

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 8

p.1

Alexander Sehmer

BRIEFS

p.3

Suds Ramachandran

New Generation of Militants Emerging in Kashmir

p.5

Emma Bauer & Meghan Conroy

Boko Haram: Nigerian Military Crackdown Prompts Terror Group to Adapt

p.8

Andrew McGregor

Saudi Arabia's Intervention in Yemen Suggests a Troubled Future for the Kingdom's Anti-Terror Coalition

SOMALIA: PUNTLAND CLASHES SHOW GROWING AL-SHABAAB THREAT

Alexander Sehmer

Government forces in Somalia claim to have killed more than 100 al-Shabaab fighters in a major clash in Puntland, located in the country's northeast. A further 59 fighters were captured—among them, several foreign fighters including three Kenyans ([Daily Nation](#), April 7). The attack is a blow to the Somali militant group and will be celebrated by Kenya, which suffered severe casualties in a devastating al-Shabaab attack on its forces in January ([Daily Nation](#), January 16). However, it should be a cause for concern that fighting is moving north.

Puntland had enjoyed relative calm amid Somalia's insurgency up until recent months. In March, dozens of al-Shabaab militants seized the coastal town of Garcad, with locals accusing the Puntland administration of failing to put up a fight ([Horseed Media](#), March 15). Later that same month, a suspected al-Shabaab suicide bomber detonated near a popular teashop in Galkayo, killing at least six people ([Garowe Online](#), March 31).

For some, Al-Shabaab's movement toward the north is seen as a response to the group losing ground to African Union forces (AMISOM) further south, though AMISOM's success should not be overstated. The AMISOM forces, which have been in the country for more than nine years, are still not as effective as they should be. There was an announcement earlier this month, however, that AMISOM, alongside Somali forces, had killed six Al-Shabaab commanders, indicating that the forces have found some measure of success ([AMISOM](#), April 4).

Among the militants AMISOM claimed it to have killed was a Yemeni bomb-maker identified as "Abu Islam" and—more significantly—Hassan Ali Dhoore, a leader with the group's Amniyat intelligence arm. Dhoore is thought to have played a key role in the 2014 Christmas Day attack on AMISOM forces at Mogadishu airport. Dhoore's killing was also claimed by the U.S. in its announcement that he had been killed in U.S. drone strike on March 31 ([India.com](#), April 5). The Pentagon later confirmed Dhoore's death. Al-Shabaab maintains the others claimed by AMISOM are merely propaganda.

PAKISTAN: JEM LEADER KEPT OFF UN SANCTIONS LIST

Alexander Sehmer

China has blocked India's attempt to have Maulana Masood Azhar, the leader of Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), designated a UN-sanctioned individual.

According to Indian media, China, the only member of the Security Council to vote against sanctioning Azhar, said the JeM leader did not meet the requirements to be blacklisted by the UN (Indian Express, April 2). The move angered India (Times of India, April 2), but was welcomed by JeM in its al-Qalam publication (ZeeNews, April 12). Azhar, a former member of Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, founded JeM in 2000. The group, which is officially banned in Pakistan, is active in Kashmir although its aims and operations are geographically more expansive.

This is the second time China has blocked a move to sanction Azhar. India had attempted to designate Azhar in the wake of the 2008 Mumbai attacks. This time, however, India wanted Azhar sanctioned over the January 2016 attack on its Pathankot airbase. The four-day clash at the airbase left seven Indian security personnel dead and prompted a security overhaul along the country's 2,900 kilometer western border with Pakistan (Times of India, April 11).

The Pathankot attack was claimed by the United Jihad Council (UJC), an alliance of largely Kashmiri militant groups—among them the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen (Dawn, January 4). The claim appeared to be intended to focus attention on Kashmir at a time when India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, had just undertaken a historic trip to Pakistan to meet President Nawaz Sharif (see Sudha Ramachandran's article in this issue of *Terrorism Monitor* for additional developments in Kashmir).

India remains skeptical of the UJC's claim and instead blames JeM, which has a wider field of operations than the UJC and appears a more likely candidate to have been behind the attack. A series of attacks on Indian assets around the same time as the Pathankot attack—including an attempt to storm the Indian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan—likewise suggested re-

gional militant groups were receiving some direction from the Pakistani intelligence services who were unhappy with political developments (Al Jazeera, January 3).

Soon after the Pathankot attack—likely based on intelligence supplied by India—Pakistan arrested Azhar. But it remained equivocal on India's claims against JeM, with Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah referring to the arrest as "protective custody" (Dawn, January 15). Meanwhile, China's move to keep Azhar off the UN sanctions list is a use of its UN Security Council position to contain Indian power in the region, and has occurred despite the fact that JeM as an organization has been under UN sanctions since October 2001.

New Generation of Militants Emerging in Kashmir

Sudha Ramachandran

Militants attacked a multi-storied government building in Pampore in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in February, leading to a three-day stand-off with security forces ([Indian Express](#), February 22 and [Kashmir Reader](#), February 23). While the incident was notable as one of the longest armed encounters in Kashmir in recent years, even more significant was the swell of popular protests during the incident.

A large number of Kashmiri civilians gathered at the site, pelting the security forces with stones and blocking roads to obstruct their operations during the encounter ([Kashmir Observer](#), February 23; [Times of India](#), February 23). The protesters shouted anti-India slurs and sang songs in support of the militants and Kashmir's freedom from Indian rule.

Such scenes, not seen since the early days of the insurgency, are once again a regular feature in the Kashmir Valley, leading the government to issue an advisory calling for civilians to stay away from encounter sites ([Indian Express](#), March 9). The increasing numbers of civilians gathering at the scenes of clashes and the funerals of militants, however, are indicative of the public mood and reflect a renewed interest by a newer, younger, and more internet-savvy generation of Kashmiri militants.

Popular Support for the Insurgency

When anti-India protests erupted in the Valley in 1989-90, they enjoyed popular support. Thousands of people would pour into the streets demanding freedom from India. Huge crowds would converge at funerals of militants where people would eulogize the "martyrdom" of "their boys." As Pakistan's grip over the militancy tightened, however, the militancy grew more Islamist in nature. Groups like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) that were as opposed to Pakistan as they were to India were marginalized by Kashmiri pro-Pakistan groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), which soon gave way to Pakistani terror outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Mohammed. Kashmiri groups consequently receded into the background of the jihadist scene.

By the mid-1990s, India's counter-insurgency operations had broken the back of most militant groups. More importantly, popular support for the militants had deteriorated as locals grew tired of the violence and crime that had become associated with them and recognized that Pakistan's support for the militants was driven by territorial ambitions rather than concerns about Kashmiri welfare. Several Kashmiri militants had become informants as a result, playing an important role in turning the tide against the militancy.

Slowly the situation in J&K improved and relative normalcy returned, although anti-India sentiment continued to simmer, often spilling over into protests against the security forces, in particular over extrajudicial killings. In one of the clearest examples, Kashmir erupted in anger in March 2010 when Indian soldiers tried to pass off the killing of three Kashmiri civilians as an elimination of Pakistani "infiltrators." People took to the streets, youths pelted the police and paramilitary forces with stones, and life in the Valley came to a virtual standstill for about four months. Even amid these protests, however, the local population remained opposed to militancy ([The Hindu](#), November 17, 2015).

Since then, however, civilian support for Kashmir's militants—even Pakistani factions—appears to have intensified. In December 2015, LeT commander Abu Qasim was killed in Kulgam in a joint operation between the military and the police, and 30,000 people attended in his funeral. Residents observed a three-day shut down to protest his killing by the security forces and villagers from Kakapora, Khandaypora and Bugam ([Hindustan Times](#), October 31, 2015; [Indian Express](#), March 9). The scenes were reminiscent of those of the early 1990s.

Even if Kashmiri youth are not flocking to militant groups as they did in the early 1990s, the use of violence to address perceived or real grievances is gaining popularity. That signals a mounting alienation from the Indian state, as well as repeated disillusionment with democracy and dialogue. Moreover, the fact that Qasim, a Pakistani national and leader of the Pakistan-backed LeT, could be so popular in south Kashmir should be of significant concern to India ([Rising Kashmir](#)).

The New Generation

A new generation of militants is taking charge in Kashmir. In the past, the epicenter of militancy was in the

state's north near popular infiltration routes, but violence incidents are increasingly occurring in southern Kashmir. The area is also providing fertile ground for new recruits, with some even deserting the police to join the militants (Rising Kashmir, February 22).

Unlike those who took up arms in the early 1990s, the new militants are educated, employed, well-to-do, tech-savvy, and active on social media. HM's Mohammad Ishaq Parray, also known as "Newton," was top of his class, scoring 95% in the 12th grade exams, while Zakir Rashid Bhat, also from HM, was a civil engineering student in Chandigarh before he joined the group in March 2015. Both former students are now wanted men (Greater Kashmir, December 23, 2015).

Another development is that the new militants flaunt their identity online. A photograph of a group of 11 militants uploaded on Facebook shows them with their faces uncovered and their weapons on display, and such audacity has generated much excitement among Kashmiri youth. Foremost among these new "heroes" is HM's 21-year-old commander in south Kashmir, Burhan Wani. Audio clips of his speeches are all the rage among Kashmiri youth and have reportedly stirred at least 80 young men from south Kashmir to take up arms (Indian Express, July 26, 2015).

The number of local youths joining the militancy has more than doubled over the last couple of years. According to police records, 31 local youths joined the militant group in 2013. The number for 2015, even with figures only until the end of September, stood at 66. The ratio of local to foreign militants has also changed, from 40:60 in 2013 to 60:40 last year (Rising Kashmir, November 20, 2015).

This localization of the militancy should worry India after having distanced themselves from the militancy for almost two decades. As one Indian intelligence official put it, "Kashmiris are eyeing the gun again, slowly but surely." He explained that, while India had earlier been able to condemn terrorist attacks by foreign militants as being "part of Pakistan's proxy war against India," it will be harder for India to dismiss the more local roots of the insurgency. Local militants are also more familiar with the topography of Kashmir. They have a large network of support provided by their families and local communities, advantages that counter-insurgency forces cannot easily match. [1]

Return to Resistance

Some attribute the return of popular support for militancy to a shift in Pakistan's strategy. Since it has become more difficult for Pakistan to push terrorists across the heavily guarded Line of Control (LoC) into India, Islamabad is recruiting local Kashmiris and providing them with rudimentary training (Hindustan Times, December 17, 2015). Others see the 2010 protests as a turning point, highlighting the fact that several of the new recruits were participants and/or had family and friends who were killed by police during the demonstrations (Indian Express, July 26, 2015).

More broadly, the rise of communal politics in India and the subsequent targeting of Muslims has stoked fear and anger among J&K's Muslim majority. Mohammad Akhlaq, who was lynched to death in Dadri in Uttar Pradesh on the mere suspicion of consuming beef, and Zahid Ahmed, a trucker from south Kashmir who was killed by a Hindu mob as a result of mere rumors, are "household names" in Kashmir today (Hindustan Times, December 17, 2015). India's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads India's coalition government, has not reined in or punished activists who unleash violence on Muslims—this has further enraged Kashmiri youth.

The decision by the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a Kashmiri party, to collaborate with the BJP to form the J&K state government in the 2014 elections has also alienated many of the PDP's core supporters—who were "soft separatists" to begin with—and pushed Kashmiri youth towards militancy (Rising Kashmir).

Growing Threat

Although militant violence remains low in the Valley overall, the rise in public support for the militants is a matter of concern for India. The glorification of militants will only encourage more Kashmiris to turn to violence. While several of the "new generation" of militants appear to be more active online than on the ground, the threat they pose cannot be taken lightly. They are playing an important role in glamorizing militancy online and attracting new recruits. The current phase is one of quiet recruitment, and India should act quickly to address the underlying grievances of the local population or risk

watching them pick up arms to secure their political rights once more.

Dr. Sudha Ramachandran is an independent researcher and journalist based in Bangalore, India. She has written extensively on South Asian peace and conflict, political and security issues for The Diplomat, Asia Times and Jamestown's China Brief.

Notes:

[1] Author interview with official from India's Intelligence Bureau (IB), Srinagar, April 3.

Boko Haram: Nigerian Military Crackdown Prompts Terror Group to Adapt

Emma Bauer and Meghan Conroy

Shortly after his May 2015 inauguration, President Muhammadu Buhari gave the Nigerian military until the end of that year to defeat Boko Haram. As the deadline approached, Buhari assured the public the jihadist organization had been “technically” defeated ([Naij](#), February 6). In December 2015, the current Nigerian administration—including the president and defense minister—claimed that Boko Haram would be completely defeated within three months’ time. Although they missed their second deadline, Nigerian security forces have successfully killed and arrested several Boko Haram leaders, including a key member of Ansaru—a Boko Haram splinter group linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Borno native Khalid al-Barnawi was designated a wanted terrorist by the U.S. Department of State in June 2012 ([The Herald \[Nigeria\]](#), April 3, 2016). Further supplementing their success, the Nigerian military has taken back a good amount of the territory occupied under the insurgency’s so-called “Islamic Caliphate,” which was declared by its leader, Shekau, in 2014 ([All Africa](#), January 5).

These are signs of a successful counterinsurgency strategy by President Buhari, faring in stark contrast to the efforts of his predecessor Goodluck Jonathan, who was frequently criticized for downplaying the threat Boko Haram posed as a terrorist organization and ignoring its mass atrocities, claiming instead the group was a “northern weapon” aimed at discrediting him ([All Africa](#), March 15, 2015).

However, while Nigerian security forces have achieved some success, Boko Haram does not show signs of ultimate defeat—it has already been responsible for the deaths of at least 350 people within Nigerian borders in 2016. [1] Its strategy has shifted since Buhari’s inauguration, leaning away from conventional warfare and toward more asymmetric tactics.

Counterterrorism Under Jonathan

During President Jonathan's early years in office, Boko Haram's attacks had focused on targeting police, government officials, and religious figures, employing large-scale massacres and mass abductions as the group's key strategies. [2] Boko Haram's most significant attack during this period was arguably its August 2011 bombing of the UN regional headquarters in Abuja, in which 23 people were killed (The Indian Express, September 17, 2011).

The years 2012 and 2013 saw intensified brutality by Boko Haram, resulting in President Jonathan declaring a state of emergency in three northeastern Nigerian states and the U.S. designating the group as a terrorist organization (Al-Jazeera, May 15, 2013; U.S. Department of State, November 13, 2013).

Violence at the hands of the group continued to increase throughout 2013 and 2014 as Boko Haram seized several towns and villages throughout the northern states of Borno and Adamawa. In 2014, the group garnered international attention when it kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April that year (Al-Jazeera, August 25, 2014). Jonathan's apparent ineffectiveness in the face of the insurgency's attacks was demonstrated in the wake of the Chibok kidnappings. According to Borno state governor Kashim Shettima, Jonathan took 19 days to contact him in response to the abductions, despite being informed of national security issues on a daily basis (All Africa, April 2).

Five months later, Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, declared its captured territory in Borno state to be an Islamic caliphate (Al Arabiya, Sept. 3, 2014).

Mass abductions by Boko Haram continued throughout 2014, as did Jonathan's failure to properly address them. In November of that year, Boko Haram kidnapped at least 300 schoolchildren in the town of Damasak, abductions which received little attention until the story broke in late March 2016. Residents of Damasak are claiming that they were silenced by the Nigerian government (PM News Nigeria, March 31; Naij, April 3). One of those who came forward about the kidnapping—and whose seven-year-old was among those abducted—claimed: "We kept quiet on the kidnap out of fear of drawing the wrath of the government, which was already grappling

with the embarrassment of the kidnap of the Chibok schoolgirls ... Every parent was afraid to speak out."

Behind the failure of Jonathan's administration to tackle Boko Haram was an inability to deal with issues within the Nigerian military. For years, the Nigerian army has been plagued by corruption, exacerbated by unpaid wages and poor morale (Naij, January 23, 2015). Former Defense Minister Muhamud Yayale Ahmed, a critic of Jonathan's handling Boko Haram, said the rampant corruption and mismanagement had left Nigeria with an unmotivated and under-equipped national security force (The Guardian [Nigeria], May 25, 2015).

Jonathan's presidency came to a close with Boko Haram's *bayat* to the Islamic State in March 2015 (Terrorism Monitor, December 17, 2015).

Counterterrorism Under Buhari

Following his inauguration on May 29, 2015, President Buhari dismissed the Nigerian National Security Adviser (NSA) and other chiefs that had served under President Jonathan. After appointing their replacements, Buhari gave the new NSA an ultimatum to defeat Boko Haram by December 2015. Though the deadline has come and gone, Buhari's strategy has been successful in cutting off the group's resource routes and destroying many of its safe havens and camps (African Arguments, January 5).

In pursuance of bolstered collaboration across borders to counter Boko Haram, President Buhari has urged his fellow African leaders to counter youth radicalization and to actively undercut terrorist efforts to exploit younger populations (Daily Trust, April 6). Buhari identified the trends underscoring Africa-based terror attacks, claiming that "intense planning, strong alliances, and proper financial sponsorships" are common on the continent, citing Boko Haram's close relationship with the Islamic State and its bevy of material resources (Daily Trust, April 6). The greater focus on cross-border efforts has allowed Nigeria to starve the militants of much-needed assets, including recruits.

Reports surfaced this month—that have since been denied by the government—that Boko Haram has requested more than \$50 million in ransom for the return of the abducted Chibok schoolgirls. This could indicate the group is struggling to provide resources for themselves and their prisoners (Premium Times [Nigeria],

April 10). Hostages rescued from Boko Haram in May of 2015 had already reported arguments between Boko Haram members over resource and weapons shortages and reports have emerged from West Africa detailing the food crisis that Boko Haram members are now suffering (Yaig, May 5, 2015; Food World News, March 7).

A slew of Boko Haram members have surrendered in recent months, largely in part to a lack of food (Pulse [Nigeria], March 2; Naij, April 7; Naij, March 10). In a planned initiative termed “Operation Safe Corridor,” these former Boko Haram militants will be profiled, documented, and trained in new skills as the part of a de-radicalization and rehabilitation program. More than 800 former fighters are expected to receive rehabilitation and training as part of the program, but the real test will be whether victims of Boko Haram—including those subjected to sex slavery and rape at the hands of the group—will be willing to accept former militants back into their communities (The Guardian [Nigeria] April 9).

Boko Haram has attempted to make a show of strength to counter Buhari’s successes. On April 1, the group released a video aimed at dispelling its rumored weakness, claiming, “You should know that there is no truce, there [are] no negotiations, there is no surrender” (Daily Post [Nigeria], April 1). The video—which pictured fighters bearing AK-47s posed in front of Toyota pickup trucks—came a week after another less slickly produced video, featuring Boko Haram’s leader Abubakr Shekau was released in which he reminded his followers of their religious duties and assured them that he was still alive. This “recent” video of Shekau appears to have been produced in 2014 but had not been previously released; there exist a number of theories in regards to why the video was not released at the time of its production (Enca, March 24).

While the government appears to have reduced the group’s ability to conduct conventional warfare, its asymmetric tactics continue to pose a significant threat. Instead of focusing on capturing land, the group has become more mobile and focused on terror attacks, carrying out kidnappings, rapes, and suicide bombings. Militants have increasingly targeted remote villages in agricultural regions, conducting hit-and-run attacks, stealing cattle and food to sustain both the fighters and their prisoners. The group’s change in tactics has led some officials to make bold claims about the group’s demise. Governor Kashim Shettima said of Boko Haram:

“For now, they have been defeated as a fighting force, they don’t have the capacity to hold on to territory in this country as they used to” (Naij, April 8). While Boko Haram has undoubtedly lost territory, it may not be as much as Buhari claims. In a recent hearing held by the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, David Rodriguez of the US Africa Command, said that while the group no longer holds the territory it once did, it does still possess swaths of land in northern Nigeria (Sahara Reporters, March 11).

Conclusion

Boko Haram’s modus operandi of late appears to be use of vulnerable populations—namely women and children—as both victims and the perpetrators. Instead of focusing on capturing land, the group has instead adopted more mobile tactics focused on wanton violence including kidnapping, rape, conscription of youth, suicide bombing, and sexual slavery. This was most recently seen in an attempted attack on Maiduguri, in which five female suicide bombers were thwarted by a vigilante group (All Africa, April 9). While a great number of people have been freed from Boko Haram’s captivity recently (StarAfrica, April 7), they are then placed in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, often located in the Lake Chad region. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over 2.2 million people from Nigeria’s northern region have been displaced by Boko Haram, resulting in overpopulated IDP camps and inadequate security to protect them (Ventures Africa, September 29, 2015; Vanguard, September 13, 2015). Boko Haram’s successful increase in use of children and female suicide bombers indicates that the Nigerian army does not have a jihadist “front” to counter like they once did, and Boko Haram’s acts of terror are more unpredictable and thereby more difficult to proactively counter. [3]

Emma Bauer is a graduate student at George Washington University and currently works at AECOM International Development.

Meghan Conroy is the Program Associate in Global Terrorism Analysis at The Jamestown Foundation.

Notes:

[1] Statistics gathered by Gregory Burton and Alexander Sullivan, threat analysts for Project Cyma. The authors

would like to thank Gregory and Alexander for their research assistance on this piece.

[2] Ibid.

[3] For more information on Boko Haram, read [Northern Nigeria's Boko Haram: The Prize in al-Qaeda's Africa Strategy](#) by Jacob Zenn, Fellow at The Jamestown Foundation.

Saudi Arabia's Intervention in Yemen Suggests a Troubled Future for the Kingdom's Anti-Terror Coalition

Andrew McGregor

Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud appears intent on shaking off the perceived lethargy of the Saudi royals in international efforts to combat terrorism, forming a 35-nation anti-terrorism coalition. The coalition has been promoted by Muhammad bin Salman, Salman's son and the Saudi Defense Minister, as a "partner in the worldwide fight" against terrorism ([Gulf News](#), December 15, 2015). In February, Saudi Arabia mounted a military exercise termed Operation Northern Thunder, involving 20 majority Sunni nations and constituting the greatest concentration of troops and military equipment in the Middle East since the Gulf War ([Middle East Monitor](#), March 3).

But the Kingdom's ambitions for its anti-terror coalition—which extend far beyond the military drills of Northern Thunder—are unlikely ever to be realized. Since Shia-majority Iran and Iraq were deliberately excluded (as was Lebanon's Shia Hezbollah movement), there are already questions about the coalition's true intent.

The Kingdom earlier established an alliance of Muslim countries to combat Yemen's Houthi movement after the Shia Zaidi rebels occupied Sanaa in 2014 and displaced the government from Yemen's capital. Assessing the performance of this coalition provides a useful guide to the potential for an even larger Saudi-led counterterrorism coalition designed to intervene in Syria and elsewhere, and its relative lack of success should constitute a warning.

Coalition Operations in Yemen

Operation Decisive Storm was launched on March 26, 2015, as a means of reversing recent territorial gains by the Houthis, securing Saudi Arabia's border with Yemen, and restoring the government of internationally recognized president Abd Rabu Mansur al-Hadi, primarily by means of aerial bombardment. Although it had support

from the UK and the U.S., the Saudi-led intervention was seen by Iran, Russia, and leaders within the Gulf's Shia population as a violation of international law.

Nine other nations joined the Saudi coalition: the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Senegal, the only non-Arab League member to take part, likely the result of promised financial aid. Pakistan, a long-time ally of Saudi Arabia, declined a Saudi invitation to join the conflict ([Reuters](#), April 10, 2015).

Despite having the largest army in the coalition, Egypt's contribution on the ground appears to have been minimal, with Cairo perhaps still wary of entanglement in Yemen after the drubbing its expeditionary force took from Royalist guerrillas in Yemen's mountains during the country's 1962-1970 civil war. The Egyptians instead focused on contributing naval ships to secure the Bab al-Mandab southern entrance to the Red Sea, a strategic priority for both Egypt and the U.S.

On April 21, 2015, Operation Decisive Storm was declared complete, to be replaced the next day with Operation Restoring Hope. Though the new operation was intended to have a greater political focus and a larger ground component, the bombing campaign and U.S.-supported blockade of rebel-held ports continued.

A reliance on aerial bombardment failed to make significant changes in military facts on the ground, while a general lack of concern for collateral damage, poor ground-air coordination (despite Western targeting assistance), and a tendency to strike any movement of armed groups alienated the civilian population and kept Yemeni government troops in their barracks ([Jadaliyya](#), May 2, 2015). At times, the airstrikes dealt massive casualties to non-military targets, including a raid on a wedding party in September 2015 that killed 131 people and an attack on a market in Hajja province in March 2016 that killed 119 ([Al-Jazeera](#), October 8, 2015; [Middle East Eye](#), March 17).

Coalition operations have killed some 3,000 militants, but the death of an equal number of civilians alongside the use of cluster munitions and the destruction of infrastructure, mosques, markets, heritage buildings, residential neighborhoods, health facilities, schools and other non-military targets have been serious missteps. Meanwhile, interruptions to the delivery of food, fuel, water, and medical services have left many Yemenis pre-

pared to support whoever is able to provide essential services and a modicum of security.

Army of Mercenaries

A number of Muslim-majority nations appear to be contributing troops to the Saudi-led coalition in return for substantial financial favors. Khartoum's severance of long-established military and economic relations with Iran has been followed by a much cozier and financially beneficial relationship with Saudi Arabia. Sudan committed 850 troops (out of a pledged 6,000) and four warplanes to the fight in Yemen. In return, Khartoum is reported to have received a \$1 billion deposit from Qatar in April 2015, and another from Saudi Arabia that August, followed by pledges of Saudi financing for a number of massive infrastructure projects ([Gulf News](#), August 13, 2015; [East African](#) [Nairobi], October 31, 2015; [Radio Dabanga](#), October 4, 2015). Sudanese commitment to the Yemen campaign was also rewarded with \$5 billion worth of military assistance from Riyadh in February, much of which will be turned against Sudan's rebel movements and help ensure the survival of President Omar al-Bashir ([Sudan Tribune](#), February 24, 2016).

Like the leaders of other coalition states, President Bashir justified the deployment in locally unchallengeable terms of religious necessity—the need to protect the holy places of Mecca and Madinah ([Sudan Tribune](#), March 15, 2016). Neither, of course, is under any realistic threat from Houthi forces.

UAE troops, mostly from the elite Republican Guard (commanded by Australian Mike Hindmarsh) have performed well in Yemen, particularly in last summer's battle for Aden. The UAE's military relies on a large number of foreign advisers at senior levels, mostly Australians ([Middle East Eye](#), December 23, 2015). Hundreds of Colombian mercenaries have been reported fighting under UAE command, with the Houthis reporting the death of six plus their Australian commander ([Saba News Agency](#) [Sanaa], December 8, 2015; [Colombia Reports](#) [Medellin], October 26, 2015; [Australian Associated Press](#), December 8, 2015).

There is little to be surprised about in the coalition's use of mercenary soldiers. A large portion of Saudi Arabia's combat strength and officer corps consists of Pakistanis, while Pakistani pilots play important roles in the air forces of both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Oman and

Qatar also rely on mercenaries in their defense forces, and Eritrean troops are thought to be embedded with the UAE's forces in Yemen. Although denied by Eritrea's foreign ministry ([Geeska Afrika Online](#) [Asmara], February 23), the UN's Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) has cited "credible information" that this is the case. SEMG also reported that Eritrea was allowing the Arab coalition to use its airspace and territory in return for fuel and financial compensation. [1] Somalia accepted a similar deal in April 2015 ([Al-Monitor](#), September 10, 2015).

In response to the coalition, the Houthis have mounted near-daily attacks on Saudi Arabia's border defenses, using mortars, Katyusha, and SCUD rockets to strike Saudi positions in Najran and Jizan ([Al-Jazeera](#), December 27, 2015). When Republican Guard forces loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh joined the Houthi rebellion, they brought substantial firepower in the form of the Russian-made OTR-21 mobile missile system ([Al-bawaba](#), January 18). These have been used in at least five major strikes on Saudi or coalition bases, causing hundreds of deaths and many more wounded.

Houthi forces have made little attempt to hold ground on the Saudi side of the border. Such a move would only feed Saudi propaganda that the Shia are intent on seizing the holy cities of the Hijaz.

Tackling the Terror Groups

Eliminating al-Qaeda's presence in Yemen was not a military priority of the Saudi-led campaign at the outset, and recent efforts have had little success in this regard, with an assault by Saudi Apache attack helicopters on AQAP positions near Aden on March 13, and airstrikes against AQAP-held military bases near Mukalla, failing to dislodge the group ([Xinhua](#), April 3, 2016).

Instead, al-Qaeda has thrived amid the coalition's bombardment of Yemen. With control of nearly four governorates, a major port (Mukalla, capital of Hadramawt province) and 373 miles of coastline, al-Qaeda has created a financial basis for its administration by looting banks, collecting taxes on trade and selling oil to other parts of fuel-starved Yemen, an unforeseen result of the naval blockade. The group even tried (unsuccessfully) to negotiate an oil export deal with Hadi's government last October ([New Straits Times](#), April 8, 2016). Perhaps drawing on lessons learned from al-Qaeda's attempt to

hold territory in Mali in 2012-2013, AQAP has focused less on draconian punishments for locals and the destruction of Islamic heritage sites than on the creation of a working administration that provides infrastructure, humanitarian assistance, health services and a degree of security not found elsewhere in Yemen ([IBT](#), April 7, 2016).

Meanwhile, the Islamic State (IS) has been active in Yemen since its local formation in November 2014. Initially active in Sanaa, it has switched its focus to Aden and Hadramawt, using asymmetric tactics such as assassinating security figures and deploying suicide attackers in bomb-laden vehicles against soft targets such as mosques, as well as launching suicide attacks on military checkpoints followed by assaults with small arms.

With its small numbers, IS has been most effective in urban areas that offer concealment and dispersal opportunities. While the group appears unable to expand its influence in Yemen, this has little to do with the Saudi-led coalition's efforts and more about the contempt with which it treats the lives of its own fighters and the widespread dislike of the movement's foreign (largely Saudi) leadership.

High Cost and Limited Military Success

The cost of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen has been considerable, both in terms of cash and international reputation. It is also difficult to see the operation as a military success—Hadi is no closer to ruling than when the campaign began, Sanaa remains under Houthi control, and radical Islamists have taken advantage of the intervention to expand their influence. The Saudi-led intervention has also left one of the poorest nations on earth in crisis, with 2.5 million displaced and millions more without access to basic necessities.

The Saudis are now intent on drawing down ground operations ([al-Arabiya](#), March 17, 2016). A ceasefire came into effect on April 10, in advance of UN-brokered peace talks in Kuwait to begin on April 18. President Hadi's appointment of a new vice president and prime minister, the presence of a Houthi negotiating team in Riyadh, and the exclusion of ex-president Saleh are all signs that a negotiated settlement could be imminent ([Ahram Online](#), April 7, 2016).

If peace negotiations succeed in drawing the Houthis into the Saudi camp, the Kingdom will emerge with a significant political, if not military, victory. The Kingdom will, however, still have to contend with an even stronger AQAP. The group is consolidating a popular administration in the Yemeni regions under its control and it is not impossible to imagine it becoming the first al-Qaeda affiliate to shift from terrorist organization to political party.

In light of the current intervention in Yemen, it is difficult to imagine how the insertion of another Saudi-led coalition into Syria would make any meaningful contribution to ending the conflict there. A possible admission of this came from Saudi foreign minister Adl al-Jubayr, who indicated the Kingdom intends to contribute only a smaller Special Forces unit to the fighting in Syria, and will focus on destroying IS forces "in the framework of the international coalition," rather than wholesale regime change (*Gulf News*, February 23, 2016).

Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security, a Toronto-based agency specializing in security issues related to the Islamic world.

Notes:

[1] See Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2182 (2014): Eritrea, October 19, 2015, 3/93: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/802. Operation Northern Thunder: Besides Saudi Arabia, the other nations involved in were Egypt, Jordan, Senegal, Sudan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Pakistan, Chad, Tunisia, Djibouti, Comoro Islands and Peninsula Shield Force partners Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE.