



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# CTC SENTINEL

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## About the CTC Sentinel

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

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# Reevaluating Al-Qa`ida's Weapons of Mass Destruction Capabilities

By Peter Bergen



**T**WO MONTHS AFTER the 9/11 attacks, Usama bin Ladin claimed to possess a nuclear capability.<sup>1</sup> On the morning of November 8, 2001, the Saudi militant was eating a hearty meal of meat and olives as Hamid Mir, a Pakistani journalist, interviewed him in a house in Kabul. Mir asked Bin Ladin to comment on reports that he had tried to acquire nuclear and chemical weapons, to which the al-Qa`ida leader replied: "I wish to declare that if America used chemical or nuclear weapons against us, then we may retort with chemical and nuclear weapons. We have the weapons as deterrent."<sup>2</sup> Mir asked, "Where did you get these weapons from?" Bin Ladin responded

cooly, "Go to the next question."<sup>3</sup> After the interview was finished, Mir followed up this exchange over tea with Bin Ladin's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri. "I asked this question to Dr. al-Zawahiri: that it is difficult to believe that you have nuclear weapons," Mir explained. "So he said, 'Mr. Hamid Mir, it is not difficult. If you have 30 million dollars, you can go to the black market in Central Asia, make contact with a disgruntled Russian scientist and get from him suitcase nuclear weapons.'"<sup>4</sup>

Al-Qa`ida's nuclear weapons claims came after a long quest by the terrorist organization to research nuclear technology and acquire nuclear materials. Sensing the inadequacy of his own knowledge about nuclear weapons, Abu

1 This marked Usama bin Ladin's first public statement claiming to have a nuclear capability.

2 Hamid Mir, "Osama Claims he has Nukes: If US Uses N-Arms it Will Get Same Response," *Dawn*, November 10, 2001.

3 Ibid.

4 Personal interview, Hamid Mir, Islamabad, Pakistan, May 11, 2002.

Khabab al-Masri, the terrorist group's in-house weapons of mass destruction researcher, asked his al-Qa`ida bosses in a pre-9/11 memo whether it was possible to get more information about nuclear weaponry "from our Pakistani friends who have great experience in this sphere."<sup>5</sup> For that information, al-Qa`ida's leaders turned to Dr. Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood, a recently retired senior Pakistani nuclear scientist sympathetic to the Taliban.<sup>6</sup> Mahmood failed polygraph tests about his meetings with al-Qa`ida's leaders once those encounters became known to U.S. and Pakistani investigators. Mahmood met with Bin Laden over the course of two meetings just weeks before the 9/11 attacks, during which he provided information to the al-Qa`ida leader about the infrastructure needed for a nuclear weapons program.<sup>7</sup>

Bin Laden's and al-Zawahiri's portrayal of al-Qa`ida's nuclear and chemical weapons capabilities in their post-9/11 statements to Hamid Mir was not based in any reality, and it was instead meant to serve as psychological warfare against the West. There is no evidence that al-Qa`ida's quest for nuclear weapons ever went beyond the talking stage. Moreover, al-Zawahiri's comment about "missing" Russian nuclear suitcase bombs floating around for sale on the black market is a Hollywood construct that is greeted with great skepticism by nuclear proliferation experts. This article reviews al-Qa`ida's WMD efforts, and then explains why it is unlikely the group will ever acquire a nuclear weapon.

#### Al-Qa`ida's WMD Efforts

In 2002, former UN weapons inspector David Albright examined all the available evidence about al-Qa`ida's nuclear weapons research program and concluded that it was virtually impossible for al-Qa`ida to have acquired any type of nuclear weapon.<sup>8</sup> U.S. government

analysts reached the same conclusion in 2002.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence, however, that al-Qa`ida experimented with crude chemical weapons, explored the use of biological weapons such as botulinum, salmonella and anthrax, and also made multiple attempts to acquire radioactive materials suitable for a dirty bomb.<sup>10</sup>

After the group moved from Sudan to Afghanistan in 1996, al-Qa`ida members escalated their chemical and biological weapons program, innocuously code-naming it the "Yogurt Project," but only earmarking a meager \$2,000-4,000

### **"There is no evidence that al-Qa`ida's quest for nuclear weapons ever went beyond the talking stage."**

for its budget.<sup>11</sup> An al-Qa`ida videotape from this period, for example, shows a small white dog tied up inside a glass cage as a milky gas slowly filters in. An Arabic-speaking man with an Egyptian accent says: "Start counting the time." Nervous, the dog barks and then moans. After struggling and flailing for a few minutes, it succumbs to the poisonous gas and stops moving. This experiment almost certainly occurred at the Darunta training camp near the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, conducted by the Egyptian Abu Khabab.<sup>12</sup>

Not only has al-Qa`ida's research into WMD been strictly an amateur affair, but plots to use these types of weapons have been ineffective. One example is the 2003 "ricin" case in the United Kingdom. It was widely advertised as a serious WMD plot, yet the subsequent investigation showed otherwise. The case appeared in the months before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, when media

in the United States and the United Kingdom were awash in stories about a group of men arrested in London who possessed highly toxic ricin to be used in future terrorist attacks. Two years later, however, at the trial of the men accused of the ricin plot, a government scientist testified that the men never had ricin in their possession, a charge that had been first triggered by a false positive on a test. The men were cleared of the poison conspiracy except for an Algerian named Kamal Bourgass, who was convicted of conspiring to commit a public nuisance by using poisons or explosives.<sup>13</sup> It is still not clear whether al-Qa`ida had any connection to the plot.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the only post-9/11 cases where al-Qa`ida or any of its affiliates actually used a type of WMD was in Iraq, where al-Qa`ida's Iraqi affiliate, al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), laced more than a dozen of its bombs with the chemical chlorine in 2007. Those attacks sickened hundreds of Iraqis, but the victims who died in these assaults did so largely from the blast of the bombs, not because of inhaling chlorine. AQI stopped using chlorine in its bombs in Iraq in mid-2007, partly because the insurgents never understood how to make the chlorine attacks especially deadly and also because the Central Intelligence Agency and U.S. military hunted down the bomb makers responsible for the campaign, while simultaneously clamping down on the availability of chlorine.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, a survey of the 172 individuals indicted or convicted in Islamist terrorism cases in the United States since 9/11 compiled by the Maxwell School at Syracuse University and the New America Foundation found that none of the cases involved the use

5 Roland Jacquard, *L'Archive Secrètes d'al Qaïda* (Paris: Jean Picollec, 2002), p. 291.

6 Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), pp. 20-22.

7 Peter Baker, "Pakistani Scientist Who Met Bin Laden Failed Polygraphs, Renewing Suspicions," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2002.

8 David Albright, Kathryn Buehler, and Holly Higgins, "Bin Laden and the Bomb," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*

58:1 (2002).

9 Thom Shanker, "U.S. Analysts Find No Sign Bin Laden Had Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, February 26, 2002.

10 Barton Gellman, "Al Qaeda Nears Biological, Chemical Arms Production," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2003.

11 Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaïda's Quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction: The History Behind the Hype* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2009), p. 35.

12 Nic Robertson, "Tapes Shed New Light on Bin Laden's Network," *CNN*, August 19, 2002.

13 Stenersen, p. 48; Walter Pincus, "London Ricin Finding Called a False Positive," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2005. For details on Bourgass, see Duncan Campbell, "Yesterday's Trial Collapse has Exposed the Deception Behind Attempts to Link al-Qaïda to a 'Poison Attack' on London," *Guardian*, April 14, 2005.

14 Vikram Dodd, "Doubts Grow Over al-Qaïda Link in Ricin Plot," *Guardian*, April 16, 2005.

15 Stenersen, p. 42; "Chlorine Bomb' Hits Iraq Village," *BBC*, May 16, 2007; Personal interview, Charles Faddis, Central Intelligence Agency officer involved in the effort against Iraq's chlorine bomb makers in 2007, Washington, D.C., January 20, 2010.

of WMD of any kind. In the one case where a radiological plot was initially alleged—that of the Hispanic-American al-Qa`ida recruit Jose Padilla—that allegation was dropped when the case went to trial.<sup>16</sup>

#### Unlikely Al-Qa`ida Will Acquire a Nuclear Weapon

Despite the difficulties associated with terrorist groups acquiring or deploying WMD and al-Qa`ida's poor record in the matter, there was a great deal of hysterical discussion about this issue after 9/11. Clouding the discussion was the semantic problem of the ominous term "weapons of mass destruction," which is really a misnomer as it suggests that chemical, biological, and nuclear devices are all equally lethal. In fact, there is only one realistic weapon of mass destruction that can kill tens or hundreds of thousands of people in a single attack: a nuclear bomb.<sup>17</sup>

The congressionally authorized Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism issued a report in 2008 that typified the muddled thinking about WMD when it concluded: "It is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013."<sup>18</sup> The report's conclusion that WMD terrorism was likely to happen somewhere in the world in the next five years was simultaneously true but also somewhat trivial because terrorist groups and cults

have already engaged in crude chemical and biological weapons attacks.<sup>19</sup> Yet the prospects of al-Qa`ida or indeed any other group having access to a true WMD—a nuclear device—is near zero for the foreseeable future.

If any organization should have developed a serious WMD capability it was the bizarre Japanese terrorist cult Aum Shinrikyo, which not only recruited 300 scientists—including chemists and molecular biologists—but also had hundreds of millions of dollars at its disposal.<sup>20</sup> Aum embarked on a large-scale WMD research program in the early 1990s because members of the cult believed that Armageddon was fast-approaching and that they would need powerful weapons to survive. Aum acolytes experimented with anthrax and botulinum toxin and even hoped to mine uranium in Australia. Aum researchers also hacked into classified networks to find information about nuclear facilities in Russia, South Korea and Taiwan.<sup>21</sup>

Sensing an opportunity following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Aum recruited thousands of followers in Russia and sent multiple delegations to meet with leading Russian politicians and scientists in the early 1990s. The cult even tried to recruit staff from inside the Kurchatov Institute, a leading nuclear research center in Moscow. One of Aum's leaders, Hayakawa Kiyohide, made eight trips to Russia in 1994, and in his diary he made a notation that Aum was willing to pay up to \$15 million for a nuclear device.<sup>22</sup> Despite its open checkbook, Aum was never able to acquire nuclear material or technology from Russia even in the chaotic circumstances following the implosion of the communist regime.<sup>23</sup>

19 In 1984, for instance, in The Dalles, Oregon, followers of the Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh tried to swing a local election by infecting salad bars throughout the town with salmonella. Hundreds succumbed to severe food poisoning, but no one died in the biological attack.

20 Sara Daly, John Parachini and William Rosenau, *Aum Shinrikyo, Al Qaeda, and the Kinsbasa Reactor* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005).

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

In the end, Aum abandoned its investigations of nuclear and biological weapons after finding them too difficult to acquire and settled instead on a chemical weapons operation, which climaxed in the group releasing sarin gas in the Tokyo subway in 1995. It is

**“Terrorist groups simply do not have the resources of states. Even with access to nuclear technology, it is next to impossible for terrorist groups to acquire sufficient amounts of highly enriched uranium to make a nuclear bomb.”**

hard to imagine an environment better suited to killing large numbers of people than the Tokyo subway, yet only a dozen died in the attack.<sup>24</sup> Although Aum's WMD program was much further advanced than anything al-Qa`ida developed, even they could not acquire a true WMD.

It is also worth recalling that Iran, which has had an aggressive and well-funded nuclear program for almost two decades, is still some way from developing a functioning nuclear bomb. Terrorist groups simply do not have the resources of states. Even with access to nuclear technology, it is next to impossible for terrorist groups to acquire sufficient amounts of highly enriched uranium (HEU) to make a nuclear bomb. The total of all the known thefts of HEU around the world tracked by the International Atomic Energy Agency between 1993 and 2006 was just less than eight kilograms, well short of the 25 kilograms needed for the simplest bomb;<sup>25</sup> moreover, none of the HEU thieves during this period were linked to al-Qa`ida.

24 David Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World: The Terrifying Story of the Aum Doomsday Cult, from the Subways of Tokyo to the Nuclear Arsenals of Russia* (New York: Crown, 1996), pp. 33, 65, 157-167.

25 "Combating Illicit Trafficking in Nuclear and Other Radioactive Material," IAEA Nuclear Security Series No. 6, 2007, pp. 129-130.

16 Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, "Assessing the Terrorist Threat," A Report of the Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group, September 10, 2010.

17 Creating true WMD using chemical and biological weapons is complex because "weaponizing" such devices is quite difficult. Consider that the anthrax attacks in the United States in the fall of 2001 which targeted a number of politicians and journalists caused considerable panic but only killed five people. The Federal Bureau of Investigation concluded that Bruce E. Ivins was the author of that attack. Before he committed suicide, Ivins was one of the leading biological weapons researchers in the United States. Even this skilled scientist only weaponized anthrax to the point that it killed a handful of people, albeit it is not clear whether his intent was to infect a large number of people or strictly target certain individuals.

18 Bob Graham et al., *World at Risk: The Report of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).



Therefore, even building, let alone detonating, the simple, gun-type nuclear device of the kind that was dropped on Hiroshima during World War II would be extraordinarily difficult for a terrorist group because of the problem of accumulating sufficient quantities of HEU. Building a radiological device, or “dirty bomb,” is far more plausible for a terrorist group because acquiring radioactive materials suitable for such a weapon is not as difficult, while the construction of such a device is orders of magnitude less complex than building a nuclear bomb. Detonating a radiological device, however, would likely result in a relatively small number of casualties and should not be considered a true WMD.

There is also the concern that a state may covertly provide a nuclear device to a terrorist group. This was one of the underlying rationales to topple Saddam Hussein’s government in Iraq in 2003. Yet governments are not willing to give their “crown jewels” to organizations that they do not control, and giving a terrorist group a nuclear weapon would expose the state sponsor to large-scale retaliation.<sup>26</sup> The United States destroyed Saddam’s regime on the mere suspicion that he might have an active nuclear weapons program and that he might give some kind of WMD capacity to terrorists. Also, nuclear states are well-aware that their nuclear devices leave distinctive signatures after they are detonated, which means that even in the unlikely event that a government gave a nuclear weapon to terrorists, their role in the plot would likely be discovered.<sup>27</sup>

Just as states will not give nuclear weapons to terrorists, they are unlikely to sell them either. This leaves the option of stealing one, but nuclear-armed states, including Pakistan, are quite careful about the security measures they place around the most strategic components of their arsenals. After 9/11, the United States gave Pakistan approximately \$100 million in aid to help secure its nuclear

weapons.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense has assessed that “Islamabad’s nuclear weapons are probably stored in component form,”<sup>29</sup> meaning that the weapons are stored unassembled with the fissile core separated from the non-nuclear explosive.<sup>30</sup> Such disassembling is just one layer of protection against potential theft by jihadists.<sup>31</sup> A further layer of protection is Permissive Action Links (PAL), essentially electronic locks and keys designed to prevent unauthorized access to nuclear weapons; Pakistan asserts that it has the “functional equivalent” of these.<sup>32</sup> As a result of these measures, Michael Maples, the head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency at the time, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2009 that “Pakistan has taken important steps to safeguard its nuclear weapons.”<sup>33</sup>

What has distinguished al-Qa`ida from other terrorist groups is that its leaders have made it clear publicly that they would deploy such weapons without hesitation, despite the fact that privately some al-Qa`ida leaders were aware that their WMD program was strictly an amateur affair.<sup>34</sup> This was

28 Thom Shanker and David Sanger, “Pakistan is Rapidly Adding Nuclear Arms, U.S. Says,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2009.

29 “Proliferation: Threat and Response,” U.S. Department of Defense, January 2001, p. 27.

30 “Nuclear Weapons Status 2005,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available at [www.carnegieendowment.org/images/npp/nuke.jpg](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/images/npp/nuke.jpg).

31 Paul Kerr and Mary Beth Nikitin, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues,” Congressional Research Service, June 12, 2009.

32 Ibid.; Peter Crail, “Pakistan Nuclear Stocks Safe, Officials Say,” *Arms Control Today*, June 2009.

33 Michael Maples, “The Current and Future Worldwide Threats to the National Security of the United States,” U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, March 10, 2009. One caveat: Shaun Gregory of the University of Bradford in *The Terrorist Threat to Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons* in the *CTC Sentinel* of July 2009 pointed out that while these weapons are unassembled, “Pakistan’s usual separation of nuclear weapons components is compromised to a degree by the need to assemble weapons at certain points in the manufacture and refurbishment cycle at civilian sites, and by the requirement for co-location of the separate components at military sites so that they can be mated quickly if necessary in crises.”

34 Abu Walid al-Masri, *The History of the Arab Afghans from the Time of their Arrival in Afghanistan until their Departure with the Taliban*, serialized in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 8-14, 2004.

the mirror image of the Cold War, where the Soviets had enough nuclear devices to end civilization, yet their intentions about what they might do with those weapons were so opaque that the art of Kremlinology was created to divine what their plans might be. The Soviets had the capability to destroy the United States but never really had the intention to do so, while al-Qa`ida’s leaders have said they intend to kill millions of Americans but their ability to do so has been nonexistent.

### Conclusion

Nevertheless, governments must be cognizant that scientists motivated either by greed or ideology might give WMD technology to terrorist groups. Yet even a group armed with such scientific knowledge would still have to overcome enormous technical challenges to build a workable nuclear device or to weaponize agents such as anthrax. As a result, groups such as al-Qa`ida will, for the foreseeable future, continue to use the tried-and-true tactics of hijackings, truck bombs, and suicide attacks, rather than being able to successfully execute the quite complex and prohibitively expensive task of developing true WMD. This, of course, does not preclude al-Qa`ida or its affiliates from deploying crude biological, chemical, or radiological weapons during the coming years, but these will not be “weapons of mass destruction.” Instead, they will be weapons of mass disruption, whose principal effect will be panic and a limited number of casualties.

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26 Brian Michael Jenkins, *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008), p. 143.

27 Daniel Chivers and Jonathan Snider, “International Nuclear Forensics Regime,” Security for a New Century Study Group Report, February 2, 2007.

## The Evolving Terrorist Threat in Yemen

By Christopher Boucek

ON DECEMBER 25, 2009, a terrorist dispatched by al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) attempted to blow up Northwest Airlines Flight 235 over Detroit, Michigan. Since the attack, instability in Yemen has emerged as a U.S. national security priority. Although the initial concern in the aftermath of the attack has waned, in recent weeks there has been increased suggestion that the Yemen-based AQAP has eclipsed “al-Qa`ida central” as the primary threat to U.S. national security.<sup>1</sup> This assessment comes as conditions in Yemen continue to deteriorate, and U.S. policy options for addressing Yemen’s confluence of crises are narrowing.

AQAP has evolved into an increasingly lethal and agile organization, with a proven track record of mounting operations within Yemen, regionally, and internationally. AQAP has been clear in stating its planned objectives, and it has repeatedly delivered on its threats. These concerns have been heightened by the presence of Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-`Awlaqi in Yemen and his alleged role in inciting English-speaking foreigners to engage in violence and militancy. There are also increasing worries about the involvement of Western, and especially American, nationals in alleged domestic terrorist plots related to or connected with Yemen, AQAP, and Anwar al-`Awlaqi. Moreover, Yemen itself is being transformed from a rest and training arena into an actual theater of jihad.

This article examines the evolving threat from AQAP, including the possibility that the group has recruited a number of Americans. It also reviews how AQAP has turned Yemen into a theater of jihad, pursuing a strategy to destabilize the state and its security forces.

### Gauging the Threat

According to media reports, the U.S. intelligence community recently estimated that there are approximately 100 al-Qa`ida fighters in Afghanistan and roughly 300 in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> While it is admittedly difficult to obtain accurate numbers regarding the current size of AQAP, commonly cited estimates suggest that there are several hundred fighters in Yemen.<sup>3</sup> These consist of Yemenis, Saudis and various Arab nationals, as well as other foreigners including Westerners. Since January 2009, at least 12 non-Yemeni Arabs have been killed or captured, while 50 foreigners have been arrested by Yemeni authorities on suspicion of involvement with AQAP; these foreigners have been identified as British, French and Malaysian nationals, among others.<sup>4</sup> Reportedly, 12 Americans are among the 50 detained foreigners in Yemen, although there has been little information forthcoming about their status, or why they were detained.<sup>5</sup>

The lure of Yemen has received significant coverage, and there is considerable concern about Westerners who travel to the country. In January 2010, a report by the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations suggested that as many as 36 American ex-convicts who converted to Islam while in prison traveled to Yemen in 2009 to study Arabic. According to the committee’s report, some of these former convicts have since disappeared and are suspected of having joined AQAP.<sup>6</sup>

The Yemeni government has taken measures to address these issues. Visa waiting periods are now longer, and according to the Yemeni government visas are no longer available upon arrival at Sana`a International Airport. Additionally, due to the deteriorating

security situation in the country (and the occasional exaggerated reporting of the situation), fewer foreign students are studying Arabic in Yemen.<sup>7</sup>

Compared to al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership in South Asia, AQAP is under significantly less pressure. The large U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and a more aggressive drone campaign in Pakistan have degraded the capacity of al-Qa`ida central. By comparison, in Yemen there is no public U.S. military presence aside from training missions,<sup>8</sup> and after several U.S.-facilitated airstrikes in 2009 and 2010, these have reportedly all but stopped following a May 25 airstrike that inadvertently killed the deputy governor of Marib Province, Jabir al-Shabwani.<sup>9</sup> Although the Yemeni government has recently launched large-scale offensives against suspected AQAP operatives in the southern cities of Lawder and Huta, it has not been clear who the government has actually been fighting—whether it is AQAP, southern separatists, or disaffected tribes.<sup>10</sup>

According to some recent press reports, the debate around which al-Qa`ida faction is the greatest danger to U.S. national security centers on the magnitude and immediacy of the threat posed by each group. Al-Qa`ida central is still believed to represent the greater threat because of an assumption that it could mount a large-scale “complex” operation such as the 9/11 attacks. The Yemen-based AQAP, however, is reportedly a more “imminent” threat and is more likely to attack the United States, although by less “sophisticated”

7 Previous Arabic language students in Yemen have included John Walker Lindh and Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab.

8 Numbers differ from 25-50 (Lolita Baldor, “US Terror Training in Yemen Reflects Wider Program,” Associated Press, September 8, 2010) to nearly 75 (Schmitt and Shane).

9 Scott Shane, Mark Mazzetti and Robert F. Worth, “A Secret Assault on Terror Widens on Two Continents,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2010.

10 In addition to fighting a resurgent al-Qa`ida organization, the Yemeni government is also involved in two other conflicts. In Sa`da in the north of the country, the government has been fighting Shi`a Zaydi rebels known as the Huthis. In the former South Yemen, the government is facing an increasingly violent, albeit divided, southern secessionist movement. On top of these conflicts, the government has also been at odds with various tribes.

1 Cameron Barr, “Obama’s Depiction of al-Qaeda Differs from Aides,” *Washington Post*, September 1, 2010.

2 “Inside al-Qaeda,” *Newsweek*, September 4, 2010.

3 Some reports suggest there may be up to 600 AQAP fighters in Yemen. For details, see Eric Schmitt and Scott Shane, “Aid to Fight Qaeda Divides US Officials,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2010.

4 “Yemen Arrests 50 Foreigners, Clashes Hit South,” Reuters, June 7, 2010.

5 Ibid.

6 “Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb,” report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, January 21, 2010. While some have disputed the report’s accuracy, it does adequately represent the level of concern regarding Yemen.

methods.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there is concern that AQAP has had success in recruiting Westerners, including converts, who do not fit traditional terrorist profiles; it will be more difficult for U.S. security services to identify and disrupt plots led by these individuals.

#### AQAP's Violence Spreads in Yemen

In Yemen, AQAP has been able to take advantage of the absence of the central government's authority and presence in large swaths of the country to plot, plan, prepare, and mount operations domestically, regionally, and internationally. Since AQAP announced its formation in January 2009, the pace of attacks has increased. One recent assessment identified more than 30 AQAP incidents in Yemen so far this year.<sup>12</sup>

The group's targets have been strikingly consistent. They include foreigners and expatriates, energy infrastructure, and government security forces. Since the merger that created AQAP, the group has also increasingly targeted Saudi Arabia, including trying to mount a suicide bombing campaign in the kingdom and attempting to assassinate the Saudi counterterrorism chief, Prince Muhammad bin Nayif. In many respects, AQAP has learned the lessons of the failed al-Qa`ida campaign in Saudi Arabia. AQAP avoids targeting Yemeni civilians, has a highly sophisticated media apparatus, and is cautious not to repeat the same mistakes made in Saudi Arabia.<sup>13</sup> Of greater concern, when initial operations have been unsuccessful, AQAP has re-attacked the same target, such as the U.S. Embassy in Sana`a<sup>14</sup> and Prince Muhammad in Saudi Arabia.<sup>15</sup> This serves as a stark

warning with regard to the failure of the Christmas Day attack to destroy Northwest Airlines Flight 253.

Throughout much of 2010, there have been back and forth AQAP attacks and counterattacks by the Yemeni government (facilitated by the close support of the United States). Yemeni government claims of having dealt serious blows to the organization

**“There is concern that AQAP has had success in recruiting Westerners, including converts, who do not fit traditional terrorist profiles.”**

frequently proved overstated. After a period of relative calm for much of 2009, violence again returned to the capital in 2010. On April 26, 2010, British Ambassador Tim Torlot survived an attempt on his life when a suicide bomber targeted his convoy.<sup>16</sup> As Torlot's convoy drove through Sana`a, the attacker stepped into traffic and detonated his explosives. The ambassador was unhurt, but several bystanders were wounded in the attack. AQAP subsequently claimed responsibility for the attempted assassination, and in September four individuals were charged by Yemeni authorities for their roles in the plot.<sup>17</sup>

The Torlot incident was strikingly similar to another attack that took place in March 2009. In that attack, a suicide bomber stepped into traffic and detonated his explosives just as a convoy from the South Korean Embassy was passing. The convoy was en route to the airport and was carrying investigators and the family members of the victims

from Yemen. For details, see Abdullah al-Oraifij, “Fourth Assassination Attempt Against Prince Foiled,” *Saudi Gazette*, August 16, 2010. Yusuf al-Shihri, brother-in-law of AQAP deputy commander Said al-Shihri and a former detainee at Guantanamo Bay, was killed in this incident.

<sup>16</sup> “UK Envoy in Yemen Escapes ‘Suicide Bomb,’” BBC News, April 26, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> “Four Qaeda Suspects Charged with Targeting Foreigners in Yemen,” Agence France-Presse, September 20, 2010.

killed in an earlier suicide bombing in Shibam that killed four South Korean nationals.<sup>18</sup> In both incidents, the attackers knew their targets' vehicles, routes and schedules, suggesting a level of prior knowledge. These attacks were especially concerning due to the heightened sense of vulnerability and exposure that comes with sitting in traffic in Sana`a.

In mid-June, AQAP attacked the Aden headquarters of the Political Security Organization (PSO) and broke out several imprisoned comrades. The attackers were reportedly dressed in military uniforms, and at least 10 security personnel were killed.<sup>19</sup> Violence in Aden continued throughout the summer, including an explosion outside a PSO building.<sup>20</sup>

In late summer, the Yemeni government engaged in two large-scale operations against towns where suspected AQAP operatives were said to be hiding. In August, intense fighting took place in the southern city of Lawder in Abyan Province. According to press reports, more than 30 people were killed, including 19 suspected militants.<sup>21</sup> In September, Yemeni forces mounted a similar operation in the town of Huta in Shabwa Province. In both cases, the Yemeni military laid siege to the towns after instructing the civilian populations to flee. In Huta, thousands of civilians have reportedly been displaced by the fighting. Reports in the Yemeni press claimed that Saudis and Somalis were among the AQAP operatives fighting against the government in Huta.<sup>22</sup> After retaking Huta, the Yemeni government said that it killed five AQAP fighters, and arrested an additional 32.<sup>23</sup> Despite these large operations, early indications suggest that many of the

<sup>18</sup> There have been several attacks in Hadramawt, including a shooting that killed two Belgian tourists in January 2008.

<sup>19</sup> “Yemen Gunmen in Deadly Raid on Aden Security Service HQ,” BBC News, June 19, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Masdar.com, August 26, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> “Yemen Troops Kill Two at Checkpoint in Troubled Town,” Agence France-Presse, September 19, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Nasser Arrabyee, “Four al-Qaeda Fighters Killed as Army Starts All Out Attack in al-Huta,” *Yemen Observer*, September 25, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> “Yemen Forces Disable Bomb in Town Retaken from Qaeda: Govt,” Agence France-Presse, September 26, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Baldor.

<sup>12</sup> Cody Curran and Patrick Knapp, “AQAP and Suspected AQAP Attacks in Yemen Tracker 2010,” AEI Critical Threats, September 23, 2010. Despite these figures, more than 80% of violence in Yemen is the result of disputes over access to water.

<sup>13</sup> For more on these points, see “Da’wa, Jihad, and Salafism in Saudi Arabia and Yemen,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 24, 2008; “Al-Qaeda in Yemen,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 7, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> The U.S. Embassy in Sana`a was attacked twice in 2008, in March and September.

<sup>15</sup> The Saudi press recently identified three other attempts made to assassinate Prince Muhammad, including the October 2009 attempt to smuggle in suicide belts

AQAP operatives believed to have been in the towns managed to recede into the countryside.<sup>24</sup>

#### Assassination Campaign

During the course of the summer of 2010, AQAP waged a coordinated campaign in Yemen's southern provinces to assassinate senior government security and intelligence officers. In many of the attacks, the victims were shot by motorcycle-riding assailants. One Yemeni media outlet reported that by September some 50 officers had been killed in the campaign;<sup>25</sup> according to a Yemeni official, however, that figure

### “AQAP avoids targeting Yemeni civilians, has a highly sophisticated media apparatus, and is cautious not to repeat the same mistakes made in Saudi Arabia.”

was actually more than 60.<sup>26</sup> The campaign caused Yemeni authorities in September to announce a ban on motorcycles in urban areas of Abyan Province.<sup>27</sup>

During Ramadan 2010 (corresponding roughly to the first week of August through the first week of September), AQAP mounted nearly 12 attacks on government security targets.<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan, AQAP escalated the campaign when it released a “hit list” of 55 security officers in Abyan.<sup>29</sup> The

24 Ellen Knickmeyer, “Al Qaeda 2.0,” *Global Post*, September 27, 2010. Knickmeyer highlights the timing of these operations: the siege of Lawder coincided with the arrival in Sana'a of National Security Adviser John Brennan, while the Huta operation coincided with the Friends of Yemen meeting in New York City.

25 “Al Qaeda Claims Six Attacks in Yemen,” *News Yemen*, September 8, 2010.

26 Personal interview, Yemeni official, August 2010.

27 Benjamin Joffe-Walt, “Yemen Outlaws Motorcycles in Governorate Under Siege,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 19, 2010.

28 “Al Qaeda Attacks Yemeni Military Installations,” BBC Arabic, September 9, 2010.

29 “Qaeda Threatens 55 Yemeni Security Officers by Name,” Agence France-Presse, September 10, 2010. See

list identified by name 31 PSO officers, 15 criminal investigation officers, and nine military intelligence officers.<sup>30</sup> The campaign of violence continued into September when militants launched rocket-propelled grenades at the convoy of the deputy governor of Abyan Province, Ahmed Ghalib al-Rahawi.<sup>31</sup> Al-Rahawi, who escaped an earlier assassination attempt in August 2009, survived the attack.<sup>32</sup>

The assassination campaign serves to weaken government stability in Yemen while avoiding large numbers of civilian casualties, the latter of which could turn the population against AQAP. The intensity and pace of the attacks demonstrate AQAP's increasing ability to strike at will at those serving the “illegitimate regime.” It has also provided a clear reminder to those who continue to serve in the military and state security apparatus of what awaits them should they not disassociate themselves from government service. Ultimately, the campaign has been a clear example of the steady erosion of state power in southern Yemen.

#### Conclusion

In early September 2010, Jonathan Evans, director-general of Britain's Security Service, noted that the threats to the United Kingdom are increasingly originating from Yemen and Somalia.<sup>33</sup> According to Evans, there has been a “surge” in Yemen-related casework this year at MI5.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in recent congressional testimony, National Counterterrorism Center Director Michael Leiter noted the relative weakness of al-Qa`ida in

also Ghamdan al-Yusufi, “Report on Al-Qaida Threat to Assassinate 54 Yemeni Security Officials in Abyan,” Elaph.com, September 20, 2010. Elaph.com lists only 54 officers, not 55.

30 Ibid.

31 “Yemen's Abyan Deputy Governor Survives Qaida Assassination Attempt,” Xinhua, September 18, 2010. Other reports have cited a roadside bomb rather than a rocket-propelled grenade in the attack. See “Yemen Official Escapes Death in Ambush, Five People Wounded,” *Jordan Times*, September 19, 2010.

32 “Security Official Escapes Assassination in Southern Yemen,” *News Yemen*, September 18, 2010.

33 Selah Hennessy, “MI5: Somalia, Yemen Pose Increasing Threat to Security,” Voice of America, September 17, 2010.

34 Gordon Corera, “MI5 Head Warns of Serious Risk of UK Terrorist Attack,” BBC News, September 16, 2010.

Pakistan, while highlighting Yemen as a “key battleground.”<sup>35</sup> He cited AQAP's method in the Christmas Day attack as making it much more difficult to successfully deter and disrupt.<sup>36</sup>

The evolving threat from Yemen is clear. AQAP has effectively “recast” the country as a legitimate venue to participate in jihad against an illegitimate ruler and a place to resist U.S. aggression. If increased U.S. counterterrorism assistance to Yemen only focuses on military and security cooperation, it will likely increase the grievances that fuel al-Qa`ida militancy and other opposition. There are fewer attractive policy options with regards to Yemen, and none of them offer any promise of solving the challenges posed by the deteriorating conditions in the country. An important first step, however, is to recognize that inattention is not an option. The United States and the international community must be fully engaged in Yemen. The country's problems are no longer contained within its borders.

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35 Michael Leiter, “Nine Years After 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland,” U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, September 22, 2010.

36 Ibid.



## The U.S.-Pakistan Relationship and Finding an End State in Afghanistan

By Moeed W. Yusuf

THE U.S.-PAKISTAN PARTNERSHIP in the war in Afghanistan has been both challenging and complex. While Pakistan's military has cooperated with its U.S. counterpart and has incurred tremendous losses itself, it has resisted American pressure to act against prominent anti-U.S. groups operating in Afghanistan from Pakistani soil. From the Western perspective, Pakistan has deliberately played a "double game" in South Asia by picking and choosing which militant outfits to target, while leaving out those that have been directly responsible for the deaths of Western forces in Afghanistan. Bewildered by this, Western analysts have often asked why Pakistan has not fallen in line with the U.S. position.

This article attempts to explain Pakistan's strategy from the point of view of its security establishment. It highlights why Pakistan has defied the United States and why it is unlikely to depart from its position substantially. Comprehending Pakistan's strategy requires analyzing the conflict from within Islamabad's own strategic calculus and perceived objectives. Using this lens, Pakistan's otherwise bewildering position appears rational even though it is counterproductive to U.S. interests. Understanding the Pakistan security establishment's outlook is critical so that the United States and Pakistan can find converging interests on which they can achieve an end state in Afghanistan.

### Mismatched Goals

The potential for divergent strategic objectives between Pakistan and the United States was inherent in the circumstances that led the two to partner in the "war on terrorism." The United States was seeking to eliminate al-Qa`ida and the Taliban from Afghanistan and wanted full Pakistani support.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan's dilemma was that

it had supported the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Islamist militants in Indian Kashmir for years; it feared that an abrupt reversal in policy would cause an internal backlash. Moreover, its strategic calculus had always been India-centric, and a fear of a "two-front" scenario—whereby animosity with India was compounded by an unfriendly or irredentist Afghanistan—had preoccupied the county's military minds for decades.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, while Pakistan agreed to support the U.S. effort in Afghanistan, at no cost did it want its intervention to upend its balance vis-à-vis India or to create an unfriendly scenario in Afghanistan.

To ensure full Pakistani support, the United States needed to institute an incentive structure to convince Islamabad to alter its strategic calculus. To date, however, the United States has failed in this endeavor. In fact, U.S. strategy in Afghanistan became the reason for Pakistan's growing, not lessening, reluctance to support U.S. policy. In the view of Pakistan's military, U.S. involvement in Afghanistan further aggravated the regional imbalance regarding India and brought to power an antagonistic government in Kabul.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Pakistan has been gradually challenged from within as Pakistani Islamist militants continue to make their country's partnership with

the United States the pretext to launch attacks and destabilize the state.<sup>4</sup>

### Pakistan's Response

The key point of divergence between Pakistan and the United States has been the treatment of the Afghan insurgent groups and al-Qa`ida cadres who sought refuge in Pakistan's tribal areas to escape U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan was wary that an all out effort against these groups—the major Afghan groups include Mullah Omar's Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Hizb-i-Islami—would unnecessarily cause them to turn against the Pakistani state.<sup>6</sup> Pakistan's concerns about a backlash were accentuated when the state faced extreme opposition to President Pervez Musharraf's 2002 decision to send the army into the tribal region.<sup>7</sup> The Pakistani tribal areas are peculiar in that citizens from the region are fiercely opposed to intrusion of any sort from the central government in Islamabad; there had always been an in-principle understanding that the Pakistan Army would not be sent into the tribal areas without permission from the tribes. Moreover, cultural considerations reign supreme in the region; therefore, although the Afghan militants and al-Qa`ida operatives had not been invited by Pakistani tribesmen, once they sought refuge the tribal customs did not allow the tribes to refuse them outright.<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> "Bush Announces Opening of Attacks," CNN, October 7, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Ayesha Siddiqi Agha, "Pakistan's Security Perceptions," in Imtiaz Alam ed., *Security and Nuclear Stabilization in South Asia* (Lahore: Free Media Foundation, 2006), pp. 201-216; Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (New York: Viking Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> President Karzai was viewed as favoring elements of the erstwhile Northern Alliance, perceived by Islamabad to be anti-Pakistan, to take major power-wielding positions in the post-Taliban Afghan set-up. Moreover, he remained strictly opposed to allowing Pakistan any major role in developments in Afghanistan and instead made positive overtures toward India. India's major role in reconstruction in Afghanistan's north was sufficient to irk Islamabad tremendously. Relations reached their nadir in 2007 when Presidents Karzai and Musharraf were regularly involved in a war of words as they sought to pin the blame for the failing military campaign in Afghanistan on each other. For details, see Moeed Yusuf, "Rational Institutional Design, Perverse Incentives, and the US-Pakistan Relationship Post-9/11," *Defense Against Terrorism Review* 2:1 (2009): pp. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> From 2003 onward, sporadic terrorist incidents began to take place in Pakistan. Between 2003-2006, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Multan, Quetta, and Dargai were attacked. It is largely believed that much of this anti-state activity was a direct reaction to Pakistani military operations in the tribal areas.

<sup>5</sup> These fighters also sought refuge in parts of Baluchistan Province.

<sup>6</sup> For background information on these groups, see Greg Bruno and Eben Kaplan, "The Taliban in Pakistan," Council on Foreign Relations, August 3, 2009; Imtiaz Ali, "The Haqqani Network and Cross-Border Terrorism in Afghanistan," *Terrorism Monitor* 6:6 (2008); "Hizb-i-Islami (Islamic Party)," GlobalSecurity.org, undated.

<sup>7</sup> The Pakistan Army was first ordered to deploy to the Tirah Valley in Khyber Agency to check possible infiltration and movement of militants from across the Durand Line. The first major offensive, however, came in February 2003 when the army, under U.S. pressure, launched an operation against al-Qa`ida and Afghan Taliban operatives in South Waziristan Agency. Opposition to the military intrusion escalated thereafter.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief discussion of the local tribal norms and the challenge they have posed in eliminating terrorist sanc-

<sup>1</sup> U.S. President George W. Bush defined his initial goals in a speech announcing the launch of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. For details, see



locals thus saw the Pakistan military's propensity to target these "guests" as a breach of trust.

As local resentment grew and as the military's initial forays proved ineffective, Pakistan's establishment concluded that defying U.S. pressure was preferable to launching an all out war against Afghan insurgent groups on Pakistani territory. A full blown military operation was seen as a catalyst that would unite these groups and large segments of Pakistani tribesmen against the state. Instead, Pakistan chose to pursue a selective approach whereby it targeted non-Afghan al-Qa`ida cadres—this was preceded by difficult negotiations and peace agreements with the tribes—while taking a much softer approach toward the Afghan militant groups.<sup>9</sup>

Even this selective approach did not prevent a substantial number of ideologically-motivated Pakistanis, mainly hailing from the tribal belt, to use Pakistan Army operations as a pretext to launch a domestic insurgency. Starting with inconsequential sporadic operations in the bordering tribal region in 2004, these loosely knit operators eventually came together under the banner of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).<sup>10</sup> By 2008-2009, the TTP had successfully undermined the writ of the state in large pockets in the country's northwest.<sup>11</sup> A number of new splinter groups, some of them associated with

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tuaries, see Vikram Jagdish, "Reconsidering American Strategy in South Asia: Destroying Terrorist Sanctuaries in Pakistan's Tribal Areas," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 20:1 (2009).

9 In the initial stages, the Afghan Taliban are believed to have found a relatively safe existence in their hideouts in Pakistan. For this view, see Ashley J. Tellis, *Pakistan and the War on Terror: Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), p. 7.

10 For a profile of the TTP, see Hassan Abbas, "A Profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan," *CTC Sentinel* 1:2 (2008).

11 By April 2009, the Taliban had not only established their complete control in South Waziristan and partial control in a number of other tribal agencies, but they had also effectively captured the settled area of Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province) and were threatening to continue their advance further south. When Pakistan's military finally launched a decisive operation against them in late April 2009, the Taliban had infiltrated Buner District, merely 60 miles from Islamabad.

the old anti-India guard and situated in the heartland of Pakistani Punjab, also saw an opportunity and began to support the TTP—these individuals have been somewhat casually labeled the "Punjabi Taliban."<sup>12</sup>

Pakistan's reaction to the growing instability within its borders was precisely the opposite of what Washington had hoped. Rather than heeding to Western warnings that Islamist militants ultimately share the same ideology, retain organic links and should therefore be seen

**“Prominent voices within Pakistan’s strategic enclave contend that it should be satisfied with any Afghan government that is friendly, addresses its concerns vis-à-vis India, and prevents militants from using Afghan territory to operate against Pakistan.”**

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as a singular threat, the Pakistani security enclave chose to bank even more heavily on its selective approach. Capacity limitations were also a major concern; as the internal threat grew, the security establishment became more certain that it could not afford to open new military fronts. This view was justified considering that Pakistan had already deployed more troops to fight militants in its northwest than the combined presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. troops in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Pakistan's military was (and remains) acutely short on equipment required for counterinsurgency operations.<sup>14</sup> As

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12 Hassan Abbas, "Defining the Punjabi Taliban Network," *CTC Sentinel* 2:4 (2009).

13 The Pakistani military claims that its deployments have been upward of 100,000, while ISAF and U.S. forces combined only crossed that mark in 2009.

14 Pakistan's military and civilian leadership have constantly emphasized the need for additional hardware to bolster their counterinsurgency capabilities. See "Zardari Asks US for Aid to Combat Terror," *Rediff India Abroad*,

a result, Pakistan's military focused almost exclusively on the TTP and its associated groups from 2007 onward.<sup>15</sup> As for the Afghan Taliban insurgents present in Pakistan's tribal belt, the state used its leverage to prevent them from supporting the anti-Pakistan groups; this was the *quid pro quo* received for not attacking them directly.

There is an external dimension that played into Pakistan's strategy as well. In Afghanistan, Pakistan lost a friendly government with the Taliban's departure. The new Afghan government, led by President Hamid Karzai, was until recently decisively firm against Pakistan and open to allowing Indian ingress into Afghan territory.<sup>16</sup> This shattered the two fundamental pillars of Pakistan's security calculus: preventing India from encircling Pakistan and retaining a friendly government in Afghanistan. The Bush administration's reluctance to address these concerns—evident from its supportive attitude toward President Karzai's firm policy vis-à-vis Islamabad, as well as Washington's proactive efforts to reach out to India while ignoring Pakistan's demands—irked Islamabad even more. In 2003-2004, the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan also seemed to be nearing defeat.<sup>17</sup> From Pakistan's perspective, its neighbor was slipping out of its control and the prospect of an antagonistic Afghanistan had become real. Pakistan had been sidelined in what seemed to be the end game at the time.

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January 29, 2009; "Kayani Asks US to Give Pakistan Cobra Helicopters," *Daily Times*, February 28, 2009.

15 Pakistan has staunchly resisted U.S. demands to launch operations against Afghan insurgent groups operating from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, citing its need to focus on the TTP as a priority. The author's conversations with Pakistani strategic experts and military officers confirm that the security establishment is acutely concerned about the military's capacity limitations and is wary of opening any new operational fronts for fear of spreading itself too thin.

16 After indifferent relations in the initial period of President Karzai's rule, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations reached their nadir in 2006-2007 when Presidents Karzai and Musharraf continuously blamed each other for the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. See "Bush Urges Karzai, Musharraf to Unite Against Terrorism," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 28, 2006.

17 The confidence about having defeated the insurgency was high enough for U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to declare in May 2003 that "major combat activity" in Afghanistan had ended.

With no other allies within the Afghan political spectrum, the Afghan insurgent groups remained Pakistan's obvious and only support base if it had any chance of regaining ground in Afghanistan. This reinforced Pakistan's reluctance to target these groups. In fact, Pakistan had an interest in turning a blind eye to their actions in Afghanistan, and according to some accounts even actively supported their efforts in a bid to raise Western costs.<sup>18</sup> In retrospect, Pakistan's Western allies underestimated Islamabad's potential to influence events in Afghanistan. They also discounted Islamabad's inevitable rejection of any outcome that left India at an advantage. Indeed, just as Islamabad had hoped, multiple Western failures in Afghanistan post-2004, Washington's divided attention between Iraq and Afghanistan, reported links between Afghan insurgent groups and al-Qa'ida's affiliate in Iraq, and the former's ability to operate from Pakistani soil reversed Western successes and forced Pakistan back into the equation. Today in 2010, Pakistan has won the round tactically; the world acknowledges that it has a central role to play in negotiating an end state in Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup>

### The Opportunity

The United States and Pakistan have blamed each other for being insincere partners. Yet the fact is that both Pakistan and the United States have sought to defend their self-defined interests all along. Bilateral mistrust and frustration stemmed from the fact that their goals have never really converged;

18 The recent "wikileaks" controversy has reinforced this belief by exposing U.S. intelligence documents that allege that Pakistani intelligence was supporting the insurgency in Afghanistan as recently as 2007. Pakistan has consistently denied the allegations. See Mark Mazzetti, Jane Perlez, Eric Schmitt, and Andrew W. Lehren, "Pakistan Aids Insurgency in Afghanistan, Reports Assert," *New York Times*, July 25, 2010.

19 A number of Pakistani moves throughout this period have reiterated both the country's desire and ability to manipulate the end game. One much-hyped recent move was to arrest Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a senior member of Mullah Omar's Afghan Taliban, allegedly because he was reaching out to President Karzai for peace talks without the acquiescence of the Pakistani establishment. Despite initial indications to the contrary, Pakistan has not extradited Baradar to Afghanistan. For details, see Dexter Filkins, "Pakistanis Tell of Motive in Taliban Leader's Arrest," *New York Times*, August 22, 2010.

in Pakistan's case, U.S. policy has been unable to incentivize the necessary switch in its security establishment's thinking. Therefore, just as they have cooperated, both sides have also continued to work at odds with each other. Going forward, a convergence of interests and not a normative blame game will bring about a final solution in Afghanistan. There is an opportunity for the two sides to work together to find a mutually agreeable end state. The optimism stems from the fact that both sides are highly constrained in their options and yet remain frustrated with the status quo.

Three Pakistani limitations should give Washington hope. First, Pakistan's quest for internal stability should make it favorable to some semblance of stability in Afghanistan. A reversion to an anarchic Afghanistan with little or no state authority would imply a fresh refugee spillover and economic burden on Pakistan. Pakistan is also wary of the possibility of the TTP using a lawless Afghanistan as a safe haven to launch attacks within Pakistani territory once the U.S. and international presence scales down. The anti-Pakistan groups appear intent on fighting Islamabad, regardless of what happens in Afghanistan.

Second, Pakistan's security establishment is no longer interested in an all-powerful Afghan Taliban government across the Durand Line (or for either of the other two mentioned Afghan insurgent groups to take power on their own). There is growing consensus that a return to the 1990s would cause Pakistan's isolation among the international community. There is a realization that the Afghan Taliban may have already peaked militarily and that a lengthy civil war would have to ensue for Taliban militants to take over Afghanistan; Pakistan is neither willing nor able to back a new civil war across the border. Pakistan is also cognizant of the development benefits large pockets of Afghan society have extracted from the U.S. presence, making Afghans unwilling to return to the repressive era of the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> U.S. opposition to having

20 Most representative polls conducted in Afghanistan since 9/11 suggest that the majority of Afghans oppose a return of the Taliban. This remains true even as the insurgents have gained ground of late and opposition to

an Islamist government rule Kabul is also a deterrent.

Third, Pakistan has an interest in having the Afghan insurgent groups currently present in its tribal belt relocated to Afghanistan. Their presence provides the TTP and other anti-Pakistan groups the ability to present their actions as an extension of the Afghan fight against the Americans.<sup>21</sup> Their co-existence in tribal agencies such as North Waziristan also makes it difficult for Pakistan's military to launch decisive operations against the TTP. The sheer proximity of the two factions carries a lingering threat of growing organic, and perhaps even covert, links.

In practical terms, the above implies substantial convergence in U.S. and Pakistani views on the end game. To begin with, both sides see an interest in stabilizing Afghanistan. This should prevent Pakistan from supporting any move that raises Western costs to a point that they consider a premature troop withdrawal. In fact, Pakistan has been looking for assurances from Washington that President Barack Obama's July 2011 troop deadline does not signify a drastic scale down next year. Next, the averseness to the Afghanistan of the 1990s means that Pakistan is open to a broad-based government in Kabul. Pakistan's positive reception of President Karzai's recent conciliatory overtures toward Islamabad should be seen in this light.<sup>22</sup> Although the view

the Western presence and the Afghan government has risen tremendously. For a sense of the changing opinion, see "WPO Poll: Afghan Public Overwhelmingly Rejects al-Qaeda, Taliban," World Public Opinion, January 30, 2006; "Afghanistan Conflict Monitor," Human Security Report Project, available at [www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/polls/](http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/polls/).

21 Moeed Yusuf, "Taliban Have Been Fooling Us All Along," *The Friday Times* 21:12 (2009). Interestingly, not only has this been the message the TTP has presented publicly, but this is also the thrust of their motivational message imparted to would-be suicide bombers and in their multimedia productions targeted at potential recruits.

22 The Afghan president has repositioned himself to accommodate Pakistan's concerns, a move largely believed to be a result of his realization that Pakistan's support is necessary for a stable end state in Afghanistan (and his own political future). See Nick Shifrin, "Afghan President Karzai Steps Up Talks with Insurgents," ABC News, June 29, 2010. Senior Pakistani military officials have reciprocated the overtures and have reportedly vis-

is still far from unanimous, prominent voices within Pakistan's strategic enclave contend that it should be satisfied with any Afghan government that is friendly, addresses its concerns vis-à-vis India, and prevents militants from using Afghan territory to operate against Pakistan.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Pakistan's interest in seeing the Afghan insurgent groups relocate across the border implies a desire for a negotiated settlement sooner rather than later.

### Approaching the End State

Despite some shared goals between the United States and Pakistan, there should not be unwarranted optimism. There are a number of differences that need to be addressed within this frame of convergence. To cite just one example, both sides have different definitions of a "broad-based" government. It is still not clear whether Washington would accept the three Afghan insurgent groups playing a role in the new government.<sup>24</sup> Pakistan, on the other hand, is likely to insist that these groups be accommodated, or they will continue their insurgent activities and possibly join the anti-Pakistan groups directly. Moreover, the United States would likely seek as a prerequisite a guarantee that Afghan soil would not be used against U.S. interests in the future. Pakistan will be unable to provide any such assurance. In addition, the Pakistani paranoia about India's ambitions to encircle Pakistan remains entrenched; the stubbornness on not allowing India a foothold in Afghanistan is categorical.<sup>25</sup> Will the United States be willing to dispense with India on the Afghanistan question? If so, will India find enough reason to oblige?

The United States will have to be realistic as it moves forward. If repeated recent U.S. pronouncements that a favorable end state in Afghanistan is impossible to achieve without Pakistan's acquiescence are true, then any sustainable end state

will have to be closer to Islamabad's position. An imperfect yet defensible settlement is the best one can hope for at this point. Pakistan on its part must not get carried away by its success in regaining a place at the table. Its achievement is tactical at best, and any flirtation with unrealistic goals in Afghanistan may cause this to be converted into a strategic loss. Be that as it may, Washington and Islamabad are best advised to focus exclusively on the points of convergence identified in this article. Within this framework, they should seek a minimal end state acceptable to both. Their current recognition of each other's limitations provides a window of opportunity that must be exploited as such windows are temporary. Should this pass, both Pakistan and the United States may be eventual losers.

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## Piracy in the Horn of Africa: A Growing Maritime Security Threat

By Peter Chalk

THE WATERS AROUND the Horn of Africa (HoA) currently constitute the most pirate-prone region of the world. Between 2008 and June 2010, 420 actual and attempted attacks were reported in this strategic corridor—which encompasses the Gulf of Aden, southern Red Sea and territorial seas of Somalia—accounting for roughly 70% of global incidents during this period.<sup>1</sup> As of August 2010, Somali pirates were holding 18 ships and 379 crew for ransom, with average settlements now in the range of \$3.5 to \$4 million per vessel.<sup>2</sup> Perpetrating groups have demonstrated an ability to operate far from shore as well as seize even the largest ocean-going freighters. This article examines how these groups operate, while also questioning whether the use of private security contractors to safeguard vessels constitutes a viable response to the ongoing piracy threat in the HoA.

### Piracy in the HoA: Perpetrating Groups and Attack Dynamics

Historically, the Hobyo-Harardhere cartel (sometimes referred to as the Somali "Marines") and syndicates based in Puntland dominated much of the Somali piracy scene. The Hobyo-Harardhere cartel was largely the product of one man, Mohammed Abdi Hassan "Afweyne," a former civil servant, and it mainly operated out of Ceel-Huur and Ceel-Gaan (roughly 250 miles north of Mogadishu). By the end of August 2006, the cartel was thought to have between 75 and 100 armed men and a flotilla of at least 100 small motorized skiffs.<sup>3</sup> Farah Hirsi Kulan (also known as "Booyah" and considered

ited Kabul frequently in the recent past.

<sup>23</sup> This information is based on the author's various personal conversations with Pakistani strategic experts and military officials during the summer of 2010.

<sup>24</sup> As stated earlier, these groups include Mullah Omar's Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network and Hizb-i-Islami.

<sup>25</sup> This information is based on the author's various personal conversations with Pakistani strategic experts and military officials during the summer of 2010.

<sup>1</sup> International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea: Annual Report, 2009* (London: International Chamber of Commerce, 2010); International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Report for the Period 1 January - 30 June 2010* (London: International Chamber of Commerce, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Bandel and Kevin Crowley, "Somali Pirate Attacks Sink Premiums as Insurers Leap Aboard," Bloomberg, August 2, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Schiemsy, "Piracy's Rising Tide: Somali Piracy Develops and Diversifies," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 20, 2009.



the “father of piracy in Puntland”) was key to the Puntland piracy scene, acting as the principal recruiter, organizer and financier for missions of several hundred pirates operating out of the Eyl area.<sup>4</sup> Today, these players now compete with a diffuse mosaic of groups based in a number of coastal hamlets along the 1,900-mile Somali seaboard. The current main piracy hubs include Eyl, Garard and Ras Asir.<sup>5</sup>

Membership in these gangs is fluid, although most personnel have a fishing background and are generally linked by common clan, blood or tribal allegiances.<sup>6</sup> They do not espouse any particular ideological agenda and have no association with al-Shabab Islamist insurgents currently fighting the notional Somali government in Mogadishu.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the pirate-infested waters of Southeast Asia, the vast majority of HoA attacks—more than 93%—occur during daylight and last between 30 and 45 minutes.<sup>8</sup> The most vulnerable

ships are those that are easy to intercept and board, and which offer the greatest potential for a large payoff. In most cases, this means vessels traveling at 15 knots or less with low freeboards (the distance from the upper deck to the waterline) and medium-to-high tonnage.<sup>9</sup>

While most incidents currently occur close to Somali shores, gangs have exhibited an ability to act extremely far out at sea. Somali pirates have been reported as far west as the Maldives and as far south as the Mozambique Channel, tending to “migrate” as weather conditions around the HoA deteriorate during the northeastern monsoon period.<sup>10</sup> One particularly publicized attack, the hijacking of the Saudi-registered supertanker *MV Sirius Star* in 2008, occurred more than 500 nautical miles from shore.<sup>11</sup> When attacks of this distance are mounted, pirates will operate from a “mothership” and then launch skiffs as they approach their intended target.

Once on board, the pirates will generally round up the crew and detain them below deck. Depending on the size of the hijacked vessel, they will either force the captain and his first officer to pilot the ship back to Somali waters or sail it themselves. The ship will then be docked at a port under the control of the pirates where it remains until negotiations for its release are finalized.<sup>12</sup> Most vessels are currently

gen, Denmark, March 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Personal interview, Royal Australian naval officer, Canberra, Australia, July 2009. See also “Countering Piracy Off the Horn of Africa: Partnership and Action Plan,” U.S. National Security Council, December 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Personal interviews, maritime specialists, Copenhagen, Denmark, March 2010; International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Report for the Period 1 January – 30 June 2010* (London: International Chamber of Commerce, 2010), pp. 20–21.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Worth, “Pirates Seize Saudi Tanker Off Kenya: Ship Called the Largest Ever Hijacked,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2008; Sharon Otterman and Mark McDonald, “Hijacked Supertanker Anchors off Somalia,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Personal interviews, Royal Australian naval officer and maritime specialists, Canberra, Australia, July 2009 and Copenhagen, Denmark, March 2010. While the ship is at dock, supplies are rendered from “vendors” working on shore. In many ways, piracy has served to stimulate a cottage service industry in pirate dens such as Eyl and Garard and most locals in these communities have little motivation to see the practice eradicated (as it is viewed

being held in hamlets located along the northeastern Somali coast.<sup>13</sup> Since attacks are short and the distance to be monitored so large, the probability of intercepting a “live” hijacking while it is underway is extremely low. This means that in most cases perpetrating gangs have little to fear from the various international navies currently patrolling off the HoA.<sup>14</sup>

The cost of an attack obviously varies by complexity, but most amount to no more than \$300 to \$500 assuming a gang has its own boats. The more expensive part of an operation is the maintenance of the vessel during negotiations, which can add up to as much as \$100 a day depending on the size of the ship and the number of hostages being held.<sup>15</sup> In the case of smaller hijackings, costs are either “fronted” by the pirate leader (who also takes most of the ransom) or collectively borne by the gang’s members. For operations involving the seizure of large ocean-going freighters, however, outside investors usually provide the necessary funds. Since payments are made in cash and then transferred through the unofficial *hawala* remittance system, the money trail has proven difficult to follow. Nevertheless, law enforcement officials believe backing comes principally from mafia “bosses” based in Somalia, Lebanon, Dubai and Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Somali pirates are well equipped with access to a wide assortment of both basic and more advanced weaponry, including assault rifles, heavy and light machine guns, anti-ship ordinance and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). Most of these arms appear to be sourced from

as an economic lifeline).

<sup>13</sup> Some vessels are also being held in Hobo (on the coast of Puntland) and Hobyo.

<sup>14</sup> There are currently around 14 international navies with a collective contingent of around 30 ships patrolling in or near the Gulf of Aden. These include both unilateral deployments and coalition forces operating under the auspices of Combined Task Force 151, the European Union’s *Atalanta* flotilla and NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Chalk, “Piracy off the Horn of Africa,” p. 91; Patrick Mayo, “Kenyan Firms Make Killing from Piracy,” *Daily Nation*, July 23, 2010; Jaiindi Kisero, “Mystery of Sh164bn Smuggled into Kenya,” *Daily Nation*, June 9, 2010; Raymond Gilpin, *Counting the Costs of Somali Piracy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009), p. 2.

4 Kerin Backhaus, “Piracy in the Puntland Region of Somalia,” OilPrice.com, May 12, 2010.

5 Bosasso is also home to pirate gangs, but does not act as an operational base per se. Kismayo used to be a prominent den, but syndicates have mostly been driven out since al-Shabab took over the city a couple of years ago.

6 Peter Chalk, “Piracy off the Horn of Africa,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 16:2 (2010): pp. 91–92. See also Stig Hansen, *Piracy in the Greater Gulf of Aden: Myths, Misconceptions and Remedies* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, 2009). It should be noted that a number of Somali gangs have recruited across lineage lines to ensure they have the best and most experienced personnel available.

7 Indeed, al-Shabab is vehemently opposed to Somali pirates, viewing them as common bandits that act contrary to Islamic principles. During the brief period of rule under the Islamic Courts Union, the incidence of piracy in Somalia dropped markedly and al-Shabab has vowed should they ever regain full control over the country they will immediately move to eradicate any gangs that continue to operate from Somalia’s shores. While there have been some reports of certain pirate syndicates splitting their ransom payments with Islamist insurgents to obtain more powerful weaponry, there is no concrete evidence to support these assertions. Additionally, Somali pirates already have access to arms sources, including Yemeni gunmen and illegal munitions dumps/bazaars in East Africa, particularly in Sudan and Ethiopia. For further details on the supposed link between pirates and insurgents in Somalia, see Jeffrey Gettleman, “In Somali Civil War, Both Sides Embrace Pirates,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2010.

8 Personal interviews, maritime specialists, Copenha-

illegal bazaars and dumps in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan or bought directly from Yemeni gun dealers. Although outfitted with an array of guns and other battle-related materiel, syndicates are generally low-tech. Contrary to popular wisdom, the use of night vision goggles, global positioning systems, satellite phones and automated ship identification units is rare.<sup>17</sup>

The basic objective of an attack is to extort money from shipowners by seizing their vessels and cargo. As noted, average settlements now amount to around \$4 million, which is more than double the figure a mere 22 months ago. Last year, Somali gangs netted an estimated \$50 to \$150 million in total ransoms, with one case involving the Greek-owned *Maran Centarus* running to a staggering \$7 million.<sup>18</sup> Since the essential aim is to elicit as large a payment as possible, violence is typically not a feature of attacks (unlike incidents off West Africa and Indonesia). In most cases, hostages are treated relatively well and reports of abuse and forced starvation appear unfounded.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, between 2009 and mid-2010, of the 1,381 seafarers taken hostage in acts of piracy off the HoA, only five were killed.<sup>20</sup>

#### Countering Piracy off the HoA: The Role of Private Security Companies

Growing international concern with the piracy problem off the HoA has prompted a number of private security companies (PSCs) to make their services available to protect commercial vessels transiting the region. Prominent examples include Eos Risk Management, Hollowpoint Protection, Anti-Piracy Maritime Security Solutions, Secopex, Gulf of Aden Group Transits, the Hart Group, the Olive Group, ISSG Holdings Ltd., Muse Professional Group Inc and Xe Services.<sup>21</sup> According to David Johnson,

the chief executive officer of Eos Risk Management, business opportunities for these firms have more than tripled since 2008.<sup>22</sup>

PSCs have aggressively engaged the shipping industry, arguing that they constitute a vital force multiplier to existing naval patrols in the Gulf of Aden by providing professional protection that is uniquely tailored to the specific requirements of their customers. The range of services currently on offer has spanned the spectrum from advice and training to active defense (both lethal and non-lethal), escort support and hostage-rescue. An implicit point

**“If pirates encounter vessels with heavily armed security details, there is a high likelihood that they will move to elevate their own threshold of violence and storm vessels with an active intent to use lethal force against anyone they confront.”**

in the PSC case is that their presence obviates the need for shipowners to arm their own crews.<sup>23</sup> This is an important consideration as most mariners are generally not well versed in the controlled use of light weapons and do not have combat experience; not only would this leave the ship in jeopardy, it would also place the crew in extreme danger by exposing them to a situation for which they have little (if any) training.<sup>24</sup>

Several parties have actively backed the growing PSC presence off the HoA. The United States has been especially favorably inclined, with Vice Admiral William Gortney—the commander of the 5th Fleet—acknowledging that coalition maritime forces simply do not have the resources to provide round-the-clock surveillance for a region that measures more than two million square miles in area and sees transits in excess of 20,000 vessels a year.<sup>25</sup> European shipowners have been equally as supportive. In Germany, for example, there has been a growing trend toward flagging vessels in open registry countries so that mercenaries can be taken on board to protect personnel and cargoes (which is not allowed under German law).<sup>26</sup>

A number of maritime insurance companies have also welcomed the growing interest of PSCs in the Gulf of Aden. Certain firms have slashed premiums by as much as 40% for ships hiring their own security—bucking a trend that has otherwise seen rates escalate by as much as 400% since 2008.<sup>27</sup> In late 2008, the British-based Hart Group launched the first joint venture with an insurance company, whereby the latter offered discounted rates for ships sailing past Somalia using the former’s guards.<sup>28</sup>

Despite these endorsements, there are a number of arguments against using PSCs for policing duties in the HoA. First, many firms have yet to develop clear rules of engagement or seek legal advice about the legal consequences of opening fire against suspected criminals. Accidental death or injury as a result of an exchange could, as a result, expose shippers to potentially

17 Personal interviews, maritime security specialists, Copenhagen, Denmark, March 2010.

18 “Pirates Seize Singapore Cargo Ship in the Gulf of Aden,” BBC, June 28, 2010; Tristan McConnell, “Battle Rages in Pirate Hub Over \$7 Million Ransom,” *Times*, January 19, 2010.

19 Chalk, “Piracy off the Horn of Africa,” p. 93. See also Jeffrey Gettleman, “Somali Pirates Seize Up to Five More Ships,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2009.

20 *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Annual Report 2009*, p. 13; *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Report for the Period 1 January – 30 June 2010*, p. 11.

21 “Private Security Companies Called in to Combat So-

mal Piracy,” *The Strategist*, September 10, 2009; Katherine Houreld, “Companies Hire ‘Shipriders’ Against Somali Pirates,” Associated Press, June 5, 2009; Sandra Jontz, “Hired Guns Secure Ships, Stir Controversy,” *Stars and Stripes*, February 15, 2010.

22 “Splashing and Clashing in Murky Waters,” *Economist*, August 20, 2009.

23 See, for instance, “‘Ships Need Armed Guards,’ Says Security Firm Chief,” *FeralJundi.com*, October 20, 2008.

24 Personal interviews, maritime security and defense officials, London, May 2009.

25 Jacquelyn Porth, “Piracy Off the Horn of Africa Threatens Relief Efforts, Trade,” *America.gov*, October 31, 2008.

26 Patrick Hagen, “German Owners Swap Flags to Protect Against Pirates,” *Lloyds List*, June 14, 2010.

27 “Private Security Firms Join Battle Against Somali Pirates,” *Fox News*, October 26, 2008; “Economic Impact of Piracy in the Gulf of Aden on Global Trade,” U.S. Department of Trade, undated; “Piracy Could Add \$400m to Owners’ Insurance Cover Costs,” *Lloyds List*, November 21, 2008.

28 “Private Security Firms Join Battle Against Somali Pirates”; “Potential Hikes in Shipping Rates Involving Gulf of Aden Transits,” *Gerson Lehrman Group*, September 29, 2008.

crippling liability claims or even criminal charges.<sup>29</sup>

Second, many states do not allow armed vessels to enter their territorial waters as this runs counter to the established right of “innocent passage.” Having armed guards on board a ship would be likely to significantly enhance the legal complexities and costs of any journey that entails multiple ports of call, which is the case for most commercial container carriers.<sup>30</sup> Egypt already requires all commercial vessels to forfeit any weapons that they might have before entering the Suez Canal, which is creating eight-to-ten hour backlogs. Abu Dhabi also recently announced that it plans to confiscate weapons on any ship traveling through its territorial waters, which could potentially create delays of up to six hours.<sup>31</sup>

Third, traditional flag states generally do not register ships that carry weapons.<sup>32</sup> The employment of armed guards would therefore be likely to encourage a shift to “open registry” countries (or flags of convenience/FoCs) such as Belize, Honduras, Liberia, Panama, the Bahamas and Bermuda—all of which are characterized by considerably more lenient standards and legal requirements. As noted, this is already occurring in Europe. If the trend continues, it will exacerbate what is already a remarkably opaque and unregulated industry.<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, PSCs are expensive. Providing a robust external escort costs between \$10,000 and \$50,000, depending on the length of the accompanied trip,

while an on-board three-man security detail can cost as much as \$21,000 a day.<sup>34</sup> Although larger owner-operators may be able to contemplate such outlays, they are well beyond the means of smaller “mom and pop” shipping companies. Unfortunately, it is these entities that constitute the bulk of attacks in the HoA, presently accounting for around two-thirds of all hijackings in the region.<sup>35</sup>

Fifth, PSCs could trigger an inadvertent arms race with pirates—thereby potentially placing vessels in even greater risk of being caught in a hostile exchange. As noted, most gangs presently neither act to cause structural harm to the vessels they hijack nor do they injure those they capture: the basic objective is to lever these “assets” for ransom.<sup>36</sup> If pirates encounter vessels with heavily armed security details, however, there is a high likelihood that they will move to elevate their own threshold of violence and storm vessels with an active intent to use lethal force against anyone they confront. In the words of Cyrus Moody, a senior manager with the International Maritime Bureau, “If someone onboard a ship pulls a gun, will the other side pull a grenade?”<sup>37</sup> Such a prospect has definitely informed the threat perceptions of shipowners, with most “happy” to pay ransoms rather than contemplate the costs that could result from a major firefight that leads to the wholesale loss of a vessel, its cargo and crew.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, there is no public registry of the different companies providing armed guards to commercial vessels, which makes auditing the standards and personnel of these entities difficult. In most cases, shipping companies are forced to rely on the “sales pitch”

of the PSC in question, which is unlikely to provide the basis for an objective assessment of the security to be provided.<sup>39</sup> In addition, because owner-operators seek to minimize their overhead operating costs as much as possible, the probable tendency will be to hire the cheapest PSC on offer. In the absence of a formal vetting procedure, there is no way to ascertain whether this price is genuinely cost effective or merely reflective of a “fly by night cowboy outfit.”<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

Long considered a scourge of the past, piracy continues to flourish off the HoA. Gangs have access to a wide array of weapons, are prepared to act far from shore and are clearly capable of seizing even the largest ocean-going carriers. While the use of PSCs may offer some deterrent value, the potential costs of hiring these firms would appear to outweigh the benefits. Moreover, employing PSCs have no effect on the land-based “push-factors” in Somalia that lie at the root of the problem, notably poverty, underdevelopment and above all a lack of internal governance.

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29 “Private Security Firms Join Battle Against Somali Pirates”; Houreld; Jontz.

30 See, for instance, Nick Blackmore, “New Tricks: Examining Anti-Piracy Tactics,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, December 21, 2009.

31 “Suez Gun Law Catches Carriers in Cross Hairs,” *American Shipper Magazine*, August 12, 2010.

32 See, for instance, Peter Chalk, Laurence Smallman and Nicholas Burger, *Countering Piracy in the Modern Era: Notes from a RAND Workshop to Discuss the Best Approaches for Dealing with Piracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), p. 5; “Ships Need Armed Guards.”

33 For an interesting analysis on the use of open registry countries and their potential interplay with crime and terrorism, see Catherine Meldrum, “Murky Waters: Financing Maritime Terrorism and Crime,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 15, 2007.

34 Personal interviews, International Maritime Bureau, London, May 2009 and private security consultant, Hong Kong, February 2010. See also Tim Fish, “Private Security Firms Step Up Anti-Piracy Ops in Gulf of Aden,” *Jane’s Navy International*, August 18, 2010.

35 Chalk, Smallman and Burger, p. 3.

36 Gettleman, “Somali Pirates Seize Up to Five More Ships”; Blackmore.

37 Cyrus Moody, cited in “Private Security Firms Join Battle Against Somali Pirates.”

38 Comments made during the “Countering Piracy in the Modern Era: The Best Approaches for Dealing with Piracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” workshop, RAND Corporation, Pentagon City, Virginia, March 2009.

39 Houreld; Steven Jones, “Implications and Effects of Maritime Security on the Operation and Management of Vessels,” in Rupert Herbert-Burns, Sam Bateman and Peter Lehr, *Lloyd’s MIU Handbook of Maritime Security* (London: CRC Press, 2009), p. 107.

40 The International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA) has produced a simple checklist to evaluate a potential PSC’s suitability. The auditing document includes such matters as the contractor’s company structure, their recruitment standards, training procedures and competency/professionalism of their guards. Although somewhat useful, the checklist necessarily defaults to a self-evaluation, which may or may not be accurate.



## Al-Qa`ida's Key Operative: A Profile of Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri

By Seth Nye

ON AUGUST 6, 2010, the U.S. government identified Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri as a specially designated global terrorist for his role and actions in Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam (HuJI) and al-Qa`ida.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the U.S. government's decision, Pakistani, Indian and Afghan authorities were already well acquainted with Kashmiri, whose militant operations stretch back decades. Kashmiri is number four on the Pakistani Interior Ministry's most wanted terrorist list, a significant feat considering the number of jihadists operating in the country.<sup>2</sup> He has emerged as a key operational commander for al-Qa`ida and a major player overall in the Pakistan-based jihadist scene. His deep involvement in the Kashmir jihad, close associations with jihadists based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), relationship with al-Qa`ida and ties to Punjabi militant organizations allows him to link together these various strands of the Pakistan-based jihadist movement.

Kashmiri has been tied to recent assassinations of Pakistani generals, transnational terrorist plots and suicide bombings in Pakistan. There is also speculation that Kashmiri was involved in the suicide attack on the Central Intelligence Agency's Camp Chapman in Afghanistan's Khost Province in December 2009.<sup>3</sup> All of these factors have earned him a reputation as one

1 Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam was founded by Qari Saifulah Akhtar in the early 1980s. It has been active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. HuJI was also designated as a "foreign terrorist organization" by the United States. For details, see "Designations of Harakat-ul Jihad Islami (HUJI) and its Leader Mohammad Ilyas Kashmiri," U.S. State Department, August 6, 2010. The United Nations added Ilyas Kashmiri and HuJI to their 1267 Committee Sanctions List. For details, see "The Consolidated List Established and Maintained by the 1267 Committee with Respect to Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban and Other Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Associated with Them," United Nations, August 6, 2010.

2 Amir Mir, "The Top Ten Most Wanted Jehadis," *The News International*, September 1, 2009.

3 Amir Mir, "US Seeks Harkat Chief for Khost CIA Attack," *The News International*, January 6, 2010.

of the most formidable and effective jihadist commanders operating today.

This article profiles Ilyas Kashmiri, providing background information on his early years and how he became involved in fighting jihad. It looks at his break with the Pakistani state and identifies concerns related to Kashmiri's increasing connections to transnational jihadist terrorism threatening the West. Most worryingly to U.S. and European authorities, Kashmiri has been directly linked to terrorist plots in the United States and Denmark through his connections to David Coleman Headley, Tahawwur Hussain Rana, Raja Lahrasib Khan and unnamed European operatives.<sup>4</sup> Kashmiri now appears fully engaged in transnational terrorist activity, and he has become a key component in al-Qa`ida's strategy to conduct attacks against the West.<sup>5</sup>

### Early Years and Joining the Jihad

Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri was reportedly born in either January or February 1964 in Bhimber in Azad Kashmir.<sup>6</sup> He attended Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad where he studied communications, but left after becoming embroiled in jihadist activities.<sup>7</sup> In the 1980s, he fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan, losing an eye and a finger on the battlefield.<sup>8</sup> There

4 Headley conducted surveillance operations in Denmark on behalf of Kashmiri, discussed conducting attacks there and met with Kashmiri's contacts in Europe. Headley directly assisted Lashkar-i-Tayyiba in the preparation for the Mumbai attacks of 2008 by conducting surveillance and reconnaissance operations.

5 Raja Khan, for example, claimed that Kashmiri wants to train operatives to conduct attacks in the United States. See "Chicago Man Charged with Providing Material Support to al Qaeda by Attempting to Send Funds Overseas," U.S. Department of Justice, March 26, 2010. Kashmiri's own rhetoric makes clear that he views the United States as his central enemy.

6 "United States Targets Terrorist Organization Operating in India and Pakistan in Joint Terrorism Actions, Treasury, State Designate Harakat-ul Jihad Islami And Its Senior Leader Mohammad Ilyas Kashmiri," U.S. Treasury Department, August 6, 2010. Physically, he is described as more than six feet tall, well built and has a long white beard dyed with reddish henna. For details, see Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy," *Asia Times Online*, October 15, 2009.

7 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

8 Ibid.; Arif Jamal, "South Asia's Architect of Jihad: A Profile of Commander Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri," *Mili-*

are conflicting accounts on whether he was a member of the Pakistan Army's special forces, known as the Special Services Group (SSG), or whether he served in the military at all.<sup>9</sup> Whatever his military role, Kashmiri later proved adept at recruiting members of the Pakistani military to his cause.

Following Afghanistan, Kashmiri joined the Kashmir conflict as part of HuJI.<sup>10</sup> He was appointed HuJI's "chief commander of Jammu and Kashmir" with his unit known as Harkat-ul-Jihad Brigade 111 (also known as Brigade 313).<sup>11</sup> As *amir* of HuJI's Kashmir wing, he earned a reputation as a ruthless and skilled commander, and he trained his cadre at a camp outside Kotli in Azad Kashmir.<sup>12</sup> Kashmiri's operatives were considered an elite group of jihadists who launched a daring series of cross-border operations into Indian-controlled Kashmir. During one of these raids, Kashmiri was captured and imprisoned for two years before escaping.<sup>13</sup> Describing his tactics, Kashmiri explained in 1999,

I have learned the art of war from the Arabs. The Arabs fighting in Afghanistan, including Egyptians and Palestinians, have adopted a separate style combining the war strategies of the Russians and Americans. I am an expert in that style. We have trained our boys also in that mode so that they can fight better than India's regular army commandos.<sup>14</sup>

*tant Leadership Monitor* 1:1 (2010).

9 Kashmiri may have been trained by Pakistan's military or the ISI. In Kashmiri's most recent purported interview, he appears to deny that he was ever in the SSG. For that interview, see Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy." Hamid Mir wrote that Kashmiri was an SSG member. See Hamid Mir, "How an Ex-Army Commando Became a Terrorist," *The News International*, September 20, 2009.

10 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

11 Muhammad Amir Rana, *A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistan* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2004). The 111 may refer to one of the branches of HuJI, all of which would add up to 313, which references the number of Muslims who fought alongside the Prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Badr.

12 Jamal, "South Asia's Architect of Jihad: A Profile of Commander Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri."

13 Mir, "How an Ex-Army Commando Became a Terrorist."

14 Bill Roggio, "Ilyas Kashmiri, Then and Now," *The*

In 1994, Kashmiri took part in an operation utilizing the group cover name al-Hadid with the future kidnapper of Daniel Pearl, Omar Saeed Sheikh.<sup>15</sup> They kidnapped four Western tourists (including an American), brought them to safe houses outside New Delhi and demanded the release of militant commanders in Indian prisons.<sup>16</sup> In a police raid, Saeed was shot and detained, while Kashmiri narrowly escaped.<sup>17</sup>

Kashmiri's notoriety greatly increased in February 2000 after he led a gruesome attack on an Indian military post in which he allegedly beheaded an Indian soldier.<sup>18</sup> Pictures of Kashmiri holding the head circulated through the press, and it was reported that he received a personal reward after presenting the head to General Pervez Musharraf.<sup>19</sup> This action made Kashmiri a hero among jihadists fighting in Kashmir.

Kashmiri's more extreme views were evident in these early days. In 1999, when asked what he would do if the conflict in Kashmir were resolved, he responded that there were many other parts of India left to conquer.<sup>20</sup> He further stated that his fighters could continue their war in Chechnya, Palestine or elsewhere, elaborating, "we folks have taken an oath from Mullah Omar and we consider him as Ameerul Momineen. We have absolute permission from him to go to any place and engage ourselves in jihadi activities."<sup>21</sup>

### Breaking with the Pakistani State

Following the 9/11 attacks and the toppling of the Taliban, Kashmiri turned his sights once again to Afghanistan and the internal dynamics of Pakistan. As with many Pakistani jihadists, Kashmiri was reexamining his relationship with the Pakistani military and the Inter-

Services Intelligence (ISI).<sup>22</sup> After 9/11, Pakistan began limited crackdowns on jihadist groups, restricting their activity in Kashmir and shutting down training camps. The clearest challenge to the Pakistani state came with assassination attempts on President Musharraf in 2003, organized by HuJI operative Amjad Hussain Farooqi.<sup>23</sup> The ISI detained Kashmiri on a number of occasions for his alleged role in these attacks, links to al-Qa'ida and refusing to shut down his operations in Kashmir.<sup>24</sup> Although a major suspect in the attacks, Kashmiri was released, apparently due to lack of evidence or pressure from other Kashmiri jihadist leaders.<sup>25</sup> He transferred his operations from Kotli to Ramzak in North Waziristan Agency in 2005 where he was back on familiar ground from his days fighting the Soviets.<sup>26</sup>

In 2007, the situation changed again for Kashmiri when Pakistani authorities raided *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) in Islamabad. Zahid Hussain, a Pakistani security analyst, explained that "the *Lal Masjid* incident was the turning point for Pakistani militant groups when they declared jihad against the state

and the military."<sup>27</sup> Kashmiri resumed his activities and reentered the jihadist world.

Today, Kashmiri is thought to be closely involved with a series of suicide attacks in response to events at *Lal Masjid* and Pakistani military incursions in FATA.<sup>28</sup> He is further suspected in spreading suicide operations into Azad Kashmir.<sup>29</sup> Two major operations attributed to Kashmiri include the mid-2009 attack against ISI offices in Lahore, and the assassination of a former commander of the SSG, General Amir Faisal Alvi, in 2008.<sup>30</sup> Kashmiri is also thought to have been involved in the attack on the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi in October 2009.<sup>31</sup> A purported interview with Kashmiri offers important insights into his thinking and significance among Pakistan-based jihadists. When asked why he is now fighting the Pakistani military, he answered, "It was never the Pakistan Army that was against me, but certain elements who branded me as an enemy to cover up their weaknesses and to appease their masters."<sup>32</sup>

22 In 2000, Kashmiri had already come into conflict with a Pakistani general when he refused orders to join the newly created Jaysh-i-Muhammad. For details, see Mir, "How an Ex-Army Commando Became a Terrorist." As with a variety of jihadist groups that interacted with the Pakistani military and intelligence units for operations in Kashmir, the relationships were complicated. Many were happy to receive arms, training and funding, yet resisted government control of their operations.

23 Amir Mir, *The True Face of Jihadis* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2006), p. 166. Farooqi was later killed in a shoot-out with Pakistani security forces.

24 Mohammad Imran, "Government Releases Maulana Ilyas Kashmiri," *Daily Times*, June 9, 2004. A demonstration of Kashmiri's continued stature among Kashmiri jihadists was evident when Syed Salahudin, head of Hizb al-Mujahidin, personally intervened with Pakistani authorities to get him released. See "Militant Leader Ilyas Kashmiri Released," *Daily Times*, February 2, 2004; Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

25 Mir, "How an Ex-Army Commando Became a Terrorist"; Mir, "The Top Ten Most Wanted Jihadis."

26 Amir Mir, "Kashmiri Behind Khawaja's Murder?" *The News International*, May 1, 2010. In September 2009, a drone strike in the Machikhel area of North Waziristan Agency was thought to have killed Kashmiri, yet he survived. For details, see "Pakistani Al Qaeda Leader Killed in U.S. Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 2009.

27 Zaffar Abbas, "Khwaja's Murder Points to Home Truths," *Dawn*, May 3, 2010.

28 Asad Kharal, "LJ, HJI, TTP Behind Recent Attacks in Punjab: Report," *Daily Times*, July 12, 2010.

29 A previous base of operations for Kashmiri along with many other jihadists, Azad Kashmir remained largely untouched by the violence plaguing Pakistan until these recent attacks. For more details, see Mir, "Kashmiri Behind Khawaja's Murder?"; Amir Mir, "Lashkar-e-Zil Behind Azad Kashmir Suicide Hits," *The News International*, January 11, 2010.

30 "Designations of Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami (HUJI) and its Leader Mohammad Ilyas Kashmiri," U.S. State Department, August 6, 2010. Kashmiri developed a plan to kill Pakistan's current chief of army staff (General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani), a plan that even al-Qa'ida at the time was supposedly reluctant to carry out. See Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Keeps its Eyes on Afghanistan," *Asia Times Online*, May 22, 2009.

31 This attack was thought to have been carried out in revenge for the killing of TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud. See Amir Mir, "Cursing the Nurse," *The News International*, October 18, 2009.

32 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy." It is impossible to verify the accuracy of this interview.

*Long War Journal*, October 26, 2009.

15 Jamal, "South Asia's Architect of Jihad: A Profile of Commander Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri."

16 Ibid.

17 PranabDhalSamanta, "Omar Sheikh's Pak Handler Ilyas Kashmiri also Handled Headley," *Indian Express*, November 15, 2009.

18 Jamal, "South Asia's Architect of Jihad: A Profile of Commander Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri."

19 Ibid. Ranjani Raghavan, "Dead Sepoy's Village Doesn't Know his Killer is Killed in Pakistan," *Indian Express*, September 23, 2009.

20 Roggio.

21 Ibid.

Beyond these attacks, he reportedly turned to kidnap-for-ransom activities for funding, such as the October 2008 kidnapping of a film producer.<sup>33</sup> Another kidnapping operation believed to have had Kashmiri's backing was the capture of former ISI operatives Khalid Khwaja and Sultan Amir Tarar (also known as Colonel Imam), along with a British Pakistani journalist.<sup>34</sup> As a result of these operations, Kashmiri's networks are believed to have garnered millions of dollars in ransom payouts.<sup>35</sup>

### Transnational Plots and Kashmiri's Western Operatives

In addition to South Asia plots, Kashmiri appears to have more recently focused his attention on plotting attacks in the West. According to a recent purported interview, the jihadist leader explained how his focus changed from regional jihads in places such as Kashmir to a more global jihadist strategy with the United States as a central target. "The real game is the fight against the great Satan [U.S.] and its adherents," he reportedly said.<sup>36</sup> Providing further insight into why he joined with FATA-based militants, Kashmiri explained that "a unified strategy is compulsory. The defeat of American global hegemony is a must if I want the liberation of my homeland Kashmir, and therefore it provided the reasoning for my presence in this war theater."<sup>37</sup>

Kashmiri's threats against the West appear to have come to fruition. The cases of David Coleman Headley, Tahawwur Rana and Raja Lahrasib

Khan expose Kashmiri's connections to Western operatives in North America and Europe. These cases also point to the significant role Kashmiri is playing in al-Qa`ida's international operations and his connections to Lashkar-i-Tayyiba and the Mumbai operation. Headley allegedly met with Lashkar member Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed (also known as Pasha), a close associate of Kashmiri's, who instructed him to conduct surveillance in Denmark.<sup>38</sup> In Europe, Headley allegedly met with Kashmiri's contacts there to gain assistance in planning and supporting attacks in Denmark against locations and individuals associated with the Prophet Muhammad cartoon controversy.<sup>39</sup> During a February 2009 meeting in Waziristan, Kashmiri allegedly informed Headley that he could provide the manpower, weaponry and funding for the Denmark operations.<sup>40</sup>

Following the Mumbai attacks, Kashmiri also wanted Headley to return to India to conduct surveillance on Israeli targets in response to events in Gaza in 2009.<sup>41</sup> Kashmiri told Headley that "the elders," supposedly referring to the al-Qa`ida leadership, were extremely unhappy with Israel's Gaza activities.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the targeting of the Nariman House and Israeli Jews in the Mumbai attacks may have demonstrated involvement by Kashmiri's Brigade 313, as that name was referenced in phone intercepts between the attackers and handlers.<sup>43</sup> When asked if more Mumbai-style attacks would be carried out, Kashmiri responded, "That was nothing compared to what has already been planned for

the future."<sup>44</sup> When further asked if he meant attacks against the United States and Israel, he reportedly replied, "As a military commander, I would say every target has a specific time and reasons, and the responses will be forthcoming accordingly."<sup>45</sup>

The separate case of Raja Lahrasib Khan reveals Kashmiri's intent to support attacks in the United States. Khan is a Pakistan-born U.S. citizen who was arrested in Chicago in March 2010 and charged with providing material support to al-Qa`ida.<sup>46</sup> Khan claimed to have known Kashmiri for 15 years, met him numerous times and learned that he wanted to train operatives to strike in the United States.<sup>47</sup> Khan discussed attacking a stadium in the United States with an unnamed associate, although it does not appear he was doing so under orders from Kashmiri.<sup>48</sup> In recorded discussions, Khan also seemed to intimate that Kashmiri was at one time part of the Pakistan Army and developed an international network.<sup>49</sup> Khan also discussed Kashmiri's ties to al-Qa`ida and said that Kashmiri acts under Bin Ladin's orders.<sup>50</sup>

Various other international connections to Kashmiri and HuJI have been reported. The Central Intelligence Agency has reportedly documented the presence of Brigade 313 operatives in various European cities.<sup>51</sup> According to Pakistani prosecutors, the five men from the Washington D.C. area who were arrested in December 2009 in Sargodha made contact with Kashmiri's fellow HuJI commander Qari Saifullah Akhtar.<sup>52</sup> All of this

33 Retired Pakistani Major Haroon Rasheed (also known as Abu Khattab) was charged for his role in this operation, along with two others, but was acquitted in June 2010 by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan. See "3 Acquitted of Former SSG Commandos Murder," *Dawn*, June 16, 2010.

34 Arif Jamal, "The Asian Tigers - The New Face of the Punjabi Taliban," *Terrorism Monitor* 8:20 (2010). Following the claim by the Asian Tigers, a group called "Lashkar Jhangvi al-Alami, Abdullah Mansour" claimed responsibility for this operation with a video release of Colonel Imam. See "Video of Pakistani Colonel Imam Sultan Amir Tarar," Flashpoint Partners, July 26, 2010.

35 Kashmiri specifically stated to the Pakistani major who led the operation that the militants' financial situation was dire. For details, see S. Raza Hassan, "Tale of Militants' Motivation and Reach," *Dawn*, April 14, 2009.

36 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

37 Ibid.

38 *U.S.A. v. David C. Headley*, Northern District of Illinois, 2009.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid. Kashmiri felt that as part of the Denmark operation a suicide attack should be conducted along with heading anyone captured.

41 Sagnik Chowdhury, "Post-26/11, Headley Scouted Israeli Targets in India to 'Avenge' Gaza War," *Indian Express*, April 6, 2010.

42 Ibid.; Tejas Mehta, "The Importance of Being Ilyas Kashmiri," NDTV, August 7, 2010.

43 Ibid. Headley's associate, Tahawwur Rana, met with Abdur Rehman in Dubai before the attacks in Mumbai and learned they were going to take place. See *U.S.A. v. Tahawwur Hussain Rana*, Northern District of Illinois, 2009. The revitalized Brigade 313 is thought to be different from the one Kashmiri led in the Kashmir days and now has members from a variety of groups.

44 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

45 Ibid.

46 Those al-Qa`ida charges were for his assistance to Kashmiri. Khan's case is unrelated to that of Headley and Rana, aside from the links to Kashmiri.

47 Khan's meetings with Kashmiri took place in both Miran Shah (North Waziristan) and Kotli (in 2008) indicating Kashmiri traveled out of FATA in recent years.

48 "Chicago Man Charged with Providing Material Support to al Qaeda by Attempting to Send Funds Overseas," U.S. Department of Justice, March 26, 2010.

49 *U.S.A. v. Raja Lahrasib Khan*, Northern District of Illinois, 2010.

50 Ibid.

51 "I-Team Report: Brigade 313," ABC Local, January 28, 2010.

52 Akhtar reportedly encouraged them to come to Paki-



leads to further evidence of HuJI's and Brigade 313's involvement with Western jihadists.<sup>53</sup>

#### Role with Al-Qa`ida and Other Jihadist Organizations

Following HuJI's and Kashmiri's recent designations, State Department counterterrorism coordinator Daniel Benjamin stated, "The linkages between HUJI and Al-Qaeda are clear, and today's designations convey the operational relationship between these organizations."<sup>54</sup> On a number of occasions, both Headley and Raja Khan stated that Kashmiri worked for and was in contact with al-Qa`ida's leaders.<sup>55</sup> Kashmiri further confirmed his involvement when asked why he joined al-Qa`ida, purportedly stating, "We were both victims of the same tyrant. Today, the entire Muslim world is sick of Americans and that's why they are agreeing with Sheikh Osama."<sup>56</sup> Aside from al-Qa`ida, Kashmiri is known to have close relationships with a multitude of jihadist groups including the Haqqani network and the TTP.<sup>57</sup>

In a posthumous audio statement released in June, former al-Qa`ida operative Mustafa Abu'l-Yazid referred to Kashmiri as a part of al-Qa`ida, saying that he heads "Qaedat al-Jihad in Kashmir."<sup>58</sup> Al-Yazid further claimed

that al-Qa`ida in Kashmir carried out the February 2010 bombing in Pune, India, which killed 16 people at a German bakery.<sup>59</sup> Following that attack, Brigade 313 issued threats against internationally connected events, such as the 2010 Hockey World Cup and the Commonwealth Games.<sup>60</sup> Kashmiri himself stated that attacks conducted in India were part of a larger strategy of striking at the United States regionally.<sup>61</sup>

#### Conclusion

Kashmiri brings a wealth of advantages to al-Qa`ida and associated groups. His decades of experience and contacts with Pakistani jihadist networks are deep and widespread. He has directly participated in and supported a range of insurgent and terrorist operations in Afghanistan, Kashmir and India. Involvement with transnational terrorist plots in Denmark and the United States proves he has developed international contacts willing to carry out and support attacks in the West. Kashmiri also offers al-Qa`ida a route into Kashmir and India; this is the first time that al-Qa`ida has placed a longtime Kashmir jihad veteran—and an ethnic Kashmiri—in such a central role in their operations.

Kashmiri's links to Pakistani Taliban militants, al-Qa`ida operatives, and Punjab-based militants<sup>62</sup> who have fought in Kashmir places him at the crossroads of all these groups, demonstrating his danger. He has improved the ability of militants to strike in Pakistan's interior and has created important logistics routes throughout the country.

Kashmiri is described as an exceptional guerrilla fighter who "turns the strategic vision into reality, provides the resources and gets targets achieved, but he chooses to remain in the background and very low key."<sup>63</sup> Kashmiri himself stated that "I have always been a field commander and I know the language of battlefields."<sup>64</sup> Having honed his skills from years of warfare and commanding an insurgent group in Kashmir, Ilyas Kashmiri is now transferring the same tactics and experience to other theaters of jihad.<sup>65</sup>

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stan. See "American Suspects Linked to Militants: Prosecutor," *Dawn*, April 17, 2010. Kashmiri joined HuJI when it was under Akhtar's leadership and served as leader of HuJI operations in Azad Kashmir. Interestingly, the U.S. designation of Kashmiri appears to portray him as the overall commander of HuJI.

53 An additional case of interest is that of Bangladeshi-born British citizen Golam Mostafa, who is described as the UK *amir* for HuJI-B (Bangladesh).

54 "US, UN Declare Harakat-ul Jihad al-Islami a Terrorist Group," Agence France-Presse, August 7, 2010. HuJI's relationship with al-Qa`ida dates back more than a decade, and HuJI-B's leader signed Bin Ladin's 1998 *fatwa* declaring war on the United States and Israel.

55 "Chicago Man Charged with Providing Material Support to al Qaeda by Attempting to Send Funds Overseas."

56 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

57 Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Pakistan Has its Own Battle to Fight," *Asia Times Online*, July 28, 2010; "Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami Merges With Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Preparing Suicide Bombers Squad," *Daily Express*, September 20, 2008.

58 "Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid in Posthumous Audio Message Urges Attacks in U.S.; Says Al-Qaeda in Kashmir

Behind February 2010 Attack in India; Complaints of Shortage of Funds," Middle East Media Research Institute, June 15, 2010. A group claiming to be al-Qa`ida in Jammu and Kashmir announced itself in 2006, and another individual claiming to represent al-Qa`ida in India emerged in June 2007. See "CD Announces Qaeda Head in India," *Economic Times*, June 9, 2007.

59 "Sahab: Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid in Posthumous Audio Message," Middle East Observatory, June 15, 2010; Jane Cowan, "Two Men Arrested Over India Bomb Attack," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, September 8, 2010.

60 The message did not specifically claim responsibility for the attack. See Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Chief Delivers a Warning," *Asia Times Online*, February 10, 2010. Kashmiri may have delivered on these threats when two bomb blasts occurred outside a cricket stadium in the Indian city of Bangalore. See Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Chief Delivers a Warning," *Asia Times Online*, February 10, 2010.

61 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy." Baitullah Mehsud was said to have also been working with Kashmiri on expanding operations into India. See Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Afghanistan: The Neo-Taliban Campaign," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1, 2008.

62 The Punjabi Taliban is said to consist of operatives from Lashkar-i-Jhanghvi, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan and Jaysh-i-Muhammad. For details, see Hassan Abbas, "Defining the Punjabi Taliban Network," *CTC Sentinel* 2:4 (2009).

63 Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda's Guerrilla Chief Lays Out Strategy."

64 Ibid.

65 Syed Saleem Shahzad, "The Rise and Rise of the Neo-Taliban," *Asia Times Online*, April 1, 2009.

## The Role and Significance of Signature Attacks in the Iraqi Insurgency

By Michael Knights

ON AUGUST 31, 2010, the United States declared an end to combat operations in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> In recent months, however, there has been a stubborn perception that security in Iraq is suffering a downturn.<sup>2</sup> Yet the raw numbers of monthly security incidents reveal a significant decline in year-on-year comparisons. The key reason for the difference between perception and reality is the rising incidents of so-called “signature attacks” that capture the media’s attention. These high-profile attacks involve tactics such as suicide vest bombings, suicide car bombings and other attempted mass casualty attacks. In October to December 2009, for example, the average number of attempted or completed signature attacks in Iraq was 15 per month. By the second quarter of 2010 (April-June), the monthly average increased to 23. The month of July 2010 witnessed 34 such attacks and was claimed by the Iraqi government to have been the deadliest month since May 2008.<sup>3</sup>

Typically for Iraq, the rise in signature attacks can be viewed in two ways. To some analysts, the attacks signal a partial recovery of movements such as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). To others, including Iraqi government spokesmen and U.S. military leaders, the attacks represent increasingly desperate attempts by such groups to demonstrate that they remain active and strategically relevant.<sup>4</sup>

This article will show how the ISI’s insurgent campaign was interrupted in March 2010, when the insurgent group lost a key operational leader. As a result, large-scale simultaneous bombings on strategic targets have given way to sporadic and sometimes ineffective attacks on individual targets. It will then disaggregate the different strands of Iraq’s interwoven insurgencies to gain a better understanding of the role, significance and future evolution of signature attacks in Iraq.

### Interrupted Campaign in Baghdad

Throughout 2009, the ISI was fixed in a pattern of quarterly car bombings (spaced three months apart) on clusters of government buildings in Baghdad. On August 19, 2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance were both seriously damaged, resulting in at least 90 deaths.<sup>5</sup> On October 25, 2009, the Ministry of Justice and Baghdad Provincial Council were struck by car bombs, killing 155 people.<sup>6</sup> On December 8, 2009, five car bombs were detonated in car parks and public areas in the government district just outside Baghdad’s International Zone, killing 127 people.<sup>7</sup> On January 25, 2010, three major international hotels were attacked in Karrada, near the International Zone, killing 15 people.<sup>8</sup> This campaign was interrupted on March 11, 2010, when the ISI *amir* in west Baghdad, Munaf `Abd al-Rahim al-Rawi, was captured. Although one further “concept” attack flowed through the operational pipeline, there have been no major coordinated attacks against government targets in Baghdad since al-Rawi’s arrest.<sup>9</sup>

Musawi characterized the attacks as the “hysterical” attempts of surviving al-Qa`ida cells to “prove their existence and their influence.” See Aseel Kami and Suad al-Salhy, “Attacks Kill Over 100 in Iraq, al Qaeda Blamed,” Reuters, May 10, 2010. Also see General Ray Odierno, news briefing, U.S. Department of Defense, July 21, 2010.

5 “Blasts Bring Carnage to Baghdad,” BBC, August 19, 2009.

6 “Baghdad Bomb Fatalities Pass 150,” BBC, October 26, 2009.

7 Steven Lee Myers and Marc Santora, “Election Date Set in Iraq as Bombs Kill Scores,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2009.

8 Haider Kadhim, “Baghdad Bombs Kill 36, Chemical Ali Hanged,” Reuters, January 25, 2010.

9 The last “concept” attack was the April 4, 2010 assault on four diplomatic targets west of the International Zone, which left 42 dead.

Instead, the ISI has executed a patchwork of smaller profile-raising attacks. In response to the April 18, 2010 deaths of ISI leader Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi and al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) chief Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the ISI launched a hasty series of five car bombs on Shi`a mosques in Baghdad on April 23, striking crowds of worshippers as they left Friday prayers.<sup>10</sup> Fifty-eight people were killed.<sup>11</sup> In June and July, the ISI sought to humiliate the government by storming government-protected buildings in the capital. On June 13, ISI fighters stormed the Central Bank of Iraq, using three suicide vests to defeat the guard force and then rampaging through the building.<sup>12</sup> On June 20, a twin car bomb attack killed 26 people queuing outside a government immigration office near the International Zone.<sup>13</sup> On July 26, the ISI claimed a car bomb attack on the Saudi-funded al-Arabiya television channel.<sup>14</sup> On July 29, an ISI assault force overran a police checkpoint in Adhamiyya, a predominately Sunni part of northeastern Baghdad, and then ambushed government reinforcements with a series of roadside bombs.<sup>15</sup> The July 29 attack, in which a number of security personnel were killed, generated widespread publicity due to the ISI’s ability to literally plant its flag in Baghdad during daylight hours.<sup>16</sup> Other attacks targeted security force headquarters in Baghdad in July and August.

Although these acts are troubling for the government, they represent a more manageable problem than the highly effective, quarterly strikes against government ministries that unfolded in 2009.

1 Although the U.S. combat role in Iraq officially ended on August 31, 2010, approximately 50,000 U.S. troops remain in the country.

2 All statistics in this article are derived from Olive Group’s database of more than 130,000 geo-located incidents. This data suggests that reported monthly incidents have decreased from 1,562 in July 2008 to 873 in July 2009 and finally to 330 in July 2010. The database is maintained by private security company Olive Group and represents data gained through more than 2,000 days of consecutive on-the-ground operations in Iraq.

3 Iraqi figures of 535 Iraqi deaths and 1,000 other casualties reflect the impact of all security incidents in the country during July 2010, not just mass casualty attacks. The U.S. government queried the figures, claiming that 222 Iraqis were killed and 782 were wounded.

4 Government spokesman Major General Qassim al-

10 “Bombings Across Iraq Target Shiite Mosques, Leaving 58 Dead,” Fox News, April 23, 2010.

11 Ibid.

12 Suad al-Salhy and Muhanad Mohammed, “Gunmen, Bombs Target Iraq Central Bank, Killing 15,” Reuters, June 13, 2010.

13 “Twin Baghdad Car Bombs Kill 26, Wound 53,” Agence France-Presse, June 20, 2010.

14 “4 Killed, 10 Injured in Al Arabiya Suicide Bombing,” al-Arabiya, July 26, 2010.

15 Tim Arango, “Iraqi Insurgents Plant Qaeda Flag in Baghdad,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2010.

16 Ibid.

### Reaching into the South

The declining scope and scale of ISI attacks in Baghdad have been offset to some extent by the series of attention-grabbing attacks launched on May 10 and August 25, 2010. The May attacks involved coordinated car bomb explosions in Baghdad, Hilla and Iskandariyya (in Babil Province, south of Baghdad), and Basra. The August 25 attacks were mass casualty bombing attempts in Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit, Dujail (near Saddam's birthplace), Ba`quba, Muqdadhiyya, Ramadi, Falluja, northern Baghdad's Adhamiyya and Kadhimiyya districts plus the southern cities of Karbala, Kut and Basra. Although only the latter attack on August 25 was claimed by the ISI, some ISI elements were probably involved in both of the series of attacks, which claimed a combined total of at least 140 lives.<sup>17</sup>

The unique feature of the attacks was the inclusion of so many southern targets, particularly in Basra, which is nearly 370 miles by road from the nearest major Sunni Arab concentrations. Although only soft targets were selected across the south—typically Shi`a civilian gatherings targeted with multiple car bombs—the coordination involved in the attacks is noteworthy at a time when the ISI and other groups continue to suffer significant attrition to their leadership cadres. There are various theories to explain this contradiction. Ba`athist and mercenary elements have played a major role in bombings claimed by the ISI. Separately, some suggest that Iranian intelligence support has facilitated some bombings in an effort to destabilize Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's claims to have improved security in Iraq.<sup>18</sup>

17 "Dozens Dead in Iraq Attacks," al-Jazeera, August 25, 2010. Also see "Dozens Killed in Wave of Bombings Across Iraq," BBC, August 25, 2010. The casualty figures have been adjusted to reflect more accurate totals later provided by contacts in the Iraqi Security Forces.

18 Ba`athist involvement has been a persistent theme in government announcements during the past year, ranging from the August 2009 to the August 2010 bombings. This is not just a political issue (where the government seeks to rouse fears of a Ba`athist return), but it also reflects the sophistication and professionalism of some attacks, which point to the involvement of former regime intelligence officers. For details, see Ned Parker and Riyadh Mohammed, "Iraq Car Bombings, Other Attacks Kill 51: Al-Qaida, Baathists Blamed for Bloodshed," *Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 2010. See also Liz Sly and Saif

Such theories may be correct, but the south is hardly impenetrable to the ISI or other Sunni Arab militant groups. Baghdad's southern "belts"—Babil and Wasit provinces—have long functioned as a base for attacks against Shi`a communities and particularly pilgrim processions moving between Baghdad and the shrines in Karbala and Najaf. Indeed, there are precedents for mass casualty attacks in Iraq's "deep south": on June 10, 2009, a car bomb was remotely-detonated in a Shi`a market town west of Nasiriyya, with the vehicle later traced back to a Basra safe house where booby-trapped children's toys had previously been found on May 2, 2009.<sup>19</sup>

### Disaggregating Iraq's Interwoven Insurgencies

In any given month, at least half (and usually a greater proportion) of mass casualty attacks are spread across the provinces in non-coordinated attacks. The mainstream media erroneously aggregates these incidents with coordinated attacks to give the sense of a unitary Sunni Arab insurgency that is guided by a single controlling hand. In fact, there are clearly a number of regional insurgencies operating largely independent of each other within Iraq, with each making different use of mass casualty attacks to meet their own objectives and reflecting local tactical conditions.

In some Sunni Arab areas, little use is made of mass casualty attacks. The ISI and related movements have largely moved away from the use of vehicle bombs against civilian targets to collectively punish and intimidate Sunni Arab communities. Instead, such groups are attempting to rebuild operational sanctuaries and recruitment areas using more selective tools such as "night letters" (warnings), assassination, and

Hameed, "Iraq Arrests Former Baathists in Baghdad Bombings," *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 2009. Speculation concerning Iranian involvement in mass casualty attacks is commonly voiced by Iraqi generals and politicians in private. The only open source discussion of the issue was the official U.S. attribution of responsibility to Iran for market bombings in Iraq in November 2007. See comments by Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, the deputy spokesman for Multinational Corps-Iraq in a press briefing on November 25, 2007.

19 Personal interview, U.S. Marine Military Training Team adviser, Basra, Iraq, July 2009.

bribery targeting significant numbers of key community leaders and security force members.<sup>20</sup> Where mass casualty attacks are undertaken, they tend to target the security forces. In eastern Anbar (the Ramadi-Falluja-Abu Ghurayb corridor), for instance, there have been 22 mass casualty attacks since August 2009. Twelve of these were aimed at security force checkpoints and bases, while only two were focused on civilian targets.<sup>21</sup> This approach to targeting stands in marked contrast to AQI's use of chlorine vehicle bombs to coerce the population in the same area in 2007 and 2008.<sup>22</sup>

Although Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi and AQI leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri were killed in Tikrit, the Tigris River Valley (TRV) has not been an intensive theater of mass casualty attacks in the last year. Once again, more subtle methods are being utilized to increase the operational space for insurgent groups as the U.S. drawdown creates opportunities to influence uncertain Sunni Arab communities. The TRV and the foothills of the Hamrin Mountains to the east continue to be a logistical, transportation and rest and recuperation area for Sunni insurgents.<sup>23</sup> The only significant use of car bombs in the TRV between Baghdad and Beyji has been in areas south of Balad, where eight car bombs have been used in the last year to attack Iraqi Army checkpoints and U.S. convoys on Main Supply Route Tampa North (Highway 1).<sup>24</sup>

The Diyala River Valley (DRV) is a far more active theater for mass casualty attacks. Diyala is known as "Little Iraq" because the province mirrors Iraq's mountainous Kurdish-Arab northeast

20 For a good recent account of how the ISI and other groups undertake such intimidation campaigns, see Richard Spencer, "Now it's Every Iraqi for Himself," *Daily Telegraph*, August 31, 2010.

21 This data is based on Olive Group's statistics. Contrast this with the composition of 29 mass casualty attacks carried out in the last year in the nine southern Shi`a provinces, of which 27 were aimed at civilian targets.

22 Michael Knights, "Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre Briefing: Chlorine Bombs in Iraq," Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center, March 2007.

23 For details on AQI's longstanding use of the Hamrin Mountains, see Michael Knights, "Endangered Species - Al-Qaeda in Iraq Adapts to Survive," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 2008.

24 This data is based on Olive Group's statistics.



and its fertile Shi`a-Sunni center and south.<sup>25</sup> Diyala also continues to be the scene of a war within a war, including 40 mass casualty attacks in the last year. The DRV was the operational headquarters of AQI for at least the first three years of the occupation, and it continues to see high levels of violence in areas such as the provincial capital Ba`quba, Khalis, Muqyadiyya, and the Lake Hamrin villages of Jalula, Saadiyya and Qara Tapa. In Ba`quba, where there have been 16 mass casualty attacks in the last 12 months, five were carefully targeted attacks on provincial leadership, five on Shi`a civilians, and the remainder on security forces. Across the province, these proportions are mirrored in the split of effort among the ISI's key opponents.<sup>26</sup>

A subtle difference is observable in Ninawa and Kirkuk provinces, where the ISI and Ansar al-Sunna predominately target Kurdish security forces and Kurdish civilians. In raw numbers, there were 63 mass casualty attacks in Ninawa and 12 in Kirkuk since August 2009. In both provinces, Islamist militants are more integrated into the broader anti-Kurdish and anti-American resistance forces. The insurgency in Mosul is mounting roughly the same number of monthly car bombs and suicide vest attacks as it did over a year ago. The five or six mass casualty attacks undertaken each month in the provinces represent a sub-set of the 90 or so major attacks launched by insurgents in the two provinces (combined).<sup>27</sup>

In the urban fight against the federal and Kurdish-led security forces, car bombs and suicide vest attacks are still utilized as heavy weapons with which to attack bases and hardened checkpoints. To a greater extent than any other part of Iraq, suicide attacks remain the norm in Ninawa and Kirkuk. Whereas remote-detonation of car bombs and truck bombs is the identified means of initiation in around half of mass casualty attacks across the country in the last year, they only account for 12% of attacks in Ninawa and Kirkuk.<sup>28</sup>

25 For a discussion of Diyala as an operational environment, see Michael Knights, "Pursuing Al-Qa`ida into Diyala Province," *CTC Sentinel* 1:9 (2008).

26 This data is based on Olive Group's statistics.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid. The number of true suicide-detonated devices

This has given the insurgency in these provinces the ability to effectively target armored mobile targets (such as individuals marked for assassination) and also to achieve optimal detonation of vehicle bombs during attacks on hardened checkpoints. Around a quarter of mass casualty attacks continue along the corridor linking Mosul to the Syrian border, which includes the hard-hit Turkoman city of Tal Afar—the recipient of a triple suicide bombing at a football match on May 14, 2010. The key targets are Kurdish-led security forces and ethnic minorities, who are viewed by the insurgents as Kurdish proxies in the area.

#### Conclusion

The May 10 and August 25, 2010 serial mass casualty attacks were significant feats of coordination, but they are only part of a broader picture. Leadership casualties appear to have interrupted an intensifying series of ISI attacks on the Iraqi government in Baghdad and diverted the group onto a different path: targeting soft civilian targets in Shi`a areas. Most of the other mass casualty attacks that occur in Iraq are not coordinated and are directed by local cells for tactical reasons. In some areas, they are fully integrated with other military means of resistance and there has been a marked movement away from coercive mass casualty strikes on Sunni civilians. Kurdish, Shi`a and ethnic minority civilians remain fair game to almost all Sunni Islamist groups.

In most parts of Iraq, the use of increasing numbers of remotely-detonated vehicle bombs against soft targets has allowed greater numbers of attacks to be carried out and has given cells greater longevity and survivability than networks specializing in suicide operations.<sup>29</sup> This should not be confused with a resurgence of the insurgency. The effectiveness of mass casualty attacks is arguably declining.

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is declining considerably, with almost all suicide attacks falling into two categories: suicide vest attacks or suicide car bomb attacks on moving convoys, both modes of attack where suicide operations are a prerequisite, not a choice. Very few attacks witness insurgent groups deliberately expending valuable martyrs on targets that can be attacked using other means.

29 This data is based on Olive Group's statistics, blended and cross-referenced against numerous open source reports of individual bombings.

Vehicle-borne devices are getting smaller; whereas devices of more than 800 pounds of military explosives were the norm in previous years, devices now usually comprise 50-150 pounds of homemade or bulk explosives in a sedan car or even a motorbike.<sup>30</sup> Larger payloads are increasingly rare and are difficult to transport due to the density of checkpoints. Military munitions are likewise becoming harder to procure and transport, driving partially successful efforts by many cells to switch to Ammonium Nitrate Fuel Oil for their main explosive charges, and leading the government to consider its first explosives security regulations regarding fertilizer sales.<sup>31</sup> Instead, the most effective attacks in Iraq continue to be suicide vest bombs, particularly when utilized by female bombers or by pairs of bombers acting in a coordinated manner.

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30 Ibid.

31 "Bombers Used Fertilizers – BOC," *Aswat al-Iraq*, April 7, 2010.

## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

August 1, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): The Netherlands withdrew its combat troops from Afghanistan, handing its mission in Uruzgan Province to U.S. and Australian forces. – *CNN, August 1*

August 2, 2010 (UNITED STATES): A federal court jury in Brooklyn, New York convicted Russell Defreitas and Abdul Kadir of plotting to blow up jet fuel tanks at John F. Kennedy International Airport. – *USA Today, August 2*

August 2, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed six children in Kandahar Province. It appears that the bomber tried to assassinate Haji Ahmadullah Nazak, the governor of Dand district, but his explosives detonated early. – *al-Jazira, August 2; New York Times, August 2*

August 2, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Waheedullah Sabawoon, a prominent aide to President Hamid Karzai, was severely wounded when a bomb exploded next to his vehicle in Jalalabad. – *New York Times, August 2*

August 2, 2010 (NORTH AFRICA): An al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader released a new statement threatening attacks against France and Mauritania in retaliation for a July 22 joint military raid by the two states against an AQIM base in Mali. – *al-Jazira, August 2*

August 3, 2010 (STRAIT OF HORMUZ): Jihadist militants belonging to the Brigades of Abdullah Azzam claimed credit for a suicide bombing against the Japanese oil tanker *M.Star* as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz in late July. On July 28, the ship's crew reported an explosion shortly after midnight, but they were unsure of its origin. The explosion only caused minor damage to the ship, which is owned by Mitsui O.S.K. It is suspected that a suicide bomber detonated a dinghy loaded with explosives near the hull of the ship. – *AFP, August 3; BBC, August 6; UPI, September 3*

August 3, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants launched a coordinated attack against Kandahar airfield, the main NATO base in southern Afghanistan. A suicide bomber first detonated his explosives

outside the gates to the base, while an estimated five other fighters opened fire on the facility. – *al-Jazira, August 3; Voice of America, August 3*

August 3, 2010 (IRAQ): Al-Qa`ida-linked gunmen overran a security checkpoint in Baghdad, killing five policemen. – *Reuters, August 3*

August 3, 2010 (IRAQ): At least one car bomb exploded at an outdoor market in Kut, Wasit Province, killing at least 12 people. – *AP, August 4; Reuters, August 3*

August 3, 2010 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives at the police headquarters in southern Yemen's al-Dali` Province. The explosion wounded at least eight policemen. Authorities suspect that al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula was responsible for the attack. – *Yemen Post, August 3*

August 3, 2010 (INDONESIA): An Indonesian court sentenced three men to prison for harboring terrorists involved in the suicide bombings against the Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott hotels in Jakarta in July 2009. – *AFP, August 3*

August 4, 2010 (UNITED STATES): U.S. authorities arrested Shaker Masri of Chicago and charged him with attempting to support al-Qa`ida and Somalia's al-Shabab militant group. According to the FBI, Masri, who was born in Alabama, was arrested shortly before he was due to fly to Los Angeles, with Somalia as his final destination. Counterterrorism officials in Chicago had been secretly monitoring the 26-year-old Masri for two years. – *BBC, August 4; ABC News, August 5*

August 4, 2010 (CANADA): A Canadian judge freed Abdullah Khadr from jail and refused to extradite him to the United States. Khadr has been indicted in the United States on terrorism charges as U.S. authorities allege that he purchased weapons for al-Qa`ida. The Canadian government has not yet decided whether to appeal the decision. – *al-Jazira, August 4*

August 4, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber assassinated a senior commander of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Constabulary in Peshawar. The commander, Sifwat Ghayoor, also had served as Peshawar's police chief. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, which also killed three

other people. – *BBC, August 4; Bloomberg, August 4; Los Angeles Times, August 5*

August 5, 2010 (UNITED STATES): U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced charges against 14 people accused of supporting the al-Shabab militant group in Somalia. According to Voice of America, "Two suspects have been arrested, the rest are still at large with several believed to be in Somalia fighting for al-Shabab." – *Voice of America, August 5*

August 5, 2010 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. State Department released its annual report on terrorism, stating that al-Qa`ida's core in Pakistan remains the "most formidable" terrorist group threatening the United States, along with its affiliates in Yemen and Africa. – *AFP, August 5*

August 5, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants gunned down a 10-member international medical team in Badakhshan Province. Six Americans, a German and a Briton were among the dead. – *Los Angeles Times, August 8*

August 5, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a convoy of Afghan and international forces in Kunduz Province, killing seven policemen. – *Reuters, August 5*

August 5, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters shot down a Canadian Chinook helicopter in Kandahar Province. None of the crew members were seriously injured during the emergency landing. – *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, August 7*

August 5, 2010 (PHILIPPINES): A bomb exploded at the Zamboanga airport in the southern Philippines. Two people were killed by the blast. – *AFP, August 5*

August 6, 2010 (GLOBAL): The United States and United Nations designated Pakistan's Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam (HuJI) as a foreign terrorist organization and blacklisted its commander, Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri. The U.S. Treasury Department said that Kashmiri "provides support to Al-Qaeda operations, including logistical support for Al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks." – *AFP, August 6*

August 6, 2010 (ALGERIA): Islamist militants assassinated the mayor of Baghliia village in Boumerdes Province. The region is considered a stronghold

for al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb.  
– *Reuters, August 7*

August 7, 2010 (IRAQ): A series of explosions ripped through the southern Iraqi city of Basra, killing at least 43 people. – *BBC, August 8*

August 8, 2010 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed six people in Ramadi, Anbar Province. – *BBC, August 8*

August 9, 2010 (INDONESIA): Abu Bakar Bashir, one of Indonesia's leading radical Muslim clerics, was arrested on accusations that he played a part in setting up a militant training camp in Aceh Province. Bashir is one of the founders of Jemaah Islamiya. – *New York Times, August 9*

August 11, 2010 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. military court at Guantanamo Bay sentenced Ibrahim al-Qosi to 14 years in prison. Al-Qosi, who was once a cook for Usama bin Ladin, had already agreed to a plea deal with prosecutors, so he could possibly serve a shorter sentence or be repatriated to Sudan. The details of that deal remain secret. – *AFP, August 11*

August 11, 2010 (SAUDI ARABIA): Said al-Shihri, a leader of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), purportedly released a new audio statement, ordering supporters in the Saudi military to “collect information on everything related to the Saudi royal family.” In addition to attempting to overthrow the Saudi monarchy, al-Shihri also asked followers in the Saudi military to “carry your arms against Israel, which is only few kilometers away from you. Whoever among you is a pilot should seek martyrdom in the skies of Palestine, and who works in the navy should aim his weapon at the Jews there.” He further said, “You who work as guards for tyrants, princes, ministers or complexes where Christians live, or can reach them, seek help from Allah to kill them. Together, let's overthrow the Al Saud family.” – *Bloomberg, August 11*

August 12, 2010 (MALI): Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb executed a guide working for the Malian customs service. The guide was abducted along with a Malian soldier on August 10. The guide's execution apparently occurred after “militants found he was carrying documents from a Western embassy based in the capital.” – *AFP, August 11*

August 14, 2010 (LEBANON): Lebanese security forces killed two senior members of Fatah al-Islam during clashes in the eastern Bekaa Valley region. The men were identified as Abdul Rahman Awad and Abu Bakr. – *AFP, August 18*

August 14, 2010 (MAURITANIA): Omar Sid'Ahmed Ould Hamma, a Malian national convicted of kidnapping three Spanish aid workers in Mauritania last year and handing them to al-Qa`ida, will be extradited to Mali. According to Agence France-Presse, “The extradition appeared to be part of efforts to obtain the freedom of two Spaniards still in the hands of the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.” – *AFP, August 14*

August 17, 2010 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives near a police checkpoint in North Ossetia, killing two police officers. – *CNN, August 17*

August 17, 2010 (RUSSIA): A car bomb ripped through a café in the city of Pyatigorsk in the Stavropol region, wounding 30 people. – *Reuters, August 17*

August 17, 2010 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives among dozens of people at an Iraqi Army recruitment site in Baghdad, killing at least 57 of them. The Islamic State of Iraq took credit for the attack. – *New York Times, August 17; Reuters, August 17; Reuters, August 20*

August 17, 2010 (IRAQ): A bomb attached to a fuel truck exploded in a Shi`a neighborhood in Baghdad, killing eight people. – *New York Times, August 17*

August 18, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a district police commander and three officers in Kandahar Province. – *New York Times, August 18*

August 18, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Gunmen assassinated Atta Khan Qadir Wal, the director of tribal affairs for Zabul Province, as he returned from evening prayers in Qalat. – *New York Times, August 18*

August 19, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Gunmen killed the chief of police for Burka district in Baghlan Province. Abdul Haq was shot to death after gunmen entered his home. – *New York Times, August 21*

August 20, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters attacked a construction

company in Sangin district in Helmand Province, killing approximately 25 workers and security guards. – *Reuters, August 20; New York Times, August 21*

August 21, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Six policemen were killed in their sleep while manning a checkpoint on Ring Road in Helmand Province. – *New York Times, August 21*

August 21, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A remotely-detonated bomb killed six anti-Taliban militia fighters in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP, August 21*

August 21, 2010 (YEMEN): Yemeni security forces announced that an al-Qa`ida operative, Ali Husayn Abdullah al-Tays, surrendered to authorities. Al-Tays was identified as a former detainee at Guantanamo Bay. – *Yemen Post, August 21*

August 22, 2010 (YEMEN): Yemeni security forces killed seven suspected al-Qa`ida terrorists in Abyan Province. The province has been the site of deadly clashes since August 19. – *Saba, August 23; UPI, August 22*

August 23, 2010 (NORTH AFRICA): Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) released two Spanish hostages who had been held in captivity since November 2009. Al-Arabiya television reported that the release was linked to Mauritania's recent extradition of Omar Sid'Ahmed Ould Hamma to Mali. There are also unconfirmed reports that the Spanish government paid nearly seven million euros to secure their freedom, along with another hostage who was previously released in March 2010. – *Voice of America, August 22; Telegraph, August 24*

August 23, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A teenage suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a mosque in Wana, South Waziristan Agency, killing 25 people. Maulana Noor Muhammad, a former lawmaker and head of the Islamic school where the mosque was located, was among the dead, and it appears that he was specifically targeted by the bomber. – *Los Angeles Times, August 24*

August 23, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A remotely-detonated bomb ripped through a school in Kurram Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. A number of tribal elders were meeting in the school



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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.

at the time of the blast. Six people were killed. – *Los Angeles Times*, August 24

August 24, 2010 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Muhammad Abdallah Hasan Abu-al-Khayr, one of Usama bin Ladin's son-in-laws. The United Nations took a similar action. The Treasury Department alleges that al-Khayr is a key leader of al-Qa`ida's finance section. – *AFP*, August 24

August 24, 2010 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed two Iraqi police officers and a civilian at a checkpoint in Ba`quba, Diyala Province. – *AFP*, August 24

August 24, 2010 (SOMALIA): At least two al-Shabab militants stormed the Hotel Muna in Mogadishu, shooting at lawmakers and their bodyguards who were meeting inside the building. Both of the gunmen detonated explosives attached to their bodies during the assault. The assailants, disguised as security force personnel, killed at least 31 people. At least six lawmakers were among the dead. – *Washington Post*, August 24; *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24; *Wall Street Journal*, August 25

August 25, 2010 (CANADA): Ottawa police arrested two men for alleged involvement in an al-Qa`ida-related terrorism plot. Authorities said that more arrests were expected. – *Vancouver Sun*, August 25; *UPI*, August 26

August 25, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): An Afghan police officer shot to death two Spanish military trainers and an interpreter in Badghis Province. The assailant was also killed. – *Los Angeles Times*, August 25

August 25, 2010 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a police station in Baghdad's Qahira district, killing 15 people. Most of the dead were police. The Islamic State of Iraq later claimed credit for the attack. – *BBC*, August 25

August 25, 2010 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives outside a police station in Kut, Wasit Province, killing at least 19 people. The Islamic State of Iraq later claimed credit for the attack. – *BBC*, August 25

August 25, 2010 (MAURITANIA): Mauritanian troops killed a suicide bomber as he tried to ram an explosives-

laden vehicle into a military barracks at Nema in the eastern part of the country. The bomber was killed and there were no other fatalities. – *AFP*, August 24

August 26, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): At least 10 Taliban fighters raided a checkpoint just outside Kunduz city, killing eight Afghan police officers. The attack occurred while the officers were asleep. – *BBC*, August 26; *Reuters*, August 26

August 26, 2010 (IRAQ): Militants killed six members of a Sunni militia allied with U.S. forces against al-Qa`ida. The militia members were killed in Diyala Province. – *Voice of America*, August 26

August 28, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters dressed in U.S. military uniforms attacked two coalition bases in Khost Province. According to the *Washington Post*, "The simultaneous assaults on Forward Operating Base Salerno and nearby Forward Operating Base Chapman in Khost province ended with 21 insurgents killed but no U.S. deaths, NATO officials said." – *BBC*, August 28; *Washington Post*, August 28; *New York Times*, August 28

August 30, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Seven U.S. soldiers were killed in two roadside bomb attacks in southern Afghanistan. No details were provided about the incidents. – *AFP*, August 30; *AP*, August 30

August 30, 2010 (SOMALIA): Insurgents launched a mortar strike at the presidential palace in Mogadishu, killing four African Union peacekeepers. The killed peacekeepers were from Uganda. – *New York Times*, August 31

August 31, 2010 (UNITED STATES): Mahmoud Mamduh Salim, an alleged aide to Usama bin Ladin, was sentenced to life in prison in the United States. Salim was charged for an assault on a New York corrections officer on November 1, 2000, an incident that occurred while he was awaiting trial on conspiracy charges stemming from the al-Qa`ida bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. – *CNN*, September 1

August 31, 2010 (IRAQ): The United States officially ended its combat mission in Iraq. Approximately 50,000 U.S. troops will remain in the country. – *Reuters*, September 1