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HOUTHS BATTLE ARMY AND TRIBAL MILITIAS FOR CONTROL OF YEMEN'S AMRAN GOVERNORATE

Andrew McGregor

At the conclusion of a three-day battle, experienced Houthist fighters stormed the ancient Yemeni walled city of Amran on July 8, killing some 200 people in the process and displacing at least 35,000 before beginning a manhunt for remaining security officials (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 10). Amran is the capital of the Amran governorate and the home of ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the powerful al-Ahmar clan. With the Houthists now established only 50 kilometers away from the capital, Yemen's cabinet met to condemn the offensive and issue a statement that said: "We hold the Houthis legally and morally responsible for what is happening in Amran and the implications of this on the security and stability of the homeland" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 10). At the same time, the Yemeni Air Force was striking targets within Amran, including the captured headquarters of the 310th Armored Brigade (Yemen Times, July 10). Soviet and Saudi-trained Brigadier General Hamid al-Qushaibi, an ally of the Islamist Islah (Reform) Party and commander of the 310th Brigade, was killed soon afterwards in ambiguous circumstances, with the Houthis claiming he was found dead and the Islah Party insisting he was executed by Houthist insurgents (Yemen Times, July 15).

The Houthis are a religious-political movement in northern Yemen that have fought a series of wars with the central government. The Houthis are Zaydi Shiites, but so are most of their opponents in the Hashid tribal confederation, which includes the powerful al-Ahmar clan. Even religious differences between the Zaydis and the Shafi'i Sunni population of Yemen (a slight majority since unification with the largely Sunni south) are minimal, though the small but growing Salafist community in Yemen takes a sterner view of Zaydi Shi'ism.



French troops in Bamako. France recently announced a new West African military operation.

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Fighting between the Houthis and al-Ahmar tribesmen in Amran governorate began last October. Clashes between the Houthis and Yemen's 310th Armored Brigade began in March after troops denied armed Houthis entry to Amran City (Yemen Times, July 10). By June the Houthis were battling the 310th Armored Brigade and tribal militias over the approaches to Amran city.

After driving the 310th Brigade from Amran, the Houthis began artillery exchanges with units of the 6th Military Command based in the mountains outside Amran city. The 6th Military Command withdrew on July 13 to allow the replacement of both it and the 310th Brigade in Amran with troops belonging to the 9th Brigade, a unit based in Houthist-controlled Sa'ada that is viewed as less inimical to the Houthist movement than the withdrawn units (Yemen Times, July 15).

Although the 310th Brigade made an effort to hold the city, there were concerns over the ease with which the local Special Security Forces camp was overrun, with accusations from observers of a "hand-over" and an "act of treason" (Yemen Times, July 10). Shortly after the Houthist occupation of Amran, new clashes broke out between Houthist fighters and tribal militias affiliated with the Islah Party in neighboring al-Jawf governorate. The UN Security Council addressed the situation on July 11, demanding that the Houthis withdraw from Amran while promising sanctions against those parties determined to be inhibiting a political solution in Yemen (al-Jazeera, July 12). The Houthis have begun to use the Islah Party's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood to characterize Party members as "terrorists," as they are now described in Egypt (Yemen Post, July 16). The Saudi government has also recently backed off from its traditional support of the Islah Party due to the Party's connections with the Brotherhood.

An agreement was reached to allow Houthist forces in Amran city to be replaced by forces under the command of the Defense Ministry; however, even after the withdrawal agreement, a large-scale al-Houthi presence continued in Amran city and nearby areas (Yemen Times, July 15). [1]

The failure of Major General Ali Mohsin's loyalists to hold Amran enabled President Abdu Rabbu Mansur Hadi to make further changes in the military command, removing Mohsin's loyalists General Muhammad al-Magdashi (commander of the 6th Military Command) and General Muhammad al-Sawmali (commander of the Hadramawt-based 1st Military Command) (Yemen Times, July 15). Since becoming president, Hadi has struggled to bring the factionalized armed forces under presidential control, using purges of the senior officer corps to address continuing competition for influence from the former president, General Mohsin and

the Islah Party, all of which remain significant forces within Yemen's military.

A series of presidential decrees have already removed Hadi's biggest challengers for control of the military, sending Ahmad al-Ahmar, ex-president Saleh's son and commander of the Republican Guard, to the United Arab Emirates to serve as Yemen's ambassador. General Mohsin was relieved of his command of the 1st Armored Division and made special military advisor to the president. Shortages of pay have aggravated the situation in the military, provoking a series of small mutinies in the army and the security forces. The fact that the central government has no other means than negotiation to persuade the troops to return to their duties only encourages further such events.

Note

1. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Yemen: Amran conflict situation report no.6," July 16, 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-amran-conflict-situation-report-no-6-16-july-2014>.

OPERATION BARKHANE: FRANCE'S NEW MILITARY APPROACH TO COUNTER-TERRORISM IN AFRICA

Andrew McGregor

With several military operations underway in the former colonies of French West Africa, Paris has decided to reorganize its deployments with an eye to providing a more mobile and coordinated military response to threats from terrorists, insurgents or other forces intent on disturbing the security of France's African backyard.

France will redeploy most of its forces in Africa as part of the new Operation Barkhane (the name refers to a sickle-shaped sand dune). Following diplomatic agreements with Chad, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania (the "Sahel G-5"), over 3,000 French troops will be involved in securing the Sahel-Sahara region in cooperative operations involving G-5 troops. Other assets to be deployed in the operation include 20 helicopters, 200 armored vehicles, 200 trucks, six fighter-jets, ten transport aircraft and three drones (*Le Figaro* [Paris], July 13).

French President François Hollande made a tour of Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Chad between July 17-19 to discuss the new security arrangements with political leaders, but also to promote French trade in the face of growing Chinese competition (*Economist*, July 19). In Niger, Hollande was met by a group protesting French uranium mining operations in that country (AFP, July 18). In a speech given in Abidjan, Hollande declared that the reorganization of French military assets in Africa would enable "quick and effective responses to crisis... Rather than having heavy and unwieldy crisis bases, we prefer to have facilities that can be used for fast and effective interventions" (*Nouvel Observateur* [Paris], July 19).

The official launch of Operation Barkhane will come in the Chadian capital of N'Djamena on August 1. The operation will be commanded by the highly-experienced Major General Jean-Pierre Palasset, who commanded the 27e Brigade d'Infanterie de Montagne (27th Mountain Infantry Battalion, 2003-2005) before leading Operation Licorne in Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and serving as commander of the Brigade La Fayette, a joint unit comprising most of the French forces serving in Afghanistan (2011-2012).

The initiation of Operation Barkhane brings an end to four existing French operations in Africa; Licorne (Côte d'Ivoire, 2002-2014), Épervier (Chad, 1986-2014), Sabre (Burkina Faso, 2012-2014) and Serval (Mali, 2013-2014). Licorne is coming to an end (though 450 French troops will remain in

Abidjan as part of a logistical base for French operations) while the other operations will be folded into Operation Barkhane. Operation Sangaris (Central African Republic, 2013-present) is classified as a humanitarian rather than counter-terrorism mission and the deployment of some 2,000 French troops will continue until the arrival of a UN force in September (Bloomberg, July 21). Some 1,200 French soldiers will remain in northern Mali (*Guardian* [Lagos], July 15). Existing French military deployments in Djibouti, Dakar (Senegal) and Libreville (Gabon) are expected to be scaled back significantly, a process already underway in Dakar (*Jeune Afrique*, July 19).

The force in Chad has been boosted from 950 to 1,250 men. Chad will play an important role in Operation Barkhane – N'Djamena's Kossei airbase will provide the overall command center, with two smaller bases in northern Chad at Faya Largeau and Abéché, both close to the Libyan border. Zouar, a town in the Tubu-dominated Tibesti Masif of northern Chad, has also been mentioned as a possibility (*Jeune Afrique*, July 19). Kossei will provide a home for three Rafale fighter jets, Puma helicopters and a variety of transport and fuelling aircraft. Chadian troops fought side-by-side with French forces in northern Mali in 2013 and are regarded as the most effective combat partners for France in North Africa despite a recent mixed performance in the Central African Republic. Four Chadian troops under UN command died in a June 11 suicide bombing in the northern Mali town of Aguelhok (AFP, June 11). Chadian opposition and human rights groups are dismayed by the new agreement, which appears to legitimize and even guarantee the continued rule of President Idriss Déby, who has held power since 1990 (RFI, July 19).

Intelligence operations will be headquartered in Niamey, the capital of Niger and home to French unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations in West Africa. There are currently about 300 French troops stationed in Niger, most of them involved in protecting, maintaining and operating two unarmed General Atomic MQ-9 Reaper drones and an older Israeli-built Harfang drone (Bloomberg, July 21). The French-operated Harfang drones are being gradually phased out in favor of the MQ-9s, though the Harfangs saw extensive service during French operations in northern Mali in 2013. Three Mirage 2000 fighter jets will be transferred from N'Djamena to Niamey. A French Navy Dassault Atlantique 2 surveillance aircraft has been withdrawn from Niamey with the conclusion of Operation Serval.

Small groups of French Special Forces will continue to be based in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, and at Atar, a small settlement in northwestern Mauritania. Other

small bases are planned for Tessalit in Mali, which controls the road running between the rebellious Kidal region and southern Algeria, and in Madama in Niger, a strategic post near the Malian border that was the site of a French colonial fort. There are reports that French troops have already occupied the nearby Salvador Pass, an important smuggling route between Niger and Libya that appears to have acted as a main transit route for terrorists passing through the region (*Libération* [Paris], July 16).

French forces in the Sahel-Sahara region will continue to be targeted by Mokhtar Belmokhtar's Murabitun group, which claimed responsibility for the death of one Legionnaire and the wounding of six others in a suicide bomb attack in northern Mali on July 15 (*al-Akhbar* [Nouackchott], July 16; RFI, July 17). Much of the ground element for Operation Barkhane is likely to be drawn from the French Légion étrangère and the Troupes de marine, the successor to the French Colonial Infantry.

The implementation of Operation Barkhane, an apparently permanent defense agreement with five former French colonies, raises a number of important questions, not least of which is what attitude will be adopted by Algeria, the most powerful nation in the Sahara-Sahel region but one that views all French military activities there with great suspicion based on Algeria's 132-year experience of French occupation. There is also a question of whether the new defense agreements will permit French forces in hot pursuit of terrorists to cross national borders of G-5 nations without obtaining permission first. The permanent deployments also seem to present a challenge to local democracy and sovereignty while preserving French commercial and political interests in the region. For France, Operation Barkhane will enhance French ability to fend off Chinese commercial and trade challenges and allow France to secure its energy supplies while disrupting terrorist networks and containing the threat from southern Libya.

A Marriage of Convenience: The Many Faces of Iraq's Sunni Insurgency

Bashdar Pusho Ismaeel

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) may have stolen the limelight, but the current Sunni insurgency in Iraq is dominated by a number of Sunni groups, with ISIS forming possibly less than a third of rebel forces. Each group has its own reason and motivation for siding with ISIS, but far from sharing ideology or a common end goal, the main binding factor is hatred of the Shiite government and Iraq's prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki (Middle East Monitor, June 17; Rudaw [Erbil], July 7).

The key to ousting ISIS and arriving at a peaceful solution ultimately lies in the hands of the Sunni tribes and the local Sunni population, not in the guns of the Shiites. It was the Sunnis that turned the tide against al-Qaeda once before, but wary Sunnis may not bail out Baghdad so easily again. The danger now after 11 years of bloodshed and Sunni marginalization is that Baghdad may find it impossible to resurrect the notion of a united Iraq, let alone heal the gulf of sectarian mistrust and animosity.

A number of the Sunni armed groups currently fighting Baghdad are remnants of the previous insurgency against U.S. occupation. Many of these groups have formed alliances and grown in strength since the revitalized Sunni uprising evolved from popular protests at the end of 2012 to renewed armed conflict and sectarian war. Indeed for this reason, many Sunni tribal leaders discount ISIS as the spark of the revolution and accuse them of taking advantage by jumping on the Iraqi Sunni bandwagon.

- **General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries (GMCIR)**

One of the main groups that fought alongside ISIS is the GMCIR. This group was formed in early 2014 from an alliance of various other military councils or tribal revolutionary groups with the aim of establishing a unified command as a result of renewed fighting with Baghdad (*al-Ahram Weekly* [Cairo], March 20). The GMCIR includes a large number of former officers of the disbanded Iraqi army and has the general aim of establishing a Sunni autonomous entity without compelling any break-up of Iraq. The group is associated with the Muslim Scholars' Association led by the influential Shaykh Harith Sulayman al-Dhari. GMCIR has an

uneasy cooperation with ISIS that saw large areas of northern Iraq slip from the control of Baghdad, but differences between the groups are discernible in their approach to governance in Mosul and the issue of ISIS' dominant role on the ground (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], June 16).

Days after the occupation of Mosul, GMCIR spokesman and former general Muzhir al-Qaisi described ISIS as "barbarians" (BBC, June 14). Distancing themselves from ISIS' extremist ideology, the GMCIR has tried to emphasize a non-sectarian agenda and a political solution to the crisis.

- **Military Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries (MCTR)**

The MCTR is the largest non-ISIS force and is believed to include a coalition of approximately 80 Sunni Arab tribes and 41 armed groups, including former officers from the Saddam era. Its presence is especially strong in Fallujah, Ramadi and parts of Nineweh and Salahuddin (al-Araby al-Jadid [Beirut], June 14).

- **Military Council of Anbar Tribal Revolutionaries (MCATR)**

One of the main military councils, the MCATR was formed in early 2014 (Journal of Turkish Weekly, June 25). The MCATR has pressed the remaining Sahwa (Awakening) forces to fight for their cause – many of the groups that comprise MCATR today relinquished their Sahwa allegiance after key demands were not fulfilled by al-Maliki and the prime minister ordered a violent crackdown of sit-in protestors. However, in the battles for Ramadi and Fallujah earlier this year, it was clear that remnants of the Sahwa forces battled insurgents on the side of the government.

Shaykh Hatim al-Sulayman is the leader of the MCATR and chief of the powerful Dulaim tribe in Ramadi (with significant influence in Anbar). The Dulaim tribe, including the al-Bou Nimr, al-Farraj, al-Bou Issa and al-Fallaha sub-tribes as well as gunmen from the al-Jamilat, al-Jabour and al-Janabat clans, has played a central role in the uprising since last year (Al-Monitor, January 8).

Al-Sulayman, like many other tribal leaders, is hardly full of praise for ISIS but sees al-Maliki as more dangerous. Pointing out various disagreements with ISIS, he signalled that the inevitable fight against ISIS was merely postponed (Rudaw [Erbil], July 7). For al-Sulayman, ISIS came only to take advantage of the Sunni revolution and their quest to win back Sunni rights.

- **Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandia (JRTN - Army of the Men of the Naqshabandi Path)**

Another major group, with particular influence in the provinces of Nineweh and Kirkuk, is the JRTN, which has a close alliance with the GMCIR. The JRTN, spearheaded by Saddam Hussein's former deputy, Izzat al-Douri, is based on a mix of old Ba'athist pan-Arab secular nationalism and Naqshabandi Sufi Islam (see Terrorism Focus, July 28, 2008).

The goals of the JRTN are the return to power of the Ba'ath party and the safeguarding of Iraqi sovereignty through the simultaneous end of the strong Iranian influence in Baghdad. Their key aim is to "fight for the unity of Iraq's land and people to preserve the Arab and Islamic identity." [1]

- **Al-Jaysh al-Islami fi'l-Iraq (JII - Islamic Army of Iraq)**

The JII was particularly potent at the height of the initial uprising against U.S. military occupation (*Telegraph*, June 20). The movement went from being a thorn in the side of the Americans to being a key player in the Sunni Sahwa (Awakening) councils that turned the tide against al-Qaeda before later turning full circle by re-joining the anti-Baghdad insurgency.

Shaykh Ahmad al-Dabash, founder of the Islamic Army of Iraq and an influential *imam* from the Batawi family, is determined to accept nothing less than the removal of al-Maliki and has noted his movement's common interest with ISIS in removing the Shiite prime minister (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 27). Its demands, like those made by the majority of Sunni groups, include a political solution to the ongoing crisis, the establishment of a Sunni federal region and the removal of al-Maliki.

- **Jama'at Ansar al-Islam (JAI)**

JAI is a jihadist group from the post-2003 era that shares the general ISIS goal of a caliphate, but rejects a leading role for ISIS in an Islamic state (BBC, July 1).

- **Jaysh al-Mujahideen (JAM)**

JAM is another group that dates back to the early post-Saddam era with an anti-Shiite agenda and the goal of overthrowing the central government (BBC, July 1). It is known to have disagreements with ISIS and the Islamic Army of Iraq.

- **Kata'ib Thawarat al-Ashrayn (KTA - 1920 Revolution Brigades)**

Named for an anti-British nationalist uprising during the British mandate in Iraq, the 1920 Revolution Brigades is a lesser known Sunni militia originally formed in 2005 to fight the American occupation (al-Jazeera, June 27).

There is a growing unease between Sunni tribes and ISIS. ISIS recently executed 30 people, including a tribal leader and his son, after they refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and pay “royalties” (Shafaq News [Erbil], July 10).

Most of the Sunni groups have insisted that they are in control of key areas and facilities and have pushed back ISIS where necessary. For example, the Islamic Army of Iraq prevented ISIS from entering Dulu’iya after they took control of it due to ideological differences between the movements (al-Arabiya [Dubai], June 11). Al-Maliki has tried to manipulate Sunni tribal anxiety by encouraging Arab tribal leaders in northern areas to fight ISIS (BasNews [Erbil], July 8). There have been skirmishes between these tribes and ISIS militants but for any real impact on the ground Sunnis must turn against ISIS in much greater numbers.

What is clear, however, is the increasing tension between former the Ba’ath party, JRTN factions and ISIS. These groups have already been involved in deadly clashes in the Kirkuk area with reports of JRTN assassination campaigns against ISIS leaders in the Diyala region (al-Sumaria [Baghdad], June 22; Shafaq News [Erbil] July 9). There are other reports of generalized clashes between tribal forces and ISIS in Mosul, Salahuddin and in other areas (al-Mustakbal [Baghdad], July 12; al-Estiqlama [Baghdad], July 11).

With so many groups and varying end games, the danger of Sunni infighting can only grow. Furthermore, the more Sunni groups in the field, the more difficult it becomes to establish a negotiating partner. Sunni tribes have to find a solution to ISIS, but are more likely to deal with that problem when al-Maliki is removed from power and a Sunni region is endorsed under an agreement. Either way, Sunni tribes have learned their lesson from the disappointments of the first Awakening initiative and Sunni support to expel ISIS or offer Baghdad any respite will not come cheap this time around.

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Note

1. See the JRTN official website, July 12, <http://www.alnakshabandia.net/army/>.

Boko Haram Opens New Fronts in Lagos and Nigeria’s Middle Belt

Jacob Zenn

Since Boko Haram kidnapped more 250 girls from Chibok in Borno State on April 14, new signs have emerged that Ansaru – whose leaders were Nigerian members of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – has reintegrated with Boko Haram and its former operatives are carrying out attacks in Nigeria’s Middle Belt region (for Ansaru, see Terrorism Monitor, January 10, 2013). In addition, a new faction connected to Boko Haram deployed a female suicide bomber to attack a fuel tanker at Apapa port in Lagos on June 25 (Sahara Reporters, June 26).

The attack in Lagos was Boko Haram’s first in that city and was claimed by Boko Haram leader Abubakr Shekau, who mocked Nigerian security officers for initially saying it was a “fire accident” (*Punch* [Lagos], July 14). The attack also realizes the goals of Nigerian AQIM militants, who trained in northern Mali to strike Western interests in southern Nigeria (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 7, 2013). The attack was not without forewarning: in the last six months Shekau threatened to attack southern Nigeria three times, Nigerian security forces arrested more than 1,000 Boko Haram suspects in Rivers, Imo, Bayelsa and Abia states in the Niger Delta and in the month prior to the attack Nigeria’s National Information Center and the U.S. Department of State warned of an attack in Lagos (*Vanguard* [Lagos], January 28; BBC Hausa, February 11; *Punch* [Lagos], June 18; AFP, May 3).

As a result of the attack in Lagos, there are now three active zones of operation for Boko Haram:

- The border region between Borno State and northern Cameroon, where Boko Haram maintains a safe haven to train militants, hold hostages-for-ransom and launch attacks;
- The Middle Belt, where Boko Haram is carrying out nearly weekly bombings of churches, malls and government facilities; and
- Southern Nigeria, where a network of militants is emerging that likely includes Muslims from southern Nigerian ethnic groups.

Documents uncovered in northern Cameroon, however, reveal that Boko Haram’s networks extend beyond Nigeria. A Cameroonian businessman who serves as an intermediary

between Boko Haram and the Cameroonian government in hostage negotiations has exported cars from Cameroon to Qatar, while flight tickets originating in Qatar and Libya have been found in Boko Haram camps (Camer.be, June 2). Boko Haram's logistical network in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region is also sophisticated enough that smugglers can funnel weapons into Borno from Libya and kidnappers can apparently hide more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok for three months without a trace (Nouvelle Expression Online [Douala], June 14).

One reason for Boko Haram's expansion southwards may be that Ansaru and other internationally connected militants are becoming active after a lull caused by the French-led intervention in northern Mali in 2013. There is evidence, for example, that a former Ansaru militant, Hussaini, was recently operating in the Middle Belt. On June 21, Nigerian security forces killed Hussaini along the Jos-Bauchi highway while his cell was ambushing a Nigerian military convoy (Defenceinfo.mil, June 21). The attack resembled an ambush Hussaini led on a military convoy in Kogi State, south of Abuja, in January 2013 (*Vanguard* [Lagos], January 20, 2013). Hussaini was also responsible for a November 26, 2012 prison break at the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) prison in Abuja that led to the escape of several Boko Haram members. [1]

In addition to Hussaini's operations, the series of bombings in the Middle Belt since April 2014 resemble those that Ansaru or AQIM-funded militants carried out in 2011 and 2012. During those two years, more than 20 of the 25 suicide-vehicle bombings in Nigeria were carried out in Ansaru main's area of operations in the Middle Belt and Kano and many were traced to AQIM and Ansaru funding and training networks (*Vanguard* [Lagos], September 4, 2011; May 11, 2013). The bombings in the Middle Belt since April include:

- On April 15 and May 5, Boko Haram bombed a motor park in Abuja, killing more than 100 and 20 people, respectively. The British-born alleged mastermind of the first attack was captured in Sudan and deported to Nigeria (Interpol.int, July 16; Sudan Tribune, July 16);
- On May 21, Boko Haram carried out car bombings in a Christian area of Jos, killing more than 100 people;
- On June 2, Boko Haram bombed a bar and brothel in Mubi, Adamawa State, killing more than 60 people, including soldiers and civilians (*Punch* [Lagos], June 2);

- On June 9, a female suicide bomber – the first in Nigeria's history – detonated explosives at a military barracks in Gombe, killing one soldier and herself (*This Day* [Lagos], June 9);
- On June 25, Boko Haram bombed an elite mall in Abuja, killing 20 people just as the Nigeria-Argentina World Cup match was about to start (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 25);
- On June 26, Boko Haram attempted to bomb a police station in a popular market in Mubi (Adamawa State) but missed the target (pmnewsnigeria.com, June 25);
- On June 28, Boko Haram bombed a brothel in Bauchi State, killing 11 people (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 29);
- On July 12, Nigerian police uncovered a Boko Haram plan to bomb Abuja's transport network with suicide bombers and explosives concealed in luggage (*The Nation* [Lagos], July 12);
- On July 23, Boko Haram bombed Murtala Square in Kaduna after the Ramadan sermon by prominent shaykh Dahiru Bauchi, killing more than 30 people. A second bomb nearly killed former military head-of-state Muhammadu Buhari (*This Day* [Lagos], July 23; Sahara Reporters, July 23).

In addition, Boko Haram appears to have internalized Ansaru's kidnapping skills and took hostage a German NGO worker in Adamawa on July 16 as well as two Cameroonian businessmen and the children of an Islamic cleric in the same week (*This Day* [Lagos], July 16). The deployment of a female suicide bomber at the military barracks in Gombe as well as the Lagos attack suggests that there is also coordination between Boko Haram cells in the Middle Belt and southern zones (*Punch* [Lagos], June 9). Somalia's al-Shabaab announced its support for the Chibok kidnappings and there are rumors carried by the Nigerian press and a British tabloid that Boko Haram's attack on the elite mall in Abuja, its World Cup attacks and the April 15 bombing in Abuja, which resembled al-Shabaab operations in east Africa, benefitted from "technical assistance" from al-Shabaab (*Punch* [Lagos], April 21; *Daily Star* [London], April 15).

Although Boko Haram's recent operations in the Middle Belt and Lagos are of immediate concern, the longer term threat for the Sahel region is unfolding in Borno. Since April, Boko Haram has been turning Borno into an "island" by cutting off Borno's road and bridge connections to Cameroon, Adamawa and Yobe

and taking towns near Chibok (*Daily Post* [Lagos], May 8; *Vanguard* [Lagos], July 14). Boko Haram has also been observed raising the black and white *rayat al-uqab* flag (used by Iraq's Islamic State and Somalia's al-Shabaab) along the Nigeria-Cameroon border (*Daily Trust* [Lagos], July 20).

Borno could become the base for the “Islamic State” that Boko Haram has called for since the founding of the group in 2002. Boko Haram could monopolize the use of force in Borno but allow locals to govern their own affairs according to tribal and religious customs or expel people from towns and then “govern” more easily in towns where there are few or no people. Boko Haram may also follow the Islamic State’s strategy of operating in remote borderlands between two countries (Nigeria and Cameroon in this case) and then rapidly expanding deeper into regions where the militants have already established logistical networks (e.g. Niger and Chad). The movement might also attempt to seize a major population center like Maiduguri (equivalent to Mosul for the Islamic State).

Shekau’s pledge of support for the Iraqi-Syrian Islamic State and use of the black-and-white *rayat al-uqab* flag used by the Islamic State in the background of the video in which he claimed the Lagos attack suggest he is receiving inspiration from the Islamic State, while other Sahelian militants, such as the leader of Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), Hamada Ould Muhammad Kheirou (formerly close to Ansaru), also now support the Islamic State. [2] The current series of attacks in the Middle Belt and Lagos may also divert the attention of the Nigerian security forces’ from Borno and allow Boko Haram to continue increasing its control over northeastern Nigeria.

Jacob Zenn is analyst of African and Eurasian Affairs at The Jamestown Foundation. He provided testimony to U.S. Congress on “The Continuing Threat of Boko Haram and Ansaru” in February 2013 and on “Islamist Militant Threats to Eurasia” in November 2013 and was a panelist on Nigerian security at the House of Commons in London in June 2014.

Notes

1. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1m5-zV3zfU.
2. See <http://justpaste.it/nusraazawad>.

From Theory to Action: The Rationale behind the Re-establishment of the Caliphate

Michael W.S. Ryan

According to most public analysis, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or its latest iteration as the Islamic State (IS), is a serious regional threat but not yet a direct threat to the United States on the order of 9/11. [1] Reforms instituted after 9/11 have protected the American public for the most part, but the system struggles with a threat that is serious but not imminent. In the case of ISIS, it might well be that the United States is within the Islamic State’s lengthy planning cycle for attack – and the blow could fall first on the world petroleum market through subversion of regional partners such as Saudi Arabia.

Relationship to al-Qaeda

Before determining what kind of threat the IS poses to the United States, one must first define what it is and what strategy it is likely following. Despite the well-known rift with al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, ISIS under any of its previous names has never been more than a nominal member of al-Qaeda, occupying a space somewhere between a fellow traveler and an affiliate. On October 17, 2004, after months of negotiation, Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance (*bay‘ah*) to Bin Laden. However, al-Qaeda leaders could try to persuade but could never give direct orders to al-Zarqawi or his successors. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, or “Caliph Ibrahim” as he now styles himself, claims never to have sworn allegiance to al-Zawahiri after Bin Laden’s death. Thus, IS does not consider itself a splinter of al-Qaeda. Instead, the Islamic State is a rival to al-Qaeda’s leadership within the larger “jihadist movement.” In its area of operations, ISIS has been more successful than al-Qaeda, while the Islamic State is the fulfillment of al-Zawahiri’s constantly foiled dream as expressed in his 2001 book, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*:

The jihadist movement must build its plan on the basis of controlling a portion of land in the heart of the Islamic world in which to establish a defensible Islamic state from which it will launch its battle to restore the Rightly Guided Caliphate according to the program of prophethood (*manhaj al-nubuwah*). Just as armies cannot achieve victory except through the occupation of a portion of land, likewise the jihadist Islamic movement will not achieve victory against the global infidel alliance without possessing a base in the heart of the Islamic

world. Without the establishment of a caliphate in the heart of the Islamic world, everything we have reviewed, the means and the plans of assembling and mobilizing the *ummah*, will be left hanging in the air without a concrete result or demonstrable benefit... [2]

Controlling a portion of land proved elusive in the face of an American campaign using weapons for which al-Qaeda has no defense. The closest al-Qaeda has come to its goal has been through its most dangerous affiliate, the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Al-Suri's Analysis of the Failure of the 1982 Insurrection in Syria

To appreciate ISIS's approach to its operations in Syria and Iraq, it is useful to review the record of the 1982 Muslim Brotherhood insurrection in Syria that ended in utter failure. Syrian jihad ideologue Abu Mus'ab al-Suri established his reputation in jihadist circles by writing a strategic history of this insurrection against Hafiz al-Assad. Al-Suri participated as part of the self-styled "Fighting Vanguard" and was in a position to provide his observations on the reasons for the failure (for which he accepted a share of responsibility). He published these observations separately in short articles that formed the basis for jihadist training in Afghanistan and elsewhere. [3] These lessons are certainly known to the leaders of the major jihadist groups in Syria and have been influential in Iraq since al-Zarqawi launched his "jihad." [4] Al-Suri identified 17 general "bitter lessons" of the failed insurgency and one hopeful lesson – the possibility of mobilizing a Sunni Muslim population for "Islamic jihadist revolution."

The overarching reason for the Brothers' failure, according to al-Suri, was the lack of a comprehensive strategy before the insurrection was launched. ISIS has been following a clear plan based on the same strategic outline that inspires AQAP. This plan, given in broad strokes by Abu Bakr Naji and in keeping with Maoist dictates, urges local commanders to compose detailed plans based on the salient economic, geographic and social aspects of the area targeted for insurrection. [5] ISIS has both an overarching plan and different detailed approaches in Syria and Iraq – harsh in its relations with other groups in Syria and more accommodating in Iraq. It is worth noting that Naji advised his readers/students (who often came from urban settings) to study books on the sociology of tribal groups that could end up becoming allies. Tribal groups have become a major factor in both Syria and Iraq.

Al-Suri urges jihadists to avoid weaknesses such as failing

to explain the ideology and objectives of the revolution; low political and revolutionary awareness and weak religious indoctrination within the population and recruits. Clearly, ISIS has made its ideology, objectives and required indoctrination trademarks of its operations in response to al-Suri's guidance.

A key weakness noted by al-Suri, the practice of having jihadists spread in numerous competing organizations, is one of ISIS's intractable problems. Its attacks on fellow jihadist groups in Syria form major propaganda material for competing jihadists and other rivals. ISIS's call for other groups to offer allegiance to the newly proclaimed caliph is aimed at this problem but is far from being able to solve it. In Iraq, an important number of its allies do not share the movement's ideology. Over time, this weakness, if not ameliorated, could become an existential liability for the Islamic State.

Another ISIS liability often cited in the Western press, its relatively small fighting force, could be considered a strength. Al-Suri points out that when the first bullets began to fly in Syria in 1982, the Muslim Brothers accepted a large number of recruits whose lack of preparation or dedication to a central ideology weakened the group's effectiveness. Al-Suri characterized this as a dependence on "quantity rather than quality" in recruiting. ISIS has chosen to keep its ranks small and highly flexible while depending on allied groups from local areas to provide additional manpower to ease the consolidation of captured territory and increase its capability to conduct further terrorist attacks.

Other causes of the failure of the 1982 Syrian insurrection addressed by ISIS include the inability to communicate ideas internally and externally; dependence on outside support rather than self-sufficiency; dealing with neighboring regimes as though they were reliable supporters; maintaining a leadership in exile away from the theater of operations; allowing the leadership to operate openly rather than clandestinely and failing to learn lessons from earlier jihadist insurrections. The point is not that ISIS has excelled in these areas; but their actions demonstrate that they thought through these issues and applied corrective actions in many cases. For example, they make use of outside sources, but they are mostly self-sufficient for resources.

In his eighth "bitter lesson," al-Suri criticizes the Muslim Brotherhood for allowing its fighters to become mired in a war of attrition with the powerful central regime on its terms rather than using proven terrorist and guerrilla tactics. ISIS's leaders appear to have decided that they would take the criticism of other jihadists when they minimized operations

against Bashar al-Assad's forces inside Syria and devoted themselves to setting up a rudimentary state straddling the border with Iraq instead. Their pragmatic willingness to sell Assad oil from captured fields and to attack other jihadist groups has prompted conspiracy theories that ISIS is a product of the Assad regime and is working closely with it. The reality is simpler: ISIS wanted a state of its own over any other objective.

ISIS has demonstrated various levels of success in addressing the remaining "bitter lessons." Unlike the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS has successfully regionalized its operations. One may well criticize ISIS's handling of populations under its control, but it has a deliberate system of governance, which has enjoyed mixed success. It has applied its harsh interpretation of Islamic law in conquered areas, but it has also promoted vaccination campaigns and even a consumer protection service. It has also shown the ability to step back from its harshest practices on occasion. [6]

Al-Suri noted that the Brotherhood had not been able to use religious scholars to mobilize the people. Although the most influential Salafi-Jihadist scholars such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qutada al-Filastini continue to support al-Qaeda, ISIS has been able to engage the allegiance of lesser figures such as Abu Humam al-Athari. As early as July 21, 2013, al-Athari wrote an essay not only arguing for al-Baghdadi's role as the Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful), but also asserting that he is the most qualified to sit "in the caliph's seat." [7] The cleric provided a genealogy tracing al-Baghdadi's lineage to the Prophet Muhammad and asserting that the leader is a member of the noble Quraysh tribe, as well other attributes associated with the ideal Muslim leader that neither al-Zawahiri nor Bin Laden could claim. One may judge how powerful al-Athari's arguments were by the fierce refutations issued by ISIS opponents. In this way, al-Baghdadi engaged at least part of the religious community to lay the groundwork for his self-declaration as caliph almost a year later. Successfully inspiring al-Athari and other religious figures in Syria, Iraq and beyond addresses another shortcoming cited by al-Suri, the failure to transform preachers into active jihadists.

One of the most important of the "bitter lessons" cited by al-Suri was the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood to mobilize Sunni Muslim Arab tribes and Kurds. There is little doubt that a great measure of ISIS's success in both Syria and in Iraq is due to its alliances with tribes. [8] Without tribal allies, the relatively small ISIS force would struggle to gain territory and find it impossible to hold it. At the same time, the tribes will always have their own agenda, which will diverge from ISIS's goals, especially if ISIS stops winning. The Kurds have

resisted efforts by ISIS to co-opt them and will fight the jihadists when necessary. The best the Islamic State can hope to gain from the Kurds in current conditions is a stalemate. Taking on the patriotic Kurds in their own homeland would be a dangerous gamble.

The Strategy: Next Steps

We should expect IS to continue to foil predictions. However, if they are following Abu Bakr Naji's strategy for establishing an emirate, we should be able to see the broad strokes of the Islamic State's strategic thinking. [9] Naji's strategy has been adopted by AQAP's leader, Nasir Abd al-Karim al-Wuhayshi, and extolled by another influential ISIS supporter, Abu Sa'ad al-Amili. To paraphrase the AQAP leader's advice to other Muslims about judging al-Qaeda, we should look at Naji's book, *Idarah al-Tawahhush* (Administration of Savagery), and look at what ISIS is doing before deciding whether this jihadist group is following a rational plan or simply running boldly on a tightrope over a deep canyon.

Naji's plan would have ISIS conquering areas after the mujahideen have driven out central government forces by using terrorist tactics and mobilizing the population to their side by polarizing society using money and sectarian politics. They would place these areas under the control of a primitive government one step above a state of nature, which would be accepted by people desperate for security. The mujahideen would introduce more government services over time and expand these areas while defending them from government counterattacks by arming the local population where possible and continuing mujahideen guerrilla operations to compel government forces to defend fixed locations, such as the capital, major religious shrines and economic targets. They would expand each area they control and merge them with others under their control or controlled by ex-military or tribal groups. They would offer the tribes booty taken during their insurgency to gain their allegiance.

As a real state begins to appear viable, the mujahideen leaders would send out a worldwide call for administrative experts, managers, judges and others who might help govern a complex state. We know from abundant reporting and IS's first magazine *Dabiq* that ISIS and now IS have already engaged in all these practices and more in Naji's playbook. This does not mean ISIS is following Naji as a recipe, but it does mean that more attention needs to be paid to Naji's work as experts devise a strategy to defeat ISIS without the use of U.S. military ground forces. More importantly, if the Islamic State is following Naji we should expect them to focus on undermining Saudi Arabia's ruling family and developing a plan to disrupt the flow of energy to the world's economies

from the Arabian Peninsula. We should also expect the Islamic State to eventually inspire attacks inside Europe and the United States, with AQAP apparently ready to help in both endeavors if the opportunity arises.

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Notes

1. This article is based on a presentation the author delivered at a recent symposium at the U.S. Naval War College's Center for Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups.
2. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Knights under the Prophet's Banner (*Fursan Tahta Rayah al-Nabi*), 2nd ed., As Sahab Publishers, p. 215, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo>. See also Michael W. S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle against America*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, p.72.
3. Al-Suri, *Mulahazat Hawla al-Tajribah al-Jihadiyah fi Suriya* (Observations concerning the jihadist experience in Syria), <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hqkfgsb2>.
4. Compare Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Jabhat al-Nusra's New Syria Strategy" (in Arabic), *al-Hayat*, January 14, 2013, (English trans. by Al-Monitor, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/politics/2013/01/jabhat-al-nusras-new-strategy-in-syria.html#>).
5. See Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarah al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (The Administration of savagery: the most dangerous phase through which the ummah will pass), <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr>.
6. For an analysis of the soft and hard aspects of ISIS's governance, see Aaron Zelin, "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Has a Consumer Protection Office," *The Atlantic*, June 13, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-isis-guide-to-building-an-islamic-state/372769/>.
7. See Abu Humam al-Athari, *Madd al-Ayadi li-Bay'ah al-Baghdadi* (Extend hands in allegiance to al-Baghdadi), July 21, 2013. This essay may be found on the Free Syrian Army's website, but is also available in a number of formats on various online storage sites, e.g., <https://ia600904.us.archive.org/4/items/baghdadi-001/al-Baghdadi.pdf>.
8. For an analysis of the relationship between ISIS and tribes in Iraq, see Nicholas A. Heras, "The Tribal Component of Iraq's Sunni Rebellion: The General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries," *Terrorism Monitor*, June 27, 2014. For tribes in Syria, see Aaron Zelin, "Al-Qaeda in Syria: A Closer Look at ISIS," parts I & II, *Policy Watch* 2137 & 2138, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September

10-11, 2013.

9. See also Alistair Crooke, "The ISIS' 'Management of Savagery' in Iraq," *Huffington Post*, June 30, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/iraq-isis-alqaeda_b_5542575.html.

