, on his arrival at Mogadishu Airport on June 29, Somalia's Special Forces arrested Aweys and beat up members of his delegation, including politicians and traditional elders (Dhacdooyinka.com, June, 29).

Aweys' arrest has angered politicians and elders from Aweys' Hawiye/Habr Gadir/Ayr clan, who felt betrayed and demanded the immediate release of the leader without conditions. Warlord Yusuf Muhammad Siyad, a former state minister for defense and a relative of Aweys, threatened to rescue the Shaykh by force (Dhacdooyinka.com, June 30).

After several local media outlets announced that Aweys, who appears on the UN sanctions list and is a U.S.-designated terrorist, would be handed over to the CIA, hundreds of violent protesters took to the streets of Mogadishu to demand his immediate release. Government authorities, however, denied that Aweys would be turned over to any foreign intelligence agency (Sahanjournal.com, July 5).

Though Aweys is still in the custody of Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and is believed to be negotiating with government officials secretly, his surrender has not helped the government. Aweys' detention is instead hampering the government's efforts to stabilize the country because militias from his clan, who enjoy a large presence in the capital, could be a threat to Mogadishu's security. It also represents a missed opportunity that the government could have exploited to attract senior al-Shabaab leaders to surrender because Shaykh Aweys has the influence to convince members of the group to join the government if he is given the chance.

Shaykh Aweys' erstwhile companion, Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, is now thought to be the last major opponent of Godane in the field. After fighting Godane's forces at Hudur (Bakool region) on June 22, Mukhtar Robow withdrew to the southern Bay and Bakool region, the home turf of his Rahanweyn clan, where his forces were reported to have again engaged in heavy fighting with Godane's faction on August 3 (Mareeg Online, July 30; Garowe Online, August 3). Prior to Aweys' arrest, Mukhtar Robow was in contact with clan leaders to negotiate the possibility of turning himself in under a government amnesty program (alldhacdo.com, June, 28). However, seeing the government's mistreatment of Shaykh Aweys and the betrayal of the Shaykh's clan, Abu Mansur is now unlikely to hand himself over to the government voluntarily, even though there is no way of returning to the Godane-led al-Shabaab. Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who was the first senior Islamist leader to surrender to the government in some years is now likely to be the last high-ranking al-Shabaab officer to defect as senior commanders of the movement will prefer remaining in the lines between the government and Godane rather than risk public humiliation.

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Bahrain's Monarchy Determined to Prevent Egyptian-Style Revolt in Mid-August

Andrew McGregor

Bahrain's Interior Ministry has warned the nation's largely Shiite political opposition against following through with plans for massive Egyptian-style pro-democracy street demonstrations planned for August 14. The opposition is calling for free elections in the Sunni-dominated monarchy and an end to the authoritative rule of Bahrain's al-Khalifah royal family.

With the Shi'a representing approximately 70 percent of Bahrain's population, all calls for democracy in Bahrain are interpreted as a revolutionary rejection of the existing order, which has proven extremely lucrative for Bahrain's Sunni rulers. Although Bahrain was an historic center for Shi'a commerce and education, its conquest by the Sunni al-Khalifah tribe in 1782 brought permanent changes to the political landscape, especially after Bahrain's new rulers began to offer incentives to other Sunni tribes to resettle there. The once-dominant indigenous Shi'a soon found themselves on the lowest rung of Bahrain's new social order. [1]

The current regime has the support of Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood, both of whom are wary of an alleged "U.S.-Iranian plot" against Bahrain. Though the alliance sounds improbable, allegations of this sort help keep the United States on the margins of the political struggle for Bahrain, which plays host to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

Most of Bahrain's press is strongly conservative, Sunni-dominated and pro-regime, with frequent commentaries decrying the "naïve Western media's" inability to distinguish "organized terrorism" from "peaceful unrest calling for democracy," as well as descriptions of the Arab Spring as a "false wave of change bringing only "destruction, havoc and destabilization" (*Akhbar al-Khalij* [Manama], July 30; *al-Ayyam* [Manama], July 30). Other accounts from the pro-regime media condemn the opposition's use of "terrorist tactics" and "sectarian incitement," as well as the "abuse of social media" to organize opposition protests and incite violence against security personnel (*al-Watan* [Manama], July 31; *al-Ayyam* [Manama], July 31; *Akhbar al-Khalij* [Manama], July 31).

In his Friday sermon of August 2, Manama's Shaykh Salah al-Juwdar warned that Bahrain was facing a "relentless war" against terrorism and extremism "supported by Iran, the Shiite Da'wah Party of Iraq and Lebanon's Hezbollah" (*Akhbar al-Khalij* [Manama], August 3). Other Sunni clerics have used their Friday sermons to warn against "tolerance and leniency to the forces of evil" and to call for full cooperation with the Emirate's security forces (*Akhbar al-Khalij* [Manama], July 27).

The Political Opposition

Bahrain's opposition consists in the main of five sometimes-feuding but generally cooperative and largely Shi'a organizations, including al-Wifaq (the National Islamic Society), Wa'd (the National Democratic Action Society), al-Ikha National Society, the National Democratic Assembly and the National Democratic Unity Gathering. To these may be added the leftist Progressive Democratic Tribune, constructed from the remains of the old Bahrain Communist Party (*al-Wasat* [Manama], July 25). Public protests and street demonstrations are often organized by the February 14 Youth Coalition, an opposition group that organizes through social networking sites.

The aims of the opposition were set forth in the October 2012 Manama Document, which compared the "non-democratic government" of Bahrain to the former regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. While noting that Bahrain is an oil-producing nation, the document says Bahrain still suffers "from an acute poor distribution of wealth and widespread poverty" that is exacerbated by the concentration of land, wealth and power in the hands of a small number of people. [2]

Shiite opposition groups complain that their observance of Ramadan has been marred by continued raids on personal residences and subsequent arrests that have no "legal pretext or judicial order" (al-Wifaq [Manama], July 29). Al-Wifaq general-secretary Shaykh Ali Salman is reported to have received threats from "parties affiliated with the regime" and recently had his home in al-Bidal al-Qadim assaulted by "masked civilian militias" (al-Wifaq [Manama], July 31). Pro-regime media have issued frequent calls for the arrest and detention of Ali Salman, though the Wifaq leader accuses the regime of forcing the "popular movement" to take to the streets due to the former's reluctance to engage in dialogue, defiantly remarking: "It is an honor to me to be arrested or martyred for the sake of the cause" (*al-Wifaq* [Manama], July 17; *al-Watan* [Manama], July 22).

The most important opposition cleric in Bahrain remains Ayatollah Shaykh Isa Ahmad Qassim, whose Friday sermons

are often followed by public marches and demonstrations. Isa Qassim, who was accused of organizing an attempted coup in 1996, plays an important but unofficial role in the leadership of al-Wafiq, the most important opposition movement. The regime considers Shaykh Qassim to be an Iranian-backed radical; after Qassim met with a senior U.S. State Department official in May, three Sunni political groups issued a statement saying the meeting exposed the U.S. government's "support for terrorism operations in Bahrain" (BBC, May 24, 2013). In a recent Friday sermon, al-Qassim said: "the belief that a solution could be struck with the regime is only a mirage… The regime is using its political promises to mask and camouflage its real intentions on the ground - an escalation of violence against its own citizens with utmost ferocity" (Ahlul Bayt News Agency, July 13).

Bahrain's opposition is of the general belief that the regime has been given a green light by the United States and the Sunni-dominated monarchies of the Gulf to take whatever action is necessary to repress a Shiite-led pro-democracy movement (Fars News Agency [Tehran], July 28). The opposition alleges that their peaceful overtures have been met with repression, collective punishment, killings, torture, abductions, assaults on women and the destruction of Shiite mosques (*al-Wasat* [Manama], July 31). Much of the political violence takes place in Bahrain's many Shiite villages, some of which have tried to fortify themselves against incursions by security forces. Such operations tend to finish in clashes with Shiite villagers often using homemade weapons against security personnel.

A Terrorist Threat in Bahrain?

Though charges of "terrorism" are routinely applied by the regime and its supporters to the Shi'a opposition, an actual terrorist campaign has been slow to evolve in Bahrain. An indicator that this might change came in the rather ineffective car-bombing of a mosque parking-lot in the al-Rifa'a suburb of Manama on July 17.

The car-bomb appeared to consist of a single gas cylinder and caused no injuries. One Bahraini daily pointed an improbable finger of responsibility at Lebanon's Shiite Hezbollah, citing the group's "specialization" in car-bombs (*Akhbar al-Khalij* [Manama], July 22). The blast came during evening *tarawih* prayers (extra night-time congregational prayers conducted during Ramadan) (*Akhbar al-Khalij* [Manama], July 20). Three suspects were reported to have been arrested on July 27, though neither their identities nor affiliations were given immediately (*Ilaf*, July 27).

The Rifa'a neighborhood is home to the palaces of the royal family and pro-regime media quickly interpreted the blast as an attempt to strike the royal family. The choice of target may have had some symbolic significance, as the mosque in question was named for Shaykh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifah, Bahrain's former Amir and the father of the current king. A claim of responsibility was issued by the little-known al-Ashtar Brigade that appeared to support this interpretation: "Our men from al-Ashtar Brigade were able to infiltrate the regime's headquarters and conduct a unique operation in Rifa'a… We assure that our target is not any place of worship, but it was a final warning to the regime that our men are capable of reaching anywhere and we demand immediate release of our sisters in prison" (Gulf Daily News [Manama], July 19). The reference to "our sisters in prison" appeared to be an attempt to implicate al-Wifaq, which has been campaigning for the release of female detainees. The five main opposition groups responded to al-Ashtar's statement by issuing a "call for peacefulness and renunciation of violence" (al-Wifaq [Manama], July 26).

In response to the opposition's rejection of violence, the Ashtar Brigade's statement included a defense of their methods:

> Legitimate resistance is not violence, and the brigade will not abandon resistance and will protect resistance with their blood until Bahrain is liberated from the filth of the al-Khalifah occupiers…With great regret, we have followed the statements of the political opposition societies condemning the legitimate resistance, calling it violence, at a time when the mercenaries of the enemy continue committing the ugliest crimes and violations against the sons of our people… We stress the right of everyone to act in accordance with his viewpoint and his mechanism, be it the approach of resistance or peacefulness (Bahrain Online, July 26).

Despite al-Wifaq's strong condemnation of the attack and any other form of political violence, Bahrain's pro-regime press still took the opportunity to speculate on al-Wifaq's involvement, saying the group "always raises suspicions" or "blesses terrorism" (al-Wifaq [Manama], July 18; *al-Watan* [Manama], July 18; July 26).

In the days after the parking lot bombing, Bahrain's pro-regime press carried dozens of formulaic condemnations of the attack from various Sunni Islamic organizations, most of which concluded with a rejection of sectarianism and demands for the immediate and firm application of anti-terrorism legislation. One such statement identified Shaykh Ali Salman and Shaykh Isa Ahmad Qassim as the agents behind the bombing, alleging they were backed by Iran and "Hezbollah terrorists" (Akhbar al-Khalij [Manama], July

20). Ali Salman condemned the bombing, but called for an investigation by a "neutral body," saying he "does not have to believe the official story" (al-Wifaq [Manama], August 4). Some quarters of the opposition have described the blast as a "fabricated" attack designed to defame and delegitimize the political opposition just as new and repressive legislation is introduced prior to the mid-August protests (Bahrain Mirror, July 19). The bombing was immediately followed by the Interior Ministry's prohibition of mass-protests scheduled for July 19, followed by a ban on an already rescheduled protest set for July 26 (*al-Wasat* [Manama], July 21).

Another car bomb exploded near a recreational area west of Manama on August 3, again without casualties. The method appeared similar to the al-Rifa'a bombing, with two gas cylinders used this time, though only one cylinder was successfully detonated.

The Pre-Protest Crackdown

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa issued new decrees on August 1 giving authorities wide powers to revoke citizenship for participation in terrorism and to interrupt the funding of groups suspected of supporting terrorist acts (Bahrain News Agency, August 1). Also approved was a bill banning gatherings and rallies in Manama, the Bahraini capital. Friday protests have become common in Manama as opposition supporters call for the release of political prisoners. A number of Sunni MPs have called for Bahraini citizenship to be withdrawn from anyone who "incites terrorism via religious channels or social networking sites" (*al-Watan* [Manama], July 19). Moderates in the opposition complain they are being forced into the same camp as the more radical opposition due to the regime's inflexibility.

Bahrain's security services have repeatedly demanded that local health professionals refuse medical treatment to injured protesters or sought their cooperation in identifying such patients, arresting those doctors and nurses who have displayed reluctance in these efforts. Now, according to a Twitter report from a Manama doctors' association, the emergency center of the Salmaniya Medical Complex has been put under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior two weeks before the expected protests, complete with security cameras to record those who might seek treatment for demonstration-related injuries (Bahrain Mirror, August 1).

In the crackdown that followed the February, 2011 protests, some 38 Shiite mosques and *hussainiya*-s (Shiite congregation halls) were destroyed. The government pledged to rebuild these structures, but so far only four mosques have been restored, while the government now looks to use the remaining land for other purposes (*as-Safir* [Beirut], July 23). Attacks on Shiite mosques have intensified lately both in the capital and in other urban centers, leading Shaykh Ali Salman to ask why officials have failed to address the trend: "Where are the directives to protect sacred places and take measures against perpetrators of such attacks?" (Bahrain Mirror, July 19; al-Alam [Tehran], July 25; *as-Safir* [Beirut], July 23).

The Role of Iran

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei sees the political turmoil in Bahrain as part of a larger plot pursued by "Western and Zionist spy agencies" to prevent Islamic unity by sparking dissension in the Muslim community. The Ayatollah has tried to defuse the sectarian aspect of the Bahraini protests, preferring to describe it publically as a natural and understandable preference for the equitable treatment of Bahrain's majority population: "In Bahrain, an oppressed majority, which has been deprived of the right of voting and other basic rights of a nation for long years, has risen to ask for its rights... Should this strife be seen as a Shiite-Sunni clash only because the oppressed majority is Shiite and the secular and tyrannical government pretends to be Sunni?" (Fars News Agency [Tehran], July 29).

Iran is especially opposed to the presence of the Gulf Cooperation Council's multi-nation Peninsular Shield Force and the regime's reliance on foreign recruitment (particularly from South Asia) for its security forces (for the Peninsular Shield Force, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, March 24, 2011). According to Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian: "The continued presence of foreign law enforcement forces in Bahrain and (Manama's) noncompliance with effective national talks will undermine people's trust" (Fars News Agency, July 20).

King Hamad insists he is always ready for dialogue with the opposition while alluding to "foreign parties around us who have interest in instability [and] are politically encouraging violence, which certainly threatens Bahrain's stability… Terror will not be allowed to have a foothold in a country that is a leader in development and civilization" (*Ilaf*, July 27).

Conclusion

The blast at al-Rifa'a did little to advance the cause of the political opposition in Bahrain; to the contrary, it has diverted attention from the policies of the Khalifah regime and helped authorities paint the opposition as terrorists, or

potential terrorists at least. If the international community adopts this view (easily done at a time when Shiites in Lebanon, Syria and Iran are being defined as threats to Western interests and allies in the Middle East), the Khalifah regime will have a free hand in disposing of demonstrators who violate the new "anti-terrorism" laws by taking to the streets in mid-August. Though the planned protests are modeled on those of Egypt, there are significant differences in the two situations; in Bahrain the military is solidly on the side of the regime, foreign military forces are on hand to deal with threats that cannot be contained by Bahrain's security services, the opposition has only minimal international support and is publicly tainted by its alleged association with the Iranian regime.

Washington's pro-democracy rhetoric continues to clash with its strategic disinterest in promoting democracy at the risk of jeopardizing American interests in the Middle East, a situation that is complicated by the demands of Shiite pro-democracy activists in Bahrain for protection from the "international community" (i.e. the United States and United Nations) against the regime's "repeated human rights violations" (al-Wifaq [Manama], July 31). There is a perception amongst some Bahraini politicians that the U.S. ambassador and other foreign envoys are "meddling" in Bahrain's internal affairs (*al-Watan* [Manama], July 30).

Though the Manama Document claimed that the regime's "wrong practices of threatening people demanding reforms and democracy cannot succeed," there is every sign that the al-Khalifah family will try to ride out the protests scheduled for mid-August knowing they have the full support of their more powerful but similarly autocratic neighbors in the Gulf region. They are also well aware that American support for universal democracy will not overcome fears of a democratically elected Shi'a majority government that could come under Iranian influence in a small nation that provides a vital and highly strategic base for the U.S. Fifth Fleet. There is also a danger that the majority Shi'a population of Saudi Arabia's oil-producing Eastern Province might be inspired to follow the Bahrain example and produce further instability in the Gulf Region. However, the monarchy's hard line on political reform has essentially polarized the political debate in Bahrain, with secularists and moderates being pushed aside in a confrontation with increasingly sectarian tones. Canceling political protests indefinitely is not a sustainable approach to containing political unrest in Bahrain, where attempts to squash the opposition's mid-August demonstrations through draconian legislation and punitive enforcement could ironically lead to the type of political violence most feared by the Emirate's rulers.

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Notes

1. Graham Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*, New York, 1999, pp. 119-123.
2. Manama Document, Bahrain Justice and Development Movement, October 12, 2011, http://www.bahrainjdm.org/2011/10/13/manama-document-english/.

Royal Rivalry in the Levant: Saudi Arabia and Qatar Duel over Syria

Chris Zambelis

The cycle of calamity plaguing Syria continues to intensify with no end in sight. Syria's predicament today is far removed from the initial outburst of mass dissent witnessed in March 2011 that saw the Ba'athist regime violently suppress demonstrations demanding political change and reform. This sequence of events paved the way for the incremental militarization of the uprising by defected members of the Syrian army and ordinary civilians. While the circumstances behind these early episodes of the rebellion remain relevant, the initial displays of violent resistance combined with the formation of various competing political opposition blocs inside Syria and abroad have since given way to a lethal and expansive insurgency increasingly influenced by hardline Islamist currents. The stream of foreign fighters that are filling the ranks of the insurgency has added another layer of complexity to the Syrian imbroglio. These facets of the rebellion are particularly salient when contemplated against the backdrop of the opposition's repeated demands for lethal arms and political recognition from foreign powers. In this context, understanding the role of foreign actors, especially the Persian Gulf monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in aiding and sustaining the various political and violent strands of the Syrian opposition, is essential to deciphering Syria.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar appear united in their opposition to the Ba'athist regime. This appearance of unity, however, masks a deeper rivalry for regional influence that is being played out in parallel with the broader, multi-dimensional proxy battle that has come to embody Syria's civil war. This

shadow conflict is reflected in the agendas of the competing factions being backed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar (*al-Safir* [Beirut], March 21). The friction between Saudi Arabia and Qatar has been readily apparent as the Syrian National Council (SNC), National Council for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCR), the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) and other movements vie for primacy within the Syrian opposition (*al-Hayat*, June 8). The existing overlap in terms of ideology between the disparate insurgent factions and growing indications of their tactical and operational collaboration on the battlefield does not offset the persistence of major rifts between these groups.

Widely viewed as the most active in its support for the Syrian opposition, Qatar has been accused of empowering many of the most ideologically extreme militant factions. This includes armed detachments affiliated with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and others associated with al-Qaeda, such as Jabhat al-Nusra (The Victory Front) (Financial Times [London], May 17). Ultraconservative Salafist factions such as Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya (Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant) and the umbrella Syrian Islamic Front (SIF) under which it operates, are also known to be favored by Qatar. In contrast, Saudi Arabia is seen as enabling armed factions operating under the auspices of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and its Supreme Military Council (SMC) as well as Islamist factions deemed to be lying outside of al-Qaeda's purview (*al-Safir*, July 19). Saudi Arabia also tends to favor the factions that make up the umbrella Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF), which is seen as a comparatively more moderate than those that make up their SIF counterpart.

Officially, the U.S. reluctance to provide more extensive and lethal forms of military support to the Syrian opposition is being attributed to the prevailing influence of radical Islamist currents within the insurgency. Reports that Saudi Arabia, with U.S. encouragement, has effectively supplanted Qatar as the principal supporter of the Syrian rebellion add another layer of intrigue to an increasingly convoluted situation (*al-Safir*, July 19). The decision by former Qatari Amir Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani to abdicate his throne in favor of his son may also suggest that important changes are forthcoming in regards to Qatar's position toward Syria. The new Qatari Amir, Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, declared his opposition to the sectarianism and other divides that affect the Arab world (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], June 28). This statement may reflect a coming shift in Qatar's stance on Syria to one that is more in line with Saudi Arabia's position. Yet the muddled and fluid nature of the Syrian uprising is not conducive to engineering an insurgency whose elements adhere to narrowly defined parameters. The role of independent financiers, charity organizations and sympathetic publics in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, among other places, is also vital to fueling the insurrection. The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a violent faction believed to be an offshoot of al-Qaeda's Iraqi affiliate the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), has raised another set of anxieties. ISIS's July assassination of Muhammad Kamal al-Hamami, an FSA commander and member of the SMC in Latakia, is illustrative of the extent of the ideological divides within the insurgency (al-Arabiya [Abu Dhabi], July 12).

Geopolitical Backdrop

Due to Syria's alliance with Iran and Hezbollah – a bloc known as the "Resistance Axis" – the uprising in Syria quickly assumed geopolitical overtones. The insurrection in Syria afforded the GCC a chance to undercut Iranian influence in the Middle East. In this regard, the resort to sectarian vitriol by the Sunni-led monarchies and affiliated clergy emphasizing the Shi'a pedigree of the Islamic Republic and the prominent Alawite face of the Ba'athist regime was calibrated to stir up religious tensions between Sunni and Shi'a believers. The provision of support for radical Islamist movements, especially ultraconservative Salafist groups, has been central to the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. Consequently, the positions of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are often portrayed interchangeably when it comes to their shared goal of toppling the Ba'athist regime. Their fellow GCC allies, particularly the Sunni-led monarchies representing the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Bahrain, as well as wealthy private donors, religious associations and ordinary individuals, have likewise provided extensive moral, financial and logistical support to the political and armed factions struggling against the Ba'athist regime (al-Monitor, July 2; *The National* [Abu Dhabi], February 3). Saudi Arabia in particular saw the uprising in Syria as an opportunity to undermine the Hezbollah-led March 8 coalition in Lebanon while strengthening the March 14 coalition headed by the Sunni-led Future Movement.

The fall of entrenched despots in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, coupled with the groundswell of grassroots mobilization in Bahrain that would later prompt Saudi-led forces to intervene to prop up Manama under the auspices of the GCC's Peninsula Shield force, sent shockwaves throughout the Persian Gulf (al-Jazeera, July 2, 2011). The ongoing crackdown by UAE authorities against purported members of the al-Islah (Reform) movement, which is accused of engaging in subversive activities and receiving

support from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, combined with intensifying exhibitions of dissent by opposition forces in Kuwait, continue to raise anxieties within the GCC (al-Jazeera, June 19; al-Jazeera, April 19). While not a member of the GCC, Jordan is also highly vulnerable to the developments emanating out of Syria. It has become apparent that the royal dynasties are no longer insulated from the political turbulence shaking the Arab world.

A close inspection of the respective approaches of Saudi Arabia and Qatar toward Syria reflect divergent strategies. While a number of the key protagonists closely involved in Syria, including Saudi Arabia, have formally cut ties with Damascus and are actively engaging with the opposition, Qatar, for example, has gone as far as to transfer Syria's embassy in Doha to the NCR (al-Jazeera, March 28). While Saudi Arabia has maintained an uncompromising diplomatic posture toward Damascus, the realization has started to set it in in Riyadh that the Ba'athist regime has proven far more resilient and capable than initially believed, while there is a consistent inability on the part of the political opposition and insurgents to assert and consolidate meaningful authority and some semblance of legitimacy (*The National*, May 15).

Royal Rivalry

The roots of the Saudi-Qatari rivalry run deep. In spite of their vast size discrepancy, Saudi Arabia and Qatar share many attributes. Both countries are parties to entrenched and multifaceted strategic relationships with the United States. Each also boasts tremendous energy wealth – Saudi Arabia is the world's largest exporter of crude oil while Qatar is the world's top exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Saudi Arabia and Qatar have also amassed huge reserves of international currency. Both operate monarchical systems of governance marked by varying degrees of authoritarianism and promulgate a common ideology derived from ultraconservative Wahhabist and Salafist philosophies. Yet the sum of these commonalities conceals a multitude of divergences on questions related to foreign policy. The disparate reactions by Saudi Arabia and Qatar to the wave of popular revolutionary upheaval that gripped the Arab world in late 2010 are exemplary cases in point. Fearing the potential of a grassroots revolt by its own people, Saudi Arabia viewed the calls for freedom, justice and democracy by Arab and Muslim publics with great trepidation. Saudi Arabia's fears about the changing geopolitical landscape in the Middle East were compounded when the United States appeared to assent to the fall of Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. In contrast, Qatar viewed the wave of uprisings as a chance to enhance its regional posture and expand its influence globally.

Despite its diminutive stature, Qatar has employed an ambitious and aggressive foreign policy that has allowed it to wield tremendous regional and international influence that far transcends its tiny geography and population. Qatar has effectively leveraged its wealth through institutions such as its network of Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs). It has also relied on instruments of soft power, including the al-Jazeera satellite television network, which is owned and operated by the Qatari royal family, to throw its weight behind the political opposition movements that have upended the status quo. Despite Qatar's stance on the crisis in Syria today, it was not too long ago that Doha enjoyed a relatively amicable relationship with Syria, Iran and Hezbollah while serving as a mediator between regional and international rivals. Qatar, in essence, has excelled at engaging numerous and contradictory actors, including the United States; Qatar serves as host to a forward headquarters of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).

Qatar also has a history of challenging Saudi Arabia. At one time, al-Jazeera provided members of the Saudi political opposition operating in exile with a forum to address Arab audiences (al-Jazeera, November 12, 2003). Qatar has also sought to circumvent Saudi Arabia's preeminent position in the energy sector by proposing the development of a network of natural gas pipelines that would transport Qatari natural gas to Turkey and Europe (Today's Zaman, January 11, 2011; *The National*, August 26, 2009). Many of the most economically feasible proposals involving pipelines originating from Qatar would involve traversing Saudi territory. This gives Saudi Arabia tremendous leverage over Qatar. The fact that Qatar shares the South Pars natural gas field – the world's largest – with Iran is another point of concern for Saudi Arabia. Qatar's interest in enhancing its ability to expand its natural gas footprint is often mentioned as a motivating factor in its strategy toward Syria. However, it was Qatar's support for the numerous Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated associations and political parties in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and eventually Syria, that drew the ire of Saudi Arabia (*Daily Star* [Beirut], July 13). Qatar's strategy also coincided with Turkey's approach to the region. The electoral victory of now-ousted Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) helped midwife what came to be viewed as an axis between Qatar, Turkey and Egypt (*al-Safir*, July 22; Today's Zaman [Istanbul], July 16).

Saudi Arabia's fears of the Muslim Brotherhood are manifold. At one point, Saudi Arabia provided refuge for persecuted members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were

targeted by the likes of Gamal Abd al-Nasser in Egypt and Hafez al-Assad in Syria. Saudi Arabia also enabled exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood to organize opposition activities designed to undermine the secular, socialist and pan-Arab nationalist ideals promulgated by republican Arab governments. However, as the self-proclaimed "Custodian of the Two Holy Sites of Mecca and Medina," Saudi Arabia began to grow wary as the Muslim Brotherhood cadres active in the Kingdom began to make inroads among Saudis. The Wahabbist and Salafist principles that serve as the foundation of Saudi Arabia's legitimacy, especially as they relate to the unquestioned loyalty demanded by its rulers, was inherently threatened by the activist-oriented approach to politics advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi animosity toward the Muslim Brotherhood also stems from the latter's support for Saddam Hussein following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (al-Monitor, July 4).

Saudi Arabia is a deeply authoritarian regime that is witnessing growing displays of resentment and anger by disaffected members of its own population. This includes a sizeable segment of its youthful, politically aware and social media savvy population that is calling for greater freedom and reform and a sizeable Shi'a minority that faces severe discrimination by a political and religious establishment that views them as heretics and apostates. Consequently, Saudi Arabia fears the precedent of a democratic, modern and Islamist-oriented movement that can organize political action. It should come as no surprise that Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE and Kuwait, has welcomed Mursi's fall in Egypt. Democracy, by definition, severely threatens the viability of the royal family as the dominant political and economic entity. Saudi Arabia also harbors concerns over the potential return of Egypt as a major geopolitical player in the Middle East. Egypt's limited rapprochement with Iran and Hezbollah under the FJP is a case in point. In the long run, Egypt may reemerge to challenge Saudi Arabia and rekindle their natural rivalry. Qatar, on the other hand, due its tiny population – almost 80 percent of Qatar's population of 2.5 million is made up of foreign nationals – is relatively insulated from the kind of domestic opposition that threatens its neighbors. On account of its small size, it is also agile enough to recalibrate its foreign policy to benefit from what are often conflicting and contradictory regional interests.

Conclusion

Foreign actors will continue to be instrumental in the course of events in Syria. Despite Saudi Arabia's apparent efforts to rein in segments of the insurgency deemed to be threatening to the wider region, the Syrian insurgency is operating through its own inertia. The reconstitution of al-Qaeda-affiliated elements in Iraq that are making forays into Syria raises another set of important challenges. It is also unlikely that the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar will cease to be a factor affecting events in Syria. Meanwhile, the Ba'athist regime, emboldened by a series of major military gains over the last few months, is likely to prefer having to deal with an opposition operating under Saudi rather than Qatari auspices. Among other things, Syria may be calculating that Saudi Arabia's growing anxiety over the course of the insurgency and its impact on regional stability may provide a window of opportunity for some sort of agreement to end the crisis.

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