THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION JULY 28, 2017

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XV, ISSUE 15

CAMEROON: BOKO HARAM STEPPING UP ATTACKS

Alexander Sehmer

Two suicide bombers killed at least 14 people and wounded another 30 in northeast Cameroon on July 12 in an attack on a bustling market town near the Nigerian border (Cameroon-Info, July 14). The attack in Waza, attributed to Boko Haram, is the latest in what appears to be a resurgence of Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon's Far North region and elsewhere (Kmer SAGA, July 13).

After a dip in Boko Haram violence in the region, militants appear to be stepping up operations. Just a few days ahead of the Waza attack, members of Cameroon's Rapid Intervention Brigade (BIR) intercepted a group of suspected Boko Haram fighters — made up of four men and eight women — near Amichde, also near the Nigerian border (Kmer SAGA, July 11). Two of the alleged fighters were killed while the others escaped.

Cameroon's Far North region saw 18 suicide bombings in June, according to the International Crisis Group. There were also numerous clashes with BIR solders and members of local "vigilance committees," the vigilante groups Cameroon encourages as a form of local police.

Across the border, Nigeria has seen a similar increase in attacks after a period of relative quiet. A Boko Haram suicide attack killed at least 12 people and wounded another 18 on the outskirts of Maiduguri, the Borno state capital (Daily Post, July 17). The attack, reportedly carried out by two female suicide bombers, follows a wave of similar suicide attacks carried out in the same area (Sahara Reporters, June 19). The Nigerian army is now under orders to capture Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau "dead or alive" within the next 40 days (Premium Times, July 22).

In Cameroon, the military is conducting a similarly tough campaign, one that has received criticism in a recent report by Amnesty International, which accused Cameroon of torturing citizens suspected of supporting Boko Haram (al-Jazeera, July 20)

Analysts have warned that Cameroon, Nigeria and others in the region that are fighting against Boko Haram must develop a more comprehensive strategy that will take the fight to the extremists while at the same time hold the security forces accountable and resist the harsh treatment of local communities. Without that, it is ar-

gued, Boko Haram cannot be permanently defeated. The recent attacks may be evidence of this.

If officials are considering a more nuanced strategy, it is unclear. Certainly the rhetoric remains unchanged. Cameroonian officials met with their counterparts from Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Benin, in the capital Yaoundé this month to discuss the regional security and humanitarian situation. Few details of the meeting were released, but Cameroon's defense minister, Joseph Beti Assomo, described it only as bringing the neighbors closer to the goal of "complete eradication of Boko Haram" (Kmer SAGA, July 9).

QATAR: TIGHTENING UP ANTI-TERROR LAWS

Alexander Sehmer

Qatar announced changes to its anti-terrorism legislation on July 20, including amending rules that define terrorism and establishing two national terrorism lists, efforts that are aimed at ending the boycott by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (New Arab, July 21). It follows an agreement with the United States — signed while U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was in Doha on July 11 — committing Qatar to work with the United States to fight terrorism financing.

The move is broadly seen as positive by the Arab states, but they still dismissed it as "insufficient" to ease their boycott (Gulf News, July 21). Qatar's planned changes are loosely in line with some of the demands made of them, including freezing the assets of those designated terrorists by the Arab states and handing over wanted individuals. There is now interest to see who makes it onto the Qatari lists (The National, July 21).

The Arab states have made clear who and what they consider blacklisted, releasing a list of 59 individuals and 12 organizations (examined in detail by Andrew McGregor in the previous issue of Terrorism Monitor). Among them is Abdulrahman al-Naimi, a Qatari academic who is accused of orchestrating the transfer of millions of dollars to groups in Iraq and Syria. Al-Naimi is something of an "easy sell" in the West since, as a Specially Designated National (SDN), he already appears on sanctions lists. Indeed, when Anwar Gargash, the UAE's minister of foreign affairs, spoke on the issue in London this month, al-Naimi was the example he gave to illustrate Qatar's nefariousness. Less explicable — and unmentioned by Gargash — are the Bahraini opposition groups that also make the list.

The Arab states are also keen to stress that Qatar's alleged sponsorship of terror groups sabotaged international efforts to find non-jihadist partners on the ground in Syria. Qatar denies this. Its foreign minister, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, said his country had never funded Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front) or other terror groups in Syria (al-Jazeera, 22 June). But Qatar was sloppy about the funding it did send to Syria, and it was slow to crack

down on private donations to jihadist groups, although it hardly stands alone in that regard.

Qatar's problem has been its willingness to back Islamists — Qatar's support of the Muslim Brotherhood is what really riles the Arab states. Unsurprisingly, its definition of terrorism has differed from that of its neighbors. While the Arab states have dismissed Qatar's proposed legislative changes, they may still prove to be a greater step toward resolving the crisis than the UAE and others are letting on. Its critics will say Qatar has made commitments to tackle terrorism funding in the past and failed to live up to them (The National, July 11). But bringing its definition of terrorism more in line with that of its neighbors is a practical step that Qatar can actually take. By contrast, it is highly unlikely to shut down al-Jazeera, another of the demands and one that, unlike the accusations about Syria, plays less well internationally (al-Jazeera, June 30).

The Future of Sunni Jihadist Violence in Iran

Nat Guillou

Since Islamic State (IS) declared its caliphate in June 2014, the rate of jihadist violence has escalated throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Until last month, Iran had proved to be an exception to this general trend, with its aggressive efforts to combat IS outside its own borders and its experienced domestic security forces regularly arresting "takfiris," a term used by the regime to describe those suspected of links to Sunni militant groups.

This situation changed dramatically on June 7, when 17 people were killed in simultaneous attacks by IS at the parliament building and at the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini (al-Jazeera, June 7). The attacks came as a shock to many Iranians, unused to such violence in Tehran, but militancy by domestic Sunni extremists is only likely to increase as IS loses ground in Iraq and Syria.

Potential for Jihadist Recruitment

Iran views minorities in its peripheral regions as most vulnerable to radicalization and militancy. Following the June 7 attacks, the Iranian intelligence ministry identified one of the alleged perpetrators as Serias Sadeghi, an Iranian Kurd from the western town of Paveh near the Iraqi border. Further, the ministry said at least three of the four other attackers were also of Kurdish origin and that they had fought in Iraq and Syria before returning to the country.

Security forces subsequently cracked down on radicals in Kurdish-majority areas in the northwest, reflecting the increased perceived threat from this group (Rudaw, June 23). Additionally, Balochs in the country's southeast suspected of jihadist sympathies have also been killed and detained by security forces, despite the lack of evidence suggesting any direct involvement in the attacks (Press TV, June 19).

These incidents illustrate the key areas where extremist ideology most often translates to potential support for jihadist groups seeking to conduct attacks against the Iranian state. This is not always that case, however. In

the southwestern Khuzestan province, where the security services are also highly active, members of the Ahwazi Arab minority involved in anti-state violence are mostly Shia and, as such, are not a significant potential source of future jihadist recruits.

Kurdish Threat and IS Links

Kurds make up an estimated nine to ten percent of the Iranian population, and most are Sunni. Despite initial support for the 1979 revolution, which they hoped would lead to greater political autonomy, Sunni Kurds abstained from voting for the creation of the Islamic Republic, which established Shia primacy. This ultimately led to an uprising, which was brutally repressed. Oppression of the Kurdish minority continues to the present day. Indeed, nationalist groups continue to wage insurgencies in response. These ethnic tensions therefore clearly provide a potential source of recruitment for militancy that can be exploited by radical groups.

However, while this may provide a source of hostility against the regime, the rise across the region of Salafist ideology, which justifies anti-Shia violence, has played a crucial role in forming Kurdish jihadists in Iran. A key development occurred in 2003, when members of Ansar al-Islam (AAI), a Kurdish Salafist-jihadist group established in Iraqi Kurdistan, fled to Iran during the U.S. occupation. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) allowed AAI's members to regroup and tolerated their presence as their fighters were focused on fighting the United States in Iraq.

Although Tehran ultimately outlawed the group, AAI ensured its extremist views gained traction among some Iranian Kurds. The dissemination of such ideas may also have been facilitated by members of al-Qaeda, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who also spent some time in Iran during the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

This predisposition to IS' extremist worldview will have incentivized the group's own efforts to boost its support among Kurds. Indeed, IS has recently released propaganda videos in Kurdish, making clear that IS seeks to win further Kurdish backing (Jihadology, November 12 2016). Geography will also have played an important role in the development of links to the so-called IS caliphate, as militants will have been able to take advantage of pre-existing fuel smuggling networks along the Iran-Iraq border to exit and return without detection. Around 150 Kurds were reported to have joined IS by early 2016, likely via such routes (Radio Zamaneh, February 29, 2016). Returning fighters now probably represent the key source of future jihadist violence in Iran.

Growing Radicalization in Balochistan

Like the Kurds, ethnic Balochs who seek greater political independence have suffered long-term oppression, something that was again exacerbated by the advent of the Islamic Republic, which further marginalized this majority-Sunni group. Baloch nationalism intensified as a result, but also took on a sectarian dimension that had previously been of little political significance — fighting against the Shah's government had been principally led by secular groups.

This more sectarian focus was evidenced by the establishment of Jundullah, a militant group founded by Abdolmalek Rigi in 2003 to fight for greater rights for Iranian Sunnis and ethnic Balochs. Although the group claimed to reject religious extremism, Rigi was himself educated at the Binnori Town seminary in Karachi, a madrasa that has played a significant role in helping to establish several major radical, and particularly anti-Shia, militant groups. Rigi's background, as well as other cross-border linkages with radical Islamists in neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan, will doubtless have further influenced Jundullah. Notably, major successor groups that have gained prominence since Rigi's death in 2010, and the subsequent weakening of Jundullah, have included Jaish al-Adl (JaA) and Ansar al-Furqan, both of which present themselves as openly Salafist-jihadist organizations.

None of these have expressly sworn allegiance to transnational jihadist groups, and their own established networks in Iran's southeast will have faced greater difficulties than Kurdish jihadists in establishing direct links with IS' central command, owing to the greater distance from Iraq and Syria. However, given that these groups have a sectarian agenda and are fighting a Shia state, there is a degree of synergy between their ideologies. It is therefore possible these groups will be sympathetic to IS and provide future recruits.

Future Militancy Risk

While for now Kurds provide the most significant source of further IS violence, the threat may rise in the south-

east, particularly if security forces engage in a wider crackdown against Balochs. That could in turn prompt Baloch jihadists to increase operations within the Iranian interior rather than confine themselves to attacks in border areas, such as that in April by JaA in which 10 Iranian military personnel were killed near the border with Pakistan (See Terrorism Monitor, July14; Tehran Times, April 28).

Tehran's strategy of allowing some Sunni militants to use Iran as a safe haven and logistics hub, on the understanding that they will focus on targets outside Iran, has helped limit the threat of jihadist violence. Such groups, including al-Qaeda, were unwilling to jeopardize this arrangement. However, the rise in Salafist ideology among Iranian Sunnis, as well as the growing regional Sunni-Shia divide, will provide fertile ground for future jihadist recruitment.

Indeed, IS will look to continue its insurgency in neighboring Iraq despite the recent fall of Mosul. The group has already increased its activities to win greater support in Pakistani Baluchistan, including involvement in the recent kidnapping and killing of two Chinese nationals (Dawn, June 9).

An IS presence in Baluchistan will ensure the group can further develop links with Kurdish and Baloch extremists in Iran over the longer-term, increasing the risk of further jihadist violence, especially as Iran presents an important symbolic target for IS as it seeks to maintain its relevance while its caliphate fades away.

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Sanctioning Syed Salahuddin: Too Little, Too Late

Sudha Ramachandran

On June 26, the U.S. State Department announced the designation of Mohammad Yusuf Shah (a.k.a. Syed Salahuddin) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). The 71-year-old is "supreme commander" of the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), the largest Kashmiri militant group operating in the Kashmir Valley, and heads the United Jihad Council, an umbrella organization of anti-India terror outfits based in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). **[1]**

Salahuddin figures on India's "most wanted" list and is sought in connection with more than 50 cases ranging from assassinations and attacks on Indian security forces to money laundering (DNA, June 28). **[2]** According to a U.S. State Department announcement, he has carried out several attacks in Jammu and Kashmir and, in September 2016, "vowed to block any peaceful resolution to the Kashmir conflict, threatened to train more Kashmiri suicide bombers and vowed to turn the Kashmir valley 'into a graveyard for Indian forces'." **[3]**

Unlike Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), HM has not been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States, but it has been listed under "Other Terrorist Groups" in the appendix of the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report since 2002. Because of its Kashmiri composition and agenda — as opposed to the predominantly Pakistani composition of LeT and JeM — the United States has refrained from imposing sanctions on the group or its leaders (Outlook, May 05, 2003). **[4]** With Salahuddin's listing as a SDGT that has changed. The move restricts Salahuddin's access to the U.S. financial system, freezes any U.S. assets and prevents American nationals from doing business with him. However, it is doubtful that the U.S. designation will impact HM's operations in the Valley.

Kashmir Conflict

Salahuddin spent his early years in the Kashmir Valley and was an active member of the Jamaat-e-Islami. In 1987, he contested elections to the Jammu and Kashmir State Assembly as a candidate of the opposition Muslim

United Front. That election, which was marred by widespread irregularities, triggered Salahuddin's disillusionment with electoral politics and prompted him to turn to militancy.

Like hundreds of other Kashmiri youth, Salahuddin crossed over to POK for weapons and training to fight the Indian state. He joined HM, which Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) set up to promote its own objectives in the Kashmir conflict, and in 1991, emerged as the group's "supreme commander" (Hindustan Times, June 27).

The group's predominantly Kashmiri composition contributed to its popularity in the Valley, and Kashmiri youth joined it in large numbers. Pakistan's funding and weapons enabled it to wipe out its rivals and carry out innumerable attacks on Indian security forces and civilians in Kashmir, helping it to dominate militancy in the Valley in the 1990s (Swarajya, June 28). However, Pakistan preferred the Pakistani-dominated LeT and JeM to carry out its anti-India agenda, and the group declined in prominence from about 2000 onward.

It was in 2016 that HM made a comeback. Its south Kashmir commander, Burhan Wani, had captured the imagination of Kashmiri youth, and his death in July that year triggered mass protests and provided a fillip for the group's popularity in the Valley (see Militant Leadership Monitor, December 31, 2015; Rising Kashmir, July 6).

However, the organization has suffered several setbacks over the past year. Indian security forces have eliminated several of its commanders and cadres, including Wani's successor, Sabzar Bhat (Rising Kashmir, June 3). Additionally, HM suffered a split in May, when its operations commander Zakir Musa broke away to form the Taliban-e-Kashmir. Musa, who espouses a transnational jihadism, as opposed to Salahuddin's pro-Pakistan agenda, wants to introduce sharia law in Kashmir and could act as a bridgehead for Islamic State (see Militant Leadership Monitor, July 4; India Today, June 9). It is in this evolving situation that Salahuddin has been labeled an SDGT.

Limited Impact

The SDGT tag will cut off Salahuddin's access to his U.S.-based assets and funding from U.S.-based supporters (Times of India, June 27). But this is unlikely to have much impact on HM's functioning for at least two reasons.

First, the group's funding from U.S.-based Kashmiris has declined in recent years as it was hit by the arrest in 2011 of the Kashmir American Council's Ghulam Nabi Fai, who among other things was channeling ISI funds to the group and its front organizations (The Hindu, July 21, 2011). Second, since the vast majority of Salahuddin's funding comes from Pakistan's ISI, the U.S. designation will not substantially weaken his organization's capacity to operate in the Valley. Only if the ISI funding were shut off would the group's operations be crippled, and Pakistan is unlikely to withhold its support. In addition, operational decisions are made in the Valley, and Salahuddin's designation as an SDGT will have little impact there (Indian Express, June 27).

This has been the case with the LeT and JeM. Although their respective leaders, Hafeez Syed and Masood Azhar, were designated terrorists and substantial bounties put on their heads, they continue to operate freely in Pakistan and their group's operations have not been curtailed (Swarajya, June 28).

Additionally, in the case of HM, Salahuddin's control over his commanders and fighters in the Valley has diminished significantly over the years. The latter openly criticize his comfortable life in POK while they face pressure from the Indian security forces (The Quint, November 7, 2015). Indian analysts say that the designation of Salahuddin as a terrorist would have been effective had it come at least two decades ago (First Post, June 27). Sanctions on him now, at a time when he is largely irrelevant, are too little, too late.

Diplomatic Victory

More positively, the designation of Salahuddin as an SDGT will strengthen India-U.S. relations, especially in the field of counter-terrorism co-operation. Salahuddin's blacklisting is an indication to Indian officials that the United States has come round to accepting India's position that in Kashmir there is little difference between the violence of indigenous militants and Pakistani jihadists (The Week, July 09). For India, which has been pressing the United States for years to act more robustly against all Pakistan-based anti-India terror groups, including HM, the move is a major diplomatic victory.

The decision to designate Salahuddin as an SDGT was announced just hours ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump. It set the tone for a productive meeting, which saw the two sides agree on setting up "a consultation mechanism on domestic and international terrorist designations listing proposals" (Indian Express, June 28).

Salahuddin's designation is a victory for India in the India-Pakistan tug-of-war over cross-border terrorism, but Salahuddin's designation as a SDGT is unlikely to impact HM's military operations on the ground in Kashmir.

With Pakistan unlikely to shut off funding, the group's capacity to carry out attacks in the Valley will not be undermined, and the United States is targeting Salahuddin at a time when he is a marginalized leader with little remaining influence in Kashmir. Instead, the move's most significant impact has been to boost U.S.-India relations.

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NOTES

[1] In 1947, when Pakistani raiders attacked the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Maharaja chose to accede to India. However, Pakistan has questioned the legality of the Instrument of Accession and argues that the territory is disputed. At least a third of the former princely state's territory remains under Pakistani occupation today, an area India calls Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The main bone of contention between India and Pakistan is the Kashmir Valley, which is part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Since 1987, Pakistan has armed and trained Kashmiris and Pakistanis to carry out attacks in the state and other parts of India.

[2] "Wanted Details: Mohd Yusuf Shah," National Investigation Agency, Government of India (see: *http://www.nia.gov.in/wanted-details.htm?35*)

[3] "Terrorist Designations of Mohammad Yusuf Shah aka Syed Salahuddin," US State Department, Washington DC June 26, 2017. https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/06/272168.htm

[4] "Appendix C - Background Information on Other Terrorist Groups," in *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, US State Department, Washington DC, pp. 134-35, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/20120.pdf

Reclaiming Lost Ground in Somalia: The Enduring Threat of al-Shabaab

Michael Horton

Over the last 12 months, al-Shabaab has markedly increased the tempo and sophistication of its attacks on a range of soft and hard targets in Somalia, the semi-autonomous region of Puntland and in southeast Kenya. The al-Qaeda affiliate is re-taking territory it once controlled in southern and central Somalia while threatening Puntland and southeast Kenya by moving more operatives into those regions (al-Jazeera, June 8; The Star, July 16). The resurgence coincides with the 2016 withdrawal of a significant number of Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and a planned drawdown of troops with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (African Arguments, October 27, 2016).

The partial withdrawal of the EDNF and the proposed drawdown of AMISOM forces have contributed to al-Shabaab's ability to go on the offensive (IRIN, February 28). There is no doubt that the presence of relatively well-trained EDNF troops helped keep al-Shabaab from overtly taking control of villages and towns. However, the EDNF, AMISOM and the Somalia National Army (SNA) have struggled to consistently provide security for Somalis in the areas outside of select villages, towns and strategic roadways. In much of Somalia, especially in those areas under the nominal control of the Somali federal government, banditry, kidnapping and extortion are rife. The Somali National Army (SNA) remains poorly trained and is plagued by corruption and clan rivalries. [1] AMISOM — which is plagued by issues of corruption — and the SNA have largely failed to fill the security vacuum (Daily Nation, July 24).

Instead, al-Shabaab is stepping in, perhaps more so than ever before. The reasons for the group's enhanced capabilities in Somalia and further afield are twofold and interlinked. First, it has, over the last six years, further developed its formidable intelligence apparatus, the Amniyat. [2] Second, due to greater organizational discipline and efficiency, it is providing more consistent and predictable levels of security for residents than its primary rival, the Somali government.

Amniyat: A Ministry of Fear

Since its 2011 withdrawal from Mogadishu and its 2012 withdrawal from the port of Kismayo, al-Shabaab has undergone a transformation (al-Jazeera, September 29, 2016). Much like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in neighboring Yemen, it is an organization that readily learns from its mistakes and rapidly adapts to shifting political and tactical environments. This ability to learn and adapt has served al-Shabaab well over the last five years. Under the leadership of Ahmed Abdi Godane (killed September 2014), al-Shabaab became a more streamlined and disciplined group (Daily Nation, September 5, 2014).

In the wake of its withdrawal from Mogadishu and the subsequent loss of the revenue generating port of Kismayo, al-Shabaab was forced to restructure itself. Rather than focusing its efforts on set piece battles with the better-armed AMISOM forces and on holding and governing territory, al-Shabaab prioritized organizational security and lower risk operations against its foes. Both of these priorities fostered and fueled the development of the Amniyat, al-Shabaab's intelligence apparatus.

Enhancing the Amniyat's capabilities and power was viewed by al-Shabaab's former leader, Godane, as critical to both his own survival and that of the organization. After its withdrawal from Mogadishu in 2011, al-Shabaab was riven with bloody internal disputes. The empowerment of the Amniyat allowed Godane to purge al-Shabaab of those who posed a threat to his leadership (African Arguments, July 2, 2013). Amniyat operatives instilled fear in al-Shabaab's cadre of fighters through intimidation and, when required, assassination. Amniyat operatives — who were and are seeded throughout the larger al-Shabaab organization — ensured the loyalty and discipline of regional and sub-commanders. Disloyalty to Godane, financial irregularities and ideological deviations could all lead to harsh punishments that included summary execution.

The ability of Amniyat operatives to seemingly see everything that went on in the larger al-Shabaab organization led some al-Shabaab members to refer to them as "Godane's ghosts." [3] The al-Shabaab leader recognized that secrecy is as seductive as it is useful, and while members of the Amniyat were feared, being chosen to serve within its ranks was an honor for which many fighters competed. [4]

Secrecy is at the heart of the Amniyat. To achieve a high degree of secrecy and security, the Amniyat is ring-fenced from the broader al-Shabaab organization. In addition to operating as an organization within an organization, parts of the Amniyat itself are further compartmentalized. This measure was taken to prevent leaks and, most critically, to ensure that when its operatives are captured by enemy forces, they are only able to reveal limited amounts of information about their particular job or task.

The compartmentalization of the Amniyat became ever more critical in 2012 and the years that followed. The sustained AMISOM offensive that began in earnest in 2012 and persisted to varying degrees for three years put pressure on al-Shabaab. Its fighters retreated to the thickly forested parts of the Somali state of Jubaland, located along the Somali-Kenya border. However, while the bulk of al-Shabaab's forces retreated to these areas where they could not be easily targeted, Amniyat operatives remained behind in the cities, towns and villages from which al-Shabaab had retreated. These operatives were al-Shabaab's eyes and ears on the ground.

The Amniyat has gone on to set up a countrywide network of operatives and informants. Al-Shabaab has boasted about the fact that it has informants in every government ministry and within AMISOM itself. [5] This is evidenced by the fact that al-Shabaab has repeatedly been able to attack secure sites in the Somali capital of Mogadishu and, with increasing regularity, heavily defended AIMISOM bases (The New Arab, March 21; BBC, January 27).

Many of these attacks are coordinated and timed in a way that points to its ability to conduct persistent surveillance of targets. In addition to being able to attack secure compounds, al-Shabaab, via its Amniyat operatives, routinely intimidates, recruits — often via threats to family members — and assassinates members of the Somali government, its security services, journalists and non-compliant business owners (Garowe Online, July 1; Garowe Online, July 6).

Clan Management

The Amniyat is also tasked with collecting intelligence on Somalia's fluid and fraught clan dynamics. [6] Such intelligence allows al-Shabaab to safeguard and grow its influence in Somalia.

In the early 1990s, the then-emergent al-Qaeda organization failed to establish itself in Somalia. Abu Hafs al-Misri, the deputy dispatched to Somalia by Osama bin Laden, attributed this failure to Somalia's fractious and ubiquitous clan politics. [7] All but a minority of those Somalis which al-Qaeda tried to recruit put loyalty to their clans and sub-clans ahead of ideology and obedience to foreigners.

The same problem bedeviled al-Shabaab's early expansion efforts. The leadership of al-Shabaab was, just like the Somali government, often held hostage to ever-shifting clan politics. Former al-Shabaab leader Godane recognized that clan rivalries posed a serious threat to his organization. Al-Shabaab, especially during times when it is under pressure, must be able to rely on its core membership. When it is on the offensive, it must also be able to rely, at least for a short period of time, on those it recruits and uses as "first wave" fighters. If clan politics and rivalries predominate, then there is little or no organizational cohesion.

To circumvent this, Godane and those close to him undertook a two-step plan. First, they indigenized al-Shabaab by expelling and or assassinating most of its members who were foreign jihadists. Al-Shabaab, much like AQAP would do later, recognized that, apart from some with technical expertise, foreigners were an unnecessary liability. The presence of foreigners had alienated al-Shabaab from the local population that they wanted to control. The second and concurrent step undertaken by al-Shabaab leadership in the aftermath of the defeats in 2011-2012, was to reshape al-Shabaab's organizational structure. Godane cleverly adopted a structure that outwardly modeled the de-centralized and non-hierarchical structure of Somalia's clans.

To this end, commanders and sub-commanders were empowered and allowed to recruit foot soldiers, appoint junior commanders and undertake limited defensive and offensive actions on their own initiative. They were also permitted to work with one another on joint operations, with little guidance from al-Shabaab's governing body, the executive shura council. However, this de-centralization of power was permitted because, at the same time, Godane markedly expanded the scope and powers of the Amniyat, which monitored all of al-Shabaab's junior and even senior commanders. Most importantly, the Amniyat answered only to Godane. The Amniyat was

and remains highly centralized in terms of its leadership structure.

Al-Shabaab's commanders and sub-commanders were allowed — and indeed encouraged — to engage in clan politics. Al-Shabaab's leadership considers this as an "above but part of" strategy. The group's senior leaders and, to a lesser degree, its regional commanders remained above the often messy and at times bloody machinations of rival clans and sub-clans, allowing al-Shabaab's senior leadership to act as arbiters in conflicts. This outcome was not accidental and has allowed al-Shabaab to build a considerable amount of goodwill in parts of Somalia.

Hearts and Minds?

Al-Shabaab's pragmatic and Machiavellian approach to managing and taking advantage of Somalia's clan dynamics is emblematic of its larger strategy for winning the minds, if not the hearts, of the people it wants to control. Al-Shabaab's militant Salafist ideology remains an anathema to most Somalis. However, the aversion of many Somalis to al-Shabaab's radical interpretation of Islam is overcome by the higher levels of security and predictability that the organization often provides.

The leadership of al-Shabaab clearly understands the importance of predictability to a target population. To this end, while their methods are harsh and their punishments often overly punitive, they are consistent. For example, in those areas outside of al-Shabaab influence and control, a trader or mid-level businessman never quite knows what to expect from the SNA and AMISOM troops and officials that exert nominal control. He may be heavily taxed on whatever goods he is trying to move or sell or he may have them seized outright. He may also have to pay off numerous clan-based militias before he is able to finally get his goods to market. With al-Shabaab this trader or businessman knows what taxes he will have to pay. He is given a receipt for payment which allows him to move his goods through subsequent checkpoints without paying more taxes (Somali Update, July 24). Additionally, he knows that he is unlikely to come across bandits in those areas controlled by al-Shabaab. [8] This level of predictability and security is no small thing in a country that has known neither for three decades. While few Somalis are enthusiastic about al-Shabaab, in some areas there is a grudging respect for the control commanders have over their forces.

At the same time, there is fear. This fear is largely due to the Amniyat and its hold over both of al-Shabaab's own forces and of those civilians living in areas under al-Shabaab control. The Aminyat often imprisons or executes individuals who work against the group, those who refuse to pay its taxes and even clan elders who refuse to acknowledge its authority. Within al-Shabaab itself, those fighters and commanders who take bribes, embezzle funds or who do not follow orders are also subject to harsh punishments, including summary execution.

In the areas it controls, al-Shabaab is successfully employing a "carrot and stick" method to guarantee compliance if not support. Because of the years of war and famine, the bar for good governance in most parts of Somalia is low. If al-Shabaab provides a minimal level of security — in fact, it often provides quite a high level — and if it can control its forces, this places it well ahead of many of its rivals for power. Combined with this, it wields a mighty stick in the form of the Amniyat. Al-Shabaab's leadership has developed a formula for control that works and is likely to continue to do so.

Outlook

Over the last three years, there have been numerous forecasts that have predicted the demise of al-Shabaab as a force. These forecasts have all proved to be premature if not wholly incorrect. Al-Shabaab, much like AQAP in Yemen, has proven itself to be an adaptable organization that learns from its mistakes and then in response to lessons learned, modifies its tactics and overall strategy accordingly.

This ability to learn and adapt is evidenced by al-Shabaab's combination of an efficient and highly capable intelligence service with a pragmatic approach to building local support. This alone will guarantee that al-Shabaab endures. When these enhanced capabilities are combined with a planned drawdown of AMISOM forces and the inability of the SNA to provide real security, the result may well be that al-Shabaab yet again thrives.

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NOTES

[1] See: Andrew McGregor, 'Are Corruption and Tribalism Dooming Somalia's War on al-Shabaab,' Terrorism Monitor (February 21, 2017).

[2] The Amniyat's origins as a power within al-Shabaab are not clearly defined. It is known that it was formalized as an institution within al-Shabaab in 2009 with Mukhtar Abu Seylai as its head. The Amniyat rapidly evolved into an elite cadre of al-Shabaab operatives and soldiers recruited on the basis of both their abilities and most importantly their ideological resolve. Members of the Amniyat were and are the most radical members of the al-Shabaab organization, and most of them likely subscribe to takfirism, a more radical form of Salafism. The Amniyat's remit includes ensuring the unity and security of al-Shabaab. As part of this remit, the Amniyat has the ability to circumvent al-Shabaab's own justice system and carry out immediate (most often lethal) action against those members who the Amniyat suspected of disloyalty.

[3] Author interviews with Somalia-based analysts (2016-17).

[4] Members of the Amniyat enjoy higher pay and status than most other members of al-Shabaab.

[5] Al-Shabaab operatives routinely phone even senior military commanders on their private lines in order to threaten and intimidate them.

[6] Governance within Somalia clans is acephalous – ie there is no central or hierarchical leadership. A popular aphorism in Somalia is: "Everyman is an elder." This is broadly reflective of the reality in which often even relatively young members of families and sub-clans participate in informal and formal discussions about matters that affect them. Somalia scholar IM Lewis argues that, "democratic principles in Somalia are practiced almost to the point of anarchy." To a large degree this characterization remains valid, especially in Somalia's predominantly rural areas where resources and power are less likely to concentrate. The primacy of the clans and their diffuse power structures militate against the imposition of hierarchical systems.

[7] See: "Al-Qaeda's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa," Harmony Project, West Point Combating Terrorism Center (2007).

[8] Author interviews with Somalia-based analysts and journalists (May 2017).