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Nuer and Dinka White Army

SOUTH SUDAN'S TRIBAL "WHITE ARMY" – PART ONE: CATTLE RAIDS AND TRIBAL RIVALRIES

Andrew McGregor

One of the most important developments in the ongoing political and tribal violence in South Sudan is the apparent re-emergence of a largely Nuer militia known as “the White Army.” More of an *ad hoc* assembly of tribal warriors than an organization, the White Army has a checkered history involving ethnic-based massacres of civilians and has played an important role in the breakdown of traditional order in South Sudan.

The current crisis in South Sudan began as a dispute between President Salva Kiir Mayardit (a member of the dominant Dinka tribe) and his vice-president, Riek Machar (a member of the Nuer, South Sudan's second-largest tribe). With rumors flying of a failed coup-attempt by Machar, clashes began breaking out in mid-December in Juba, the South Sudan capital, between Dinka members of the presidential guard and members of the largely Nuer Tiger Division Special Forces unit. Over 1,000 people have been killed over the following weeks in the ongoing violence.

In late December, a UN surveillance aircraft reported large numbers of armed men marching on Bor, the capital of Jonglei state. Bor had been seized earlier by Nuer fighters but had been driven out by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA – the former rebel movement now turned national army) after several days of heavy fighting. The SPLA then took up defensive positions in expectation of the arrival of 20,000 or more armed members of the White Army (Radio Miraya [Juba], December 30, 2013). The predominantly Dinka population of Bor was thrown into panic by news of the approaching White Army – the militia had joined members of Riek Machar's SPLA-Nasir faction in a massacre of over 2,000 Dinka civilians in Bor in 1991. The destruction of the local cattle-based economy in the raid led to the deaths of thousands more from starvation in the following weeks and months. An SPLA spokesman claimed the White Army's current march on Bor was being directed by Riek Machar (VOA, December 28).

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On December 29, 2013, South Sudan's Minister of Information said that Nuer elders in Jonglei had persuaded the bulk of the White Army to disband and return home (AP, December 29, 2013). However, on the same day, a spokesman for President Kiir denied these reports, saying the White Army had ignored the pleas of the Nuer elders and had clashed with government forces: "They seem to be adamant because they think that if they don't come and fight, then the pride of their tribe has been put in great insult" (BBC, December 29, 2013). SPLA spokesman Philip Aguer said the army had used helicopter gunships to disperse the militia (al-Jazeera, December 29, 2013).

A spokesman for Riek Machar's forces said that they "coordinated" with the White Army, but as the White Army is a civilian force, they did not have command over it: "We are not controlling the White Army. We are controlling our forces, Division 8, the SPLA that's whom we know [the SPLA's Jonglei-based Division 8 has supplied most of the military defectors to Machar's cause]" (Radio Tamazuj, December 29, 2013).

Due to its decentralized structure and ad hoc formation, there are few documents describing the White Army's ideology or political approach and those that do exist are often contradictory. One such statement was issued in May 2006 by the largely Nuer South Sudan Defense Force (SSDF) and its political wing, the South Sudan United Democratic Alliance (SSUDA). [1] Apparently acting as a spokesman for the militia, the statement was written by SSDF member Professor David de Chand (an American-educated Nuer). De Chand accused the SPLA's political wing of using "Nuer oil revenue to kill Nuer" and accused its leadership of harboring a "hidden agenda of superimposing the Dinka power elite's hegemonic tendencies." According to the statement:

The strategic goal of the Dinka power elite is to disarm every non-Dinka in the South, starting with the Nuer nation that is the backbone of anti-Dinka power elite forces... The second plan will be to attack eastern Upper Nile (Jikany Nuer) [followed by the] rest of the Nuer areas... Once the Nuer final solution is achieved, others that would follow are the Murle, the Toposa, the Dingdinga, the Anyuak, the Latoka, the Mundari then the Fertit including any groups suspected of exhibiting anti-SPLM/A domination in South Sudan.

However, there are reasons to question the legitimacy of this document as an authentic statement of White Army beliefs. The pro-Khartoum SSDF had at times acted as a sponsor of the White Army, but though the SSDF obtained some influence over its activities, the White Army never

came under its direct command. De Chand was better known at the time as a Khartoum-based politician firmly in the camp of the ruling Omar al-Bashir regime than a Nuer militia leader. Even as the statement was issued, most of the SSDF, including its leader Paulino Matip Nhial, was being integrated into the SPLA in accordance with the 2006 Juba Declaration that called for former pro-Khartoum militias to be integrated into a broader SPLA that would represent all of South Sudan's tribal groups. De Chand remained with a rump SSDF faction that continued to oppose Juba. This statement and its accusations of planned genocide by the Dinkas must be viewed in the light of Khartoum's campaign to spread political dissension in advance of the 2011 referendum on South Sudanese independence.

A more legitimate media statement released in 2012 under the name of the "Nuer and Dinka White Army" asked for Dinka cooperation against cattle raiders of the Murle tribe and emphasized the membership of the Twic Dinka (a Dinka clan traditionally allied with its Nuer neighbors that has also suffered from Murle cattle raids) in the White Army, along with elements of the Lou, Jikany and Gawaar Nuer. The group was meeting at the time with Nuer groups living in south-west Ethiopia that had also been subject to Murle cattle raids. [2] In December 2011, a Nuer Youth/White Army statement claimed the movement had decided the only way to guarantee the security of Nuer cattle was to "wipe out the entire Murle tribe on the face of the earth" (*Upper Nile Times*, December 26, 2011).

The militia has support and fundraisers amongst the Nuer diaspora community in the United States, which is centered in Seattle. The White Army's U.S. fundraising wing is called the Nuer Youth in North America, headed by a Seattle-based Nuer refugee, Gai Bol Thong. The Nuer Youth runs a fundraising network extending to other cities in the United States and Canada hosting Nuer communities. Gai Bol came under criticism in early 2012 when he told a reporter: "We mean what we say. We kill everybody. We are tired of [the Murle]" (*New York Times*, January 12, 2012). The fundraiser toned down his remarks the following day, saying that "killing everybody" did not include children (*Seattle Weekly*, January 13, 2012).

Notes

1. David de Chand, "White Army declares protracted confrontation against SPLM/A," South Sudan United Democratic Alliance/ South Sudan Defense Force Press Release, May 23, 2006, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article15813>.
2. "Nuer and Dinka White Army to Launch 'Operation

Savannah Storm' against Murle Armed Youth," Leadership of the Nuer and Dinka White Army Media Release, Uror County, Jonglei State, South Sudan, February 4, 2012, <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/news/press-releases/nuer-and-dinka-white-army-to-launch-operation-savannah-storm-against-murle-armed-youth>.

COMMANDER OF IRAQ'S JAYSH AL-MUKHTAR MILITANTS ARRESTED

Andrew McGregor

Following attacks on a U.S.-supported Iranian dissident group based in Iraq and a Saudi border post as well as public threats to hit targets in Kuwait, Jaysh al-Mukhtar (Army of the Chosen) leader Wathiq al-Battat was arrested at a Baghdad checkpoint on January 2.

The stated intention of Jaysh al-Mukhtar at its founding was to protect Iraq's Shia population and aid the national government in fighting Sunni extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Al-Battat told AP in February 2013 that Jaysh al-Islam was armed by Iran, though Iranian authorities have strongly denied such claims (AP, February 26, 2013). Ahmad Abu Risha, leader of the Sunni Awakening National Council in Iraq, has accused the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government of sponsoring and protecting Jaysh al-Mukhtar (al-Arabiya, February 27, 2013). Prior to forming Jaysh al-Mukhtar in February 2013, al-Battat was a senior figure in Iraq's Hezbollah Brigades. Al-Battat claims to operate with the approval of all the senior Shia religious authorities in the holy city of Najaf and regards Iranian Ayatollah Seyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei as the leader of Jaysh al-Mukhtar (*al-Hayat*, February 24, 2013).

Jaysh al-Mukhtar claimed responsibility for firing 20 Katyusha rockets and several mortar rounds at the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MeK – People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran) compound in the former U.S. "Camp Liberty" (re-named Camp Hurriya) in Baghdad on December 26, 2013, killing three MeK members and wounding several others. Al-Battat justified the attack by saying his movement had repeatedly asked the Iraqi government to expel the MeK, "but they are still here." The MeK saw the hand of the Maliki government behind the attack, while the United States called for the perpetrators to be found and held accountable (Reuters, December 27, 2013). The MeK is a former Marxist group best known for its terrorist attacks against the Iranian regime and an often bizarre personality cult built around its Paris-

based leaders. The group enforces isolation from the outside world and bans personal relationships between its male and female members.

Once closely allied to Saddam Hussein, the MeK was a U.S.- and EU-designated terrorist group until both these bodies abandoned the designation following a well-funded lobbying campaign, which fortuitously coincided with a Western desire to pressure Iran in the confrontation over the Islamic State's nuclear ambitions. The turnabout ignored widespread reports of the movement's cult-like activities under the leadership of Maryam and Massoud Rajavi (the latter has not been seen in public since 2003). The U.S. Department of State revoked the terrorist designation in September 2012, allowing the group access to frozen assets, but also noted that "the Department [of State] does not overlook or forget the MEK's past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil [against the Iranian UN Mission in New York] in 1992. The Department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members." [1] Both Iraq and Iran continue to designate the MeK as a terrorist group despite its renunciation of violence in 2001.

Al-Battat may have felt he had a free hand to act against the MeK at Camp Hurriya after 52 members of the MeK were slain in a September 1, 2013 raid by Iraqi security forces against another MeK compound at Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad (BBC, September 1, 2013). The raid was just one of many clashes between Iraqi security forces and the MeK since 2009, including a July 29, 2009 raid that killed 11 members of the MeK and injured over 500 others at Camp Ashraf.

Al-Battat's group had previously launched rockets and mortar rounds at the MeK compound in Camp Hurriya on February 9, 2013, killing eight and wounding nearly 100 without any serious government response, despite calls from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for his arrest. Shortly after the first strike on Camp Hurriya, al-Battat vowed to target the camp again, saying his movement regarded "striking and killing [MeK members] as an honor as well as a religious and moral duty" (*al-Hayat*, February 24, 2013).

Jaysh al-Mukhtar also claimed responsibility for a November 2013 mortar attack on an uninhabited area near a Saudi Arabian border post, which al-Battat described as a warning to the kingdom to end its involvement in Iraqi affairs (Reuters, November 21, 2013). Reflecting the strength of Shia eschatological beliefs, al-Battat has sworn to "annihilate the infidel, atheist Saudi regime" and all the regimes that support Israel and America by marching on Saudi Arabia

with the Hidden Imam upon the latter's return (Sharqiya TV, February 5, 2013). Twelver Shia Muslims believe the 12th Imam (Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi) has been in hiding in a cave underneath a Samarra mosque since the late ninth century and will return to battle the forces of evil shortly before the Day of Judgment. When it briefly appeared a U.S.-led strike on Syria was imminent in September 2013, al-Battat promised to "cut the West's economic artery" by attacking Saudi Arabia's oil facilities and ports in retaliation (Fars News Agency [Tehran], September 11, 2013). Al-Battat's threats to Kuwait, however, were based on the latter's decision to build a new port that would compete with the nearby Iraqi port of Umm Qasr (al-Siyasah [Kuwait], February 25, 2013; al-Arabiya, February 27, 2013).

Note

1. "Delisting of the Mujahedin-e Khalq," U.S. Department of State Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Washington D.C., September 28, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/09/198443.htm>.

Ansar al-Shari'a: Transforming Libya into a Land of Jihad

Ludovico Carlino

In the first attack of its kind in Libya, a suicide car bomber drove an explosive-laden truck into a military checkpoint in Bersis (east of Benghazi) on December 22, 2013 that killed 13 people and injured 17 others (*Jeune Afrique*, December 23, 2013). The investigation team did not rule out the possibility that the bomb had been set off remotely. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but Libyan officials interpreted the incident as an indication of the increasingly belligerent stance undertaken by local jihadist militias and Ansar al-Shari'a in particular (LANA News [Tripoli], December 22, 2013; *Libya Herald*, December 22, 2013, December 24, 2013).

Ansar al-Shari'a, which began in Benghazi as a revolutionary brigade in the 2011 anti-Qaddafi revolt, acquired popularity amongst extremists in September 2012 for its alleged role in the attack that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens at the U.S. consulate in Benghazi. In October 2012, the organization changed its name to Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL), likely in an attempt to stress its national ambitions, which came to fruition in the following months with a geographical expansion to Sirte, Derna and Ajdabiya (al-Ahram, [Cairo] November 26, 2013). Similar to other of the Arab world's "Ansar al-Shari'a" movements, ASL has devoted

much of its effort to *da'wa* (missionary activities) and trying to gain local support through the provision of social services, ranging from security patrols to garbage collection. ASL has also sought to insert itself into the local social fabric by establishing, amongst other things, a cultural center for women, a medical clinic and religious schools (*Libya-Almostakbal*, September 11, 2013). [1]

This *da'wa* effort, coupled with rhetoric largely focused on moral issues, has partially overshadowed ASL's militant side, bolstering the perception that the group is more preoccupied with solidifying its presence in post-Qaddafi Libya than seeking an open confrontation with Libyan authorities. While its real agenda remains somewhat vague (besides the call for the application of Shari'a), several indications suggest that alongside its charitable efforts, ASL is also involved in shadowy activities aimed at assisting regional jihadists in using Libyan territory as a safe haven for militant training and the smuggling of weapons and fighters. With Libya serving as a central transit point for North African individuals seeking to reach the Syrian jihad, ASL is providing logistical assistance to would-be fighters with mobile training camps established around Benghazi and elsewhere in eastern Libyan (al-Arabiya, [Dubai] November 23, 2013; *al-Watan*, [Tripoli] November 27, 2013).

According to the accounts of Libyan officials, dozens of Tunisians and Algerians arrive every week in Benghazi to receive militant training, using fake Libyan passports to leave the country in a scheme facilitated by the presence of ASL operatives amongst the city airport's personnel (*Libya-Business News*, December 16, 2013). While this sort of activity may fall within the kind of pan-Islamist solidarity shared by many Islamist actors, other evidence suggests that Libyan territory has become a fertile arena for regional jihadists to forge closer relationships and plan terrorist operations.

A case in point is that of Ayman Saadi, a young Tunisian arrested on October 30, 2013 in the Tunisian city of Monastir while trying to carry out a suicide mission (Kapitalis [Tunis] October 31, 2013). Saadi is said to have received training near Benghazi and Derna with the aim of fighting in Syria, but ended up being tasked by Libyan militants with a plot in his own country (Tunisie14, October 30, 2013; *Tuniscscope*, November 3, 2013).

Although there is no evidence suggesting that Saadi was in direct contact with ASL in particular, the links between other regional groups and ASL appear to have been growing in recent months. Tunisian security officials have pointed to operational, financial and logistical links between ASL and Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST), with the latter receiving weapons from its Libyan counterpart (Kapitalis, October 31, 2013; *al-Watan*, November 27, 2013). Those suspicions appeared well-grounded when news emerged about the recent arrest of AST leader Abu Iyadh in Misrata, although the

reports were denied by Libyan officials (Tunisienumerique, December 30, 2013; December 31, 2013; LANA, December 31, 2013). Abu Iyadh's presence in Libya, where he is said to have found shelter after AST was designated a terrorist organization by the Tunisian Government, was reported on at least one other occasion (Tunisienumerique, September 24, 2013). Algerian security sources claimed he attended a secret meeting hosted by ASL in Benghazi last September with representatives of AST, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and various Moroccan and Egyptian jihadi militias. A new regional strategy aimed at intensifying the jihadi struggle both in Libya and in Tunisia was allegedly the topic of discussion (Africanmanager, December 15, 2013; Tunisie Focus, December 16, 2013).

On the domestic front, ASL has not yet been clearly implicated in the relentless wave of attacks in Benghazi and Derna that has killed more than 300 security officials in recent months. Assigning responsibility for such attacks is complicated by the presence of other jihadist and local militias operating in both cities in defiance of the central government (*Jeune Afrique*, January 1). However, the November 25 clashes in Benghazi between ASL and soldiers of the Saiqa Special Forces Brigade, which left 9 dead and 49 injured, proved that ASL has no restraint in resorting to armed violence against security forces when confronted (LANA News, November 26, 2013; see also Terrorism Monitor Brief, December 3, 2013).

New fighting erupted again near Benghazi on November 28, when ASL operatives attacked a Libyan Army unit escorting four militants arrested for possession of explosives, killing three soldiers and injuring three more (*al-Watan*, November 29, 2013). After the capture in Tripoli of Libyan militant Abu Anas al-Libi by U.S. Special Forces last October, ASL released a strong statement calling on its fellows to seek to release al-Libi "with every legitimate way allowed by the pure Shari'a," [2] The statement further criticized the Libyan Government for being too friendly to foreign powers (Libya Herald, October 7, 2013). On November 12, only a few days after opening its Derna branch under the slogan, "A step toward the building of an Islamic State," the group issued another communiqué stating that the only way to guarantee stability and security in Libya "was dependent on the application of the Shari'a" and accusing anyone working for the government of apostasy (AllAfrica.com, November 15). [3]

Although ASL involvement in recent episodes of violence against Libyan security forces might be a Benghazi-centred phenomenon facilitated by the group's strong presence in the area and the city's lawless environment, ASL's belligerent progression in both words and deeds might suggest that regarding Libya as a land of jihad and not only dawa has become a concrete reality. Given the fluidity of Libya's Islamist scene, where ASL is not alone in its calls for Shari'a and a number of Islamist militias continue to pose serious challenges to the country's future, such a development is

likely to worsen the security situation in Libya with potential consequences well beyond the country.

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Notes

1. Photos of ASL da'wa activities are regularly posted on the group's official Twitter account, available at https://twitter.com/AnsarShariaa_ly.
2. The statement is available at www.tinyurl.com/nldktm4.
3. The statement is available at <http://justpaste.it/dkpbq>.

Tunisian Extremists Expand Beyond Their Bases in Jebel Chaambi

Stefano M. Torelli

2013 marked the return of terrorism to Tunisia. Since the middle of the year, terrorist incidents have occurred with greater frequency and now pose an alarming threat to the safety of Tunisia. During the first half of 2013, the Tunisian security forces were the target of several jihadist attacks, especially in the mountainous area of Jebel Chaambi, on the border with Algeria. This phase, which cannot yet be declared completed, reached its peak with the terrorist attack of July 29, 2013 that resulted in the death of eight soldiers, the worst terrorist attack in recent years in Tunisia. The Tunisian government, with the Ministry of the Interior in the front row, has repeatedly accused the Salafist Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST) movement to be responsible for the attacks, but failed to provide evidence.

Indeed, these terrorist actions seemed to have been conducted in a manner that resembled Algerian jihadism. However, on August 27, 2013 the government officially banned the AST, declaring it a terrorist organization. On the one hand, this has contributed to the radicalization of a part of the Salafist group, especially with reference to its base. On the other hand, it has to be emphasized that this reactive policy did not coincide with the end of terrorist activities.

Terrorism spread beyond Jebel Chaambi last October. Two officers of the National Guard were killed on October 17, 2013 in an exchange of fire at Goubellat, in the Beja governorate of northern Tunisia. According to sources within the security

apparatus, the assailants belonged to a sleeper cell, composed of individuals who settled in the area as farmers (*L'conomiste Maghrébin*, October 22, 2013). The incident suggested that the militants are no longer just hidden in border areas, but are gradually being placed into internal regions of the country. The reaction of the Tunisian government was massive, including the combined use of air and ground forces. On October 19-20, 2013, the government launched one of its most important offensives since the confrontation with the jihadists that started in December 2012, killed at least 13 suspected terrorists and led to the seizure of two tons of explosive material at Goubellat, near Jebel Touayer (*Tunisia Daily*, October 19, 2013). The Goubellat operations, conducted jointly by special anti-terrorism squads, the army and the National Guard, have partly succeeded in preventing further attacks from the cell.

However, only a few days later, on October 23, 2013, another attack hit the National Guard in one of the poorest areas of the country, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid. On that occasion six members of the National Guard and a policeman were killed in an exchange of fire. Two terrorists were killed (*Tunis Afrique Press*, October 23, 2013). The same day, in Menzel Bourguiba (governorate of Bizerte), a policeman was killed and another wounded by four terrorists shooting from a car, while four other suspected terrorists were arrested (*Tunis Afrique Press*, October 24, 2013). The state's response to this expansion of terrorism beyond the Jebel Chaambi area – where it seemed to be confined – has been twofold. To the military reaction on the ground and the campaign of arrests, new legal responses have been added. Immediately after the terrorist attack in Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, an October 24, 2013 meeting of the Higher Council for Security, directed by President Moncef Marzouk, approved legislative measures aimed at making the fight against terrorism more effective and coincided with the establishment of joint anti-terrorist units formed by the army, the national guard and the police forces (*Menara* [Casablanca], October 24, 2013; *Tunivisions*, October, 24, 2013).

A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a hotel in the resort city of Sousse on October 30, 2013. On the same day, a man was arrested after attempting to bomb the mausoleum of Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba in Monastir, Tunisia. Both attacks were unsuccessful; the first only caused the death of the terrorist, while the second was foiled in advance by the security forces. Nevertheless, the two episodes created extreme concern in Tunis and highlighted some trends threatening Tunisian national security:

- The most worrying fact concerns the target of these terrorist acts: having been a peripheral threat directed

essentially against the security forces, terrorism in Tunisia now appears likely to target urban centers

- The targets of the October 30, 2013 plots were not only symbolic (as in the case of the mausoleum of Bourguiba), but also strategic and economic. Sousse is one of the most important tourist centers in Tunisia. An attack on the tourism sector could seriously weaken the national economy
- The fact that the suicide bombing and foiled attack occurred on the same day in two different locations; the attacks may have been coordinated
- Finally, the jihadi network that is penetrating the country is fueled by other criminal activities, such as trafficking in drugs, arms and other contraband.

On November 11, 2013, the city of Kébili was the scene of clashes between security forces and a group of suspected terrorists. The shooting resulted in the killing of two militants, while a National Guard officer was wounded (*Direct Info*, November 12, 2013). However, in late November 2013 the Tunisian authorities announced the dismantling of three terrorist cells in Zarzis, Djerba and Ben Guerdane. In these operations, 20 people were arrested, including four Libyan nationals. Moreover, Tunisian soldiers seized weapons and military uniforms intended to be used for ambushes of the security forces (*al-Sabah* [Tunis], November 23, 2013). However, jihadist elements still seem to maintain their presence in the Jebel Chaambi area, as an army captain was killed by the explosion of a landmine on December 2, 2013 (*Tunisia Live*, December 2, 2013).

At the same time, the Tunisian government has continued to reinforce a framework for cooperation both with neighbors (Libya and Algeria) and with other countries such as France. Tunisia is negotiating the purchase of six Caracal transport helicopters, produced by the group Eurocopter, for an estimated \$415 million (*Maghreb Emergent*, November 15, 2013). Although the government has decided to increase the 2014 defense budget by \$185 million over last year, the contract has not yet been signed as negotiations on the cost of the helicopters are not complete (*Jeune Afrique*, December 9, 2013). Indeed, the Tunisian army faces a serious lack of adequate resources to conduct asymmetric warfare-style operations. Therefore, Tunisia is considering a five-year plan aimed at developing and modernizing its army. The United States may support the Tunisian efforts through its Africa Command (AFRICOM). AFRICOM commander David M. Rodriguez has been in Tunis more than once and has reiterated Washington's commitment to Tunis (*Tunis Afrique Presse*, November 20, 2013).

The political stalemate represents a further destabilizing

factor for Tunisia. Moreover, the government's repressive policy vis-à-vis the Salafist Ansar al-Shari'a has not helped to defuse tensions. As long as the situation remains insecure, new terrorist attacks could take place. In this context, the Tunisian government is trying to modernize its security apparatus, helped by its external allies, as the jihadist threat enters the country from the Sahel region and from neighboring Algeria and Libya, where Ansar al-Shari'a leader Abu Iyad is reportedly hiding (Tunisia Live, December 30, 2013).

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Northern Cameroon Under Threat from Boko Haram and Séléka Militants

Jacob Zenn

The Tenth Parallel North has been described as the "fault line where Islam and Christianity meet and clash." [1] In Africa, the Tenth Parallel passes west to east through Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia. Cameroon is the only one of these countries to avoid major ethnic, religious, sectarian or terrorism-related conflict in the last decade.

However, militants are now using Cameroon as a rear base for carrying out attacks in Nigeria and the Central African Republic (CAR). These groups include Boko Haram and Ansaru in northern Cameroon and (CAR) militants, including Séléka, in eastern Cameroon. Cameroon is likely to see new security threats spilling over into its territory from its two Tenth Parallel neighbors, as well as increasing pressures on the state from refugee flows into Cameroon from Nigeria and the CAR.

Boko Haram's Rear Base in Cameroon

In 2004, Boko Haram carried out its first organized attacks on Nigerian security forces in the Mandara Mountains, along Nigeria's border with Cameroon (News24.com [Kano], October 9, 2004). Five years later, in July 2010, Abubakar Shekau became the leader of Boko Haram and announced

that "jihad has begun" from a hideout in Maiduguri, Borno State, 100 miles from the Cameroonian border in Nigeria (*Daily Trust* [Abuja], July 4, 2011; Ansar1.info, July 11, 2010).

Shekau's base is currently believed to be in Gwoza, Borno State, not far from the border with Cameroon. He reportedly received medical treatment in Cameroon after receiving an injury during an army raid on one of his bases (Vanguard [Lagos], August 25, 2013). However, Shekau mocked reports of his presence in Cameroon as well as the seven million dollar bounty on his head in a September 2013 Hausa-language video:

Imagine telling the whole world that I was injured and was taken to Amchide in Cameroon for treatment and that it was in Amchide that I died! As I talk to you now, I have never been to Cameroon in the whole of my life. It is only Allah that knows where I am (laughing). Obama, I learned you are giving one-billion, but I will not disclose where I am. Allah alone knows where I am (laughing) (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], September 25, 2013).

Since Shekau became Boko Haram leader, Boko Haram has consistently used Cameroon as a rear base for carrying out attacks in Nigeria. Most recently, on December 19, 2013, a convoy of Boko Haram militants crossed the border from Cameroon into Banki, Nigeria, and attacked the Kur Mohammed Barracks in Bama. Shekau said in a video that Boko Haram "destroyed 21 armored tanks and killed multitudes," while the Nigerian army claimed that 50 terrorists were killed (AFP, December 27, 2013). The Nigerian Air Force pursued Boko Haram as it retreated back to Cameroon and destroyed nearly 20 Boko Haram 4x4s. The air force also destroyed several villages where Boko Haram was hiding but failed to evacuate non-combatants, thus exacerbating the toll taken on civilians in the border region (*Nigerian Tribune*, December 28, 2013).

Operational Environment of the Border Region

The attack on the military barracks in Bama was particularly traumatic because it came only days after Boko Haram destroyed parts of the Maiduguri air base in a 300-militant attack. Local villagers in the border region reportedly saw Boko Haram militants entering Nigeria from Cameroon on the way to Bama. [2] Even after Boko Haram movements were reported to the security forces, Boko Haram was still able to travel far from major roadways on motorcycles and 4x4s to Bama, where they launched their attack.

One of the main difficulties for the Nigerian security forces in patrolling the border with Cameroon is a lack of

infrastructure, which allows Boko Haram to set up bases and training camps in the desert or forested areas of the northern Nigerian-northern Cameroon border region or in the Mandara Mountains between Adamawa State, Nigeria and Adamawa State, Cameroon. Moreover, the people on both sides of the Nigerian-Cameroon border are from the same tribes and speak the same languages, while Nigerian security forces officers come from all over that country and lack sufficient knowledge of the human terrain to detect Boko Haram members.

The “Civilian Joint Task Force” in northeastern Nigeria is a mostly ethnic Kanuri vigilante group comprised of hundreds of lightly armed locals who oppose Boko Haram and whose families were victims of its attacks. Since May 2013, they provided the army’s Joint Task Force (JTF) with an on-the-ground force that effectively detected Boko Haram members, but Boko Haram may have intimidated and deterred the vigilantes in late 2013 by massacring villagers where the group was operating (*Daily Post* [Lagos], September 17, 2013). Nonetheless, locals in the region report that each “job” given to the youth in the Civilian Joint Task Force is one less potential recruit for Boko Haram. [3]

Kidnappings in Cameroon

In addition to using Cameroon as a base to attack Nigeria and funnel weapons into the country, Boko Haram has also carried out two types of attacks on Cameroonian soil. First, Boko Haram has chased defectors who escaped to Cameroon and assassinated them. Cameroonian authorities, for example, reported on December 14, 2013, that Boko Haram members in Kousseri, located in Cameroon near the Chadian border, rode in on motorcycles and shot a former Boko Haram member (Camer.be, December 17, 2013). It is possible that this defector and others reported assassinated in 2011 and 2012 were from Ansaru, which in June 2012 claimed that Boko Haram’s killing of members who left the group as well as the killing of innocent Muslim civilians were the reasons why Shekau was “inhuman” to the *ummah* (Muslim community) and was unfit to be the *amir* of Boko Haram (*Desert Herald* [Kaduna], June 5, 2012).

Second, Boko Haram has carried out kidnappings in Cameroon, possibly with support from Ansaru’s skilled kidnapers, who prioritize operations over ideological or moral disputes with Shekau. In February 2013, for example, kidnapers took hostage a French family of seven on the Cameroon side of the border with Nigeria and brought the family back to Nigeria’s Borno State. The kidnapping resembled Ansaru operations, which are known to target foreigners for ransom. Ansaru justifies such attacks as

revenge against France for its “war against Islam” (*Premium Times* [Abuja], February 25, 2013). Subsequent proof-of-life images of the family came from Boko Haram and were transmitted in Shekau’s name, possibly because Ansaru passed the hostages over to Boko Haram bases in Borno State.

More recently, in December 2013, Boko Haram kidnapped a French priest in Cameroon and claimed in a statement that it “coordinated” the kidnapping with Ansaru (AFP, November 15, 2013). Like the French family, the priest was taken back to Borno State, Nigeria and was freed after Cameroonian president Paul Biya intervened. According to French President François Hollande, Biya was “personally involved” in the negotiations, which resulted in Cameroon releasing at least one Boko Haram prisoner and, according to unconfirmed reports, also paying a ransom of several million dollars. (Radio France Internationale, December 31, 2013; *Africa Review* [Nairobi], January 7).

In the case of the French family, President Hollande also thanked President Biya for “playing an important role” in securing the freedom of the family by releasing Boko Haram prisoners in Cameroon and reportedly paying a \$3.14 million ransom to Boko Haram, although the payment was intended to be confidential before Nigerian security sources made it public (Camerooninfo.net, April 22, 2013). Biya, who has expressed concerns about Islamic extremists and the growing Salafist movement in Cameroon to African and Western diplomats, may have overseen the arrest of Cameroonian Islamists and Boko Haram members in recent years (Cameroononline.org, January 11, 2012).

Shekau has not ordered attacks in Cameroon since 2010, except for targeting defectors who fled to Cameroon, there may be a new Boko Haram branch operating in Cameroon. If these defectors were Ansaru members, this would add further evidence of Ansaru operating – and carrying out kidnappings – with Boko Haram from Ansaru bases in Cameroon.

Séléka Spillover

The conflict in the CAR started in December 2012, when a coalition of rebel groups from the eastern CAR, called Séléka, attempted to overthrow the government of President François Bozizé in the CAR’s capital of Bangui. Spillover from the conflict to Cameroon began surfacing about six months after Boko Haram’s first kidnapping in northern Cameroon and the Séléka rebels advanced on Bangui in March 2013:

- In August 2013, three Séléka commanders crossed

into Cameroon to acquire supplies, but became drunk, clashed with a border guard and then, in what Cameroon called an “isolated incident,” killed a border guard (*Le Jour Online*, September 16).

- In September 2013, a former Chadian Séléka member, Abdoulaye Miskine, who helped Séléka take Bangui but left Séléka to form the Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain (FPDC), was arrested in Bertoa – the same place where the border guard was killed – for plotting to “destabilize CAR from a rear base in Cameroon” (*Journal de Bangui*, September 19, 2013).
- In November 2013, Cameroon’s Defense Ministry reported that an “armed gang” of 400 gunmen entered Cameroon from the CAR and killed a Cameroonian soldier and a civilian while five members of the “gang” were killed (*Africa Review* [Nairobi], November 18, 2013). The FPDC denied that this attack was revenge for Miskine’s arrest, despite intelligence reports that the attackers belonged to his group (*Le Messenger* [Douala], November 22, 2013).
- On December 31, 2013, “Séléka forces” reportedly clashed with Cameroonian soldiers on the border, causing the deaths of four Cameroonian soldiers and three of the attackers, though the reason for the clash is unknown (PANA Online [Dakar], January 2).

While the identity and motivations of the attackers in these “armed gangs” and “Séléka forces” remained uncertain, they were armed with assault rifles, heavy machine guns, rocket launchers, four-wheel drive vehicles, GPS, night-vision field telescopes and satellite telephones. Moreover, according to a Cameroonian political analyst, the “mediocrity of the transport infrastructure” and the “low density of the population” in the Cameroon-CAR border regions “eased their deployment” (*Le Messenger* [Douala], November 22, 2013). With as many as 30,000 refugees from Boko Haram-related violence in Cameroon and 100,000 CAR citizens having fled the CAR to seek refuge in Cameroon and other neighboring countries, Cameroonian border authorities have been too overwhelmed to deal with security concerns (AFP, January 3; *Nigerian Tribune*, November 30, 2013).

Conclusion

Although the attackers from the CAR, including Muslims from Séléka, likely have little in common ideologically with Boko Haram, many of their weapons are the same. Their area of operations may also be different, but the same issues related to the free flow of weapons (particularly from Libya), unguarded borders and difficult terrain allow militants, poachers and other criminals to thrive in that environment. As the conflict in the CAR continues, Boko Haram’s anti-

Christian “jihad” could resonate among Séléka militants, who have increasingly been fighting with Christian militias in the CAR. However, Arabic-speaking Ansaru militants, whose self-declared mandate is to “protect Muslims in Black Africa” and who have trained or studied in Sudan, would be more likely than grassroots Nigerian Boko Haram militants to travel to the CAR and fight alongside the Sudanese and Chadian Séléka militants. Thus, the “Boko Haram” members reported in western CAR who are “shocked following the destructions of mosques and Korans” may be connected to Ansaru cells in Cameroon rather than Boko Haram cells under Shekau in Borno State (*Alwihda Online*, November 24, 2013; *Bangos Life Magazine Facebook Page*, December 18, 2013).

Cameroon is therefore in the center of a rising tide of Islamism, religious violence, insurgency and border conflict sweeping Nigeria, the CAR and its other neighbors on the Tenth Parallel North. Moreover, northern Cameroon’s lack of infrastructure and development relative to southern Cameroon, a growing Salafist trend and the narrative of a poorer “Muslim north” and a richer “Christian south” led by Paul Biya, a Christian and Africa’s longest serving president, fits well with the narratives advanced by Boko Haram, Ansaru and possibly Séléka as well. If Cameroonians are recruited into these networks, they may form a movement of their own in coming years.

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Notes

1. Elisa Grizwold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam*, Picador, New York, 2011.
2. Author’s phone interview with civilians in the Nigerian-Cameroonian border region, December 30, 2013.
3. *Ibid.*