

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XVIII, ISSUE 17

p.1

Brian M. Perkins

BRIEFS

p.3

Brian M. Perkins

Houthi Offensive in Marib Represents Dual Threat to Yemeni Government

p.5

Animesh Roul

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Factions Reunited for 'Holy War' Against Islamabad

p.7

Michael Horton

Will Egypt Send Troops to Libya?

TURKEY COURTS AFRICAN STATES AS FRANCE SEEKS EU PARTNERS

Brian M. Perkins

Turkey's increasingly assertive military and economic role has seen the balance of power across several key regions begin to shift, particularly in the Mediterranean and the Maghreb, where Ankara's role in Libya has significantly changed the geopolitics of North Africa. Ankara has sought to turn the tide of the Libyan war by attempting to enlist neighboring countries as military partners, and if that route fails, as more passive collaborators or supporters of Turkish involvement.

Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria in particular, have unsurprisingly found themselves on the receiving end of Ankara's largesse, much to the chagrin of other Maghrebi and European states ([Middle East Monitor](#), January 27). France, specifically, is deeply concerned not only with Ankara's designs on the eastern Mediterranean, but also Turkey's courting of Algeria.

While Ankara would likely brim at the chance to gain Algeria's military involvement in Libya—a prospect that is considerably slim due to the country's dug-in stance of

neutrality and its historical dogma of non-interference. Short of that support, Ankara still has much to gain from strengthening its diplomatic and economic relations with Algeria.

Close economic and security partnerships with countries in the region are likely to help blunt the outward perception of Turkey as a purely conquering force by demonstrating a commitment to mutually beneficial investment in the region as a whole, rather than simply doing so by force in the Maghreb's most vulnerable state. That is not to say that under the surface Ankara will not engage in plans to influence domestic politics across the region—it surely will—but that its partnerships will be publicly touted as the opposite.

Strengthening ties with Algeria is also a powerful hedge against France and other European powers that have been particularly hawkish in their stance toward Turkish involvement in the region, particularly in Libya and the eastern Mediterranean. France's waning influence in the region creates an opportunity for a significant shift to occur and for Turkey to become a preeminent force across the region. For its part, however, Algiers is unlikely to step back and jeopardize its relationship with France in any significant way in the near-term.

While Turkey is jockeying to gain partners in Africa, France has steadily increased its efforts to organize the Mediterranean states, including Egypt, in opposition to Turkey. Most recently, France has stepped up its efforts to swing Italy and Spain in favor of imposing EU sanctions on Turkey ([Euro News](#), September 10). If France manages to lobby a unanimous EU vote for sanctions on the country, Ankara will have tough decisions on how to proceed with its power game across Africa.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

KADHIMI FACES TOUGH ROAD TO EXPEDITED ELECTION

Brian Perkins

The Trump administration's plans to decrease the number of U.S. troops in Iraq from 5,200 to 3,000 will come at a critical time for the country and for Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. Kadhimi, who came to power after parliament approved a new government in May, inherited a country in crisis that is torn between the United States and Iran while still fighting the remnants of what appears to be a slightly resurgent Islamic State (IS). As if the task of righting the ship was not daunting enough, Kadhimi announced that the country's next parliamentary elections would take place in June 2021, rather than the originally scheduled May 2022. In this shortened timeframe, Kadhimi will need to carefully position the U.S. troop drawdown in a manner that appeases the Iranian-backed Shia militias, which he simultaneously has in the crosshairs of his precarious crackdown on corruption.

Kadhimi has made little secret of his desire to restructure the government's relationship with the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) and his disdain for the groups that fall under its umbrella, but answer directly to Iran. This fact was particularly evident in late June when the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) raided the Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) headquarters in Baghdad ([Al Jazeera](#), June 26). His position toward the United States and Iran, however, has been intentionally ambivalent in public, allowing him to position himself as independent and make his anti-corruption campaign appear free from outside interference or motives.

The withdrawal of U.S. troops will, to a certain extent, help to appease the pro-PMU politicians who had earlier called for the government to expel the United States from the country. If, however, Kadhimi does not successfully wrest some power away from the Iranian-backed PMUs, it would risk creating a political imbalance that could allow for their continued preponderance working up to the snap election. On the other hand, too strong of a move against the PMU will almost certainly spell disaster for his time in office.

Much of Kadhimi's actions thus far—including the anti-corruption campaign and election date change—have been in response to key demands from the mass protests that swept the country in late 2019. Gaining the support of the people is critical, but time and time again

it has not proven to be enough in the face of a political field dominated by small, self-interested factions, many of which are directly connected to the PMU. Kadhimi's best hope is likely to maintain his ambivalence to the United States-Iran conflict and tread carefully in who he ensnares with his anti-corruption campaign ([Arab Weekly](#), September 19). Biding his time and avoiding creating the wrong enemies, be it the people or the PMUs, is likely the only way the Iraqi government will see any continuity.

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Houthi Offensive in Marib Represents Dual Threat to Yemeni Government

Brian M. Perkins

The oil-rich governorate of Marib has increasingly become the focal point of the war in Yemen as the Houthis' determination to take control of the strategic governorate has intensified over the past several months. Marib is the last remaining stronghold in the north for Yemen's internationally recognized government and is a key strategic territory not only due to its oil fields, but also because it could set the stage for the Houthis to eventually move into key southern governorates, where fractures between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and pro-government forces show no signs of abating. A Houthi success in Marib would mark a critical tipping point in the war and a major defeat for the government and Saudi coalition, leaving them essentially hemmed in by the Houthis on one side and the Southern Transitional Council on the other. In such a scenario, the Saudi coalition and the Yemeni government would be left with few options other than negotiating from a position of considerable weakness or dragging the losing fight on for far longer than the coalition likely has the will for.

The Houthis' military offensive in Marib has coincided with other critical developments that have undermined the Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia's ability to control any outcomes in Yemen. Among the most critical developments, which also has serious implications for the battle for Marib, was the Southern Transitional Council's withdrawal from the troubled Riyadh Agreement—the Saudi-sponsored power-sharing deal meant to deescalate fighting between the STC and pro-government forces, most critically forces affiliated with Islah ([Middle East Monitor](#), August 27).

Beyond air superiority, the Saudi coalition and Yemeni government have few advantages in their fight against the Houthis in Marib. Persistent turmoil and uncertainty has plagued the pro-government ranks, which is largely an incoherent, cobbled together fighting force from different regions and governorates and with disparate political motivations, hindering the government's ability to dictate strategic and operational priorities. Higher levels within the coalition have also experienced continued

tumult, as evidenced by King Salman's sacking of coalition forces commander, Prince Fahd Bin Turki ([Al Jazeera](#), September 1).

The pro-government coalition's limitations only magnify the fact that the battle for Marib will, in all likelihood, be won or lost not through sheer military force, but through either the Houthi or the government's ability to gain support, or acquiescence, from the governorate's key tribes, particularly the powerful Murad tribe. The Saudi coalition has steadily poured money into the governorate and, early on in the war, the tribes of Marib put up a stiff resistance to the Houthi's incursions. That same resistance, however, is not guaranteed in perpetuity and history has shown that the tribes of Marib have deftly shifted their alliances to ensure their survival or for their own enrichment. The battle for tribal loyalty is already well underway, with the Yemeni government claiming tribal fighters are being integrated into its forces and the Houthis claiming that countless tribesmen have defected and are now fighting the government ([Twitter.com/hussinalezzi5](#), September 5). From this perspective, the duration and intensity of the conflict in Marib will also play a significant role in which direction tribal support swings, with tribal support likely to swing toward the seeming victor in a more drawn-out fight.

Another key challenge beyond the Houthis superior maneuverability and the issue of galvanizing tribal support in Marib is the government's hesitance to redeploy forces from critical, resource-rich southern locations—notably Bayhan and Ataq in Shabwa and Sayoun in Hadramawt—for fear the STC will exploit the situation to make gains that would further erode the government's power. In addition to Marib, these southern locations represent the government's primary power bases as well as nearly all of the country's oil production. These areas have intermittently seen fierce fighting between STC forces and the government since August 2019, and the STC considers them essential to their aim of being the preeminent southern authority ([Al Jazeera](#), August 2019).

With the Houthis marching on Marib and the STC withdrawing from the Riyadh agreement, the Yemeni government and Saudi coalition is facing one of its greatest dilemmas since the war began. Preventing the STC from gaining additional ground has left pro-government forces less flexible for more than a year while the government's legitimacy was further eroded. The prospect of losing critical economic assets in southern governorates to STC control will prevent those pro-govern-

ment forces from being used to shore up the frontlines in Marib.

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Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Factions Reunited for 'Holy War' Against Islamabad

Animesh Roul

Since the death of firebrand Taliban leader Mullah Fazlullah in June 2018, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has witnessed a substantial decline in stature and firepower due to a leadership crisis, inherent factionalism, and a sustained military offensive on its strongholds across the Durand Line, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Following nearly two years of internal conflict, the Pakistani Taliban under the leadership of Abu Mansoor Asim Mehsud (a.k.a. Noor Wali Mehsud) has seemingly recovered from those reversals and is back from a near obsolescence.

In a surprise show of force and integration, Taliban factions in Pakistan renewed their pledge of allegiance to the present TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud on August 17. Two major, violent Taliban factions—Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) under Omar Khalid Khurasani and Hizb ul-Ahrar (HuA) led by Omar Khurasani—have re-joined the anti-Pakistan jihadist conglomerate. The statement issued by TTP's official media arm Umar Media congratulated the Muslim Ummah and the Taliban commanders for the merger. The announcement communicated that the factions are currently fighting individually, and that the jihad in Pakistan and efforts to establish sharia would be strengthened following the merger. The statement also emphasized the 'Holy War' (jihad) and vowed to continue it until the 'tyrannical system' in Pakistan is eradicated. [1] Both of the Ahrar factions have pledged to join TTP and adhere to the principles of TTP and Islamic sharia law.

The other major pro-Taliban groups that re-joined the TTP bandwagon were Maulvi Khush Muhammed Sindhi, led by Lashkar-e Jhangvi (of the Saifullah Kurd faction), the Amjad Farooqi-led Punjabi Taliban, and the Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed group. A video message issued later by Umar Media showed the oath of allegiance ceremony ([Jihadology](#), August 8; [Jihadology](#), August 19).

Exactly a month before this Taliban amalgamation, the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) blacklisted TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud, designating him as a global terrorist on July 16, 2020. In September 2019, the United

States imposed sanctions on the TTP chief and also designated him as a global terrorist ([Daily Times](#), September 12, 2019).

TTP and its factions are believed to be operating from Afghanistan, in the border provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, and Khost. These groups often stage anti-Pakistan attacks from their bases across the border. A recent UN report noted this phenomenon, indicating that more than 6,000 Pakistani militants from different groups have a sanctuary in Afghanistan ([Dawn](#), July 26).

TTP's renewed operational capacity was on display within weeks of the merger, when the group claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in South Waziristan. TTP's spokesman, Mohammad Khurasani, claimed responsibility for a roadside bombing on September 2 that killed at least three soldiers in the South Waziristan area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, near the border with Afghanistan ([Gandhara](#), September 3). On August 30, three Pakistani soldiers were killed and several others wounded in an ambush by TTP militants in the Ladha area of South Waziristan. TTP exaggerated the death count, claiming that 11 soldiers were killed ([Express Tribune](#), August 31; [Gandhara](#), August 31). Attacks targeting police also took place in Karachi, Sindh and Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that are suspected to be the handiwork of TTP militants ([Dawn](#), September 1). TTP reportedly carried out these latest attacks to avenge the death of multiple senior commanders, including Tawakkal Zulqarnain and his associate Hamza Ali, who were killed in South Waziristan on August 24.

JuA moved away from the parent TTP organization due to operational differences with then-chief Mullah Fazlullah in August 2014. The leader of the faction, however, never quit the group and retained the TTP name as a prefix to Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (TTP-JuA). JuA leaders have reiterated several times in the past that the split was nothing but a restructuring of Pakistani Taliban groups ([Terrorism Monitor](#), September 16, 2016). HuA too had a similar origin, when the disgruntled commander of JuA moved away from the TTP in November 2017 to form what became the organization's most violent offshoot. Both HuA and JuA have perpetrated numerous deadly assaults targeting armed forces, police, politicians, and minorities in Pakistan. JuA's March 2016 suicide bombing that targeted Christians in the Gulshan-e-Iqbal amusement park in Lahore was one of the deadliest sectarian attacks in Pakistan in a decade ([Express Tribune](#), April 01, 2016). Similarly, For example, HuA's anti-military offensive named Operation Shamzai, launched in

February 2019, and Operation bin Qasim, in April 2018, managed to inflict significant damage on the Pakistani army in Sindh, Punjab, and Baluchistan provinces ([Terrorism Monitor](#), December 17, 2019).

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which is independent from, but ideologically loyal to, the Afghan Taliban, was formed as an umbrella group in December 2007 under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud. Since then, the group has witnessed setbacks due to internecine rivalries, ideological differences within the senior leadership, and persistent military offensives. In JuA's October 2014 magazine, *Ihya-e-Khilafat*, it clearly noted the objectives for the group: to fight for an Islamic state, full implementation of sharia in Pakistan, and to avenge the deaths of TTP members. [2] Even when factions have parted ways and merged again, these Taliban formations have never drifted away from these core objectives.

Behind the Pakistan Taliban's strategic merger, a tacit role was possibly played by core al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) senior leadership. The merger was widely reported and praised by the prominent pro-al-Qaeda media group Thabat on social media platforms and Telegram after its announcement ([AGC News](#), August 19). Even though al-Qaeda leaders present in the region have for decades often carried out a mediator role between the warring militant groups, it is unclear which leaders were involved in the Taliban reunion and how they brought the factions back together. Regardless of how TTP reconsolidated, the formal return of two powerful Taliban commanders to the TTP's fold can be seen as a game-changer for the organization in Pakistan, as it strengthens the withered group both in terms of manpower and military capability.

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Note

[1] "Declaration of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan regarding the Merger of Jamaat ul Ahrar and Hizb-ul Ahrar with Tehreek e Taliban" *Jihadology*, August 17, 2020, [\[Nation-In-General-and-the-Mujāhidīn-In-Particular-On-the-Merger-of-the-Two-Main-Groups-of-Jihād-in-Pakistan22.pdf\]\(#\)](https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2020/08/Muhammad-al-Khurāsānī-22Congratulating-the-Muslim-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

[2] "Ihya-e-Khilafat: Vice of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan", No.1, October 2014. See, MEMRI Special Announcements No. 338, <https://www.memri.org/reports/jtm-reports-about-tehreek-e-taliban-pakistans-ttp-english-language-ihya-e-khilafat-magazine>

Will Egypt Send Troops to Libya?

Michael Horton

On July 20, the Egyptian Parliament authorized the deployment of Egyptian armed forces outside of the country. The bill made no mention of Libya ([Arab News](#), July 21). Nonetheless, the authorization serves as a proverbial shot across the bow for Turkey and Qatar, which support Libya's Tripoli-based and UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

The authorization followed the failure of the Libyan National Army (LNA), based in the east of the country, to take GNA-held Tripoli. The LNA is led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and backed by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Russia. Yet, despite this support, the LNA's fourteen-month offensive on Tripoli failed. In June, GNA forces launched a counter-offensive that pushed LNA forces eastward.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi declared in a televised address in June that Egypt would respond if GNA forces crossed a "red line" extending from Sirte to the inland area of Jufra ([Egypt Independent](#), June 21). Sisi declared Egypt had a right to secure its border with Libya and defend Libya and Egypt against "foreign schemes." While Sisi did not mention Turkey or Qatar, it was clear that these two countries were his primary concern.

Parliamentary approval for the deployment of Egyptian troops and Sisi's rhetoric suggest military action might be imminent. This is unlikely, at least for now. It is more likely that Sisi's rhetoric is saber rattling designed to appeal to his domestic and foreign audiences, namely the UAE and Saudi Arabia. As a career army officer and former director for military intelligence, General Sisi, and his circle of advisers, are aware of the grave risks posed by a large-scale deployment to Libya. Both Egypt's ongoing war in Sinai and the experience of its intervention in Yemen in the 1960s will check enthusiasm for a war in Libya.

Sinai and Yemen: Lessons Learned

The Egyptian military and security services have been fighting al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS)-linked groups in the Sinai Peninsula for ten years. Despite deploying more than 40,000 mainline troops from the Egyptian

Army and thousands of police and security forces to Sinai, the Egyptians struggle to combat a small number of terrorists and insurgents. [1] The most prominent terrorist group in the Sinai, Wilayat Sinai, an affiliate of IS, has fewer than 1,000 active operatives. Yet, attacks by the group persist ([al-Monitor](#), May 7).

The early years of the insurgency in Sinai (2011-2015) were particularly painful for the Egyptian Army. The army was designed and equipped to fight a land war with Israel. It was not prepared to engage in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. This role was filled by Egypt's Central Security Forces (CSF) commanded by the Ministry of Interior. However, due to the CSF's inability to manage the threats in Sinai, the Egyptian Army assumed the leading role in combatting insurgents and terrorists in Sinai.

The fighting in Sinai made the inadequacies of the Egyptian Army clear. Despite air support, overhead surveillance, vast numerical and military superiority, the Egyptian Army failed to secure a small number of roads, towns, and bases. The army's lack of nimbleness has hampered its ability to respond to rapidly evolving threats. As has long been the case, command and control in the Egyptian Army is subject to bottlenecks at the top. Field grade officers and even general officers rarely act without approval from senior officials in Cairo. The officer heavy nature of the army also means motivated and empowered non-commissioned officers are rare. Additionally, the army relies on large numbers of poorly trained and often illiterate conscripts who leave the service as soon as they are able.

Few of these problems have been adequately addressed. The army remains a top-heavy force geared for fighting large scale land battles. Even in that role, the Egyptian Army would underperform due to a persistent lack of realistic training.

The Egyptian Army's performance in Sinai and the institutional memory of Egypt's involvement in North Yemen's civil war (1962-67) contributed to President Sisi's decision not to participate in the ground war in Yemen's current civil war. While Sisi and his government vocally supported Saudi Arabia and the UAE's armed intervention in Yemen, they never sent troops.

The Egyptian experience in what was then North Yemen's civil war—known as Egypt's Vietnam—continues to inform Egyptian policy. Instructors and professors at the Egyptian Military Academy (Sisi's alma mater) and the Command and Staff College examine lessons

learned from Egypt's costly war in Yemen. Despite deploying 70,000 soldiers, the war ended in a stalemate that cost the lives of at least 20,000 Egyptian servicemen. Involvement in Yemen also contributed to Egypt's defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War.

High Risk, Low Reward

If Egypt were to deploy a large force to Libya, it would face many of the same challenges it now confronts in Sinai along with the problems associated with intervening in a complex civil war. The war in Libya mirrors the current war in Yemen. Like Yemen, Libya is riven with divisions and armed militias supported by foreign powers abound. Navigating these kinds of internecine wars is difficult. Winning in such a war, no matter how narrowly defined, is rare.

The blowback from deeper Egyptian involvement in Libya might be more significant than the results of its 1960s-era intervention in North Yemen. The war in Yemen was 1,200 miles away. Those who opposed Egypt in Yemen were not able to take their fight to Egypt. By contrast, Libya shares a largely unguarded 693-mile border with Egypt. Illicit networks, the stretches of which reach from Libya to Syria, make abundant use of the deserts and mountains that the border passes through to smuggle weapons and other contraband.

Weapons traced to Libya routinely turn up in Sinai, Upper Egypt, and much further afield. [2] Libya-based militias fighting against the Egyptian-backed LNA can—and likely will—tap into and use these illicit networks to carry out attacks in Egypt. Many of these illicit networks are linked with Sinai-based insurgent groups. Egypt could see an intensification of its ongoing war in Sinai as a result of covert support from Libya-based militias and their foreign backers. In the face of overt large-scale Egyptian actions in Libya, it is unlikely that the war will remain within Libya's borders.

Even more significantly, the Egyptian Army is unprepared for the kind of war it will need to fight in Libya. The army has failed to defeat a few hundred insurgents in Sinai where it is fighting on home ground from well-defended and easily supplied bases. In Libya, Egypt's military will need to engage multiple militias with shifting loyalties while defending hundreds of miles of vulnerable supply lines. Egypt and Libya fought what is referred to as the "Four Day War" in July 1977. The skirmish ended in a truce but the Egyptians struggled to supply the armored columns they deployed to their desolate border with Libya.

Underperformance in Libya and what could be visible defeats will erode the domestic and international views of Egypt's military competence. Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen has demonstrated the inadequacies of its armed forces. Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional foe, has learned a great deal about Saudi vulnerabilities. In the case of Egypt, where the army plays a more significant role in national narratives, widespread perceptions of the army as incapable or weak will be even more damaging.

Outlook: Limited, Covert, and Tribal

Rather than pursue a high-risk deployment, Sisi and his government will most likely continue to fight a largely covert war in Libya. Egypt is providing arms and training to tribal militias that support the LNA. This is in addition to the air support and Special Forces troops that Egypt already uses alongside the UAE and Russia to support core LNA forces.

In July, Sisi and members of his government hosted members of Libya's Supreme Tribal Council in Cairo. The meetings are part of Egypt's attempt to strengthen its relationship with those influential and powerful tribes fighting alongside General Haftar's LNA. At the same time, Egypt wants to distance itself from Haftar who it views as erratic and unreliable. Tribal elders at the meeting said they supported Egyptian deployments to Libya as the only way to end the civil war ([Middle East Monitor](#), July 16). If Egypt deploys large numbers of troops to Libya, it would tip the scale in the LNA's favor, but it would not end the war. Instead, Egypt would find itself mired in a war that it cannot afford while fighting alongside unreliable allies.

President Sisi has proved himself adept at maintaining the critical financial aid provided by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in exchange for low-risk Egyptian military support in Libya and Yemen. In Yemen, Egypt provided some naval and air support, but little more than that ([al-Ahram](#), March 26, 2015). Egypt's involvement in Libya is more extensive but will remain limited due to Sisi and the military's understanding of the risks associated with a large-scale deployment. Such a deployment would do little to achieve Egypt's stated aims in Libya. Instead, Egyptian troops in Libya could further compromise border security and may strengthen support for the UN-backed GNA. While many Libyans might welcome Egyptian soldiers, a significant number would see them as invaders.

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Notes

[1] See: Michael Horton, "[Crossing the Canal: Why Egypt Faces a Creeping Insurgency](#)," CTC Sentinel: July 2017.

[2] See: Nicholas Marsh, "[Brothers Came Back with Weapons: The Effects of Arms Proliferation from Libya](#)," *Prism: The Journal of Complex Operations*, National Defense University: Volume 6, No 4.