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AQAP (Source Arab News Agency)

AL-QAEDA STRIKES U.S. DRONE BASE IN YEMEN’S HADRAMAWT GOVERNORATE

Andrew McGregor

Yemen’s al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has claimed that its September 30 attack on a military base in eastern Yemen was focused on the destruction of an American drone operations command-and-control room. In its statement, AQAP said that its attack was directed against an “intelligence and operations room” at the Mukalla air base and promised that further attacks on American drone installations would follow: “Such joint security targets, which participate with the Americans in their war on the Muslim people, are a legitimate target for our operations, and we will puncture these eyes that the enemy uses” (Shumukh al-Islam, October 14). However, Yemeni officials denied that any American drone operations room existed at the base, saying the command-and-control room there was dedicated exclusively to anti-piracy operations in the Arabian Sea (Reuters, October 14).

AQAP’s claim referred to an attack by Islamist militants on the headquarters of the Yemen Army’s Second Military Region at the port of Mukalla, capital of Yemen’s eastern Hadramawt governorate. The operation began with the detonation of a car-bomb at the entrance gate of the base, followed by the infiltration of militants disguised as Yemeni Special Forces personnel (Saba [Sana’a], September 30; Yemen Post, October 3). The tactic created massive confusion at the base, allowing the militants to seize a number of soldiers as hostages before taking refuge in a three-storey building.

The military responded with a fierce counter-attack that deployed Special Forces troops from Sana’a using RPGs, missiles and fire from four tanks that destroyed much of the installation during a three-day standoff. Four soldiers were reported killed and nine wounded in the effort to re-take the base from Islamist militants who claimed to have killed dozens of officers in the initial attack (Mukalla2011.net, October 1; Felix

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News Agency, October 5; Reuters, October 14; Yemen Post, October 3).

The attack came only days after AQAP strikes in southern Yemen killed 31 soldiers and policemen in southern Yemen (Reuters, September 30). Other air bases have been targeted by AQAP this year, including al-Anad airbase in Lahj governorate, where three pilots were killed by gunmen on motorcycles only days after the base's gas tanks were set ablaze (*Yemen Times*, May 9).

Not long after the attack on the Hadramawt military headquarters, a senior intelligence officer was killed in Mukalla on October 10 (Yemen Post, October 11). AQAP's assassination campaign has claimed the lives of some 90 senior officers of Yemen's security forces since the 2011 uprising against the regime of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh (*Yemen Observer*, September 1).

Yemen's current president, Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi, reported that he has requested the provision of armed drones from the United States, saying that the American drone attacks have "widely curtailed al-Qaeda activities" while describing claims of significant civilian casualties as "exaggerated" (SABA [Sana'a], August 22; Yemen Online, August 24). While the Yemeni request for armed drones remains under consideration, Yemen's air force took delivery of two American surveillance aircraft in mid-September (AP, September 16).

Despite the president's enthusiasm for armed drones, there have been calls in Yemen for a review of the nation's counterterrorism strategy to address the root causes of Islamist extremism rather than continuing the pursuit of an exclusively military response. In Hadramawt, the influential Imam Abu al-Harith Omar bin Salim Bawazir has claimed some success in persuading militants to abandon al-Qaeda's ideology and "distorted" approach to Islam, though he complains of a lack of support for these efforts from authorities (Yemen Post, October 11). Local human rights groups in Hadramawt have also complained of the "negative effects" of American drone strikes in the region (Mukalla Online, October 10). Yemeni sources indicate that over 30 American drone strikes on suspected militants have taken place in Yemen since the beginning of the year (Felix News Agency, September 1).

While the internal debate in Yemen over the use of American drones continues, the Sahelian nation of Niger has requested the deployment of American armed drones in that country to "collect intelligence and conduct operations" against Islamist militants who took refuge in Niger after being driven out

of northern Mali by joint French-African Union military operations (Reuters, September 19).

MOROCCAN MILITANTS AND THE SYRIAN JIHAD

Andrew McGregor

A recent al-Qaeda video and Syria's growing anti-Alawite jihad have raised alarms in Morocco, where a traditional monarchy is attempting to resist efforts to Islamize the nation's society and government.

The 41-minute video, entitled "Morocco – The Kingdom of Corruption and Despotism," was produced by al-Andalus, the media arm of the Algerian-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and calls on young people in Morocco to rise up in jihad to implement Shari'a throughout the northwest African country. The video focuses on the allegedly corrupt monarchy of King Mohammed VI, which is described by AQIM leader Musab Abd al-Wadoud as supporting a "Jewish-Crusader union" and being "a traitor to Allah and his Prophet and all his believers" (Reuters, September 17). Footage within the video contrasted the King's enormous wealth with the desperate conditions of Morocco's slums and shantytowns. The video also cites a 2009 Forbes magazine article describing the king's enormous wealth and a 2012 book by Catherine Graciet and Eric Laurent that profiles the inner workings of the court and the concentration of wealth amongst the king's family and close associates. [1] The King's family, known as the Alaouite dynasty, has ruled Morocco since 1666.

Ali Anouzla, the director of independent Moroccan news website Lakome.com was arrested on September 17 for posting a link to the video as carried by the website of Spanish daily *El Pais*. There are suspicions that the real reason for the arrest and the threat of a six-year prison sentence under Morocco's anti-terrorism legislation was Anouzla's critical coverage of monarch Mohammed VI, a taboo for most of Morocco's generally tame media. *El Pais* removed the link after the Moroccan government complained to Madrid; YouTube similarly removed the video from its website after determining it broke the site's guidelines on inciting violence. A statement from Reporters sans Frontières claimed that Moroccan authorities "have shown that they are confusing journalism with inciting terrorist acts" (Reporters sans Frontières Press Release, September 26).

On June 21, eight residents of the Spanish enclave of Ceuta (a deeply impoverished coastal remnant of Spain's Moroccan

Empire) were detained on charges of recruiting individuals for the Syrian jihad. All eight of the detainees are Spanish citizens. After the eight were arrested, a video was released calling for “divine punishment” of the police agents of the Policia Nacional and the Guardia Civil made the arrests. The families of the security agents were also threatened in the video, which was believed to have originated in a mosque in Benzu, near Ceuta’s border with Morocco (20minutos.es, July 31). Most of those recruited for jihad in Syria travel through Spain to Turkey, where they are infiltrated across the border to bases near Latakia (*El Pais* [Madrid], June 27, 2012). Five of those recruited by the Ceuta cell are believed to have perished in suicide attacks.

Belgian authorities arrested Moroccan national Ismail Abd al-Latif Allal on September 26. Allal, the subject of an international arrest warrant, was described by the Spanish Interior Ministry as the organizer of a network that recruited Spanish and Moroccan youths for jihad in Syria. Earlier in September, Spanish security forces arrested two other Moroccan recruiters for Syria’s Islamist Jabhat al-Nusra movement, Muhammad al-Bal and Yassine Ahmad Larbi (a.k.a. Pistu).

Salafist-Takfiri groups have established themselves in the shantytowns outside urban centers such as Fez, Marrakesh, Tangiers and Casablanca, where displaced populations try to survive outside the traditional communal support systems or government services available in the impoverished inner city neighborhoods. These shantytowns are the source of most of the suicide bombers and other extremists that have emerged in Morocco in the last decade.

Veteran jihadist and former Guantanamo inmate Brahim Benchekroune (a.k.a. Abu Ahmad al-Muhajir) formed a new al-Qaeda-sympathetic movement in late August under the name Harakat Sham al-Islam. The movement’s apparent purpose is to recruit fighters for the Syrian jihad while establishing a militant force within Morocco that could utilize the military experience of fighters returning from Syria and Mali. Moroccan authorities continue to arrest any individuals suspected of having returned from jihad activities abroad.

Moroccan fighters have suffered heavy losses in Syria, including commanders such as Muhammad al-Alami Suleymani (a.k.a. Abu Hamza al-Maghrebi), who was killed in August. A video released by Sham al-Islam in mid-September depicted the death and funeral of al-Alami, a former Guantanamo inmate who was released in 2006. Also shown in the video is Ibrahim bin Shakaran, another former Guantanamo detainee who is now a combat leader in Syria.

A new Islamist-led government was formed in Morocco on October 10 when Abdelilah Benkirane’s Parti de la justice et du développement (PJD) created a new, broad-based coalition that left several important posts (such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Foreign Ministry) in the hands of pro-monarchists. The Islamist PJD has taken steps to distance itself from the Muslim Brotherhood to avoid the political turmoil that followed the election of Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia (Arab News, October 13).

Notes

1. Catherine Graciet and Eric Laurent, *Le Roi Predateur*, Editions de Seuil, Paris, 2012.
2. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f04x2zxmZtg>.

Al-Murabitun: North Africa’s Jihadists Reach into History in Their Battle against European “Crusaders”

Dario Cristiani

At the end of August, the Katibat al-Muslimeen (Veiled Brigade) of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, announced a merger with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) to create a new jihadist movement, al-Murabitun (The Almoravids). According to its founding statement, the group aims at pursuing the unity of all the Jihadist groups “from the Nile to the Atlantic” (Agence Nouakchott d’Information [Nouakchott], August 22). The group also stressed its allegiance to al-Qaeda and the Taliban by greeting “the leaders of jihad in this time,” al-Qaeda leader Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar.

France, responsible for expelling the jihadists from Mali earlier this year, was singled out in the statement, which called for jihadists to attack French interests “wherever they may be found.” The group also described the Muslim Brotherhood’s ouster from power in Egypt as proof of the assault of secular forces against Islam (*Annahar al-Maghribia* [Rabat], August 23). However, the identity of the group’s new Amir remains unclear, with Belmokhtar announcing his intention of forgoing leadership of the group to allow a new generation of jihadist leaders to come to the fore. According to Mauritania’s Agence Nouakchott d’Information (ANI), which enjoys close contacts with North Africa’s jihad movements, the movement’s new leader is a non-Algerian veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan and the 2002

battles against American forces in the same country (ANI [Nouakchott], August 22).

Jihadist groups often use specific references to underline some particular operational features, ambitions or tactical and strategic aims. In this case, the name al-Murabitun was likely chosen to stress three major elements:

- The call for unity of the Muslim people of North Africa from “the Nile to the Atlantic.” While the Berber Almoravid Empire stretched, at its greatest extent, as far as Algiers in the east, the historical period of the rule of this dynasty (1040 – 1147) was characterized by a certain degree of unity among the people under its control. This must be analyzed in the context of the current strategic situation in North Africa. The Arab Spring revolutions did not open new political opportunities for North Africa’s jihadist groups, which remain particularly weak in terms of political depth and popular support. What has changed is the capacity of central states to control their own territories. Libya presents the most notable example, while Egypt and Tunisia are experiencing similar problems, though to a lesser extent. This weakened statehood capacity provides room, in the eyes of this new group, to boost unity among the radical Islamist groups operating in the region (*al-Khabar* [Algiers], August 26). The new movement may also intend to appeal the conservative sectors of those societies that are disappointed and/or disenchanted with more traditional expressions of political Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Tunisia’s Ennahda. These sectors of the society may find a political answer to their needs in more radical Salafist groups.
- The continuous confrontational stance against external invaders. Historically, the Almoravids were crucial in preserving the Islamic nature of al-Andalus (the Muslim-controlled regions of the southern Iberian Peninsula), most notably by defeating the Christian army of Castile at the Battle of Sagrajas in 1086 and thus delaying the completion of the *Reconquista* by four centuries. The Almoravid example stresses the existence of a confrontational stance against “infidel” European nations and the never-ending aim of regaining control over those lands, such as al-Andalus, that were once part of Dar al-Islam. Moreover, the focus on an external, European invader was stressed in jihadist rhetoric in the wake of the French military operation in northern Mali earlier this year. That was a partial blow to these groups, as it led them to reorganize their structures and networks, though it inadvertently restored the operational mobility that is one of their major assets.
- Fighting to protect Islamic lands and to (re)discover the real faith. Al-Murabitun is the plural form of *al-Murabit*. Among its meanings is “one who is ready to fight at a fortress.” The term is related to the word *ribat*, referring

to fortress/monasteries located at the frontiers of Islamic territories. These structures fulfilled two different aims: the defense of Dar al-Islam against external forces and spiritual elevation through religious exercises and prayers. As such, the group’s name may be considered a call to Muslim people of the region to defend their lands against external invaders. Moreover, the concept of *ribat* is particularly important in the history of the Almoravids. After his journey to Mecca, Yahya ibn Ibrahim, leader of the Berber Lamtuna tribe, realized that his people did not adhere to authentic Islamic prescriptions. As such, he appointed an ultra-orthodox Sunni religious scholar, Abdallah ibn Yasin, to teach his people the right way to be an Islamic believer. Yasin built a *ribat* to allow people to study and to know about the real Islam, consequently becoming the spiritual leader of the rising Almoravid dynasty. Treated as a historical metaphor, this may be considered a call upon the people of the region to rediscover a pure Islamic belief by sticking strictly to the prescriptions of the Quran and the Hadith.

From an operational point of view, al-Murabitun may be considered a regional competitor to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). While the two groups will continue to have the same strategic aim—imposing Shari’a in the region—their short-term aims as well as tactics and strategies are different. Belmokhtar’s relations with AQIM leadership remain particularly tense. The appointment of Jamal Oukacha (a.k.a. Yahya Abu al-Hammam)—a close ally of AQIM leader Abd al-Malik Droukdel—as AQIM’s Saharan Amir was an attempt by AQIM’s central leadership to regain control over Belmokhtar and the movement’s Sahelian battalions (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 18, 2012). At the same time, the spectacular actions of Belmokhtar—such as the In Aménas attack in Algeria in January and the May attacks in Niger—are considered more harmful than helpful in the eyes of AQIM. Such attacks may push external actors to increase pressure on the group, which, after the defeat in Mali and the loss of several organizational leaders (most notably Abu Zeid), is more interested in reorganizing its ranks and operational networks. The fact that the leader of this new group is apparently not Algerian and the presence of MUJWA fighters in its ranks suggest that this is the final stage of a process started several years ago: the ethno-national pluralization of northern African jihad activities.

While AQIM continues to remain an Algerian-led and Algerian-focused organization, jihadists from Mauritania, Mali, the Western Sahara, Niger, southern Libya and Chad now represent an important reality on the ground and the birth of al-Murabitun reflects this change. The focus is becoming more regional, as was made clear by the historical references provided by MUJWA when it split from AQIM (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 6, 2012). A second element of differentiation is the focus of Belmokhtar on immediate actions, while AQIM leader Abd al-Malik Droukdel has stressed over the last two years the need to act gradually

in order to avoid powerful external pressures and friction with local Muslim communities. Despite these differences, it is still likely that members from the two organizations will cooperate at some point, as the organizational boundaries between all the groups operating in Northern Africa are rather thin and the same members—above all, low-ranking militants—may fight and operate under different labels and affiliations according to the circumstances.

The birth of al-Murabitun adds a new brand to the already dense and fragmented environment of Northern Africa jihadism. The name of the new group recalls a series of specific features of northern Africa's history under the reign of the Almoravids, especially the search for Muslim unity, Islamic purity and the fight against external enemies. Although Belmokhtar has taken a step back by renouncing the leadership of this brand new group, his choice confirms his importance in the overall balance of North African jihadism, a particularly remarkable result for a person believed dead in March-April 2013. The Murabitun, despite having the same strategic aims as AQIM, will compete with the elder organization to some degree for a variety of reasons, primarily the personal friction between Belmokhtar and Droukdel. However, tactical and short-term convergences are more than likely on specific aims and operations, and the boundaries between these organizations will remain porous and often indistinguishable.

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Militant Islam Meets Militant Buddhism in Myanmar

Animesh Roul

A wave of violent clashes that swept Myanmar's restive Rakhine State (formerly known as Arakan) in late September left at least five Muslims dead and many members of their community injured and displaced. The epicenter of the violence was the city of Thandwe, which was targeted by a Buddhist mob (Mizzima News [Yangon], October 3). For some time now, Buddhist nationalist groups in Myanmar have opposed Muslim businesses and social practices, creating a sense of mistrust and antagonism between the two communities that frequently erupts in violence. This sectarian divide between Muslim and Buddhist communities in Rakhine State emerges intermittently in the form of riots, arson and vandalism.

The ongoing communal friction in Myanmar traces its origin to the June, 2012 killing of a Buddhist woman by three Muslim youths in the Rakhine village of Kyauknimaw and the subsequent lynching of ten Muslim bus passengers in Taunggoke that triggered waves of anti-Muslim violence from Buddhist vigilante groups. According to official Rakhine State government estimates, 98 people died and 123 others were injured from both communities. In addition, thousands of people, mostly Muslim ethnic Bengali Rohingya, were displaced by subsequent violent incidents. [1] Burma refuses to recognize its estimated 800,000 Rohingya Muslims as an ethnic group and denies them citizenship. Many Burmese consider the Rohingya to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Rohingya Muslims are also denied citizenship in Bangladesh, which says the group has been living in Burma for centuries.

The simmering discontent within the two communities flared up again in October, 2012 and again in March, 2013 in central Myanmar (*The Irrawaddy* [Chiang Mai], March 28). The growing mistrust and hatred between majority Buddhists and the Muslim minority escalated further in subsequent months, drawing the attention of the United Nations and many international rights groups. Most alarming, however, was the attention drawn from transnational jihadi groups in support of the stateless Rohingya Muslim community.

Groups sympathetic to the Rohingya cause from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, India and Afghanistan have called for a campaign against the growing Buddhist "969" nationalist movement in Myanmar spearheaded by radical Buddhist monk Ashan Wirathu. The Buddhist nationalists maintain the movement's purpose is to restrict the spread of Islam in predominantly Buddhist Burma (*Hindustan Times*, July 13). [2] In what may have been retaliation for the violence from Islamist extremists, a series of ten bomb blasts struck the 1500 year-old Buddhist complex at Bodh Gaya, India, on July 7. Reputed to be the site of Gautama Buddha's enlightenment, the complex forms one of the most important sites for Buddhist pilgrimage. A posting on a reputed Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) blog claimed that an LeT team had reached Myanmar in late 2012, where it carried out operations and recruited a Rohingya Muslim to carry out one of the Bodh Gaya bombings (*Hindustan Times*, August 15).

In neighboring Bangladesh, radical sympathizers of the Rohingya community attacked Buddhist homes, buildings and pagodas, causing the death of several people including a Buddhist monk in September, 2012. The Bangladesh government feared that umbrella organizations like the

Jamaat-ul-Arakan (JuA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) who have been running terrorist training camps in remote areas of Bandarban district along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border could create more trouble for Buddhists in Rakhine and elsewhere.

The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was the first extremist group to threaten to avenge the violence and discrimination against the Muslim Rohingya following the violence of June, 2012. While threatening to attack Myanmar's interests in Pakistan and elsewhere, the TTP's former spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan urged Islamabad to discontinue all bilateral ties with Myanmar and to close Myanmar's embassy immediately (AFP, July 26, 2012). This threat, however, was taken lightly by Pakistan's government and international observers.

Hafiz Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the current chief of the terrorist-related charity Jamaat ud-Dawa (JuD), has added the plight of the Rohingya to his focus on Kashmir and Palestine. In August 2012, Hafiz Saeed joined Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP) chief Munawwar Hasan in organizing mass rallies in Lahore to express solidarity with Myanmar's Muslims and urged immediate actions against Buddhist nationalist groups (The News (Islamabad), August 4, 2012). In early July 2012, LeT/JuD leaders in Pakistan created a new forum, Difa-e-Musalman Arakan (Defense of Muslims in Myanmar) to mobilize support for the Rohingya cause and to stoke an anti-Myanmar campaign (Waqf News TV [Karachi], July 2, 2012). A team headed by JuD spokesperson Nadeem Awan and JuD publications wing member Shahid Mahmood Rehmatullah was appointed to forge links with like-minded Islamic organizations in Bangladesh and Myanmar (Times of India, July 25). In August 2013, Hafiz Saeed said in a video message that: "Buddhists are killing Muslims with Hindus supporting this genocide. Decisions to suffocate Muslims have been made, by snatching their right to freedom. They fear that Muslims will rise for their rights; therefore they should be brutally killed and intimidated before such an occurrence." [3] Saeed even used Twitter to spread the message that: "The time is near when those oppressed in Kashmir, Palestine and Burma (Myanmar) will celebrate Eid in the air of Freedom." [4]

In July 2013, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) announced the opening of a new jihadist front in Myanmar in support of the Rohingya Muslims. Jihadi forums like Bab-e-Islam, Ansar -al Mujahideen and Arrahmah.com have posted details of this latest mujahideen campaign in both the Arabic and Urdu languages, claiming that this new jihadi group, named Lashkar Mujahideen of Rohingya had already entered Myanmar under the leadership of Commander Abu

Shafiyah and Abu Arif (BD News 24 [Dhaka], August 16). The Arrahmah website was founded by al-Qaeda associated Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) member Muhammad Jibril Abdul Rahman and has over 25 pictures of the Lashkar Mujahideen undergoing military training. [5] One of these forums also claimed an initial attack of the Lashkar Mujahideen on Myanmar's soil against a convoy of the "Buddhist army" in which 17 soldiers were killed and two vehicles destroyed. The forum also cited the killing of three Rakhine people, including a Buddhist monk, in mid-July. [6]

Though not much is known about the previous activities of these two leaders or the composition of Lashkar Mujahideen Rohingya, it is reported that both leaders are affiliated with the Bangladesh-based Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and had previously visited Indonesia's Forum Umat Islam (Islamic Community Forum, located in Petamburan, Central Jakarta) looking for men, money and material for waging jihad in Myanmar (Jakarta Post, July 11). Abu Shafiyah, the commander of the Lashkar Mujahideen was also looking for a bomb instructor to train the mujahideen in Myanmar to assemble bombs for use in guerrilla attacks against Buddhists and the military junta of Myanmar. [7]

Earlier, Indonesia's notorious militant Islamist ideologue and imprisoned spiritual head of Jemaah Islamiyah, Abu Bakar Bashir, issued a veiled threat of holy war against Myanmar's Buddhists on April 23 in a statement issued from his prison cell. [8] He blamed Myanmar's government for carrying out systematic genocide against the Rohingya Muslims and declared jihad was the only solution to the problem. Taking its cue from Bashir, Indonesia-based militant Islamist groups such as the Front Pembela Islam (FPI - Islamic Defenders Front) organized protest rallies and fund raising activities in Indonesia. Members of the FPI descended into the streets of central Jakarta to chant jihad slogans while marching to the Myanmar embassy. Placards at the rallies stated: "We want to go for jihad to Myanmar," and "Stop the Rohingya Genocide."

On May 25, FPI central board member Ustadz Jakfar Sidiq told a congregation at South Jakarta's Baiturahman mosque: "If efforts are done through diplomacy and the government still does not care, then we ask the Rohingya people to prepare their young men there to open up [a front]. It is time for the global mujahideen to start arriving, [the front] is already opened." [9] The FPI was aiming to raise 10 billion Indonesian Rupiah (approximately \$880,000) for jihad in Myanmar.

The jihadist resurgence for the cause of the Rohingya Muslims notwithstanding, Myanmar's Muslim groups have

denounced calls for jihad many times in the past. They know that violence and counter violence is not the solution. However, before the Islamic jihadist forces hijack the whole issue for their own purposes, government and international agencies may find a way to facilitate reconciliation between the Buddhist nationalists and the Muslim minorities in Rakhine province and elsewhere in Myanmar.

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Notes

1. Final Report of the Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State, Appendix C: Damage and loss during the Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State, July, 2013, p. 85.
2. “We’re Building Fences, Protecting Our Race, Religion,” (Full text interview with Wirathu), Outlook India, July 22, 2013.
3. Excerpt from Hafiz Saeed’s Eid 2013 speech, <http://tune.pk/video/311881/ProfHafiz-Saeed-EID-2013-Message->.
4. See: <https://twitter.com/HafizSaeedJUD>, August 8, 2013.
5. The authenticity of these photographs has come under question. See “Gift Ramadan al-Mubarak: Exclusive Photos Mujahideen Rohingya, No answer except by Jihad!” (Title translated from the original Bhasa Indonesia language), July 10, 2013: <http://www.annah.com/foto/hadiah-ramadhan-al-mubarak-foto-eksklusif-mujahidin-rohingya-tiada-jawaban-kecuali-dengan-jihad.html>.
6. The report was cited by one Abu Musab Al-Pakistani in: <http://ansar1.info/showthread.php?p=169944>.
7. “Ulama of Rohingya: Jihad fi Sabilillah is now Wajib in Myanmar”, June 21, 2013, <http://prisonerofjoy.blogspot.in/2013/06/ulama-of-rohingya-jihad-fi-sabilillah-i.html>.
8. See “Ustadz Ba’asyir Calls for Jihad in Defense of Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar” (Title translated from the original Bahasa Indonesia language), Voice of al-Islam, May 2, 2013, <http://www.voaiislam.com/news/indonesiana/2013/05/02/24323/ustadz-baasyir-serukan-jihad-ke-myanmar-bela-muslim-rohingya/>.
9. “FPI: 10 Billions Rp Needed to Buy Arms and Send a Thousand Mujahids to Myanmar,” May 28, 2013, <http://www.prisonerofjoy.blogspot.in/2013/05/fpi-10-billions-rp-needed-to-buy-arms.html>.

Jihadism and Counterterrorism Policy in Algeria: New Responses to New Challenges

Stefano M. Torelli

Algeria, a forerunner in the fight against Islamist terrorism due to its decades-long experience with Islamist extremists, is facing new challenges in terms of tactics and strategy. Beyond the spectacular January In Aménas attack, new trends in local terrorism were already in place. The recent attacks by jihadist groups on the Tunisian army and National Guard along the border with Algeria have had an impact on the security of Algeria itself. Facing the changes of Islamic terrorism in the area, Algeria’s Armée nationale populaire (ANP – People’s National Army) itself has embarked on a campaign aimed at combating jihadism with new tactics and operations.

The Algerian Army is one of the most advanced, both qualitatively and quantitatively, not only in North Africa but throughout the African continent. The active military force—about 150,000 soldiers—is second in size only to Egypt, while the Ministry of Defense budget is the largest in Africa. Moreover, defense spending has risen sharply as a result of the so-called Arab Spring, a symptom of the connection between the new regional scenario and the country’s security. Between 2010 and 2011, the defense budget grew by 44 percent (the highest rate in the Middle East/North African region), while in 2013 it increased by a further 14 percent to over \$10 billion. [1]

Algeria continues to import a considerable number of weapons; according to the SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, Algeria ranked sixth in the world for arms imports between 2008-2012. [2] Algeria’s top supplier of defense arms is Russia, from which it buys items such as T-90 tanks, Su-30MK aircraft, anti-ship and anti-tank missiles, AS/ASW torpedoes and air search radar. In recent years, Algiers has diversified its import sources, buying A200 frigates produced in Germany by the Thyssen Krupp Marine Group and Augusta-Westland Super Lynx helicopters from Italy (*al-Watan* [Algiers], July 3; *MedAfrica Times.com*, August 10, 2012).

Assessing New Threats

Algerian experience in the field of counter-terrorism dates to its struggle with the jihadist Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) in the 1990s and later with its successor, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM’s tactical retreat toward the Sahel region has

confirmed the effectiveness of Algeria's counter-terrorism's efforts. However, AQIM has also transformed from a local movement to a regional network developed around Algerian borders—especially between Mali and Mauritania. AQIM's reorientation has introduced new threats for the Algerian security forces; AQIM's current reorganization aims at targeting Algeria again in future attacks. It is for this reason that compared to previous decades, Algeria's response to the jihadist threat needs to be reconsidered.

Over the past two years, at least four factors have contributed to the emergence of new threats to Algerian security:

- The war in Libya and the resulting south-west movement of weapons and rebels
- The radicalization of Malian Islamist movements and the consequent conflict in Mali
- The creation of new organized crime networks in the Sahel region linked to jihadist activities
- The radicalization of Islamist movements in Tunisia and the instability on the border between Algeria and Tunisia

From the tactical point of view, there was a change in North African jihadism, which became more engaged in criminal activities than terrorist attacks. The mixture of jihadist ideology and criminal activities, a relatively new phenomenon, gave rise to new networks. The latter, though apparently devoted only to activities such as drug trafficking or kidnapping, are actually intended to lead jihad against regional state actors. [3] The latest operational zone of this network seems to be Tunisia, where arms trafficking, infiltration from Algeria and internal radicalization have contributed to the formation of new jihadi groups operating in the mountainous area of Jebel Chaambi (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 6).

All these factors were actually present before the In Aménas attack. However, this episode brought with it some element of novelty with respect to the jihadist threat that Algeria has historically faced. The new trends of North African jihadism may be summarized as follows:

- A change of objectives from the security and institutional forces to financial and strategic targets
- A shift from posing a national threat to a transnational threat
- A change from an internal problem to security issues along borders
- A change in the direction of the main threat to Algerian security. Traditionally, Algeria has had security problems with Morocco to the west due to the Sahrawi issue—the focus has now shifted to Algeria's south-eastern borders.

The In Aménas gas plant was a novel choice as a target for the jihadists as it aimed to hit Algeria's economic interests. Algeria is still heavily dependent on revenues from hydrocarbons, thus affecting this industry directly would weaken the country's economic system. Algeria's counter-terrorism forces must make the sites of hydrocarbon production safer in order to ensure Algeria's economic stability as well as the interests of foreign investors. Algeria must also rethink the deployment of its security forces. While the jihadist threat has traditionally been identified mainly in the northern regions of Kabylie and Tizi Ouzou, most of the gas and oil resources are concentrated in the south. However, terrorist incidents continue to be registered in areas such as the Kabylie and the Tizi Ouzou provinces (*Algerie Focus*, August 13; *Algerie 1*, September 1).

An Expanding Terrorist Threat

Another factor characterizing the “new” North African jihadism is represented by its internal divisions. These divisions are impacting Algerian security but lead us to a second consideration; North African jihadism is no longer just an Algerian affair, but has become a transnational phenomenon. Indeed, the new groups operating in the Sahel are made up not only of Algerian fighters, but also combatants coming from other Maghreb and West African countries.

The jihadist changes compel a rethinking of the Algerian counterterrorism strategy itself, which must now be focused on different objectives than the traditional ones and be conducted in a more cooperative way with other regional actors, as Algerian presidential advisor Kamel Rezzag-Bara has outlined (*Radio Algérienne*, May 15). The threats are no longer confined to within the borders of Algeria, but also concern border security and various types of criminal activities. In order to face this new type of jihadism, the Algerian counter-terrorist strategy must therefore operate on three new levels:

- Hitting the criminal networks throughout the Sahel region
- Using a growing number of human resources in border control
- Working in a more structured framework with the other countries affected by this threat

The war in Mali and the so-called “Sahelization” of the Algerian jihadists led to the creation of new criminal networks, mainly dedicated to drug trafficking and the smuggling of counterfeit goods. Algerian counter-terrorism strategy will therefore have to make the fight against these

activities one of its priorities in order to eradicate the jihadist threat by removing their sources of supply. From the operational point of view, this is leading to the redeployment of Algerian security forces from the center to the periphery. Algeria has historically preferred to concentrate its efforts within Algeria rather than disperse its military forces. However, it is now evident that the greatest threat comes from the border territories, with new threats having been identified along the border with Mali and on the south-eastern borders with Libya and Tunisia. In this regard, the Algerian government has already put new measures in place: out of 190 terrorists killed during 2013, most have been killed on the borders with Mali, Libya and Tunisia. During the past few months, Algerian authorities have repeatedly denounced infiltration attempts by jihadists from Tunisia and Algerian security forces have carried out several operations against fighters who were trying to cross the border in both directions (Tunisie Numerique, August 5). The borders with Libya present the same problems and during recent months more than 40 terrorists have been arrested there (*Echourouk [Algiers]*, August 7).

New Counter-terrorism Strategies

The current threat perception is so high that Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has met with ANP chief-of-staff General Ahmed Gaid Salah despite the illness that has kept him away from office for several months (*Tsa-algerie.com*, September 3). On this occasion, a new counter-terrorism strategy was developed, consisting of the deployment of 20,000 additional troops (including Special Forces and other elite units) on the south-eastern borders (*al-Khabar [Algiers]*, September 11). The Algerian counter-terrorism strategy also seems to have broken a taboo that has been difficult to overcome until now—an unwillingness to interfere in the internal affairs of its neighbors. Bouteflika has now authorized operations to flush out the jihadists within Tunisian and Libyan territory while at the operational level the National Gendarmerie, in charge of border control, will soon be provided with its own air unit (*Algerie Focus*, September 9).

The new strategies represent an important evolution for Algerian counter-terrorism, but they go hand in hand with the development of common strategies with other regional and international actors. Immediately after the In Aménas attack, Algeria signed new security agreements with the United States and United Kingdom. The U.S. government has considered sharing its drone data with Algeria to target the jihadists and to provide Algeria with surveillance drones, though a final agreement has yet to be signed (*Algeria-Watch.org*, February 28). Prime Minister David Cameron is

the first British leader to visit Algeria since its independence and defining the joint counter-terrorism agenda has been at the center of the bilateral dialogue (*The Guardian*, January 30).

At the regional level, Algeria has promoted the Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint (CEMOC), a joint counterterrorism committee in cooperation with Mali, Mauritania and Niger headquartered in the southern Algerian town of Tamanrasset. Last May important steps were taken in cooperation with Tunisia and Libya, in which Algeria has committed to patrol their common borders. In this context, Algeria has deployed more than 4,000 soldiers at the border with Tunisia, as well as exchanging intelligence information with the Tunis government as a result of the talks between their respective foreign ministries (*All Africa*, August 7). On the judicial level, the Algerian government has tightened up its counterterrorist measures by amending its Penal Code to include new types of crimes in the list of the terrorist activities. These crimes include the use of nuclear material, hostage-taking, damaging air, land and naval navigation facilities, the destruction of communication infrastructure and crimes related to the financing of terrorism (*Jeune Afrique*, October 7).

Conclusion

Thanks to its new counterterrorism strategies and despite the In Aménas incident, Algeria claims it is witnessing its quietest year in a decade in terms of terrorist activity on its territory (*Echourouk [Algiers]*, August 7). Despite this claim, the weaknesses of Algerian counter-terrorism measures were exposed in the In Aménas attack, which demonstrated the relative inability of the Algerian government to successfully cope with new terrorist threats. The results of this attack suggest Algeria must adapt its current counter-terrorism doctrine in two ways:

- A new focus must be placed on border security, even if this means violating Algeria's foreign policy taboo against extra-territorial military operations
- Algeria must continue to act in coordination with regional actors and international allies to cope with emerging terrorist trends. Although Algeria has taken steps in this regard in recent years, it was still unable to prevent the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) from mounting a car bomb attack against the CEMOC headquarters in Tamanrasset in March, 2012 (*Echourouk [Algiers]*, March 3, 2012). The incident confirmed the need for more effective security coordination and intelligence-sharing in the Sahara/Sahel region.

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Notes

1. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2012*, Routledge, London, 2012; *Journal Officiel de la Republique Algerienne*, N. 72, December 30, 2012, http://www.mf.gov.dz/article_pdf/upl-37bf45efdf8412a00de028b8d7e5427c.pdf.
2. “Top 20 Arms Importers, 2008-2012,” SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, available at: http://www.sipri.org/googlemaps/2013_of_at_top_20_imp_map.html.
3. For a reconstruction of AQIM’s activities in the region, see Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, *North Africa’s Menace*, RAND Corporation, 2013.