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# CTC SENTINEL

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## Contents

### FEATURE ARTICLE

- 1 A Profile of the TTP's New Leader: Hakimullah Mehsud**  
By Mukhtar A. Khan

### REPORTS

- 4 The October 2009 Terrorist Attack in Italy and its Wider Implications**

By Federico Bordonaro

- 7 LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence**

By Alison Pargeter

- 9 Rethinking Strategies to Secure U.S. Critical Infrastructure**

By Charles Faddis

- 12 Israel as an Al-Qa`ida Target: Sorting Rhetoric From Reality**

By Matthew Levitt

- 15 Understanding History's Seven Stages of Jihad**

By Sebastian L.v. Gorka

- 17 Mao Tse-tung and the Search for 21st Century Counterinsurgency**

By Thomas A. Marks

- 20 Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity**  
**24 CTC Sentinel Staff & Contacts**

## About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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## A Profile of the TTP's New Leader: Hakimullah Mehsud

By Mukhtar A. Khan



Hakimullah Mehsud speaks with reporters in Pakistan's Orakzai Agency in November 2008. - Photo by A. Majeed/AFP/Getty Images

ON OCTOBER 17, 2009, Pakistan's military launched a new offensive in South Waziristan Agency, the stronghold of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The offensive comes in the wake of a series of major attacks launched by suspected TTP militants, including an October 5 suicide attack on a United Nations office in Islamabad, and the audacious October 10 assault on the military's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi.<sup>1</sup> In the days before the October 17 offensive, the TTP warned Pakistan's government that any assault on South Waziristan would result in increased attacks on civilian and military targets in Pakistan. On October 28, the TTP seemed to deliver on its threat. The group was blamed for a powerful car bomb that killed more than 100 people in Peshawar just hours

after the arrival of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Islamabad.

Pakistan's military offensive is significant because it follows on the heels of the August 2009 Predator drone strike that killed Baitullah Mehsud, the TTP's leader. Baitullah's death left the TTP in disarray, as he had not established a clear succession plan. After three weeks marked by significant infighting, Hakimullah Mehsud was finally confirmed as the new leader of the TTP.<sup>2</sup> With Hakimullah at the helm of the TTP, the group may reach further into Pakistan's Punjab Province due to Hakimullah's links to Punjabi-based militant networks; this may allow the group to further solidify ties with local insurgent outfits that have been

<sup>2</sup> Shortly after his appointment, there was speculation that Hakimullah was killed as a result of infighting. It appears, however, that it was his brother who died. For more, see Mushtaq Yusufzai, "Baitullah's Death Finally Confirmed by Taliban," *The News*, August 26, 2009; "New Taliban Chief Meets Reporters," BBC, October 5, 2009.

<sup>1</sup> Shaiq Hussain and Karin Brulliard, "In Pakistan, Militants Attack Army Bastion," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2009; "Taliban Claims Responsibility For UN Pakistan Blast," Agence France-Presse, October 5, 2009.

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traditionally focused on neighboring Kashmir and India. Moreover, Hakimullah could move the TTP in a more sectarian direction as a result of his association with anti-Shi`a militant leaders. These factors mean that the TTP could become increasingly radical and dangerous under Hakimullah's leadership. On the other hand, Hakimullah's sectarian and potentially more aggressive agenda could spark infighting within the TTP and cause the loosely structured network to split into factions. Given these new challenges and broad lack of knowledge about the TTP, it is critical to understand the character of the group's decision-makers. This article profiles Hakimullah Mehsud, who has now assumed the mantle of one of the most dangerous groups threatening Pakistan.

#### Personal History

Estimated to be 28-years-old and approximately six feet in height, Hakimullah has become a household name in the region.<sup>3</sup> He achieved prominence in November 2008 after he introduced himself to journalists in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and displayed his access to heavy weaponry. He grew up in South Waziristan's Kotki, and his original name is Jamshed.<sup>4</sup> He is also known by his alias name, "Zulfiqar Mehsud."

Hakimullah belongs to the Eshangai clan of the Mehsud tribe, which is a less influential clan than Baitullah's Shobi Khel. Like other Pakistani Taliban predecessors such as Baitullah Mehsud, Abdullah Mehsud and Nek Mohammad Wazir, Hakimullah never completed his religious education. He attended a *madrasa* in Shahu village of Hangu District in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), but quit his studies early and joined the ranks of the Taliban in Afghanistan in the late 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Hakimullah received military training during the last few years of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, he reportedly returned to Pakistan's Waziristan.

3 Information on his personal statistics was acquired through speaking with journalists who have interviewed him.

4 Zahir Shah Sherazi, "Hakimullah a Fiercely Ambitious Militant," *Dawn*, August 27, 2009.

5 Alex Altman, "Hakimullah Mehsud: The New Head of Pakistan's Taliban," *Time Magazine*, August 28, 2009.

Unlike his predecessors, Hakimullah never had the opportunity to fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan because of his young age. He worked as a driver for Baitullah Mehsud when Baitullah emerged as a Pakistani Taliban leader in 2004 and became his chief spokesman in October 2007 under

### **"Hakimullah's anti-Shi`a agenda is an outgrowth of his long association with Qari Hussain Mehsud, his cousin and a TTP commander."**

his alias name of Zulfiqar Mehsud. He married two women, one in South Waziristan from the Mehsud tribe and a second wife, from the Mamunzai tribe, in Orakzai Agency.<sup>6</sup> During his time as Baitullah's driver and chief spokesman, Hakimullah reportedly served as a confidant to the former TTP leader.

#### Extensive Media Contacts

Hakimullah embraced his role as Baitullah's chief spokesman, and he quickly established strong relationships with journalists. Unlike Baitullah, who refused to be photographed due to religious concerns about the capture of human imagery, Hakimullah has been willing to pose for photographs, and he recognizes the value of the media as a propaganda tool.

In November 2008, for example, Hakimullah invited more than a dozen journalists to his stronghold in Orakzai Agency. During the meeting, he identified Mullah Omar as his supreme leader, and said that Usama bin Ladin's al-Qa`ida network was his ally.<sup>7</sup> He criticized Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari for ceding sovereignty to the United States and vowed revenge for Zardari joining the "infidels."<sup>8</sup> Hakimullah boasted about disrupting NATO supply routes

6 Riffatullah Orakzai, "Taliban's New Leader: A Fiercely Ambitious and Emotional Commander," BBC Urdu, August 22, 2009.

7 Amir Mir, "A Young Turk Takes Over TTP, Ringing Alarm Bells," *The News*, August 28, 2009.

8 Imtiaz Gul, "Will Hakimullah Fit Baitullah's Shoes?" *Pulse*, September 3, 2009.

through Pakistan; to prove his point, he arrived at the interview driving an armor-plated Humvee that he claimed was commandeered from an Afghanistan-bound NATO convoy in Khyber Agency.<sup>9</sup> During the interview, Hakimullah said his men destroyed more than 600 trucks and shipping containers in Peshawar and Khyber Agency destined for NATO in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, after rumors of his death, Hakimullah again appeared before journalists on October 4, 2009.<sup>11</sup> During the meeting, Hakimullah ended speculation of his death, and he also warned that he would avenge the killing of Baitullah Mehsud. Hakimullah likely used the press conference to improve morale among his followers; two other key Taliban leaders, Qari Waliur Rahman and Qari Hussain Mehsud, were also at the meeting.<sup>12</sup>

#### Military Capabilities

Recognizing Hakimullah's value, Baitullah assigned Kurram, Orakzai and Khyber tribal agencies to his command in early 2008. By the end of that year, Hakimullah managed to gain significant control in these agencies, which some analysts argue is evidence of his leadership and military capabilities.<sup>13</sup> In these agencies, Hakimullah gained influence by controlling strategic smuggling and supply routes. Moreover, he assassinated potential opponents.<sup>14</sup>

One tactic employed by Hakimullah to gain power in these agencies was to exploit sectarian rivalries between the Sunni and Shi`a sects. This was particularly evident in Orakzai and Kurram agencies, where he targeted the Shi`a community indiscriminately and sent a wave of fear throughout the Shi`a population in Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Hakimullah's anti-Shi`a agenda is an outgrowth of his long association with Qari Hussain Mehsud, his cousin and a TTP commander. Before joining the TTP,

9 Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Hakimullah Mehsud Unveils Himself to Media," *The News*, November 30, 2008.

10 Amir Mir, "The Top 10 Most Wanted Jihadis," *The News*, September 1, 2009.

11 "New Taliban Chief Meets Reporters."

12 Ibid.

13 Sherazi.

14 "Profile: Young Slayer Takes Up Reins of Pakistani Taliban," Deutsche Press Agency, August 28, 2009.

15 Ibid.

Qari Hussain was an active member of the banned anti-Shi`a group Sipah-i-Sahaba and its militant wing, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi.<sup>16</sup> Hakimullah reportedly relied on Qari Hussain's access to suicide bombers to gain control of Orakzai, Kurram and Khyber agencies.<sup>17</sup> Qari Hussain, for example, is considered one

**“The October 5 suicide attack on a United Nations office in Islamabad, and the October 10 assault on the military’s General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, show that the TTP remains highly effective under Hakimullah’s leadership.”**

of the TTP’s most important assets due to his training of suicide bombers; he is often called Ustad-i-Fidayin, or Trainer of Suicide Bombers.

The importance of this relationship is evident in the wave of attacks that hit Pakistan in October 2009. On October 15, Lahore, the capital of Punjab Province, was assaulted by approximately three teams of militants, leaving more than 30 people dead. The TTP claimed credit for the attacks. Analysts believe that the TTP’s links to Punjab-based militants formerly (or currently) part of groups such as Lashkar-i-Jhangvi are responsible for these strikes that are increasingly occurring in the heart of Pakistan. It is likely that Hakimullah’s relationship with Qari Hussain contributes to the TTP’s capability to strike deeper inside Pakistan.

In addition to targeting the Shi`a community, Hakimullah has undertaken other sectarian actions. In December 2008, for example, Hakimullah imposed Shari`a in Orakzai Agency and demanded local tribesmen seek the

resolution of their disputes in Shari`a courts.<sup>18</sup> He then levied *jizya* (protection tax) on the Sikh and Hindu communities. This decision is unique and significant in the history of the tribal areas because the Sikh and Hindu communities have lived unharmed in FATA for centuries under the tribal traditions. Yet the new imposition of Shari`a forced them either to leave the FATA region or submit to the dictates of the TTP and pay the *jizya*. Consequently, reports state that many minorities have already left the area and others plan to follow suit.<sup>19</sup>

**TTP More Prone to Splintering?**

It is clear that Hakimullah Mehsud poses a serious threat to Pakistan and U.S. interests. It is believed that his militia includes 8,000 fighters and several hundred suicide bombers.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, there are some indications that Hakimullah’s appointment as the new head of the TTP could cause further splits in the group.

Within the TTP, for example, there are differences between Salafists and Deobandis. The Salafist members of the TTP practice a harsher interpretation of Islam and consider the Shi`a infidels. Deobandi followers, on the other hand, are more flexible in comparison and generally do not support killing Shi`a unless they themselves are attacked by them. Hakimullah Mehsud, Qari Hussain and the TTP spokesman Azam Tariq are more inclined toward Salafijihadism, and their past affiliations with the anti-Shi`a Lashkar-i-Jhangvi have made them highly sectarian.<sup>21</sup>

Baitullah Mehsud, on the other hand, was known for his ability to coalesce an array of diverse groups under a single leadership. This leadership allowed him to overcome disagreements with Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Maulvi Nazir, while continuing to host Uzbek fighters linked to al-Qa`ida.<sup>22</sup> Yet with Baitullah out of

the picture, the TTP must be concerned about future cooperation from Maulvi Nazir in South Waziristan and Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan. On August 17, 2009, more than a dozen supporters of the Maulvi Nazir group were gunned down in the Laddha area of South Waziristan allegedly by Uzbek fighters part of Baitullah Mehsud’s faction.<sup>23</sup> The TTP is also facing challenges from the Abdullah Mehsud Group in South Waziristan and from Turkistan Bhattani in Tank District of the NWFP.

Pakistan’s government and intelligence agencies are aware of these differences, and they have been working to court tribal groups. The government’s goal is to keep as many tribal groups as possible out of its conflict with the TTP, with the hope that they will be able to eliminate the hardcore anti-Pakistan and Salafist leadership. This appears to be the goal of Pakistan’s offensive in South Waziristan, which went into full force on October 17. The increasing number of drone strikes has further shaken the Pakistani Taliban movement and disrupted its militant activity.<sup>24</sup>

**Conclusion**

The TTP has suffered a number of losses in the last few months. In addition to the killing of Baitullah Mehsud, the TTP’s chief spokesman, Maulvi Omar, was apprehended by authorities on August 17.<sup>25</sup> Muslim Khan, a well-known spokesman from the Swat faction of the group, was arrested along with another militant leader, Mahmud Khan, on September 10.<sup>26</sup> Sher Mohammad Qasab, a feared Pakistani Taliban leader known for beheading opponents, died in government custody on September 20.<sup>27</sup>

ziran,” *The News*, February 23, 2009.

23 This was seen as retaliation for a 2007 incident when Maulvi Nazir killed and expelled several Uzbek militants from the area. See “17 of Maulvi Nazir Group Killed in Tehsil Laddha,” *Geo TV*, August 17, 2009.

24 “Pakistan Drone Attacks Kill 10,” *BBC*, August 11, 2009.

25 “Two Pakistani Taliban Leaders Captured,” *CNN*, August 18, 2009.

26 For a profile of Muslim Khan, see Intiaz Ali, “The Taliban’s Versatile Spokesman: A Profile of Muslim Khan,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:2 (2009). For information on his arrest, see Ismail Khan, “Swat Taliban Mouthpiece, Top Commander Captured,” *Dawn*, September 12, 2009.

27 Robert Kennedy, “Captured Pakistan Taliban Commander Dies in Jail,” *Associated Press*, September 20, 2009.

16 For more on Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, see Arif Jamal, “A Profile of Pakistan’s Lashkar-i-Jhangvi,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:9 (2009).

17 Kamran Khan, “Aaj Kamran Khan Kay Saath,” *Geo TV*, August 11, 2009.

18 Caroline Wadhams and Colin Cookman, “Faces of Pakistan’s Militant Leaders,” *Center for American Progress*, July 22, 2009.

19 “Sikhs, Hindus Dread Taliban Tax in Northwest Pakistan,” *Dawn*, July 27, 2009.

20 Baitullah Mehsud gave Hakimullah control of 8,000 militants when he assigned him Orakzai, Khyber and Kurram tribal agencies. For more, see Amir Mir.

21 Hamid Mir, “Capital Talk Show,” *Geo TV*, September 29, 2009.

22 Yousuf Ali, “Taliban Form New Alliance in Wa-

Despite these losses, the TTP clearly remains a dangerous organization. The October 5 suicide attack on a United Nations office in Islamabad, and the October 10 assault on the military's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, show that the TTP remains highly effective under Hakimullah's leadership. These two attacks have caused an irreparable loss of confidence in the Pakistan Army. Moreover, the October 15 attacks in Lahore show that Hakimullah retains strong links with jihadist groups with access to Punjab Province. In the face of the government's major offensive in South Waziristan Agency, TTP spokesman Azam Tariq vowed that the group would continue such strikes if military operations against them were not ceased.<sup>28</sup> The assassination of a Pakistani brigadier amid heavy rush hour traffic in Islamabad on October 22 could be a sign of a new TTP assassination campaign.<sup>29</sup>

It appears that the TTP is currently at a crossroads, and its future could move in two directions. Either the TTP will successfully escalate its activities and increasingly make use of its Punjabi network to shake Pakistan, or it could splinter into smaller factions due to internal disagreements, heightened sectarian tendencies, or Pakistan's current offensive against its central leadership.

*Mukhtar A. Khan is a Pakistani Pashtun journalist and policy/security analyst based in Washington, D.C. Since 9/11, he has covered Pakistan's troubled frontier for the media, including the BBC, Mail on Sunday, and Voice of America. He has visited the region frequently. Currently, he is working on a book about the increasing trends of militancy in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions and its spillover to the rest of the world. Mr. Khan is also working as Chief Media Strategist for AfPak Media Solutions and is Senior Adviser to the Pashtun Focus. He has also served as the Communication Officer for the Sustainable Development Networking Program and The World Conservation Union to help connect and improve the lives of disadvantaged people in Pakistan.*

<sup>28</sup> "GHQ Attackers Demanded Release of 100 Militants," *Dawn*, October 13, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Jane Perlez and Salman Masood, "Pakistani Brigadier Assassinated in the Capital," *New York Times*, October 22, 2009.

## The October 2009 Terrorist Attack in Italy and its Wider Implications

By Federico Bordonaro

ON OCTOBER 12, 2009, at approximately 7:45 AM, a Libyan citizen named Mohamed Game<sup>1</sup> attacked an Italian Army barracks in Milan with an improvised explosive device similar to the type used by terrorists in the London Underground attacks of July 7, 2005.<sup>2</sup> It is believed that the attack was an attempted suicide bombing, although Game survived the explosion due to poor construction of the IED. Nevertheless, the bomb was powerful enough to injure him severely. By October 19, Game was still hospitalized and in a coma, having lost one hand and the use of both eyes. The IED's blast also lightly injured the Italian soldier who managed to stop Game's attempt to access the inhabited sections of the barracks.

After five days of investigations, Italy's intelligence services believe that Game and his apprehended accomplices—the Libyan Mohamed Imbaeya Israfel<sup>3</sup> and the Egyptian Abdel Hady Abdelaziz Mahmoud Kol<sup>4</sup>—may be linked to an unspecified Egyptian terrorist organization.<sup>5</sup> Although many of the details are not yet clear, some conclusions can be drawn about the operative and tactical aspects of the attack, and especially on the wider political and security implications for Italy. Italy's north is home to Muslim immigrants, and the activities of some

<sup>1</sup> Game, a 35-year-old engineer and electrician, has been living in Italy for nine years and has a relationship with an Italian woman. The couple have two children and are reportedly undergoing serious economic troubles after Game's business failed to pay back debt. See Carlo Bonini, "Dal sogno di fare fortuna ai debiti il mistero di Mohamed, lupo solitario," *La Repubblica*, October 13, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Libyan in Milan Bomb Attack," ANSA Press Agency, October 12, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Israfel is a Libyan citizen aged 33 and currently unemployed. He attracted the attention of Italy's DIGOS police service in July 2009, as he was wiretapped speaking in extremist religious terms. He has a clean criminal record.

<sup>4</sup> Kol, a 52-year-old Egyptian living in Italy, has a clean criminal record but is suspected of being linked to Egyptian extremist networks.

<sup>5</sup> "Attentato, spunta un testimone 'Ho visto nascondere il nitrato,'" *La Repubblica*, October 16, 2009.

Muslim religious leaders have been strictly monitored in recent years due to fears of radicalization in mosques.

This article will first describe the operative and tactical aspects of the October 12 terrorist attack and report the findings of the ongoing investigations. It will then briefly illustrate the recent history of Islamist terrorist threats in Italy before analyzing the wider implications of the seemingly minor incident in Milan.

### The Dynamics of the Milan Terrorist Attack

According to initial reports, Mohamed Game tried to enter the "Santa Barbara" barracks by waiting near the facility until the arrival of an authorized vehicle enabled him to follow it through the automatic gate. Once the gate opened, he tried to reach the core area of the barracks, but was immediately confronted by an armed soldier, Corporal Guido La Veneziana, whose unit is currently deployed in Herat, Afghanistan. Before the soldier could physically block him, Game reportedly detonated the IED. The device, however, was not prepared properly, and the blast did not cause the desired amount of damage. According to the soldier's declarations, the Libyan shouted some words in Arabic moments before the explosion.<sup>6</sup>

Early probes found that the IED was carried by the attacker in a toolbox placed in a rucksack. It had been assembled with five kilograms of ammonium nitrate, likely mixed with ammonia and acetone, while the trigger may have been electronic.<sup>7</sup> The explosive mixture used by Game was similar to ANFO,<sup>8</sup> although the exact chemical composition of the device has not been revealed by authorities.

While the prompt intervention of Corporal La Veneziana denied Game the possibility of proceeding deeper into the barracks, the damage could have been considerable had the terrorist been able to exploit the full potential of the IED.

<sup>6</sup> "Bomba contro una caserma a Milano Gravemente ferito l'attentatore libico," *La Stampa*, October 12, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> "Bomba caserma, 40 kg nitrato ammonio," ANSA Press Agency, October 13, 2009; *Il Giornale*, October 15, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> ANFO stands for ammonium nitrate-fuel oil and is a widely used explosive mixture.

As far as the tactical side is concerned, the Santa Barbara barracks attack diverges from terrorist actions carried out by Islamists on European soil. In Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005, multiple attackers targeted public transportation systems. The tactical aim of these attacks was to cause as many dead and injured as possible among passengers, the strategic goal being to decisively weaken popular support for Western military operations in Muslim countries and instilling the perception of a constant asymmetrical threat to European cities. On the contrary, the Milan attack targeted a military facility, and its political message was directed at the Italian government and military.

#### Preliminary Results of Investigations

Strikingly, Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni declared immediately after the attack that the incident was caused by “a kamikaze.”<sup>9</sup> Since Mohamed Game suffered a coma before police could interrogate him, it was not possible to ascertain whether his intention was to act as a suicide bomber. For example, it is possible that Game’s intent was to place his IED inside the barracks to be detonated remotely.<sup>10</sup>

While during the first two days of investigations the authorities issued regular statements, they have remained silent since October 14. Available open source information and early police declarations, however, enable analysts to piece together what has been discovered and to cautiously reason about further developments.

First, contrary to the initial official declarations, Mohamed Game is no longer considered a “lone wolf.” Instead, Game and his conspirators, Kol and Israfel, had apparently set up an operational group that utilized Israfel’s apartment in Milan as its base and laboratory to conceal documents

<sup>9</sup> *Il Sole-24 Ore*, October 13, 2009. In Italy’s political discourse and press, the Japanese word kamikaze is employed as a synonym for “suicide bomber” even when referring to the Islamist concept of *shahid* (martyr), notwithstanding the considerable cultural differences between the Japanese-nationalist and Islamist traditions.

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Colonnello, “Terroristi: ora spunta un timer,” *La Stampa*, October 15, 2009. One of the hypotheses currently considered by investigators is that Game and his accomplices may have worked on an IED that they could activate without sacrificing their lives.

and the material needed to prepare the explosive devices.<sup>11</sup>

Second, the search of Israfel’s apartment uncovered documents of other suspects—which may enable the disruption of a wider network—a timer and some cellular phones that could be used to trigger an explosion, and around 40 kilograms of ammonium nitrate plus other chemical agents such as acetone and ammonia that are widely used to produce improvised bombs.<sup>12</sup> According to many reports, investigators also found evidence of a recent purchase of 120 kilograms of ammonium nitrate.<sup>13</sup> This means that the police confiscated only 40 of the 120 kilograms, leaving room for conjecture about the actual fate of the remaining 80 kilograms.<sup>14</sup> The authorities have been unforthcoming about the possibility that the rest of the nitrate may have been successfully secured by Kol and Israfel before the police stormed their logistical base. An alleged witness, a woman living near the apartment, told the police that the two accomplices hurriedly placed big sacks in their car immediately after the explosion in the barracks and that she believes that the sacks contained the remaining nitrate.<sup>15</sup>

Third, on October 13 Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni told the press after a meeting with the National Committee on Order and Security that the attackers had identified seven military targets including barracks and other facilities belonging to the Carabinieri, police and the army.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Davide Carlucci, “L’ombra della rete integralista,” *La Repubblica*, October 16, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> “Milano, processateli per terrorismo,” *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Game purchased the nitrate in the shop of Consorzio Agrario di Corbetta, a consortium specializing in agricultural products. It is legal to sell such products in Italy since it is widely used in fertilizer. See Gabriele Moroni, “Kamikaze fai da te. ‘Vorrei del nitrato d’ammonio,’” *Il Giorno*, October 14, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> The investigators confirmed to various sources that only 40 kilograms of nitrate were confiscated, but they specified that it is still impossible to say whether the remaining 80 kilograms were dissipated in various attempts to produce an IED.

<sup>15</sup> Davide Carlucci and Sandro De Riccardis, “Attentato, spunta un testimone,” *La Repubblica*, October 17, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Davide Carlucci and Massimo Pisa, “Sette obiettivi per i kamikaze,” *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2009.

These findings show that what initially appeared to be the work of a lone wolf or of a totally independent cell may instead be the act of a small unit linked to a wider network, possibly with connections in Egypt.

#### Background: The Islamist Threat to Italy and Rome’s Countermeasures

Italy hosts an increasingly large community of Muslim immigrants. According to official statistics, there are almost one million Muslims living and working in Italy, and although these figures are lower than those of France or Britain, they are nonetheless significant. Contrary to France in 1986, Spain in 2004 and Britain in 2005, Italy has never experienced Islamist terrorist attacks, although a nationalist

**“These findings show that what initially appeared to be the work of a lone wolf or of a totally independent cell may instead be the act of a small unit linked to a wider network.”**

Palestinian group linked to al-Fatah struck Rome’s Fiumicino Airport in 1985. In recent years, however, tensions have grown between the Muslim community and Italy’s political and civil society. On the one hand, Italy is experiencing various difficulties in the attempt to integrate Muslims—and immigrants in general—into its labor market. On the other hand, requests by Muslim leaders for the construction of mosques and for the introduction of special jurisdiction for Muslims have created friction.

Most of all, however, Italy’s security services have been increasingly concerned by the spread of Islamist militant ideology by some local imams, especially in Lombardy and other northern regions (where the Muslim presence is stronger), particularly after September 11, 2001 and Italy’s subsequent involvement in stabilization missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Italy, therefore, established a program to constantly monitor mosques, imams, and congregations linked to some of the religious centers.

Despite the lack of Islamist terrorist attacks in Italy, there have been a number of disrupted plots. On December 2, 2008, Italy's Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS)<sup>17</sup> arrested two Moroccan immigrants, Rachid Ilhami and Gafir Abdelkader,<sup>18</sup> both working in Italy and with clean criminal records. Ilhami was a preacher in a cultural circle called "Pace" (Peace) in Macherio, near Milan. According to DIGOS, the arrested

### **"A possible conclusion is that a new type of terrorist model is taking shape in Europe."**

were trying to recruit other militants to stage suicide bombings in northern Italy.<sup>19</sup> DIGOS proceeded to arrest the two men after investigators discovered that they had already singled out several targets, both military, such as police and Carabinieri barracks, and civilian, such as the Esselunga supermarket near Milan.<sup>20</sup> Ilhami and Abdelkader reportedly trained other militants through instructional tapes and had already conducted hostile reconnaissance activities to prepare the attacks.

Wiretaps revealed that the two militants considered themselves agents of al-Qa`ida; however, no real links have emerged between the two Moroccans and established organizations, including al-Qa`ida, outside Italy.<sup>21</sup>

Italy's security agencies and analysts have found it particularly worrying that Ilhami and Abdelkader appeared to be well integrated into Italian society, and that their radicalization during

the last few years occurred mainly through the internet, which provided ideological propaganda and operational training, and a small cultural center outside Milan.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, widely spread sociological theories about terrorism being linked to poverty and social exclusion did not apply in this case, whereas the internal dynamics of Islamist radicalization provided a better framework to understand the rise of a new kind of terrorist.

Although the December 2008 plot was the most serious, there have been other terrorist threats to Italy as well. On February 19, 2002, four Moroccan citizens were arrested in Rome after police found them in possession of a cyanide compound, allegedly destined to be released in the aqueducts running near the U.S. Embassy.<sup>23</sup> In January 2006, the Parliamentary Committee for Oversight of Secret Services (COPACO) stated that there was "concrete evidence" of Islamist terrorist threats against Turin in northwest Italy as the town hosted the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, as well as to other cities before the 2006 general elections.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it was not before the December 2, 2008 arrests that DIGOS dismantled an actual terrorist cell on Italian soil.

#### **Implications**

Sources from Italy's domestic intelligence service, AISI, stressed that the profiles of the three men arrested for the October 2009 barracks attack force analysts to rethink the general characteristics of the European-based jihadist.<sup>25</sup> Those characteristics currently include: 1) the militant may have been indoctrinated and trained on the battlefields of Iraq or Afghanistan; 2) the militant may become a "homegrown terrorist" after intensive religious indoctrination by local imams; 3) the militant can be "infected" by extremist ideologies while in jail. Game, Kol and Israfil have a seemingly very different profile: they were only moderately involved in local

religious activities.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, they have no experience fighting in wars, and they do not have criminal records. As in the case of the two Moroccans arrested in December 2008, the three men had formed a terrorist cell independently without logistical support of established organizations. According to some sources, Kol may be linked to Egyptian militants, but this remains unproven.

A possible conclusion is that a new type of terrorist model is taking shape in Europe. It is in the form of several small, independent cells whose main "fuel" is a militant ideology spread mainly through the internet, which try to target a variety of civilian and military sites, apparently without an overall strategy and unified command.

*Dr. Federico Bordonaro is an international security and defense analyst based in Italy, specializing in European security, geostrategic issues and terrorism risks. He received his Ph.D. from Paris University-La Sorbonne in 2005.*

<sup>17</sup> DIGOS is a law enforcement agency that investigates terrorism, the mafia, organized crime, and political and soccer-related violent groups.

<sup>18</sup> "Progettavano attentati, due in manette," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 3, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> "Milano, in manette i due terroristi. Maroni: tensione altissima," *Il Sole-24 Ore*, December 2, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 3, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> See "Operazione Shamal" in Bruno Megale, *Terrorismo Internazionale. Indagini*, report by the Italian police, available online at [http://appinter.csm.it/incontri/vis\\_relaz\\_inc.php?&ri=MTc4MjQ%3D](http://appinter.csm.it/incontri/vis_relaz_inc.php?&ri=MTc4MjQ%3D).

<sup>22</sup> Biagio Marsiglia, "Allarme attentati islamici a Milano Maroni: carcere duro per i terroristi," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 4, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Federico Bordonaro, "Italian Security and Potential Terrorist Targets," *Terrorism Monitor* 3:18 (2005).

<sup>24</sup> Federico Bordonaro, "Italy: The Threat to the General Elections," *Terrorism Monitor* 4:4 (2006).

<sup>25</sup> *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; Some reports, however, say that Game used to pray in front of an image of al-Qa`ida leader Usama bin Ladin.

## LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence

By Alison Pargeter

AT THE END OF August 2009, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) issued a set of revisions declaring the renunciation of violence. Following in the footsteps of Egypt's al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya, the 420-page document, titled "Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir," is a scholarly work that draws on a range of Islamic references to condemn extremism and to advocate a peaceful and patient approach to improving the state of the *umma* (global Islamic community). In what is presumably a reflection on their own past, the group declared that the "backwardness" of the *umma* cannot be remedied by "hasty solutions or by enthusiastic actions or by sentimental behavior."<sup>1</sup> Although the revisions accept the concept of defensive jihad against an occupying power, they reject the use of violence against one's own rulers, stating, "The aim of fighting is to protect the Islamic project. Protection means resistance...But for jihad to become a military profession—this is a distortion of the concept...Allah doesn't like aggressors."<sup>2</sup> It also states that "arms are not for use legally or religiously to reform or bring about change in Muslim countries."<sup>3</sup>

The revisions are a bold step for a group that was established in the camps of Afghanistan with the aim of bringing down the Libyan regime and which at their peak in the mid-1990s posed the greatest challenge to Colonel Mu`ammar Qadhafi in his 40-year rule. They are also a brave move for a regime that since coming to power in 1969 has been characterized by its zero-tolerance approach to Islamist opponents. Yet this ideological shift is not an unexpected development. The revisions are the culmination of negotiations that have been ongoing for at least the past couple of years between the Libyan regime, represented by the Qadhafi Development Foundation run

by Qadhafi's son Saif al-Islam, and the LIFG's leadership who, along with much of the group's rank-and-file, are housed in the Abu Slim prison in Tripoli. The foundation brought a number of Islamic scholars in addition to Noman bin Othman (also referred to as Noman Benotman), a former LIFG leader based in London, into the prison to convince the LIFG leaders to renounce violence in return for their release. As such, the revisions are the conclusion of more than two years of theological debate.

Although the revisions represent a major step for both the LIFG and the Libyan state, their impact is likely to be limited. Indeed, despite predictions in some quarters that this ideological shift will have major repercussions in jihadist circles and beyond, this article argues that they are unlikely to have much effect at all and may only spark relatively insignificant debate.

### The LIFG in Libya

The LIFG was all but finished as an organization before the negotiations even began. In fact, the LIFG was a failed project from its inception. Despite the fact that the LIFG in Afghanistan had a reputation for military prowess, they were never able to garner a real foothold inside Libya. Much of the group's leadership was forced to remain outside of the country, many in Afghanistan but others in the United Kingdom and a handful in Turkey and Qatar, among other places. Moreover, there was never much of an appetite for such a radical approach among the Libyan population, and the LIFG was unable to muster the same popular legitimacy as groups such as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria, who had the injustice of the canceled 1992 Algerian elections on their side.<sup>4</sup> Once the LIFG was discovered by authorities in 1995, it took only a few years for the regime to eliminate the fighters within Libya, forcing those who escaped death or arrest to flee.

Even in exile, the LIFG was unable to survive for long. Following the U.S.

<sup>4</sup> The fact that the Algerian army canceled elections that the Islamists were set to win provided the GIA with additional legitimacy, as many in the population felt that they had been robbed of their rightful victory and as such found the idea of taking up arms against the state more acceptable.

invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, its members who had been residing there—including much of its leadership—were scattered and forced to flee. A number of key figures were subsequently arrested and handed over to Tripoli in 2004, while others were arrested in Europe under the threat of being returned.

It is clear that by the time the Libyan regime was willing to engage in dialogue, the LIFG was already compromised and had little room for maneuver. The

**“Overall, the revisions are unlikely to have any direct impact on al-Qa`ida or its affiliates.”**

LIFG's main challenge was to come to agreement with the regime with the minimum loss of face. Therefore, while the LIFG's renunciation of violence may be genuine, it has been driven largely by the promise of release, which for some of the group has yet to be realized.

In fact, the LIFG's leaders were well aware that by entering into negotiations they would effectively drive the final nail into their own coffin. The Libyan state prohibits the existence of all organizations outside of the framework of Qadhafi's unique *Jamahriyya* (State of the Masses), which means that the LIFG leaders will only be released as individuals and not as a group. In spite of the fact that their revisions declare that they will continue to strive for *da`wa* (missionary activities), they will certainly not be able to do so as an organization. As such, the state has succeeded in making no real concessions itself in the process and has successfully neutralized what was once its fiercest foe.

This is not the first time the regime has achieved a victory against Islamist opponents. In March 2006, it released around 100 Muslim Brotherhood prisoners who had also struck a deal with the regime, effectively finishing off the Libyan branch of the international organization. As well as further debilitating its opposition, these initiatives have also helped Libya improve its image internationally, as

<sup>1</sup> Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, "Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir," August 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



they have demonstrated that Libya can be more flexible with its Islamist prisoners than some other states in the region. The fact that the revisions are currently being translated into 16 languages courtesy of Saudi Arabia will only add to this positive publicity.

Therefore, the revisions must be considered as a victory for the Libyan state. Indeed, in spite of the length of the document—which covers a range of issues from extremism to *da`wa* to “enjoining good and forbidding evil”—the revisions essentially boil down to one point: it is incorrect to use violence against the state. It was of course this very change that the state demanded of the group in its negotiations. The regime has triumphed to such an extent that on this year’s 40th anniversary of the Libyan revolution, the LIFG sent a communiqué to Qadhafi apologizing for their past actions and asking for his forgiveness, declaring,

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the coming of Ramadan and on this occasion we would like to send you our apologies regarding what we issued against you, from the setting up of a secret organization to all that happened afterwards, large and small.<sup>5</sup>

#### The LIFG and Al-Qa`ida

The impact of the revisions on al-Qa`ida will also be limited primarily because the LIFG was never part of al-Qa`ida or al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). It is true that some Libyan militants joined al-Qa`ida, but as a group the LIFG always retained its independence. The LIFG were positively opposed to Usama bin Ladin and believed his ideas were unworkable. They instead focused on nationalistic concerns. As former LIFG member Noman bin Othman explained, “on the question of al-Qa`ida, we never thought they had a realistic plan.”<sup>6</sup> He also declared, “We refused right from the beginning to be absorbed into this group because that would make us lose our ability to move freely and independently in Libya.”<sup>7</sup>

5 Oea [Tripoli], August 27, 2009.

6 Mahan Abedin, “From Mujahid to Activist: An Interview with a Libyan Veteran of the Afghan Jihad,” *Spotlight on Terror* 3:2 (2005).

7 Camille Tawille, *Al-Qa`ida wa Akhawatiya* (London: Saqi

Books, 2007).  
8 Ibid.  
9 Ibid.  
10 Personal interviews, former Libyan militants, 2008.

**“While the LIFG’s renunciation of violence may be genuine, it has been driven largely by the promise of release, which for some of the group has yet to be realized.”**

in Kandahar to try to persuade others to join them. During the meeting, the LIFG asked Bin Ladin to stop using Afghanistan as a base from which to launch attacks against the United States and tried to convince Bin Ladin that he should not violate the laws or policies of the Taliban, under whose protection they were all living, by launching attacks that risked bringing retribution.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the recent speculation about the LIFG’s links to al-Qa`ida was sparked by a statement made by Ayman al-Zawahiri at the end of 2007. Al-Zawahiri announced that the LIFG had become part of the al-Qa`ida network. This announcement was supported by another prominent Libyan Islamist, Abu Laith al-Libi, who was in Afghanistan and who had always been opposed to the LIFG negotiating with the Libyan state. The LIFG’s leadership, however, was appalled at the announcements, not least because, although a member of the LIFG’s *shura* council, Abu Laith did not have the authority to act or issue statements in the name of the group.<sup>10</sup> Abu Laith was killed by U.S. forces in January 2008, effectively putting an end to the project.

Books, 2007).

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Personal interviews, former Libyan militants, 2008.

There are believed to be between 20-40 Libyans who are still with al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan and Pakistan; however, the impact of the LIFG’s revisions on them is likely to be negligible, as they have always rejected the idea of entering into a dialogue with the Libyan regime let alone agreeing to such a radical and remorseful strategic reassessment.

The LIFG decision will also likely have no impact on AQIM, which remains primarily an Algerian organization. Although a number of Libyans appear to have established links with AQIM in recent years, these do not appear to have had anything to do with the LIFG; these Libyans seemed to have cooperated with the group in an individual capacity. Moreover, the LIFG has had a particularly antagonistic relationship with Algerian militants since the early 1990s when a contingent of fighters who had gone to assist in the Algerian jihad were killed by the GIA for “deviancy.”

Overall, the revisions are unlikely to have any direct impact on al-Qa`ida or its affiliates. The revisions may, however, provoke debate within Islamist circles considering that there is a growing body of former militants calling for similar reassessments. Nevertheless, it is likely that these revisions will be regarded with a heavy dose of skepticism and suspicion by many of those in the jihadist camp because they were issued from prison. Some well-known Islamists such as Ali Belhaj, the former leader of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), have already criticized the project on that basis.<sup>11</sup> As in similar revisions recently, there is a deep mistrust within jihadist circles because they have all occurred in prison. Moreover, they are being undertaken by failed movements and by older leaders who in the eyes of the young are no longer relevant to the cause.

#### Today’s Generation of Militants

The revisions are also unlikely to have much impact on the generation of militants that have sprung up across North Africa. This new generation of militants seems to be characterized by their low education levels, nihilism and desperation that is reflected in their

11 “Bin Al-Haj: Murajat al-Islamiyeen fi Libya wal Jazair wa Misr Harb Nafseer,” al-Quds Press, September 9, 2009.

willingness to blow themselves up in suicide attacks.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, on account of the failings of the nationalist insurgent projects of the 1990s, they seem to have none of the specific political goals of groups such as the LIFG. Rather, given the strict confines in which they can operate, these individuals appear bent upon destruction in some vain promise that they will achieve paradise.

Although the appearance of such militants is most pronounced in countries such as Morocco or Algeria, Libya has not been immune. Reports have emerged in recent years about young men blowing themselves up to evade capture by the security services. Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam, confirmed how in June 2007 three young militants exploded themselves in a house in Derna and in the same year clashes were reported between militants and members of the police in Benghazi. There are also many Libyans who joined the jihad in Iraq, and there are countless stories of martyrdom celebrations being held in Libya by the families of those who have died in Iraq.

For these militants, the LIFG's revisions are unlikely to have a significant impact. It is true that the LIFG are regarded as heroes by some parts of the population; the fact that they fought in Afghanistan and have suffered in Libyan prisons gives them a degree of credibility. Yet by striking a deal with the regime, many will accuse them of being co-opted by the state. Perhaps more importantly, given the low education levels of many of these young radicals, they will have a difficult time understanding such a scholarly document as the revisions.

Moreover, the majority of today's Libyan militants and volunteers for the Iraqi jihad have come from the country's eastern regions—an area that provided the bulk of support for the LIFG when it was in its prime and an area that has traditionally had an

antagonistic relationship to the center. As such, it would appear that while it is impossible to pinpoint exactly what drives someone to militancy, there are a number of underlying grievances related to internal regional factors in Libya that have yet to be resolved. As a result, while the issue of militancy in Libya should not be overplayed, it is certainly a problem that is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

In conclusion, the LIFG revisions are a positive step for both the group itself and for the Libyan authorities. Yet they are unlikely to have any real impact on militancy in the region and beyond.

*Alison Pargeter is a Senior Research Associate at the Centre of International Studies at the University of Cambridge. She is currently running a project on radicalization in North Africa that is funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council. She has published widely on issues of political Islam and radicalization. Her book, The New Frontiers of Jihad: Radical Islam in Europe, was published by I.B. Tauris in 2008 and her forthcoming book on the Muslim Brotherhood is due to be published by Saqi Books in 2010.*

## Rethinking Strategies to Secure U.S. Critical Infrastructure

By Charles Faddis

THERE IS AN ALMOST endless list of potential terrorist targets in the United States. The most concerning of these targets, however, are those loosely classified as critical infrastructure. There are a large number of such sites, and the potential impact of a successful attack on many of them would be catastrophic. An attack on the rail system in the Northeast Corridor, if effectively carried out, would kill hundreds if not thousands and cripple the transportation sector in a key region of the United States. Commuters would be stranded. Freight would not move. Economic costs would amount to the billions of dollars. Nuclear power plants scattered across the country are another concern due to the horrible effects of a disaster. Moreover, the United States is dotted with major chemical facilities, which are, in effect, giant prepositioned weapons of mass destruction. Railroads carry thousands of railcars jammed with similar types of chemicals. As warned by the Department of Homeland Security, a single rail car filled with chlorine has the capacity to kill 17,500 people.<sup>1</sup>

To prevent attacks on these targets and avoid the loss of life on an almost unimaginable scale, it is imperative that further defenses be instituted to frustrate terrorist attack plans. To accomplish this, however, it is first necessary to understand the nature of the threat and the way in which the enemy fights. Attacks planned by Islamist terrorists may involve limited physical surveillance, and the enemy will likely be prepared to die to carry out the mission successfully. Faced with this type of enemy, many of the United States' current security measures are not sufficient to counter this threat.

This article argues that more attention should focus on physical security such as explosives detection dogs or hard barriers to critical infrastructure. It explains why current security measures

<sup>12</sup> For example, data provided to the author in 2007 and 2008 by local human rights groups in North Africa regarding those arrested on terrorism charges reveal that the vast majority have extremely poor education levels with many only educated to primary school level. Although many of the LIFG rank-and-file were also poorly educated, the group also comprised graduates and those who had received an Islamic education in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> David Howe, "Planning Scenarios," The Homeland Security Council, July 2004.

are not sufficient, and then suggests some steps for moving forward.

#### **Current Security Policies Not Sufficient**

In the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London terrorist attacks, terrorists boarded trains carrying explosive devices concealed in backpacks and bags. The terrorists themselves spoke the local language, dressed in Western clothes and blended into their environment.

**“The premium must be on guards, physical barriers, metal detectors, explosives detection dogs, and related measures, and less on cameras, signs and observation. Against an enemy that relies more on shock, violence and surprise than it does on sophistication or finesse, it is essential to employ similarly tough defensive measures.”**

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They did nothing to attract attention. In Madrid, they left the bags and exited the trains. In London, they chose to detonate the bags themselves and commit suicide.

Despite this, in the United States many of the security measures in place seem to be predicated on an expectation of being able to detect and neutralize terrorists in the run-up to an attack. One example of this is a security program initiated by a major rail system in the United States that allows uniformed and off-duty plainclothes law enforcement to ride trains free of charge as a deterrent to potential terrorists. The implementation of this measure is a perfect illustration of the lack of understanding of terrorist methodology that characterizes much of what passes for security today. What would a police officer in a uniform or in plainclothes sitting behind a suicide bomber—who would not be distinguishable from other passengers—do to stop such an attack? The officer would find out

there was a bomb on board when every other passenger did: when it detonated.

Moreover, detecting a terrorist during the planning phase is also extremely difficult. There is much discussion in law enforcement and homeland security circles about the terrorist attack cycle and the necessity to detect and neutralize terrorists while they are preparing for an operation. While these detection practices are necessary and important, they gloss over the difficulty of detecting a terrorist involved in pre-attack surveillance and also greatly over-emphasize the amount of preparation that is likely to occur.

A rank amateur with aspirations to martyr himself may board a train in such a manner and behave in such a way as he prepares to carry out an attack that will allow a police officer to correctly identify and apprehend him before he takes action. Yet an operative of even marginal competence will not do so. He, or she, will dress and act and speak appropriately enough to blend into the surrounding population. In the run-up to the attack, the terrorist will board the train, ride it as far as needed to gather data and then disembark and go home. An experienced terrorist will not stand and stare or take photographs of a station platform while standing in view of a security camera. In short, the operative will not do anything while conducting surveillance in preparation for an attack or as he boards the train on the day of the attack that will appear out of the ordinary to an observer. For law enforcement, it is not just looking for a needle in a haystack; it is looking for a needle in a pile of identical needles.

It is also likely that the number of such pre-attack visits to any particular site will be limited. A U.S. special operations team preparing to attack a target will undertake extensive pre-attack surveillance. The team will use overhead imagery, reporting from clandestine assets and the results of surveillance conducted over a lengthy period of time by trained operators to allow for the preparation of the best possible plan of attack. Attributing that same kind of methodology to terrorist attack teams is a mistake. Certainly, terrorists want to have information on the target they are going to strike, but

the level of detail they typically acquire in advance of an attack is much less than what U.S. military or intelligence teams would judge sufficient. Much of that information will derive from open sources, from casual observation and from individuals who, largely by chance, happen to have access to the target. In fact, in many cases, it is probably more accurate to say that the target is chosen at least in part by virtue of the amount of information available about it than it is to say that the target is chosen and then information is compiled on it. There may, in fact, be a certain amount of directed, “formal” surveillance of the target, but it will likely be much less extensive in both time and scope than is often assumed.

A perfect illustration is the case of the individuals arrested for planning an attack on Fort Dix in New Jersey in 2007. The preparation for those attacks consisted of a few casual visits to military installations and the compilation of what U.S. analysts would consider a very limited amount of information on the potential targets. The terrorists’ ultimate selection of Fort Dix as a target was based largely on the fact that one of them already had access to the facility as a pizza delivery man.<sup>2</sup> Their visits

**“While these detection practices are necessary and important, they gloss over the difficulty of detecting a terrorist involved in pre-attack surveillance and also greatly over-emphasize the amount of preparation that is likely to occur.”**

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to other installations hardly qualified as anything other than drive-bys, were extremely limited in duration and would have been almost impossible to detect. In the end, they were not captured because of their actions while casing prospective targets, but because of good intelligence work and the actions of an undercover officer. The same is true in

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<sup>2</sup> “Fort Dix Plotter Spoke of Bombs on Tape,” Associated Press, October 29, 2008.

the recent Najibullah Zazi case, where attacks were prevented not because of pre-attack preparations, but because intelligence reports gave forewarning that Zazi had traveled to Pakistan and been trained in an al-Qa`ida camp.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, terrorists intent on attacking the United States would likely be prepared to die during their mission, which means that they will not need to case targets extensively enough to find an escape route. One example is the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Jidda, Saudi Arabia in 2004. The team of attackers mounted a furious assault on the site with the express goal of killing every American inside.<sup>4</sup> Nothing in the attack suggests any planning for extraction or withdrawal.<sup>5</sup> From the moment the attack began, the one near certainty was that every member of the assault team was going to die.

Moreover, the nature of the terrorists' objectives often obviates the necessity for extensive pre-attack surveillance. If a U.S. Special Forces team is focused on the destruction of a specific, transient target, it may require a large amount of data to plan an effective operation. Terrorists, particularly Islamic extremists, are rarely interested in mounting any such operation. They care about killing people in large numbers and spreading terror.

A case in point is the Mumbai attack of 2008. From the moment the shooting began, the attackers were intent on one goal: killing as many people as possible. When they opened fire with automatic weapons in the middle of a crowded train station, they did not know the identities of anyone they were shooting. The amount of pre-attack surveillance required to mount such an operation is minimal. The same can be said in regard to the hotel targets hit, which were chosen primarily because they catered to upscale, largely Western

tourists. When the target is one that is open to the public and employs literally hundreds of individuals from the surrounding community, as is the case with many soft targets, little pre-attack surveillance is necessary.

Even attacks on major economic targets are launched with what Western analysts would consider a rather crude understanding of the target. When al-Qa`ida struck the Abqaiq oil facility in

**“For law enforcement, it is not just looking for a needle in a haystack; it is looking for a needle in a pile of identical needles.”**

Saudi Arabia in 2006, they employed extensive resources. They used two separate vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) and a separate assault team to overwhelm the Saudi guards. Yet when they were successful in forcing their way into the site, they ultimately detonated their devices at locations that produced nothing like the kind of damage that could have resulted had the VBIEDs been exploded a relatively short distance away.<sup>6</sup> The attackers simply did not understand the facility well enough to know exactly how to cripple it.

#### **Moving Forward**

The enemy is fanatical, determined and creative. They will likely base attack plans on what Western analysts would consider limited information, much of it compiled through methodologies rather than extended physical surveillance. Even when the operations are relatively complex, the bulk of the information required will be gathered through means that are difficult for authorities to detect. A target may in fact be chosen not so much because it is the best possible choice, but because it is one the actors know already and to which they may have some degree of natural access. When the attack comes, however crude, it will be executed with vigor no matter what the odds.

In this context, efforts to detect pre-attack surveillance or other preparations are necessary, but likely to be of little value. What is of value, however, are measures that can physically prevent a successful attack. The premium must be on guards, physical barriers, metal detectors, explosives detection dogs, and related measures, and less on cameras, signs and observation.

This would establish a layered, integrated defense consisting of uniformed and plainclothes officers, combined with explosives detection dogs screening all passengers as they enter a train station or other mass transportation facility. Moreover, rather than focusing on security cameras at chemical plants and other critical infrastructure, these facilities should be gated and guarded, and protected by remotely activated barriers that can prevent entry of a truck carrying a bomb.

Against an enemy that relies more on shock, violence and surprise than it does on sophistication or finesse, it is essential to employ similarly tough defensive measures. Failure to move in this direction only creates a false sense of security, and leaves only hope that a terrorist attack will not occur.

*Charles S. Faddis is a retired Central Intelligence Agency operations officer and the former head of the CIA's WMD terrorism unit. He spent 20 years as an operative in the Near East, South Asia and Europe and led the first CIA team into Iraq in advance of the 2003 invasion. He is the author of a recently released book on the CIA entitled Beyond Repair and the coauthor of a book on the actions of his team inside Iraq in 2002-2003, entitled Operation Hotel California. His next book, Willful Neglect, is an examination of homeland security from an operator's perspective and will be released in early 2010. He runs his own security consulting business, Orion Strategic Services, LLC.*

3 "AP: CIA Learned of Zazi, Tipped Off FBI," CBS News, October 6, 2009; Richard Esposito, Clayton Sandell and Brian Ross, "Official: Terror Plot Suspect Admits al Qaeda Ties, May Plead Guilty," ABC News, September 18, 2009.

4 "Jeddah Consulate," Global Security, October 13, 2009.

5 Roger Harrison, Essam al-Ghalib and Hassan Adawi, "US Consulate Attacked," Arab News, December 7, 2004.

6 Personal interview, confidential source, Spring 2009.

## Israel as an Al-Qa`ida Target: Sorting Rhetoric From Reality

By Matthew Levitt

A VARIETY OF GROUPS in the Palestinian Territories claim to be affiliated with or inspired by al-Qa`ida. None of these groups, however, have been welcomed into the al-Qa`ida franchise. Moreover, this bottom up phenomenon where local Palestinian groups reach out to al-Qa`ida is not matched by a top down effort by al-Qa`ida's core leadership or even its established affiliates to create an official al-Qa`ida faction in the Palestinian Territories. Nevertheless, in nearly all of al-Qa`ida's public statements, the liberation of Palestine is a goal and Israel is denounced as an enemy. Al-Qa`ida's extensive anti-Israel rhetoric, however, is not matched with the parallel operational focus on targeting Israel.

Instead, it appears that Palestine is employed as a useful lightning rod through which al-Qa`ida can tap into the emotional attachment of Muslims and Arabs worldwide. The place of Palestine and Israel in al-Qa`ida's speeches and operations is shaped by its need to construct narratives, often focused on specific populations and conflicts, that support its radical and violent agenda. Al-Qa`ida, explained French scholar Gilles Kepel, combines elements of Salafism—a literalist interpretation of Islamic history akin to Saudi Wahhabism—with jihadism.<sup>1</sup> Al-Qa`ida utilizes some aspects of jihadism, namely the legitimization of violent action to achieve political means, to its organizational, logistical and operational agenda. To do this, it must place conflicts throughout the world that involve Muslims into a singular, radical narrative in which Islam in general and Muslims in particular must defend themselves from Western aggression. For al-Qa`ida, the Palestinian cause is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon. Since the Israel-Palestine conflict is perhaps the single most animating regional conflict for many Arabs and Muslims, its resonance

provides al-Qa`ida with a powerful rhetorical tool for radicalization, recruitment, and fundraising.

This article shows how al-Qa`ida has always been interested in the Palestinian issue, demonstrates the gap between al-Qa`ida's rhetoric and its operations targeting Israel, and finally identifies the few attacks that al-Qa`ida has conducted against Israel and Jewish targets.

### Al-Qa`ida's Interest in Palestine

Although al-Qa`ida's primary focus has been the United States and its presence and influence in Muslim countries, Palestine has featured prominently in al-Qa`ida's statements and propaganda from the early outset of the group's founding. In fact, nearly every public statement made by Usama bin Ladin since 1990 has mentioned the Palestinian cause, often represented through references to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem that strike both religious and political chords among Muslims and Arabs worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

One of Bin Ladin's earliest public statements, a letter addressed to Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, the late grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, illustrates the early attachment of the Palestinian cause to al-Qa`ida. The letter, written in December 1994, was entitled "The Betrayal of Palestine." The basis of the letter was a repudiation of the Saudi dynasty and Bin Baz's complicity with Saudi rule. The object of Bin Ladin's ire, and the true focus of the proclamation, however, was Bin Baz's endorsement of the Oslo Accords a year earlier, in 1993:<sup>3</sup>

The legal duty regarding Palestine and our brothers there—these poor men, women and children who have nowhere to go—is to wage jihad for the sake of God, and to motivate our *umma* to jihad so that Palestine may be completely liberated and returned to Islamic sovereignty.<sup>4</sup>

2 Asaf Maliach, "Bin-Ladin, Palestine and al-Qaeda's Operational Strategy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44:3 (2008): p. 358.

3 Bruce Lawrence ed., *Messages to the World, The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 5-14.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Two years later, Bin Ladin's 1996 declaration of war against the United States invoked the Palestinian cause to rally Muslims to fight "the American-Israeli" alliance:

Your brothers in Palestine and in the land of the two Holy Places are calling upon your help and asking you to take part in fighting against the enemy—your enemy and their enemy—the Americans and the Israelis. They are asking you to do whatever you can, with one's own means and ability, to expel the enemy, humiliated and defeated, out of the sanctities of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

This "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," while leveraging the Palestinian issue for rhetorical purposes, focused on the United States, not Israel. Similarly, a February 1998 *fatwa* issued by Bin Ladin and a host of other radical Islamists insisted that killing "Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it." The *fatwa* justified this call to terrorism in the name of liberating "the al-Aqsa mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim." In both pronouncements, the Palestinian issue is referenced in global, Islamic terms, not Palestinian nationalist ones, and is only one part of the larger call to liberate Islamic lands and defend the *umma* from the perceived enemies of Islam. Although still powerful rhetorical images leveraged to inflame the emotions of their intended audiences, neither liberating Palestine nor attacking Israel are themselves central themes.

Instead, al-Qa`ida has leveraged Palestine as a cause to support its call to jihad writ large. Consider, for example, how Ayman al-Zawahiri concluded in his 1996 treatise "The Cure for Believers' Hearts" that Arab and Muslim regimes that accept the United Nations and Israel as legitimate entities have lost their credibility and authority. Al-Zawahiri

5 Usama bin Ladin, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," August 23, 1996.

1 Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 219-22.

counted the Palestinian Liberation Organization as one of these turncoat entities, and used such logic to pave the way for attacks against the West, “apostate” Arab regimes, international organizations and Israel.<sup>6</sup>

There is precedent among al-Qa`ida ideologues for this discrepancy. At least until the mid-1990s, Ayman al-Zawahiri maintained that “the road to Jerusalem passes through Cairo,” meaning that only after illegitimate and insufficiently Islamic regimes such as Hosni Mubarak’s in Egypt were toppled could Palestine be liberated. Years later, al-Zawahiri would write to al-Qa`ida in Iraq leader Abu Mus`ab al Zarqawi that targeting Israel was a “fourth stage” goal following the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq, establishing an Islamic emirate in Iraq, and extending the jihad to the secular countries neighboring this new emirate (although it could come at the same time, he said).<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, al-Qa`ida ideologue Abu Mus`ab al-Suri reportedly doubted Bin Ladin’s own “willingness to take the fight to the heart of the Middle East,” a move al-Suri felt was essential. In contrast, al-Suri’s lectures stressed “the strategic impact of striking Jewish, American, and Western interests in the heart of the Arab world.”<sup>8</sup>

#### **Al-Qa`ida Rhetoric on Operations Targeting Israel**

Al-Qa`ida’s leaders have often stated their desire to attack the state of Israel. Yet while the intent and imperative of killing Israelis and Jews features prominently in al-Qa`ida’s rhetoric, it has rarely translated into operational attacks on Israel, its citizens abroad, or Jews more generally.

Most of al-Qa`ida’s rhetoric regarding operational planning targeting Israel references not concrete, near-term planning, but rather notional intent to

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Bakker and Leen Boer, “The Evolution of Al-Qaedaism: Ideology, Terrorist, and Appeal,” Netherlands Institute of International Relations, December 2007, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> A copy of the letter is provided by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, and can be found at the following URL: [www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTC-Zawahiri-Letter-10-05.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTC-Zawahiri-Letter-10-05.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 280.

ultimately target Israel as part of an Islamist ideological vision to “liberate” all Muslim lands. In the words of Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Palestine was a land of Islam, and it is an individual duty for every Muslim to liberate it.”<sup>9</sup> Al-Qa`ida has even linked its involvement in Iraq

### **“The delta between al-Qa`ida’s rhetorical focus on Israel and its lackluster efforts to translate its propaganda into action is significant.”**

to its eventual conflict with Israel. The leader of the al-Qa`ida-linked Islamic State of Iraq, the elusive Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, stated that Iraq has “paved the way for invading the Jewish state,” which would then lead to “the restoration of Jerusalem.”<sup>10</sup> Other al-Qa`ida leaders, such as Abu Laith al-Libi, echoed this linkage, asserting that all of al-Qa`ida’s actions are to prepare for conflict with Israel. Abu Laith stated, “the preparations we make and all the fighting in the cause of God we carry out in the East and West is preparation and training for fighting the Jews in the al-Aqsa Mosque.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, al-Zawahiri stated in a video released in January 2006 that once U.S. President George W. Bush conceded defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, al-Qa`ida would turn its attention toward the Palestinian cause. A “routing” would soon take place in Palestine, al-Zawahiri warned.<sup>12</sup>

Both Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri have addressed al-Qa`ida’s lack of operations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. When questioned on this issue, al-Zawahiri responded in April 2008 that al-Qa`ida “strive[s] as much as we can to deal blows to the Jews inside Israel and outside it, with Allah’s help and guidance.” He supported this statement by urging

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Blanchard, “Al-Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology,” CRS Report for Congress, July 9, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Maliach, p. 360.

Palestinians to perform jihad.<sup>13</sup> He tried to make a distinction between his criticism of Hamas leaders and their decision to participate in elections and Hamas fighters. Hamas leaders should not adhere to a secular constitution, al-Zawahiri complained, but “as for the mujahidin of Hamas and the rest of the mujahidin in Palestine, I supported them and continue to support them, and I call on the *umma* to aid them.”<sup>14</sup>

Al-Qa`ida’s operational absence from the Palestinian arena was perhaps most glaring during the December 2008-January 2009 war in Gaza. During this conflict, dubbed Operation Cast Lead by Israel, al-Qa`ida released written statements and media messages expressing support for the Palestinian fighters, and often denounced Arab states for failing to act in the defense of Gaza. Al-Zawahiri deliberately directed part of his statement toward Egypt, saying,

lifting the siege imposed on Gaza is your responsibility that you must take up. If you organize and participate in a campaign of strikes, demonstrations and protests that persist until the siege is lifted from over our people in Gaza, then Hosni Mubarak, the criminal traitor, is bound to give in.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Baghdadi, al-Zawahiri and Bin Ladin all released statements calling for jihad in Gaza, but none of al-Qa`ida’s proclamations provided any indication that al-Qa`ida itself would support its stance with action.

#### **Al-Qa`ida Attacks Targeting Israel**

The delta between al-Qa`ida’s rhetorical focus on Israel and its lackluster efforts to translate its propaganda into action is significant. Al-Qa`ida attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets have been small-scale and half-hearted. For a group that has executed spectacular attacks involving sophisticated planning throughout the world, al-Qa`ida’s record of targeting Israel is remarkably poor. Most of al-

<sup>13</sup> “Al-Zawahiri,” Anti-Defamation League, undated.

<sup>14</sup> “Open Meeting with Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri-Part One,” al-Sahab, available at [www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefazawahiri0408.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefazawahiri0408.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, “The Massacre of Gaza and the Siege of the Traitors,” January 6, 2009.

Qa`ida's operational planning that focused on Israel never even came to fruition. Even if they had, the majority of these plots were not of the scale typical of al-Qa`ida attacks.

According to U.S. intelligence, for example, at the time of his capture in March 2002, the Palestinian al-Qa`ida facilitator Abu Zubayda was "trying to organize a terrorist attack in Israel and he had enlisted the help of Zarqawi in finding a smuggling route into Israel for moving persons and materials."<sup>16</sup> This was not Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi's first attempt to target Israel. A year before these attacks, and long before he became famous as the head of al-Qa`ida in Iraq, al-Zarqawi reportedly attempted to set up a cell to target Israel. By 2001, according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, al-Zarqawi had received more than \$35,000 for work in the Palestinian Territories. He personally planned to use this money to train additional Jordanian and Palestinian fighters in Afghanistan, to purchase passports, and to facilitate travel to the Levant. Al-Zarqawi "received assurances that further financing would be provided for attacks against Israel" and according to some reports may have traveled to Palestine himself by 2002.<sup>17</sup>

Richard Reid, the "Shoe Bomber" convicted of trying to blow up an American airliner flying from Paris to Miami, prepared for his mission by testing out airline security on Israel's El Al airlines and scouted out potential targets for attack in Egypt and Israel. After his scouting trip, Reid reported back to an associate in Afghanistan with a variety of suggestions on how and where to conduct attacks in Israel, including specific information on Israeli buildings, Ben Gurion airport, the Wailing Wall plaza, and suggested that

the reception area of the Tel Aviv train station would be a particularly good bombing target, especially on a Saturday night, because it could be entered without

being searched and contained at least 100 people at the arrival time of any given train.<sup>18</sup>

Al-Qa`ida, however, never acted on any of Reid's detailed surveillance.

At a hearing in March 2007 before his U.S. military tribunal in Guantanamo Bay, 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaykh Muhammad claimed to have been involved in 31 terrorist plots, including several targeting Israeli or Jewish targets—most of which never occurred. These included plots to fly airplanes from Saudi Arabia into buildings in the southern Israeli city of Eilat; sending several "mujahidin" into Israel to survey "strategic targets"; targeting Israeli embassies in India, Azerbaijan, the Philippines and Australia; plotting to attack an El Al Israel Airlines flight from Thailand; the Mombasa, Kenya attacks; plotting to attack U.S., British and Jewish targets in Turkey; and plotting to attack an American oil company in Indonesia that Muhammad described as "owned by the Jewish former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger."<sup>19</sup> While the veracity of these statements is unknown, the attacks in Kenya, Turkey, and a similar attack—using rockets, not planes—on Eilat did in fact occur.

Of the attacks that did take place, some focused on soft targets that while Jewish were in no way connected to Israel. For example, in April 2002, an al-Qa`ida-affiliated suicide bomber detonated a truck bomb in front of a historic synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba. The attack, tied to Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, killed 21 people, including 16 Europeans.<sup>20</sup> In November 2003, al-Qa`ida-affiliated terrorists bombed two synagogues in Istanbul.<sup>21</sup> One reason al-

Qa`ida may have focused on soft Jewish targets is the perception that targeting Israel directly is too difficult due to its robust security measures.

Seven months after the Djerba synagogue attack, al-Qa`ida-affiliated terrorists carried out the group's most successful terrorist attack against Israeli targets. In November 2002, al-Qa`ida operatives attacked the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, a popular vacation spot for Israeli tourists. Three Israelis were killed and approximately 20 more were seriously wounded.<sup>22</sup> In a nearly simultaneous strike nearby, al-Qa`ida fighters shot a portable surface-to-air missile at an Israeli Arkia Airline passenger plane flying from Kenya to Israel.<sup>23</sup> While the missile missed its mark, the coordinated Mombasa attacks demonstrated a high level of skill and capability, the effects of which reverberated widely as aviation experts grappled with the implications of al-Qa`ida terrorists targeting passenger flights with shoulder-fired missiles.

Al-Qa`ida attacks against Israel since then have been neither as sophisticated nor as successful. In January 2006, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qa`ida in Iraq, claimed responsibility for a rocket attack in northern Israel. Although unverifiable, he claimed that he was ordered to conduct the attack by Usama bin Ladin and described the attack as "the beginning of blessed action to strike the Zionist enemy at the heart of its existence."<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

In the near-term, Israeli experts assess that while al-Qa`ida has not shifted its operational focus to target Israel, the threat of Salafi-jihadi attacks from both local groups in Gaza and al-Qa`ida affiliates remains serious. As in the Danish cartoon crisis, al-Qa`ida could easily take advantage of local events to inspire local groups or regional affiliates to prioritize attacks against Israel. For al-Qa`ida, an ideal outcome is an attack

Chronology," U.S. Department of State, undated.

<sup>22</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Terror in Africa: Attacks in Mombasa; Kenyans Hunting Clues to Bombing; Tolls Rises to 13," *New York Times*, November 30, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Thom Shanker, "Terror in Africa: Security Concerns; Ideal Terror Weapons: Portable, Deadly, Plentiful Missiles," *New York Times*, November 29, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Blanchard, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, biographical summary of Abu Zubayda, available online at [http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/wdc/documents/detainee\\_bios.pdf](http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/wdc/documents/detainee_bios.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> "Treasury Designates Six Al-Qaida Terrorists," U.S. Department of the Treasury, September 24, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> *U.S.A. v. Richard Colvin Reid*, "Government's Statement Of Relevant Facts Provided At Defendant's October 4, 2002 Rule 11 Hearing (Not An Exact Transcription)," October 3, 2002; Alan Cullison and Andrew Higgins, "Account of Spy Trip on Kabul PC Matches Travels of Richard Reid," *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2002; "KSM's Trans-Atlantic Shoe Bomb Plot," NEFA Foundation, September 2007.

<sup>19</sup> "Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024," U.S. Department of Defense, March 2007.

<sup>20</sup> "France Tries Trio Over Djerba Synagogue Bombing," *Agence France-Presse*, January 4, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> "Significant Terrorist Incidents, 1961-2003: A Brief

in which the group itself plays nothing more than an inspirational role.

Israeli officials express concern over the rise in prominence and operational capability of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its interest in targeting Israeli and Jewish targets in North Africa, Europe and possibly Israel. AQIM today, one official explained, "is al Qaeda's long arm in Europe" and is proactively seeking to carry out attacks, including operations against Jewish targets. Given its access to Muslim-European and Palestinian operatives who could potentially enter Israel, and the plethora of Jewish and Israeli targets in Europe where AQIM maintains an active network, Israeli analysts see AQIM as the al-Qa`ida element most intent and capable of targeting Israeli interests.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, al-Qa`ida and its global jihad have not yet come to Palestine in any meaningful way. This is in part due to the hostile reception Hamas has provided Palestinian Salafi-jihadi fighters in Gaza. In August 2009, for example, security forces from the Hamas-run government in Gaza—together with militants from the group's Qassam Brigades terrorist wing—raided a mosque affiliated with a Salafi-jihadi preacher and engaged in protracted gun battles with his followers, all members of the group Jund Ansar Allah. The clashes, which left some 24 people dead and 130 wounded, followed a Friday sermon by their cleric, Shaykh `Abd al-Latif Musa, condemning the de facto Hamas government and announcing the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Palestine. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq denounced the Hamas attack on its website, calling on Allah "to avenge the blood of the murdered men and to destroy the Hamas state."<sup>26</sup> The episode highlights both the presence in Gaza of Salafi-jihadi groups inspired by but not formally affiliated with al-Qa`ida and the tensions between these groups and Hamas, a violent Islamist but still Palestinian nationalist group in power in Gaza.<sup>27</sup>

Under stress, however, al-Qa`ida could seek to bolster its image by focusing not only its rhetoric but its operational focus on Israel in an effort to take ownership of the emotive Palestinian issue. Spurred on by al-Qa`ida's continued rhetorical focus on Israel, regional affiliates could ultimately carry out successful attacks on Israeli targets. Local Salafi-jihadi groups in the Gaza Strip could catapult themselves to center stage and demand the attention of al-Qa`ida's core leadership with just one successful attack inflicting significant casualties or targeting a major international figure. In the words of one senior member of the Salafi-jihadi Jaljalat group operating in Gaza, "So far al-Qa`ida has not sponsored our work. We are waiting to carry out a big jihadi operation dedicated to Shaykh Usama bin Ladin. However, our course and doctrine are similar to those of al-Qa`ida. If al-Qa`ida asks us to pledge allegiance to it, we are completely ready for it."<sup>28</sup>

*Dr. Matthew Levitt is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he directs the Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. Dr. Levitt is an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University/SAIS. From 2005 to early 2007, Dr. Levitt served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis at the U.S. Department of the Treasury and before that as an FBI counterterrorism intelligence analyst. He is the author of several books and monographs, including Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad (Yale University Press, 2006) and the forthcoming Al Qaeda Inspired Groups in Palestine: Determined but In Check (Washington Institute, 2009).*

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activity in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and among Israeli-Arabs, see Yoram Cohen and Matthew Levitt, "Al Qaeda Inspired Groups in Palestine: Determined but In Check," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, forthcoming Winter 2009.

28 Hasan Jabr, "Jaljalat' is Waiting to Carry Out a Big Operation in Order to Dedicate it to Bin-Ladin," *al-Ayyam*, July 11, 2009.

## Understanding History's Seven Stages of Jihad

By Sebastian L.v. Gorka

THE POST-9/11 DEBATE on the meaning of "jihad" has often floundered at a superficial understanding of the term. Jihad is often simply referred to as either "striving" or "holy war." Jihad, however, must be understood to consist of four varieties of human activity agreed upon by Islamic theologians and jurists. The first is the jihad of the heart, the so-called "greater jihad" of fighting evil within oneself. The second and third definitions involve the jihads of the mind and tongue, the condoning of "right" behavior in others and counseling those who have gone astray. Finally, there is jihad of the sword. Jihad of the sword is most relevant for the counterterrorism community today because it rests at the foundation of the global jihadist ideology.

The concept of jihad of the sword has been repeatedly reinterpreted and redefined since the days of the Prophet Muhammad. During this extensive time period, jihad by the sword has been used by protagonists to rally co-religionists in the pursuit of a political objective. Al-Qa`ida and the broader Salafi-jihadi movement have also reinterpreted this concept to justify the direct targeting of civilians in terrorist attacks.

To properly understand the historic significance of al-Qa`ida, it is relevant to review the contextual evolution of the concept of jihad and the great success al-Qa`ida has had in redefining it for the current conflict. Since the days of the Prophet Muhammad, jihad by the sword has been shaped by seven, historically-shaped political conceptualizations of jihad, occurring in the following order: empire building; the suppression of apostate subjects; the revolution against "false" Muslim leaders; the anti-colonial struggle and "purification" of the religion; countering Western influence and *jabiliyya*;<sup>1</sup> guerrilla warfare against secular invaders; and finally the direct targeting of civilians in terrorist attacks. This article will identify each contextual interpretation and the significance of jihad as terrorism.

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1 *Jabiliyya* refers to the age of polytheism and "unbelief" that existed before the Prophet Muhammad.

25 Personal interviews, Israeli intelligence officials, Tel Aviv, Israel, September 2009.

26 "The Struggle Between Hamas and the Jihadi-Salafist Networks in the Gaza Strip Affiliated with the Global Jihad," Intelligence and Terrorism Center, October 4, 2009.

27 For an in-depth analysis of Palestinian Salafi-jihadi



### Seven Swords of Jihad

Each of the contextualizations of jihad of the sword has been dictated by the desire to have jihad fill a real, specific and political need for Muslims in a given age and facing a specific threat. When the Prophet Muhammad was building a completely new state, he used the concept of jihad to justify the expansion of Islam. Although the Qur'an does not use the term jihad to refer directly to empire-building in the military sense, sura 25 verse 52 stipulates "obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost endeavor." Understood

### "The seventh political definition of jihad, therefore, is terrorism."

in the context of Muhammad's return to Mecca from Medina, and the ensuing conflict with the Meccans that is reflected in the latter half of an earlier sura, it is clear that striving is in this instance connected to military combat post *hijra*,<sup>2</sup> as Muhammad returns to Mecca and enforces his new writ. This constitutes the first offensive use of the concept, referring to the conflict to establish order among the Arab tribes around Mecca, through the use of force if necessary.

When Muhammad's successor, Abu Bakr, faced recalcitrant tribes on the Arabian Peninsula that were threatening the order Muhammad had previously established, the second meaning of jihad was born: *ridda*, or the war against apostasy, against one's own subjects. In the Western world, this would be equivalent to a war against rebels.

The third contextual definition of jihad came centuries later after the eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate's strength, starting in the second half of the 13th century. It is this reworking of the meaning of holy war, most significantly by Ibn Taymiyya, that has the greatest consequence for today's context. The motivation for this redefinition was the need to provide Muslims with the right to revolt against their own leaders, specifically the Mongols. Islam

had previously prohibited revolution against Muslim rulers. Ibn Taymiyya's answer was to remove the prohibition; he argued that jihad is permissible against one's own leaders if they do not live as true Muslims and if their rule does not conform to the requirements of Shari'a. He said,

And it is known by necessity from the *din* (religion) of the Muslims, and the agreement of all the Muslims, that whoever permits the following of a *din* other than Islam or following a Shari'a other than the Shari'a of Muhammad then he is a *kafir* (unbeliever), and it is like the *kufir* (blasphemy) of one who believes in part of the Book and disbelieves in part of the Book.<sup>3</sup>

Since the fusion of Mongol, Turkic and Tartar power was occurring at the same time that Ibn Taymiyya was writing, he was specific about the threat to "pure" Islam and how Muslims must respond:

Fighting the Tartars, those who came to the land of Shaam is *wajib* (religious duty) according to the Book and the Sunna, for indeed Allah said in the Qur'an: And fight them until *fitna* (schism/blasphemous upheaval) is no more, and the *din* becomes all for Allah.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, in the Middle Ages jihad became legitimate revolution based upon a new mechanism by which the people could denounce their leaders as un-Islamic.

The fourth political reconceptualization of jihad occurred four centuries later, starting in the early 1700s. As the European powers pushed militarily and politically into North Africa, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, the threat to Islamic societies was twofold. Empires such as the British had to be physically resisted. At the same time, the West's cultural influence upon the purity of the Islamic faith was growing and had to be countered. During this period, jihad was defined as anti-colonial resistance. This new

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, "Rulings of Fighting the Mongols," *fatawa*, 28/524.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; See also Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Shaykh al-Imam: Al-Siyasah al-Shariyah fi Islah al-Raiwa Rajiyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Shab, 1976).

interpretation of jihad was typified by the pronouncements of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabi Islam. Its practical and military consequences were amply demonstrated during the decade-long resistance to the 1830 French invasion of Algeria led by `Abd al-Qadir and also by the Sudanese resistance to the British led by the self-proclaimed mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad. The second, non-military element of this redefinition of jihad—what author Noor Mohammad has described as Islam's internal "housecleaning"—was represented by Shah Waliullah's call to spiritual revival and the purification of India's Muslims under British control.<sup>5</sup>

This definition of jihad would lead directly to the next interpretation, one that relies heavily on the principles laid down hundreds of years prior by Ibn Taymiyya, including the doctrine of *takfir* (excommunication). This fifth version of jihad was fathered and later developed by Abu al-A`la Mawdudi in India (then later Pakistan) and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt. This time the threat was embodied by the post-WWII Arab leaders of the Middle East and the influence of Western "soft power," which together equaled a new *jahiliyya*, or age of polytheism and ignorance. Apostate leaders were to be resisted once more (and removed if possible), Islam purified and Shari'a re-imposed.

### Holy War as an International Brand

With the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, jihad would no longer be limited to resistance against the cultural and political influence of the secular West or un-Islamic Arab rulers. Although it is true that within Afghanistan, among the Afghans, the motivation to resist Soviet domination did not have to be couched in terms of theology but simply in terms of survival and sovereignty, to the Arab mujahidin recruited by the Palestinian Abdullah Azzam, jihad was a crucial concept, a brand Azzam assiduously built in his travels around the world. Most importantly, Azzam built his jihadist brand in a way that negated earlier requirements for holy war to be declared by a legitimate authority, as he redefined military resistance as an individual duty. In his introduction to

<sup>5</sup> Noor Mohammad, "The Doctrine of Jihad: An Introduction," *Journal of Law and Religion* 3:2 (1985): p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> The *hijra* refers to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina.

“Defense of Muslim Lands,” he plainly stated that “...if a piece of Muslim land the size of a hand-span is infringed upon, then jihad becomes *fard `ayn* (a personal obligation) on every Muslim male and female, where the child shall march forward without the permission of its parents and the wife without the permission of the husband.” Azzam invoked Ibn Taymiyya by name to justify his version of self-declared jihad and then warned his audiences of the price they would pay if they did not follow the path of military resistance. Quoting from the Qur’an, sura 9 verse 39: “If you march not forth, He will punish you with a painful torment and will replace you with another people, and you cannot harm Him at all, and Allah is able to do all things.”<sup>6</sup> By the late 1980s, Azzam’s rebranding of Muslim holy war in a new political and geostrategic context was so successful that even in the West jihad would become synonymous with guerrilla resistance to communist invasion and dictatorship.

Only after the eventual defeat of the Soviets, the end of the Cold War and the outbreak of the first Gulf War would the seventh and most important redefining of jihad of the sword be born. With Azzam’s death in 1989, his organization of Arab guerrillas, the Mujahidin Services Bureau (MAK), was taken over by his deputy Usama bin Ladin. Rejected by his own government when he offered to protect Saudi Arabia from Iraq with his Arab fighters, Bin Ladin would change the mission and name of his organization. The “godless” Russians had been defeated, the bipolar world order replaced by the hegemony of a victorious United States, a country that had been invited to bring its troops and influence into the Arabian Peninsula to defend Saudi Arabia from Iraq. Guerrilla warfare within Saudi Arabia against the apostate House of Saud and against U.S. targets was impractical, if not impossible.

Several influential figures who had followed the teachings of the original Muslim Brotherhood and its leader Hassan al-Banna, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, had, after the severe crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, joined the MAK. Bin Ladin’s

Wahhabi understanding of jihad would be suffused with the ideology of the Egyptian Qutbists. What resulted was al-Qa`ida and a new indirect approach to violent jihad. Subsequently, the meaning of jihad was expanded for a seventh time since Muhammad built his empire in the seventh century. The fight would be focused less on irregular warfare in countries where Muslims were suffering and more on the “far enemy,” which they identified as supporters of tyrannical regimes in the Muslim world. With the East Africa embassy bombings, the *USS Cole* attack and then finally the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, Bin Ladin successfully defined jihad as willful targeting of civilians by a non-state actor through unconventional means. The seventh political definition of jihad, therefore, is terrorism.

#### Conclusion

It is crucial for analysts and strategic planners to fully understand this mutation and evolution of the concept of jihad over time. It is incorrect to see jihad solely as a religious concept referring to the striving of the individual to be pure, because jihad of the sword is referenced in the hadith in multiple instances. It is clear that the meaning of violent jihad has been shaped during the centuries to fit the needs of those espousing holy war and calling their co-religionists to the battlefield. Usama bin Ladin’s great historical significance is that he managed to turn jihad from referring to guerrilla resistance against military oppression of the 1980s to mean the killing of mass numbers of civilians on the soil of non-Muslim lands. Understanding this contextual evolution is critical in the effort to find strategies to weaken al-Qa`ida’s ideology.

*Dr. Sebastian Gorka teaches irregular warfare and counterterrorism at the College of International Security Affairs of the National Defense University, Washington D.C. He is an Associate Fellow of the Joint Special Operations University (USSOCOM) whose first degree was in Philosophy and Theology. Most recently, he co-authored, with David Kilcullen, “Who’s Winning the Battle for Narrative: Al-Qaida versus the United States and its Allies,” in Influence Warfare (Praeger 2009). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Defense or any other government agency.*

## Mao Tse-tung and the Search for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Counterinsurgency

By Thomas A. Marks

IN ANY DISCUSSION of insurgency, the works of Mao Tse-tung are unavoidable. His innovations resulted in “people’s war,” a formulation that lifted the asymmetric challenge from the tactical and military to the strategic and political. Mao was to irregular war what Napoleon and Clausewitz were to regular warfare. Yet today his insights are altogether ignored by Western analysts, who continue to look elsewhere for guidance.

The writings of Mao, however, are essential to achieving and maintaining success in the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. This article explains how Western analysts misinterpret Mao’s writings, the importance of understanding Mao’s approach to irregular challenges, and the implications Mao’s theories have on today’s counterinsurgency campaigns.

#### Failing to Understand Mao’s Thought

If there is any one error that hobbles the use of Mao, it is to focus strictly on the “military” aspects of his thought to the neglect of his other theories. The only widely read Maoist work, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, was in fact a 1937 training manual that was only a stepping stone to a much larger and more complex body of “people’s war” work. In his larger body of work, he stated the fundamental reality that all insurgency is strategically political and directed operationally through multiple lines of effort (only one of which was violence) toward mobilizing a challenge to the state (i.e., a counter-state) sufficient to dominate the correlation of forces.

Mao’s own framework was driven by the circumstances of China as he found it. The need to transition from guerrilla to regular warfare was because he knew in his circumstances that lesser forms of violence could never be decisive. When weak, insurgents wage the war of the weak, using terror and guerrilla warfare. The primary targets of violence during this strategic defensive stage are local notables and representatives of the state, as well as police and those

<sup>6</sup> This is otherwise known as part of the Sura at Taubah (Repentance).

who will rally the people against the insurgency. As the insurgents grow stronger, the neutralization of the military becomes the objective, with the goal to achieve strategic stalemate. Ultimately, the insurgents will go on the strategic offensive.

Strategic stalemate could only be achieved, Mao observed, through force-on-force action conducted by “regular” units. He called this mobile/maneuver warfare, which is also translated as “main force warfare.”<sup>1</sup> Terror and guerrilla warfare were not so much warfare as armed politics. Their use

**“Armed reform must be the counter to revolutionary warfare. Success is never merely protection of the status quo, but the building of a new world that is superior to the vision advanced by the revolutionary challenger.”**

opened up control of the population to the counter-state and allowed it to engage in the same mobilization of population and resources as would the state itself. As this mobilization effort produced greater combat power, regularization occurred. Insurgent units could then prevent the government’s military from reclaiming areas that had become part of the counter-state. Having forced a stalemate, the insurgents could then complete their regularization and take the offensive.

This process is misrepresented in U.S. military publications (to include the recently released JP 3-24 *Counterinsurgency Operations*). These publications suggest

<sup>1</sup> Mao repeated constantly in all his work that guerrilla units could not be decisive and had to “regularize” to become copies of regular government units (i.e., battalions, regiments, armies). Simultaneously, however, he emphasized that the transition was a delicate balancing act driven by the need of guerrilla warfare to mobilize the people even while neutralizing government regular forces. The terms “main forces” and “regular forces” ultimately came to be used as synonyms as the Vietnamese favored the first term.

that non-violent organizations build up to violence (Phase I, in U.S. military literature), then guerrilla warfare follows (Phase II), then conventional warfare culminates the process (Phase III). To the contrary, as Mao made clear time and again, violence is integral to all phases of insurgency. It is merely used at a level appropriate to the situation to eliminate resistance and government presence so that insurgent politics can produce mass and resource mobilization. Mao’s critique of Che Guevara’s *foco* approach was precisely that of Ayman al-Zawahiri’s apparent letter to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq: over-emphasis of violence to the neglect of political work. Violence, Mao stated, was but a weapon used by armed politicians and insurgents.

Mobilization, however, depends upon local circumstances, with local particulars often at variance with the larger organizational positions. If the insurgent organization is able to establish tight command and control (C2), it will dominate local activity. If the opposite holds, with local concerns holding sway, the “insurgency” will remain a welter of largely uncoordinated local actions.

Mao would be the first to point out two caveats. First, C2 is a function of time and space. An insurgency in its early stages does not have the form it will assume later. The U.S. mistake in Iraq, as an easy illustration, was to hold up the Viet Cong organization as a straw man, claiming that there were no lessons to be learned from Vietnam since that foe was hierarchical, while the Iraqi insurgents were not. This ignored the reality that all insurgencies look like Iraq early on, and that there is a constant drive by dominant players to establish tight C2 over dispersed, uncoordinated, and even rival elements.

The Afghan Taliban movement also fits this mold. It is still comprised of numerous local motivations and forces, but the dominant players seek unity. The present lack of unity creates the possibility of splitting the movement and is an important fact at this point in time, but Mao would correctly note that it is inevitable that greater C2 unity will be achieved (unless peculiar local circumstances dictate otherwise).

Second, Mao would argue that circumstances in Afghanistan and Iraq are different from those he faced because there were no U.S. forces present in China as the lynchpins of the conflict. The case of Vietnam, however, is more relevant. In this conflict, Mao supported the Vietnamese dual approach of using military power to shatter the South Vietnamese by breaking the will of the American interlopers. In this sense, producing American casualties in Vietnam, by whatever means, served to remove the critical element without which the indigenous forces could not survive.

In Iraq, “the surge” was the appropriate response to the conflict and prevented the insurgents from moving beyond IEDs and unfocused guerrilla action to anything more substantive. The several occasions when the insurgents did mass in larger numbers resulted in their decimation and exposed them further because the U.S. surge allowed troops to pursue them vigorously.

In contrast, in Afghanistan, the failure to implement the same process creates a situation where even U.S. platoons are at risk, with the forces of NATO far more endangered. Taliban units as large as 400 men have been identified in some areas, with complementary local presence demonstrated in incidents of terror and guerrilla action not unlike those of China or Vietnam. With the growing resources available from the drug trade and other support, the Afghan Taliban are regularizing at a rapid rate, which bodes ill for a status quo response to the situation.

#### **Mao’s Approach to Irregular Challenges**

To defeat insurgents, it is necessary to look at Mao’s approach to irregular challenges. Mao highlights that violence is critical to insurgencies. Yet it was not the most important element. The most important element was “the cause,” or the politics of the insurgent effort. Violence allowed “the cause” to advance, and it did so on five complementary and intertwined lines of effort: violence with politics, winning allies outside the movement, using non-violence to make violence more effective, and international efforts.

These lines of effort are the “answers” to five questions a counterinsurgent must ask of any irregular challenge:

1. What is the political content of the movement?
2. Who are its domestic allies?
3. How is it using violence?
4. How is it using non-violence?
5. What is it doing internationally?

In representing his “answers” to these questions, Mao used a synthesis of terminology and concepts drawn from individuals such as Jomini and Clausewitz (whom he had read in translation) and key Marxist-Leninists (especially Lenin and Trotsky). Of greatest value was his use of lines of effort and campaigns/battles.<sup>2</sup>

Although U.S. manuals utilize decision-points as the constituent elements on lines of operation/effort, Mao would use the Marxist-Leninist term “struggles.” A series of struggles (i.e., battles) thus comprises a “campaign,” as it would in conventional usage. Lines of effort, in turn, are comprised of these campaigns, which move through time and space.

Mao saw the political line of effort comprised of two struggles (campaigns): popular and resource mobilization. Furthermore, any struggle, he wrote, would have numerous smaller struggles (sub-campaigns in Western literature). In perhaps his greatest insight, he observed that these unfolded not only on the ground (tangible space) but in the mind (intangible space). Every act had to be considered for both its immediate effects (e.g., assassinating a recalcitrant village elder) and its follow-on effects (e.g., the fear generated from the assassination). Such assessment was carried out at all levels of planning (tactical, operational, and strategic) and was implemented perhaps to its pinnacle by the Vietnamese.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> To be clear, this reading of Mao is the author’s, as discussed in his various works on the subject, especially his most recent book, *Maoist People’s War in Post-Vietnam Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2007). The subject of just what and who Mao consulted remains a neglected topic of research. It is not altogether clear, for instance, that he actually wrote *On Guerrilla Warfare*, as opposed to putting his name on a staff product.

<sup>3</sup> The best discussions remain those of Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966) and Douglas Pike, *PAVN* (Novato, CA: Da Capo Press, 1986).

What was particularly dazzling was Mao’s use of multiple frameworks in his conceptualization process. He had no trouble, as noted above, using standard military terminology and concepts for violence. Battles along a line of operation became a campaign, and a series of campaigns executed a military strategy. Simultaneously, he used appropriate political vocabulary and ideas to discuss struggles merging into campaigns, unfolding as efforts directed in time and space (i.e., lines of

**“To the contrary, as Mao made clear time and again, violence is integral to all phases of insurgency. It is merely used at a level appropriate to the situation to eliminate resistance and government presence so that insurgent politics can produce mass and resource mobilization.”**

effort). The non-violence line of effort, which was called “political warfare,” was perhaps the most complex because its struggles could be conceptualized in a variety of different ways. What Mao found most useful, however, was to use the target audiences as the objects of struggles. This decoupled these campaigns from their delivery systems. “Information warfare,” to use a particularly apt example, was not a campaign, only a means to influence a target audience, which simultaneously was being influenced by other means (e.g., subversion, which was included within political warfare).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Also used to translate the Chinese “political warfare” is the term “allegiance warfare,” which is that used by Monte Bullard in his excellent *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan’s Development* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1997). His earlier work on the institutionalization of political warfare in China may be found in Monte Bullard, *China’s Political-Military Evolution: The Party and the Military in the PRC, 1960-1984* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985). Concerning the Chinese “PolWar” system, see Edward C. O’Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

U.S. leadership never understood the relationship between the non-violence line of effort and the other lines of effort. This should not be a surprise because operational art itself entered U.S. usage only relatively recently through the study of the Soviet Union.

#### Implications

It is principally “others” who have grasped the implications of Mao’s insights and their meaning for counterinsurgency. Peru and Colombia are two clear cases. In fact, most insurgencies are unsuccessful, and they fail precisely because they fail to advance simultaneously along the five lines of effort outlined by Mao. FARC, for instance, adopted people’s war as its warfighting doctrine yet consistently overemphasized the violence line of effort. It became a large *foco* in search of a mass base, thus a perfect target for a multifaceted, whole-of-government response by the state.

The FARC case illustrates that, whether Maoist or not, insurgencies must pursue the Maoist strategic essentials as realized in operational art. Although each state that has achieved victory has done so in a particular manner, appropriate to its national circumstances (especially culture), ample evidence exists to demonstrate that the assessment that led to correct adaptation followed the analytical outline already discussed. Analysis of insurgent strategy and operational art led to detailed plans intended to neutralize the identified elements.

This is where the value of Mao’s analysis lies today. It is all but a truism to observe that each insurgency is different. Nevertheless, Mao has provided an approach which, when turned inside out, allows insight into any insurgent project (and any irregular challenge). Beyond all else, counterinsurgency must be built upon political mobilization enabled by security. The more that the irregular challenge veers toward pure terrorism and divorces itself from a mass base, the more relevant traditional “hearts and minds” activity will become (“wells, roads, and shots”). The closer the challenge is to implementing fully Mao’s five lines of effort, the more good governance rooted in legitimacy must be the state’s response.

The reality that the strategic quest for legitimacy is the heart of the matter is often said, but little understood. It was the conundrum faced by the United States in Vietnam, where a contest of Vietnamese nationalisms, communist and noncommunist, saw advantage go to the former due to the latter being fatally wounded by corruption and inefficiency. The United States tried unsuccessfully for a decade (1955-65) to support nation-building, then intervened directly with regular forces (1965-73) in an effort to change the correlation of forces. In contrast, the Taiwan advisory mission of only dozens sought to reinforce “will” by emphasizing activities that comprised campaigns on the non-violence line of effort. It sought to emphasize “why we fight” programs and actions to build legitimacy that would allow enhanced national mobilization.

Not surprisingly, “why we fight” remains the heart of the challenges the United States faces around the globe. It is significant that the most salient illustration of an answer—transparent and effective governance by a democratic, market economy state—has been provided by Colombia, a country in which the United States has been intimately involved since World War II. Bogota grasped the heart of the matter and built success. That success first came from a sound assessment of the flawed adoption of the people’s war approach by FARC within a rapidly changing global context; second, through mobilizing the inherent strengths of a democratic order. The strategy of “Democratic Security” used lines of effort that neutralized FARC’s own strategy and operational art even as popular mobilization swamped the insurgents.

Asked at one point what “counterinsurgency philosophy” he was following, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe noted that he was only engaging in politics, determining the needs of the people and then rallying them behind programs that addressed those needs. Since the system had legitimacy, the people were willing to support it in its effort to neutralize the counter-state, which in turn was built upon winning the myriad local wars. In that final effort, the central weapon was the approximately 600 platoons of the Home Guard, or “Peasant Soldiers.” Even

the political opposition supported the state’s effort, and an array of nonviolent efforts complemented violence. Abroad, Colombian representatives spoke with one voice when it came to the legitimacy of the democratic order. It was a Colombian people’s war that overwhelmed the increasingly externally sustained, dwindling forces of FARC. Tactical shifts, such as greater emphasis upon special operations, could then follow.

These are the lessons for counterinsurgent forces today, whether dealing with global insurgency or its individual theaters. Bin Ladin and his al-Qa`ida project are neo-Guevarist, but in localities it is often people’s war that dominates “terrorist” strategy and operational art. As a result, it is a balanced, multifaceted response, appropriate to the local level, however defined, that will produce victory. Armed reform must be the counter to revolutionary warfare. Success is never merely protection of the status quo, but the building of a new world that is superior to the vision advanced by the revolutionary challenger. Mao would be the first to admit that the devil is in the details, but he would conclude that tactics are meaningless in the absence of sound strategy and operational art driven by an accurate and penetrating analysis of the conflict.

*Dr. Thomas A. Marks is a political risk consultant based in Honolulu and the author of several benchmark works on Maoist insurgency, including Maoist People’s War in Post-Vietnam Asia (Bangkok, 2007) and Counterrevolution in China: Wang Sheng and the Kuomintang (London, 1998).*

## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

September 1, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine authorities announced the arrest of a suspected terrorist accused of kidnapping at least four Americans and dozens of Filipinos. Hajer Sailani, an alleged member of the Abu Sayyaf Group, was arrested at some point last week in Cotabato City. – *BBC, September 1; New York Times, September 1*

September 2, 2009 (AUSTRALIA): An Australian court sentenced Shane Kent to five years in prison for being part of a terrorist cell and making a jihadist propaganda video. Kent participated in jihadist military training at the al-Faruq camp in Afghanistan in August 2001. Due to time already served, however, Kent will be eligible for parole in nine months. – *Herald Sun, September 2*

September 2, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghanistan’s second-ranking intelligence official was killed by a suicide bomber in Laghman Province. Abdullah Laghmani, the deputy director of the National Directorate for Security, was killed along with at least 15 others. The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. – *New York Times, September 2*

September 2, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen shot and wounded Hamid Saeed Kazmi, Pakistan’s religious affairs minister. The attack occurred in Islamabad. – *Reuters, September 2*

September 4, 2009 (THAILAND): A bomb in a truck exploded in southern Thailand’s Yala Province, killing a policeman and wounding 10 villagers. – *Reuters, September 4*

September 5, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani security forces reportedly killed at least 43 Islamist militants in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The operation targeted militants part of Lashkar-i-Islam and their headquarters in Khyber’s Tirrah valley. – *AFP, September 5*

September 7, 2009 (UNITED KINGDOM): A jury in the United Kingdom declared three men guilty of plotting to blow up transatlantic planes in an al-Qa`ida terrorist plot. The men, Abdulla Ahmed

Ali, Tanvir Hussain and Assad Sarwar, were part of the so-called “liquid explosives” plot in August 2006. The three men could be sentenced to life in prison. Four other defendants, however, were acquitted of the same charges. – *Los Angeles Times*, September 8

September 7, 2009 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at a checkpoint just outside Ramadi, Anbar Province. The attack killed nine people. – *Reuters*, September 7

September 7, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed five suspected militants near Mir Ali in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Local officials said that four of the dead were ethnic Arab militants. Early press reports stated that Algerian national and al-Qa`ida member Mustafa al-Jaziri, in addition to Pakistani guerrilla commander Ilyas Kashmiri, may have been killed in the attack. – *BBC*, September 8; *UPI*, September 8; *New York Times*, September 18

September 8, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle blew up outside the entrance to Kabul’s international airport. Three Afghan civilians were killed. The Afghan Taliban claimed credit for the attack and said that it targeted a foreign military convoy. – *BBC*, September 8; *Voice of America*, September 8

September 8, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban militants killed four schoolchildren in Atmankhel town of Orakzai Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Officials stated that the attack was sectarian and the children were targeted because they were Shi`a. Atmankhel tribesmen reportedly retaliated for the attack on the schoolchildren and killed two militants. – *Christian Science Monitor*, September 8

September 8, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen on the outskirts of Quetta set fire to eight trucks carrying fuel supplies to NATO forces in neighboring Afghanistan. Quetta is the capital of Baluchistan Province. – *AFP*, September 8

September 9, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives outside Camp Bastion, a major British base in southern Helmand Province.

The explosion killed at least two Afghan civilians. – *AFP*, September 9

September 10, 2009 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated a truck filled with explosives in the Kurdish village of Wardak in northern Iraq, killing at least 19 civilians. A second suicide bomber, also in a truck filled with explosives, tried to detonate a second blast in the same village, but Kurdish *peshmerga* forces killed him before he reached the inside of the town. The village of Wardak lies 18 miles east of Mosul. – *Reuters*, September 9

September 10, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Muslim Khan, the spokesman for Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan’s Swat faction, was apprehended by authorities. Four other senior Tehrik-i-Taliban leaders were also captured. – *Dawn*, September 12

September 11, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed 14 civilians in Uruzgan Province’s Chora district. – *AFP*, September 11

September 11, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters attacked a police post in Kunduz Province and killed seven policemen. – *AFP*, September 11

September 12, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters and Afghan and international forces clashed in western Farah Province, leaving seven Afghan and two U.S. soldiers dead. Approximately 40-50 Taliban militants were killed. – *AFP*, September 13

September 12, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at the gate of a police station in Hangu District of the North-West Frontier Province. The attack injured a police official and two civilians. – *Dawn*, September 13

September 12, 2009 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives after being confronted by police in Grozny. The bomber was killed, and three police officers were injured. – *Focus News Agency*, September 12

September 13, 2009 (GLOBAL): A new audio message purportedly from al-Qa`ida leader Usama bin Ladin was posted on jihadist websites. – *Voice of America*, September 14; *The Australian*, September 14

September 13, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A roadside bomb killed three Pakistani soldiers in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Voice of America*, September 13

September 13, 2009 (THAILAND): A group of militants attacked an army ranger base in Yala Province, killing five Thai soldiers. – *Reuters*, September 13

September 14, 2009 (UNITED STATES): Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and police officers from the terrorism task force raided three apartments in New York City that had been visited by a possible al-Qa`ida operative. The possible operative had returned to the United States from Afghanistan recently. The suspect was later identified as Najibullah Zazi, who is 24-years-old. – *Toronto Star*, September 15; *USA Today*, September 16

September 14, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed four alleged militants near Mir Ali in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. One of the dead was later identified as Najmiddin Kamolitdinovic Jalolov (also known as Abu Yahya Muhammad Fatih), a senior Uzbek militant linked to al-Qa`ida. Jalolov was the founder of the Islamic Jihad Union. – *BBC*, September 14; *Reuters*, September 17

September 14, 2009 (SOMALIA): U.S. commandos launched a raid in southern Somalia and killed wanted al-Qa`ida militant Salah Ali Salah Nabhan. Nabhan was wanted for playing a leading role in an al-Qa`ida attack on an Israeli hotel in Mombasa, Kenya in 2002; he may have also been involved in al-Qa`ida’s U.S. Embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. According to the *New York Times*, “American military forces have been hunting [Nabhan] for years, and...villagers near the town of Baraawe said four military helicopters suddenly materialized over the horizon and shot at two trucks rumbling through the desert.” The trucks were carrying al-Shabab fighters, in addition to Nabhan and other foreign fighters. The *New York Times* report further stated that “the helicopters landed, and the commandos inspected the wreckage and carried away the bodies of Mr. Nabhan and other fighters for identification.” – *New York Times*, September 14

September 15, 2009 (UNITED STATES): A federal court in New York sentenced Oussama Abdullah Kassir to life in prison for trying to establish an al-Qa`ida training camp in the United States and operating websites that contained information on how to make bombs. – *Reuters, September 15*

September 15, 2009 (UNITED STATES): U.S. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair said that the United States is targeting al-Qa`ida more aggressively because the U.S. government has finally built up years of information on the group. – *AFP, September 15*

September 15, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Sher Mohammad Qasab, a feared Pakistani Taliban leader known for beheading opponents, was apprehended by authorities after an army operation. Qasab reportedly sustained injuries during the operation. – *BBC, September 16*

September 15, 2009 (SOMALIA): A spokesman for al-Shabab said that the group would attack Western targets in retaliation for the September 14 death of al-Qa`ida operative Salah Ali Salah Nabhan, who was killed in a U.S. military raid in southern Somalia. – *Guardian, September 15*

September 16, 2009 (RUSSIA): A female suicide bomber detonated her explosives next to a police car in Grozny, the capital of Russia's southern region of Chechnya. Six people were wounded in the blast. The bomber was described as a "young woman" by an eyewitness. – *Reuters, September 16*

September 17, 2009 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. judge ordered the Barack Obama administration to release a Kuwaiti detainee held at Guantanamo Bay. The detainee, Fouad al-Rabiah, has been in detention for seven years on charges of conspiracy and providing material support to al-Qa`ida and the Taliban. – *Reuters, September 17*

September 17, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber driving an explosives-laden vehicle killed six Italian soldiers in Kabul. At least 10 civilians were also killed in the blast. – *BBC, September 17*

September 17, 2009 (INDONESIA): Indonesian police killed Noordin Mohamed Top, a top leader in the al-

Qa`ida linked Jemaah Islamiya terrorist group and the most wanted militant in Indonesia. The killing was seen as a major success for Indonesia, as Noordin was involved in multiple terrorist attacks in the country, including the August 2003 JW Marriott hotel bombing in Jakarta and possibly the July 17, 2009 twin suicide bombings at the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta. DNA tests confirmed the identity of Noordin's body. – *Reuters, September 17; Bloomberg, September 18*

September 17, 2009 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab suicide bombers launched a major attack on the headquarters of the African Union peacekeeping force in Mogadishu. The al-Shabab fighters disguised two vehicles with United Nations markings and followed a legitimate UN convoy directly into the headquarters. The al-Shabab suicide bombers detonated their explosives and killed 17 peacekeepers, including the AU force's second-in-command from Burundi, Major-General Juvenal Niyonguruza. Other senior leaders were injured. It is believed that one of the bombers may have been a Somali-American from Seattle, Washington. An al-Shabab spokesman later said that the attack was revenge for the September 14 death of al-Qa`ida operative Salah Ali Salah Nabhan, who was killed by U.S. special forces in southern Somalia. – *Telegraph, September 17; AFP, September 17; CNN, September 24*

September 18, 2009 (GERMANY): Al-Qa`ida spokesman Abu Talha (also known as Bekkay Harrach) appeared in a new video warning Germans that there would be a "bad awakening" in Germany if they did not vote to change their government in the September 27 national elections. Abu Talha spoke in German on the video, and told Muslims to avoid vital services in Germany for two weeks following the elections. He also wore a suit and tie and was clean shaven. – *Bloomberg, September 18*

September 18, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber driving an explosives-laden vehicle killed 33 people after striking a hotel and market on the outskirts of Kohat, in the North-West Frontier Province. – *Reuters, September 18; AP, September 18*

September 19, 2009 (UNITED STATES): U.S. authorities arrested Najibullah Zazi on charges of making false statements to federal agents after investigators allegedly discovered bomb-making instructions on his laptop. His father, Mohammed Wali Zazi, was also arrested, along with Ahmad Wais Afzali, an Afghan immigrant in New York. Both Najibullah Zazi and his father were arrested in Colorado. The men are suspected of being part of an al-Qa`ida sleeper cell that was planning a major terrorist attack in the United States. – *The Times, September 21*

September 20, 2009 (GERMANY): Al-Qa`ida spokesman Abu Talha (also known as Bekkay Harrach) appeared in a new online video threatening Germany. Unlike his video on September 18 in which he wore a suit and tie, in the latest video Abu Talha wore a mask. – *Reuters, September 20*

September 20, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Sher Mohammad Qasab, a feared Pakistani Taliban leader who was apprehended on September 15, died in government custody, presumably from injuries sustained during his arrest. – *Dawn, September 20*

September 20, 2009 (SOMALIA): The Somali insurgent group al-Shabab released a new 48-minute video in which its leader, Abu Zubayr, pledged loyalty to Usama bin Ladin. In the video, crowds of al-Shabab fighters chanted "at your service, Usama," and Abu Zubayr said, "we await your [Usama bin Ladin] guidance in this advanced stage of jihad." In addition to appearing on the web, al-Shabab fighters reportedly distributed the video in several neighborhoods in Mogadishu. It was the first time that the group officially pledged loyalty to al-Qa`ida. – *Voice of America, September 22; AFP, September 22; CBS News, September 22*

September 20, 2009 (SOMALIA): A leading Islamist leader in Somalia, Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys, called upon "the people" to "carry out more attacks against African [Union] forces; they came to Somalia to assist our enemy, kill them...in any way possible and use suicide attacks to kill them." Aweys is part of the Hisbul Islamiyya militant opposition group in Somalia. – *AFP, September 20*

September 20, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine Marines seized the Abu Sayyaf Group's (ASG) main camp in the jungles of Sulu Province in the southern Philippines. During the fighting, eight soldiers and at least 22 ASG terrorists were killed. The military launched the operation with the hopes of capturing or killing three senior ASG leaders who were believed to be in the camp; the three leaders, however, were not killed or captured in the fighting. - *Philippine Star*, September 22; *Bloomberg*, September 22

September 21, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Pakistan's military arrested Nasim Shah (also known as Abu Faraj), who was identified as a close associate of the Swat Taliban chief Maulana Fazlullah. Shah is allegedly an expert at making suicide vests and training suicide bombers. - *Voice of America*, September 21

September 22, 2009 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video statement apparently marking the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. In the video, al-Zawahiri said, "Obama has resorted to the policies of his predecessors in lying and selling illusions." In his concluding remarks, he said, "America has got involved in many wars and lost them...But this one isn't like others. You have become embroiled with the Islamic nation and its mujahidin, and the nation has begun to wake up." - *Reuters*, September 22; *Reuters*, September 23

September 22, 2009 (SOUTH AFRICA): The U.S. government temporarily closed its embassy, three consulates and other aid offices in South Africa. U.S. officials "refused to disclose any details about the threat that prompted" the closures, according to *Voice of America*. A South African newspaper, however, said that the closures were prompted after an al-Qa`ida-linked group telephoned a threat to the U.S. Embassy on September 21. - *Voice of America*, September 24

September 23, 2009 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab named its own governing council to run the strategic port city of Kismayo. According to *Reuters*, however, the move angered the militant opposition group *Hisbul Islamiyya*: "Both groups want to control Kismayo, which is a lucrative source of taxes and other income for their fighters, and until

this week they controlled the port in an uneasy alliance...Residents say both sides are rushing in reinforcements in anticipation of battle, and on Thursday [September 24] a senior *Hisbul Islam* leader said that they would not recognise the new authority." - *Reuters*, September 24

September 24, 2009 (UNITED STATES): Najibullah Zazi, who was arrested on September 19 on charges of making false statements to federal agents, was indicted in New York on a charge of conspiring to detonate bombs against targets in the United States. According to *USA Today*, the indictment stated that "Zazi received explosives training from al-Qaeda and bought large quantities of hydrogen peroxide and nail-polish remover at beauty supply stores to make bombs." - *USA Today*, September 25

September 24, 2009 (UNITED STATES): The Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested Hosam Maher Husein Smadi, a 19-year-old Jordanian accused of trying to blow up an office tower in downtown Dallas, Texas. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, "Authorities said the Jordanian, who claimed to be a supporter of al-Qaeda, parked an SUV packed with what he thought were explosives outside Fountain Place, a 60-story office tower at Ross Avenue and Field Street." He is charged with trying to detonate a weapon of mass destruction. The case was not connected to a similar case in Illinois involving Michael C. Finton. - *Dallas Morning News*, September 26

September 24, 2009 (UNITED STATES): The Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested Michael C. Finton on charges of attempted murder of federal employees and attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction. Finton, who converted to Islam while in an Illinois prison from 2001-2006, drove a van he thought was loaded with explosives to the Paul Findley Federal Building in Springfield, Illinois. According to the *New York Times*, Finton then allegedly "locked the vehicle, then moved a few blocks away before twice making cellphone calls he believed would trigger a blast that would kill or injure people inside the building." The operation involved undercover FBI agents posing as low-level al-Qa`ida operatives. The case was not connected to a similar case in Texas involving Hosam Maher Husein Smadi. - *New York Times*, September 27

September 24, 2009 (GERMANY): Al-Qa`ida released a third video threatening Germany before its upcoming September 27 parliamentary elections. The latest video called on Muslims in Germany to take part in jihad. - *AP*, September 25

September 24, 2009 (IRAQ): Sixteen al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) operatives escaped from a prison in Tikrit, Salah al-Din Province. Five of the escaped men were awaiting execution. According to one Iraqi official, "We suspect that they had accomplices inside [the prison] because there was such a high number of fugitives." One of the escapees was recaptured on the same day. Five of the escaped men, including the "ringleader," were recaptured the following day on September 25. - *AFP*, September 24; *AFP*, September 25

September 24, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed 10 militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. - *AFP*, September 29

September 25, 2009 (GLOBAL): Usama bin Ladin purportedly released a new audio statement calling on European countries to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan, stating that "an intelligent man does not waste his money and sons for a gang of criminals in Washington." The statement had German and English subtitles. - *BBC*, September 25

September 25, 2009 (AUSTRALIA): An Australian court sentenced Belal Khazaal to nine years in jail for producing a training manual on how to conduct jihad, which included information on how to make bombs, conduct assassinations and shoot down airliners. He was arrested in June 2004. - *AFP*, September 24

September 26, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden truck into a police station in Bannu District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing 10 people. Other reports said that two vehicles may have been involved. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. - *Reuters*, September 26; *AP*, September 26

September 26, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed 10 people in Peshawar,



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**CONTACT**

Combating Terrorism Center  
U.S. Military Academy  
607 Cullum Road, Lincoln Hall  
West Point, NY 10996  
Phone: (845) 667-6383  
Email: [sentinel@usma.edu](mailto:sentinel@usma.edu)  
Web: [www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/)

\* For Press Inquiries: (845) 667-6383

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the capital of the North-West Frontier Province. The bomber first threw a hand grenade toward a crowd of people, and then detonated the approximately 100 kilograms of explosives in the vehicle. – *Reuters, September 26*

September 27, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghanistan's energy and water minister, Mohammad Ismail Khan, escaped injury after Afghan Taliban tried to kill him in a roadside bombing. The attack, which occurred in Herat Province, killed at least three people. – *Reuters, September 27*

September 27, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone may have killed Tahir Yuldashev, the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The attack occurred in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *Reuters, October 2; The Times, October 2*

September 28, 2009 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio statement eulogizing slain Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, who was killed in August by a suspected U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle. Al-Zawahiri also criticized U.S. President Barack Obama on the audio recording, stating: "Have we realized the truth of Obama the criminal, or do we still need more crimes to be carried out in Kabul, Baghdad, Mogadishu and Gaza to be sure of his criminality?" – *AP, September 28; AFP, September 28*

September 28, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants ambushed a convoy of trucks in Kunar Province, killing six drivers and burning their vehicles. A seventh truck driver was kidnapped. The trucks were carrying construction materials and were headed to a military base. – *AP, September 28*

September 28, 2009 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber drove a truck packed with explosives into an Iraqi police outpost in Ramadi in Anbar Province, killing at least seven people. The truck exploded near the front gate of the post. – *AP, September 28*

September 28, 2009 (PAKISTAN): Kalimullah Mehsud, the brother of new Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud, was killed by Pakistan's

security forces. The clash occurred in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *BBC, October 1*

September 28, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed an anti-Taliban tribal elder in the Bakakhel area of Bannu District in the North-West Frontier Province. The elder, Gul Hakim, was killed along with three others. – *BBC, September 28*

September 29, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A bus filled with civilians traveling from Herat to Kandahar hit a roadside bomb, killing at least 30 people on the bus. Ten children and seven women were among the dead. – *BBC, September 29*

September 29, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed five suspected Taliban militants in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, September 29*

September 29, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone fired missiles at militants associated with the Haqqani network in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Seven Afghan Taliban may have been killed in the attack. – *AFP, September 29*

September 29, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Two U.S. Navy personnel and one Philippine soldier were killed by a landmine in Sulu Province in the southern Philippines. They were the first deaths since 2002 among U.S. forces deployed to the Philippines. – *GMA News.tv, September 29; Reuters, September 29*

September 29, 2009 (PHILIPPINES): Suspected Abu Sayyaf Group militants detonated explosives to damage a bridge used by Philippine Army tanks in Sulu Province in the southern Philippines. – *AP, September 30*

September 30, 2009 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. unmanned aerial drone killed approximately six people near Mir Ali in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *BBC, September 30*