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Cairo's Raba'a Square during the removal of pro-Muhammad Mursi supporters.

Preparing for the Next Stage: Islamic Jihad's Gaza War

Andrew McGregor

Days after the September 24 ceasefire that ended Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, thousands of members of Islamic Jihad (IJ), who had fought alongside Hamas in the 50-day conflict, gathered with their weapons in Gaza City to hear al-Quds Brigade (the armed wing of Islamic Jihad) spokesman Mahmoud al-Majzoub (a.k.a. Abu Hamza) declare: "We have not stopped making weapons, even during the battle, and we will redouble our efforts... to prepare for the next stage, which we hope will be the battle for freedom" (AFP, August 30).

The Iranian-supported Sunni "resistance movement" (full name: Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin – The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine) was targeted by Israeli bombardment and heavily involved in the urban warfare that claimed the lives of 66 Israeli soldiers. Islamic Jihad reports the loss of 121 members during the fighting but asserts that it managed to fire 3,250 rockets, mortars and missiles into Israel during operations that were often closely coordinated with Hamas (i24news.tv, August 29). In addition, some 900 mortar shells were fired during operations against Israeli armor along the Gaza-Israel border (Press TV [Tehran], August 30). Certain IJ leaders were targeted during the conflict, including Shaban Sulayman al-Dahdouh, who was killed along with 13 others in a July 21 airstrike (Ma'an News Agency, August 5).

Islamic Jihad leader Ramadan Abdullah Shallah maintains that Israel was surprised by the military capabilities of the resistance movement in Gaza (Press TV, August 26). His movement mounted its own limited military operation in March after Israeli forces killed three IJ fighters within Gaza, firing 130 rockets into Israel during "Operation Breaking the Silence" (al-Jazeera, March 12).

While Islamic Jihad was prepared to negotiate a ceasefire in the latest conflict in August, Israeli demands for disarmament were rejected from the first. According to a senior

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Islamic Jihad leader, Khader Habib, “The issue of arms is connected to the existence of the occupation... This right [to bear arms in self-defense] is guaranteed by the laws of heaven and earth” (Middle East Monitor, August 7).

Al-Quds Brigade spokesman Abu Hamza has emphasized that Islamic Jihad is determined to improve its military capabilities while thanking those nations and groups who supported the Palestinians during the Israeli offensive, singling out Hezbollah, Iran and Sudan in particular (Press TV [Tehran], August 30). Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander General Mohammed Ali Jafari has assured both Hamas and Islamic Jihad of more help “than in the past in all defense and social domains” (AFP, August 30).

With inspiration from the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Palestinian exiles Abd al-Aziz Awda and Taghi Shafaqi created Islamic Jihad in the same year, initially operating out of Egypt. Shafaqi was assassinated in Malta by a Mossad team in 1995, while Awda assumed the spiritual leadership of the group. Today, Islamic Jihad operates in both Gaza and the West Bank under the leadership of Dr. Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, an original member and former professor in southern Florida who took control of the movement after Shafaqi’s death.

Though he views its establishment as unlikely, Shallah has indicated he would favor a one-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in which Palestinian Muslims and Christians would have equal rights with Israeli Jews. [1] Short of a one-state solution, the IJ secretary-general insists on nothing less than the “total liberation of Palestine.” Shallah acknowledges ideological similarities with Hamas, but emphasizes Islamic Jihad’s separate approach:

We share the same Islamic identity. From a strategic point of view, there is no difference between us and Hamas, only a tactical difference... Don’t ask me what the political solution is to be. We aren’t the guilty party to be asked for a solution because we didn’t create the problem. Our sacred duty is to fight, to resist occupation of our sacred land change the conditions of our people. That is our duty, our sacred duty. Others, like Fatah, have maps and negotiations. We resist. [2]

Despite the close (and almost essential) military cooperation between Hamas’ Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (the military wing of Hamas) and Islamic Jihad during the conflict with Israel, the two movements have become political rivals to some degree within Gaza. Recent polling has suggested Islamic Jihad has made recent gains in popularity at the

expense of Hamas, though the movement still commands just over 13 percent support (Al-Monitor, August 10). Besides its military activities, Islamic Jihad offers social services to Gaza’s hard-pressed population, including health services, schools and dispute mediation, the latter often in ways that are more efficient than similar services offered by Hamas.

The movement believes its focus on armed struggle is attracting new supporters, though Islamic Jihad has the luxury of not having to focus on the nearly insurmountable problems of governing a region under blockade that confront Hamas on a daily basis. Islamic Jihad has also distanced itself from Hamas’ association with Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, a liability in today’s political climate and counter to IJ’s interest in maintaining good relations with the new Egyptian leadership. There are reports of occasional small-scale clashes between Hamas and Islamic Jihad inside Gaza, but Islamic Jihad shows little inclination to pursue or escalate these conflicts, keeping in mind that Hamas has control over the supply of weapons smuggled into Gaza (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], April 16).

Notes

1. Scott Atran and Robert Axelrod, “Interview with Ramadan Shallah, Secretary General, Palestinian Islamic Jihad,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4(2), 2010, Damascus, Syria, December 15, 2009, http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/docs/00/50/53/76/PDF/Ramadan_Shallah.pdf.
2. *Ibid.*

Islam’s Leading Muftis Condemn the ‘Islamic State’

Andrew McGregor

Egypt’s Grand Mufti (chief Islamic jurist), Shaykh Shawqi Ibrahim Abd al-Karim Allam, has opened a new campaign to combat Islamist militancy of the type promoted by the Islamic State through electronic means such as internet sites, videos and Twitter accounts. The campaign, which will involve Islamic scholars from across the world, aims to: “correct the image of Islam that has been tarnished in the West because of these criminal acts and to exonerate humanity from such crimes that defy natural instincts and spread hate between people” (Middle East News Agency [Cairo], August 31; September 1; AP, August 25). There were 37 million internet users in Egypt as of September 2013 (Ahram Online, September 1).

Egypt's Grand Mufti has also been pulled into the debate on the controversial death sentences issued against leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their followers in connection with a series of violent incidents that followed last year's popular rising/military coup that toppled the rule of Muhammad Mursi and the Freedom and Justice Party (the political wing of the Brotherhood). The specific case in which the Grand Mufti was invited to give his opinion involved death sentences handed down to Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Muhammad al-Badi'e and seven other Brotherhood leaders in June (six others were sentenced to death *in absentia*, but have the right to new trials if they return) in connection with murder charges related to the clashes at the Istiqama mosque in Giza on July 23, 2013, that left nine people dead.

Egyptian legal procedure calls for all death sentences to be confirmed by a non-binding decision of the Grand Mufti, though in practice such decisions are nearly always followed. Unusually, in this case, the Mufti's original decision to commute the June death sentences to life imprisonment was returned by the court for reconsideration (Ahram Online [Cairo], August 30; al-Jazeera, August 8). Shawqi Allam declined to take the hint and instead reaffirmed his position that the death penalties were inappropriate given that the evidence consisted solely of unsupported testimony from a police operative (Deutsche Welle, August 30). The Grand Mufti's actions have been interpreted as a rebuke to the judicial process that has delivered hundreds of death sentences to Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters this year following the group's official designation as a "terrorist" organization. Muhammad al-Badi'e still faces another death sentence in relation to a separate case regarding the Brothers' alleged armed response to a July 2014 demonstration at their al-Muqattam headquarters in eastern Cairo.

The decisions of Egypt's Dar al-Ifta (House of Religious Edicts) are typically closely aligned to official government policy, leading many observers to consider it a quasi-governmental agency. Nonetheless, the office and Egypt's Grand Mufti remain important sources of spiritual direction throughout the Sunni Islamic world, with thousands of *fatwa*-s being issued every month in response to questions of faith and practice from around the Islamic world. Compared to institutions such as Cairo's 10th century al-Azhar Islamic University (also brought under government control in 1961), Dar al-Ifta is a comparatively modern institution, having been created at the order of Khedive Abbas al-Hilmi in 1895.

In Saudi Arabia, Grand Mufti Shaykh Abd al-Aziz al-Ashaykh, chairman of the Council of Senior Ulema and the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta (the

Kingdom's *fatwa*-issuing office), used an August 28 radio interview to respond to the arrest of eight men charged with recruiting fighters for the Islamic State by urging young Saudis to resist calls for jihad "under unknown banners and perverted principles" (Nida al-Islam Radio [Mecca], August 28).

The interview followed a statement entitled "Foresight and Remembrance," made several days earlier in which the Saudi Grand Mufti described members of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State as "Kharijites, the first group that deviated from the religion because they accused Muslims of disbelief due to their sins and allowed killing them and taking their money," a reference to an early and traditionally much despised early Islamic movement whose advocacy of jihad against rulers they deemed insufficiently Islamic (similar to the *takfiri* pose adopted by the modern Islamist extremists) led to nearly two centuries of conflict in the Islamic world: "Extremist and militant ideas and terrorism which spread decay on earth, destroying human civilization, are not in any way part of Islam, but are rather Islam's number one enemy, and Muslims are their first victims..." (Saudi Press Agency, August 19).

The Grand Mufti's comments reflect a growing concern in Saudi Arabia that the Kingdom will inevitably be targeted by the so-called Islamic State, a development that could shatter the partnership between Wahhabi clerics and the al-Sa'ud royal family that dominates the Kingdom both politically and spiritually. Thousands of Saudis are believed to have left to join Islamic State and al-Nusra Front forces in Iraq and Syria in recent months (Reuters, August 25). The Islamic State poses a direct challenge to the religious legitimacy of the al-Sa'ud monarchy and their rule of the holy cities of Mecca and Madinah by presenting the creation of a caliphate as the true fulfillment of the Wahhabist "project" while simultaneously undercutting the authority of Wahhabist clerics such as Shaykh Abd al-Aziz, whom the movement views as having been co-opted by their partnership with a "corrupt and un-Islamic" royal family.

Coming to Grips with Terrorism in Egypt a Year after the Raba'a Square Massacre

Muhammad Mansour

Before the June 30, 2013 coup that overthrew Muhammad Mursi, Egypt's first civilian elected president, terrorist operations in Egypt were far fewer in number and scale, focusing mainly on blowing up gas pipelines supplying Egyptian gas to neighboring Israel. However, after the violent crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood supporters orchestrated by then-Defense Minister Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi in the summer of 2013, radicalism became viewed as the only means of expressing critical views of the political system.

This rise in terrorism enabled al-Sisi to strike fear amongst grassroots Egyptians and pose as a national savior despite excluding all peaceful ways of dissent and arguably provoking much of the violence that followed the Raba'a, Nahda and the Abu Zaabal massacres in 2013.

In the midst of such a polarized situation, it was easy for al-Sisi to become president in June 2014 and begin the return of the country back to a Mubarak-style regime. Yet, even during Mubarak's iron-fisted rule in a seemingly stable country, terrorism did exist and his strong police state could not eradicate the influence of Saudi-style Wahhabist Islam.

Amidst the tug-of-war between al-Sisi's plan to create stability and terrorist acts aimed at striking such stability based on an "illegitimate coup," al-Sisi ignored political solutions based on adopting a democratic approach and giving a space for opposition voices in order not to give radical Islamists an excuse to launch retaliatory attacks against police and soldiers. Al-Sisi instead tried to fix the deteriorating economy by cutting the energy subsidy – an explosive issue that no previous president had dared address. However, such a solution could only achieve stability in the short term so long as the current government ignores the fact that the product of its violent crackdown is new victims who are easily recruited by radical groups. Even if they do not have the same capability as Sinai's Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, these groups can still form a nucleus for extremism and will eventually threaten the nation's security.

As al-Sisi took advantage of the unprecedented crackdown, radical groups, topped by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, found the military brutality against Islamists created fertile soil to recruit new jihadists, ranging from Salafi conservatives to

Islamist victims of random arrests by the security forces. The rise of regional extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – would also prove an asset in enabling the extremists to survive repeated and ongoing military strikes. The result was an intensification of terrorist attacks in Egypt and a new ability to recruit operatives at local and global levels (*al-Ahram* [Cairo], April 11).

As the anniversary of the Raba'a massacre arrived on August 14, Egyptian media outlets were abuzz with a video released by an armed group self-described as the "Armed Brigade of Helwan" (Helwan is an Egyptian city just south of Cairo). In the video, 12 masked men in black carrying machine guns in a street displayed the four-finger gesture commemorating the Raba'a massacre while their spokesman announced: "We're tired of the pacifism of the Muslim Brotherhood." [1] Though the group criticized the Egyptian armed forces, its ire was directed primarily at the Interior Ministry: "This is a warning for the Interior Ministry... You are all targeted."

Members of the armed group were arrested on August 26, with local media displaying a photo of the group's 34-year-old founder, Magdy Fonia, who confessed he espoused the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and had led pro-Brotherhood protests in the Helwan region. Fonia was reported to have recruited 12 people and trained them in a desert area near Cairo on how to use guns to fight police and soldiers (*al-Wafd* [Cairo], August 26; *Ahram Online* [Cairo], August 30).

In the Egyptian media, various strategic experts claimed that the brigade is evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood is pointing weapons at the state and must be charged with treason, another explained that slum areas are incubators for the spread of radical ideology, while others said the video release is meant to distract attention from a recent Human Rights Watch report which called for Egypt's top military brass to be investigated over the killing of more than a thousand mostly unarmed protesters in Cairo last year, describing the August 2013 mass killings in Raba'a and Nahda squares as likely amounting "to crimes against humanity" (*al-Shorouk* [Cairo], August 18). [2]

A Muslim Brotherhood website recently published a statement by the Anti-Coup Pro-Legitimacy National Alliance that reminded people of the massacres committed by the military, emphasizing the importance of continuing the revolutionary wave: "Despite fascist coup terror, the popular resistance moves forcefully forward without abandoning its established principles, committed to its peaceful path and the right of self-defense... The revolution will certainly triumph and the people will certainly bring to trial all those

involved in the horrific atrocities inflicted on this homeland's citizens." [3]

Nonetheless, Fahmy Howeidy, a moderate Islamic intellectual, has suggested that Egyptian state security benefits from the presence of terrorist organizations, given that the support for the current government is based, in no small part, on perceptions about the constant threat of terrorism in Egypt (*al-Shorouk* [Cairo], August 18).

Al-Sisi's government could seek more radical solutions to dismantle the network of terrorism by giving a space for critical voices within the context of a policy that respects human rights, freedom of speech and the rule of law. Oppression will bring more violence and history tells that Islamist extremism began in Egypt when former president Gamal Abd al-Nasser cracked down on the Islamists in 1954, after which the once-limited violence practiced by the Muslim Brotherhood expanded to large-scale violence by offshoots of the group, including al-Gama'a al-Islamiya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

Muhammad Mansour is an highly accomplished investigative journalist who covers a broad range of topics related to Egyptian politics and global affairs.

Notes

1. Please see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OQMPE-Jk60U>.
2. "Rab'a Killings Likely Crimes against Humanity," Human Rights Watch Report, Egypt, August 12, 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-rab-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity>.
3. "Egypt Pro-Legitimacy Alliance: Reign of Terror Will End Soon," The Anti-Coup Pro-Legitimacy National Alliance, Cairo, August 16, 2014, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31754>.

The Islamic State Eyes Expansion and Recruitment in India

Udit Thakur

Despite its growing reputation as one of the world's best organized militant groups, the actions of the self-described "Islamic State" have been largely concentrated in Iraq and Syria. However, agents and affiliates of the Islamic State have begun to widen their rhetorical outreach and social networks in order to specifically reach out and recruit members of India's Muslim community, the second largest in the world by most accounts.

Indian authorities and intelligence experts have an intimate familiarity with the work of domestic terrorist organizations such as the Indian Mujahideen (IM). However, it seems that the rise of Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria has introduced new security concerns, particularly after the August 25 news of the death of Arif Ejaz Majeed, the first Indian reported to be killed while fighting alongside Islamic State forces in Iraq (*Indian Express*, August 28). The engineering student reportedly went missing in May, along with three of his friends, only to call his family later that month to reveal to them that he had flown to Iraq. His death marks a critical junction in a string of recruitment efforts launched by the Islamic State and its affiliates to target Indian Muslims.

On July 5, in his first public speech as the self-declared "caliph" of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made specific reference to India a total of three times. The first referred to India as one of several countries in which the rights of Muslims "are forcibly seized." The second was a reference to perceived atrocities against Muslims in Kashmir. His third reference to India described the newly founded Islamic state and caliphate as one that "gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami (Syrian/Lebanese), Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghrabi (North African), American, French, German and Australian." The would-be caliph pleaded: "Rush, O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state." [1]

While al-Baghdadi's speech was greeted by largely negative reviews around the world, the reaction of Sunni theologian Maulana Salman Nadvi of Lucknow's Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama Islamic institute stood out for his praise of the so-called caliph, claiming that: "All have accepted whatever role you [al-Baghdadi] are playing and have accepted you as Amir al-Muminin (Leader of the Faithful)." [2] Nadvi's endorsement of Baghdadi has since been condemned by several members of the All India Ulema Council, as well as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, indications of the

fringe nature of the Islamic State's nascent efforts to reach out to India's mainstream Muslim population (*Times of India*, July 26).

Despite the fact that the Islamic State has yet to establish a physical presence in India, let alone any semblance of a mainstream following amongst Indian Muslims, the group seems to have cultivated something of a cultural niche for itself through the use of online social networks and chat rooms. By simply exploiting its status as the self-declared "caliphate" and broadcasting an outwardly welcoming message to all Muslims, it has made sure that fringe elements of the Muslim community in India will do its hard lifting for it.

In one particularly strange incident of Islamist propaganda taking on a life of its own, two young men were arrested after having ordered and distributed T-shirts designed with the logo of the Islamic State's predecessor, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The two men, Abdul Rahman and Rilvan, reportedly put in an order for 100 T-shirts with ISIS insignias in their home state of Tamil Nadu. They then distributed the shirts and even posed for a photo alongside 24 friends wearing them. That photo did the rounds on social media and was eventually seen by the authorities, who arrested the two men on charges of abetting insurgent activity and criminal conspiracy (NDTV [New Delhi], August 5). However, the men do not appear to have had any formal links with ISIS. On the contrary, their support indicates an altogether unique situation, in which an incredibly minute group of Indian Muslims have rallied behind ISIS imagery in an almost cult-like fashion. They lack the support or influence of any mainstream Indian Muslim organizations, and yet, have succeeded in providing the Islamic State with free publicity.

The effects of this type of internet-driven sympathy for the Islamic State have been two-fold. Firstly, it has created a virtual cottage industry of pro-Islamic State internet propaganda. The most notable example is the emergence of al-Isabah Media Production, the media arm of an entirely new group that refers to itself as Ansar ut-Tawhid fi Bilad al-Hind (Supporters of Monotheism in the Land of India). Through coordinated use of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, the group specifically targets Indian Muslims by providing Hindi, Urdu and Tamil translations of Islamic State propaganda, as well as subtitles to pro-Islamic State videos. Since being discovered, the group's social media profiles have been removed, but it continues to spread information through online chat rooms and similar means (*India Today*, August 13). [3] While instances like these bolster the notion that the Islamic State has little in the way of coordinated

physical networks in India, they point to a growing nexus of internet material that is driving Indian Muslims to take up arms in the service of the Islamic State.

The second, and perhaps most concerning effect of the Islamic State's internet propaganda, has been its influence on the young Muslims of Kashmir. Troubling reports have emerged of Islamic State black flags being displayed by Kashmiri youth protesters in Srinagar. On two separate occasions, July 11 and July 29, masked men emerged during protests that had been organized in response to Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. On both occasions, the masked men unfurled black flags bearing the Islamic State's characteristic insignia (known as *al-riya al-uqab*) as protesters hurled stones at security personnel. The incident was jarring, not only to outside observers, but to many Kashmiri separatist leaders as well who fear the introduction of Islamic State-style sectarianism into Kashmiri society, in which Sunni and Shi'a Muslims have historically close ties (*Times of India*, August 2). But amidst the grim political realities of Kashmir, the Islamic State's ideology, no matter how brutal, seems to command a certain radical authority.

Support for the Islamic State does not seem to be approaching any sort of critical mass in India given that the country's Muslim community has a strong, pluralistic and moderate core. However, instances of sympathy for the Islamic State, even from the fringes of Indian society, indicate the troubling cleavages that the group and its affiliates have sought to exploit thus far. The strategy has been to provoke India's Muslim community, invoking the authority of an "Islamic State" to induce an artificial identity crisis amongst the young and impressionable. It tells them that they can never truly belong in India. There is a new Islamic state, and they can have it – they just need to get rid of the old secular state first.

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Notes

1. Full text of the July 5, 2014 speech made by Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi in Mosul: https://ia902501.us.archive.org/2/items/hym3_22aw/english.pdf.
2. Translation of Maulana Salman Nadvi's letter to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: <http://newageislam.com/the-war-within-islam/indian-maulana-salman-nadwi-congratulates-abu-bakr-baghdadi,-accepts-him-as-caliph-of-muslims,-writes-him-a-letter-expressing-his-excitement-at-the-establishment-of-islamic-caliphate/d/98142>.
3. Instance of al-Isabah propaganda on pro-Islamic State

site “Shabab ul-Hind” (Youth of India), <http://shababulhind.net/vb/showthread.php?t=26>.

Egypt, the UAE and Arab Military Intervention in Libya

Andrew McGregor

A pair of recent airstrikes against Islamist-held targets in the Libyan capital of Tripoli have raised questions about Arab military intervention in Libya after reports emerged claiming the strikes were conducted by United Arab Emirates (UAE) aircraft using Egyptian airbases. The first strike, on August 17, hit up to a dozen sites in Tripoli held by the Misratan militia and their Islamist allies, killing six people and destroying a small arms depot. A second wave of attacks on August 23, struck numerous military targets shortly before dawn in southern Tripoli, but failed to prevent the Islamist-allied Libyan Shield militia (dominated by Qatari-backed Misratan fighters and allied to the Muslim Brotherhood and Ansar al-Shari'a) from seizing Tripoli's airport and most of the capital only hours later (Middle East Monitor, August 27; *New York Times*, August 25).

Though anti-Islamist commander General Khalifa Haftar attempted to claim responsibility for the attacks, their precision, the distance covered by the aircraft and the night operations all precluded the participation of Haftar's small air element. The U.S. State Department initially said the airstrikes were conducted by UAE aircraft operating from an Egyptian airbase, but later issued a type of ambiguous retraction that suggested further questions should be addressed to the parties involved (*Ayat al-Tawy*, August 29; *Ahram Online* [Cairo], August 29). The participation of Egypt and the UAE was confirmed, however, by Pentagon spokesman Admiral John Kirby (*Financial Times*, August 21; Reuters, August 26). On August 26, a U.S. official said Washington was aware the UAE and Egypt were preparing an attack on Tripoli, but had warned against carrying out the operation (AP, August 26). When the two Arab militaries took the decision to strike Tripoli, they failed to inform their long-time military patron, possibly marking some dissatisfaction with Washington's reluctance to take more decisive action in Libya and elsewhere.

An Arab Military Solution?

The apparent failure of General Haftar's “Operation Dignity” has led his Arab backers in Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia to consider more direct approaches to re-establishing security in Libya, where both of the nation's major cities (Tripoli and Benghazi) have been effectively seized by Islamist militias, forcing the national government to move to Tobruk, close to the border with Egypt.

Rumors of an Algerian-Egyptian invasion of Libya circulated throughout August, though a prolonged Algerian military intervention would risk inflaming social and economic tensions within Algeria (Middle East Eye, August 21). The lack of military cooperation between Algeria and Egypt would also seem to argue against a joint operation.

Qatar supports the Islamist faction in Libya and hosts leading Islamist politician Ali Muhammad al-Salabi, an associate of former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group commander Abd al-Hakim Belhadj, now a prominent Islamist militia commander in Tripoli. Both the Algerian and Egyptian militaries are involved in ongoing counter-terrorism campaigns; the question is whether these nations view Libya as an unwanted second front or as an integral part of a wider international anti-terrorist campaign.

The UAE Adopts a More Muscular Foreign Policy

The UAE's approach to regional security has been described by UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash:

Arab affairs should be settled within the framework of the Arab world because the Arab arena then becomes [accessible] to many regional players. I think this is a risk that threatens all Arab countries... There must be strong and effective police and military forces because not every threat faced by countries is international. There are many regional challenges so we should have the potential to face these threats. As [much as] the UAE and other countries need regional allies, we have to start with our own self-power and potential (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], March 31).

Gargash later said that allegations of UAE interference in Libyan affairs were merely an attempt to divert attention from Libya's parliamentary elections, in which the Islamists fared poorly: The people have spotted [the Islamists'] failure and recognized their lies. Disregarding the results of the Libyan parliamentary election is nothing but an indication of the isolation of the group, which is seeking a way out of their segregation, and [to] justify their mismanagement... Since their seven percent does not form a majority, Islamists in Libya resorted to violence and spread chaos across the country" (*Khaleej Times* [Dubai], August 27).

UAE pilots certainly know the way to Tripoli; during the NATO-led intervention in 2011, the UAE Air Force (UAEAF) deployed six F-16s and six Mirage fighter jets during the anti-Qaddafi campaign (AP, April 27). The UAE has used some of its considerable oil wealth to obtain a modern and well-

trained air arm to help ensure the security of the Emirates in an increasingly unstable region. Many of the pilots and technicians are Pakistani ex-servicemen serving the UAE on private contracts. With the Mirage jets being phased out in favor of American-built F-16s, many of the pilots are not trained in the United States or by American trainers in the UAE. The UAE is also one of the few nations in the region to have mid-air refueling capabilities for long-distance operations thanks to its recent purchase of three Airbus A330 Multi Role Tanker Transports (MRTT). In recent years, the UAE has been improving its military capabilities to take a greater role in foreign affairs (particularly in the Arab world) and regional counter-terrorism efforts under the direction of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayid al-Nahyan.

The Egyptian Perspective

Although a cursory examination of a map of North Africa would seem to indicate Libya and Egypt are close neighbors, in reality, their interaction has been historically limited by distance, topography and culture. A brief 1977 border war that ended in disaster for Mu'ammar Qaddafi's poorly trained Libyan forces marked the last military encounter of any significance between the two nations.

Egyptian president Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi told a U.S. congressional delegation on August 29 that Egypt respected Libyan internal affairs, but noted that democracies cannot be built on ruins: "Despite Egypt being one of the most harmed parties from the deteriorating political and security situation in Libya, it is committed to non-interference in internal Libyan affairs" (Egypt State Information Service, August 29; Ahram Online [Cairo], August 29). While Egypt has been reluctant to admit any involvement in the airstrikes, there are reports that its newly formed Rapid Intervention Force, a group of some 10,000 commandos with airborne capability dedicated to counter-terrorism operations, has been involved in intelligence collecting operations in eastern Libya focused on Ansar al-Shari'a activities (AP, August 26; Cairo Post, May 8; al-Bawaba, March 30).

Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry was adamant that Egypt was not involved in "any military activity and does not have any military presence on Libyan territories," all of which might be technically true if Egypt only provided use of an air base to a UAEAF mission (al-Jazeera, August 26). UAE officials were more reticent, noting at first only that the Emirati authorities had "no reaction" to reports of UAEAF activity in Libya (al-Jazeera, August 26).

The day after the attack, the Egyptian and Libyan Foreign Ministers announced a bilateral initiative to restore security

in Libya without military intervention by non-Arab (i.e. Western) nations. The plan calls for the disarmament of Libya's militias with the aid of regional and international partners, but depends largely on commitments from international arms suppliers to halt sales to the militias after disarmament. Though well-intended, neither the Egyptian nor Libyan armed forces have the ability or will to further this initiative (Ahram Online [Cairo], August 25).

Egypt's Concerns

The political chaos in neighboring Libya is the source of a number of security concerns being examined by Cairo. These include:

- Contacts and arms trading between Libyan Islamists and Salafi-Jihadist groups operating in the Sinai;
- Harassment and assaults on Egyptian nationals working in Libya could lead to the return of hundreds of thousands of workers who would become reliant on a state already experiencing its own economic and unemployment crises for their welfare. Other economic impacts have been slight so far, as there is little trade between Libya and Egypt and only a small degree of Egyptian investment in Libya;
- The absence of state control over Libyan borders, seaports and airports raises a host of security concerns;
- New armed Islamist groups operating in the greater Cairo region and the Nile Valley (possibly including returnees from the fighting in Syria and Iraq) may seek arms supplies from Libya transported over the largely defenseless southern region of the border between Libya and Egypt. Gunmen and smugglers operate openly in the region and in July attacked an Egyptian base for counter-smuggling operations in the western desert oasis of Farafra (Wadi al-Jadid Governorate), killing 22 soldiers. Securing this region with some type of permanent military presence would require an expensive and logistically difficult deployment of officers and troops, most of whom (despite Arab stereotypes) have little to no experience of the desert and share a great aversion to serving in the Libyan desert in any prolonged capacity;
- Libya could provide a rallying point for Egyptian jihadists, likely in the newly-declared "Islamic Emirate of Benghazi" (see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 7). Though the anti-Sisi "Free Egyptian Army" with supposed Qatari-Turkish-Iranian backing appears to have a greater presence in the virtual world than the battlefield, a small number of Egyptian extremists have taken refuge in Libya and could attempt to form new armed opposition groups there (*al-Ahram Weekly* [Cairo], April 24; *al-Akhbar* [Beirut], April 10). Working in favor

of the Egyptian government is the relative difficulty of mounting operations of any size in Egypt from Libyan bases.

Egyptian Options

Among the options available to Egypt to impose a political/security solution in Libya are the following:

- An air campaign of limited or sporadic intensity targeting Islamist bases in Libya;
- Securing the length of its 700 mile border with Libya (a near physical and financial impossibility aggravated by the lack of credible partners on the Libyan side);
- A limited incursion into Libya establishing a secured buffer zone in the northern reaches of the Libyan-Egyptian border (a move of dubious international legality that would invite Islamist attacks, inflame relations with some Arab nations and drain Egyptian resources better used in the Sinai);
- A broad multi-year military occupation (with or without allied Arab contingents) designed to disarm militias and support a new government that is likely to be viewed in many quarters as an Egyptian proxy (diplomatically provocative, militarily risky and financially draining);
- Covert military/logistical/intelligence support for new anti-Islamist factions (created with the help of Egyptian military intelligence) or existing militias. This has been the Egyptian strategy so far, but its support for the "National Libyan Army" forces of Khalifa Haftar and their allies has failed to yield results so far. Cairo may look elsewhere in Libya for someone with greater credibility in Libya to lead anti-Islamist forces – Haftar's long American exile and CIA associations have worked against him in Libya;
- Training and arming Libyan nationals to form a new national Libyan army with some limited political direction from Cairo. According to Libyan Army chief-of-staff Major-General Abdul Razzaq al-Nazhuri, Egypt has offered military training for Libya's new army, an important consideration given that both NATO and the United States have backed off from earlier pledges to provide training due to the continuing unrest in Libya (*Stars and Stripes*, August 28);
- Continuing its policy of cultivating tribal elites in the border region for intelligence gathering and counter-terrorist operations. These elements will not work for free, however; they are seeking development projects and legal concessions in return for their cooperation. The tribes that straddle the modern border now control much of the smuggling of arms and other contraband from Libya to Egypt.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood responded to the airstrikes by issuing a statement warning of the "disastrous consequences" of an intervention in Libya and calling for the expulsion of Khalifa Haftar from his Egyptian residence:

Forcing the Egyptian army into this war to achieve foreign powers' goals and agendas represents the biggest threat to Egypt's national security and tarnishes the reputation of the Egyptian army, making it look like a group of mercenaries. It also weakens its capabilities when it comes to face real enemies, which brings to mind painful memories of the intervention of the Egyptian army in the war in Yemen, which later led to a disastrous defeat in 1967 in the war against the Zionist entity [i.e. Israel] (Ikhwanweb [Cairo], August 24).

Libya's branch of the Brotherhood, which fared badly in the elections last June, is now setting up a rival regime in Tripoli to that of the elected parliament.

Conclusion

The lack of consensus in the Arab world regarding the direction of Libya's future precludes military intervention by an allied force under the direction of the Arab League. Any Arab attempt to impose order in Libya with a military presence on the ground would rely overwhelmingly on forces from Egypt, the Arab world's largest military power and Libya's neighbor. However, there are long memories in Egypt of the nation's last major foreign adventure, the disastrous 1962-1967 Egyptian military intervention in Yemen, which disrupted the Arab nationalist movement, diminished Egyptian influence and weakened its military in the lead-up to the 1967 war with Israel. [1]

The turmoil in Libya strengthens al-Sisi's posture as the Egyptian and even regional defender of Arabs from religious-political extremism, giving him the freedom to impose stricter security regimes designed to eliminate the Islamist opposition. The question now is whether Qatar will step up its military support of Libya's Islamists to counter the UAE's and Egypt's support of anti-Islamist factions. The August airstrikes on Tripoli suggest that this distant arena is gradually becoming a battleground in the struggle between pro-Islamist states such as Qatar and Turkey and their more conservative opponents – the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

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Note

1. See Andrew McGregor, *A Military History of Modern Egypt: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Ramadan War*, Praeger Security International, Westport CT, 2006, Chapter 19.