



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# CTC SENTINEL

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## Contents

### FEATURE ARTICLE

- 1 Between Islamization and Secession: The Contest for Northern Mali**  
By Derek Henry Flood

### REPORTS

- 6 A Profile of AQAP's Upper Echelon**  
By Gregory D. Johnsen
- 9 Taliban Recruiting and Fundraising in Karachi**  
By Zia Ur Rehman
- 12 A Biography of Rashid Rauf: Al-Qa`ida's British Operative**  
By Raffaello Pantucci
- 16 Mexican DTO Influence Extends Deep into United States**  
By Sylvia Longmire
- 19 Information Wars: Assessing the Social Media Battlefield in Syria**  
By Chris Zambelis
- 22 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.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

# Between Islamization and Secession: The Contest for Northern Mali

By Derek Henry Flood



An Islamist fighter from the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa in the city of Gao on July 16, 2012. - AFP/Getty Images

**O**N JANUARY 17, 2012, a rebellion began in Mali when ethnic Tuareg fighters attacked a Malian army garrison in the eastern town of Menaka near the border with Niger.<sup>1</sup> In the conflict's early weeks, the ethno-nationalist rebels of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)<sup>2</sup> cooperated and sometimes collaborated with Islamist fighters of Ansar Eddine for as long as the divergent movements had a common enemy in the Malian state.<sup>3</sup> On March

22, disgruntled Malian soldiers upset about their lack of support staged a coup d'état, overthrowing the democratically elected government of President Amadou Toumani Touré.

By April 1, all Malian security forces had evacuated the three northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. They relocated to the garrisons of Sévaré, Ségou, and as far south as Bamako.<sup>4</sup> In response, Ansar Eddine began to aggressively assert itself and allow jihadists from regional Islamist organizations to establish themselves in cities under its rudimentary administration.<sup>5</sup> Locals

1 Adama Diarra and Tiemoko Diallo, "Tuareg Fighters Attack Town in Northern Mali," Reuters, January 17, 2012.

2 Its official name, in French, is Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad.

3 Ansar Eddine has been variously transliterated as Ansar Dine, Ançar Dine, Ansar al-Din, and Ansar ul-Din. Iyad ag Ghaly's new movement should not be confused or conflated with the 30-year-old Islamic movement in southern Mali called Ansar Dine led by Cherif Ousmane Madani Haidara. See "Mise au point de Chérif Ousmane Madani

Haidara sur la confusion autour du nom Ançardine: Nous n'avons aucun lien avec les djihadistes d'Iyad Aghaly," *L'Indépendant*, April 5, 2012.

4 Personal observations, Bamako, Sévaré and Ségou, Mali, May 26, June 3-4, 2012.

5 AQIM and its predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le

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from Gao also reported seeing members of Nigeria's Boko Haram and other Salafi-jihadis who they claimed spoke none of the regional languages and attempted to use English as a lingua franca in Gao.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, the northern two-thirds of Mali have become a safe haven for Ansar Eddine, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)<sup>7</sup>—three Salafi-jihadi groups. The temporary alliance between the MNLA and the Salafi-jihadi forces has now turned into outright rivalry. The MNLA has been pushed out of all of northern Mali's cities and towns by Ansar Eddine and MUJAO, retreating into the wilderness.<sup>8</sup> On July 15, the faltering MNLA announced that it was formally withdrawing its demand for an independent state, with a Mauritania-based rebel official stating: "Independence has been our line since the start of the conflict but we are taking on board the view of the international community to resolve this crisis."<sup>9</sup> The MNLA has been forced to pragmatically reconstitute its demands in light of its eviction by Ansar Eddine and MUJAO.

This article highlights several of the core issues at stake both for West Africa and the wider world in northern Mali's vast breakaway region. First, it analyzes the long-held separatist roots of the present conflict. Second, it examines Ansar Eddine's narrow Islamist worldview in context of the events unfolding in Timbuktu. Finally, it looks into the near decade-long U.S. military relationship with Mali. The article draws on interviews with Malians of varying ethnicities from

Combat), have had a presence in difficult to reach zones of northern Mali for a number of years. The stark difference today is that AQIM is operating openly and with impunity in the three regional capitals of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu as never before. See Andre Le Sage, *Africa's Irregular Security Threats: Challenges for U.S. Engagement* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2010), p. 4.

6 Personal interviews, locals from Gao, Bamako, Mali, May 29, 2012.

7 In French, it is Le Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest.

8 "Islamists Push Tuareg Rebels from Last N. Mali Bastion," Agence France-Presse, July 12, 2012.

9 Mark John and Tiemoko Diallo, "Mali Rebels Say Have Dropped Separatist Goal," Reuters, July 15, 2012.

Gao and Timbuktu Regions conducted by the author during a two-week span in Bamako, the Malian capital, and the northerly front line town of Sévaré in May and June 2012.

#### Background

In 1958, Tuareg elders penned a letter to Paris petitioning French administrators for an independent Tuareg state from what was then a constituent part of Soudan Français (French Sudan). Mali's colonial rulers wrestled with the question of whether to include Saharan Tuareg and Arab populations into a separate political entity or bind them together with ethnic sub-Saharan Africans in the southern regions.<sup>10</sup> The term Azawad traditionally referred to the vast plain north of the Niger Bend between Timbuktu and the town of Bourem northwest of Gao, but gradually expanded to mean the entirety of northern Mali by assorted rebel outfits fighting there in the first half of the 1990s.<sup>11</sup>

The sparse deserts of northern Mali suffered a series of rebellions by ethnic-Tuareg<sup>12</sup> fighters that began not long after the country was granted independence from France in 1960. Before the present uprising, Malian Tuaregs rebelled against the state in 1962-1964, 1990-1996 and 2006-2009. The root causes of these armed uprisings were economic, racial, linguistic, or some mix of the three depending on the particular perspective of those asked.<sup>13</sup> These insurgencies were put down by ham-fisted counterinsurgency operations and peace negotiations. The 2012 rebellion coupled with encroaching Salafist radicalism, however, has cleaved Mali's state and society between north and south in a way the previous three outbreaks did not come close to doing.

10 "Mali's Tuareg Rebels Declare Independence," Associated Press, April 6, 2012.

11 James McDougall and Judith Scheele, *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 145.

12 The Tuareg (singular endonym Imuhagh) are an ethnic Berber (singular endonym Amazigh) group who are one of the indigenous peoples of North Africa. They are an often marginalized nomadic pastoralist group who feel sidelined by the Arab and black demographic majorities in the countries they inhabit and view their culture as being perpetually under threat.

13 Personal interviews, locals who fled Timbuktu, Sévaré, Mali, June 4, 2012.

The core of the present crisis in northern Mali is formed from a decades-old separatist sentiment of the Kel Tamasheq (the endonym used by Tuaregs and other Tamasheq-language speakers) that stems from economic inequality, neglectful development of the north by southern elites and perceptions of ethnic differences. While external factors in the conflict such as Libyan arms and the influx of notorious Algerian jihadist actors have

### **"The northern two-thirds of Mali have become a safe haven for Ansar Eddine, AQIM and MUJAO—three Salafi-jihadi groups."**

brought the conflict much international attention, it is also important to note that highly localized economic and ecological factors helped the fighting come to fruition. The once vital tourism industry has entirely collapsed while the region is concomitantly suffering a food crisis exacerbated by drought conditions.<sup>14</sup>

In the 2012 rebellion, the MNLA broadened the geography of Azawad even further by including a swath of northwestern Mopti Region up until the town of Douentza. On April 5, Moussa ag Assarid, a Paris-based spokesman of the MNLA, was quoted saying: "Since the day before yesterday when our units reached Douentza which we consider to be the frontier of the Azawad."<sup>15</sup>

From the conflict's outset, the MNLA's goal was the swift formal political partition of Mali. Ansar Eddine, in its role as a Salafi-jihadi organization, has expressed no genuine interest in the politics of post-colonial state building. Rather, its desired near-term objective is the implementation of Shari'a (Islamic law) throughout Mali.

14 Personal observations, Mopti Region, Mali, June 3-5, 2012; Baz Lecocq and Nadia Belalimat, "The Tuareg: Between Armed Uprising and Drought," *African Arguments*, February 28, 2012.

15 Rukmini Callimachi, "Mali Rebels Declare Cease-Fire After Seizing North," Associated Press, April 5, 2012.





A map of Mali.

The two groups fumbled through nearly two months of power sharing in Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu that culminated in the declaration of the “Islamic State of Azawad” on May 26.<sup>16</sup> Sounding as if they were trying to coopt each other’s agenda, they issued a joint statement proclaiming: “We are all in favor of the independence of Azawad...we all accept Islam as the religion” with Ansar Eddine’s Sanda Ould Bouamama adding, “Allah has triumphed.”<sup>17</sup> This awkward attempt at a fusion of such disparate ideologies was a contradiction in terms, unraveling just days later.

In an interview in Kidal following the fallout with the MNLA in Gao, Ansar Eddine’s quixotic leader Iyad ag Ghaly framed his goal in strangely modest terms: “We are not asking for much: just the application of Shari`a law in the northern and southern regions [of Mali]. We are Malians and we are against the division of Mali.”<sup>18</sup>

Although much has been made of the Tuareg rebels’ return from Libya via northern Niger following the collapse of the Qadhafi regime, this circumstance more helped to reinvigorate a stalemated conflict than was itself the *raison d’être* for the present war. Although Tuareg fighters returned from Libya with fresh stocks of small-arms, ammunition, fighting vehicles, and anti-aircraft

weaponry, they also accessed weapons stockpiled from previous outbreaks of political violence and raided arms depots abandoned by retreating Malian troops. A press report described the Malian army weapons acquired by AQIM in Gao as a “vast cache.”<sup>19</sup>

There is evidence that the third source of weapons—those that rebels either never surrendered in previous bouts of secessionism or gained in the years leading up to the 2012 war—also likely forms a significant amount of arms in the current conflict. Ensnared in the rugged Tigharghar Massif due south of the Algerian border, Tuareg rebels then led by Iyad ag Ghaly and the late militant leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga began as a movement called the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) on May 23, 2006, when it mounted attacks on army garrisons in Kidal and Menaka in which they acquired a large trove of weapons.<sup>20</sup>

Although on July 15 the MNLA publicly recanted its separatist stance in light of territorial losses to Islamist fighters, it will not diminish Tuareg separatism over the long-term. Indeed, the renouncement of the MNLA’s secessionist goal issued by Ibrahim ag Assaleh, a member of the MNLA’s negotiating team who traveled to Burkina Faso for mediation talks, was immediately contradicted by its Paris-based spokesman, Moussa ag Assarid.<sup>21</sup>

### The Role of Ansar Eddine

Ansar Eddine, an armed Islamist movement of the Salafi-jihadi strain, is viewed as an outfit whose mercurial decision-making processes seem to regularly contradict their previous public statements. Ansar Eddine was formed toward the end of 2011 by a veteran 1990s Tuareg rebel leader named Iyad ag Ghaly. Ghaly had been a mainstream figure in Tuareg rebel politics for many years and liaised with the U.S. Embassy in Bamako on several occasions including a May 2007 meeting with the then U.S. ambassador

in his capacity as leader of the ADC.<sup>22</sup> In the meeting, Ghaly described violent confrontations between his ADC fighters and AQIM in October 2006.

For Ghaly to then suddenly emerge as a die-hard Salafist raises a number of questions, such as precisely when and where he was radicalized.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the reason for his radicalization, the

22 “Spotlight on Leader of Islamist Group in Mali,” Associated Press, April 27, 2012.

23 It has been suggested that Ghaly became much more interested in stringent variants of Islam after South Asian missionaries from the global Deobandi-inspired movement Tablighi Jama`at became active in Ghaly’s home Kidal Region. Ghaly reportedly became a Tablighi Jama`at devotee along with other members of his Ifoghas clan at some point during the 1990s. For Ghaly to make the doctrinal leap from the revolutionary yet non-violent Tablighi Jama`at to outright Salafi-jihadism would have been a sizeable one. See Baz Lecocq and Paul Schrijver, “The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust: Potholes and Pitfalls on the Saharan Front,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25:1 (2007): pp. 148-150. It also has been speculated that he was radicalized during his stint as a diplomat at the Malian consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from 2008-2010 when he was ejected by Riyadh for being in contact with Sunni extremists. Aside from Ghaly himself, Saudi and other reformist Wahhabi proselytizers from the Gulf have been active in mosque construction and other forms of religious development in the Malian Sahel for many years trying to appeal to Malians in general. Some sources cite Ghaly’s presence in Jeddah as beginning in 2007. See “Spotlight on Leader of Islamist Group in Mali”; author’s personal observations, Mali, June 3, 2012. Still other sources suggest that Ghaly cloaking himself in the mantle of Salafism is merely another ruse for power by a long-time savvy political opportunist. Ghaly supposedly made a failed bid to be the leader of the MNLA and to be chief of his Ifoghas Tuareg clan which considers itself the ruling elite of the area. After being rebuffed in this scenario, he then founded Ansar Eddine and set forth a Salafi-jihadi religio-political agenda at odds with historic Tuareg irredentism. Just as importantly, Ghaly’s Salafism goes against the current of Mali’s widely adhered to Tijaniyya, Hamawiyya, and Qadiriyya Sufi tariqas that cross both geographic and ethnic boundaries. For details, see Steve Metcalf, “Iyad ag Ghaly - Mali’s Islamist Leader,” BBC Monitoring, July 17, 2012; Brian J. Peterson, “Mali ‘Islamisation’ Tackled: The Other Ansar Dine, Popular Islam, And Religious Tolerance,” *African Arguments*, April 25, 2012. The final idea proposed in regard to Iyad ag Ghaly’s radicalization deals with his role as an interlocutor during hostage negotiations between President Amadou Toumani Touré’s central government and the GSPC (which later became AQIM) where he was exposed to that group’s Salafist ideology in the process. For details, see Boris Thiolay, “Mali: Iyad ag Ghali, le rebelle touareg devenu djihadiste,” *L’Express*, April 12, 2012.

16 James Butty, “Mali Says Rebel Tomb Desecration a War Crime,” Voice of America, July 2, 2012.

17 “Mali Rebel Groups Unite to Create New Islamist State,” Agence France-Presse, May 27, 2012.

18 Adama Diarra, “Mali Islamist Leader Rejects Independence,” Reuters, June 16, 2012.

19 “Al-Qaeda Branch Seizes Key Mali Arms Depot as Crisis Deepens,” Agence France-Presse, May 27, 2012.

20 Abdoulaye Tamboura, “Tuareg Crises in Niger and Mali,” Institut français des relations internationales, January 2008, pp. 4-5.

21 Sébastien Badibanga, “Nous n’avons pas renoncé à notre revendication de l’indépendance de l’Azawad,” Afrik.com, July 15, 2012.

man once described as “soft-spoken and reserved” in leaked U.S. Embassy cables from 2007 now calls for “holy war.”<sup>24</sup>

Once all vestiges of Malian authority evaporated, animosity between ethno-nationalist rebels and Salafi-jihadi fighters seemed inevitable. At the outset of the conflict, the MNLA stated that one of its goals was to rid Azawad of AQIM figures while its then tacit allies in Ansar Eddine were simultaneously closely aligned with the al-Qa`ida franchise.<sup>25</sup> Following a half-hearted attempt at uniting for the purposes of power sharing in late May, it would not be long before the AQIM-allied Ansar Eddine—estimated to have only a few hundred fighters—emerged as the more well endowed war fighting group.<sup>26</sup>

A key point of tension between the MNLA and Ansar Eddine has been the visible presence of AQIM leaders and fighters in the areas under Ansar Eddine rule. AQIM’s southern *amir*, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, was reportedly seen in Gao.<sup>27</sup> Belmokhtar purportedly issued a statement on the events surrounding the MNLA’s departure from the city.<sup>28</sup> He was reported killed by the MNLA in the battle of Gao that occurred between the MNLA and combined Ansar Eddine and MUJAO forces on June 27. It was later reported that Belmokhtar was still alive, and was basing himself in Gao after the MNLA’s ouster.<sup>29</sup> Abdelhamid Abu

Zeid, another of AQIM’s southern *amirs*, has been spotted in Timbuktu.<sup>30</sup> Ahmed Ould Cherif, the head of the ethnic Arab National Front of Liberation of Azawad (FNLA) militia, was quoted as saying that Abu Zeid personally ordered his men out of the city to avoid conflict with AQIM.<sup>31</sup>

By June 28, Ansar Eddine boasted that they had evicted the MNLA in totality from northern Mali’s three key urban centers of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu.<sup>32</sup> As Ansar Eddine tightened their grip over Timbuktu, they accelerated vandalism of its Sufi holy places classified by UNESCO as protected World Heritage Sites. This destruction attracted arguably more attention than the flight of several hundred thousand refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Ansar Eddine’s emboldened spokesman for Timbuktu, Sanda Ould Bouamama, justified the Salafist destruction of Sufi sites on theological grounds. Bouamama stated: “What is UNESCO? We don’t care about the words of any entity because God is one without partners. All UNESCO’s calls are just polytheism. We are Muslims and we don’t revere any shrines or idols.”<sup>33</sup> The Salafists of Ansar Eddine seek to rid Mali of what they deem to be *shirk* (polytheism). They consider themselves the righteous upholders of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) whose inherent duty is to eradicate *shirk* in a bid to create a more virtuous Islamic society based up the divine principle of *tawhid*. Revered graves and shrines and ceremonies like Mawlid al-Nabi (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed) are considered in violation of the Salafists’ strict interpretation of *tawhid*.<sup>34</sup>

Viewing itself as a new local standard-bearer in regional Sunni orthodoxy, the movement believes it is justified in leveling Timbuktu’s historic sites to rubble. Ansar Eddine member Mohamed

Kasse described their reasoning behind the demolitions: “We found a man lying at the foot of a mausoleum. He was praying. That is why we broke the door and took it off of its hinges. We think he was stupid praying at the tomb of a human being. No matter who it is, you can only pray to God.”<sup>35</sup> When the International Criminal Court indicated that damage in Timbuktu may represent a war crime, Ansar Eddine’s ever defiant Oumar Ould Hamaha said: “The only tribunal we recognize is the divine court of Sharia.”<sup>36</sup> From this rigid stance, it appears less likely that a negotiated settlement will be initiated before an armed intervention in the north.

#### Mali and the International Response

The most vocal concerns about the crisis in northern Mali have arisen from a few of its geographically contiguous neighbors, Niger in particular. The United Nations and Western powers, primarily France and the United States, have not acted forcefully while the crisis continues along a highly negative trend line. The UN Security Council’s 15 members voted unanimously on Resolution 2056 (2012), which will put economic sanctions on individual militant leaders under the rubric of the UN’s al-Qa`ida Sanctions Committee under Resolution 1267 (1999).<sup>37</sup>

Despite the less than enthusiastic response from Malian state actors, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leaders have been attempting to cobble together a force comprised of 3,270 proposed troops from Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal that could aid Malian regular forces in retaking the lost northern regions. In reaction, MUJAO threatened Senegal with reprisal attacks.<sup>38</sup> Senegal’s newly elected President Macky Sall then suddenly withdrew from the proposed coalition, citing prior regional

24 Serge Daniel, “Mali Rebel Iyad ag Ghaly: Inscrutable Master of the Desert,” Agence France-Presse, April 5, 2012.

25 Moussa ag Assarid, “Ma lutte pour la liberté et la dignité de mon peuple se poursuit,” Le Blog Officiel de Moussa ag Assarid, July 14, 2012. This source is the blog of the MNLA’s Paris-based international spokesman.

26 In contrast to the MNLA, it is believed Ansar Eddine has access to financial largesse from the vast ransoms AQIM has received from several European governments in return for the release of their hostages held in the Sahara. AQIM and MUJAO currently hold nine Western hostages. Ansar Eddine may also be funding itself through AQIM’s well established drug trafficking routes and the looting of banks in the territories it conquered in late March 2012. See “Mali: Rebels and their Cause,” IRIN, April 23, 2012; Thomas Fessy, “Mali Unites Against the Ansar Dine Islamists in Timbuktu,” BBC, July 17, 2012.

27 Michelle Faul, “Mali Attracts Islamist Fighters in Void after Coup,” Associated Press, April 6, 2012.

28 “Bellawar [Belmokhtar] raconte sa version des affrontements de Gao et appelle ‘au calme et à la concertation,’” Agence Nouakchott d’Information, July 1, 2012.

29 “Mali: Al-Qaida cordonnes les différents groupes Isla-

mistes du nord,” Agence France-Presse, July 20, 2012.

30 Echorouk News, April 26, 2012.

31 “New Mali Militia Leaves Timbuktu to ‘Avoid Blood-bath,’” Agence France-Presse, April 28, 2012.

32 Tiemoko Diallo and Adama Diarra, “Islamists Declare Full Control of Mali’s North,” Reuters, June 28, 2012.

33 Jemal Oumar, “Locals, UNESCO Condemn Destruction of Timbuktu Mosque,” Magharebia, July 4, 2012.

34 Terje Østebø, *Localising Salafism: Religious Change Among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), p. 159.

35 “Ansar Dine Fighters Destroy Timbuktu Shrines,” al-Jazeera, July 1, 2012.

36 Ron Depasquale, “UN Council Threatens Mali Fighters with Sanctions,” Associated Press, July 5, 2012.

37 UNSC Resolution 1267 (1999) later became Resolution 1989 (2011) when the Taliban and al-Qa`ida were decoupled from the original sanctions stemming from the 1999 resolution. See “Security Council Calls for ‘Road Map’ for Restoration of Constitutional Order,” United Nations, July 5, 2012.

38 Bakari Gueye, “Senegal Faces al-Qaeda Threat,” Magharebia, June 26, 2012.

peacekeeping commitments that had already stretched the Senegalese military too thin.<sup>39</sup>

One of the biggest questions with regard to Mali's northern rebels and now entrenched jihadists has been the potential role or lack thereof of Algeria. The government of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has insisted on its noninterventionist stance as the crisis along its southern border has only escalated over the course of its six-month duration. The immediate reaction by Algiers to the outbreak of conflict was to immediately withdraw military advisers it had working with Malian troops and to suspend all military assistance.<sup>40</sup> The Bouteflika government stated it sought a solely political solution to the crisis. After winning its hard-fought independence from France in 1962, Algeria became a bulwark of the non-aligned movement in Africa, viewing itself as a politically protective buffer state between the global north and south.<sup>41</sup> In this light, it is wary of a Libya-style military intervention in any form along its borders imposed by France or other Western powers.<sup>42</sup> Despite hosting the Tamanrasset joint military command designed to coordinate cross border efforts on AQIM in southern Algeria, Algiers has not so far demonstrated an appetite to intervene in what it views as internal Malian affairs.<sup>43</sup>

### The Post-9/11 Role of the U.S. Military in Mali

The U.S. military's engagement in Mali has been evolving for nearly a decade. After 9/11, the greater Sahel and Sahara regions were highlighted as lightly or undergoverned spaces that were vulnerable to transnational Salafi-jihadi terrorist organizations. In

39 Tamba Jean-Matthew, "Senegal Changes Mind on Sending Soldiers to Mali," *Africa Review*, July 11, 2012.

40 "L'Algérie décide de geler son aide militaire au Mali," *El Khabar*, January 28, 2012.

41 Robert Malley, *The Call From Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 144-145.

42 Abdelkader Abderrahmane, "Deep Read: Malian Tinderbox - A Dangerous Puzzle," *Mail & Guardian*, July 9, 2012.

43 In April 2010, Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger created the Le Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint (Committee of Joint Chiefs, CEMOC) to jointly combat AQIM. See "Al-Qaeda Offshoot Claims Algeria Attack," Agence France-Presse, March 3, 2012.

October 2002, the Pan-Sahel Initiative was launched by the U.S. Department of State and implemented by the Pentagon to train and equip the militaries of Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. The goal of the initiative was to bolster border security along the Sahel's porous post-colonial frontiers and to boost interoperability among the regional militaries.<sup>44</sup> The poorly funded, low-priority program was not begun in earnest until the following year when it was officially commenced in Mali by U.S. European Command (EUCOM).<sup>45</sup> The Pan-Sahel Initiative concluded in 2004 and was then absorbed into the much larger in scope Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative,<sup>46</sup> which included the four aforementioned countries as well as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria and Senegal.

For years after these programs began, critics who specialize in the Sahel and Maghreb regions were skeptical of the U.S. military's entrance into France's historic zone of influence. Yale political anthropologist Mike McGovern stated: "the overall estimation of this author is that the threat of violent jihadi activity in the Mauritanian, Malian, Nigerian and Chadian Sahel is very small though not inexistent."<sup>47</sup> AQIM is regularly reported to be an organization in decline, particularly in Algeria where the movement was borne out of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).

Mali was commonly believed to not be overly susceptible to Salafi-jihadi movements because of the prevalence of Sufi *tariqa* (brotherhoods or orders). Mali's past Tuareg rebellions erupted from long-held local grievances as the MNLA still continues to portray the battle lines of the present conflict. Ansar Eddine is also a local Malian

44 James J.F. Forest and Matthew V. Sousa, *Oil and Terrorism in the New Gulf: Framing U.S. Energy and Security Policies for the Gulf of Guinea* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), p. 166.

45 Alex Belida, "US Counterterrorism Training for W. Africa Gets Under Way," *Voice of America*, November 14, 2003.

46 The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative was later changed to Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership in 2007.

47 Mike McGovern, *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 81.

movement but it is attempting to frame its struggle in purely Islamist terms mostly irrespective of Sahelian state boundaries after it dislodged its partner turned peer competitor, the MNLA. While AQIM may be on the defensive in the Kabylie and Algeria's urban centers, it has grown in the Sahel economically if not in numbers of recruits.<sup>48</sup>

The collapse of the Tunisian and Libyan security states has resulted in the expansion of AQIM's maneuverability in the Sahel and Sahara.<sup>49</sup> It has also allowed AQIM to link itself to outfits such as Ansar Eddine, MUJAO,<sup>50</sup> and possibly Boko Haram. Despite years of U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts in Mali, the region faces its biggest security challenge since the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. As the Algerian state has

48 Paul Schemm, "Officials: Feared al-Qaida Offshoot Neutralized," Associated Press, July 9, 2012.

49 Nizar Maqni, "Tunisia: A New Home for Jihadi-Salafis?" *al-Akhbar*, March 3, 2012; Christian Lowe and Lamine Chikhi, "Algeria Says Kidnapped Governor Freed on Libyan Soil," Reuters, January 17, 2012.

50 MUJAO emerged in 2011 of uncertain and oft debated origins. It says its aim is to expand jihad in West Africa, although many of its attacks have been in Algeria and the Maghreb beginning with a kidnapping of three European aid workers in October 2011 from a Polisario Front refugee camp in Tindouf, Algeria. Its center of gravity is in Gao near the frontier with Burkina Faso which acts as a human conduit for its recruitment from littoral states along the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic coast. Gao is also equidistant from the border with Niger, which provides MUJAO with aspiring jihadists as well. MUJAO has been described as an outgrowth of AQIM's expansion in the Sahel or a dissident movement maintaining important ideological differences; other sources suggest it is a competitor to AQIM. Residents who fled Gao stated that the ethnic and national makeup of foreign jihadists in their city differed from those groups in Timbuktu due to Gao's proximity to the aforementioned borderlands. MUJAO is believed to be led by a Mauritanian, Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, who is described as a key member of the group's *shura* council. See Dimitri Kaboré, "Libération des otages du Mujao: escale à Ouagadougou," *Fasozine*, July 19, 2012; "Algérie: un groupe islamiste ouest-africain revendique l'attentat de Tamanrasset," Agence France-Presse, March 3, 2012; personal interviews, internally displaced Gao residents, Bamako, Mali, May 29, 2012; Dario Cristiani, "West Africa's MOJWA Militants - Competition for al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb?" *Terrorism Monitor* 10:7 (2012); "Radical Islamist Group Threatens France," Agence France-Presse, January 3, 2012; "Al-Akhbar News Agency interview with Hamada Mohamed Kheirou, a commander in the al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad Movement," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, May 1, 2012.



applied pressure, AQIM has become more adept at exploiting the Sahel's weak security infrastructure and its southern *amirs* have become emboldened.<sup>51</sup> The Sahel has transformed from a rear logistical base to the locus of jihadist activity in North and West Africa.

Despite the suspension of the U.S. train and equip program in the wake of the March coup, AFRICOM still maintained Special Operations troops in the country. Their presence was revealed when three soldiers died after careening off Martyr's Bridge into the River Niger alongside three Moroccan women while driving from Bamako's Badalabougou neighborhood toward the Centre Ville in April.<sup>52</sup>

### Conclusion

The ECOWAS talks involving Ansar Eddine, the MNLA and Malian interim authorities in Ouagadougou mediated by Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré have led to no tangible effect. ECOWAS has been unable to get Malian political or military leaders to green light its proposed intervention force. Former colonial power France has not demonstrated a willingness to get formally involved in the conflict as it has done in the past with several of its former colonies when confronted by coups and rebels. AFRICOM intimated that it could aid Malian or ECOWAS troops with logistics or intelligence gathering, but has not indicated that U.S. troops may play an advisory role on the ground despite nearly a decade of counterterrorism involvement in Mali. Mali's interim president still has not returned from medical exile in Paris following the brutal May 21 beating he withstood in the presidential Koulouba Palace in Bamako. Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra continues his diplomacy in regional capitals, but the Islamist hold in the north is consolidating in the interim.

Songhai Malians from Timbuktu and Gao interviewed by this author described AQIM as firmly in the top echelon of

non-state actors roaming northern Mali. While no single group can claim to control or even hold all of this vast territory, locals say that the AQIM's GSPC veterans are the commonality between the different jihadist movements jockeying for influence across the region.<sup>53</sup> They believe that AQIM is what connects Ansar Eddine, MUJAO, Boko Haram, and other unaffiliated jihadists who have managed to cross into Mali and what pushes them further against the comparatively secular MNLA rebels. Add to this mix Arabs arming themselves under the banner of the FNLA and black Songhais and Peuls reconstituting the Ganda Koy/Ganda Iso movement, and the narrative of the struggle for the north of Mali becomes that much more complex. A well-planned military intervention in any form would require taking these increasingly fissiparous ethnic, tribal, and religious dynamics into account.

The Salafi-jihadi agenda has so far been limited to the regions of Mali under control of the Islamists. They have focused on eliminating the presence of their MNLA rivals from population centers, consolidating territorial control and implementing their interpretation of Shari'a. On June 29, MUJAO issued a statement claiming it was behind a suicide attack far north of Mali on a gendarmerie building in Ouargla, Algeria.<sup>54</sup> Ansar Eddine and its allies AQIM and MUJAO have continually tweaked their agenda to suit the circumstances of the day. For now, the fight to advance their Salafi-jihadi objectives is primarily contained in northern Mali's angular borders, yet there is no firm indication this shaky status quo will hold.

*Derek Henry Flood is an independent analyst working in MENA, Central and South Asia. Mr. Flood has written for Asia Times Online, CNN, Christian Science Monitor and Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst among others. Previously he served as editor of The Jamestown Foundation's Militant Leadership Monitor.*

## A Profile of AQAP's Upper Echelon

By Gregory D. Johnsen

THE UNITED STATES has relied heavily on airstrikes to disrupt al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) activities in Yemen. U.S. forces killed Muhammad al-Kazami in 2009, Jamal al-Anbari and Nayif al-Qahtani in 2010, as well as Anwar al-`Awlaqi in 2011 and Fahd al-Qusa in 2012. As important as these men were, their deaths have done little to diminish AQAP's strength. At the same time, U.S. strikes over the past two-and-a-half years have killed a number of civilians, which has likely helped AQAP's recruiting within Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

By early 2012, as Yemen's military fractured and split amidst widespread popular protests, AQAP seized and held several towns in the southern Yemeni governorates of Abyan and Shabwa. Following the installation of Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi as Yemen's president in February, the United States increased the number of strikes in the country, and in May and June a sustained military offensive by Yemeni troops backed by the United States forced AQAP to abandon overt control of the towns it had captured.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There have been conflicting reports as to whether or not U.S. airstrikes and resulting civilian casualties have indeed led to a spike in recruiting for AQAP. According to the U.S. and Yemeni governments, however, AQAP has grown in strength from 200-300 fighters in late 2009 to more than 1,000 in 2012. Material in both Arabic and English suggests that this increase is being driven, at least in part, by civilian deaths. See, for instance, reports in *al-Maddad* newsletter, published by Ansar al-Shari'a, as well as Kelly McEvers, "Yemen Airstrikes Punish Militants, and Civilians," NPR All Things Considered, July 6, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Given the nature of U.S. strikes in Yemen and the fact that both the U.S. and Yemeni governments obfuscate the details of military actions in the country, it is difficult to maintain an accurate account of when and where the U.S. attacks. Reporting by the *New York Times*, the New America Foundation and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism all agree that the United States has increased the number of strikes since Hadi took office in February 2012. See, for instance, Jo Becker and Scott Shane, "Secret 'Kill List' Proves a Test of Obama's Principles and Will," *New York Times*, May 29, 2012; Peter Bergen and Jennifer Rowland, "Obama Ramps up Covert War in Yemen," CNN, June 12, 2012; "Yemen Strikes Visualised," The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, July 2, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Wilkinson, *West African Studies Global Security Risks and West Africa: Development Challenges* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012), p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> "Three U.S. Military Service Members Killed in Auto Accident," U.S. AFRICOM Public Affairs, April 20, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Personal interviews, locals from Timbuktu, Sévaré, Mali, June 4, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> "Le groupe terroriste Mujao revendique l'attentat contre la gendarmerie à Ouargla," *Tout Sur l'Algerie*, June 30, 2012.

Today, AQAP is at a crossroads. Does it revert to what it was prior to 2011, a terrorist organization operating in the shadows? Or, does it try to reclaim the territory it lost and once again position itself as a governing authority? Whatever the group decides, the four top leaders profiled in this article—Nasir al-Wahayshi, Said al-Shihri, Qasim al-Raymi and Ibrahim Asiri—will play key roles in shaping AQAP's strategy going forward.

#### Nasir al-Wahayshi, AQAP's Leader

Nasir al-Wahayshi is a tiny wisp of a man with a jutting beard and soft-spoken manner. Known by the *kunya* Abu Basir, he was born in 1976 in the region of Mukayras in what was then Abyan.<sup>3</sup> Redistricting in 1998 put Mukayras in al-Bayda and that same year al-Wahayshi left Yemen for Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> He had just graduated from one of Yemen's private religious institutes, which had been established in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to convince Yemeni tribesmen that a republican form of government was compatible with Islam. Staffed by Egyptian exiles and Saudi teachers, many of these institutes eventually gravitated toward the more radical works of Islamic theology.

Al-Wahayshi arrived in Afghanistan in the months after Usama bin Ladin's 1998 *fatwa*, declaring war on the United States and Israel, and he soon joined al-Qa`ida. Bin Laden made the young Yemeni his personal secretary, and for the next four years the two were nearly inseparable.<sup>5</sup> Al-Wahayshi spent all of his time with Bin Laden, watching as the older man built and ran an international organization. He sat in on councils and helped with correspondence.

After the 9/11 attacks and the confused aftermath of the Battle of Tora Bora in late 2001, al-Wahayshi was separated from the al-Qa`ida commander. Bin Laden escaped into Pakistan, while al-Wahayshi moved south toward Iran, where he was eventually arrested and held for nearly two years.<sup>6</sup> In late 2003,

al-Wahayshi was extradited back to Yemen. Apparently unaware of his close connections to Bin Ladin, Yemeni intelligence held him in the general prison population at a maximum-security facility in Sana`a.

In February 2006, al-Wahayshi and 22 other prisoners tunneled out of the jail and into a neighboring mosque where the men said their morning prayers before walking out the door to freedom. After the dramatic prison break, al-Wahayshi set about rebuilding al-Qa`ida's network in Yemen. He recruited carefully, relying on the relationships he had built during his years in prison. Months later, in June 2007, Qasim al-Raymi announced al-Wahayshi as al-Qa`ida in Yemen's new commander.<sup>7</sup> Al-Wahayshi immediately set out to correct some of al-Qa`ida's mistakes of the past. Using the lessons he had learned from Bin Ladin in Afghanistan, al-Wahayshi designed a network that could withstand the loss of key cell leaders and, most importantly, he realized that to win in Yemen al-Qa`ida needed popular support. To that end, al-Wahayshi attempted to minimize Muslim civilian casualties and provide a clear rationale for those al-Qa`ida considered legitimate targets.

In 2009, al-Wahayshi oversaw what he ambitiously called a merger of the Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qa`ida. The new organization, al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, has since attempted several attacks against U.S. and Saudi targets. Most notably, it smuggled a bomb onto a U.S.-bound airliner on Christmas Day 2009.

#### Said al-Shihri, AQAP's Deputy Leader

On September 11, 2001, Said al-Shihri was at home in Saudi Arabia. A veteran jihadist with experience in Afghanistan and Chechnya, he traveled to Bahrain on September 23 before making his way to Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Al-Shihri was captured in December 2001 and later sent to Guantanamo Bay.

Saudi intelligence agents, who were cooperating with the U.S. government at Guantanamo, put al-Shihri on a list of the 37 most dangerous prisoners, and the United States labeled him a "negative leader."<sup>9</sup> Still, on November 9, 2007, the United States sent him and 13 others back to Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup> Once back in the kingdom, al-Shihri was required to take

### **“Nasir al-Wahayshi, Said al-Shihri, Qasim al-Raymi and Ibrahim Asiri are key to the future of AQAP.”**

part in a rehabilitation program run by the Ministry of the Interior. Less than a year later, in September 2008, Saudi officials decided he no longer posed a threat and he was released.<sup>11</sup> The 35-year-old al-Shihri was offered a wife and a job, but he declined.

Within weeks of his release, al-Shihri organized and led several former Guantanamo Bay detainees over the border to Yemen to rejoin al-Qa`ida. In January 2009, al-Shihri and Muhammad al-`Awfi, another former Guantanamo Bay detainee, appeared alongside Nasir al-Wahayshi and Qasim al-Raymi in a video announcing the formation of AQAP.

As the deputy commander and highest-ranking Saudi in AQAP, al-Shihri played a key role in recruiting other Saudis and fundraising in the kingdom. In late 2009, a cell phone video of al-Shihri surfaced in which he made a plea for money from wealthy Saudi donors. In an effort to avoid detection the video never left the phone on which it was recorded. Instead, an AQAP courier traveled throughout Saudi Arabia showing the video message to different individuals.<sup>12</sup>

3 UN Security Council SC/9848, January 19, 2010.

4 Ibrahim al-Maqhafi, *Mu'ajim al-buldan wa-l-qaba'il al-yamaniya*, volumes 1-2 (Sana`a: Dar al-Kalimah, 2002), pp. 1269-1270.

5 Jabir al-Fayfi, "Interview on Hamuna," Saudi Television, December 2010.

6 Robert F. Worth, "Is Yemen the Next Afghanistan?"

*New York Times*, July 6, 2010.

7 Gregory D. Johnsen, "Yemen Attack Reveals Struggles Among al-Qaeda Ranks," *Terrorism Focus* 4:22 (2007).

8 "Said al-Shihri," Administrative Review Board Summaries, Round 2, Guantanamo Bay, available at <http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/372-said-al-shihri/documents/3>.

9 Ibid.

10 Robert F. Worth, "Freed by the U.S., Saudi Becomes a Qaeda Chief," *New York Times*, January 22, 2009.

11 Abdullah al-Oraifj, "Shihri's Father Damns Him for Returning to al-Qaeda," *Saudi Gazette*, January 26, 2009.

12 "Al-Arabiya takashif rasala min al-qa`ida," al-Arabiya.net, December 27, 2009.



Al-Shihri has also been an important voice in planning AQAP's external plots. In 2009, al-Shihri modified al-Raymi's original plan to assassinate Muhammad bin Nayif, convincing the Yemeni that the plot required a Saudi bomber.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Qasim al-Raymi, AQAP's Military Commander**

Currently AQAP's military commander, Qasim al-Raymi has a commanding presence and a subtle mind. During his time in a Yemeni prison, al-Raymi often delivered the Friday sermon for his fellow prisoners, and it was al-Raymi who first had the idea of using one of Saudi Arabia's early successes in the war on AQAP against the kingdom. In the spring of 2009, al-Raymi told Said al-Shihri about his idea to smuggle a suicide bomber into Saudi Arabia posing as a repentant terrorist.<sup>14</sup> The plan, al-Raymi explained, would turn Saudi Arabia's earlier victory in convincing an AQAP commander to surrender into a defeat. Al-Raymi thought the bomber could get close enough to Muhammad bin Nayif, Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism head, to assassinate the prince. The eventual attack, in August 2009, barely missed killing Bin Nayif.

Born in 1978, al-Raymi spent some time in the 1990s at al-Qa`ida's training camps in Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> He was among the 23 prisoners who escaped in February 2006 and it was al-Raymi, more than anyone else, who helped al-Wahayshi rebuild al-Qa`ida's fractured network in Yemen.<sup>16</sup> More recently, al-Raymi has played a key role in AQAP's takeover of towns in Abyan and Shabwa, and evidence from the martyr biographies the organization often publishes on the internet suggests that he often directs the movements of fighters.<sup>17</sup>

13 Turki al-Sahayl, "Tafasil jadid min muhawala ighthiyal Muhammad bin nayif," *al-Sbarq al-Awsat*, January 12, 2011.

14 Ibid.

15 United Nations 1267 Committee, July 3, 2012.

16 Al-Raymi delivered al-Qa`ida's first audio message following its resurrection in 2007. He was also the individual who announced that al-Wahayshi had been named the *amir* of the new group with al-Raymi as his deputy commander. Following the "merger" that formed AQAP in January 2009, al-Raymi was named a "military commander," while al-Shihri, a Saudi, became AQAP's deputy commander.

17 See, for instance, "Shuhada al-jazira #10, Mawhid al-Maribi," al-Malahim Media, March 2012.

Al-Raymi has been reported killed several times, including in a U.S. airstrike in January 2010, but he has always survived.<sup>18</sup> His younger brother, Ali, is currently in Guantanamo Bay.

#### **Ibrahim Asiri, AQAP's Chief Bomber**

Following the death of Anwar al-`Awlaqi in September 2011, Ibrahim Asiri has emerged in Western media reports as AQAP's biggest threat.<sup>19</sup> Much of this reporting, like that surrounding al-`Awlaqi, focuses on a single individual—an "evil genius"<sup>20</sup>—as opposed to the more accurate if less spectacular truth of a group effort. Al-Raymi thought of the idea to

### **"In the nearly six years since Asiri's escape from Riyadh, he has emerged as one of AQAP's top bombmakers."**

assassinate Bin Nayif—the plot from which AQAP's attempts against the United States have stemmed—but it was al-Shihri who, along with others, refined the plot and Asiri who provided the technical expertise.<sup>21</sup>

Asiri did not plan to join al-Qa`ida, at least initially. In 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq, Asiri was a chemistry student at King Saud University in Riyadh. Within months he had abandoned his studies and joined a group that was looking to fight against U.S. forces in Iraq. Saudi troops uncovered the cell and seized Asiri, imprisoning him for several months. Asiri's time in prison radicalized him. "Up until that point I didn't know that the Saudi government was in the service of the crusaders," he later said.<sup>22</sup>

18 Sudarsan Raghavan, "Yemeni Airstrike Kills Six Suspected al-Qaeda Militants," *Washington Post*, January 16, 2010.

19 Paul Cruickshank, Nic Robertson and Tim Lister, "Al-Qaeda's Biggest Threat," CNN, February 16, 2012.

20 Representative Peter King, as quoted in Sudarsan Raghavan and Peter Finn, "Al Qaeda Bomber Represents CIA's Worst Fears," *Washington Post*, May 8, 2012.

21 Al-Sahayl.

22 Salim al-Najdi, "Sira al-datiya abu al-khayr, 'abdullah hasan tali 'asiri,'" *Sada al-Malahim* 11, November 2009.

When Asiri was released he started another cell, only this time he was looking to fight the Saudis as well as the Americans. Muhammad bin Nayif's men from the Ministry of the Interior again broke up the cell. Asiri and his younger brother, Abdullah, escaped the crackdown and fled to Yemen, crossing the border in August 2006.<sup>23</sup>

In the nearly six years since Asiri's escape from Riyadh, he has emerged as one of AQAP's top bombmakers. He made the bomb his brother, Abdullah, used in AQAP's attempted assassination of Muhammad bin Nayif in August 2009, and he built the one Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab smuggled on board a Northwest Airlines plane on Christmas Day later that same year. It is unclear whether Asiri built the two explosives used in the 2010 parcel bomb plot or the latest underwear bomb that was intercepted by an undercover agent in early 2012. What does seem clear is that Asiri, who apparently acquired his bombmaking skills after arriving in Yemen, is also training others in an effort to not only increase AQAP's capabilities, but potentially to replace him should he be killed.

In late 2010, following the parcel bomb plot, an AQAP author mocked Western analysts who were focused exclusively on Asiri, asking: "Isn't it funny how America thinks AQAP has only one major bombmaker?"<sup>24</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

Nasir al-Wahayshi, Said al-Shihri, Qasim al-Raymi and Ibrahim Asiri are key to the future of AQAP. Yet to truly dismantle and disrupt AQAP, Yemen and the United States must both eliminate the group's leadership and erode the popular support that has led to an influx of new recruits in recent years.

*Gregory D. Johnsen is the author of The Last Refuge, Yemen, al-Qaeda and America's War in Arabia, due out this fall from W. W. Norton. A former Fulbright Fellow in Yemen, he is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and the author of the Yemen blog, Waq al-Waq.*

23 Ibid.

24 "Questions We Should be Asking," *Inspire* 3 (2010): p. 6. The author thanks Aaron Zelin for help in locating this source.

## Taliban Recruiting and Fundraising in Karachi

By Zia Ur Rehman

KARACHI IS PAKISTAN'S commercial hub as well as its largest city. Taking advantage of Karachi's ongoing ethnic and sectarian violence, militants from several Taliban factions and al-Qa`ida have moved to the city to escape U.S. drone strikes and Pakistani military operations in Pakistan's northwest tribal regions.<sup>1</sup>

Karachi's role as a shelter for al-Qa`ida and Taliban militants is well known. This article, however, provides clarity on how al-Qa`ida and Taliban militants are using Karachi to recruit university-educated youth as well as finance their operations against Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan.

### A Brief Profile of Karachi City

Karachi is Pakistan's financial hub with an estimated population of 18 million.<sup>2</sup> It accounts for the lion's share of Pakistan's gross domestic product and generates at least 60% of national revenue.<sup>3</sup> It is home to Pakistan's central bank and its stock exchange. Karachi is where national and multinational corporations—such as international banks and real estate companies—have established their Pakistan operations.

Karachi is a key port city strategically located on the shores of the Indian Ocean, serving as a major shipping and maritime hub. It is the primary entry-point for U.S. and NATO supplies for Afghanistan. The majority of NATO supplies arrive at Karachi port where they are trucked through Pakistan to two entry points into Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

1 Personal interview, militant linked to the TTP in Karachi, Pakistan, January 5, 2012.

2 Pamela Constable, "Bombing and Fire Disrupt a Fragile Peace in Karachi, Pakistan," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2010.

3 "Karachi Contributes 60-70pc of Revenue," *The Nation*, July 25, 2010.

4 Personal interview, Khan Dil Khan Niazi, a leader of Karachi's truck association, Karachi, Pakistan, May 10, 2012. After a NATO airstrike killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011, Pakistan blocked NATO's road-bound supply routes into Afghanistan.

With its affluent residents, Karachi is fertile ground not only for criminal groups and armed wings of political and religious parties, but also for Taliban militants as well as al-Qa`ida. During the last decade, there has been an influx of Pashtun and Sindhi people to the city due to displacement caused by ongoing Pakistani military operations in the country's tribal areas, as well as by recent flooding in Sindh Province.<sup>5</sup>

Karachi is considered an attractive hideout for al-Qa`ida and Taliban groups because the sheer size of the city, combined with its assortment of ethnic and linguistic groups, makes it easy to live and operate unseen.<sup>6</sup> Al-Qa`ida and Taliban groups can also rely on logistical and other support from Karachi's assortment of militant, religious and sectarian groups.<sup>7</sup> The capture of several high-profile al-Qa`ida and Taliban leaders from Karachi shows that both organizations are operating in the city.<sup>8</sup>

Security experts argue that al-Qa`ida has successfully merged with Karachi-based local militant groups in Pakistan, and is in the process of shifting its base from the tribal areas to urban areas, especially Karachi, to avoid drone strikes.<sup>9</sup> These local militant groups include Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, Jundullah, Jaysh-i-Muhammad, Jamaat-ul-Furqan, Harkat-ul-Mujahidin, Lashkar-i-Tayyiba, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, and Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami.<sup>10</sup>

5 Zia Ur Rehman, "Demographic Divide," *Friday Times*, July 15-21, 2011.

6 Personal interview, Chaudry Aslam Khan, head of the Anti-Extremism Cell (AEC), Karachi Police, Karachi, Pakistan, June 2, 2012.

7 Zia Ur Rehman, "Karachi's New Terrorist Groups," *Friday Times*, January 6-12, 2012.

8 In the past decade, a number of high-profile al-Qa`ida and Taliban leaders have been arrested in Karachi. These include, but are not limited to, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Abdu Ali Sharqawi, Ammar al-Balochi, Walid Mohammad Salih bin Attash, Jack Thomas, Majid Khan and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. See Rehman, "Karachi's New Terrorist Groups."

9 Personal interview, senior police official who runs anti-militancy operations, Karachi, Pakistan, June 15, 2012.

10 "Profiling the Violence in Karachi," Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), Islamabad, Pakistan, July-September 2009.

### Recruitment

Karachi's role in recruitment for al-Qa`ida and Taliban groups is underreported. While the recruiting pool in the tribal areas is largely uneducated, Karachi offers a very different dynamic. Karachi is recognized for its academic institutions as well as religious seminaries.

One professor in the Applied Physics department at Karachi University told a reporter in May 2011 that the material learned in certain courses could be used by students for militant purposes.<sup>11</sup> "Last semester, I was planning to start

**"One professor in the Applied Physics department at Karachi University told a reporter in May 2011 that the material learned in certain courses could be used by students for militant purposes."**

a project with my students to remotely control a device, but then stopped when I learnt that one of them hailed from Waziristan," the professor said.<sup>12</sup> The professor clarified that he was not profiling students from Pakistan's tribal areas, but he did worry that the material learned in university courses could be applied in terrorist attacks.

Recruitment from universities was highlighted after the arrests of Dr. Akmal Waheed and Dr. Arshad Waheed in April 2004, two Pakistani brothers. The men were accused of having links to al-Qa`ida, attacking a Karachi corps commander's convoy and aiding financially as well as harboring activists of the banned Jundullah militant group. The brothers, who were former leaders of the Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA), an affiliate organization of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), reportedly inspired a

11 Salman Siddiqui, "After KU Student Arrested on Terror Suspicion, Time for an Examination on Campus," *Express Tribune*, May 14, 2011.

12 Ibid.

number of students through their lectures and jihadist literature. Many of these students joined the so-called Punjabi Taliban and later lost their lives in U.S. drone strikes.<sup>13</sup> In 2006, the brothers were exonerated from all charges and released by Pakistani authorities. Yet in March 2008, Arshad Waheed was killed by a U.S. drone in Wana, South Waziristan Agency, while his brother, Akmal, was sentenced to three years in prison in the United Arab Emirates in 2011 for running a jihadist organization in the country and having direct communications with a senior al-Qa`ida member.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, al-Qa`ida's media wing, al-Sahab, released a 40-minute compilation video

**“Various professors at the university reportedly worried that students with a ‘jihadist bent of mind’ were more inclined to study at departments such as Chemical Engineering, Applied Physics and Computer Science.”**

commemorating Arshad Waheed in the third part of a series of videos entitled “The Protectors of the Sanctuary,” which was also reportedly the first time that al-Qa`ida used Urdu in a video instead of Arabic.<sup>15</sup>

Three militants, all drop-outs of Karachi University, inspired by the Waheed brothers were arrested on January 13, 2011. In that case, Karachi Police said the three former students bombed Shi`a students on the university's campus on December 28, 2010. According to police reports, the three men received military training in the Miran Shah area of North Waziristan Agency.<sup>16</sup> The accused told interrogators that in 2007 they created a group called the “Punjabi

Mujahidin” after a disagreement with the JI leadership over jihad in Pakistan and after being inspired by the Waheed brothers.<sup>17</sup> They claimed to have recruited 150 activists, and their goal was to fight against Pakistan's security forces as well as support the TTP.<sup>18</sup>

In another incident, on May 12, 2011, local police announced the arrests of four Karachi University students, who were accused of being members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. The students were in possession of weapons and suicide bomber jackets, and planning to attack major government installations in the city.<sup>19</sup> The men were studying Applied Physics and Computer Science at the university.<sup>20</sup> After the arrests, various professors at the university reportedly worried that students with a “jihadist bent of mind” were more inclined to study at departments such as Chemical Engineering, Applied Physics and Computer Science—all subject areas that could be used to further jihadist violence.<sup>21</sup>

Al-Qa`ida and the Taliban's move to penetrate academic institutions is strategic, said police officials who run anti-militancy operations in the city, adding that military groups have successfully gained sympathizers at not only Karachi University, but also at NED University of Engineering and Technology, Dawood College of Engineering and Technology, the Institute of Chartered Accountants and other prestigious institutions.

Taliban groups distribute jihadist literature among college and university students in Karachi in an effort to recruit them into militancy, and also disseminate guidelines for making bombs and thwarting explosive detection equipment to potential recruits, according to media.<sup>22</sup>

Observers argue that JI, and especially its student wing Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT), has faced internal dissent ever since the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. JI's decision not to take a clear stand against the

**“Taliban groups distribute jihadist literature among college and university students in Karachi in an effort to recruit them into militancy.”**

intervention in Afghanistan upset many of the party's more radical members, especially among the youth. There is evidence that radical members within the party have joined or supported militant activities in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup>

It is also reported that Jundullah, a banned militant outfit linked with al-Qa`ida and the TTP, was also formed by former IJT activist Attaur Rehman, a student of the statistics department at Karachi University.<sup>24</sup> Rehman was arrested in June 2004 on charges of masterminding a series of terrorist attacks in Karachi and targeting security forces and government installations.<sup>25</sup>

Shahid Khan (also known as Qari Shahid), the alleged mastermind of the Mehran Naval Base attack in May 2011, was also a former member of the IJT and a key leader of the Punjabi Taliban.<sup>26</sup> He reportedly had a master's degree in Political Science from Karachi University and was a working journalist.<sup>27</sup>

Taliban groups also run recruiting activities at religious *madrassas*, the only schooling available to many underprivileged children. During General Zia-ul-Haq's 11-year rule, Karachi experienced the tremendous growth of *madrassa* networks, and these schools have trained and dispatched

13 “Punjabi Muhahideen Involved in KU Blast Held,” *The News International*, January 14, 2011.

14 Tahir Siddique, “Dr Akmal Facing Trial in UAE, High Court Told,” *Dawn*, August 20, 2011.

15 Ali K. Chishti, “Jundullah, the New al-Qaeda,” *Daily Times*, September 7, 2010.

16 “Punjabi Muhahideen Involved in KU Blast Held.”

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Siddiqui.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Javed Mahmood, “Jihadi Literature Distributed in Karachi Universities,” *Central Asia Online*, December 13, 2010; Javed Mahmood, “Al-Qaeda Distributes Thumb Drives to Teach Bomb Making,” *Central Asia Online*, December 13, 2010.

23 Kalbe Ali, “Jamaat Factor in Saga of the Missing,” *Dawn*, February 24, 2012.

24 Chishti.

25 Ibid.

26 Ali.

27 Ibid.



fighters to Afghanistan and Indian-administered Kashmir. According to government estimates, out of a total of 1,248 *madrasas* in Sindh Province, at least 869 exist in Karachi alone.<sup>28</sup> Taliban groups manipulate deprived youth through jihadist literature and lectures into believing they can go from a state of dispossession to one of exaltation through jihad.

The sectarian, jihadist content of the *madrasa* curriculum is untouched, and there is no meaningful control over money flow into and through *madrasas* and other religious institutions. According to one sociologist, the *madrasa* landscape in Pakistan is still frightening not because some are directly involved in creating terrorists, but because they all foster a particular mindset in which—under certain circumstances—terrorism can easily take root. The umbilical link of banned militant groups, especially Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), with Karachi's jihadist *madrasas* remains intact, their teachers and students its main strength. All SSP leaders, including Haq Nawaz Jhangvi and Azam Tariq, have been Karachi *madrasa* graduates.

#### Funding

Karachi, with its affluent residents and big business, has proved fertile ground for financing Taliban activities. Police say that Taliban generate funds in Karachi through bank robberies, protection rackets and kidnappings.<sup>29</sup> The police claim that the TTP has robbed Karachi banks of \$18 million since 2009.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, kidnappings of high-profile figures and businessmen for ransom is a major source of funding. Kidnap-for-ransom schemes are common among criminal groups in Karachi, yet there are signs that Taliban-affiliated groups are escalating their kidnap-for-ransom activities in the city as well. Many cases of kidnapping are not reported to police, and families decide to pay the ransom money quietly due to fear of repercussions from militants.

In 2011, there were more than 100 recorded kidnap-for-ransom cases in Karachi, a record high.<sup>31</sup> A government adviser in Sindh Province told the BBC, "With local criminals, kidnaps can take six weeks to resolve. With the Taliban it can take six months, or a year. They demand payment in foreign currency and they do their homework quite well."<sup>32</sup>

In October 2008, prominent Pakistani filmmaker Satish Anand was kidnapped in Karachi. He was eventually released in the Miran Shah area of North Waziristan Agency after his family

### **“Truck drivers who transport NATO supplies from Karachi to the border regularly pay protection money to the Taliban to prevent attacks on their convoys or families.”**

paid approximately \$169,000 for his release—down from an initial ransom demand of \$530,000.<sup>33</sup> In 2011, three Punjabi militants kidnapped local Karachi industrialist Riaz Chinoy and demanded approximately \$740,000. Although they eventually lowered their demands to \$211,000, all three militants were killed after the police raided the home in which they were holding Chinoy.<sup>34</sup>

Prominent figures are not the only targets in kidnap-for-ransom schemes. A tribal elder based in Karachi explained that dozens of truck drivers working in the city have paid billions of rupees in ransom money after militants kidnapped their family members who were living in South Waziristan and Mohmand tribal areas.<sup>35</sup> In these cases, ransom

demands range from about \$10,000 to \$50,000.<sup>36</sup>

In an interview with the BBC, one purported member of the Taliban in Karachi said that the group gets financial help from “university students and college students. Big businessmen also support us and help us. We cannot mention their names. People give freely.”<sup>37</sup> The Taliban member, who claimed to be in the group's finance department, said “donations” amount to \$80,000 per month in the Karachi area.<sup>38</sup> The BBC report suggested that what the Taliban call “donations,” others call “bhatta,” or protection money to prevent Taliban attacks.<sup>39</sup> Truck drivers who transport NATO supplies from Karachi to the border regularly pay protection money to the Taliban to prevent attacks on their convoys or families.

#### Conclusion

Karachi's role as a shelter for al-Qa`ida and Taliban militants is clear. Yet the extent of the Taliban's support network in the city, and its attempts to recruit educated students from the city's many universities, is deeper than commonly reported. Recruits who receive university level training in Applied Physics and similar disciplines likely pose a bigger threat than other new fighters. Separately, Karachi's role as Pakistan's financial hub is also at risk should al-Qa`ida and the Taliban escalate their fundraising attempts—such as kidnap-for-ransom and other extortion schemes—in the city.

*Zia Ur Rehman is a journalist and researcher and covers the militancy in Pakistan. He has written for several international and national publications including The Friday Times, Central Asia Online, The Jamestown Foundation, Himal South Asian and The News International, and contributed to the New York Times.*

28 “Karachi: 11,000 Foreigners in Sindh Madaris,” *Dawn*, January 16, 2003.

29 “Taliban's Brisk Trade of Kidnapping in Karachi,” BBC, March 23, 2012.

30 Central Asia Online, May 21, 2012.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Faraz Khan, “Satish Anand Released from Captivity After 6 Months,” *Daily Times*, April 13, 2009.

34 “Three Alleged Taliban Militants Killed in Karachi Encounter,” *The News International*, December 6, 2011.

35 Personal interview, Karachi-based political activist belonging to South Waziristan Agency, Karachi, Pakistan, July 18, 2012.

36 Ibid.

37 “Taliban's Brisk Trade of Kidnapping in Karachi.”

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

## A Biography of Rashid Rauf: Al-Qa`ida's British Operative

By Raffaello Pantucci

LIKE A GHOST in the machine, the figure of British jihadist Rashid Rauf is one that continues to emerge on the fringes of terrorist plots. A Kashmiri Briton whose life story epitomizes the Pakistani connection to Britain's jihadist community, Rauf was a young man who left the United Kingdom after the 9/11 attacks to connect with extremist networks in Pakistan. Having joined Kashmiri oriented networks that increasingly became intertwined with al-Qa`ida, he rose up the ranks, featuring in the background of a number of different plots—from the July 7, 2005, attacks in London to the 2006 liquid explosives plot targeting transatlantic airliners. After a brief period in Pakistani custody, Rauf escaped and once again played a role in a number of serious al-Qa`ida attempts against the West, including the 2009 plot by Najibullah Zazi to attack New York City's subway system.

His exact role in al-Qa`ida, however, has not been carefully explored publicly, in particular to try to assess how important the Briton was within the organization and to see whether he was merely a point of contact or a more operational leader. Given the fact that plots connected to him continued to be uncovered almost two years after his reported death in a U.S. drone strike in Waziristan in November 2008, confusion continues to dominate his narrative. In an attempt to try to pry apart the man from the myth, this article provides a detailed assessment of what is known about Rashid Rauf before drawing some conclusions about his position in al-Qa`ida.

### Birmingham Youth

Rashid Rauf was born in Mirpur, Pakistan, in 1981 and moved to Birmingham as a child.<sup>1</sup> His father, Abdul, moved with his family in the early 1980s as part of the chain of migrations

from that part of Pakistan to the United Kingdom. Living in the Alum Rock part of Birmingham, the Rauf family settled quickly into a normal life within the fiercely nationalistic Kashmiri immigrant community. In 1984, a group of men from the community calling themselves members of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Army (a previously unknown group, they named the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, a known group, as their mediators) kidnapped Birmingham-based Indian Deputy Consul General Ravindra Mhatre and demanded the release of imprisoned leaders in India and £1 million sterling. When their demands were not met, they executed Mhatre and dumped his body outside a farm near the city.<sup>2</sup> While the murder was a shock to many, it highlighted the strength of pro-Kashmiri feeling among the community.

Throughout the 1990s, jihadist leaders from Kashmir would travel through Birmingham and other British Pakistani communities raising money. One such individual who made this journey was Maulana Masood Azhar, who in 1992-1993 was reported to have given fiery speeches in Birmingham at mosques near where Rauf was being brought up raising money for Kashmiri fighters.<sup>3</sup> An apparently impressive speaker, an attendee told local journalist Amardeep Bassey that they saw women taking off their jewelry after conferences and handing it over to the preacher in support of Kashmir.<sup>4</sup>

The Rauf family was not atypical in its activity support of the Kashmiri cause, and came from a long line of distinguished religious leadership.<sup>5</sup> Reports have stated Abdul Rauf was a religious judge back in Kashmir, a role he continued in Birmingham.<sup>6</sup> He also helped found Crescent Relief, a charitable organization that sent many thousands of British pounds to provide

support in the wake of the October 2005 earthquake in Kashmir (although it is not clear Abdul Rauf was still involved then). The family's mother apparently used a garden shed as a makeshift school in which she would give free Islamic classes to local children.<sup>7</sup> Rashid Rauf's childhood home was near an Ahl-e-Hadith mosque,<sup>8</sup> the strict religious sect that has historically gone hand-in-hand with Lashkar-i-Tayyiba to provide religious indoctrination to their fighters.

Rauf attended Washwood Heath High School that became infamous in 1996 (while Rauf was a student) when a teacher, Israr Khan, leapt up after a rendition of carol-singing shouting "Who is your God? Why are you saying Jesus and Jesus Christ? God is not your God—it is Allah."<sup>9</sup> Another teacher expressed little surprise at the revelation that Rauf had been to the school, saying, "I'm not at all surprised that someone from the school has been implicated. There were some very influential radical elements there."<sup>10</sup> In 1999, he was awarded a place at Portsmouth University, although it remains unclear what he was studying.<sup>11</sup> Alongside him at the university was another Birmingham-Pakistani named Mohammed Gulzar, who while from the same background as Rauf appears to have come from a family far less involved in local politics.<sup>12</sup> A student at a nearby school in Birmingham, Gulzar lived a few streets away from Rauf and the two were apparently close as children.<sup>13</sup> The two are believed to have been involved in Islamic societies at the university and it is thought that this may have been at the root of why they never completed their studies. Gulzar and Rauf were reported to have started attending Tablighi Jama`at sessions in 2000,<sup>14</sup> and a childhood friend of

7 Cahal Milmo, Ian Herbert, Jason Bennetto and Justin Huggler, "From Birmingham Bakery to Pakistani Prison, The Mystery of Rashid Rauf," *Independent*, August 19, 2006.

8 Personal interview, Amardeep Bassey, June 2012.

9 "Muslim Teacher in Carol Concert Tirade is Made Ofsted Inspector," *Daily Mail*, September 30, 2006.

10 *Daily Mirror*, August 15, 2006.

11 Dominic Casciani, "Profile: Rashid Rauf," BBC, November 22, 2008.

12 Unpublished "Special Investigation" into Gulzar for the *Sunday Mercury* by Ben Goldby.

13 Ibid.

14 Mitchell D. Silber, *The Al Qaeda Factor* (Philadelphia:

1 "Allegations of UK Complicity in Torture," House of Lords and House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, 23<sup>rd</sup> Report of Session 2008-2009, July 21, 2009, p. 109.

2 *Regina v. Abdul Quayyum Raja*, Royal Courts of Justice, 2004.

3 Personal interview, Amardeep Bassey, June 2012. A West Midlands based journalist, Bassey has done a lot of work among Birmingham's Muslim and gang community.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Cole Morton and Andrew Buncombe, "The Life and Death of Rashid Rauf," *Independent on Sunday*, November 23, 2008.

Gulzar's reported that after returning from a trip to Pakistan that year, Gulzar "was much more devout. He had grown a long beard and seemed a lot quieter and more focused."<sup>15</sup>

During breaks in school, Rauf was reported to have been assisting his father's bakery business delivering cakes to local shops.<sup>16</sup> He was also seen at the local gym, played football with other locals and prayed relatively regularly at the mosque.<sup>17</sup> At the time, Birmingham had a number of gangs involved in defending local minority communities from right-wing attacks, and while it is not clear that Rauf was a member, he was reportedly close to one of the key members of the Aston Panthers.<sup>18</sup> He is also understood to have been close to an uncle living in East London who was involved in the Kashmiri struggle.<sup>19</sup> It is uncertain whether this uncle was involved in the East London charity "Crescent Relief" that Rauf's father had helped establish and that was reported by neighbors in 2005 (after Rauf's father had stepped down from his role) to have started to distribute flyers highlighting the plight of Kashmiris.<sup>20</sup>

In April 2002, Rauf and Gulzar abruptly left the country to go to Pakistan, wanted for questioning in the murder of an uncle of Rauf's named Mohammed Saeed.<sup>21</sup> The exact causes of the "frenzied stabbing" are unclear, with speculation that jihadist politics<sup>22</sup> or an arranged marriage<sup>23</sup> may have been causes. A couple of months prior to the murder,

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 42.

15 Unpublished "Special Investigation" into Gulzar for the *Sunday Mercury* by Ben Goldby.

16 Morton and Buncombe.

17 Ibid.

18 Personal interview, Amardeep Bassey, June 2012. More famous to readers than the Panthers in Birmingham was the Lynx gang of which Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg was a member. A number of individuals from these groups ended up involved in jihadist activity.

19 Personal interview, Amardeep Bassey, June 2012.

20 Ian Fisher and Serge Kovaleski, "In British Inquiry, a Family Caught in Two Worlds," *New York Times*, August 20, 2006.

21 Richard Greenberg, Paul Cruickshank and Chris Hansen, "Inside the Terror Plot that 'Rivalled 9/11,'" Dateline NBC, September 14, 2009.

22 Andrew Alderson, "Rashid Rauf: Profile of a Terror Mastermind," *Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 2008.

23 Milmo et al.

Gulzar and Rauf were reportedly spotted at an internet cafe in Portsmouth where they researched a U.S. aviation firm and purchased a GPS map receiver and "various compass/map CDs" using fraudulent credit cards.<sup>24</sup> It is unclear if they were traveling together, but this equipment would have proved useful to Rauf who by the middle of 2002 had reached Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Gulzar was ultimately acquitted of all charges against him.

#### Linking to Al-Qa`ida

Once Rauf reached Bahawalpur, his links to the Kashmiri jihad became clearer. Soon after arriving, he married the daughter of Ghulam Mustafa, the founder of the Darul Uloom Madina, a famous local Deobandi *madrassa*.<sup>25</sup> According to one report, Rauf knew Mustafa from when the preacher had stayed at the family home in Birmingham.<sup>26</sup> Another of Mustafa's daughters is married to Masood Azhar,<sup>27</sup> the jihadist leader who visited Birmingham and who had since 1992 risen to establish his own Kashmir oriented jihadist group, Jaysh-i-Muhammad.<sup>28</sup>

According to Rauf's confessions to Pakistani interrogators in 2006, his intention in 2002 was to go and fight the United States in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> Arriving in Pakistan, Rauf claimed he connected with Amjad Hussein Farooqi, a senior Pakistani member of Jaysh-i-Muhammad with close links to al-Qa`ida.<sup>29</sup> Rauf claimed that he first went to Afghanistan with Farooqi in mid-2002 and from there was able to establish a close connection with a number of core al-Qa`ida members.<sup>30</sup> When Farooqi was killed in a police raid in 2004, Rauf's connection within al-Qa`ida seems to have shifted to Abu Faraj al-Libi,<sup>31</sup> a senior member of al-Qa`ida described as head of external

24 *Secretary of State for the Home Department and AY*, Royal Courts of Justice, July 26, 2010.

25 "The Radical with Perfect Cover," *Sunday Times*, August 20, 2006.

26 "Rashid Rauf," *Guardian*, November 22, 2008.

27 The Radical with Perfect Cover."

28 Asif Farooqi, Carol Grisanti and Robert Windrem, "Sources: UK Terror Plot Suspect Forced to Talk," NBC News, August 18, 2006.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Silber, p. 50.

operations, who was reportedly in regular contact with operatives in the United Kingdom. Other Britons al-Libi is believed to have been in contact with include Mohammed al-Ghabra, a Syrian still living in East London who has been identified in British court documents as having stayed with al-Libi for a week in 2002.<sup>32</sup> Al-Ghabra was later accused of being involved in the 2006 transatlantic airliners plot (although no specific charges were laid against him) and is listed on the UN sanctions list as being associated with al-Qa`ida and al-Libi in particular.<sup>33</sup>

By 2004, Rauf was still a relatively low-level player within the organization, as he does not appear much in secondary reporting. For example, in the large Operation Crevice plot (which was disrupted by authorities in March 2004)—the first large-scale British plot in which a group of mostly second-generation Pakistani-Britons from London's environs planned to explode a large fertilizer device at a shopping mall—Rashid Rauf does not feature. Behind the scenes, however, it seems it was around this time that Rauf's first major plot came together.

#### Operationalizing

According to a post-operation report that European and U.S. security services believe was written by Rauf,<sup>34</sup>

32 *Secretary of State for the Home Department and AY*, Royal Courts of Justice, July 26, 2010.

33 "Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) Concerning Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," United Nations, October 2009.

34 The documents in question were found on German suspects believed linked to al-Qa`ida. They provide a post-operational assessment from al-Qa`ida's perspective of what happened in the July 7, 2005, and July 21, 2005, plots to attack London and the 2006 transatlantic airliners plot. They were first reported by Yassin Musharbash, "In ihren eigenen Worten," *Die Zeit*, March 15, 2012. Subsequent quotes attributed to Rauf are drawn from author read-outs, and the following news pieces: Nic Robertson, Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, "Document Shows Origins of 2006 Plot for Liquid Bombs on Planes," CNN, April 30, 2012; Nic Robertson, Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, "Documents Give New Details on al Qaeda's London Bombings," CNN, April 30, 2012; Duncan Gardham, "7/7 bombers Planned Attack on Bank of England," *Telegraph*, April 30, 2012; Duncan Gardham, "Al Qaeda Commander's Guide to Beating MI5," *Telegraph*, May 1, 2012. Heretofore, all these articles are referred to as the "Rauf documents."



at around this time a young Pakistani-Briton known as Umar made his way to Waziristan and connected with an individual identified in documents as Haji, but believed to be Abu Ubaydah al-Masri.<sup>35</sup> According to Rauf, Haji persuaded Umar to train for a martyrdom operation back in Europe and was sent to the United Kingdom in June 2004 once he had been trained in how to use hydrogen peroxide as an explosive.<sup>36</sup> The connection, however, seems to have been through Haji, with Rauf playing a supportive role.

While Umar failed to carry out his attack, Rauf reported that he did pass on the contacts for Mohammed Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, two men Umar knew and whom he trusted. Rauf waited a couple of weeks before making contact with the two men and assessed whether they seemed dedicated enough to the cause.<sup>37</sup> Having concluded the men were committed, he traveled with them into the tribal areas putting them in direct contact with Haji. Leaving them with the leader for a couple of days, by the time he returned Haji had persuaded them to carry out attacks in the United Kingdom.<sup>38</sup> Rauf then chaperoned the two men around the tribal regions to get explosives training, record their suicide videos, and instruct them on the targets they should aim for once back in the United Kingdom. At a certain point, he reported planning to travel back with the two to help them with their operation, but that he was unable to get a clean passport in time.<sup>39</sup> In any event, by February 8, 2005, Khan and Tanweer moved back to the United Kingdom.<sup>40</sup> Rauf continued to manage the plot from afar, using Yahoo messenger, e-mails and mobile phones to help them decide on targeting and helping them when they encountered problems, for example in the concentration of the hydrogen peroxide.<sup>41</sup>

In December 2004, Rauf reported receiving information that a new group of three Britons had arrived in the tribal areas—Mukhtar Said Ibrahim, Rizwan

Majid and Shakeel Ismail (though they were all using cover names).<sup>42</sup> Ibrahim boasted to his roommate as he left that he was off to “do jihad” and that “maybe [he] wouldn’t see [Ibrahim] again, maybe [they] were going to see each other in heaven.”<sup>43</sup> Having waited a couple of weeks, Rauf made contact and spent some time with the men assessing their credentials and their potential use as plotters. He then dispatched them to meet with Haji who took them to be trained in explosives.<sup>44</sup> Likely more focused on the eventual July 7, 2005, plotters, Rauf spent less time with the men, reporting that while they were receiving their explosives training there was an accident during which Majid and Ismail were killed. When he met Ibrahim again, it was in Islamabad and the two had a short period in which to record his suicide video, arrange his return flight, organize codes and methods of communication and ensure that Ibrahim was ready for his operation.<sup>45</sup>

The shortened timeline was due to the need to get Ibrahim out of the country before his visa expired. Rauf reported that everything came together and he received a note from Ibrahim saying he had arrived safely in the United Kingdom.<sup>46</sup> After this, however, there was silence with no responses using the predetermined methods. Through other contacts, Rauf was able to reach out to Ibrahim, but all he heard back was that the operation was proceeding.<sup>47</sup>

In the end, the first plot succeeded and the second did not. Rauf ascribed the fact that he was able to keep contact with Khan as the key behind success, since he could manage the operation and help Khan work through the technical difficulties with the hydrogen peroxide. Based on Rauf’s assessments, it is possible to see that with both cells he acted as the first point of contact for the fighters having been passed their details, vetted them for suitability and then helped them connect with more

senior members of al-Qa`ida who trained and persuaded them to become willing suicide bombers back in the United Kingdom. He also helped the plotters record their martyrdom videos and arranged their communication methods.<sup>48</sup> Clearly a key figure in the plots, he was nevertheless a middleman, and one who to some degree must have

### **“From an al-Qa`ida perspective, Rauf’s escape from custody was a blessing, and he almost immediately started to feature in reports from foreign fighters who joined al-Qa`ida.”**

been viewed as expendable given the fact that he claimed to have attempted to go back to operate alongside the plotters in the United Kingdom, an operationally risky move. Furthermore, the fact that he played a different role with the July 21, 2005, plotters (spending less time with them) suggests that he was not the only operator shepherding cells around at the time.

#### **Rising in the Ranks**

The success of the July 7, 2005, operation in London—in which 52 people died on London’s public transportation system—is likely to have raised Rauf’s profile within al-Qa`ida. By the time he came to the transatlantic airliners plot in his post-operation report, Rauf referred to himself and Haji as peers and co-plotters. While it is clear that Haji was still the senior organizer, Rauf had taken on a far more hands-on leadership role in the plot. He described the technical details of how they decided to come to use liquid explosives on planes and other particular aspects of the chemical composition of the devices, suggesting deep involvement in this aspect.<sup>49</sup>

35 Rauf documents.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 “7 July Bombings,” BBC, July 8, 2008.

41 Rauf documents.

42 Ibid. “Terror: How a String of Blunders Left Bombers Free to Cause Carnage,” *Daily Mail*, July 10, 2007; *Secretary of State for the Home Department and AH*, Royal Courts of Justice, May 9, 2008.

43 “Profile: Mukhtar Said Ibrahim,” BBC, July 11, 2007.

44 Rauf documents.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

Rauf provided a lot less detail about shepherding the key figures in the plot around the tribal regions, and instead wrote about the individuals like pawns in an operation.<sup>50</sup> He described using methods of communication similar to those he deployed in the earlier plots, but instead this time had a set of mobile numbers he was using for the operation, one for each contact. He described how he had three numbers for contacts in the United Kingdom and one for Pakistan.<sup>51</sup> Court evidence of his control over the plot was provided in the form of e-mails that were supposedly from him (using the nickname “Paps”) or someone linked to him showing Rauf directing key figures on the ground. The language deployed was colloquial British slang, and clearly delivered by someone with good command of the language.<sup>52</sup>

In a separate case linked to the plot, Rauf instructed via e-mail Adam Khatib, one of the younger members of the network, to behave himself after he was arrested for driving illegally.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, authorities alleged that he dispatched his old Birmingham friend Mohammed Gulzar back to the United Kingdom to act as his man on the ground.<sup>54</sup> During the time since Gulzar had fled from the United Kingdom, the only substantial activities he is identified as doing is traveling back and forth to South Africa to obtain a passport and a wife, and meeting with Mohammed al-Ghabra (which he admitted to in court).<sup>55</sup> Later court documents identified Gulzar as being “in contact with Rauf and with one of the convicted plotters, Assad Sarwar.”<sup>56</sup> As well as being in touch with at least one key figure on the ground in the United Kingdom linked to the airliners plot, authorities alleged that Gulzar was in touch with at least one other potential cell in the United Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> Rauf referred to two other

individuals in his report who were not detected, as well as highlighting the purpose of Assad Sarwar to act as bombmaker and to stay undetected for use after the plot.<sup>58</sup>

While this plot has clear evidence of Rauf having moved up the value chain in al-Qa`ida—working to establish networks in Europe for future attacks, coordinating the plot seemingly on the same level as a senior al-Qa`ida leader, involved in most aspects from managing the individuals to the technical aspects of the bomb—it ended up with him being arrested in Pakistan. Largely kept from talking to the press, when he was brought before a court in December 2006 he declared, “I have done nothing wrong but I have been framed. I am not optimistic that I will be cleared... everything against me is based on lies, lies.”<sup>59</sup> Oddly, however, for an innocent man, he did not appear to ask for consular assistance.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the Pakistani courts were forgiving and a judge declared the charges against him “flimsy” and with “no substance,” dropping all the charges.<sup>61</sup> Less than a year later, he had still not been extradited to the United Kingdom, and in September 2007 was ordered released by a Pakistani court.<sup>62</sup> Before any of this could take place, however, in December that year he managed to escape from custody in very questionable circumstances.<sup>63</sup>

#### Returning to the Fight

Whether anything can be read into his escape and Pakistani unwillingness to extradite him to the United Kingdom is unclear. From an al-Qa`ida perspective, however, Rauf’s escape from custody was a blessing, and he almost immediately started to feature in reports from foreign fighters who joined al-Qa`ida. For example, Bryant Neal Vinas, a young American who came to the tribal

belt to join the fighting in Afghanistan in September 2007, claimed to have met Rauf and senior al-Qa`ida ideologue Abu Yahya al-Libi at some point in 2008.<sup>64</sup> In November 2008, a few days before Rauf was allegedly killed in a drone strike, Vinas was captured in Peshawar by Pakistani forces. He claimed to have met senior al-Qa`ida leaders and to have plotted with them to attack the Long Island Rail Road in the United States.<sup>65</sup> Whether it was Rauf who directed him is unclear, but security services in the United Kingdom believe that during 2008 Rauf devised a plan to use a group of local Pashtuns who were to infiltrate the United Kingdom using student visas and allegedly carry out an attack in a northern British city.<sup>66</sup> The specifics of his involvement in the plot are uncertain given the fact that no one has been convicted of the plot and one of the key alleged figures is currently fighting extradition to the United States, obstructing the release of information.

Rauf’s hand was more prominently visible in another plot linked to this group: the cell led by Najibullah Zazi that was intercepted in September 2009 during an attempt to carry out a suicide bombing on the New York City subway system. According to Zazi’s co-conspirator Zarein Ahmedzay, having made contact with al-Qa`ida in Peshawar in September 2008 they were taken by “Ahmad” to Miran Shah in the tribal belt where one day a convoy of vehicles came to meet them bearing Salah al-Somali and Rashid Rauf. Rauf is reported to have told the men that “they would be presented with a serious decision” and had to decide whether they wanted to become suicide bombers.<sup>67</sup> A third cell, connected through an e-mail account that was managed by “Ahmad” who was in touch with individuals from all three groups, was uncovered in Oslo. It is unclear whether Rauf met with the key plotters, although on the presumption that he was indeed killed during a drone strike on November 22, 2008, it would have been difficult for him to meet with the lead plotter Mikael

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 “Explosive Emails,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 7, 2009.

53 Duncan Gardham, “Teenager Sentenced to 18 Years after Being Groomed as Suicide Bomber in Trans-Atlantic Airlines Plot,” *Telegraph*, December 10, 2009.

54 Greenberg et al.

55 *Secretary of State for the Home Department and AY*, Royal Courts of Justice, July 26, 2010; Silber, p. 42.

56 *Secretary of State for the Home Department and AM*, Royal Courts of Justice, July 6, 2012.

57 Ibid. *Secretary of State for the Home Department and AM*,

Royal Courts of Justice, December 21, 2009.

58 Rauf documents.

59 David Williams, “It’s All Lies, Protests Suspected Air Bomber,” *Daily Mail*, December 22, 2006.

60 “UK Request Being Considered: FO: Extradition of Rashid Rauf,” *Dawn*, August 28, 2006.

61 CNN, December 13, 2006.

62 “Release of Two Britons including Rashid Rauf Sought,” *Daily Times*, September 1, 2007.

63 Massoud Ansari and Miles Erwin, “London Airline Bomb Plot Suspect Escapes,” *Daily Telegraph*, December 16, 2007.

64 Sebastian Rotella and Josh Meyer, “A Young American’s Journey into Al Qaeda,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 2009.

65 *USA v. John Doe*, Eastern District of New York, 2009.

66 “Arrest of ‘Easter Bombers’ Led to International al Qaeda Network,” *Daily Telegraph*, May 18, 2010.

67 Silber, p. 160.

Davud since it was only November 20, 2008, that Davud left Turkey for Iran to make his journey to the tribal belt.<sup>68</sup>

What is clear is that Rauf was no longer the contact man reaching out and vetting recruits or shuttling them around. In both Vinas' and Ahmedzay's accounts, he was a figure brought in to talk to the aspirant plotters and then left them to be trained and prepared by others. In this set of cells, it appears as though it was "Ahmad" acting as the courier, bringing the aspirant warriors around, acting as their first point of contact with al-Qa`ida and then later managing the e-mail account through which they could communicate with the al-Qa`ida leaders—roles that Rauf played with the July 7 plotters. His elevation to the core of al-Qa`ida seemed complete, with him now only appearing to talk to foreign recruits alongside senior al-Qa`ida members and presumably acting as an English-speaking figure of importance who could talk to foreigners in their own terms. Having met them, he seemed to slip into the background from where he directed the men immediately handling the plotters—in this case "Ahmad" who acted as the go-between to the various cells. Once established, the plots were seemingly able to run without Rauf's leadership, something necessary given his reported death on November 22, 2008. It was another five months before the plotters in northern England were uncovered, and almost a year before Najibullah Zazi and his cell were detected in New York.

### Conclusion

Rashid Rauf's body was never found, al-Qa`ida never officially recognized his death and plots with links to him were still being uncovered almost two years after his reported demise. His family is convinced he is alive and in the custody of Pakistani intelligence services,<sup>69</sup> while senior American sources are certain he is dead.<sup>70</sup> Whatever the case, it seems clear that Rashid Rauf was by his death a serious player in al-Qa`ida who had risen up the ranks from a British-Pakistani fixer and foot soldier to the key hub for a number of terrorist

plots. His ascension was no doubt accelerated by his Kashmiri jihadist pedigree and his ability to develop close relationships with numerous senior al-Qa`ida figures. Having gained their trust, he was then used as a friendly foreign face who was able to vet and meet foreign fighters who arrived in the tribal belt seeking to connect with al-Qa`ida. For these foreigners, the contact with al-Qa`ida was likely made easier by the presence of someone like Rauf—a Westernized foreigner who could understand their backgrounds and their psychological journey. His death, if true, would have clearly been a loss to the group, although it does not seem as though it has necessarily stopped their capacity to train and dispatch fighters back to plot attacks.

Rauf's trajectory from a Birmingham Pakistani involved in Kashmiri politics and Islamism to an al-Qa`ida militant is one that is typical of the British jihadist narrative, and one that echoes a number of other narratives. Where Rauf distinguished himself is in having survived within al-Qa`ida in the tribal belt for so long, slowly rising up to a rank of some importance within the group and not ultimately returning to the United Kingdom to attempt to carry out an attack. Instead, from his perch in the tribal belt he acted as a puppeteer to a series of plots that while only successful once, were able to strike fear and terror right into the heart of the West. The 2006 transatlantic airliners plot, with its innovative use of liquid explosives, led to the still current ban on liquids on airplanes. Rashid Rauf, dead or alive, clearly succeeded in making his mark on the world as a key al-Qa`ida figure.

*Raffaello Pantucci is an Associate Fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College, and the author of the forthcoming We Love Death As You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Mujahedeen (Hurst/Columbia University Press).*

## Mexican DTO Influence Extends Deep into United States

By Sylvia Longmire

THE DRUG WAR in Mexico has been raging for almost a decade and news headlines suggest violence is only getting worse. Half a dozen Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are vying for control of lucrative drug smuggling corridors, both along the border with the United States and within Mexico, while dozens of smaller "mini cartels" and criminal groups are fighting for the leftovers.

As a result, the United States has allocated more resources to its southwest border to prevent a spillover of violence. Nevertheless, an increasing number of incidents show that some spillover is already occurring, and that DTO-related violence is occurring well beyond the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>1</sup> This article argues that it is important for U.S. law enforcement agencies across the country—not just those located on the U.S.-Mexico border—to understand the DTO threat to the United States, and to prepare accordingly.

### DTOs' Expanding U.S. Operations

DTOs are a known threat along the U.S.-Mexico border. Their penetration, however, extends much deeper into the United States than is commonly known among the public. Law enforcement officers who work in states far from the U.S.-Mexico border—and especially those who do not routinely work drug cases—do not have a working knowledge of the main Mexican DTOs, or in what type of activities they are involved. One could argue that this lack of understanding is concerning since, according to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), Mexican DTOs are operating (either directly or

<sup>1</sup> The National Drug Intelligence Center at the U.S. Department of Justice released an annual National Drug Threat Assessment. In the 2008 assessment, it stated that "Mexican DTOs maintain drug distribution networks or supply drugs to distributors in at least 230 U.S. cities." In the 2011 assessment, it stated that "Mexican-based TCOs were operating in more than a thousand U.S. cities during 2009 and 2010." See National Drug Intelligence Center, U.S. Department of Justice, available at [www.justice.gov/archive/ndic](http://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic).

<sup>68</sup> "Den offentlege patalemakta mot Mikael Davud, Shwan Sadek Saeed Bujak Bujak, David Jakobsen," Oslo City Court, January 30, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Personal interview, Amardeep Bassey, June 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Greenberg et al.



by proxy) in more than 1,000 U.S. cities (up from 230 in its 2008 report) and are responsible for roughly 90% of the illegal drugs sold and consumed in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Several different counterdrug operations, investigations, and arrests in recent years illustrate the breadth of the DTOs' reach. In October 2009, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced the arrests of nearly

**“Tractor-trailers are ideal places to move illegal drugs from Mexico in hidden compartments for transport across the United States, often without the knowledge of the truck driver.”**

1,200 individuals on narcotics-related charges and the seizure of more than 11.7 tons of narcotics as part of a 44-month multiagency law enforcement investigation known as “Project Coronado.”<sup>3</sup> In just the two days prior to the announcement, 303 people in 19 states were arrested during the operation, which targeted the distribution network of the Mexican DTO La Familia Michoacana.<sup>4</sup>

The primary DTOs tend to have large drug operations running in major U.S. cities due to the higher local demand and ability to move drugs in and out of cities with ease. In April 2009, agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration arrested a Gulf Cartel associate in a hotel room at Baltimore's Inner Harbor with more than \$600,000 in alleged drug proceeds.<sup>5</sup> The Gulf Cartel sent an operative to Baltimore to find out what happened to the money, but he was arrested by the FBI and turned

into an informant. In a U.S. court, the informant explained how he ran a direct distribution route through Little Rock, Wisconsin, Chicago, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Delaware, and Atlanta:<sup>6</sup>

driving across the country in a mobile home packed with millions of dollars' worth of cocaine. Testifying through an interpreter...he discussed staying in fancy hotels and dining at fine restaurants to set up contacts, and outlined how drugs are smuggled into the country by boat, personal watercraft and tractor-trailer, directed from Mexico by cartel members with two-way radios.<sup>7</sup>

DTOs have targeted unassuming, non-Hispanic U.S. citizens willing and able to assist with their drug operations. In January 2010, for example, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Denver, Colorado, announced that 35 people, including a retired Denver firefighter and an assistant baseball coach at Regis University, were part of a gang-affiliated network that distributed 20 kilograms of Mexican cocaine a week in the metro area.<sup>8</sup>

In one of the more interesting finds in recent U.S. drug raids, a federal drug trafficking investigation in May 2012 led to six arrests in the Chicago area, as well as the seizure of heroin, cash, weapons, and a Green Bay Packers Super Bowl ring reported stolen from a team executive.<sup>9</sup> Authorities said the individuals arrested were part of an organization with direct ties to Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

In another example from May 2012, a federal grand jury in Denver indicted 22 people in four states for drug trafficking and money laundering following an 18-month investigation into smugglers using “corrupt drivers” from a California trucking company to transport drugs and illegal proceeds.<sup>11</sup> As part of the

scheme, the suspects used “corrupt drivers” from a California trucking company to move methamphetamine and money between California and Colorado.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. Attorney's Office in Denver said that “in one instance, the money was hidden in a truck load of milk...[the gang] also used other means to send money back to California, including one instance where a minor had cash strapped to his body as he was being driven to California.”<sup>13</sup>

**DTO Blood Spilled on U.S. Soil**

Although many Americans are familiar with news of drug smuggling and cocaine rings, what is more surprising is the number of violent incidents committed by members of Mexican DTOs in cities and small communities hundreds, and sometimes more than a thousand, miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border.

Shelby County in northern Alabama might see a handful of murders in an entire year.<sup>14</sup> Yet in August 2008 several deputies stumbled upon a grisly sight: five dead men on the floor of an apartment living room. According to press reports, the bodies showed

**“Having a clear understanding of DTO methods of operation and U.S. presence allows law enforcement officers to better prepare for future confrontations with drug traffickers.”**

signs of torture. “Burns seared into their earlobes revealed where modified jumper cables had been clamped as an improvised electrocution device,” said the Associated Press. “Adhesive from duct tape used to bind the victims still clung to wrists and faces, from mouths to noses.”<sup>15</sup> The throats of the five men had also been slashed open after they

2 Ibid.

3 “More Than 300 Alleged La Familia Cartel Members and Associates Arrested in Two-Day Nationwide Take-down,” press release, U.S. Department of Justice, October 22, 2009.

4 Ibid.

5 Justin Fenton, “Mexican Cartel on Trial in Baltimore Drug Case,” *Baltimore Sun*, February 2, 2011.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Joey Bunch, “Firefighter, Coach Among Arrested in Alleged Cocaine Ring,” *Denver Post*, November 8, 2010.

9 Annie Sweeney, “Feds Make 6 Drug Arrests, Seize Heroin, Weapons, Super Bowl Ring,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 4, 2012.

10 Ibid.

11 Keith Coffman, “Feds Say Bust Drug Ring with Ties to

Mexican Drug Cartel,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 2012.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Pauline Arrillaga, “Grisly Slayings Brings Mexican Drug War to US,” Associated Press, April 18, 2009.

15 Ibid.

were murdered.<sup>16</sup> The murders were the result of the loss by the victims of \$500,000 belonging to the Gulf Cartel.<sup>17</sup> “We became a [drug trafficking] hub without knowing it,” Shelby County Sheriff Chris Curry told a reporter. “We’ve got to wake people up because we’re seeing it all over the place. It is now firmly located throughout this country.”<sup>18</sup>

How did this come to happen in a small community so far from the southwest border? Due to the routes of the highways in Alabama, Shelby County is a huge throughway for commercial trucks, with highways 65, 20, 59 and 459 running east to Atlanta, north to Nashville, south to New Orleans, west to Dallas. Tractor-trailers are ideal places to move illegal drugs from Mexico in hidden compartments for transport across the United States, often without the knowledge of the truck driver.

Just a few months later and 1,800 miles away, three masked and armed men stormed into six-year-old Cole Puffinburger’s home in Las Vegas. The men tied up Cole’s mother and her boyfriend, ransacked the house, and then kidnapped Cole at gunpoint. Cole was found wandering the streets four days later unharmed. The reason for the incident was because Cole’s grandfather had scammed millions of dollars from one of the men—suspected enforcers for the Gulf Cartel—and they came to collect on his debt.<sup>19</sup>

In just the first half of 2008, police in Gwinnett County, Georgia, had to deal with nine kidnapping cases related to the Mexican drug trade.<sup>20</sup> Today, drug-related kidnappings have continued in the United States, and reports of confrontations between traffickers and U.S. law enforcement officers—most often in south Texas—have increased.<sup>21</sup>

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Nicholas Riccardi, “Kidnapped Boy is Safe,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 2008.

20 Mary Lou Pickel, “Flood’ of Drugs from Mexico Linked to Area Abductions,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 20, 2008.

21 Anthony Kimery, “Drug, Human Smuggling, Cartel Shootouts With Police Escalate In Rio Grande Valley,” *Homeland Security Today*, December 6, 2011.

### Difficulty in Attributing Violence to Mexican DTOs

One of the problems for law enforcement with these types of cases is how to capture the Mexican DTO connection—if it is even possible, or desirable. Most, if not all, state and local law enforcement agencies that investigate drug-related crimes do not have a specific manner of recording a crime’s connection to a Mexican DTO. Suspects may have easily identifiable gang tattoos, or—if the officer is lucky—he or she will be wearing clothing or driving a vehicle with a DTO-associated logo. There are many police departments whose officers are unaware of these logo associations, however, and a gang tattoo identification

### “The more DTO connections that can be made by law enforcement at the local level across the country, the better that analysts can identify shifts and trends in national drug trafficking routes.”

will likely only lead to speculation about a DTO affiliation. There is also no “checkbox” on a police report or field in an electronic database to be filled in with the name of a DTO that might have been provided by a drug dealing or using suspect.

It is typically difficult to ascertain a solid DTO connection because of the way these cartels operate in the United States. DTOs try to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the ultimate purveyors of their product on the street to reduce the chances of identification and prosecution. They coopt U.S.-based gangs in cities and communities across the country to buy drugs from them at wholesale prices, then turn around and sell them on the streets. Gang leaders know few details about the individuals from which they buy their wholesale drug quantities, and probably do not always know the exact DTO affiliation—although this may sometimes be useful for gang leaders so that they do not betray one particular DTO by dealing with a rival. Street

dealers—most commonly the people who are busted for drug distribution—know even less than the gang leaders.<sup>22</sup>

Individuals who work directly for the DTOs in the United States operate in a cell structure, much like terrorist organizations.<sup>23</sup> Members of the Sinaloa Cartel working in Chicago will probably not know members of the same DTO working a couple of hours south in Peoria, although one cell leader might know the other. This type of organization allows a DTO to further insulate itself from U.S. law enforcement.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

The lack of clarity on DTO activity in the United States makes it difficult for law enforcement agencies—especially those located far from the southwest border—to prepare themselves for potential confrontations.

It is important to understand that part of this challenge is political. Elected officials and law enforcement leaders in the four southwest border states often cannot agree on the definition and existence of border violence “spillover,” and that is with good reason—a standardized definition does not exist. As a result, spillover becomes politicized; some public officials want more attention and resources directed to their part of the border, which they argue is being overrun with violent drug smugglers and illegal immigrants, while other officials tout their city’s or community’s low violent crime statistics and capability of their police and sheriff departments, intent on not losing tourists, investments, and future elections.

Despite this, most agencies in the southwest have at least a fundamental understanding—and often well beyond that—of how DTOs operate and the threats their people could pose to police

22 “2011 National Gang Threat Assessment: Emerging Trends,” National Gang Intelligence Center, U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011.

23 According to one report, “Some of the DTOs have adopted a more decentralized and networked model with independent cell-like structures that make it harder for law enforcement to dismantle.” For details, see June S. Beittel, “Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence,” Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2012, p. 31.

24 Ibid.

officers. Move away from the border, however, and that knowledge becomes sparser—as do the implications of crime connections to Mexican DTOs, and where their local incidents fit in with the national criminal threat picture.

Having a clear understanding of DTO methods of operation and U.S. presence allows law enforcement officers to better prepare for future confrontations with drug traffickers. They can identify certain logos on clothing or markings on drug packages that can connect their activities to a Mexican DTO operating in the area. It helps them ask better questions to elicit more useful answers about the local drug trade, and possibly ties of their higher-ups to larger, national and international trafficking organizations.

As such, the more DTO connections that can be made by law enforcement at the local level across the country, the better that analysts can identify shifts and trends in national drug trafficking routes. It can also help predict future shifts based on arrests or enforcement efforts, which aids both police officers on the streets and policymakers who need to determine required resources for their departments. DTO members and their associates in the United States excel at hiding in plain sight in all parts of the country, and the better educated and prepared U.S. law enforcement officers are about them, the more effective they will be at stopping their illegal activities.

*Sylvia Longmire is a medically retired Air Force captain and former Special Agent with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. She is also a former Senior Intelligence Analyst for the California State Fusion Center, where she focused almost exclusively on Mexican DTOs and border violence issues. Ms. Longmire is currently a consultant, correspondent for Homeland Security Today magazine, and author of Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico's Drug Wars.*

## Information Wars: Assessing the Social Media Battlefield in Syria

By Chris Zambelis

EFFORTS TO UNDERSTAND the nuances inherent to the political turmoil in Syria present daunting challenges. While the numerous insurgent factions and the Syrian security forces engage each other in combat in towns and cities to secure tangible battlefield gains, the warring parties are also waging a contentious information war in cyberspace, specifically within the virtual arena of online social media. The various strands of the opposition in Syria—political and violent—have taken to social media since the earliest stages of the uprising to advance their agendas. Analogous to their role in facilitating communication and information exchange during the wave of revolts that have been sweeping the Arab world since 2011, new media platforms such as the array of social media websites and related technologies that are available to the public at virtually little or no cost have become crucial to shaping how the crisis in Syria is portrayed and perceived.<sup>1</sup>

This article examines the social media battlefield in the Syrian uprising with specific attention on the Free Syrian Army's (FSA) online activities. It also addresses the relative impact of the social media battlefield on dictating the course of events in Syria.

### The Social Media Landscape

Every serious political or militant actor with a stake in what is happening in Syria has a presence on social media through some combination of officially hosted websites and blogs, as well as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Flickr, online chat room forums, Short Message Service (SMS) platforms, and other venues. The leading political opposition factions, namely the Syrian

National Council (SNC),<sup>2</sup> National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC),<sup>3</sup> and the numerous Local Coordination Committees of Syria (LCCs),<sup>4</sup> all operate a network of professionally-designed and maintained websites and social media platforms to broadcast information. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a body closely tied to the SNC, is also widely active on social media. The SOHR publicizes alleged casualty counts and human rights abuses it blames on the Ba`athist regime's security services and irregular paramilitary forces.<sup>5</sup>

Led by the FSA and the numerous insurgent groups that claim to be fighting under its umbrella, the violent strain of the Syrian opposition is also well represented on social media.<sup>6</sup> The Omawi News Live<sup>7</sup> network and Ugarit News<sup>8</sup> are two of the most prominent among a host of outlets that serve as

2 For the official website of the Syrian National Council (SNC), see <http://ar.syriancouncil.org>.

3 For the official website of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC), see <http://www.ncsyria.com>.

4 For the official website of the Local Coordination Committees of Syria (LCCs), see <http://www.lccsyria.org>.

5 These details are located on the official website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), available at <http://www.syriahr.com>.

6 A number of websites broadcast official statements, video footage, and related material on behalf of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). See the FSA's self-declared official website at <http://www.free-syrian-army.com>. Similarly, the regularly updated <http://www.syrianarmyfree.com> and the less frequently updated <http://www.freesyrianarmy1.com> also provide an extensive sampling of FSA discourse and material. Also see the FSA's official Twitter and YouTube pages, available at: <http://twitter.com/FreeSyrianArmy> and [http://www.youtube.com/user/MrFSAOI?ob=O&feature=results\\_main](http://www.youtube.com/user/MrFSAOI?ob=O&feature=results_main), respectively. In addition to the FSA, the numerous insurgent groups operating autonomously, but which at the same time also claim to be affiliated with the FSA, have also established a presence on social media. The FSA-affiliated al-Farouq Battalion posts video footage of its attacks and other items on its official YouTube channel, available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/ktaealfarooq/videos> and Twitter page, available at <https://twitter.com/ktaealfarooq>.

7 See the official YouTube channel of Omawi News Live, available at: [http://www.youtube.com/user/omawitv?feature=results\\_main](http://www.youtube.com/user/omawitv?feature=results_main). Also see the official Twitter page of Omawi News Live, available at: <https://twitter.com/OmawiLive>.

8 See the official YouTube channel of Ugarit News, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/UgaritNews>.

1 For the purposes of this article, the author identifies a broad typology of social media that includes a variety of internet-based communication technologies, namely, conventional websites, official and independent blogs, chat room forums, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Google+, Flickr, and similar venues, as well as Short-Message Service (SMS) and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) platforms such as Skype.



quasi-official information platforms broadcasting a wide range of material on behalf of the Syrian opposition on social media. Both networks air amateur video footage of alleged attacks by Syrian security forces and insurgent operations, reports documenting purported defections of members of the Syrian military, alleged evidence of human rights abuses and atrocities perpetrated by the Ba`athist regime, and other items that cast Damascus in a negative light. The growing radical Islamist current within the Syrian opposition, including Jabhat al-Nusra and other extremist movements that appear to be motivated by al-Qa`ida's style of radicalism are also active on social media.<sup>9</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra announced its formation and claimed responsibility for a series of terrorist attacks across Syria through official declarations and video features produced by its al-Manara al-Bayda Foundation for Media Production and issued on radical Islamist websites and chat room forums.<sup>10</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra has since carved out its own place on social media through the creation of a dedicated website and affiliated online outlets.<sup>11</sup>

The importance of winning the information war on social media has not been lost to the Ba`athist regime and its supporters. Official Syrian media and information outlets such as the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) are active online.<sup>12</sup> The creation of the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA) and a host of associated outlets, however, reflects a greater effort by the Ba`athist regime to combat the opposition's struggle to monopolize the information war.<sup>13</sup> In addition to encouraging supporters of the Ba`athist regime to engage in online activism, the SEA is also involved in cyber warfare and hacking operations. The SEA has produced a recruitment video in Arabic and English that

9 Brian Fishman, "The Evidence of Jihadist Activity in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 5:5 (2012).

10 Zeina Karam, "Iraq Warns al-Qaeda Flowing into Syria," Associated Press, July 5, 2012.

11 See the official Jabhat al-Nusra website, available at <http://alnusraa.blogspot.com>.

12 See the official website of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), available at: <http://www.sana.sy>. Also see the official SANA Twitter page, available at <https://twitter.com/SANASyria>.

13 See the official website of the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA), available at <http://syrian-es.org>.

outlines its mission to defend Syria and is reminiscent of the videos issued by the hacktivist group Anonymous in its presentation and tone.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, the SEA relies on a nationalistic discourse that emphasizes Syrian unity and loyalty among Syrians to their country. Social media platforms associated with the Ba`athist regime reflect the narrative presented by Damascus: Syria portrays the crisis as an effort by its primary enemies—the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Israel—and their regional allies to undermine and destroy Syria by way of proxy war and encouraging sectarianism, violent insurrection, and radical Islamist militancy.<sup>15</sup> A range of social media outlets operated by supporters of the Ba`athist regime inside Syria and abroad also helps sustain this effort to counter the opposition.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Free Syrian Army Online

The FSA, the amorphous insurgent movement that has emerged as the armed wing of the Syrian opposition faction directed by the SNC, along with its many armed affiliates are prolific on social media. The inaugural statement declaring the establishment of the FSA by defected Syrian Air Force colonel and subsequent FSA commander Riyad Musa al-Asa'd and seven fellow members of the Syrian military was uploaded to YouTube and other social media outlets.<sup>17</sup> The numerous other militant groups that have proclaimed their allegiance to the FSA and intention to violently resist the Ba`athist regime have likewise taken to social media to announce their motives.<sup>18</sup>

14 See "Syrian Electronic Army - Recruitment Video," available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-cy-qjHa3hQ>.

15 "Assad Says US Working to 'Destabilize' Syria," al-Jazeera, July 9, 2012; Dalal Mawad and Rick Gladstone, "Russia Prods Syria's President Assad With Message of Growing Impatience," *New York Times*, July 9, 2012.

16 For example, see the Friends of Syria website, available at <http://friendsofsyria.wordpress.com>. Also see the Syria Tube YouTube channel, available at <http://www.youtube.com/user/1SyrianTube>.

17 See the inaugural videotaped statement issued by the FSA declaring the establishment of the movement, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk7Ze5jVCj4>.

18 For example, see the videotaped statement issued by FSA-aligned insurgents declaring the establishment of the Yazid bin Muawiyah Battalion, available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN5QAAb\\_7go&feature=](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN5QAAb_7go&feature=)

Despite securing varying degrees of financial, diplomatic, materiel, and logistical support from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the United States, the FSA's ability to defeat the far better trained and equipped Syrian security forces remains in question.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the FSA appears keen to compensate for its tactical and operational inadequacies

### **"The FSA appears keen to compensate for its tactical and operational inadequacies by exploiting social media as a force multiplier."**

by exploiting social media as a force multiplier. The circulation of amateur video footage of dead or captured Syrian forces undergoing interrogation by the FSA<sup>20</sup> or a smoldering Syrian military vehicle<sup>21</sup> relayed on social media can have a multiplier effect on domestic and international perceptions regarding the military prowess of the insurgents. This is the case even as the insurgents continue to sustain heavy losses in direct engagements with Syrian security forces. The proliferation of videotaped statements and other items issued by defected members of the Syrian security forces on social media can also work as an effective psychological tool to illustrate declining unity and morale among the ranks of Ba`athist forces even as the numbers of defected forces remain marginal.

19 Roula Khalaf, "Arms Deliveries to Syria Rebels Delayed," *Financial Times*, July 11, 2012; Anne Barnard, "U.S. and Turkey to Step Up 'Nonlethal' Aid to Rebels in Syria," *New York Times*, March 25, 2012.

20 See amateur video footage posted to YouTube that shows what the narrator described as 13 detained members of the irregular pro-Ba`athist paramilitary forces known as Shabiha (ghosts) in Idlib Province, on December 15, 2011, titled "The Free Syrian Army Captured 13 of al-Assad's Thugs in Idlib Province in Syria 15.12.2011," available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnGpA5md6O8>.

21 See amateur video footage posted to YouTube of what is described as the remains of Syrian tanks following an attack by the FSA titled "The Free Syrian Army Destroyed 2 Government Tanks!!!" available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHPCCPXiCCw>.

Overall, the accessibility of social media enables the insurgents to participate on a leveled information playing field that was previously the exclusive domain of state actors or institutions closely aligned with ruling authorities. Similarly, the advent of social media enables individuals and organizations with little or no formal association with the factions currently operating inside Syria to project their influence into the events on the ground. Extremist

**“The virtual arena has emerged as a crucial battlefield for the warring factions, political and violent, operating on Syrian soil and outside of its borders.”**

ideologues such as Shaykh Adnan al-Arour, for instance, a Syrian Salafist cleric who currently resides in exile in Saudi Arabia, is among the most vocal supporters of the FSA on social media and traditional media outlets, including satellite television.<sup>22</sup>

The FSA and its associates are also exploiting the virtual domain of social media to disseminate propaganda and disinformation to bolster their causes, with an eye toward capitalizing on its inherent multiplier effects. Evidence that activists sympathetic to the FSA have broadcast doctored amateur videos showing alleged battlefield successes executed by the insurgents against Syrian forces, desertions of Syrian troops from their posts, and massacres of civilians and other atrocities blamed on Syrian security forces in the absence of concrete proof implicating the Ba`athist regime is a case in point.<sup>23</sup> Members of the Syrian security forces who undergo questioning by the FSA on video also often appear to recite claims frequently made by the insurgents to validate their positions. Along with the

<sup>22</sup> Shaykh Adnan al-Arour's numerous public declarations regarding the uprising in Syria are catalogued on his official YouTube channel, available at <http://www.youtube.com/AdnanAlarour>.

<sup>23</sup> Mike Giglio, “Syrian Rebels Caught Embellishing on Tape,” *Daily Beast*, March 27, 2012.

SNC, the FSA accuses Syrian allies Hizb Allah and Iran of actively assisting the Ba`athist regime to violently suppress the uprising. Alleged Shabiha members captured in Idlib Province admitted on a video that was circulated across cyberspace to receiving orders and support from Hizb Allah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iran, among other claims, in spite of a lack of concrete evidence.<sup>24</sup>

The FSA has also worked hard to refute accusations that radical Islamists and other extremists motivated by sectarian agendas or mercenaries acting on behalf of Syria's enemies make up their ranks. The dissemination of a video showing an alleged Syrian Christian military officer announcing his defection from the Syrian army—the first Christian member of the Syrian security forces to do so, according to the video's title—and decision to join the Sham Eagles Brigade of the FSA is another example of the insurgency's resort to social media as a force multiplier.<sup>25</sup>

**Conclusion**

Effective messaging allows for the contesting parties in Syria to present unadulterated versions of their respective narratives and positions to supporters, opponents, and neutral parties alike in Syria and beyond. A successful information campaign also helps sway target foreign audiences that may have little or no stake in what is happening in Syria to choose sides. In this context, the competing factions in Syria are waging a virtual campaign to win over international public opinion.<sup>26</sup> In today's information climate, an item posted to YouTube or Twitter by individual users or activists can easily compete with and often may supersede a breaking dispatch from reputable international media conglomerates in terms of the number of consumers it reaches in the public domain. Raw

<sup>24</sup> See “The Free Syrian Army Captured 13 of al-Assad's Thugs in Idlib Province in Syria 15.12.2011,” available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnGpA5md6O8>.

<sup>25</sup> See the videotaped statement titled “First Christian Officer Announcing His Defection and His Joining to the Free Syrian Army,” available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB3gUhOxMPk>.

<sup>26</sup> As a result, much if not the majority of the information that is being broadcast on social media is translated into English and sometimes other major languages, in addition to Arabic, in order to reach as wide an audience as possible.

reports, such as amateur video footage and photography of events such as a public protest organized by opposition activists or a funeral procession for a Syrian who is believed to have perished at the hands of the Syrian security forces, make an impact on social media in such a way that is impossible to emulate through traditional print or second-hand news reportage. Amateur video footage of the funeral of Hamza Ali al-Khateeb, a 13-year-old boy who was allegedly tortured and killed by Syrian security forces after being detained in a protest in his native Dera`a, spawned a wave of outrage in Syria and around the world that helped embolden the already simmering opposition against the Ba`athist regime.<sup>27</sup>

At this juncture, it is impossible to determine the precise effect social media is having on shaping the course of developments in Syria. It is clear, however, that the virtual arena has emerged as a crucial battlefield for the warring factions, political and violent, operating on Syrian soil and outside of its borders. At the very least, the sheer volume of social media platforms operating independently and in unison by all sides suggests an interest to secure both tactical and strategic gains through victories in the virtual battlefield.

*Chris Zambelis is an analyst and researcher specializing in Middle East affairs with Helios Global, Inc., a risk management group based in the Washington, D.C. area. The opinions expressed here are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of Helios Global, Inc.*

<sup>27</sup> See “Funeral of Tortured Syrian Child Hamza al-Khatib (Video),” *Jadaliyya*, May 31, 2011.

## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

June 1, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants attacked a U.S.-led coalition base three miles outside Khost city in eastern Afghanistan. Approximately 14 Taliban fighters were killed in the assault, which included the use of a suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle. NATO officials later linked the Haqqani network to the attack. – *AP, June 1; al-Jazeera, June 1; Reuters, June 26*

June 2, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed at least three suspected militants in Khawashi Khel village, near Wana, South Waziristan Agency. – *New York Daily News, June 2*

June 3, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video, in which he recounted his memories with Usama bin Ladin. “He spent all his money on jihad,” al-Zawahiri said. “He was known for his generosity with guests. He would slaughter livestock for them and give them tasty food.” – *Reuters, June 3*

June 3, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed 10 suspected militants in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to Voice of America, the “suspected militants were gathered to offer condolences to the brother of a militant commander killed during another American unmanned drone strike on Saturday [June 2].” – *AP, June 3*

June 3, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle targeted a church on the outskirts of the northern city of Bauchi, killing at least 12 people. Boko Haram later claimed responsibility. – *Voice of America, June 3; The News International, June 3; al-Arabiya, June 4*

June 4, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Sabirhan Hasanoff, a dual U.S. and Australian citizen, pleaded guilty to supporting al-Qa`ida. The New York accountant was accused of helping al-Qa`ida with computer systems. He faces up to 20 years in a U.S. prison. – *Reuters, June 4*

June 4, 2012 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle targeted a Shi`a Muslim office in central Baghdad,

killing at least 23 people. According to Reuters, the attack, which targeted the Shi`a Endowment, “comes at a sensitive time, with the country’s fractious Shi`ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs locked in a crisis that threatens to unravel their power-sharing deal and spill into sectarian tension.” – *Reuters, June 4*

June 4, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed Abu Yahya al-Libi, one of al-Qa`ida’s most senior operatives. The strike, which occurred in Mir Ali, North Waziristan Agency, killed at least 15 people. Al-Libi was considered al-Qa`ida’s second-in-command. – *New York Times, June 4*

June 4, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a checkpoint in southern Abyan Province, killing four pro-army militiamen. – *AFP, June 4*

June 6, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Two suicide bombers killed at least 22 people at a bazaar in Kandahar. – *BBC, June 6*

June 7, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A group of at least 20 prisoners, most of them Taliban members, escaped from a jail in Sar-e-Pul Province in northern Afghanistan. The men used an improvised explosive device to destroy part of the jail, allowing them to escape. – *Reuters, June 8*

June 7, 2012 (SOMALIA): The U.S. government announced \$33 million in rewards for information leading to the locations of top al-Shabab leaders in Somalia. – *New York Times, June 7*

June 8, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri’s wife released a rare message on Islamist web forums praising Muslim women for their role in the Arab Spring uprisings. “I congratulate all females of the world for these blessed revolutions and I salute every mother who sacrificed her loved ones in the revolutions,” the letter said. “It is really an Arab Spring and will soon become an Islamic spring.” – *Reuters, June 8*

June 8, 2012 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. federal judge sentenced Raja Lahrashib Khan to seven and a half years in jail for attempting to financially support al-Qa`ida’s operations against India. Khan, a Pakistan-born Chicago taxi driver,

admitted to giving approximately \$550 to Ilyas Kashmiri. He pleaded guilty in February 2012. – *Reuters, June 8*

June 8, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked the police headquarters in Maiduguri, Borno State. At least five people were killed in the blast. Authorities suspect the Boko Haram group was responsible. – *AFP, June 8*

June 9, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber disguised as a woman wearing a burqa detonated explosives at a market in Kapisa Province, killing four French soldiers. As reported by Reuters, “The French forces were responding to a report of a bomb planted under a bridge in the main market area of Kapisa Province’s Nijrab district when the bomber walked up to them and detonated his explosives.” – *AP, June 9*

June 10, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio recording, calling on Tunisians to rise up against the country’s Islamist ruling party for accepting a constitution not based on Shari`a. “It is strange to see a leadership party that claims to be associated with moderate Islam and at the same time it says it does not call for ruling by Islam,” al-Zawahiri said. – *AP, June 11*

June 10, 2012 (NIGERIA): Militants attacked two separate churches in Nigeria. In one attack, the church’s congregation was sprayed with bullets. In the second attack on a different church, a suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives. At least one person was killed in the attacks. Boko Haram claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, June 10; Deutsche Welle, June 11*

June 12, 2012 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. court sentenced Haji Bagcho to life in prison after being convicted of conspiracy, distribution of heroin to the United States and narcoterrorism. Bagcho, an Afghan national, had links to the Taliban and conspired to distribute heroin in the United States to help fund the Taliban. He was extradited to the United States from Afghanistan in May 2009. – *Reuters, June 12; AFP, June 12*

June 12, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber tried to assassinate an anti-Taliban tribal elder on the outskirts of



Peshawar, killing two of the leader's security guards. – *AFP, June 12*

June 12, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemen's military pushed Ansar al-Shari`a fighters out of their two main strongholds in Zinjibar and Jaar. Ansar al-Shari`a is linked to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. – *Reuters, June 12*

June 13, 2012 (IRAQ): A series of explosions mostly targeting Shi`a Muslims tore through Iraq, killing at least 70 people. The Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility. The bombings marked the deadliest day in Iraq since the withdrawal of U.S. troops in December 2011. – *New York Times, June 13; Reuters, June 13; Voice of America, June 16*

June 14, 2012 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle in a Damascus suburb, wounding 10 people. – *AP, June 14*

June 15, 2012 (UNITED STATES): U.S. President Barack Obama publicly acknowledged for the first time that the U.S. military had taken “direct action” against al-Qa`ida affiliated groups in Yemen and Somalia. In the past, U.S. officials would not confirm publicly that U.S. forces were involved in the fight in Yemen or Somalia. – *New York Times, June 15*

June 15, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemen's military retook the port town of Shaqra, Abyan Province, from Ansar al-Shari`a, an insurgent group linked to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. On June 12, the Yemeni military also regained control of Zinjibar and Jaar. – *Voice of America, June 15*

June 16, 2012 (IRAQ): Two separate car bombs targeted Shi`a Muslims in Baghdad. One bomb exploded near a bus station, where dozens of Shi`a pilgrims were standing, killing at least 14 people. A second bomb exploded in Sanaa Square, killing 18 people. – *CNN, June 16*

June 16, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A truck bomb ripped through a busy market in Landi Kotal of Khyber Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing at least 20 people. Authorities suspect that the bomb targeted tribesmen who have been fighting against local militants. – *Los Angeles Times, June 16*

June 16, 2012 (SOMALIA): A suicide bomber drove a vehicle into the gate of a government base in Afgoye, outside Mogadishu, killing two Somali soldiers. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, June 16; AFP, June 16*

June 16, 2012 (SAUDI ARABIA): Saudi Arabia's interior minister, Crown Prince Nayif bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, died in Geneva at 78-years-old. Prince Nayif was in charge of the country's fight against al-Qa`ida and domestic militants. Although the cause of death was not immediately known, he was believed to have had recent heart bypass surgery. – *New York Times, June 16*

June 17, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio recording calling on Egypt to cancel its peace treaty with Israel and to establish Islamic rule. – *AP, June 17*

June 17, 2012 (NIGERIA): Boko Haram killed at least 50 people after attacking three Christian churches in Zaria and Kaduna. – *CNN, June 18*

June 18, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Wesam El-Hanafi pleaded guilty to one count of providing material support to a terrorist group and one count of conspiracy in a Manhattan courtroom. The New York-born man admitted to helping al-Qa`ida. – *Reuters, June 18*

June 18, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A Taliban roadside bomb killed eight civilians, including women and children, in Musa Qala, Helmand Province. – *AFP, June 18*

June 18, 2012 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed 22 people at a Shi`a gathering in Ba`quba, Diyala Province. – *al-Arabiya, June 20*

June 18, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber assassinated Yemen's army general leading the fight against al-Qa`ida-affiliated militants in southern Yemen. The general, Salem Ali Qatan, was killed on his way to work in Aden despite driving in a three-car convoy. Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula later claimed responsibility. – *AP, June 18; Reuters, June 21*

June 18, 2012 (ISRAEL): Two militants crossed into Israel from Egypt and killed an Israeli civilian. Israeli security forces

killed both assailants. A group calling itself the Mujahidin Shura Council of Jerusalem claimed responsibility. – *CNN, June 19*

June 19, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A group of Taliban fighters attacked a NATO camp on the outskirts of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. The assault, which involved suicide bombers, left seven militants dead. – *Washington Post, June 19*

June 20, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani security forces announced the arrest of a French national suspected of being a key al-Qa`ida operative. The man, identified as Naamen Meziche, was apprehended outside Quetta in Baluchistan Province. – *Los Angeles Times, June 20*

June 20, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorbike targeted an Afghan-NATO checkpoint in Khost city, killing 18 Afghans and three U.S. soldiers. – *Washington Post, June 20*

June 20-21, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Insurgents armed with weapons and suicide vests attacked the Spozhmai Hotel on the outskirts of Kabul, killing at least 20 people. The militants arrived at the hotel in a minivan disguised as women by wearing burqas, then proceeded to shoot their way through the building. All of the militants eventually died. The Taliban claimed responsibility. – *New York Times, June 22*

June 21, 2012 (NIGERIA): The United States officially designated three members of Boko Haram as “foreign terrorists”—Abubakar Shekau, Abubakar Adam Kamar and Khalid al-Barnawi. – *Voice of America, June 21*

June 22, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Amine El Khalifi, an illegal immigrant from Morocco living in Virginia, pleaded guilty to attempting a suicide bomb attack on the U.S. Capitol. He faces up to 30 years in prison. – *Voice of America, June 22*

June 22, 2012 (NIGERIA): A bomb exploded outside a nightclub in Nigeria's capital of Abuja. No one was injured. – *Voice of America, June 23*

June 24, 2012 (GLOBAL): U.S. General Carter Ham, the head of the U.S. military's Africa Command, said that

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Director, CTC

**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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al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Shabab and Boko Haram are seeking to "coordinate and synchronize" their operations. - *Bloomberg, June 25*

June 24, 2012 (PAKISTAN): More than 100 Taliban fighters crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan and killed at least 17 Pakistani soldiers. The men, reportedly loyal to Pakistani Taliban commander Maulana Fazlullah, then released a video showing the dismembered heads of the 17 ambushed troops, as well as their identification cards. - *CNN, June 25; New York Times, June 25; AP, June 25; Reuters, June 28*

June 24, 2012 (KENYA): An explosion tore through a nightclub in Mombasa, killing three people. The cause of the blast was not immediately known, but Kenya has been targeted by a series of blasts since it sent troops into neighboring Somalia to fight al-Shabab. - *Reuters, June 24; Reuters, June 25*

June 24, 2012 (NIGERIA): Boko Haram militants broke into a prison in Damaturu in northern Nigeria, freeing 40 inmates. - *Reuters, June 24*

June 25, 2012 (GLOBAL): Officials from three European security agencies told reporters that a Norwegian man had received terrorist training from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula and was awaiting orders to execute an attack in the West. The officials said that the man had gone "operational." The man is apparently a convert to Islam with no immigrant background, and he has no criminal record. He spent "some months" in Yemen where he received terrorist training. - *AP, June 25*

June 25, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO officials said that insurgent attacks in Afghanistan increased in April and May, indicating a rise in Taliban activity after months of declines. - *Wall Street Journal, June 25*

June 25, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban militants attacked the private Aaj television station in Karachi, injuring two people. The Taliban said that the station was overly critical of the Taliban. - *BBC, June 26*

June 26, 2012 (SAUDI ARABIA): A Saudi court sentenced 11 men to jail terms up to 15 years for membership in

a cell linked to al-Qa`ida that plotted to attack U.S. troops in Kuwait as well as state-owned Saudi Aramco. - *Reuters, June 27*

June 27, 2012 (MALI): Militants belonging to the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) took complete control of Gao from the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in northern Mali. The MUJAO is considered a Salafi-jihadi group, whereas the MNLA is an ethno-nationalist insurgent group. MUJAO has direct ties to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. - *Voice of America, June 28*

June 29, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked the remote Kamdush district of Nuristan Province, although Afghan security forces eventually pushed the militants back with the support of NATO airstrikes. - *AFP, June 29*

June 29, 2012 (ALGERIA): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a paramilitary police base in Ouargla, killing at least one person. - *Reuters, June 29*

June 30, 2012 (MALI): Islamist militants who control northern Mali destroyed ancient tombs of Muslim saints in Timbuktu, creating an international outcry. - *AFP, June 30*