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LIBYA PURCHASES BLOODLESS RETURN OF ITS EASTERN OIL FACILITIES

Andrew McGregor

In a move that may help restore revenues to a desperate national government in Tripoli, Libya's ruling General National Council (GNC) has come to a costly agreement with eastern Libyan gunmen that will enable the resumption of oil exports from Libya's most productive oilfields, facilities blockaded by their former guards since July 2013. Numerous blockades of oil facilities across Libya since the 2011 revolution have cost the nation billions in revenue, effectively denying it the funds it needs to create the kind of security structure that could prevent gunmen from holding the national economy hostage.

According to the April 6 deal between the government and Cyrenaica federalists (Cyrenaica is the former eastern province of Libya) led by former Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) commander Ibrahim Jadhran, the eastern rebels are to hand over two occupied terminals this week, with two more following within a month. The status of Libya's oil terminals and production facilities continues to be fluid, but the current situation at the major installations is as follows:

- Zawiya: This west Libyan terminal was closed again by Berber protesters on April 10 (al-Arabiya, April 11; Libya Herald, April 12). The protest was short-lived, however, and the terminal was set to re-open on April 14, though officials acknowledged there were "continuing issues" with protesters in the area (Reuters, April 13).

- Al-Sharara: Oil facilities in the southwestern oil field holding an estimated 3 billion barrels has been occupied repeatedly by various groups of gunmen and protesters. Al-Sharara plant has been inoperative since March.

Hezbollah Deputy Leader Na'im Qasim

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•Hariga: This terminal is open and loading tankers after the PFG took control of the port on April 9. Libya's National Oil Company (NOC) lifted the force majeure the next day (LANA [Tripoli], April 10). Hariga has a capacity of 110,000 bpd.

•Zuwaytinah: This terminal is set to re-open, but was recently still in the hands of supporters of Ibrahim Jadhran.

•Ras Lanuf: This terminal is still blockaded, but is set to be turned over to the government within a month.

•Al-Sidr: Libya's largest terminal, with a daily capacity of 450,000 bpd, remains occupied but is set to re-open within a month.

•Al-Buri and al-Jurf: These oilfields off western Libya's Mediterranean coast continue to function without interruption.

Jadhran's official demands included autonomy for Cyrenaica, a greater share of oil revenues and an investigation into corruption in the Libyan oil ministry. While the GNC agreed to the investigation, there were no commitments on the other issues (al-Jazeera, April 11).

The secret negotiations behind the agreement nearly broke down at one point, with Jadhran having apparent difficulty in persuading his lieutenants to support a deal. Seven members of Jadhran's Cyrenaican Political Bureau resigned to protest Jadhran's monopolization of the talks (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 6). The Bureau is an unelected body that has positioned itself under Jadhran's leadership as the administration of an autonomous Cyrenaica (or Barqa in Arabic), though the movement has backed off somewhat from earlier talk of outright secession. Jadhran appears to have jeopardized his local popularity with his failed attempt to arrange the covert sale of eastern Libyan oil by means of a North Korean flagged tanker in early March.

According to pan-Arab daily *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, the agreement also contained secret clauses calling for the formation of a committee to supervise a referendum on federalism in Cyrenaica, the return of state institutions to the region and a more equitable distribution of national oil revenues. These clauses are supposedly contingent on both parties implementing the present agreement without delay or further amendment (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 10). Much of the agreement appears to be financial in nature, however, with Tripoli pledging an undisclosed sum of money to cover the "back pay and expenses" of the former Petroleum Facilities Guards who took control of the facilities they were supposed to guard last July (al-Jazeera, April 11). The cash payments and amnesties behind the deal are unlikely to help discourage future occupations and blockades, leaving the national economy in the hands of any of the hundreds of armed groups in Libya ready to seize part of the nation's poorly protected energy-producing infrastructure.

In a televised video statement from Tripoli's Hadba Prison, Sa'adi al-Qaddafi, the recently extradited son of the late Libyan leader, claimed that he had been working through intermediaries with Ibrahim Jadhran to sell Cyrenaican oil on the international market in order to purchase weapons and equipment for Libya's remaining Qaddafists. Jadhran immediately refuted the damaging allegations on his own TV station while indicating he would sue those involved in broadcasting Sa'adi's statement (Libya Herald, April 2). No evidence was provided to support Sa'adi's statement from prison, which comes at a time when a relatively powerless government is interested in discrediting one of its most powerful opponents.

The oil blockades have crippled Libyan efforts at reconstructing the state and re-imposing national security. Oil exports account for nearly all government revenues and their disruption has threatened the government's ability to meet its payroll as well as various subsidies based on oil revenues. Most importantly, it prevents the GNC from building a national army capable of enforcing its writ. Though there is discussion of Moroccan and/or Turkish involvement in training a new army, the army's current powerlessness was best displayed when the Zintan militia controlling Tripoli's airport seized an incoming shipment of weapons destined for the Libyan national army (*Los Angeles Times*, April 13).

IS RESOLUTION CLOSE IN NORTHERN IRAQ'S PIPELINE WAR?

Andrew McGregor

Baghdad is worried about the political and economic consequences that could follow energy sales conducted independently of the central government, which insists it has the right to control all Iraqi oil sales and the distribution of energy revenues according to the Iraqi constitution. The administration of Kurdish northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), interprets the constitution differently, claiming it has the right to sell oil without the consent of the central government in Baghdad. According to Iraqi deputy prime minister Hussein al-Shahristani, "The most prominent challenge is that we have not reached a national agreement to extract and market oil from all of Iraq's territory… We have a grey area - we do not know how much oil the [Kurdistan] region is extracting, what price they are selling at and where the revenue goes" (Fars News Agency [Tehran], April 14). With the KRG now pumping oil directly to Turkey through a converted gas pipeline and the central government withholding budget transfers to the north, there is still some optimism that Baghdad and Erbil will come to a mutually profitable agreement to avoid economic and political collapse.

Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki is determined to assert Baghdad's control over national oil revenues and is resolutely opposed to Kurdish attempts to make their own deals with foreign consumers like Turkey (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 8). To enforce the central government's role, al-Maliki's government suspended Kurdistan's annual budget allocation – a loss of billions of dollars to a government that may be pumping oil, but is not yet making any money from it due to Baghdad's threats to launch legal action against anyone purchasing oil it considers to have been "smuggled" from Iraq.

After signing six energy contracts with Turkey in December, KRG authorities opened the flow of crude oil through a new pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan in late December 2013 (Xinhua, January 2). Shipping 300,000 bpd through the pipeline to start, the oil is being stored for now at the Ceyhan terminal rather than being sold and shipped abroad as Turkey refuses to allow its sale without Baghdad's approval. The new pipeline (actually a converted natural gas pipeline) connects the Taq Taq oilfield operated by Anglo-Turkish Genel Energy to the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline at the Fishkabur pumping station near the Kurdish border, thus bypassing the regions affected by sabotage on the Baghdad-controlled Kirkuk-Ceyhan line and enabling the KRG to stop the piecemeal export of oil by tanker truck (Reuters, April 17). The KRG announced plans in October 2013 to build a second pipeline to Turkey within two years that will ship one million bpd to Turkey (Bloomberg, November 8).

Turkey has proposed that revenues from the sale of oil shipped through this proposed pipeline and the existing pipeline that opened in January be handled by a Turkish state bank that will distribute funds according to the formula in the Iraqi constitution that calls for an 83 percent share to Iraq's central government and a 17 percent share to the KRG (Xinhua, January 2; Rudaw, February 12, 2013). Turkey has emphasized its wish to conduct all such dealings with transparency, but Baghdad still favors full control over oil exports with revenues being deposited to the Development Fund for Iraq account in New York, as is the current practice. Ankara's role in allowing shipments of Kurdistan-sourced oil to Turkish facilities without the consent of the Baghdad government indicates Turkey's eagerness to diversify its energy sources (particularly its strategically dangerous overreliance on Russian natural gas) and its intention of pursuing a deepening economic relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan that has both economic and security payoffs.

Baghdad's suspension of government transfers to Kurdistan to punish its independent oil policy brought an angry response from KRG president Masoud Barzani earlier this month:

> I consider depriving the Kurdistan Region of means of livelihood to be a declaration of war. It could be a crime that is worse and more dangerous than shelling Halabjah with chemical weapons. We will wait for the outcome of [U.S.] mediation, but I say for sure that the region will not remain silent on this measure if it continues and will not stand idly by. We have a program and a plan that we will implement (*al-Hayat*, April 5).

In a recent meeting with the head of the Democratic Socialist Group in the EU parliament, President Barzani maintained that the main problem in Iraq was not the oil issue or the failure to pass a national budget, but was rather Baghdad's insistence on making the Kurds "followers" rather than "partners" (National Iraqi News Agency [Baghdad], April 7). Kurdistan's economic security adviser, Biwa Khansi, warned that further delays in oil shipments to Turkey would "negatively affect economic relations between Iraq and Turkey" as well as threaten development projects and the ability to form a workable state budget (National Iraqi News Agency [Baghdad], April 12).

Oil flow through the main Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline ceased

on March 2, when suspected Islamist militants blew up part of the line in the Ayn al-Jahash desert of northwestern Iraq, a region where anti-government Sunni militants are active. Since then, saboteurs have struck the line three more times and have mounted deadly attacks on repair crews sent to fix the damage (*Hurriyet* [Istanbul], April 1). Military escorts have failed to prevent such attacks and there is little reason to believe Iraqi claims that the pipeline will be back in action within days (Reuters, April 10). Controlled by the Iraqi central government, the Kirkuk to Ceyhan pipeline carries about 20 percent of Iraq's total oil exports. Nineveh governor Ethel al-Nujaifi admitted that security forces in his governorate were "powerless" to provide the protection necessary to enable repair crews to bring the pipeline to Turkey back online (Zawya [Dubai], April 13). Baghdad is looking to export over one million bpd through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline by the end of the year and is also looking to build a new 200 kilometer pipeline to Turkey to help expand exports (al-Arabiya, April 9).

Terrorist Campaign Strikes Mombasa as Somali Conflict Spreads South

Raffaello Pantucci

Kenyan authorities in the coastal city of Mombasa arrested two individuals on March 17 as they drove a vehicle laden with explosives into the city. Authorities believed that the two men were part of a larger cell of 11 who were planning a campaign of terror that would have culminated in the deployment of a "massive" VBIED (vehicle-borne improvised explosive device) against "shopping malls, beaches or tourist hotels" (Capital FM [Nairobi], March 17; Standard [Nairobi], March 17; March 20). A day later, Ugandan authorities announced they had heightened their security in response to a threat from al-Shabaab aimed at fuel plants in the country (*Africa Report*, March 19).

The VBIED was built into the car, with ball bearings and other shrapnel welded into its sides and a mobile phone detonator wired to the device (Standard [Nairobi], March 20). The men were also caught with an AK-47, 270 rounds of ammunition, six grenades and five detonators (Capital FM [Nairobi], March 18). The suspects, Abdiaziz Abdillahi Abdi and Isaak Noor Ibrahim, were both born in 1988, with Abdiaziz allegedly "a cattle trader and renowned navigator of old caravan trade routes based in Garissa town," while Noor was described as "a long distance truck driver or conductor who often travelled to South Sudan through Uganda" (Standard [Nairobi], March 23). Their ethnicity was unclear with conflicting reports in the press, though the names suggest a Somali heritage, with Abdiaziz in particular being identified as a member of the Degodia, a sub-clan of the Hawiye of Somalia (Standard [Nairobi], March 23).

Later leaked reports indicated that another possible target was the Mombasa International Airport (Standard [Nairobi], March 23). On January 16, a bomb went off at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. Initially dismissed as a light bulb blowing up, authorities later admitted an IED had caused the explosion in a bin in the airport and reported capturing a car with further explosives onboard after a shootout near the airport. One man was killed in the gunfire and four others were subsequently charged in connection to the plot. One of those charged, Ilyas Yusuf Warsame, was identified by his lawyers as being accredited as a third secretary at the Somali Embassy in Nairobi (AP, February 4).

Authorities claimed to have been tracking a larger cell of

individuals targeting Mombasa for around a month prior to the arrests with international assistance. One senior intelligence officer told the Kenyan press that five of the group had gone to Nairobi and the rest to Mombasa. The group allegedly included "foreign fighters" described as members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) by the Kenyan press (Standard [Nairobi], March 23). Official accounts around the plot were somewhat undermined by a report that Kenyan police had initially kept the VBIED parked outside their headquarters after seizing the vehicle without realizing it had a live device wired up within it (*Daily Telegraph* [London], March 19).

There is little independent corroboration of the international connection to the plot, though one name to appear repeatedly in the press was Fuad Abubakar Manswab, a Nairobi-born man connected by authorities to a number of plots in the past. Most notably, Manswab was arrested and charged alongside Briton Germaine Grant in Mombasa in December 2011. The two were accused of being involved in a bombing campaign in the city that was directed by Ikrima al-Muhajir, a Somalia-based al-Shabaab leader with close ties to al-Qaeda (for Ikrima, see Militant Leadership Monitor, November 2013). Manswab jumped bail in that case and a year later was almost killed in a shootout with Kenyan authorities in the Majengo neighborhood of Mombasa. Two others were killed in the confrontation with authorities and a cache of weapons uncovered, though Manswab managed to escape by jumping out a window with bullet wounds in his shoulder (*Star* [Nairobi], June 12, 2013). The group was alleged by prosecutors to have been plotting to free other al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab prisoners being held in Mombasa, as well as launching a series of assassinations of security officials and grenade attacks on bars (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], October 30, 2012). Manswab was later reported to have joined al-Shabaab in Somalia (*Star* [Nairobi], June 12, 2013).

This targeting of Mombasa comes as a popular radical preacher was mysteriously gunned down in the street. Shaykh Abubakar Shariff Ahmed (a.k.a. Makaburi) was gunned down alongside another man as he left a courtroom within the Shimo la Tewa maximum security prison (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], April 1). Long reported by official and media sources to be close to al-Shabaab, Makaburi was on U.S. and UN sanctions lists for his connections via funding and support to terrorist networks in East Africa. [1] He had also been connected to the transit of over 100 British nationals to join al-Shabaab, including the elusive Samantha Lewthwaite and Germaine Grant (*Daily Mail*, April 2). Close to slain radical clerics Shaykh Aboud Rogo and Shaykh Ibrahim Ismael, Makaburi was the leader of the radical Masjid Shuhada (Martyrs Mosque), previously known as the Masjid Musa. Similar to events in the wake of the deaths of the other two clerics, rioting broke out in Mombasa, though local authorities repeatedly called for calm and the violence was markedly less than in the wake of the deaths of the other clerics (Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation, April 2).

Following Makaburi's death, another controversial cleric known as Shaykh Amir (a.k.a. Mahboob) took control of the mosque and called for "total war against non-Muslims" to a packed house (The People [Nairobi], April 8). Sectarian violence was already visible in Mombasa prior to Makaburi's death, when gunmen tied to the Masjid Shuhada by the Kenyan press were accused of opening fire on a mass in the Joy in Jesus church in the Likoni district, killing seven (*Star* [Nairobi], March 23). The attackers attempted to go on to target another local church, but dropped the necessary ammunition before they got there (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], March 23). The attack on the church was believed to be a reaction to a police raid on the Masjid Musa in early February in which two youths from the mosque and a policeman were killed. Among the 129 people arrested in the raid, police claimed to have arrested an individual alleged to be close to the late al-Qaeda in East Africa leader, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed. (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi] February 4).

At present, tensions remain high in the city and the government seemed to have responded to the recent spike in trouble with mass arrests and the threatened deportation of foreign nationals. A day prior to Makaburi's shooting, some 657 people were arrested in sweeps in Eastleigh, a mostly Somali neighborhood in Nairobi, as part of the government's response to grenade attacks on restaurants in the city that killed six (*Daily Nation* [Nairobi], April 1). A week after Makaburi's death, some 4,000 Somalis were reportedly being held in Nairobi's Kasarani stadium as authorities sifted through who was a Kenyan and who was not (Standard, [Nairobi], April 8). Interior Minister Joseph Ole Lenku stated that 3,000 had been detained, with 82 deported to Mogadishu (AFP, April 10). On April 12-13, Mombasa police rounded up 60 foreign suspects as part of an ongoing operation (KTN TV [Nairobi], April 13).

This focus on foreigners, however, may be a distraction from the larger problem of radicalization in Kenya, epitomized by the goings on around the mosques in Mombasa where there is evidence of connections to Somalia through Somali youth attending the mosque and connections through preachers like Makaburi, but it is not as clear that it is a solely foreign problem. The connection between the mosque and the community around it in Mombasa and foreign elements (including a trio of Algerian, Belgian and French nationals deported to Belgium on charges of being part of a Belgian-

based network sending people to fight in Syria and Somalia) and reports of possible plotting in Uganda all highlight how these problems in Mombasa could have an international dimension (AFP, March 23; *Africa Report*, March 19).

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Note

1.http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1630.aspx; https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10748.doc.htm.

Is the End in Sight for Colombia's FARC Insurgency?

John C.K. Daly

Colombia's Marxist Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) began its armed struggle in 1964. Fifty years later, FARC representatives and Colombian government officials are negotiating in Havana in peace talks initiated in 2012 by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. Santos, facing reelection in May, is promoting a negotiated end to the world's longest civil war, remarking: "Hopefully by the end of the year, we will have this deal done" (*The Guardian*, March 16).

Santos rose to prominence as minister of defense in the right wing administration of President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010). He later infuriated his former mentor after being elected president in June 2010, when he declared Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to be his "new best friend" and then two years later began peace talks with FARC. Following exploratory talks, the two sides reached agreement on six key agenda points. Two of the six agenda items have been settled: political participation and agrarian reform.

FARC said it was participating in the talks to embrace "the immense clamor for peace from different sectors of Colombia…" [1] The reality, however, is a growing awareness in FARC's decimated leadership that, after fifty years of armed struggle, its original Marxist hopes of overthrowing the Colombian government and its U.S. funded military remain as distant as ever. The movement's ideological purity has been sullied by involvement in the lucrative drug trade and a policy of kidnapping for ransom has also alienated many Colombians. Furthermore, FARC is losing members; at its height in 2002, FARC could field 18,000 guerrillas (*The Economist*, July 7). Current estimates suggest FARC can field only 8,000 fighters (*El Nuevo Herald* [Miami], March 26). A peace agreement would allow FARC to contest elections, where the movement might have some success in the still disaffected countryside.

Santos has been criticized by opposition presidential candidates for his decision to negotiate with FARC rather than defeat them militarily. Candidate Óscar Iván Zuluaga said, "I'm in favor of a negotiated peace but we have to set conditions" (*The Miami Herald*, April 4). Enrique Peñalosa, another candidate remarked, "I fully support the negotiations in Havana, but it is good to remember that one of the characteristics of these negotiations is that there is no truce" (La F.M. [Bogotá], April 10). Ex-president Uribe is

also critical of his former *protégé*, insisting that FARC agree to a ceasefire prior to talks continuing (*Colombia Opina*, April 4).

Seeking to project a tough image, President Santos said on March 30 that military offensives against FARC would continue "until the time we get these (peace) agreements" (*El Espectador* [Bogotá], March 30). Peace is popular; a 2012 poll taken shortly after the peace talks began reported that 77 percent of respondents approved of the negotiations. [2]

The human cost of FARC's fifty-year campaign has been immense. On July 24, 2013, Colombia's government truth commission issued a 434-page report entitled *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad* (Enough! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity). The report estimated that 220,000 Colombians were killed during Colombia's 54-year civil conflict. [3] The Colombian government reports that the conflict has additionally produced nearly 3.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs). [4] Colombia's National Planning Department believes that after a peace agreement, the Colombian economy would grow by an additional one to two percent annually. [5]

Many obstacles remain as skirmishing continues. On April 8 four people died in a dawn ambush in Cartagena del Chaira, with Santos calling the attack "the vile product of this senseless war that we are striving to end" (*Prensa Libre* [Guatemala City], April 8). Two days earlier, suspected FARC guerrillas from the Jacobo Arenas Front dynamited a stretch of the Pan-American Highway between Santander de Quilichao and Mondomo in Cauca department (*El País* [Cali, Colombia], April 1).

One of the more intractable negotiating issues is Colombia's illegal drug cultivation and trafficking, with both sides being disingenuous. Washington is in no doubt of FARC's participation; on March 22, 2006 the U.S. Department of Justice unsealed an indictment issued by a federal grand jury in the D.C. District Court that charged 50 FARC leaders with importing more than $25 billion of cocaine into the United States and other countries. [6]

Pablo Escobar's former mistress, Virginia Vallejo, claimed during a 2007 interview that the late drug kingpin idolized Uribe and that Uribe granted dozens of licenses for runways and hundreds of permits for planes and helicopters during the period 1980-1982, when Uribe was Colombia's civil aviation director. This provided the infrastructure on which Colombia's drug trade was built. Vallejo asserted, "Pablo used to say that if it weren't for that 'blessed little boy,' we would have to swim to Miami to get drugs to the *gringos*" (*El País* [Miami], October 14, 2007).

Vallejo's credibility is underlined by the fact that on July 18, 2006, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency flew her to Miami to testify in drug cartel cases. The United States subsequently granted Vallejo political asylum on June 3, 2010 and her assertions bolstered a 1991 "confidential" intelligence report from U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency officials in Colombia that stated Uribe was a "close personal friend of Pablo Escobar" who was "dedicated to collaboration with the Medellín cartel at high government levels." [7]

Hurdles remain, among them a definitive agreement on land reform. In commenting on the Havana talks, FARC negotiating team member Commandante Ricardo Téllez (a.k.a. Rodrigo Granda) noted that land is increasingly concentrated in the hands of the wealthy and five percent of landowners now own 87 percent of the country's acreage (*El Telégrafo*, [Paysandú, Uruguay], April 6). A major concern for Téllez is that Santos "lacks greater political will" to impose a settlement on the "enemies of peace," among whom he lists Uribe. Téllez suggests that these opponents are "grouped on the far right and still powerful, even though they are just a minority that profits from war and wants to continue it" (*El Espectador* [Bogotá], April 6).

While any deal reached could provide an important accomplishment for FARC leaders to showcase to their rank and file, enforcing a peace accord throughout FARC's ranks will face the problem of a centralized command and control structure that has been weakened by more than a decade of government offensives.

For his part, Santos has to maintain an image of toughness as he negotiates. During an April 10 interview, Santos said he knows "more or less" where FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño is hiding, commenting, "I'm not going to say I would take the decision [to kill Londoño] or not take it, but I think that at this stage of the process I'd think twice" (La F.M. [Bogotá], April 10).

On February 28 FARC lead negotiator Iván Márquez said they were asking the United States to the talks to speed up the process because "Washington was making all the important decisions anyway." He continued, "We are discussing a matter of interest to the United States… The U.S. government is determining whether anything actually happens here or not, so we'd like to talk to the U.S. government ... We would reach an agreement soon" (Reuters, February 28).

Pre-presidential election polls in Colombia indicate that the Colombian population is overwhelmingly in favor of peace.

Whether the pragmatic compromise necessary to achieve a final peace agreement will be derailed by political posturing remains to be seen, but on May 25 the Colombian electorate will deliver their mandate.

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Notes

1. "Abriendo senderos hacia la paz," Comunicados, Secretariado del Estado Mayor Central de las FARC-EP, Montañas de Colombia, November 19, 2012.
2. "QAP Colombia Opina 2012-2013: Especial proceso de paz," Ipsos Study no. 9103, 2012.
3. *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad*, Bogotá: Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2012, pp.434.
4. "A refugee in their own country – the fate of the Colombian IDPs," United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, Brussels, 2014, http://www.unric.org/en/colombia/27002-a-refugee-in-their-own-country-the-fate-of-the-colombian-idps-.
5. "Weekly review of the Colombian economy," September 23-27 2013, U.S. Embassy, Bogotá, http://usbusiness-opportunities-embassybogota.com/2013/09/30/weekly-review-of-the-colombian-economy-september-23-27/.

In a Shifting Political Landscape, Hezbollah Repositions Itself as the Anti-Terrorist Defender of Lebanon

Andrew McGregor

The growing perception in the Arab Middle East that Syria's military has recently gained the upper hand in Syria's civil war over an armed opposition that includes a number of politically dangerous extremist groups is leading to a number of new diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving the Syrian crisis in a manner that will ensure security and stability for its neighbors. In Damascus there is a new confidence, with preparations underway for presidential elections in July and the war expected to finish by the end of the year. In the Hezbollah headquarters in southern Beirut, movement leaders are working on efforts to overcome the party's politically-damaging military intervention in Syria by repositioning Hezbollah as Lebanon's first line of defense against Syrian-based jihadists and terrorists. According to Hezbollah leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, "The problem in Lebanon is not that Hezbollah went to Syria, but that we were late in doing so" (al-Jazeera, March 29).

Intervention in Syria

Hezbollah entered the Syrian conflict in 2012 by sending small numbers of fighters to protect the Shrine of Sayida Zaynab (revered by Shi'ites) in south Damascus. The Hezbollah deployment escalated sharply in April 2013 as the movement played a major role in the battle for al-Qusayr (al-Jazeera, April 6).

Militarily, the movement has had a number of notable successes in Syria in recent weeks, ranging from the mid-March capture of the rebel stronghold at the strategically vital town of Yabroud, close to Lebanon's Beka'a Valley, to the April 9 capture of the Syrian border town of Rankous, part of an effort to consolidate control of the Damascus to Homs highway. Both operations were conducted in cooperation with forces of the Syrian national army. These successes permit Hezbollah and the Lebanese military an opportunity to secure the Syrian-Lebanese border from further suicide bombings and other attacks by Sunni jihadists operating in Syria. Syrian opposition forces crossing the Lebanese-Syrian border are already restricted to using the most difficult mountain routes to cross the frontier (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 11).

Hezbollah is currently cooperating with the Lebanese Army in a security crackdown in the Beka'a Valley, home to a significant number of Shi'ites (*Daily Star* [Beirut], April 11). The region has witnessed numerous retaliatory attacks by Syrian opposition forces on Hezbollah operatives since the Hezbollah intervention began. There have also been a number of incidents of sectarian violence in northern Lebanon (particularly the port city of Tripoli) that the Lebanese Army is working to eliminate. Lebanese security forces have also warned of a recent infiltration by al-Nusra Islamist fighters into the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, where they are able to avoid ongoing security sweeps and plan bombings within Lebanon and Syria (*Daily Star* [Beirut], April 3).

Hezbollah deputy leader Shaykh Na'im Qasim says the recent battles in Syria have left the international community with a choice:

> Either have an understanding with Assad to reach a result, or to keep the crisis open with President Assad having the upper hand in running the country… America is in a state of confusion. On the one hand it does not want the regime to stay and on the other it cannot control the militants which are represented by ISIS and al-Nusra. This is why the latest American position was to leave the situation in Syria in a state of attrition (Fars News Agency [Tehran], April 10).

Elsewhere, Qasim has noted that Assad retains the support of Syria's religious minorities and suggests that political realities in the region must be addressed: "There is a practical Syrian reality that the West should deal with – not with its wishes and dreams, which proved to be false" (Fars News Agency [Tehran], April 12).

The Intervention and Hezbollah's Domestic Standing

The former head of the opposition Syrian National Council, Dr. Burhan Ghalioun, predicts that Hezbollah will soon pull out of Syria due to heavy combat losses and growing dissent within the movement (*al-Watan* [Abha, Saudi Arabia], April 10). While possible, Ghalioun's prediction runs counter to Hezbollah's determination to preserve the Assad government for various reasons vital to the movement's future success and overlooks Tehran's importance in encouraging further Hezbollah operations in Syria. Nonetheless, Hezbollah has adapted its tactics to reduce battlefield losses by emphasizing reconnaissance and secure communications (AP, April 13).

Hezbollah leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah believes there is a growing recognition within Lebanon and even his own movement of the necessity for Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria: "We do not face a problem with our people about our participation in Syria, on the contrary, there was a group that was hesitant, but it has settled its choice with us… I can say that some [anti-Assad] March 14 partisans support our involvement in Syria to protect Lebanon from terrorist *takfiri* groups" (*Daily Star* [Beirut], April 7).

Already strong in its military and social service divisions, Hezbollah is now seeking to expand its political influence in Lebanon beyond its representatives in parliament. Nonetheless, Hezbollah pulled out of Lebanon's national dialogue in March after President Michel Sulayman criticized the movement's involvement in Lebanon. Shaykh Na'im Qasim has stated that the movement will rejoin the talks only if four conditions are met:

- All parties must recognize that Israel is a threat to Lebanon
- No single group can monopolize power in Lebanon
- Political parties must resist linking the fate of Lebanon to the regional crisis
- Presidential and parliamentary elections must be held on schedule (*Daily Star* [Beirut], April 5).

Hezbollah has also emerged as a major player in the selection of a new Lebanese president. The candidate of the Christian Lebanese Forces Party (part of the anti-Syrian March 14 coalition), Dr. Samir Geagea, is a traditional opponent of Hezbollah and Syria (with the latter being behind his 11 years spent in solitary confinement in a windowless basement cell). However, Geagea is now seeking a more collaborative relationship with Hezbollah, which he insists should abandon its weapons and become a full-fledged political party. A former militia leader, Geagea does not agree with Hezbollah's argument that it must retain its weapons so long as the Lebanese Army is incapable of defending the nation against Israeli incursions:

> They are not the ones to make that decision. Lebanon will be an effective state that makes decisions or it will cease to exist. They cannot make decisions on our behalf. Hezbollah cannot assume that weapons are the best way to protect Lebanon… Talking about resistance is no longer convincing… If you take a look at the military's weapons capabilities as it currently stands, the military is more than 50 times better armed than Hezbollah… The military's Special Forces (the Marine Commandos, Mountain Commandos and Strike Force) outnumber Hezbollah's Special Forces two

to one or more. Hezbollah's constituency will be the greatest beneficiaries of a stable, secure state that will allow the Lebanese economy to recover and create new opportunities for development projects (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 9).

Hezbollah, however, is supporting the as yet undeclared candidacy of Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader and former Lebanese Army commander General Michel Aoun for president (the office is restricted to Christians under Lebanon's national pact; Aoun is a Maronite Christian). The movement is expanding its political role in Lebanon by building alliances with the Shiite Amal movement and other elements of the pro-Syrian March 8 coalition (which includes both Hezbollah and the FPM). Sayyid Nasrallah insists his movement is seeking a "made-in-Lebanon" president, chosen without foreign interference (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], April 8).

The Anti-Terrorist Agenda

A generally pro-Hezbollah Beirut daily's description of the movement's current security role provides some idea of how Hezbollah is positioning itself as Lebanon's first line of defense against "*takfiri*" terrorists:

The Lebanese army cannot succeed in its current and future plans without at least moral support from Hezbollah. It would not be possible to eliminate terrorist and takfiri groups in Syria without the party. Security actors are aware of the important intelligence role played by the party in uncovering bombs and networks aiming to terrorise Lebanon and ignite strife. The party and its allies form a heavy political force, making it impossible to take any major national political decision against the party or without it (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], April 11).

According to Sayyid Nasrallah, Hezbollah is not a substitute for the state, "even in the matter of resistance. When the state becomes capable and strong enough to defend Lebanon, we in the Resistance will go back to our schools and our universities and affairs" (*as-Safir* [Beirut], April 8). There are few signs, however, that anyone in the Hezbollah leadership believes that time is near. In the meantime, movement officials emphasize the movement's success in closing a number of car bomb factories threatening Lebanon during recent Hezbollah military operations in Syria's Qalamun region, close to the Lebanese border.

The Shifting Diplomatic Landscape

There are indications that Iran and Saudi Arabia are beginning to develop contacts with the goal of eventual discussions on the Syrian issue (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], April 9). Nasralllah has stated he supports reconciliation between the two nations (*as-Safir* [Beirut], April 8). Iran is reported to be proposing a ceasefire, the formation of a national unity government, gradual transfer of presidential powers to a national government and finally presidential and parliamentary elections (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], March 31). There is little doubt that Hezbollah would welcome any steps towards finding a Syrian solution; the movement's participation in the conflict has come at an enormous human and financial cost to Hezbolllah's Lebanese constituency.

While the movement's leadership maintains support for their role in Syria is actually increasing, it is also clear that Hezbollah's commitment in Syria cannot be open-ended. While Nasrallah sees a turn-around in the fortunes of the Assad regime, he is also aware the conflict is entering a dangerous phase for his movement if no settlement is in sight: "In my opinion, the phase of bringing down the regime or bringing down the state is over… [The armed opposition] cannot overthrow the regime, but they can wage a war of attrition" (*as-Safir* [Beirut], April 7).

Hezbollah's relations with Egypt also appear to be thawing after a complete breakdown during the rule of former Egyptian president Muhammad Mursi. With the discredited Muslim Brotherhood out of the way, Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy met with Hezbollah MP and Industry Minister Hussein al-Hajj Hassan on March 20. Hassan is said to have explained Hezbollah's intervention in Syria as a response to the dangers posed by cross-border terrorism (*al-Akhbar*, March 31). While the groundbreaking meeting was far from an Egyptian endorsement of the movement, it did represent an important, if tentative, step towards improving relations and developing a more cooperative policy on the Syrian issue (Egypt opposes Hezbollah's military intervention). With Egypt working closely with Saudi Arabia, its main financial backer during the political transition, and Hezbollah working closely with the Iranian regime, further talks could be the beginning of a gradual reduction in the dangerous tension between the often overlapping Shi'ite and Sunni spheres of the Middle East.

The Anti-Israeli Resistance

Hezbollah is aware that its military commitment in Syria could be interpreted as an opportunity by the Israeli military and has therefore remained active along the border with Israel to demonstrate it can still mount operations against Israel while supporting the Assad regime within

Syria. Israeli strikes such as the air attack on two Hezbollah trucks carrying missiles in late February are politically useful to the movement, which characterizes such strikes as attacks on the Lebanese nation that confirm Israel's "aggressive nature" (*Daily Star* [Beirut], February 27).

A Hezbollah attack on an Israeli unit in the disputed Shaba'a Farms region on the border was carried out on March 14 in response to an Israeli Air Force raid a week earlier (*Jerusalem Post*, April 11). Nasrallah said the attack "sent a message that the Resistance is still capable of fighting Israel" and added that the operation was "about deterrence" (*as-Safir* [Beirut], April 8).

Financial Distress?

There are signs that Hezbollah is undergoing financial stress at the moment due to several factors, most notably cuts in funding due to Iranian austerity measures. While the movement continues to receive financial assistance from the independent budget of Supreme Guide Ayatollah Khamenei, funding from the Iranian Foreign Ministry is reported to have stopped five months ago (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 9).

A bipartisan bill before the U.S. House of Representatives, the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (H.R. 4411), is designed to "cripple" Hezbollah and eliminate its threat to Israel by extending new financial sanctions, penalizing satellite providers carrying Hezbollah's al-Manar TV and dual designations as a narcotics trafficking organization and transnational criminal organization (*Daily Star* [Beirut], April 6). [1] Economic investments and an expanding commercial element are important sources of revenue for Hezbollah that may be threatened to some extent by the proposed U.S. legislation.

Hezbollah's deployment in Syria is also a financial drain on the movement. While Iran covers the costs of the actual military deployment, the costs of responding to associated attacks by Sunni militants within Lebanon are borne by the movement, which also provides $50,000 in cash to the families of each Hezbollah member killed in Syria, as well as housing for those families who need it. The result has been cutbacks in various Hezbollah programs, especially allocations to media groups belonging to allied Sunni and Christian currents (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 9).

Donations from the Lebanese Shi'a diaspora are another important source of funding, but this source is also under duress. On April 8, German authorities banned what they described as a Hezbollah front organization that had raised $4.5 million in Germany since 2007. The ban was accompanied by a series of raids as Interior Minister Thomas de Maziere explained: "Organizations that directly or indirectly from German soil oppose the state of Israel's right to exist may not seek freedom of association protection" (*Daily Star* [Beirut], April 9).

Conclusion

Hezbollah is confident it can regain the respect and influence it had in the region after it repulsed the Israeli military in 2006 by positioning itself as not only an anti-Israel resistance movement but also a shield against (Sunni) jihadist groups preparing cross-border terrorist attacks in Lebanon. Overlooked in Hezbollah statements is the fact that it is Hezbollah's intervention in Syria that attracts many (though by no means all) of these attacks. Though the movement is undergoing great stress from its military campaign in Syria and Western efforts to interrupt its funding, the movement has demonstrated great resilience in the past and is likely to support diplomatic efforts to end the costly conflict in Syria. Resolution in this sphere promises to bring greater regional acceptance for the movement and will enable it to continue its move from Lebanon's political periphery to its political center in Beirut.

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Note

1. See Rep. Mark Meadows, "Cut Off Hezbollah's Lifeline to International Financing," Washington Examiner, April 10, 2014, http://washingtonexaminer.com/cut-off-hezbollahs-lifeline-to-international-financing/article/2547025; Rep. Paul Cook, "Rep. Paul Cook Cosponsors Bills to Sanction Hezbollah, Block Terrorist from Entering the United States," Press Release, April 9, 2014, http://cook.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-paul-cook-cosponsors-bills-to-sanction-hezbollah-block-terrorist.