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Egyptian Army (Source AP)

JIHADIS CHALLENGE THE ROLE OF THE ARAB ARMIES

Andrew McGregor

With one Arab army locked in battle against rebels (including Sunni Islamists) in Syria and another apparently set on cleansing the Egyptian political scene of its Islamist presence, a prominent jihadist scholar has questioned the role of Arab militaries in the modern Middle East. In an article entitled “Is There Any Legitimacy Left for the Arab Armies?” Shaykh Abu Abdullah Ahmad al-Jijeli calls on Arabs to look closely at the fighting doctrines, methods, education and loyalties of their military elites rather than accept the claims of these militaries that they are guardians of the nation or defenders of the interests of the *umma* (Islamic community). Al-Jijeli suggests that the leaders of the Arab armies form a corrupt, Westernized elite that exists free of oversight or accountability.

Shaykh al-Jijeli identifies the following as the main problems with modern Arab militaries:

- Arab militaries have a common allegiance to the “secular trend” and are hostile to Islam.
- Blind obedience to military commanders comes before obeying the law of Allah. Orders must be executed without reference to the Koran or Sunna.
- The movement and freedom of Arab armies is inhibited by bilateral and multilateral alliances that tie these armies into a global military and security system.
- Rather than following the law, these armies live above it without accountability, making presidents and policies in accordance with their own corrupt principles and the interests of their supporters in Russia, Europe or America.
- Under the pretexts of counterterrorism and international legitimacy, the Arab armies allow themselves to be moved about according to the will of the Western

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“crusader armies.”

- The military leaderships ignore mandatory retirement ages in order to perpetuate themselves in power for as long as possible. The shaykh cites as an example Algerian army chief General Ahmed Gaïd Salah, who is “near the end of his ninth decade.”

The shaykh concludes that Arab Muslims have the right “by every standard” to question the legitimacy of these armies following their “horrible crimes.” According to al-Jijeli, the Algerian, Syrian and Egyptian peoples could have avoided their current misfortunes and the crimes of their corrupt militaries if they had owned arms individually, “the only guarantee to remain alive, in a world that only understands the sounds of bullets and only respects the heavy boots.”

Al-Jijeli’s critique was followed a few days later by a statement delivered by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, a spokesman for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in which al-Adnani called on Salafists to join the battle against the Egyptian military.

In Sunni Islam, the military traditionally undertakes the functions of defense and jihad on behalf of the community, rendering it basically unassailable by the community it represents. Al-Adnani challenged this basic interpretation by identifying the Arab armies as the defenders of apostate and tyrannical rulers rather than the Islamic community:

The infidelity of the armies protecting the tyrants’ regimes, most prominent of which are the Egyptian Army, the Libyan Army and the Tunisian army, before the revolution and after it. As for the Syrian Army, its infidelity is apparent even to the elderly... The Egyptian Army... is seeking until death to prevent the implementation of the Law of Allah... The Egyptian army and those [other] armies falsely claim that they are protecting and defending Muslims and that they watch for their safety and comfort. These armies were only present to protect the tyrants, to defend them and secure their thrones in the palace. The Egyptian Army... is one that protects the interest-charging banks and brothels. It also protects the Jews, the Copts and the Christians who fight against Allah and his messenger... It is a wild army that has burnt mosques and Qurans, finished off the wounded and burnt the bodies of the dead. How can any sane person say, ‘it is not allowed to fight against this army’ even if he or she considered the army as Muslim?

The ISIS spokesman also criticized the Muslim Brotherhood (“a secular party disguised as Islamists”) and the Salafist al-Nur Party (which has decided to support the army’s takeover)

for being too peaceful at a time when violence is called for (al-Tahrir TV [Cairo], September 1). [2] Al-Nur leader Younis Makhion says the party has been forced to distance itself somewhat from the military’s “roadmap” for Egypt due to security abuses, but at the same time rejected jihadist calls to fight the military: “There are conspiracies to attack the Egyptian army... Those who carry them out are traitors” (Daily News Egypt, August 28).

As the Egyptian military tries to separate itself from the discredited Mubarak regime, a new decree that ends the practice of Egyptian troops pledging direct loyalty to the Egyptian president is designed to create distance between the military leadership and Egypt’s political leadership (Daily News Egypt, September 2).

Notes

1. Shaykh Abu Abdulillah Ahmad al-Jijeli, “Is There Any Legitimacy Left for the Arab Armies?” al-Andulus Media, August 26, 2013.
2. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLuiccsV8JE&feature=share>.

NIGERIAN ARMY TAKES OVER ANTI-BOKO HARAM OPERATION

Andrew McGregor

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has authorized the creation of a new Nigerian Army Division dedicated to conducting operations against the Boko Haram Islamist militant group in the Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states of north-eastern Nigeria currently under a state of emergency. The new Division is taking over operations against Boko Haram from the multi-service Joint Task Force (JTF), a counter-terrorism force initially created to combat militants in the oil-rich Niger Delta, but whose deployment in north-eastern Nigeria during the current anti-terrorist offensive has been characterized as heavy-handed with a casual regard for the safety and security of civilians in combat areas.

The handover from the JTF to the new division took place on August 19 and marked a new stage in Operation BONOYA, a three-month old offensive against Boko Haram terrorists operating in northeastern Nigeria near the unsecured borders with Chad, Niger and Cameroon. With its headquarters in Maiduguri, the new division will be under the command of Major General Obida Etnan, former commander of the Army Garrison Headquarters in Abuja (*Nigerian Tribune*, August 18).

Three armored brigades currently based in the northeastern states of Bauchi, Borno and Adamawa will form the core of the new division along with the 241st Reconnaissance Battalion in Yobe, which brings the Nigerian Army to a strength of six divisions with headquarters in Maiduguri, Kaduna, Jos, Bradan, Lagos and Enugu (*Daily Trust* [Abuja], August 19; *Nigerian Tribune*, August 18). Some 900 Nigerian troops that were prematurely withdrawn from their mission in Mali will also be directly assigned to the new division (*Leadership* [Abuja], August 19; for the Nigerian withdrawal from Mali, see Terrorism Monitor Brief, July 25).

Earlier this year, Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Onyeabo Azubuike Ihejirika created a new counterterrorism training center in Kontagora (Niger State) where Nigerian troops could receive advanced training for operations against Boko Haram. The director of the training facility, Brigadier General TK Golau, said the course included training in house entry and clearance, urban patrols, unarmed combat, arms skills, the creation of road-blocks and checkpoints, recognition and disposal of IEDs and “the dynamics of terrorism and insurgency as they relate to Boko Haram, among others” (*Leadership* [Abuja], February 21).

The creation of the new division came a day before General Ihejirika made a scathing speech before various commanding officers in which he criticized the army’s mode of operations against Boko Haram and complacency in the officer corps that was allowing infiltration of the military by terrorists (Channels TV, August 19). The remarks were a counterpoint to President Goodluck Jonathan’s more optimistic views: “We are consistently adapting our security architecture to deal with terrorism which has become a challenge to the whole world. Boko Haram is being progressively weakened but we are not resting on our oars. We will continue to do everything possible to achieve greater security for all who reside within our borders” (*Guardian* [Lagos], August 31). However, despite his efforts to improve discipline in the Army’s ranks, General Ihejirika has come under accusations of nepotism and ethnic favoritism from other senior officers who have gathered under the banner of the Group for the Salvation of the Nigerian Army (*Osun Defender/Punch* [Lagos], September 4).

Meanwhile, attempts by the civilian population to assert themselves against Boko Haram terrorists through the formation of vigilante groups backfired on August 31 when roughly 100 members of a Borno vigilante group joined what they thought was a group of uniformed Nigerian troops on their way into the forest to apprehend Boko Haram members. The men instead led the vigilantes into an ambush in which 24 were killed (AFP, August 31; Reuters, August 31).

The vigilante groups are typically poorly armed (often bearing little more than machetes and clubs) but have played an important part in intercepting Boko Haram movements, making the vigilantes and their families a target for retribution. However, there are fears that the formation of vigilante groups from unemployed youth in the region will open the door to their use as private militias by various politicians (*Nigerian Tribune*, September 1).

Egypt and Hamas Struggle with the Growing Salafist Threat in the Sinai

Ryan Arant

The July 3 *coup d'état* in Egypt was an occasion few mainstream Islamists had cause to celebrate. As the remonstrations of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were drowned out by the rattle of tank treads and the rhythmic palaver of General Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, Islamic parties in and around Egypt have been left in a state of disarray. Yet while established political organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas are still reeling from the coup, the early termination of Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi’s lease on the presidential palace in Heliopolis may have provided the fodder necessary to relight the engine of regional Salafist groups. These organizations—far more conservative in their religious prescriptions and militant in their leanings—may attract support from disaffected activists who, in the speeches of Hazem al-Beblawi, Adly Mansour and al-Sisi, hear only an elegy for political Islam.

The behavior of the Salafists will depend, at least in part, on how their political parties fare in post-Mursi Egypt. Salafist organizations such as the Dawa al-Salafiya movement’s al-Nour Party initially tried to capitalize on the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood, which it viewed as overstepping its political mandate by excluding al-Nour from decision-making power. In supporting the coup, al-Nour was able to block the appointment of Muhammad al-Baradei of the National Salvation Front to the post of interim prime minister, lending credence to the notion that al-Nour had pledged its support wisely. Truly, other Salafist Groups like al-Gama’a al-Islamiya and the Watan Party who sided with the Brotherhood have fared far worse. On September 1, Gama’a al-Islamiya leader Ahmad Nur al-Din Mansour was arrested by security forces for allegedly plotting an attack on the military (Ahram Online [Cairo], September 1).

Since the coup, al-Nour has acted as a unifying force in Egypt, providing both vocal support to the military and

calling for talks between military leaders and protesters (*Egypt Independent* [Cairo], August 28; al-Bawaba [Amman], August 29). However, al-Nour is far from securing its position in Egyptian politics. Notably, the committee to review amendments to Egypt's constitution prior to its finalization via a national referendum will have only two Islamists among its 50 members, with one representative from al-Nour (*Egypt Independent* [Cairo], September 1). This opens the possibility that a ban or restriction against religious parties may be passed—a move that would all but erase the huge political gains al-Nour and other Salafist organizations have made in Egypt since the 2011 revolution.

Yet even if al-Nour manages to carve out a place for itself in the new government, the coup and the persecution of other Salafist organizations by the military may drive Islamists away from politics and towards militancy. Just days after the coup, a representative of al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya in the Sinai announced the formation of a new organization called “Ansar al-Shari’a in Egypt” with the object of violently resisting the military and the successors to the Mursi government. [1] Al-Nour itself may risk breaking apart into splinter factions, as at least one prominent leader resigned from the party in protest at al-Nour's support of the coup. In such an environment, Salafist militants operating in the Sinai may very well find themselves bolstered by a new slew of recruits comprised of disenchanted former Muslim Brotherhood members and political Salafists.

For much of his presidency Mursi favored mediation over military confrontation with tribal groups in the Sinai, despite the massing of Salafist militants on the peninsula. In late 2012, Mursi flatly rejected General al-Sisi's request to conduct operations against Salafists in the Sinai (*Daily Star* [Beirut], September 2). While al-Sisi is unlikely to fully engage militants before the situation in Cairo improves and political Islamists are neutralized, the conflict in the Sinai is already beginning to heat up.

According to Egyptian Army spokesman Colonel Ahmad Muhammad Ali, violence in the Sinai has increased markedly since the fall of Mursi (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 12). Dozens of Egyptian police have been killed, along with at least 70 militants. The Salafist groups Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem) and Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (Consultative Council of the Mujahideen) have each claimed to have launched rockets into Eilat, Israel's southernmost city. [2]

Predictably, the security vacuum is already being filled to a limited degree by Israel. Conflicting reports have arisen in which both Egyptian and Israeli forces have been credited with a strike which killed four militants in early August (*Times of Israel*, August 9). [3] The Israeli Shin Bet security service is also said to be creating a new task force to counter threats emanating from the Sinai (*Haaretz*, August 20). The threat of militant activity in the Sinai has even led to some

hopeful speculation in Israel about amending the Camp David Accords to enable Israel to conduct limited operations against militants in the Sinai (*Jerusalem Post*, August 11).

While both Israel and Egypt have a shared interest in cooperating to address the threat in the Sinai, the rise of the Salafists may also provide opportunity for cooperation from Hamas. Severely wounded by the loss of their ally in Mursi, Hamas has further been accused of meddling in Egyptian affairs through their support of the Muslim Brotherhood, while others have charged Hamas with the deteriorating security situation in the Sinai—both charges Hamas vehemently denies (UPI, August 11; al-Quds Center, July 19). To punish Hamas, the Egyptian military has closed approximately 80 percent of the tunnels used to smuggle goods and arms into the Gaza Strip. According to Ala al-Rafati, the Hamas economy minister, these closures have cost Gaza approximately \$230 million since June, or approximately 10 percent of GDP (Ahran Online, July 23).

Yet both Egypt and Hamas must remain concerned by the increasing Salafist influence in Gaza. Jund Ansar Allah, the Jaljalat, the Jaysh al-Umma and the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem are just a few of the Gaza-based Salafist groups that conduct operations in the Sinai. Many of these organizations, which undermine Hamas in Gaza, have already called for jihad against Egypt's “New Pharaoh,” General al-Sisi (al-Monitor, July 26). Hamas is also greatly concerned the Salafists will provide Israel with a justification to launch an attack against Gaza now that Egypt is no longer providing Hamas military protection. Shortly after the coup, the Qassam Brigades deployed dozens of fighters to the border with Egypt to prevent the firing of rockets toward Israel and the movement of militants across the border (Vetogate.com [Cairo], July 3).

While questions remain about the ability of Hamas and Egypt to repair relations, the coup in Egypt almost certainly served to exacerbate the Salafist threat in the Sinai, at least in the near term. How and when it is addressed remains to be seen and is largely dependent on the outcome of ongoing political negotiations. However, the new Egypt may likely be more willing and better equipped to confront the issue than the old. Once matters are more settled in Cairo, expectations of increased activity in the Sinai would not be remiss.

Ryan Arant is an independent analyst specializing in Middle East national security issues.

Notes

1. See: “The Starting Statement: Ansar al-Shari’a in the Land of Kinaanah,” July 5, 2013, <http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=46317>.
2. See: Jama’at Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, “Statement Claiming Responsibility: Launching 2 Grad Rockets on the Occupied City of Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat), July 7, 2013, <http://>

ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=46329, and Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, “Bombing Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat) with a Grad Rocket, August 13, 2013, <https://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=209316>.
3. See: <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/353262638138058>.

Meeting the Jihad Challenge in Tunisia: The Military and Political Response

Stefano M. Torelli

Tunisia continues to go through a critical phase—to its economic and social difficulties, it now adds a political crisis. It is in this context that new security challenges have emerged. In a climate already made tense by the July 25 assassination of a leading member of the opposition, Muhammad Brahmī, Tunisia has witnessed an unprecedented act of terrorism. On July 29, a jihadist commando attacked a military patrol on the mountains of Jebel Chaambi (on the border with Algeria), killing eight soldiers and fueling fears that Tunisia could become one of the new regional theaters of jihad. Who are the groups responsible for the attack—and other attacks that occurred in the same area in the previous months—and how is the Tunisian security apparatus facing the renewed threat coming from these fighters? In analyzing these issues, it must be kept in mind that, even today it is not clear who is behind the attacks on Jebel Chaambi, nor how widespread and deep the jihadist threat really is.

Since last December, the Tunisian government has claimed to be aware of a jihadist cell in the Jebel Chaambi area (All Africa, December 21, 2012). Between late April and early June some explosive devices positioned around the area caused dozens of casualties in the army and National Guard (see Terrorism Monitor, June 14). In the midst of the emergency, the Tunisian army has been affected by changes in its leadership. In fact, the Jebel Chaambi affair and the difficulties of the army in coping with this emergency could be behind the surprising June 24 resignation of the Chief of Staff, General Rachid Ammar, following opposition accusations of inefficiency (Tunisie Numerique, June 24). Although Ammar stated his age was behind the resignation, he stated that the army was not in possession of adequate intelligence information to combat the jihadist threat and warned of the possibility Tunisia might become a “second Somalia” (Ettounsiya TV, June 2; Melekher.com, June 24).

On July 9 Brigadier General Muhammad Salah Hamdi was appointed the new Chief of Staff (La Presse de Tunisie, July 9). Hamdi is a prominent member of the Tunisian army and was trained by the U.S. military (All Africa, July 9). The Brigadier will have to face a number of interconnected challenges:

- Tunisia is in the midst of a political and institutional crisis, characterized by a resurgence of political violence
- Arms and drugs trafficking at the borders with Algeria and Libya have increased significantly in recent months
- According to the Ministry of Interior, there could be a return flow of Tunisian jihadists who have previously fought in Syria [1]
- The government is increasingly at odds with the Salafist group Ansar al-Shari‘a in Tunisia (AST) and this has resulted in an escalation of verbal and physical violence between Salafists and the security forces (see Militant Leadership Monitor, August 2013).

In particular, the terrorist threat represented by the supposed presence of a jihadist group on the Jebel Chaambi continued to be the subject of constant attention by the Tunisian army. On July 2, Defense Minister Rachid Sabbagh stepped up counterterrorism operations, pushing for the formation of a new national security structure that would be able to cope with the emerging challenges thanks to a more effective intelligence system, while Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh declared that the jihadists at the border with Algeria had not yet been defeated (Magharebia, July 24). One of the strategies implemented by the Tunisian government has been to forge security cooperation with Algeria due to the common threat posed by the jihadists and the Algerian army’s extensive experience in counterterrorism operations.

In addition to a series of agreements on border control signed with the Algerian government, cooperation involves intelligence sharing. According to Algerian sources, in the first six months of 2013 there were 84 attempts to infiltrate Algeria’s borders, many of which came from Tunisia (*al-Khabar* [Algiers], July 9). Libya is another worrisome front to the Tunisian authorities as it would be from here that most of the weapons intended for jihadists on Jebel Chaambi would pass (Business News [Tunis], August 6).

In connection with the re-emergence of political violence, Tunisia has been afflicted by terrorist incidents, some of which are unprecedented. On July 27, a bomb exploded in Tunis, in the district of La Goulette near the Marine Guard post, causing no injuries (Tunis Times, July 27). On July 31, a home-made bomb exploded at the passage of a National Guard patrol near the town of Mhamdia, a few kilometers south of Tunis (Tunisia Live, July 31). On August 2, a

religious extremist reportedly blew himself while making a bomb in a home near the capital Tunis (al-Arabiya, August 3). These incidents have directly affected urban centers for the first time. Although these attacks raised fears that Tunisia could enter into a new phase of urban jihad, it is in the area of Jebel Chaambi that more severe episodes have continued to occur. The July 29 attack that killed eight soldiers represented a real turning point in the Jebel Chaambi issue due to its brutality (including mutilations) and its apparent confirmation that jihadist elements were actually present in the region. In previous months, military casualties had been caused only by the explosion of landmines placed in the area and not a single firefight with militants had been recorded (see Terrorism Monitor, June 14).

In facing the new threat posed by the presence of jihadist combatants on the border with Algeria, the Tunisian security apparatus has a double challenge. The first is to identify who is behind the attacks; the second, at a more purely strategic level, is to put in place measures to face the threat. On August 2 the Tunisian army launched a large scale military operation aimed at locating and neutralizing the fighters (*Jeune Afrique*, August 2; see Terrorism Monitor Brief, August 9). Fundamental at this stage is the coordination and cooperation with the Algerian army: a new information-sharing cell was created between Tunisia and Algeria and about 4,000 Algerian troops deployed to prevent cross-border movement by the jihadists (Tunisie Numerique, August 3). The operations produced some tangible results, with roughly ten fighters killed in the early days of the operation (Kapitalis [Tunis], August 4). However, at the same time the tactics used by the jihadists have continued to prove effective. On August 4, an explosive device killed two Tunisian soldiers and wounded five others (Mosaique FM, August 4; Tunisie 14.tn, August 4). The biggest problem for the Tunisian army is its relative inexperience in counterterrorism operations of this kind, as well as difficulties in defending itself against attacks using non-conventional Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that are difficult to trace with traditional metal detectors, as they often consist of non-metallic materials such as plastic. The only military vehicles potentially able to withstand such attacks are Tunisia's M60 tanks, but they are challenging to maneuver on the difficult terrain of Jebel Chaambi. Alternatively, the Tunisian army has M113 and FIAT 6614 type armored personnel carriers, but they are vulnerable to IED explosions and attacks by RPG-7s, a weapon the jihadists are believed to possess (*Jeune Afrique*, August 22).

Moreover, the Tunisian army suffers from more structural weaknesses, such as the fact that the Air Force has only 20 helicopters and 20 combat aircraft and defense spending

levels are lower than those of other countries in the region. [2] The area in which jihadists operate is extensive and requires more sophisticated means of patrolling and flushing out the terrorist presence, leading to reports that the Tunisian military may turn to greater use of drones for surveillance (Ettounsiya TV [Tunis], August 14).

Meanwhile, the army renewed land operations on August 23 and launched aerial bombing operations on August 26 (Tunisie Numerique, August 25; Tunisie Afrique Presse, August 26). Further changes have also come to the military command; on August 22, Brigadier General Bechir Bedoui was appointed the new Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Brigadier General Nouri Ben Taoues became the new Director General of Military Security and Brigadier General Muhammad Nafti was appointed as the new Inspector General of the armed forces (Tunis Times, August 22). The moves are an acknowledgement of the difficulties the army is facing *vis-a-vis* the jihadist challenge to the Tunisian security apparatus.

What is still not clear in the Jebel Chaambi affair is who might be behind it. According to some sources, the cell responsible for the July 29 attack was led by an Algerian militant named Kamal Ben Arbiya (a.k.a. Ilyas Abu Felda) (Business News [Tunis], July 29). Ben Arbiya is a prominent Algerian jihadist implicated in cross-border operations who was arrested on July 27 by Algerian security forces and the attack may have been a response to his arrest (*al-Watan* [Algiers], July 27; Mosaique FM, July 29). According to other interpretations, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) could be behind the attack through the involvement of Abu Abd al-Rahman, an Algerian jihadist in direct contact with AQIM amir Abd al-Malik Droukdel (Tunisie Numerique, July 31). This interpretation is supported by the "Algerian-style" of the attack, which differed from other attacks in the Jebel Chaambi region in its brutality and the subsequent theft of military uniforms, weapons and ammunition. According to the confession of Muhammad Habib al-Amri, an alleged jihadist who filmed the attack with his cell phone before his arrest, the operation was carried out by 16 jihadists divided into four cells, a formation used by Algerian jihadists against security forces during the Algerian civil war (All Africa, August 19).

Other interpretations suggest the violence in Jebel Chaambi could be part of a retaliatory operation by former members of the deposed Ben Ali regime's Interior Ministry and security apparatus (Tunis Times, August 21). One of the suspected killers of Chokri Belaid, Ezzedine Abdelawi, is in fact a former police officer who was arrested on August 4 (Tunis Afrique Presse, August 5). If the alleged involvement

of elements linked to the former regime remains a hypothesis without confirmation, the Tunisian government has shown a willingness to pursue another line of investigation, that of the Tunisian Salafists. In particular, Minister of the Interior Lotfi Ben Jeddou has on more than one occasion accused Ansar al-Shari'a of responsibility for the actions in Jebel Chaambi and placed the organization on the national list of terrorist groups on August 27 (Tunisia Live, August 27). However, the charges against Ansar al-Shari'a seem to serve Ennahda's political purposes rather than being supported by actual evidence. The government has issued an international arrest warrant for Ansar al-Shari'a leader Abu Iyad, who is believed to be hiding in the Jebel Chaambi region (Tunisvisions.net, August 21; al-Chourouk [Algiers], August 26).

On the other hand, the government revealed last December the existence of a Tunisian jihadist cell tied to AQIM called the Uqba ibn Nafaa Brigade (Mag14.com December 21, 2012). On August 28, Ben Joddou added new information about the supposed ties between the Uqba ibn Nafaa brigade, al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Shari'a and revealed that a plot was discovered aimed at killing Tunisian politicians and anti-Islamist figures (*al-Hayat*, August 29). At the same time, the Interior Minister admitted that not all alleged jihadists among the Salafis belong to Ansar al-Shari'a (Al-Monitor, August 29). Rather, as some sources report, new forms of Salafism are emerging, made up of a new generation that is more radical and sometimes linked with local criminal activities, such as drug and arms smuggling. [3]

Finally, although the army and the government are trying to respond—both at a military and a political level—to the jihadist threat, there is still too much confusion about who the enemy is, but the possibility that there are Algerian and other foreign jihadists present at Jebel Chaambi seems most likely (Tunis Times, August 31).

The phenomenon of jihad within Tunisia is relatively new and has exposed the weakness of the Tunisian security apparatus in the field of counterterrorism. At the same time, it is an opportunity for Tunisia to cooperate with the other regional actors involved to face the regional jihadist threat jointly. However, the particular political situation in Tunisia complicates this scenario. The Ennahda-led government is going through a critical phase and in the last two years it has been harshly criticized for its supposed empathy toward the Salafi movements, which in the opinion of the secularist opposition are responsible for the current climate of domestic violence. Therefore, the need for Ennahda to defend itself from these accusations overlaps with the political necessity to show its ability and resolution in facing the terrorist threat. Although no evidence exists of direct ties between the armed

jihadist cells and Ansar al-Shari'a, the Tunisian government publicly considers the latter responsible for the terrorist activities in the Jebel Chaambi region. However, even if Ansar al-Shari'a has resorted to some degree of violence, this was always in urban areas rather than in peripheral rural regions. It is possible that new isolated cells are emerging from Ansar al-Shari'a and turning to armed jihad against Tunisian state. However, as the Algerian government has warned, the elements present at Jebel Chaambi could be foreign jihadists linked to regional groups such as AQIM.

Stefano Maria Torelli is a Research Fellow at the Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and a member of the Italian Centre for the Study of Political Islam (CISIP).

Notes

1. According to a recent study conducted, Tunisia in the second country of origin of all the foreign jihadists present in Syria and fighting against the Assad regime. See A. Y. Zelin, E. F. Kohlmann and L. Al-Khouri, "Convoy of Martyrs in the Levant. A Joint Study Charting the Evolving Role of Sunni Foreign Fighters in the Armed Uprising Against the Assad Regime in Syria," June 2013, available here: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Zelin20130601-FlashpointReport-v2.pdf>.
2. See Q. Hanlon, "The Prospects for Security Sector reform in Tunisia: A Year after the Revolution," Strategic Studies institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2012.
3. These elements are based on interviews the author conducted in Tunisia, June 2013.

Egypt's Military Devises Strategy to Move Egypt beyond Political Islamism

Muhammad Mansour

Many local media channels in Egypt are constantly broadcasting the banner "Egypt Fighting Terrorism" in what seems to be a media campaign to mobilize the masses to support the military and police in their crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood members. One large poster near the state TV building on the Nile depicts General Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi as a hero backed by Egyptians next to a picture of a bearded President Barack Obama. The billboard reads: "Obama, stop supporting terrorism!"

The scene is a reflection of the Egyptian Army chief's call for a public mandate to confront "violence and potential terrorism": "I call on all Egyptians to take to streets to remind the whole world that you have a will and a resolve of your own... authorize the armed forces to confront violence and terrorism," al-Sisi said in a speech at a military ceremony on July 24. [1]

The United States' reaction to the military's July 3 return to power and the subsequent repression of the Muslim Brotherhood has been largely negative and has encouraged public perceptions that the U.S. administration supports the Muslim Brotherhood. Shortly after President Muhammad Mursi's overthrow, the United States announced it was delaying the sale of four F-16 fighter jets to Egypt. Following the violent clearances of Brotherhood protest camps at Raba'a al-Adawiya and al-Nahda on August 14, President Obama strongly condemned Egypt's interim government and cancelled a planned joint military operation (Operation Brightstar) after bloody clashes left hundreds dead and thousands injured.

Such moves increased anti-American and anti-Obama sentiments in Egypt and led greater grass-roots support for al-Sisi as a hero who is protecting Egypt from terrorism. Many people in Egypt believe that Obama is supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt the same way he is viewed as supporting the al-Qaeda-allied extremists who are fighting the Bashar regime in Syria. One example of such perceptions was recently provided by a Cairo shopkeeper:

Obama supports Islamists here because they are similar to Mubarak in terms of keeping Egypt subordinate to America. However, he knows they are a failure, but he wants instability in the region as part of the New Middle East plan which aims to redraw the region to small countries for the service of Israel. [2]

On the other side, Mursi supporters think that the military coup is backed by the United States because Mursi wanted Egypt to be independent in its policy: "If America believes in democracy, Mursi is fairly elected, and this is the will of the people, America is lenient in its position as it was not tougher with the coup-makers who committed massacres against civilians," said Muhammad Tolba, a Mursi supporter who spent 30 days in the al-Nahda sit-in camp. [3]

It appears that many if not most of the people who took to the streets to support General al-Sisi believe that the U.S. government is supporting a terrorist group (i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood). In that sense, the Egyptian military is viewed as responding to foreign intervention in Egypt's affairs as a

national emergency. As anti-American feelings rise, the more President Obama denounces the military's actions, the more he is perceived as demonstrating that the Egyptian military was correct to step in. Similarly, the more Mursi supporters become involved in violence, the more hostility they will face nation-wide, leaving the military as the only winner.

Military Crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood

One day before launching the worst crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood since the days of President Gamal Abd al-Nasser (1956-1970), Egyptian Interior Ministry spokesman Hani Abd al-Latif told the Jamestown Foundation: "These people are breaking the law and our role is to stop any one violating the law. In Raba'a, [Mursi supporters] were torturing people to death, blocked vital roads, threatening residents and accumulating weapons, so we have to deal with that regardless of any affiliation." According to Lieutenant Abd al-Latif, police have, for the first time since the January 2011 revolution, won the trust of the people: "Such trust and bonding gave us all back the strength to deal with outlaws and this is a big responsibility [as] we develop our strategy depending on the situation on the ground."

As Egyptian security forces launched a deadly assault on protest sites backing the ousted President Mursi on August 14, several Coptic churches around the country were also burned down and separate attacks by armed men were launched against security forces in a wave of Brotherhood reprisals (al-Arabiya, August 14, 2013).

In a bid to stem the tide of expected militia attacks by Mursi supporters in other areas of the country, the military-backed transitional government announced a month-long state of emergency and imposed a curfew in Cairo and 14 other governorates. Most of the underground tunnels going from the Sinai border town of Rafah to the neighboring Gaza sector were demolished by the military and operations against militant jihadists in the Sinai were intensified after an escalation in attacks on army checkpoints and police stations in the town of Arish.

Fearing that Muslim Brotherhood leaders would incite their supporters to further violence, the security forces launched a campaign of wide-ranging round-ups that included the detention of prominent figures in the embattled group, including Supreme Guide Muhammad Badie, and influential cleric Safwat Hegazy. The wanted list still includes more than 200 Brotherhood officials and leaders of other Islamist groups. Charges leveled at them range from inciting violence to conspiring to kill protesters when Mursi was in power and after his ouster. According to sources in the prison authority,

some 23 Muslim Brotherhood leaders are in Tora prison, while hundreds of Mursi supporters who were arrested in clashes with security forces have been sent to other prisons. Most recently, prominent leader Muhammad al-Beltagy and the former Minister of Manpower, Khalid al-Azhari, were arrested at their hide-out in Tersa village in Giza, east of Cairo.

Most of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders who were arrested were fugitives, often disguising themselves to escape across the Egyptian borders to Libya or Gaza. The Brotherhood's deputy guide, Mahmoud Ezzat, is believed to now be out of reach of Egyptian security in the latter refuge. Ezzat, who is believed ready to replace Muhammad Badie as the movement's new spiritual leader, has been described in Egyptian media as the Brotherhood's "iron man," embodying his reputation for top-down decision making. Ezzat is considered close to deputy supreme guide Khayrat al-Shater and is a key figure in coordinating policy decisions between the Guidance Office and the recently dissolved Freedom and Justice Party.

Such behavior after the breakup of the protest camps suggests the extent to which the group leaders were panicked and weak: "I do not appreciate the approach of the leadership either to hide or escape; they should never leave the masses. In that sense supporters were disappointed when these leaders fled the battlefield," said 75-year-old Kamal al-Helbawy in an exclusive interview with The Jamestown Foundation on August 24. Al-Helbawy was the head of the International Muslim Brotherhood before he resigned in response to the Brotherhood's decision to enter high-level politics (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, August 9).

Helbawy believes that the military leadership is intent on putting an end to the 84-year-old group and expects that "the group now will tend towards underground work, [including] some violence and is likely to ally with some jihadist groups unless they come to their senses and admit to their supporters that what they did since they came to power is wrong."

Some have tried to explain the arrests as a military strategy to disconnect the leaders from their supporters, a strategy that worked well in 1960 during the Nasser era, but the continued campaign against Islamists is likely to radicalize others who have had relatives killed and could similarly make the regime more oppressive in dealing with any criticism of the army.

The Military Response to the Rafah Attack

In the worst reprisal for the military crackdown on Mursi supporters, militants in the Sinai killed 25 central security

conscripts on August 19 near the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza. The execution-style murder of these soldiers showed the extent of the connection between the radical groups in the Sinai and the Muslim Brotherhood and displayed the rage that the groups had developed after security forces began dismantling the Islamist group. [7]

Before his arrest, Muhammad al-Beltagy, a Muslim Brotherhood leader said on August 26 in footage aired from his hideout by al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr (an Egyptian affiliate of the Qatar-based broadcaster) that the crime of killing 25 conscripts in cold blood was committed by the army to use it as an excuse to escalate the counter-terrorism campaign targeting Islamists. Al-Beltagy said that authorities were trying to turn a "political crisis" into a security problem by accusing his group of orchestrating a terrorism campaign. [8]

Al-Beltagy whose 17-year-old daughter was killed during the break-up of the Raba'a al-Adawiya protest camp, insisted that the Rafah attack "was an attempt to distract attention from the unprecedented brutal massacres that exceeded the brutality of Genghis Khan," boasting that "only five countries recognized this coup regime, however there are more than 170 that did not."

Anti-Army Sentiments

A bearded Salafist *imam* of a small mosque in the Islamist stronghold of Imbaba in northwestern Cairo who is also a supporter of the Salafist al-Nur Party questioned the motivations and presentation of the army's anti-Islamist campaign:

Does it make sense that they just realized now that we are terrorists? They want people to believe that any person growing his beard is a terrorist, the media is inciting people against each other. Did Al-Sisi and the intelligence just find out now that Mursi is a terrorist? So why did al-Sisi gave him a salute? Terrorism is to terrorize you, to put you in jail, to kidnap your son, to oppress you when you want to get your voice heard, what is happening now is a political game. [9]

The imam, whose son was killed on January 29 by a random bullet fired from a nearby police station as he was on his way home from the mosque, warned that the military was moving too fast to restore security in Egypt:

Now you broke up Raba'a, those people you oppressed will spread in other places away from security grip. When I say my opinion, is this a radicalization? What

about the people who protested for al-Sisi, are they also radicals? You are running the country now, so slow down and bring wise people to make a reconciliation for the country's stability.

The fear now is that jihadists who left Egypt to launch Islamist campaigns in neighboring countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen will return to their homeland to fight against the army and the state. In a 32-minute audio message posted on YouTube on August 31, 2013, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, a spokesman for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS – an al-Qaeda affiliated group active in Iraq and Syria) called for Egyptians to take up arms and fight against their military rulers, reiterating that bloody crackdowns on Islamist protesters in Egypt proved armed opposition was the only solution: “The Egyptian army is part and a mere copy of these armies which are seeking in a deadly effort to prevent God's laws from being adopted and trying hard to consecrate the principles of secularism and man-made laws.”

Pro-Army Views

Sayyid Abd al-Latif, a resident of the poor working-class neighborhood of Imbaba, has participated in most of the clashes that broke out after Mubarak's ouster. After his son Muhammad was killed in the January 25 revolution, he became politically active and was one of millions who took to streets in all of Egypt's provinces in response to al-Sisi's call for popular support to “fight terrorism.” Abd al-Latif was disappointed by the performance of the Muslim Brotherhood since they achieved a majority in Parliament in 2011 and blames much of the current political turmoil on the machinations of the Egyptian Army and the United States:

Al-Sisi today has corrected the mistakes of his predecessor [Field Marshall Muhammad Hussein] Tantawy [Head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that took power after Mubarak's ouster in 2011 and ruled until June 30, 2012]. Tantawy handed over the country to the Muslim Brotherhood as he implemented the orders of the White House and collaborated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Obama supports terrorists. Since the Muslim Brotherhood rose to [power in] the parliament we figured out that there is a plot to partition Egypt... [The Brotherhood] sold the revolution as soon as they came to the parliament, they collaborated with the Mubarak regime at the expense of our sons' blood and they are terrorists and traitors... Now they know that they are hated by the people, and this is more dangerous to them than any security crackdown, they are panicked.” [10]

On the author's return by *tuktuk* (three-wheeler taxi) from Imbaba to downtown Cairo, the *tuktuk* driver related that he had to shave his beard for fear of security hassles, adding that the first time Sayyid Abd al-Latif saw him, he called him a terrorist and kept punching him.

Conclusion

The crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists in general is based more on grass-roots level support than the will of the security forces. For the first time in the history of the Egyptian Islamist movement, people are now hostile towards the Islamists. The deadly break-up of the pro-Mursi demonstrations is a reflection of such feelings. An example of this sea-change in attitudes was seen in the July 16 Fatah Mosque incident in Cairo, where hundreds of Mursi backers found themselves trapped inside the mosque. Many were killed or arrested by police, while many others were attacked by hostile civilians outside the mosque, forcing the army to step in to protect the survivors from the angry mob outside. [11] In other parts of Cairo, residents detained people they deemed suspect and turned them over to security forces.

The military used violence expecting the Muslim Brotherhood to respond violently and escalate their clashes against the army. In this sense, the military has succeeded in manipulating the situation to unify Egyptians against “Islamist terrorism.”

Such a strategy is meant to exclude the Islamists, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, from any political process, as demonstrated by the first draft of the newly amended constitution in which all Islamic-flavored clauses in the 2012 constitution were taken out.

Despite this, the Muslim Brotherhood as an ideology will remain, but the current Muslim Brotherhood leadership has at least temporarily put an end to the group as an organization through their approach to governance. At this point the focus has shifted to those leaders who have fled the country and will likely attempt to keep underground work going, though these activities could lead to even more oppressive practices from the military-dominated government.

General al-Sisi understands that the military cannot rule, especially after the Egyptian military's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces' bad experience running the country. The military character is based on blind obedience; though this policy can be applied to military soldiers, it is very risky in a civilian context. The military would ultimately prefer to keep its unique status in Egypt rather than jeopardize this status through further attempts to rule.

Muhammad Mansour is a Cairo-based journalist specializing in security and political affairs.

Notes

1. CBC TV [Cairo]. July 24, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYgCk7IYS2s>.
2. Interview with Cairo shopkeeper Abd al-Fatah Mustafa, August 25, 2013.
3. Author's interview with Muhammad Tolba in Cairo, August 11, 2013.
4. Author's telephone interview with Interior Ministry spokesman Hani Abd al-Latif, August 13, 2013.
5. For Badie, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEJSLbX-x7k>. Safwat Hegazy shaved his hair and beard in a failed attempt to escape to Siwa Oasis in western Egypt. See Akhbar al-Youm TV, August 22, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQNOZ2RtmUw>.
6. For footage of the arrest of Muhammad al-Beltagy, see ONTV [Cairo], August 29, 2013.
7. Cairo daily Al-Masry al-Youm published photos of the conscripts: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2046076>.
8. The Beltagy interview is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS5NtSGde-s>;
The broadcaster, al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr, was banned in Egypt on August 30 for "spreading lies and rumors damaging national security and unity" (The Peninsula [Doha], August 30).
9. Author's interview with an Imbaba imam who requested anonymity, Imbaba, August 27, 2013.
10. Author's interview with Sayyid Abd al-Latif, Imbaba, August 26, 2013.
11. Sky News Arabia, July 17, 2013, <http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/article/393159/>.