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Yemen Houthis
(Source al-Jazeera)

SUCCESSFUL OFFENSIVE ESTABLISHES HOUTHII SHIITE MOVEMENT AS A POLITICAL FORCE IN THE NEW YEMEN

Andrew McGregor

Since last October, the Zaydi Shiite Houthis of northern Yemen's Sa'ada governorate have been involved in simultaneous conflicts with the Zaydi Shiites of the Hamid Confederation of tribes in neighboring Amran governorate and Salafist Sunnis concentrated in the town of Dammaj in Sa'ada governorate. Propelled by an apparently new armory of heavy weapons, the Houthis began to push south into neighboring Amran governorate in early January, eventually defeating the powerful al-Ahmar clan, leaders of the Hashid Arab confederation. By the time a ceasefire could be arranged in early February, Houthist forces were in the Arhab region, only 40 kilometers from the Yemeni capital of Sana'a (AFP, January 30).

The Zaydi, also known as "Fiver Shi'a," constitute over 40 percent of Yemen's population, though only a portion of this total are Houthis. They have traditionally had few major doctrinal differences with Yemen's Sunni Shafi'i majority, but have run into conflict with the growing numbers of anti-Shiite Salafists in Sa'ada governorate. In the two years since the uprising that deposed Yemen's old regime, the Houthis have made a dramatic transition from a Sa'ada-based rebel movement to an important and recognized political player in Yemen.

By February 2, the Hashid defensive lines began to collapse, allowing the Houthis to take Khamri, the home of Hussein al-Ahmar (brother of Hashid tribal chief Sadiq al-Ahmar), though not before Hussein ordered his family property to be burned to the ground before evacuating (AFP, February 2). The Houthist offensive was also opposed by a number of pro-government Zaydi Shiite tribes (AFP, January 30).

On February 9, government mediators succeeded in arriving at a ceasefire agreement in Amran governorate between the Houthis and their al-Ahmar opponents. The

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agreement called for the Houthis to withdraw from the Arhab district, but in turn provided for the expulsion of all non-local Salafists from Dammaj, where many were studying at the Dar al-Hadith Seminary, which has a large number of foreign students (Yemen Post, February 10). However, Yemen's Salafist political party, the Rashad Union, referred to the "forcible displacement" of Salafists from Dammaj and accused the Houthis of committing "atrocities" and "crimes against humanity" (World Bulletin, January 19). The Houthis in turn have said they had no problem with the Salafist students, only the large number of "armed fighters who were students at the school" (Yemen Times, January 16). Houthis put the Dammaj seminary under siege last October in response to what they viewed as a mounting threat from the Salafists gathering in Dammaj.

Once the ceasefire was in place, troops of the national army's 62nd Brigade began to deploy to checkpoints formerly occupied by the combatants in Arhab (Saba News Agency [Sana'a], February 13). The agreement to expel non-local Salafis from Dammaj sent some 15,000 Salafis streaming south into the Sawan district of Sana'a, where local residents were surprised to see them filling mosques and markets as temporary residences, throwing up tents and setting checkpoints manned by gunmen along roads and alleys (Yemen Times, January 29).

Houthi representative Muhammad al-Bukhaiti has emphasized that the conflict in Dammaj was a reaction to steps taken by the leader of the Hashid confederation: "The ongoing clashes in Hashid are the result of a document signed by Shaykh al-Ahmar in 2010. That agreement stipulated that if anyone from the Hashid tribe joined the Houthis or supported them, they are subject to death and having their property expropriated. Accordingly, several individuals associated with the Houthis in the Danan area were displaced. This is the reason behind the original clashes in Dammaj" (Yemen Times, January 14).

Though the Houthi advance has brought its fighters close to Sana'a, it seems unlikely that the Houthis will attempt to take the capital, knowing such a move could easily ignite a much larger conflict. Besides, as a Houthi spokesman noted, the movement already has a sizable presence in Sana'a that makes further infiltration unnecessary: "There are hundreds of thousands of Houthis in Sana'a and everyone knows it" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 7).

Looking to explain the al-Ahmar collapse and the national army's failure to intervene, some Yemeni observers have attributed the Houthis' advance to military support from Iran and diplomatic intervention and intelligence updates from

the United States (Yemen Post, February 10). Hadi's strategy in avoiding a military confrontation with the Houthis appears to have been designed to avoid further escalation of the situation, but has inevitably made him look weak in the eyes of some Yemenis. Business mogul and al-Ahmar clan member Hamid al-Ahmar is among those who have suggested that his clan's defeat was due to the intervention of Hashid member and ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ordered followers and tribesmen within the Hashid confederation to support the Houthis in retribution for the al-Ahmar clan's role in deposing Saleh in February 2012 (*al-Masder* [Sana'a], February 9; AFP, February 2).

Defeated in battle, Sadiq al-Ahmar formed a committee of 60 tribal and religious figures to meet with President Hadi to demand the government halt Houthist expansion and force the Houthis to relinquish their heavy weapons and form a political party (*Gulf News*, February 11). The demands were quickly rejected by a Houthist spokesman: "The same religious and tribal figures who would ask Hadi to ask us to hand over our weapons, fought the former government in 2011 with heavy weapons... We are part of a country awash with weapons. No one can force us to form a political party. When we realize that it is in our interest to form a party, we will do it" (*Gulf News*, February 11).

In a January 13 speech given on the occasion of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi suggested the Houthi breakout was the result of regional insecurity: "When the state is able to protect us as citizens we will not be forced to use our weapons against anyone, but when the government is unable to do that, we will defend ourselves and our society... We really regret every drop of blood, even of those who fight against us" (NationalYemen.com, January 14).

A presidential "Regions Defining Committee (RDC)" formed in January to decide on Yemen's new federal structure has approved the division of Yemen into six federal regions, with special status for certain regions such as the capital:

- In the south, the regions of Aden (including the governorates of Aden, Lahj, al-Dhale and Abyan) and Hadramawt (including Hadramawt, Shabwa, al-Mahra and Socotra)
- In the north, the regions of Shebah (including the governorates of al-Jawf, Marib and al-Bayda), Janad (including Ta'iz and Ibb), Azal (including Amran, Sana'a, Dhamar and the Houthi homeland of Sa'ada) and Tahama (Hodeida, al-Mahwit, Hajjah and Raymah).
- The capital, Sana'a, would exist independent of any regional authority as a "neutral" space

- The southern port of Aden would be given “independent legislative and executive powers” (BBC, February 10).

The Houthis political wing, Ansar Allah, quickly objected to the work of the RDC, which will be folded into a new constitution that must be approved in a national referendum. According to Ansar Allah, the new internal borders will divide Yemen into poor and wealthy regions (Press TV [Tehran], February 11).

Houthi representative Muhammad al-Bukhaiti pointed out that Sa'ada had been included into the Azal region, an area with no major natural resources and no access to the sea, while Sa'ada's stronger “cultural, social and geographic links” with neighboring Hajjah (with access to the sea) and Jawf (east of Sa'ada beside the Saudi border) had been ignored by the RDC (Yemen Online, February 12). Another Houthi leader, Ali al-Emad, predicted that “This form of division will probably cause internal conflicts in the future because it was decided on a sectarian and tribal basis” (Yemen Times, February 13).

MALI'S GANDA ISO MILITIA SPLITS OVER SUPPORT FOR TUAREG REBEL GROUP

Andrew McGregor

In a statement issued on February 9 in the Burkina Faso capital of Ouagadougou (host of a series of negotiations between the warring parties in northern Mali), Ganda Iso founder and unofficial leader Seydou Cissé announced that the Malian militia/political movement intended to support the largely Tuareg Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) in all parts of the peace process being conducted with Bamako. Cissé followed this unexpected declaration of support for his movement's traditional enemies with the astonishing observation that Ganda Iso made a mistake by not following the MNLA into the 2012 rebellion from the start (*L'Indicateur du Renouveau* [Bamako], February 12). Cissé formed the movement from Songhai and Peul/Fulani tribesmen in 2008 during Tuareg disturbances in the region “to maintain social stability” (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], August 12, 2010).

From 2008 to 2009, Ganda Iso engaged in a private war with the pro-government Imghad Tuareg militia led by Colonel al-Hajj ag Gamou (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 19, 2012). Ganda Iso also clashed with the MNLA several times in March 2012, but fled Gao at the joint approach of the MNLA and Ansar al-Din (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], March 20,

2012; 22 Septembre [Bamako], March 19, 2012). MNLA spokesman Moussa ag Attaher said he believed the alliance of the two movements affirmed the will of the people of Azawad (northern Mali) to “conduct the good fight” (*L'Indicateur du Renouveau* [Bamako], February 12).

In a response nearly as strange as Cissé's remarks, Ganda Iso spokesman Muhammad Attaib Sidibé issued a statement saying that Cissé “had never been a member of the Ganda Iso movement. On the contrary, Monsieur Cissé is a known member of the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad and resides in Ouagadougou (*L'Indépendant* [Bamako], February 11; MaliActu.net, February 11). The statement added that Ganda Iso reaffirmed its support for the Coordination des Forces Patriotique de Résistance (CMFPR) under the leadership of Bamako-based lawyer Harouna Toureh.

However, according to the CMFPR, Toureh has not been the chairman of the group since January 14, having been replaced by Ganda Iso president Ibrahima Abba Kantao (22 Septembre [Bamako], January 30). Toureh's reported absence at nearly all CMFPR meetings led the group to drop him as its spokesman, but Toureh has found other work – the defense of “General” Amadou Sanogo, leader of the 2012 military coup (*Le Scorpion* [Bamako], January 30; *Les Echos du Parlement* [Bamako], November 29). Indicted on charges of conspiracy to kidnap, Sanogo, who exchanged his rank of captain for that of a general shortly after the 2012 coup, has been fortunate in so far evading the more serious charges of complicity in multiple murders facing former defense minister General Yamoussa Camara, former security director General Sidi Alassane Toure, Captain Amadou Konare, the reputed brains behind the coup, and Lieutenant Tahirou Mariko, former aide to Captain Sanogo. The charges relate to the deaths of 21 members of the Malian paratroops/presidential guard who were arrested, displayed on television and then “disappeared” by the military regime after being captured during an unsuccessful counter-coup in April 2012 (for the rivalry between Mali's “Green Berets” and “Red Berets,” see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 22, 2013). A mass grave containing the remains of 21 men was recently found near the Kati military barracks outside of Bamako that served as Sanogo's headquarters and the remains are awaiting DNA testing (AP, February 14). General Camara is alleged to have forged documents claiming the missing men had been sent to the front to fight the Islamists and had been killed there (Reuters, February 13).

The CMFPR styles itself as a group of movements dedicated to driving jihadists and narco-traffickers from northern Mali, though none of these “self-defence” militias played a role of

any significance in the military intervention that drove most of the Islamist extremists from northern Mali in 2013, though Ganda Iso military commander Ahmadou Diallo was killed in a skirmish with Islamists in March, 2012. In the past, such groups often received support from elements of the Malian military in the interest of forming a counter-force to armed Arab and Tuareg movements in the north, but this support appears to have been withdrawn at the beginning of the intervention as the Malian army struggled to re-assert itself. There are reports that Mali's military thought the militias simply too amateur to be deployed in action (JournalduMali.com, November 14, 2013). The militias are mostly based in Gao region and are drawn largely from the Songhai, Peul/Fulani and other tribes that are traditional rivals of the Arabs and Tuaregs in northern Mali. The militias that have banded together in 2012 under the CMFPR umbrella include:

- Ganda Iso (Sons of the Land)
- Ganda Koy (Lords of the Land)
- Alliance des communautés de la région de Tombouctou (ACRT -Alliance of communities in the region of Timbuktu)
- Front de Libération des régions Nord du Mali (FLN - Front for the Liberation of the Northern regions of Mali)
- Force armée contre l'occupation (FACO - Armed force against the occupation)
- Cercle de réflexion et d'action (CRA - Circle of Reflection and Action)

Despite the effort to present a unified voice for the non-Arab and non-Tuareg communities of northern Mali, continuing dissension within these movements combined with diminished military support will work against these communities having significant representation in talks that will help determine the future of the region.

Iranian Naval Adventurism in the Atlantic Ocean

Nima Adalkah

Iran's Navy Commander, Admiral Habibollah Sayari, announced on January 21 that Iran's 29th fleet had left the port of Bandar Abbas for a three-month mission to the Atlantic Ocean (Press TV [Tehran], January 22). The 29th fleet consists of only two 1970s vintage British-built ships, the supply ship *Kharg* (refitted in 1994 and capable of supporting three Sea King helicopters) and the Alvand class

frigate *Sabalan* (usually described as a helicopter carrier and a destroyer respectively by Iranian authorities). Though the *Kharg* is the larger ship, it is essentially acting as a support ship for the *Sabalan*.

The navy sent the warships, according to Admiral Sayari, to provide security for Iranian ships in international waters, particularly near the U.S. maritime border, and to "send a message of peace and friendship to world countries" (Fars News [Tehran], January 21; Press TV, January 22). On February 9, Admiral Afshin Rezaei Haddad made a follow-up announcement, stating that the 29th fleet had already reached South Africa and entered the Atlantic Ocean (Press TV, February 9; Fars News February 9). For the first time, Rezaei claims, the Iranian military is establishing a presence near American territory (Press TV, February 9).

For the most part, Tehran argues that the decision to deploy the fleet is part of a military response to Washington building naval presence in the Persian Gulf in recent years. The American military presence in the Persian Gulf has primarily involved the Navy's 5th fleet based in Bahrain, 153 miles away from the Iranian mainland. American ships have conducted two major maritime war games with Iran's Arab neighbors since 2012 (Fars News, February 8; Seratnews.ir, February 9). The military build-up has also included the participation of NATO member countries such as France in war games, raising fears in Tehran of a major military assault, particularly against its nuclear facilities (Press TV, February 5).

For Iranians, the best way to deal with the American threat in the Persian Gulf is to confront it with regular military exercises. On one level, the expansion of naval and ballistic war game operations in the Persian Gulf since 2008 has played a key role in the Islamic Republic's projection of power against the American presence near its maritime borders (see Terrorism Monitor, November 4, 2011). On another level, the deployment of Iranian warships to places such as the Gulf of Aden in November 2008 (for anti-piracy missions) and the Suez Cannel for a visit to a Syrian Mediterranean port has served to display Iran's military capabilities "in confronting any foreign threat on the country's shores" (IRNA March 5, 2011; for other Iranian naval operations, see Terrorism Monitor Briefs, October 1, 2009; Terrorism Monitor July 29, 2010 and Terrorism Monitor Briefs, March 10, 2011).

However, it is the Persian Gulf that remains the main defensive line for Iran. This is so since, Tehran argues, the United States views the Gulf not just as a security zone but also an extension of its maritime territories. The commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Corps (IRGC) Navy

(a small-boat naval force operating as a parallel force with the Iranian Navy), Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi, articulated this perception in his assertion that for the United States, “the Persian Gulf is the only part of the world for which Americans use the phrase ‘vital national security interests.’ It is the phrase that they only use for their homeland and the Persian Gulf” (Fars News, January 29).

Iran’s February announcement of a new line of “smart combat vessels” highlights Tehran’s continuous effort to display its naval strength (Press TV, January 11, 2013; February 9; Mehr News [Tehran], February 9). In this way, Iran’s strategy involves engaging in psychological warfare, or what the Iranian state calls “soft war,” with the aim of framing the ineffectiveness of enemy abilities and the neutralization of enemy military strategy on both the operational and public policy levels (for the “soft war” concept, see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 12, 2010). This type of psychological strategy revolves largely around the construction of hyped statements that can be used both for propagandist purposes and to undermine enemy strength. It is in fact highly unlikely that the Iranian vessels are heading to the U.S. coast as declared, especially since it is difficult to send such aging ships to sea for such an extended voyage (Jamnews, February 9). In light of superior American naval power, Iran’s best chance to wage effective naval combat is to rely on asymmetrical naval warfare in home waters, the specialty of the IRGC Navy. The rough waters of the North Atlantic might be the worst geo-military space to show off whatever naval power Iran might have.

At the heart of every military operation lies politics. It should hardly be a surprise that the warships’ voyage to the Atlantic comes amidst the ongoing nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group in Geneva, with the latest talks scheduled to begin on February 18. While the administration of President Hassan Rowhani has suspended 20 percent enrichment of its uranium (the level that would enhance Tehran’s capability of producing fuel for atomic weapons), the hardline factions of the theocratic-military state apparatus have reacted strongly to the interim nuclear deal reached last November. Despite the blessing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for the agreement, the hardliners are working to delegitimize the deal, which they see as a sign of defeat at the hands of the world’s superpowers. Rowhani’s recent halt of a scheduled missile exercise has caused additional anger in the anti-diplomacy camp of Iranian politics. By deploying (or announcing the deployment) of the warships to waters off the American coast, the hardline factions seem eager to provoke the United States into reacting in a more confrontational manner, preventing the progress of diplomatic talks (al-Jazeera, February 9).

The current naval deployment also takes place during an ongoing push by the Islamic Republic to demonstrate Iran’s ability to project military power in the Gulf region and beyond. The deployment most certainly has the approval of the Supreme Leader, who has the ultimate authority to initiate such military operation and most likely believes that Iran must also project strength through military might during the ongoing nuclear negotiations.

While such projections could be viewed as a way to warn the United States against a possible military strike in case negotiations fail, in reality the move is designed to display Iranian power for domestic consumption. Far from Iran seeking “worldwide ambitions and capabilities,” as Chris Harmer of the Institute for the Study of War has suggested (USA Today, February 10), the main target of the latest naval spectacle is the Iranian people, in particular the hardline base that continues to see the deal as a sign of weakness. What the naval adventure into the Atlantic really displays is how Iran can continue to taunt its powerful American rival in oceanic territories near the enemy’s homeland.

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The Quetta Shura: Understanding the Afghan Taliban’s Leadership

Abubakar Siddique

The Afghan Taliban, formally called the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, has proved to be resilient in its commitment to imposing its own version of Islam. The hardline movement is steered by a dozen veteran leaders collectively called the Rahbari Shura, better known as the Quetta Shura. The Shura (consultative council) directs a multi-pronged insurgency from sanctuaries in Pakistan’s southwestern Balochistan Province, of which Quetta is the capital.

Quetta Shura members are veterans of the Taliban regime that ruled Afghanistan in the late 1990s. A majority are mullahs, or Islamic clerics, who adhere to Deobandism – a puritanical sect of Sunni Islam in South Asia. The death of senior leaders such as Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Osmani (in 2006), Mullah Dadullah (2007) and the arrest of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (2010) has led to less senior leaders assuming their places in the hierarchy.

Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Amir al-Mumineen (Commander of the Faithful), during the Taliban's time in power (1996 – 2001), remains the movement's undisputed leader. All important political and strategic decisions are taken in his name. His biannual statements, issued during the Muslim festivals of Eid-ul Fitr and Eid-ul Adha, are considered authentic Taliban policy pronouncements and outline the movement's response to important events and issues.

No-one in the current Taliban hierarchy seems to have personally met Omar for at least a decade. Mullah Gul Agha Akhund, a Quetta Shura member and longtime aide to the Taliban leader, is the only figure considered to be in active contact with the reclusive leader and is seen as the sole credible source through which Omar transmits orders.

The Quetta Shura is led by Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, a former aviation minister during the Taliban's stint in power. He is considered a pragmatist and appears to have the backing of many Taliban from the larger Pashtun Durrani confederacy. The Durrani now comprise a significant part, if not a majority, of Taliban cadres in the movement's erstwhile stronghold of Loy Kandahar, or Greater Kandahar. The region includes the southern Afghan provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Zabul and Farah. Mansour replaced Abdul Qayum Zakir in 2012. The two are considered rivals, but their competition now seems contained. [1]

Zakir, a former Guantanamo Bay inmate, remains a leading Shura member and is considered the overall commander of military operations in Loy Kandahar. Mullah Mohammad Hassan Rahmani and Abdul Rauf Khadim are two key Quetta Shura members who were very close to Mullah Omar. Former ministers Mullah Abdul Razzaq and Mawlawi Qudratullah Jamal are also considered important members of the leadership. Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, a former Taliban minister of culture and information, directs Taliban publications and propaganda.

Jalaluddin Haqqani is a Shura member, but is not known to have ever personally participated in council deliberations. He was represented by his son Naseeruddin Haqqani and a close confidant, Maulvi Ahmad Jan. Both were killed last year – Haqqani in a shootout in Islamabad, and Jan in a suspected drone strike in a remote region of Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

An overwhelming majority of Taliban fighters and leaders are ethnic Pashtuns, but the movement is neither ethno-nationalist nor is it a tribal uprising. The Taliban has a mix of

Ghilzai and Durrani Pashtuns within its ranks, but attracts members from other Pashtun tribes and some non-Pashtuns, too. Clan and tribal identity has never been the sole criteria for membership or leadership. The Taliban have never been able to mobilize a whole tribe or a clan for their cause. However, the exclusion of some Durrani tribes from local governance in Greater Kandahar has resulted in additional recruits to the movement.

A disproportionately high number of Ishaqzai, Noorzai and Alizai tribesmen compose the Taliban fighting force and Shura membership, mostly because these tribes have been largely deprived of senior government positions. Friendship networks, or *andiwali* (Pashto for camaraderie), often play an important role in attracting recruits, maintaining group solidarity and contributing to the authority of some Taliban figures.

The Shura has all the trappings of a government in exile, essentially functioning as the Taliban's central cabinet or main policymaking forum. It claims to derive its legitimacy from Islam and justifies its actions in the name of Islam. The Shura controls a range of commissions responsible for the military, political, financial and propaganda elements of the insurgency.

Since 2006, the Shura has issued and frequently updated a Pashto-language document called the "Rulebook for the Mujahedeen of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." It contains directives through which the Shura asserts central command over military field operations and other issues. The Shura also controls a Taliban shadow government inside Afghanistan, including provincial governors, district administrators and judges. The Taliban style of central command has prevented the kind of fragmentation that has historically hobbled other Afghan political and military organizations.

In statements posted on their website, the Taliban have clearly acknowledged the battlefield autonomy of the Haqqani Network, but the Haqqanis have remained politically subservient to the Shura. "[My son] Shaheed Naseeruddin Haqqani was neither the first martyr from our family nor will he be the last," Jalaluddin Haqqani said in a November 2013 statement after his son was killed. "Seeking martyrdom through the campaign for the supremacy of Islamic government and the defense of our beloved nation is the Haqqani family's most ardent desire." [2]

Over the years, the Shura has established some clear political positions. It is keen on keeping an identity separate from the Arab-led al-Qaeda organization, limiting its ambitions

strictly to Afghanistan. Crucially, it has indicated that it is ready to consider an alternative to recreating the Taliban Emirate by insisting that a future Afghan government be inclusive. The movement has stated that it has no desire to “create a monopoly on power.” [3]

Since 2010, Shura leaders Zakir and Mansour have personally supervised Taliban contacts with U.S. and European officials. These contacts led to the opening of a Taliban office in the Qatari capital of Doha in 2013. The Shura has also backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s reluctance to sign a bilateral agreement with the United States. [4]

The Shura has largely been silent about its relationship with Pakistan. Islamabad and the Afghan Taliban do not share an ultimate strategic purpose, but they engage in a transactional relationship that has been cemented by more than two decades of interdependence. Islamabad has been reluctant to shut down the Shura, despite American pressure and repeated demands from the Afghan government. Although it has arrested a few Shura leaders, Islamabad has not launched a major crackdown against the group since the 2010 arrest of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Most Taliban leaders enjoy freedom of movement inside Pakistan.

The Taliban are unlikely to remain Islamabad’s proxies if they recapture the Afghan government. It is also improbable that the Taliban will formally recognize the 19th century Durand Line as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. No government of Afghanistan has ever recognized the Durand Line as an international border. For now, the Taliban’s sanctuary in Pakistan enables the movement to foment violence Afghanistan, keeping the movement subservient to Islamabad.

The recent assassination of several senior Taliban figures in Quetta could potentially drive the Taliban further away from their Pakistani sponsors. The Taliban have acknowledged that Afghan clerics Mawlawi Abdul Salam and Maulana Abdullah Zakiri were senior ideologues. They were killed in Quetta in December and January, respectively. Maulana Abdullah Zakiri’s funeral in Quetta on December 31, 2013 attracted 10,000 people and was addressed by prominent Afghan and Pakistani clerics. [5]

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Notes

1. I am indebted to Afghan journalist Sami Yousafzai for explaining some issues related to the Quetta Shura.
2. “The Message of Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani - a member of the Islamic Emirate’s Leadership Council and a scholar and Mujahid of Afghanistan - to the valiant Afghan nation on the occasion of Doctor Naseeruddin Haqqani’s Martyrdom,” November 13, 2013, Available at: <http://shahamat-english.com/index.php/paighamoonaa/39631-the-message-of-mawlawi-jalaluddin-haqqani-a-member-of-the-islamic-emirate-s-leadership-council-and-a-scholar-and-mujahid-of-afghanistan-to-the-valiant-afghan-nation-on-the-occasion-of-doctor-naseeruddin-haqqani-s-martyrdom>.
3. For a detailed discussion of these issues see, Abubakar Siddique, *The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Hurst and Company, London, 2014.
4. “Islamic Emirate’s Statement Regarding Karzai’s Position on an Agreement with the Invaders (Pashto),” December 2, 2013, Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/o5uef7d>.
5. Abdul Hanan Himat, “A Report on the Funeral of Martyr Abdullah Zakiri,” January 31, 2014. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/p3kz5ra>.

Are Corruption and Tribalism Dooming Somalia’s War on al-Shabaab Extremists?

Andrew McGregor

After decades of conflict that have nearly destroyed the nation, Somalia now stands poised to make a final drive with international assistance to shatter the strength of radical al-Qaeda-associated Islamists in central and southern Somalia, but there are indications that Somalia’s leaders may be posing an even greater obstacle to Somalia’s successful reconstruction.

Arms Embargoes and Missing Weapons

In mid-February, the UN Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group issued a report to the UN Security Council’s sanctions committee claiming that weapons obtained by the Somali government under a temporary easing of UN arms sanctions were being sold to Somalia’s al-Shabaab extremists in what was described as “high-level and systematic abuses in weapons and ammunition management and distribution”

(Reuters, February 13). A UN arms embargo was placed on Somalia in 1992, but in the last year the Somali government has been able to obtain once-restricted small arms and other weapons such as rocket-propelled-grenades under a partial lifting of the embargo designed to help fight al-Shabaab terrorists.

Among the observations contained in the report were the following:

- Shipments of weapons from Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uganda could not be accounted for.
- The Somali government cancelled several UN inspections of armories
- A key presidential adviser from President Hassan Shaykh Mohamud's own Abgaal sub-clan was involved in planning weapons transfers to al-Shabaab commander Shaykh Yusuf Isse "Kabukatukade," another member of the Abgaal.
- A government minister from the Habr Gadir sub-clan made unauthorized weapons purchases from a Gulf state that were transferred to private locations in Mogadishu for use by a Habr Gadir clan militia.
- The Monitoring team photographed rifles sent to Somalia's national army for sale in the Mogadishu arms market with their serial numbers filed off (Reuters, February 13; AFP, February 16).

The easing of the Somali arms embargo is scheduled to end in March. Though a final decision on its future has yet to be made, it seems likely that the easing will remain in place until a new report on arms violations is due in October. The Somali government is looking for a complete removal of the embargo, allowing it to obtain heavy weapons and sophisticated military materiel (Reuters, February 14). The Monitoring Group has recommended either the full restoration of the embargo or a heightened monitoring regime to accompany an extension of the partial easement.

Somali security officials have complained that the UN monitors have not provided them with any information regarding the alleged arms sales to al-Shabaab or the alleged activities of Abgaal and Habr Gadir insiders at the presidential palace arranging such arms sales. One security official complained that the UN allegations could not be proven without examining al-Shabaab's arms: "If they haven't inspected al-Shabaab's [arms], how are they arriving at the conclusion government weapons are being sold to al-Shabaab. This is a dangerous and creative position by the UN" (Suna Times/Waagacusub.net, February 18).

The head of Somalia's military, General Dahir Aden Elmi

"Indhaqarshe" described the UN report as fabricated, false and without credibility, though he acknowledged an investigation into how al-Shabaab obtains its arms would be worthwhile, as the movement "does not get arms from the sky." However, the Somali army commander sees darker purposes behind the work of the UN monitors: "The UN Monitoring Group want al-Shabaab to be an endless project in order to gain funds from the world while they are struggling hard to make Somalia's government weak and nonfunctional" (Raxanreeb, February 17).

Shady Dealings and Economic Challenges

Some light was shed on the murky financial dealings of Somalia's central government when central bank governor Yussur Abrar quit after only seven weeks on the job following repeated efforts to force her to approve dubious transactions benefiting members and friends of the government. In her resignation letter to Somali President Hassan Shaykh Mohamud, Abrar described corruption and constant government interference in Central Bank operations"

From the moment I was appointed, I have continuously been asked to sanction deals and transactions that would contradict my personal values and violate my fiduciary responsibility to the Somali people as head of the nation's monetary authority... The message that I have received from multiple parties is that I have to be flexible, that I don't understand the Somali way, that I cannot go against your [Mohamud's] wishes, and that my own personal security would be at risk as a result (Suna Times, October 30, 2013).

Turkey has been the main supporter of Somali reconstruction, offering technical support, materials, medical teams, hospitals, machinery and various other means of assistance, including, apparently, lots of cash. A recent Reuters report cited various officials within the Turkish and Somali governments that Ankara had decided in December to stop its direct financial support to Mogadishu, which took the form of \$4.5 million in U.S. \$100 dollar bills transferred to the Somali central bank every month (Reuters, February 13). However, three days later, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that the payments were in line with procedure in light of the fact Somalia has no banking services and that efforts were "underway to provide budget support to the Somali Federal Government in the year 2014" (*Hurriyet*, February 16). The Turkish statement did not outline what measures, if any, were taken to trace the end use of these funds, but the potential for abuse is apparent in the absence of verifiable banking and accounting procedures in Mogadishu.

Over two decades of social and political chaos mean that the challenges to Somalia's reconstruction efforts only begin with the elimination of al-Shabaab:

- Somalia lacks trade agreements with the West, lacks a proper certificatory regime and is not a member of the World Trade Organization, making exports difficult. The vast bulk of Somalia's current exports consist of charcoal and livestock heading to the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen.
- Multiple currencies are in circulation, some of them worthless. Monetary control remains elusive with no new official bank-notes having been printed since the overthrow of Siad Barre in 1991, leading to a thriving black market in currency.
- The national government has begun signing oil and gas deals that are in conflict with deals signed by regional administrations like Puntland during the absence of an effective central government. (IRIN, February 14).

AMISOM Operations: Fighting Somalia's War

The growing deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), now 22,000 strong, includes troops from Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, as well as police from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

While Ethiopia has continued to mount its own independent military operations in regions of Somalia bordering Ethiopia since its general withdrawal from Somalia in 2009, lack of coordination with AMISOM tended to give al-Shabaab militants space to withdraw and operate elsewhere until Ethiopian operations were concluded. It was therefore regarded as good news when Ethiopia decided to integrate its Somali operations into the AMISOM command in January [Dalsan Radio [Mogadishu], February 18). Ethiopian forces followed their integration by deploying to Beledweyne in Hiraaan Region (where they are establishing a new base) and to Baidoa in Bay Region, where they will be responsible for security operations in the Bay, Bakool and Gedo Regions (Shabelle Media Network [Mogadishu], January 28). Uganda, which has roughly 8,000 troops in Somalia, has just rotated in 1,600 fresh troops under Colonel William Bainomugisha (Xinhua, February 14).

The Somali army is about to launch new operations in cooperation with AMISOM forces to re-take Bardhere in the Juba River valley and the last major port under al-Shabaab control, Barawe, which has also acted as an important headquarters and training base for the militants since the loss of Kismayo to Kenyan troops (Garowe Online, February

11; Raxanreeb.com, February 11). If successful, this new offensive would divide Shabaab forces, significantly reduce the area under its control and eliminate the movement's last major source of revenue. Unfortunately, rather than align for a final push against the militants, some units of the Somali Army in the Lower Shabelle region have been using their new arms to fight each other, based on clan allegiances (Shabelle Media Network, January 28; January 30; Garowe Online, January 29).

According to AMISOM spokesman Colonel Ali Aden Humad (part of the Djiboutian contingent of 960 troops deployed in Hiraaan Region), the offensive will suffer from a lack of naval forces (suggesting Kenya will continue its policy of consolidating the area it has taken in southern Somalia rather than move further north) and helicopters, which AMISOM hopes will still arrive from some African Union country. Most important, however, is the failure of the Somali Army to build up a force as large as AMISOM that could not only participate in operations in a meaningful way, but also undertake important garrison and consolidation duties that must now be carried out by AMISOM forces. Colonel Humad admitted it was a mystery that the national army remained small despite years of international training programs and funding: "AMISOM trained many Somali soldiers and equipped some. So, the question is where have they gone? When we train them, we turn them over to the government. So, where do they go? Where are they kept?" (Sabahi, February 7).

Al-Shabaab Leaders Go to Ground

The continuing American drone campaign in Somalia is a major concern for al-Shabaab, which has seen several senior members targeted and killed in the last year. The movement has responded with mass arrests of suspected spies believed to help in the targeting, including a number of al-Shabaab fighters. The drone strikes have also damaged communications within al-Shabaab and restricted the movements of its leaders, with many senior members, including al-Shabaab leader Abdi Godane, believing that contact with mobile communications equipment can be tracked to target drone strikes. Like the Somali army, there is infighting within al-Shabaab, which might divide into smaller groups if Godane is killed. Having narrowly survived at least two recent attempts on his life, Godane is reported to have even grown suspicious of his own bodyguards in al-Shabaab's Amniyat intelligence unit (Sabahi, February 7). Al-Shabaab has actually succeeded in intimidating a major Somali telecommunications provider to cut internet service in southern Somalia to prevent any type of communications with U.S. or AMISOM intelligence groups (Suna Times,

February 10). Last October, the United States began deploying a number of military trainers and advisors in Somalia.

Conclusion

Despite disappearing arms and soldiers and the distractions provided by incessant clan warfare, Somali Prime Minister Abdiweli Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad says that, with international assistance, “The plan is to have al-Shabaab out of the areas that they control by the end of 2014” (Xinhua, February 19). Meanwhile, the insurgency continues to wreak havoc across parts of central and southern Somalia. New UN figures indicate that two million Somalis (of 10 million) suffer from food insecurity, with 850,000 of those “in desperate need of food.” Most of the latter have been displaced by fighting and insecurity (Independent, February 19). In recent days, al-Shabaab attacks in Mogadishu and its airport have been on the rise, including a February 13 suicide bomb that killed seven just outside of Mogadishu’s Aden Adde airport, which also serves as a secure base for AMISOM and foreign diplomats (Raxanreeb.com, February 13; Reuters, February 13). Eliminating the Shabaab threat will remain impossible no matter what degree of international assistance and funding is provided so long as service in national and local administrations in Somalia is seen as a means for personal self-enrichment and the furtherance of clan interests at the expense of national interests. Ultimately, the path Somalia will follow will depend not on UN assistance or AU military deployments, but rather on the interest Somalis themselves have in the national project.

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