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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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Cooperation or Competition: Boko Haram and Ansaru After the Mali Intervention

By Jacob Zenn



A Cameroonian soldier stands in Dabanda by the car of the French family that was kidnapped on February 19. - AFP/Getty Images

SINCE THE NIGERIAN militant group Boko Haram¹ launched its first attack in northern Nigeria in September 2010, it has carried out more than 700 attacks that have killed more than 3,000 people.² Boko Haram primarily targets Nigerian government officials and security officers, traditional and secular Muslim leaders, and Christians.³ It has also

attacked schools, churches, cell phone towers, media houses, and government facilities, including border posts, police stations and prisons. Since January 2012, however, a new militant group has attracted more attention in northern Nigeria due to its threat to foreign interests. Jama`at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (commonly known as Ansaru)⁴ announced that it split from Boko Haram in January 2012, claiming

1 The group Boko Haram identifies itself as Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad, which is Arabic for "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad." The term "Boko Haram" means "Western education is sinful" in the Hausa language in Nigeria.

2 "Boko Haram Has Killed 3,000 People, Says Army Chief," *ThisDayLive*, November 6, 2012; "Boko Haram Attacks Cripple Northern Nigeria's Economy," *IRIN*, February 12, 2013.

3 Boko Haram's first attack with the name Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad was on September 7, 2010,

when approximately 50 fighters attacked Bauchi prison and freed more than 150 Boko Haram members. An additional 500 prisoners were also freed, some of whom joined Boko Haram. Before 2010, Boko Haram was known as the "Nigerian Taliban," among other names. See Sani Muhd Sani, "Attack On Bauchi Prison - Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates," *Leadership*, September 8, 2010.

4 Ansaru also refers to itself as JAMBS—the acronym for Jama`at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan. In Arabic, this means "Supporters of the Muslims in the Land of the Blacks."

that Boko Haram was “inhuman” for killing innocent Muslims as well as for targeting defectors.⁵ Ansaru’s almost exclusive focus on foreign targets may also explain why the two groups could not coexist.

Boko Haram seeks revenge against the Nigerian government and security forces for killing its founder Muhammad Yusuf and 1,000 of his followers during a four-day series of clashes in July 2009.⁶ Ansaru fights to restore the “lost dignity” of the Sokoto Caliphate, which was founded in 1804 by the Fulani *shaykh* Usman dan Fodio in northern Cameroon, northern Nigeria, and southern Niger, and lasted until the United Kingdom and France colonized the region and introduced Western education and Christianity in the 19th century.⁷

This article reviews Ansaru’s attacks on foreign interests in Nigeria, the possible role of al-Qa`ida operative Mokhtar Belmokhtar⁸ in steering Ansaru toward kidnapping foreigners despite Boko Haram’s rejection of the tactic, and why al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) chose to collaborate more with Ansaru than Boko Haram. Finally, the article assesses the future of Ansaru and Boko Haram now that the French-led military intervention has driven AQIM from northern Mali and potentially killed Belmokhtar.⁹

5 Ansaru announced its “public formation” and break from Boko Haram in flyers distributed in Kano on January 26, 2012, which was six days after Boko Haram attacked government offices in Kano, leaving more than 150 civilians dead, mostly Muslims. See “Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges,” *Vanguard*, February 1, 2012.

6 “Boko Haram Leader ‘Imam Abubakar Shekau’ Message to President Jonathan,” Sahara Reporters, January 12, 2012; Ikechukwu Nnochiri, “We Are On Revenge Mission, Boko Haram Suspect Tells Court,” *Vanguard*, November 25, 2011; “Suspects Charged in Nigeria Bombing,” al-Jazeera, December 25, 2011; Michael Olugbode, “Boko Haram Claims Killings in Borno,” ThisDayLive, September 22, 2010.

7 “Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges.”

8 Belmokhtar led an AQIM brigade in the Sahel from 2007 until he was reportedly dismissed from AQIM in late 2012. He continued to lead loyal fighters, however, and he masterminded the four-day siege at the gas plant at In Amenas, Algeria, in January 2013.

9 Chadian forces claim to have killed Belmokhtar in northern Mali in March 2013, but this has not been confirmed.

Ansaru’s Rise

To date, Ansaru may have executed six major attacks. Only the four operations carried out after Ansaru announced its formation on January 26, 2012, however, can be confidently attributed to the group.¹⁰

First Operation

Ansaru may have carried out its first operation in May 2011 when Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara—a British and Italian engineer of an Italian construction company—were kidnapped near the border with Niger in Kebbi State, northwest Nigeria. A previously unknown group called “al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel” took responsibility in a proof-of-life video showing the two hostages blindfolded and kneeling in front of three veiled militants.¹¹ The video was sent to Mauritania’s Agence Nouakchott d’Information (ANI), which usually receives AQIM videos. Employing the same Mauritanian negotiator that AQIM used in several previous kidnappings, the militants reportedly demanded \$6 million and the release of prisoners in West Africa in return for the two hostages.¹²

On March 7, 2012, Nigerian security forces broke up a Boko Haram Shura Council meeting in Kaduna led by Abu Muhammed, who defected from Boko Haram due to disagreements with Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau.¹³ The

10 In all Ansaru video statements, its leader and members conceal their identities with veils and obscure their voices. Boko Haram, in contrast, shows leader Abubakar Shekau’s face in all of its videos. This shows that Ansaru does not want to reveal the identity of its leader.

11 The militants’ Sahelian-style veils in the Kebbi proof-of-life videos, which are also worn by the militants on Ansaru’s website, differ from Boko Haram members who usually wear Western-style military fatigues. See Ansaru’s website at www.ansarulmuslimun.wapka.mobi/index.xhtml.

12 Mustapha Ould Limam Chaffi was the negotiator. See “Exclusif...Mort des deux otages occidentaux tués au Nigeria: Une source d’AQMI livre quelques détails,” Agence Nouakchott d’Information, March 10, 2012.

13 There are reports that a dispute over how to spend money given to Boko Haram by AQIM or from bank robberies caused the conflict between Abubakar Shekau, Abu Muhammed, and Khalid al-Barnawi. Shekau may have disagreed with the use of the money to fund kidnappings of foreigners instead of attacks on Nigerian targets. See Jide Ajani, “Horror in Sokoto - Al-Qaeda-Funded Group Killed Hostages,” *Vanguard*, March 11, 2012; Yusuf Alli, “Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram’s Leaders,” *The*

security forces determined from phone call logs and interrogations of the Shura Council members that Abu Muhammed was responsible for the British and Italian hostages and that the hostages were transferred to a house in Sokoto, north of Kebbi State.¹⁴ On March 8, 2012, the captors shot both hostages when they saw helicopters of the UK Special Boat Service carrying out surveillance on the house.¹⁵ Soon after, UK and Nigerian forces killed eight of the captors and detained eight others in a late effort to free the hostages. The detained captors confessed that they had “standing orders to kill the hostages immediately on sight of security agents, since we were not sure of surviving an encounter with the security men.”¹⁶ This established a precedent that any attempt to free hostages would lead to their immediate deaths.

In June 2012, a Boko Haram informant alleged long-time AQIM member Khalid al-Barnawi coordinated the kidnappings of the British and Italian hostages with Abu Muhammed, and that Abu Muhammed had trained under al-Barnawi at an AQIM-run camp in Algeria.¹⁷ That same month, the U.S. government designated al-Barnawi a “global terrorist” along with two other militants, Abubakar Adam Kamar, who trained under al-Barnawi at the AQIM camp in Algeria, and Boko Haram’s leader, Abubakar Shekau.¹⁸ Nigerian security sources reported that members

Nation, February 14, 2012; “Barnawi, Kamar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties,” Agence France-Presse, June 21, 2012.

14 Yusuf Alli, “Why We Killed Briton, Italian—Suspect,” *The Nation*, March 10, 2012.

15 Ibid.

16 Midat Joseph et al., “Kidnappers - Why We Killed Briton, Italian Hostages,” *Leadership*, March 13, 2012; “Exclusive: Boko Haram Targets Julius Berger, Dantata & Sawoe Expatriates,” *Premium Times*, March 12, 2012.

17 The U.S. designated al-Barnawi as a “global terrorist” in June 2012, and in November 2012 the UK Home Office minister proscribed Ansaru as a terrorist organization that is “anti-Nigerian government, anti-Western and broadly aligned with al-Qa`ida.” See “Barnawi, Kamar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties.”

18 Rabi Ould Idamous, “Faltering al-Qaeda Turns to Boko Haram,” *Magharebia*, January 27, 2012; “Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram Commander Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kamar,” U.S. Department of State, June 21, 2012. Kamar was killed in a Nigerian security forces raid on his hide-out in Kano in August 2012.

of Shekau's faction tipped off Nigerian intelligence about Abu Muhammed and other "traitorous" cells in northwestern Nigeria that broke from Shekau and did not focus on fighting the Nigerian government.¹⁹ Shekau's spokesman also denied that Boko Haram carried out the kidnapping on the day after the hostages were killed, and said, "We have never been involved in hostage-taking, and we never ask for ransom."²⁰

Although Ansaru did not yet exist as a formal organization at the time of the kidnapping, some suspect that Khalid al-Barnawi later formed Ansaru.²¹ Additionally, when speaking before the UK House of Commons in November 2012, Home Office Minister Mark Harper said that Ansaru is "also believed to be responsible for the murder of British national Christopher McManus and his Italian co-worker Franco Lamolinara in March 2012."²²

Second Operation

On January 26, 2012, the same day Ansaru announced its split from Boko Haram by circulating flyers in Kano, a German engineer was kidnapped in Kano. In March 2012, AQIM's official media wing, al-Andalus, took credit for the kidnapping and demanded in a video sent to ANI in Mauritania that Germany release from prison a Turkish-born female jihadist website administrator whose German husband fought with the Taliban in Afghanistan and was arrested in 2007 while planning to bomb Ramstein Air Base.²³ AQIM also reminded Germany about the "recent lesson taught to the UK [Special Boat Service] by the mujahidin," referring to the British and Italian hostages killed in Sokoto on March 8, 2012.²⁴

19 "Power Tussle in Boko Haram Led to Sect Leader's Arrest," *Leadership*, March 26, 2012.

20 This statement was corroborated by Boko Haram's record of receiving funds from other sources, including bank robberies and car thefts. See Ajani; "Al-Qaeda Affiliates use Kidnapping for Revenue," *Magharebia*, March 30, 2012.

21 Ogala Emmanuel, "Five Things You Should Know About New Extremist Sect, ANSARU," *Premium Times*, February 23, 2013.

22 "MPs Pass Motion Outlawing Suspected Terror Group," *BBC*, November 22, 2012.

23 The prisoner was Filiz Gelowicz, and her husband is Fritz Gelowicz. The statement, written in English and Arabic, and video are available at www.jihadology.net.

24 *Ibid*.

On March 26, 2012, Nigerian security forces raided a shop in Kano and detained the kidnapping cell's leader, a Mauritanian, and three Nigerian accomplices, who used the Mauritanian's shop as a base.²⁵ Documents in the Mauritanian's laptop, including an

"The attack revealed that Ansaru was able to operate in Kogi State, which is considered a 'staging point' for attacking southern Nigeria because it has direct road links to all three of Nigeria's southern zones."

AQIM operations manual, led Nigerian special forces to carry out a rescue operation of the German engineer in May 2012, but the captors shot the hostage immediately.²⁶ AQIM warned European countries not to engage in "foolishness" during future hostage negotiations and for Germany to stop violating Muslims and their holy sites.²⁷

This kidnapping was claimed by AQIM and carried out by an AQIM member and local militants. Evidence uncovered from Kaduna, where Abu Muhammed was arrested, reportedly provided leads about the cell, and AQIM referred to the first operation in Sokoto in its claim.²⁸ As AQIM was not known to operate in Nigeria and Boko Haram did not engage in kidnapping operations at this time, it is plausible that Ansaru played a role in the kidnapping, especially since it followed the group's *modus operandi*.

25 Aminu Abubakar, "Nigeria Detains 5 with 'Al Qaeda-links' over German Kidnap," *Agence France-Presse*, March 27, 2012; Lawal Danuma, "Kidnapped German Killed in JTF Raid," *Daily Trust*, May 31, 2012.

26 *Ibid*.

27 The statement in English and Arabic is available at www.jihadology.net.

28 Aminu Abubakar, "German Hostage Killed in Nigeria During Rescue Bid," *Agence France-Presse*, May 31, 2012.

Third Operation

Starting in June 2012, Ansaru sent a series of e-mails to the Kaduna-based *Desert Herald* newspaper and released English- and Hausa-language YouTube videos affirming that Ansaru disapproved of Boko Haram's killing of Muslims. In these communications, Ansaru said they would target the citizens and interests of "foreign Christian enemies in all parts of Africa," but that Ansaru's and Boko Haram's missions were otherwise the same.²⁹ Then, on November 26, 2012, 40 Ansaru militants attacked the Special Anti-Robbery Squad prison in Abuja with the "assistance of internal collaborators," according to the military and police.³⁰ The attack freed senior Boko Haram commanders and was praised in a YouTube video from Boko Haram leader Shekau, which was addressed to the "Soldiers of God in the Islamic State of Mali."³¹ Ansaru's freeing of Boko Haram prisoners and Shekau's video statement suggested that despite the circumstances surrounding Ansaru's formation, the

29 The graphics and quality of Ansaru's videos are significantly higher than Boko Haram's videos, which suggest that Ansaru had a higher level of training in media and propaganda than Boko Haram or possibly exposure to AQIM's professional media wing, al-Andalus. See "World Exclusive: Another Islamic Sect Emerges...to Counter Boko Haram?" *Desert Herald*, June 2, 2012; "Latest: Security Officials and Christians are Enemies of Islam and Muslims, We Will Target and Kill Them- Says Spokesman of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan, Abu Ja'afar," *Desert Herald*, June 5, 2012; "Important Message From Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan," November 26, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ-6STrj2tI; "Video of Introduction of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis-Sudan," November 9, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6ATD6bLaBI.

30 Niyi Odebo et al., "Jaji, Abuja Terror Attacks: Army, Police Arrest 22 Officers," *Punch NG*, December 1, 2012; "Declared of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fibiladis Sudan Garki II Abuja," November 30, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1m5-zV3zfU.

31 The attack freed the wife of Kabiru Sokoto, who was the mastermind of the Christmas Day church bombings outside of Abuja in December 2011 that killed more than 20 people. See Wisdom Patrick et al., "Gunmen Attack Police SARS Headquarters, Free 30 Suspects," *Daily Independent*, November 27, 2012; "Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah," *Ana al-Muslim Network*, December 1, 2012; Taiwo Adisa, "Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, Escapes Arrest in Kano - Wife Arrested - Security Operatives Probe 2 Top Politicians over Sect's Funding," *Nigerian Tribune*, March 5, 2012.

two groups were capable of supporting each other's mutual objectives.³²

This operation in Abuja marked the first time Ansaru formally claimed responsibility for an attack.³³

Fourth Operation

On December 19, 2012, 30 Ansaru militants kidnapped a Frenchman from the compound of an energy company near the border with Niger in Katsina State, northwestern Nigeria. According to the Katsina police commissioner, the "coordination, speed, and expertise" of the operation suggested that employees of the company were involved in an "inside job."³⁴ Ansaru claimed the kidnapping and said that it would continue to kidnap French citizens until France ended its ban on the Islamic veil for women and abandoned its plans to intervene militarily in northern Mali.³⁵

Fifth Operation

On January 19, 2013, Ansaru militants, possibly acting on a tip, ambushed a convoy of three buses carrying 180 Nigerian soldiers through Okene, Kogi State, en route to Mali, killing two soldiers.³⁶ Ansaru claimed the troops "were aiming to demolish the Islamic Empire of Mali" and warned African countries to "stop helping Western countries fight Muslims."³⁷ The attack revealed that Ansaru was able to operate in Kogi State, which is considered a "staging point" for attacking southern Nigeria because it has direct road links to all three of Nigeria's southern zones.³⁸

32 The Nigerian police claimed that only five prisoners escaped, while Ansaru alleged that the rescue operation freed 37 members and 286 other prisoners, who were subject to "real human rights violations," including "extrajudicial killings," "termite" and "a complete lack of water."

33 "Declared of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fibiladis Sudan Garki II Abuja."

34 "French Man Kidnap: Possibly an Inside Job - Katsina CP," *Vanguard*, December 21, 2012.

35 "Islamist Group Ansaru 'Kidnapped' French Man," BBC, December 24, 2012. It is unknown what happened to the Frenchman, but he may have been taken across the border into Niger or Mali, where AQIM held six other French hostages.

36 "Islamists Ansaru Claim Attack on Mali-bound Nigeria Troops," Reuters, January 20, 2013.

37 Ibid.

38 Nigeria is unofficially divided into six geopolitical

Sixth Operation

On February 16, 2013, Ansaru assaulted a prison and then kidnapped seven foreign engineers from a construction site in northeastern Nigeria's Bauchi State. Ansaru warned that any attempt to free the hostages would result in the "same happenings" as the previous

"Since the formation of AQIM in 2006-2007, AQIM's Arab-Algerian southern zone commanders, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, sought to expand their operations from southern Algeria southwards into Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria to target the increasing number of foreigners and energy and mining companies in the Sahel."

rescue attempts in Sokoto and Kano, and said that the kidnappings were in response to European "atrocities" in Afghanistan and Mali.³⁹ On March 9, 2013, Ansaru announced that it killed the "seven Christian foreigners" in an online statement with a photo and an accompanying video of an armed and camouflaged militant standing over four corpses.⁴⁰ Ansaru said it executed

zones, with all 36 of the country's states and Abuja Federal Capital Territory falling into one of the six zones. The zones do not represent ethnic or religious homogeneity and are broadly accepted in political discourse by almost all Nigerians. Kogi is in the North-Central zone, although geographically Okene, Kogi, is in the southern half of Nigeria. See "Combined Forces Raid Arrests Terror Suspects...Seizes 10 Ak47 Rifles, Smg, 3 Pistols, Anti-Tank Explosives, Ieds and Ammo Near Okene, Kogi State," Beegeagle's Blog, May 16, 2012.

39 Suzan Edeh, "Bauchi Deadly Kidnapping: Gaping Bullet Holes in Expatriates' Live Camp," *Vanguard*, February 23, 2013.

40 It is unclear whether three of the seven hostages were actually killed, since the video shows only four bodies. The Arabic and English statements are available at www.jihadology.net and "The Killing of Seven

the hostages because of Nigerian media reports that British "jet fighters, soldiers, and intelligence" landed in Abuja to prepare for a rescue mission and that UK and Nigerian security forces had killed Muslims in previous attempts to rescue "Christian hostages."⁴¹

Belmokhtar's Role in Ansaru

Since the formation of AQIM in 2006-2007, AQIM's Arab-Algerian southern zone commanders, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, sought to expand their operations from southern Algeria southwards into Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria to target the increasing number of foreigners and energy and mining companies in the Sahel.⁴² One factor constraining AQIM, however, was that its northern African members did not master the southern Sahel's physical and human terrain as well as the Tuaregs and sub-Saharan Africans from the region.⁴³ As a result, AQIM "coached" sub-Saharan Africans—such as Khalid al-Barnawi, Abu Muhammed and Abubakar Adam Kamar—in kidnappings and criminal activities and used sub-Saharan recruits as couriers between AQIM and local Islamist militant groups such as Boko Haram.⁴⁴ An example of this

Christian Hostages in Nigeria," March 11, 2013, available at www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=a4zLbOzTK2c.

41 Ansaru appears to have failed in two attempts to kidnap foreign engineers from separate construction sites in Tella, Taraba State, on February 28, 2013, and may have been behind the kidnapping of an Italian engineer in southern Nigeria's Kwara State, where kidnappings are uncommon. Like the German engineer in Kano, the Italian was working on a road construction project when taken captive. The Italian was released in June 2012, but officials did not release details about the terms of the release. See "2 Nigerian Cops Killed in Aborted Kidnap of Foreigners," *PM News*, February 28, 2013; "Italian Abducted in Nigeria Freed," BBC, June 1, 2012.

42 "Nigeria: Deadly Twist in Islamists' War," United Press International, March 15, 2012; Geoff D. Porter, "AQIM and the Growth of International Investment in North Africa," *CTC Sentinel* 2:11 (2009).

43 According to North Africa expert Dr. Geoff D. Porter, "One of the factors restraining the pace of AQIM's operations in the Sahara and Sahel has been the lack of targets and the inability of AQIM members who are not from the region to move throughout the desert." For details, see *ibid.* Also see Salima Tlemceni, "Révélations sur une organisation en déroute," *El Watan*, August 1, 2007; Yaroslav Trofimov, "Islamic Rebels Gain Strength in the Sahara," *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2009.

44 In 2007, Nigeria arrested three of its citizens who

strategy's effectiveness was the January 7, 2011, kidnapping of two Frenchmen from a restaurant in the French and Hausa-speaking capital city of Niamey, Niger. The two men were scouted by a Nigerian Boko Haram member who provided their location to other Hausa, Arabic and French-speaking members

“Evidence suggests that Ansaru and MUJAO may have been among the elite units Belmokhtar trained for attacking Western interests in the Sahel.”

of Belmokhtar's Veiled Brigades.⁴⁵ The hostages were both killed the following day when French military helicopters fired on the kidnapers as their vehicle convoy approached the Malian border.⁴⁶ Boko Haram never claimed

had trained with AQIM (then called the GSPC) in Algeria from 2005 to 2007 and were planning to attack U.S. government buildings in Nigeria. See “Five Nigerians on Terror Charges,” BBC, November 23, 2007. AQIM featured sub-Saharan recruits in an August 2010 video with members speaking West African languages, such as Hassaniya Arabic of Mauritania, Fulani, Tuareg dialects, Guinean Portuguese, and Hausa, the common language of southern Niger and northern Nigeria. See “Summary and Analysis of al-Qa'idah in the Islamic Maghreb's New Video Release ‘On The Occasion of Ramadan Fighting is Ordained for You,’” Jihadology.net, August 22, 2010. A Beninese national of Yoruba ethnicity, Abdoulah Abdoulah, was reportedly a courier between AQIM and Boko Haram in Nigeria and involved in recruiting AQIM members from French-speaking West African countries. See “Ansar Dine Pursues Peace Talks, Mujao Names New Chief,” *LeMag*, January 3, 2012; “Mali: un Béninois à la tête d'une unité combattante, une katiba, dans le Nord,” Radio France Internationale, December 28, 2012. Belmokhtar used cigarette smugglers to establish contacts with African fighters. See Rabi Ould Idamous, “Faltering al-Qaeda Turns to Boko Haram,” *Magharebia*, January 27, 2012.

45 Nathalie Guibert, “Comment sont morts les otages français du Niger,” *Le Monde*, January 6, 2012.

46 A French investigation concluded that the Nigerian was from Boko Haram's base city, Maiduguri, and his phone call logs showed that he was an intermediary between Boko Haram and AQIM in Nigeria, Niger and Mali. See “Two French Hostages in Niger Killed in Rescue Attempt,” BBC, January 8, 2011; “Une piste nigérienne dans l'enquête sur la mort des deux otages français enlevés au Niger,” Radio France Internationale, November

responsibility for the kidnapping, even though one of its members was reportedly involved.

In 2011, AQIM may have moved from recruiting sub-Saharan Africans to overseeing them form their own groups with indigenous ideologies that appealed to sub-Saharan Africans in a way that AQIM's ideology did not.⁴⁷ The two sub-Saharan African groups, Ansaru and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), likely conducted their first kidnapping operations in May 2011 and October 2011, respectively, while MUJAO announced its formation in a video statement in December 2011 and Ansaru through flyers distributed in Kano in January 2012. The two groups were independent of AQIM in name, but MUJAO's military commander was long-time AQIM kidnapping mastermind Oumar Ould Hamaha, an Arab from northern Mali and a relative of Belmokhtar's, and Ansaru is suspected of being led by Khalid al-Barnawi, who fought under Belmokhtar in Mauritania and Algeria in the mid-2000s and carried out kidnappings in Niger.⁴⁸ Both Ansaru and MUJAO adopted names reflecting their desired areas of operations, *Biladis Sudan* (Black Africa) and *Gharb Afriqqiya* (West Africa), respectively, and considered themselves to be the “ideological descendants” of Usman dan Fodio and other pre-colonial West African Islamic leaders who “fought the colonial invaders,” although in practice Ansaru operated in northern Nigeria and MUJAO operated in Mali, Senegal, Algeria and Mauritania.⁴⁹

Evidence suggests that Ansaru and MUJAO may have been among the elite units Belmokhtar trained for attacking Western interests in the Sahel.⁵⁰ Ansaru, for example, followed

14, 2011.

47 “Brainstorming the Geopolitics of AQIM's Moorish Appeal,” *The Moor Next Door* blog, August 25, 2009.

48 Most reports, including from the U.S. State Department, say that al-Barnawi is from Borno State, Nigeria, although Radio France Internationale and Agence Nouakchott d'Information have reported that al-Barnawi is Nigerien. See Emmanuel.

49 “New Qaeda Spin-Off Threatens West Africa,” Agence France-Presse, December 22, 2011; “Sénégal: Les Islamistes ‘sont à nos portes,’” *Jeune Afrique*, August 7, 2012; “Route de Kati: Des présumés membres du Mujao arrêtés,” *Journalumali.com*, March 7, 2013.

50 Another possible link between Ansaru and AQIM

Belmokhtar's kidnapping style by infiltrating foreign energy companies and targeting European employees whose countries were susceptible to ransoms and political demands.⁵¹

If not for the French-led military operation in northern Mali, the relationship between Belmokhtar and the two sub-Saharan groups would likely have continued, although

“AQIM's support may have helped Boko Haram evolve from a Taliban-inspired religious movement under Yusuf into a full-fledged militant movement under Shekau. There were several factors, however, that likely compelled AQIM to coordinate kidnapping operations in Nigeria with Ansaru, rather than with Boko Haram.”

both groups may have become more independent with the development of their own media wings, ideologies, and in Ansaru's case leadership in Nigeria outside of AQIM's area of operations. According to Nigerian intelligence documents, an “Algerian terrorist group” and Boko Haram had

comes from a letter sent to a Kano radio station “commending the jihad of our brothers that killed an American envoy and some non Muslims” after the attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, which was linked to Belmokhtar and Libyan jihadists. See “Another Islamist Sect Surfaces In Kano, Threatens To Bomb Radio Station,” *Sahara Reporters*, September 16, 2012.

51 Although the United Kingdom or the hostages' families reportedly paid AQIM \$1 million to release the two hostages in the Kebbi kidnapping and Germany released the female jihadist website administrator and recruiter from prison early, Ansaru did not free the hostages in either case. In addition, MUJAO reportedly received \$18 million in June 2012 for the release of three hostages that it kidnapped in southwestern Algeria in October 2011. See Isa Saidu, “Before Killing Briton, Italian...Kidnappers Received N207 Million Ransom,” *Daily Trust*, March 12, 2012; “German Terrorism Convict Granted Early Release,” Associated Press, April 24, 2012.

a “long-term partnership,” whereby the Algerian group would provide Boko Haram with installments of \$250,000 and select Boko Haram members for training in kidnapping and bomb-making so the Boko Haram members could kidnap “white” expatriates in Nigeria and transfer the hostages to hideouts in the desert in exchange for more money and arms from the Algerians.⁵² These Boko Haram members may have been Abu Muhammad and other Nigerians involved in the kidnappings in Kebbi in May 2011 and the Algerian group may have been Belmokhtar’s men.

The discovery that hundreds of Nigerian militants were in northern Mali and that Ansaru flyers were found in Belmokhtar’s compound in Gao the day after he fled the city suggests that Belmokhtar’s connection to Ansaru was still strong at the time of the French-led military intervention in February 2013.⁵³

52 While racism may have alienated some sub-Saharan Africans from AQIM and MUJAO’s Arab leadership, these reports do not seem to indicate that MUJAO would have completely separated from AQIM because of racism. Locals reported that “light-skinned” Arabs, Tuaregs, and sub-Saharan Africans from Niger, Nigeria, Mali and other countries fought together with AQIM in northern Mali up to the time of the French-led military intervention. Oumar Ould Hamaha also claimed that all militants fought in “the name of Islam, not Arab or Tuareg, or black or white,” and in a statement MUJAO said that the “Muslim brothers from all battalions have the same goal—jihad.” Belmokhtar’s “racism” may be explained by a statement attributed to him from August 2009 that he “wanted to attract black African recruits because they would agree more readily than Arabs to becoming suicide bombers and because poor economic and social conditions made them ripe for recruitment.” See Lydia Polgreen and Scott Sayare, “French Capture Strategic Airport in Move to Retake North Mali,” *New York Times*, January 26, 2012; “New Qaeda Spin-Off Threatens West Africa”; “Exclusive: Boko Haram Targets Julius Berger, Dantata & Sawoe Expatriates”; “Boko Haram Gets N40million Donation From Algeria,” *Sahara Reporters*, May 13, 2012.

53 A picture of the flyer is available at www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/exclusif-au-mali-dans-la-maison-du-djihadiste-mokhtar-belmokhtar_1218712.html. See Lars Inge Staveland, “New Islamist Group May Be Affiliated With Al-Qa’ida,” *Aftenposten*, February 22, 2013; “Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali’s Rebel Seize Gao,” *Agence France-Presse*, April 9, 2012; Drew Hinshaw, “Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists’ Reach,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013. AQIM’s reason for not publicizing its relationship to Ansaru or

Why Ansaru, Not Boko Haram?

AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel offered “consolation” to Boko Haram after the clashes with Nigerian security forces in July 2009 left Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf and 1,000 of his followers dead.⁵⁴ In February 2010, Droukdel also offered to provide Boko Haram with “men, arms and ammunition” to “defend” Nigerian Muslims against the “Christian minority”⁵⁵ in Nigeria.⁵⁶ In July 2010, before the one year anniversary of the July 2009 clashes, Yusuf’s former deputy, Abubakar Shekau, emerged from hiding and “sent condolences” from the mujahidin in Nigeria to key al-Qa’ida leaders, including Usama bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the *amir* of AQIM, and warned the United States that “jihad has just begun.”⁵⁷ This and

MUJAO could be explained by confidential letters written by AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel to other Islamist militants in Mali, which were uncovered in Timbuktu by the Associated Press. Droukdel wrote, “Better for you to be silent and pretend to be a ‘domestic’ movement... There is no reason for you to show that we have an expansionary, jihadi, al-Qaida or any other sort of project.” For the confidential letters, see “Al-Qaida’s Saharan Playbook,” *Associated Press*, February 15, 2013.

54 “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Condolence, Support and Comfort for our Brothers and People in Nigeria 20/08/09,” available at www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=11556; “North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims,” February 1, 2010, available at www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=32243.

55 Nigeria is split fairly evenly between a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south.

56 “North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims.”

57 In early 2011, other jihadists, such as the Algerian Abu Muslim al-Jazaari, urged Nigerians to follow the Islamic doctrines of “Unity and Jihad” and al-Qa’ida leaders, such as Abu Yahya al-Libi. As early as August 2009, Nigerians on jihadist forums began calling for “sustaining the dignity of the Sokoto jihad” and unifying with the “brothers of Chechnya, the unrelenting gladiators of Afghanistan, the fierce brothers of Iraq, the troops of Muwahhidin in Somalia and the Brigades of Unity [Tawhid] in Nigeria.” In April 2011, just as Boko Haram’s insurgency was underway, the “mujahidin brothers in Nigeria” also promised to “spearhead the call to global jihad against the apostates and their allies,” “open up a dungeon for Obama,” and “raise the banner for al-Qa’ida in the West Africa Province” for the brothers in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, Benin and Niger. These postings seem to reflect both Shekau’s and Ansaru’s future statements. Separately, an al-Qa’ida in West Africa cell connected to al-Qa’ida central in Pakistan was reported in Kano in the mid-2000s, and Boko Haram members in Algeria reportedly connected with

subsequent statements from Shekau showed that Boko Haram identified with al-Qa’ida’s ideology, but that Boko Haram was “waging jihad in the country called Nigeria.”⁵⁸

From July 2009 until Boko Haram launched its first attack in September 2010, many Boko Haram members retreated to Nigeria’s borderlands with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and solicited, according to one report, as much as 40%⁵⁹ of their funding from abroad.⁶⁰ From September 2010 until August 2011, Boko Haram attacks escalated as President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south, was inaugurated in Abuja in April 2011, and with Boko Haram’s first vehicle-borne suicide bombings at the Federal Police Headquarters and UN Headquarters in Abuja in June and August 2011.⁶¹ In August 2011, Nigeria

Usama bin Ladin through AQIM. Boko Haram, however, never formally affiliated with AQIM or al-Qa’ida central. In November 2011, a Boko Haram spokesman said that, “It is true we have links with al-Qa’ida. They assist us and we assist them. Any Muslim group that is struggling to establish an Islamic state can get support from al-Qa’ida if they reach out to them.” For all these details, see Abu Muslim al-Jazaari, “The Platform of Tawhid and Jihad,” *Jihadology.net*, March 2011; “The Brigades of Tawhid in Nigeria,” *Arrahmah.com*, August 22, 2009; “From Your Mujahideen Brothers In Nigeria,” *Ansar1.info*, April 2, 2011; “Periodical Review July 2010 - No. 2,” *ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group*, August 2010; “Islamist Sect Website Claims Nigerian Bombings,” *Agence France-Presse*, December 28, 2010; “Nigeria Sect ‘Spokesman’ Claims Al-Qaeda Links,” *Agence Presse-France*, November 24, 2011; Tobi Soniyi, “Ashafa Admitted Al-Qaeda Link, Ex-SSS Boss Tells Court,” *ThisDay-Live*, April 4, 2012.

58 Imam Imam, “Jos Bombings - Group Claims Responsibility,” *ThisDay*, December 27, 2010.

59 Slain Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf’s family said in 2011 that 40% of the sect’s funding comes from outside Nigeria. See “Suspects Charged in Nigeria Bombing,” *al-Jazira*, December 25, 2011.

60 Adam Nossiter, “Islamist Group With Possible Qaeda Links Upends Nigeria,” *New York Times*, August 17, 2011; Will Connors, “Al Qaeda Ties Seen for Nigeria Group,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 31, 2011; Hugo Odiogor, “Boko Haram: Battling Scourge of Migration and Terrorism in West Africa,” *Vanguard*, February 23, 2013.

61 The attack in Abuja mirrored AQIM’s attacks the next day against Algeria’s premier military academy at Cherchell on August 27, 2011, and also AQIM’s attack on the UN Headquarters in Algiers in 2007 and al-Qa’ida in Iraq’s (AQI) attack on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad in 2003. The attack in Abuja was an anomaly to the Shekau faction’s targeting strategy, in which interna-

and Niger confirmed that increasing numbers of Boko Haram members were receiving weapons from AQIM and traveling to Niger for training with AQIM.⁶²

AQIM's support may have helped Boko Haram evolve from a Taliban-inspired religious movement under Yusuf into a full-fledged militant movement under Shekau. There were several factors, however, that likely compelled AQIM to coordinate kidnapping operations in Nigeria with Ansaru, rather than with Boko Haram.

First, Boko Haram has always said that it does not carry out kidnappings and, at least until February 2013, did not carry out kidnappings or target Western personnel or institutions—with the exception of the attack on the UN Headquarters in Abuja in August 2011.⁶³ This would have made it difficult for Belmokhtar to coordinate with Boko Haram since his operations almost exclusively targeted Western personnel and facilities.

Second, Boko Haram was based in northeastern Nigeria's Borno State, which borders Niger but is more than 1,000 miles from northern Mali, where some of AQIM's brigades were based. In contrast, Ansaru was based in northwestern Nigeria, which is only 300 miles from Mali.⁶⁴ This suggests

tional targets have never been attacked. See "Nigerian Islamists Vow 'Fiercer' Attacks," Agence France-Presse, June 15, 2011; "18 Dead in Algeria Military School Bombing: Ministry," Agence France-Presse, August 27, 2011.

62 "Lutte contre le terrorisme: le Nigeria et le Niger renforcent leur coopération," Radio France Internationale, August 11, 2011.

63 The UN Headquarters attack in Abuja on August 26, 2011, was the only one of Boko Haram's more than 700 attacks until 2013 against a target that was not Nigerian. In claiming the attack, a Boko Haram spokesman said, "The U.S. government has been collaborating with the Nigerian government to clamp down on our members nationwide." See Adam Nossiter, "Islamic Group Says It Was Behind Fatal Nigeria Attack," *New York Times*, August 28, 2011; "Boko Haram Spokesman Denies Link to Nigerian Kidnap," Reuters, March 10, 2012.

64 The author suspects that Ansaru may be based in the Middle Belt, possibly Kaduna, based on the following: Ansaru's repeated e-mail statements to Kaduna-based *Desert Herald* newspaper, one of which threatened the southern Kaduna-based Christian militia group "Akwat Akwop," which, one week before Ansaru's e-mail, had threatened to expel all Fulani herdsmen from south-

that Ansaru was in closer operational range to AQIM and Belmokhtar's militants. Ansaru may have also avoided establishing cells in northeastern Nigeria because Boko Haram threatened to kill defectors.⁶⁵

Third, even when Boko Haram targeted churches and government offices, the casualties often included more Muslim civilians than Christians or government employees.⁶⁶ This may have alienated

ern Kaduna in one week; Ansaru's common references to Christian "massacres" of Muslims in Middle Belt cities (southern Kaduna was the scene of some of the worst post-election violence in 2011); Ansaru's possible Hausa-Fulani composition, which are ethnic groups that have come into frequent conflict with Christians in the Middle Belt; Ansaru's attack on the Nigerian military convoy passing through Kogi State en route to a base in Kaduna from where the soldiers went to Mali; Ansaru's connection to Kaduna-based Boko Haram Shura Council member Abu Muhammed in the Kebbi kidnapping in May 2011; and Ansaru's possible following of Kaduna-based cleric, shaykh Ahmad Gumi, who has been Nigeria's most vocal critic against the country's military deployment to Mali. On the same day that Ansaru targeted the military convoy in Kogi, Gumi said in a sermon in Kaduna: "If the Christian leadership of Nigeria is plunging us into Mali for the same reason of hatred and prejudice against Islamists, this is the warning they should heed, because Islam is unconquerable..." See "Sheikh Again Defends His Stand On Troops Deployment To Mali," Sahara Reporters, January 20, 2013; "Christian Militants In Southern Kaduna Threaten Fulani Herdsmen, Give Seven Days Evacuation Notice," Sahara Reporters, June 5, 2012; "Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan threatens Southern Kaduna Militant Group, Akhwat Akwop," *Desert Herald*, June 11, 2012.

65 Ansaru members may also have been ethnic Hausa-Fulanis from northwestern Nigeria who resented Borno-based and Kanuri-led Boko Haram. According to captured Boko Haram members, Abubakar Shekau, who is ethnically Kanuri, favored Kanuris of Borno State, while Nigeriens, Chadians, Cameroonians and Nigerian non-Kanuris were always chosen to carry out suicide bombings with the punishment of death for those who refused. Kanuris are the dominant ethnic group in Borno State, whereas Hausas and Fulanis are predominant ethnic groups throughout the rest of northern Nigeria. See Yusuf Alli, "How Bombers are Chosen, by Boko Haram Suspect," *The Nation*, February 9, 2012; "Boko Haram: Six Killed in Factional Clash," ThisDayLive, February 3, 2012.

66 Boko Haram's coordinated attacks on government offices in Kano on January 20, 2012, killed 180 people, including more than 150 Muslim civilians. In addition, Boko Haram's attacks on churches in Kaduna on Easter 2012 killed mostly Muslim motorcycle taxi riders, women, and children outside of the church. See "More Muslims are Killed than Christians - Joji, Arewa Chief,"

AQIM's leadership, which broke away from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria in the late 1990s because it killed many Algerian civilians during the country's civil war. Instead, AQIM's leadership focused on targeting the Algerian government and security forces in rural areas and international interests, including the United Nations, and kidnapping Westerners.

Finally, AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel reportedly dismissed Belmokhtar as a result of him "straying from the right path," in the words of one Malian official, and focusing on criminal activities and kidnappings.⁶⁷ This may have facilitated Belmokhtar's support of Khalid al-Barnawi—who also feuded with members of AQIM in Algeria over kidnappings in Nigeria⁶⁸—at the expense of Shekau, who had a closer historical connection to Droukdel.

Conclusion

Even if France and its West African allies have driven AQIM out of northern Mali, Ansaru and Boko Haram are likely self-sustainable and able to continue attacks. Ansaru relies mostly on its proven kidnapping expertise, and Boko Haram on assassinations and attacks on soft targets.⁶⁹ Both Ansaru and Boko Haram will also likely recruit militants who fought and obtained new skills from warfare in Mali. The Boko Haram attack on an army barracks in Monguno, Borno State, on March 3, 2013, in which the militants mounted weapons on four-wheel-drive vehicles, and the discovery of improvised fighting vehicles in a raid on a Boko Haram hideout in Maiduguri, Borno State, on March 9, 2012, suggest that Boko Haram has already learned new methods of fighting from the Islamist militants in Mali.⁷⁰

Vanguard, May 13, 2012.

67 "Al-Qaeda's N. Africa Branch Reshuffles Leadership," Agence Presse-France, October 15, 2012.

68 "Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties."

69 "Boko Haram Upgrading Weapons from IEDs to RPGs, Police Says," *Punch NG*, July 15, 2012.

70 "20 Boko Haram Islamists Killed in Borno," *Vanguard*, March 3, 2013; Maina Maina, "JTF Kills 52 Boko Haram Militants, Arrests 70, Recovers Arms in Borno," *Daily Post*, March 9, 2013.

An increase in the number of recruits from other West African countries or Nigerians with experience in Mali could also enable Ansaru and Boko Haram to carry out attacks or kidnappings in southern Nigeria or in Nigeria's

“Shekau’s approval of a Boko Haram cell’s kidnapping of a seven-member French family in northern Cameroon on February 19, 2013, shows that Shekau no longer prohibits targeting foreign interests and that some Boko Haram cells are shifting toward Ansaru’s strategy.”

neighboring countries of Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon in revenge for these countries’ support of the French-led intervention.⁷¹ Shekau’s personal exposure to the war in Mali or, if he did not take refuge in Gao, his contacts to militants who returned to Nigeria from Mali could cause him to adopt a more regional view of the insurgency.⁷²

71 Just as Nigeriens would help Boko Haram attack Niger and Cameroonians would help Boko Haram attack Cameroon, ethnically Yoruba Boko Haram members like Abdoulah Abdoulah could help Boko Haram establish cells for attacking southern Nigeria. See Maud Descamps, “Boko Haram tente d’enrôler la jeunesse,” *Europe1*, February 28, 2013; “Niger Police Arrest Five Suspected Boko Haram Members,” *Vanguard*, September 27, 2012; “Ansar Dine Pursues Peace Talks, Mujao Names New Chief.”

72 A March 1, 2013, video of Shekau that was distributed to journalists in northern Nigeria shows six camouflaged militants in a forest sitting with Shekau speaking in what seems to be the Kanuri language (not Hausa or Arabic). This contrasts with Boko Haram’s November 27, 2012, video, in which Shekau is training with militants in a desert and speaking in Arabic. This could signal that Shekau has returned to Borno State from northern Mali. In addition, in Boko Haram’s March 15, 2013, video, Shekau claimed to be standing next to weapons stolen from the Nigerian security forces during an attack on the Monguno army barracks on March 13, 2013, which, if true, would mean that he is likely in Borno State. See “Uncovered: Boko Haram Base Traced to Mali – Intel-

Shekau’s approval of a Boko Haram cell’s kidnapping of a seven-member French family in northern Cameroon on February 19, 2013, shows that Shekau no longer prohibits targeting foreign interests and that some Boko Haram cells are shifting toward Ansaru’s strategy.⁷³ Moreover, Shekau’s warning that Boko Haram will attack Cameroon if it continues to arrest Boko Haram members could signify an expansion of the insurgency while also deterring other countries, such as Niger and Chad, from cracking down on Boko Haram cells operating on their territory.

Finally, if Ansaru and Boko Haram are strained for resources as a result of AQIM’s retreat from northern Mali, the two groups may look past their differences and cooperate. Since Ansaru announced its formation in January 2012, Boko Haram has tried to distance itself from the perception that it kills Muslim civilians.⁷⁴ Ansaru

ligence Report Identifies Training, Operational Base,” *The Sun*, October 27, 2012; “Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, Denies Ceasefire in Beheading Video,” *Vanguard*, March 6, 2013.

73 Abubakar Shekau claimed the kidnapping in a Hausa and Arabic language video statement dated March 15, 2013, but released on March 18, 2013, in which he said, “We have a mission of establishing Shari’a in this country and the rest of the world. We are the ones holding hostage the seven French nationals because the leaders of Cameroon and Nigeria have also detained our brethren both women and children under dehumanizing conditions. These seven French people will not be released until when we see our detained brethren released...” While the kidnapping seems to contradict the Boko Haram spokesman’s claim after Ansaru’s first kidnapping that Boko Haram does not engage in hostage-taking, Boko Haram’s demands for prisoners, not money, in exchange for the French family is consistent with the spokesman’s statement that Boko Haram does not ask for ransoms. Shekau’s wife was also arrested in northern Nigeria in 2012, and Shekau’s demand for the release of imprisoned women in exchange for the French family may relate to his wife, who the security forces may be keeping captive to pressure Shekau. See Ola Audu, “Boko Haram Threatens JTF Spokesperson, Demands Prisoners Exchange for French Nationals,” *Premium Times*, March 18, 2013.

74 Since Ansaru’s formation, Boko Haram has repeatedly stated that it only targets the Nigerian government and security forces, Christians and informants and said that the Nigerian Joint Task Force is to blame for the deaths of civilians. The Boko Haram suicide attack at a bus station in a Christian area of Kano on March 18, 2013, in which an estimated 25 to 60 people were killed, shows that Boko Haram still carries out mass casualty attacks, but tries to kill mostly Christians. See Michael Olugbode,

and Boko Haram still revere Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf, and their members may move fluidly between groups and form partnerships to target mutual enemies: the Nigerian government, France and the West. They may also collaborate on refining their tactics as well as expanding their areas of operations to locate new targets and eliminate Western and Christian influence from Nigeria and the region.⁷⁵

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“Boko Haram Calls JTF a Liar,” *ThisDay*, March 12, 2013; Abdulsalam Muhammad, “60 Killed in Kano Bus Park Bombing,” *Vanguard*, March 19, 2013.

75 The father of the family that was kidnapped in northern Cameroon worked for an energy company in Yaounde, Cameroon, although it is not known whether this was merely a coincidence. If the father was targeted due to his occupation, this suggests that the kidnappers from Boko Haram followed Ansaru’s strategy to target foreign engineers, and that the kidnappers may have been tipped off, as was the case in other Ansaru kidnappings. Separately, a Boko Haram cell uncovered in Sokoto on March 13, 2013, in which Boko Haram Shura Council member Habibu Yusuf, also known as “Asalafi,” was captured, shows that Boko Haram cells are operating in Ansaru’s main area of operations in northwestern Nigeria. Similarly, Ansaru’s kidnapping in Bauchi State shows that Ansaru is operating in Boko Haram’s main area of operations in northeastern Nigeria. If, as reported, “Asalafi” was a follower of Khalid al-Barnawi, this could be another sign of collaboration and fluidity between Boko Haram and Ansaru members. See “FG Places N50m Bounty on Boko Haram Leader,” *Punch NG*, November 24, 2012; “How We Weakened Boko Haram, Killed Bomb Expert, Others By Ihejirika,” *Guardian* [Lagos], March 16, 2013; “Nigeria: Taking the Hostage Road,” *Africa Confidential*, March 15, 2013; “Boko Haram, Ansaru Target Lagos, Others,” *Punch NG*, February 23, 2013.

AQIM's Playbook in Mali

By Pascale C. Siegel

AN INTERNAL DOCUMENT recovered by the Associated Press in Timbuktu in January 2013 sheds new light on al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb's (AQIM) strategy in northern Mali.¹ The document was purportedly part of a confidential letter from Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus`ab `Abd al-Wadud), the *amir* of AQIM, to his lieutenants in the Sahara and to the Islamist militant group Ansar Eddine's² leader, Iyad ag Ghaly (also known as Shaykh Abu Fadl).³ The document was not dated, but several references indicate that Droukdel may have authored the letter in early July 2012.⁴

The letter revealed a deep strategic fracture between AQIM's leadership and its lieutenants on the ground, as Droukdel saw a military intervention as all but inevitable and therefore wanted to focus the group's strategy on outliving it. The letter further highlighted major internal dysfunction between AQIM's leadership and its subordinates in the Sahara. Finally, it showed a deep commitment to success and a worrisome plan for the future.

1 For the original document in Arabic with the Associated Press' English translation, see "Mali-Al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook," Associated Press, undated, available at www.apne.ws/YuuVAC. Also see Rukmini Callimachi, "In Timbuktu, Al-Qaida Left Behind a Manifesto," Associated Press, February 14, 2013.

2 Ansar Eddine, which means "Defenders of the Faith," is a homegrown Islamist movement led by renowned Tuareg rebel leader Iyad ag Ghaly. The group seeks to impose a stringent version of Shari`a across Mali and does not purport to have global jihadist ambitions.

3 Professor Matthieu Guidère, an AQIM specialist at the University of Toulouse in France, authenticated the document. Based on the language used and the reference system included in the material, he assessed the document to be legitimate.

4 The letter referred to the destruction of the Timbuktu shrines, which took place on June 30 and July 1, 2012. It also referred to Ansar Eddine's decision to go to war with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which took place in June 2012. Lastly, it mentioned the fighting between the MNLA and Ansar Eddine in the present tense, yet by July 17, 2012, the MNLA had fled all major cities, thereby indicating that the letter was probably written before July 17.

Strategic Disagreement

Droukdel's letter revealed a fundamental strategic disagreement both with his own operators and with Ansar Eddine in northern Mali. For Droukdel, AQIM must strive to retain its base and freedom of operation in northern Mali, or, as he wrote, to "gain a region under control and a people fighting for us and a refuge for our members that allows us to move forward with our program"⁵ even though it is "very probable, perhaps certain, that a military intervention will occur, whether directly or indirectly."⁶

Droukdel believed that AQIM's primary concern should be to outlive a Western-backed intervention by cultivating enough local support so that it could blossom again after the military operation concluded. "If we can achieve this positive thing even in limited amount, then, even if the project fails later it will be just enough that we will have planted the first, good seeds, in a fertile soil and put pesticides and fertilizer on it, so that the tree will grow more quickly," he wrote.⁷

On the basis of his strategic assessment, Droukdel contended that the tactics developed and implemented by his lieutenants in northern Mali—Nabil Makhoulfi (*amir* of the Sahara region), Abu Zeid (*amir* of the Brigades of Tariq Ibn Ziyad), and Mokhtar Belmokhtar (*amir* of the Veiled Brigades)—and the policies pursued by Ansar Eddine were wrong and would lead to failure. He strongly criticized every major decision his lieutenants have made since taking over northern Mali. He argued that:

1. The declaration of an "Islamic State of Azawad" was premature because "establishing a just Islamic regime ruling people by the Shari`a of the People's Lord is [a] very big duty that exceeds the capabilities of any organization or movement [now operating in Azawad]."⁸

2. The "extreme speed with which you applied Shari`a Law...in an environment ignorant of religion" was "wrong,"

5 "Mali-Al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook."

6 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

because "our previous experience⁹ proved that applying Shari`a this way, without taking into account the environment into consideration will lead to people rejecting religion and engender hatred toward the mujahidin."¹⁰

3. The destruction of the Timbuktu shrines¹¹ will lead to "negative repercussions" because "internally we are not strong and there is a potential for an external intervention."¹²

4. The application of "the *hadd* (religious punishment)...and the fact that you prevented women from getting out and children from playing, and searched the houses of the population...[are] contradictory to the policy of Salaf (our forebearers)."¹³

5. "The decision to go to war with the MNLA [National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad],¹⁴ after becoming close and almost completing a deal with them, which we thought would be positive, is a major mistake."¹⁵

9 It is unclear to which "previous experience" Droukdel was referring. He may have been referring to the experience of the Algerian civil war (1992-2002) where the Islamists' violent excesses fueled popular discontent against them and enabled the Algerian government to significantly degrade their capabilities. He also may have been referring to the experience of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) between 2003 and 2008, where the group's tactics led Sunni Arab leaders to distance themselves from AQI and cooperate with the United States to curb the group's power.

10 "Mali-Al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook," p. 5.

11 In early July 2012, Ansar Eddine began the destruction of several 15th century mausoleums and shrines, including the tombs of Sidi Mahmoud, Sidi Moctar, and Alpha Moya in Timbuktu. The shrines are part of the UNESCO world heritage sites. Their destruction provoked international outrage. See Ishaan Tharoor, "Timbuktu's Destruction: Why Islamists are Wrecking Mali's Cultural Heritage," *Time*, July 2, 2012.

12 "Mali-Al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook," p. 5.

13 *Ibid.*

14 The MNLA is a Tuareg nationalist-secular politico-military movement located in northern Mali, seeking the independence of northern Mali (Azawad). Tuaregs have long been disgruntled with the government of Bamako and have regularly rebelled against the central government. The latest offensive, initiated by the MNLA in January 2012, led to the overthrow of the Bamako government in March 2012.

15 "Mali-Al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook," p. 8.

Organizational Dysfunction

It was not the first time that Droukdel argued for a “gentler, kinder” AQIM. He made similar statements in a short audio message released on May 23, 2012. In that speech, he boasted that Mali offered a “historic opportunity” to establish an Islamic state, but also warned that such opportunity might be wasted if the wrong policies were implemented.¹⁶ He then advised his lieutenants to “gradually introduce Shari`a laws, not hasten to punish people, provide security and services, and consult elders and leaders amongst the people.”¹⁷

“Droukdel believed that AQIM’s primary concern should be to outlive a Western-backed intervention by cultivating enough local support so that it could blossom again after the military operation concluded.”

Droukdel’s lieutenants and allies in the Sahara must not have felt bound by his advice, and instead acted in contradiction with their hierarchy’s wishes. On May 26, 2012, the MNLA and Ansar Eddine announced the breakaway Islamic State of Azawad.¹⁸ A week later, fighting began between the MNLA and Islamist factions allied with Ansar Eddine. Shari`a tribunals were quickly established and began dispensing harsh punishments such as amputating limbs for crimes of theft.¹⁹ Finally, in late June and early July, the Islamists destroyed ancient Islamic Sufi shrines in Timbuktu because they depicted “false idols.”²⁰

16 “AQIM Congratulates Ansar al-Din for Conquests in Azawad, Cautions it to Avoid Clashes with the MNLA,” Sahara Media, May 21, 2012.

17 Ibid.

18 “Islamic State Declared in Northern Mali,” Associated Press, May 26, 2012.

19 “Crimes de guerre au Nord-Mali,” L’Association Malienne des Droits de l’Homme, July 2012.

20 Tharoor.

Droukdel did not conceal his frustration when he castigated his subordinates for providing unconvincing explanations through media channels, rather than through internal channels, for these actions. He wrote: “And with all the reasons our brother gave via their statements through the media (we have not until now received any clarification from you despite how perilous the operation was!), we can see that all these reasons are not good enough to declare a war [against the MNLA].”²¹ It is unclear whether Droukdel was angry because his subordinates were not heeding his advice or because of the technical difficulties in communicating effectively between northern Mali and Kabylia, the mountainous region to the east of Algiers where he is believed to be based, due to security forces’ surveillance efforts. Both issues could be factors.

Relations have always been difficult between Droukdel, whose operational base is in Kabylia, and the *amirs* operating in the Algerian south and the Sahel who have been fairly independent. In August 2012, for example, Droukdel mandated Necib Tayeb, head of AQIM’s judicial committee, to conduct a reconciliation mission between the three AQIM leaders in the Sahara at the time: Abu Zeid, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and Nabil Makhoulfi.²² According to the Algerian Press Service, his mission was to “unite the *amirs* of AQMI [AQIM] in the Sahel... to end the differences and conflicts that have opposed the southern branches to the northern branches.”²³ His mission failed, however, as the Algerian police intercepted Tayeb in Ghardaïa on his way to Mali.²⁴ After the failed mission, Droukdel reportedly dismissed Mokhtar Belmokhtar from his position.²⁵ At the time, AQIM sources cited in the Mauritanian press indicated that Belmokhtar had been fired for not abiding by the leadership’s decisions and recommendations.²⁶ Although neither Belmokhtar nor Droukdel have publicly tied his dismissal specifically

21 “Mali-Al-Qaida’s Sahara Playbook,” p. 8.

22 “Algérie: Un émir d’AQMI, Necib Tayeb, a été arrêté près de Ghardaïa,” *Jeune Afrique*, August 21, 2012.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 “Pro-Droukdel et Pro-Hattab face-à-face,” *Le Temps d’Algérie*, October 20, 2012.

26 Ibid.

to the strategic disagreements over Mali, those concerns possibly weighed on Droukdel’s decision.²⁷

Proposed Alternative Policy

In addition to his stern criticisms and disapproval of the current strategy pursued by his lieutenants and allies, Droukdel reiterated his call for a different vision and policy. To make the most of this historic opportunity, Droukdel recommended the time-tested al-Qa`ida strategy of co-opting local grievances and advised his subordinates to adopt a flexible strategy of alliances. Throughout his letter, Droukdel wrote about the value of “lessons learned” and extolled the virtues of adapting to local circumstances. In the Mali context, showing flexibility translated into seeking an alliance with all of the organizations that represent Azawad society, including Ansar Eddine and the MNLA. It is time, he wrote,

to extend bridges to the various sectors and parts of Azawad society—Arab and Tuaregs and Zingiya (Blacks)—to end the situation of political and social and intellectual separation between the mujahidin and these sectors, particularly the big tribes, and the main rebel movements with their various ideologies, and the elite of Azawad society, its clerics, its groupings, its individuals, and its noble forces.²⁸

Droukdel suggested an alliance of convenience to combine forces to gain widespread support as well as share the risk with partners. He explained that

this will have three fundamental benefits. First, we would not alone bear the fault of the possible failure

27 Mokhtar Belmokhtar claimed responsibility for the January 17, 2013, brazen attack against the BP gas complex at In Amenas in eastern Algeria. In a video communiqué signed by “Those Who Sign With Blood,” the brigade that Belmokhtar created in December 2012 after being fired by Droukdel, he claimed responsibility for the operation in the name of al-Qa`ida central: “We, at al-Qa`ida, are responsible for this blessed operation.” He made no reference to Droukdel or AQIM, positioning himself as a rival to AQIM. See “Belouar dans un nouvel enregistrement: ‘Nous sommes prêts à négocier avec l’Algérie et l’Occident à condition que cesse la guerre au Mali,’” Sahara Media, January 20, 2013.

28 “Mali-Al-Qaida’s Sahara Playbook,” p. 3.

and the expected blockade. Rather if it happens—God forbid though it is very probable—all the main parties would bear responsibility before the people and everyone will consider the matter objectively and responsibly. Second, administration of the region and standing up to the international, foreign, and regional challenge is a large duty that exceeds our military and financial and structural capability for the time being. So it is wise then for us not to bear the burden alone in this phase.²⁹

He further preached a policy of moderation and accommodation designed to win over the people. “And a wise policy in this stage is not to push people away and make sure to integrate everybody,” he said.³⁰ Practically, Droukdel recommended proceeding cautiously with the following policies:

1. Put aside rivalries with other movements, including Ansar Eddine and the MNLA and work toward a peace deal with the MNLA.³¹
2. Seek full integration of AQIM’s fighters into Azawad’s civil (tribes) and political (movements) society.³²
3. Proselytize al-Qa`ida’s version of Islam to local populations.³³
4. Adopt a moderate rhetoric that reassures and calms and avoid provocations and repeated threats.³⁴
5. Downplay the al-Qa`idist, jihadist nature while playing up the local nature of the movement.³⁵
6. Stay away from declaring or enforcing *takfir* (excommunicating Muslims).³⁶

These policies are designed to advance AQIM’s goals in pursuit of the global jihad. Droukdel readily admitted that the creation of an Islamic state in Azawad posed a “true dilemma,”

changed the nature of AQIM’s activity in Azawad, and required the establishment of a “new framework regulating the organizations’ relationship,” in particular between AQIM and Ansar Eddine.³⁷ He showed flexibility in the way he envisioned relations with Ansar Eddine. Droukdel proposed two organizational frameworks, one in which AQIM’s operations in northern Mali would be under Ansar Eddine’s command-and-control and another in which AQIM would “loan” fighters to Ansar Eddine for its operations in northern Mali.³⁸ These fighters would be under the command of Ansar Eddine and gain citizenship in the country of Azawad.³⁹

Droukdel’s proposal, however, made it clear that of the radical Islamist organizations operating in Mali, AQIM was the one in charge of international operations. Under both scenarios, Ansar Eddine would be confined to operations in northern Mali, whereas AQIM would operate internationally.⁴⁰ Droukdel was the artisan of the rapprochement between the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and al-Qa`ida in 2006, which resulted in the creation of AQIM in 2007. He is the one who successfully transformed the GSPC from an Algerian movement focused on local grievances into a global movement ideologically and doctrinally aligned with al-Qa`ida, dedicated to establishing a worldwide Islamic caliphate and focused on attacking the far enemy (e.g., the West).⁴¹ These two scenarios indicate that AQIM is more interested in pursuing the global jihad than ruling Azawad. They also show, however, that AQIM’s leadership is also willing and capable of adapting to new circumstances and exploiting them for the mutual benefit of both organizations.

Conclusion

As the French-led military forces retake northern Mali, Droukdel’s eight month old letter should resonate as an ominous warning as it points to a long-term strategic plan to outlive the intervention and sets the stage for a potentially successful return. Clearly, under Droukdel’s leadership, AQIM has no intention of relinquishing northern Mali.

The French-led intervention and its immediate aftermath appear to validate at least part of Droukdel’s analysis. The MNLA turned against its former allies and picked up arms to fight alongside the intervening force, while scenes of popular elation in Gao and Timbuktu showed that the jihadists’ harsh rule antagonized many.⁴² Yet there are two reasons why AQIM might get a second chance at implementing its plan for the country.

First, the disruption of AQIM’s networks in the Sahara, including the confirmed death of Abu Zeid and the uncertain fate of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, might give Droukdel an opening to reshape the regional leadership with more obedient commanders who might implement his policies.⁴³

Second, if the international community is unable to address the deep grievances that led to the rebellion in 2012, resentment may allow for the return of AQIM-linked fighters.

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29 Ibid., p. 4.

30 Ibid., p. 10.

31 Ibid., p. 7.

32 Ibid., p. 4.

33 Ibid., p. 5.

34 Ibid., p. 9.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 10.

37 Ibid., p. 6.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Liess Boukra, “Du Groupe salafiste Pour le Combat (GSPC) à la Qaida au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI),” *African Journal for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism*, June 2010, p. 51.

42 “Mali MNLA Tuareg Rebels say Control Kidal, Islamists Gone,” Reuters, January 28, 2013; “Mali: Thousands Celebrate Liberation of Gao,” Channel 4, January 27, 2013.

43 “France Confirms the Death of a Qaeda Leader in Mali,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2013; “Belmokhtar Death Unconfirmed,” Magharebia, March 4, 2013.

Al-Shabab's Tactical and Media Strategies in the Wake of its Battlefield Setbacks

By Christopher Anzalone

IN 2009-2010, THE SOMALI militant group al-Shabab controlled most of central and southern Somalia south of the autonomous region of Puntland. Since the February 2011 military offensives by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Somali government troops, and Somali Sufi militia forces, al-Shabab has suffered a series of significant territorial and strategic setbacks.¹ Pressures on the insurgent movement increased when Kenya and Ethiopia, together with client Somali militias, invaded its southern and western strongholds in October and November 2011. The Kenyan military's goal from the onset of its campaign inside Somalia was to seize the vital port city of Kismayo, one of al-Shabab's most important economic centers.² Kenya seized control of that city in October 2012. Ethiopian troops and their Somali allies quickly captured the Ethiopia-Somalia border town of Beledweyne, and within two months had also captured the city of Baidoa in western Somalia.³

These setbacks necessitated a shift in al-Shabab's military strategy. This article assesses the trajectory of both al-Shabab's military and political strategies, explains how defections have weakened the group, and reviews its information and media operations during the past two years in the midst of its relatively rapid territorial losses.

1 For a political map of Somalia showing territorial control in March 2010, see www.newsecuritybeat.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/somalia_map.jpg. For a political map showing territorial control as of February 2013, see http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9f/Somalia_map_states_regions_districts.png.

2 Jeffrey Gettleman, "Kenyan Forces Enter Somalia to Battle Militants," *New York Times*, October 16, 2011.

3 "Ethiopian Troops Capture Beledweyne from Somalia Militants," BBC, December 31, 2011; "Somalia Al-Shabab Militant Base of Baidoa Captured," BBC, February 22, 2012.

Pressure on Three Fronts: North, South and West

Al-Shabab, bolstered by initial military victories and the continued corruption and ineptness plaguing the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), launched major frontline assaults against AMISOM and TFG positions in the divided city of Mogadishu in August 2010 during its "Ramadan Offensive."⁴ Its offensive failed, however, resulting in heavy insurgent losses and the inability to capture the areas of Mogadishu under AMISOM and TFG control.⁵ A second "Ramadan Offensive" launched one year later could not turn the tide in al-Shabab's favor.⁶ By mid-August 2011, al-Shabab had announced a "strategic withdrawal" from Mogadishu and began a guerrilla war in the city against AMISOM and the TFG.⁷

Despite having withdrawn most of its forces from the capital, al-Shabab operated in outlying districts and exerted influence within Mogadishu.⁸ It also continued to execute deadly attacks deep inside the city, including vehicle bombings at the Somali Ministry of Education and a military base in October 2011.⁹ Al-Shabab's persistent ability to send insurgents and suicide bombers into the city did not stop AMISOM and TFG forces from capturing its bases in Mogadishu's northern outskirts.¹⁰ The city and the surrounding districts, however, would not fully fall to AMISOM and the TFG until four months later when they captured the Suuqa Hoolaha

neighborhood in north Mogadishu in March 2012.¹¹

Kenya, citing the increased number of kidnappings carried out in its territory close to the border with Somalia, sent military forces inside the Juba region of southern Somalia in mid-October 2011.¹² The Kenyan government also launched a major security sweep in the Eastleigh district of its own capital, Nairobi, targeting suspected al-Shabab "sympathizers."¹³ Eastleigh, which is sometimes referred to as "Little Mogadishu," has long been an important hub for al-Shabab recruitment and is home to extremist preachers and groups, such as the Kenyan Muslim Youth Center.¹⁴

In late November 2011, Ethiopian troops entered western Somalia with the goal of pushing back al-Shabab forces from its border.¹⁵ The re-entry of the Ethiopian military into the country opened a third front, to the west, against al-Shabab, which was already faced with offensives by AMISOM and the TFG in the north and Kenya and its militia allies in the south. In addition to battlefield setbacks, al-Shabab was faced with renewed pressure on its economic resources. Having lost the Bakara Market in Mogadishu in August 2011, the insurgents suffered from Kenya targeting their logistical and economic networks in the south, where it received significant revenues from taxing local merchants and traders as well as from the trade in charcoal around the Horn of Africa and the Arab Gulf states.¹⁶

4 "Somali Fighters Attack Capital," al-Jazeera, August 27, 2010.

5 Ibid.

6 "Islamic Militants Launch Ramadan Offensive in Famine-stricken Somalia," CNN, August 1, 2011.

7 "Al-Shabab Vows to Use Guerilla Tactics in Somalia," Voice of America, August 12, 2011; "Somali: Al-Shabab Militants Return to Mogadishu," Xinhua, August 12, 2011.

8 Geoffrey York, "Fear of Al-Shabab Brings Mogadishu to a Standstill," *Globe and Mail*, September 16, 2011; "Somalia's Al Shabaab Warns of More Attacks," Reuters, October 4, 2011.

9 Abdi Sheikh and Mohamed Ahmed, "Rebels Kill Scores in Somali Capital Blast," Reuters, October 4, 2011; Josh Kron, "Militants Strike at Troops at Base in Somali Capital," *New York Times*, October 29, 2011.

10 "TFG/AMISOM Secure Remaining Al Shabaab Strongholds in Mogadishu," AMISOM, press release, October 2011.

11 Mahmoud Mohamed, "Mogadishu Liberated from al-Shabaab: Somali Security Officials," *Sababi*, March 5, 2012.

12 "Kenyan Troops Move into Somalia," Associated Press, October 16, 2011; "Kenyan Troops Advance in Somalia, Pursuing Al-Shabab," Voice of America, October 17, 2011.

13 "Kenya to Target al-Shabab Sympathisers in Nairobi," BBC, October 20, 2011.

14 Christopher Anzalone, "Kenya's Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabab's East African Recruitment," *CTC Sentinel* 5:10 (2012).

15 "Somalia Confirms Ethiopian Troop Presence," Voice of America, November 20, 2011; Mohamed Ahmed, "Somali Rebels Pull Out as Ethiopian Troops Return," Reuters, November 21, 2011.

16 Gabe Joselow, "Kenyan Military Targeting al-Shabab Finances," Voice of America, November 6, 2011; John Ngirachu, "Al Shabaab Militia's Tight Grip on 'Desert' Charcoal Trade," *The East African*, November 13, 2011;

Continuity with the Past: Refocusing on Guerrilla Warfare

Shortly after al-Shabab's "strategic withdrawal" from Mogadishu in August 2011, Hasan Dahir Aweys, who was then a member of al-Shabab's leadership, said in an interview with Somali Channel that the movement would adopt a guerrilla warfare strategy since it was unable to match AMISOM's military superiority.¹⁷ Instead of continuing to launch massive and costly frontline assaults on enemy positions, al-Shabab's frontline fighting force, Jaysh al-`Usra (Army of Hardship/Difficulty), has since focused primarily on launching hit-and-run style attacks on AMISOM, TFG/Somali government, Kenyan, and Ethiopian forces and their allies.

Rather than make a "final stand" in Mogadishu, Beledweyne, Baidoa, and other strategic urban centers, al-Shabab withdrew from these cities without offering much resistance, although it promised to continue operating militarily in these areas.¹⁸ Facing defections, al-Shabab chose to save their always limited number of fighters for a protracted guerrilla war.¹⁹ It refocused its military strategy on executing guerrilla-style attacks on enemy checkpoints and other positions and planting improvised explosive devices in supposedly "liberated" areas under AMISOM, Somali government, Kenyan, and Ethiopian control.²⁰ A

¹⁷ "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)," United Nations, 2011, pp. 147-161.

¹⁸ "Al-Shabab Vows to Use Guerilla Tactics in Somalia."

¹⁹ "The Christian Ethiopian Army is Occupying Baidoa City," al-Shabab, February 26, 2012.

²⁰ "Defections Put Militant al-Shabab on the Run in Somalia," BBC, June 8, 2012; Abdi Guled, "Al Shabab Defectors Describe Hunger and Isolation with Somali Terrorist Group," *Toronto Star*, July 11, 2012; Dominic Wabala, "200 al Shabaab Militias (sic) Surrender," *The Star* [Nairobi], September 8, 2012.

²¹ Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Killing Two from the Ethiopian Forces with an IED in the Central Beledweyne," February 7, 2012; "Setting Off 4 Bombs Against the Crusaders Inside the Maslah Military Camp," March 4, 2012; "Targeting a Military Helicopter with a Surface-to-air Missile," March 7, 2012; "Targeting the Presidential Palace with Mortars for a Second Consecutive Night," March 22, 2012; "Ambush Targeting Ethiopian Forces in the Region of Bay and Bakool," April 11, 2012; and "Ambush on the Ethiopians near Bardaale city," May 19, 2012.

primary insurgent target, in addition to non-Somali and Somali government forces, were al-Shabab's militia enemies such as the Somali Sufi fighters of Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama (People of the Prophetic Tradition) umbrella group, who are labeled "apostates" in al-Shabab's written statements, videos, radio broadcasts, and other media productions.²¹

Assassinations of enemy military officers, militia commanders, and Somali government officials have long been an important staple in al-Shabab's military strategy, and the movement continues to target such officials with varying

"Rather than make a 'final stand' in Mogadishu, Beledweyne, Baidoa, and other strategic urban centers, al-Shabab withdrew from these cities without offering much resistance."

degrees of success.²² In May 2012, an al-Shabab ambush tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Somali President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad in the Afgooye corridor south of Mogadishu.²³ Such assassinations, while they cannot turn the tide of battle in al-Shabab's favor, are capable of disrupting enemy

²¹ Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Killing Seven Apostates with an IED on Factories Street in Mogadishu," February 26, 2012; "Targeting an Apostate Officer in Beledweyne with a Hand Grenade," March 15, 2012; "Killing a Number of Apostates with a Bomb near the Bakara Market," April 20, 2012; and "News Report for the Day of 26 Shawwal 1433," September 16, 2012.

²² Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Assassination of a Member of the Apostate Intelligence Services in Mogadishu," March 1, 2012; "Martyrdom Operation Inside the Presidential Palace of the Apostate Government," March 16, 2012; "Assassination of an Officer from the Apostate Militias in the District of Laba Daqah," April 4, 2012; and "Killing a Burundian Officer in a Special Operation," May 14, 2012.

²³ Abdi Sheikh and Feisal Omar, "Somali President Escapes Rebel Ambush on Convoy," Reuters, May 29, 2012; "Targeting the Convoy of the Apostate Sharif in Several Ambushes between Mogadishu and Afgooye," al-Shabab, June 1, 2012.

forces and preventing the transition to a more stable security and political environment in areas recently liberated from insurgent control. Spies remain a concern for al-Shabab, particularly as it began to lose increasing amounts of territory to its enemies. When captured, suspected spies were quickly executed.²⁴ Similar guerrilla-style attacks were also frequently used by al-Shabab during 2007 and 2008, the first two years of its insurgency against Ethiopian forces, the TFG, and AMISOM.²⁵

In May and June 2012, al-Shabab also reintroduced its "daily news report" format when releasing public statements. In its early years as an underground guerrilla movement, al-Shabab released groups of statements in this format, in which a number of its daily military actions and activities were briefly reported together in a single statement.²⁶ This more simplified version of publishing allowed the insurgents to streamline the process of collecting and publishing their print statements, which made it easier to produce statements while engaging in a more covert insurgency. Whether this is because of new technological challenges is unknown.

Regardless, this shift shows continuity not only between al-Shabab's military operations in the field, which have

²⁴ Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Assassination of a Spy in the Junaqal District in Mogadishu," April 28, 2012; "Targeting a House of Spies in the Taleeh district," May 4, 2012; "Targeting a Group of Apostate Spies with a Car Bomb," March 24, 2012; and "Assassination of Two Spies near the Bakara Market," April 28, 2012. For more on al-Shabab's previous targeting of spies, see Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabab's Setbacks in Somalia," *CTC Sentinel* 4:10 (2011).

²⁵ Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Claiming the Assassination of Shaker Shafi'i, an Officer in the Intelligence Department," September 6, 2007; "Claiming the Assassination of Two Representatives of the Apostate Government," May 11, 2007; "Explosion in Baidoa Reaps (Kills) Tens of Ethiopians and Apostates," December 6, 2007; "Assassination of a Leader of Apostate Army Forces in Hiraan, 'Ali Farah," April 30, 2008; and "Assassination of a Police Commander, 'Ali 'Aduween, with the Detonation of a Landmine under His Convoy in the North Mogadishu," August 9, 2008.

²⁶ In 2007, al-Shabab released a number of reports under the title "Harvest of the Jihad in Somalia" and in 2008 as part of two sustained military campaigns dubbed "No Peace without Islam" and "Our Terrorism is Praiseworthy."

shifted back to the movement's underground guerrilla roots, but also in its media operations.

Defections

As its fortunes began to turn during the summer of 2011, al-Shabab was faced with an increasing number of defections, which continued into 2012.²⁷ Exact numbers of defectors, from those who surrendered directly to AMISOM and the Somali government to those who simply abandoned their posts, are not available. Both Somali and foreign media outlets have, however, reported on hundreds of al-Shabab fighters surrendering.²⁸ Defections impacted its ability to respond militarily to offensives by AMISOM, Somali government, Kenyan and Ethiopian troops, and anti-Shabab militias.

In September 2012, al-Shabab suffered defections from at least a segment of Hisbul Islamiyya, a once independent, more Somalia-focused guerrilla group

“As its fortunes began to turn during the summer of 2011, al-Shabab was faced with an increasing number of defections.”

fighting against AMISOM and the TFG. Hisbul Islamiyya was forced to merge with al-Shabab in December 2010 after losing to it militarily on the battlefield in a conflict that lasted throughout that year.²⁹ A reported Kenya-based Hisbul Islamiyya spokesman, Muhammad Mu`allim, recently told reporters that his group's past allegiance to al-Shabab had been forced and was “by mouth only,” and that al-Shabab's rapidly

27 “Defections Put Militant al-Shabab on the Run in Somalia”; “Somali Government Displays Al Shabaab Defected Fighters,” Shabelle Media Network, October 22, 2011; Mohammed Yusuf, “Some Al-Shabab Defectors Still a Security Threat,” Voice of America, February 6, 2013.

28 “200 al-Shabaab Militants Surrender Outside Jowhar,” *Sabahi*, September 23, 2012; Michael Mubangizi, “200 al-Shabab Defect—AMISOM,” *The Observer* [Kampala], September 23, 2012; Patrick Mayoyo, “Shabaab Fighters Surrender,” *The Nation* [Nairobi], September 5, 2012.

29 “Al Shabaab Takes Over Region from Hizbul Islam,” Shabelle Media Network, December 14, 2010.

declining power allowed them to break free. He said that Hisbul Islamiyya was open to negotiations over the future of Somalia.³⁰ Attempting to put an end to these reports, al-Shabab responded rapidly with a written statement from its military spokesman, Abu Mus`ab. He denied that Mu`allim was an active member of Hisbul Islamiyya, claiming that he had “escaped” to Kenya when the group joined ranks with al-Shabab.³¹

Al-Shabab was also forced to deal in a public fashion with the separation of Omar Hammami (also known as Abu Mansur al-Amriki), once the insurgents' most recognizable foreign fighter. After briefly denying his initial March 2012 claim that al-Shabab threatened his life due to “differences” over matters of “Shari`a and strategy,” al-Shabab had to address Hammami's claims more forcefully when the American continued to make allegations against them in the first part of his autobiography, which was released in May 2012, and in a second video posted to YouTube in which he alleged that al-Shabab treated foreign fighters poorly.³² Hammami also made active use of his Twitter spokesman “Abu American,” who many analysts suspect is actually Hammami himself, in launching allegations against al-Shabab and its allies.³³

Al-Shabab, in a lengthy official statement released in December 2012, denied Hammami's many allegations and said that he “does not, in any way, shape, or form, represent the views” of foreign fighters in Somalia.³⁴ They

30 “Somalia: Hizbul Islam Group Withdraws Allegiance, says ‘Al Shabaab is Weakened,’” Garowe Online, September 25, 2012.

31 “Statement Regarding the Conference in which it was Announced that Hizbul Islam Withdrew from the Union with Harkat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen,” al-Shabab, September 28, 2012.

32 Clint Watts, “Hammami's Twitter War with Shabaab & MYC in Somalia & Kenya,” Selected Wisdom blog, January 14, 2013; Christopher Anzalone, “The End of a Romance? The Rise and Fall of an American Jihadi: Omar Hammami's Relationship with Somalia's Al-Shabab,” al-Wasat blog, March 17, 2012. For an overview of Hammami's political and religious ideology, which is arguably even more global than that of at least a segment of al-Shabab, see Christopher Anzalone, “The Evolution of an American Jihadi: The Case of Omar Hammami,” *CTC Sentinel* 5:6 (2012).

33 Ibid.

34 “Abu Mansur al-Amriki: A Candid Clarification,” al-

further labeled Hammami a narcissist interested in public attention and acclaim.³⁵ Al-Shabab also denied the frequent reports in Western media that Hammami was a “grand strategist, recruiter and fundraiser” for the group. They accused Hammami

“As al-Shabab lost territory in the south and west, its media department released a series of videos documenting the movement's past and present implementation of law and order over previously bandit and thief infested parts of the country.”

of spreading societal discord (*fitna*) at a time of great trial for the mujahidin and other Muslims in Somalia.³⁶ Hammami was replaced by a different English-speaking foreign fighter, Abu Ahmad al-Amriki, in another video dedicated to the group's foreign fighters.³⁷

Perhaps in part to counter Hammami's allegations with regard to foreign fighters, al-Shabab's media department, the al-Kataib Media Foundation, released the third installment of its martyrology video series “Profit of the Sale” on February 1, 2013. The video identified a number of al-Shabab martyrs, including the late British-Lebanese fighter Bilal al-Berjawi, who was killed in a reported U.S. drone strike in January 2012.³⁸ Featuring al-Berjawi so prominently in a major video may have been an attempt by al-Shabab to counter these rumors.³⁹

Shabab, December 18, 2012.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 *Mujahidin Moments*, al-Shabab, February 2013. The video features Swahili-speaking foreign fighters in addition to Abu Ahmad al-Amriki.

38 Ian Cobain, “British ‘al-Qaida Member’ Killed in US Drone Attack in Somalia,” *Guardian*, January 22, 2012.

39 That being said, al-Berjawi was allegedly involved in a power struggle with al-Shabab's *amir*, Ahmed Godane (also known as Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr), and was

Highlighting the Benefits of Insurgent Rule

As al-Shabab lost territory in the south and west, its media department released a series of videos documenting the movement's past and present implementation of law and order over previously bandit and thief infested parts of the country. Al-Shabab also claimed to have completed a number of new public works projects despite its battlefield setbacks. These projects included the construction of roads and bridges and the distribution of aid to the needy.⁴⁰ Al-Shabab also released videos in which Somali civilians discussed their happiness with insurgent rule and concern over the return of foreign troops and their Somali "lackeys."⁴¹ In addition to these projects, al-Shabab undertook other public works initiatives including agricultural programs, opening centers for people with special needs, restoring dams, and distributing food aid.⁴²

In a major video production titled *Under the Shade of Shari`a*, an English-speaking al-Shabab "journalist" recounted his 2011 trip to the city of Baidoa in western Somalia.⁴³ Contrasting the period of insurgent rule in the city to the days of corruption during the tenure of the TFG, he and al-Kataib cameramen went to great lengths to show the economic benefits allegedly brought to the city by al-Shabab's implementation of its interpretation of Shari`a.⁴⁴ The video included

a victim of group infighting, betrayed by Godane and his supporters. For an overview of these reports, see Clint Watts, "Continued Debate on al-Qaeda in Somalia: Zawahiri, Godane, Robow," Selected Wisdom blog, March 22, 2012.

40 *Distribution of Zakat to Some of the Regions in the Islamic Governorate of Juba*, al-Shabab, January 2013; *Restoration Project of Some of the Roads and Bridges in the Governorate of Juba*, al-Shabab, October 2012.

41 *The Atmosphere in the Port of Kismayo*, al-Shabab, August 2012; *Tour of the Beaches in the Region of Lower Shabelle—City of Baraawe*, al-Shabab, February 2013; *Under the Shade of Shari`a*, al-Shabab, July 2012.

42 Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Agricultural Report," March 18, 2012; "Sponsorship of 3 Disabled People in the Administrative District of Lafoole," February 14, 2012; "Restoring a Number of Dams in the Region of Middle Shabelle," May 8, 2012; "Medical Convoy for the Displaced of Baidoa City," March 10, 2012; and "Distribution of Food Aid to Those in Need in the Region of Juba," April 27, 2012.

43 *Under the Shade of Shari`a*.

44 Ibid.

extensive footage of a meeting held in 2011 near Baidoa between al-Shabab leaders, including spokesman 'Ali Rage, and clan leaders, possibly from the Rahanweyn clan group, which predominates in that area.⁴⁵ Locals and

“Despite these setbacks, al-Shabab’s leaders and media operatives understand that, to a significant degree, the appearance of power can be nearly as effective as actual power.”

clan leaders interviewed for the video said that they welcomed insurgent rule since it brought stability, which in turn allowed for the rejuvenation of the economy and increased safety for residents.⁴⁶ During celebrations in Kismayo organized by al-Shabab to mark the formalization of its affiliation with al-Qa`ida in early February 2012, a local clan leader from Juba, Isma`il Harun, praised the "mujahidin" when he appeared alongside al-Shabab's governor of Kismayo, Hasan Ya`qub, and political bureau official Hussein `Ali Fiidow.⁴⁷

The locations of al-Shabab's official celebrations following the formalization of its alliance with al-Qa`ida were chosen for their symbolic political and propaganda value. Despite AMISOM's advance beyond Mogadishu and the Kenyans' drive toward Kismayo, the insurgent movement hosted large celebrations in Kismayo, Baidoa and Lafoole, which were attended by a number of its senior leaders, including Rage, Ya`qub, Fiidow, and `Abd al-Qadir Mu`min.⁴⁸ Less than a month later, Baidoa fell to Ethiopian forces, and Kenya took control of Kismayo in October. In late August 2011, al-Shabab

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 *The Year of Unity 1433*, al-Shabab, April 2012.

48 Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Huge Celebrations in Lower Shabelle to Welcome the Bay'a with Al-Qaeda," February 14, 2012; "Celebrations in Baidoa City in Support of the Bay'a with Al-Qaeda," February 18, 2012; "Joyful Celebrations in Kismayo for the Unity with Al-Qaeda," February 20, 2012.

made similar political statements with its choices for locations of communal Eid al-Fitr prayers. One gathering was held in the outskirts of Mogadishu despite the insurgents' withdrawal from most of the city earlier that month.⁴⁹

Broadcasting its ability to continue governing has been a priority for al-Shabab even as its setbacks mounted during the past two years. It has continued to organize programs aimed at training preachers and educating merchants and craftsmen as well as distributing aid.⁵⁰ The group has also continued to focus on pushing forward an education program in areas under its control that conforms to its rigid interpretation of Islam.⁵¹

Insurgent outreach to the country's powerful clans continues, and al-Shabab claims to have received support from a number of clan leaders from the Huber, Gaaljecel and Rahanweyn, as well as other clans and sub-clans.⁵² Insurgent officials have also sought to mediate clan disputes and hold localized Shari`a court sessions aimed at resolving disagreements between locals and complaints against al-Shabab itself.⁵³

49 "The Muslims Perform the 'Eid Prayer in the Islamic Regions," al-Shabab, August 31, 2011.

50 Representative al-Shabab statements include: "Charitable Association Distributes Alms in Bur Hakaba City," May 4, 2012; "Closing of a Shari'a Session for Tailors in Baardeere City," April 28, 2012; "Conclusion of an Educational Session for Merchants in Waajed City," May 11, 2012; "Third Round of Graduates from the 'Abdullah 'Azzam Academy for Preachers," February 27, 2011.

51 "Office of Education Holds a Meeting with Officials of the Educational Institutions," al-Shabab, February 6, 2012.

52 *Under the Shade of Shari`a and Bay`a of the Gaaljecel Clan to Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujabideen*, al-Shabab, November 2012; "Huber Clan Gives Bay'a to Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen," al-Shabab, June 23, 2012.

53 "Daawo Sawirada: Shirkiid Dib U Heshiisiinta Beelihii Galguduud ku Dagaalamay Oo Wejigiisii 2-aad lasoo Gaba Gabeeyay," Somali Memo, December 20, 2012; "Completion of the Reconciliation Between 2 Clans in Harardhere," al-Shabab, April 28, 2012; "Grievances Court in the region of Middle Shabelle Issues Dozens of Rulings," al-Shabab, March 10, 2012.

Conclusion

Al-Shabab, in the midst of battlefield defeats and political setbacks, has sought over the past year to respond militarily while continuing to assert its claim to political legitimacy as an insurgent governing authority. It has shifted back to guerrilla tactics and has adopted a more flexible form of collecting and releasing reports from the frontlines. It has continued its attempts to exercise governing authority over areas under its control as well as highlighting small and medium scale public works projects, although this has become increasingly difficult with its loss of the major urban centers.

Despite these setbacks, al-Shabab's leaders and media operatives understand that, to a significant degree, the appearance of power can be nearly as effective as actual power. Therefore, they have a keen interest in maintaining the ability to project the image of a movement that is both well-rooted in local social structures and capable of launching regular, successful attacks against its enemies—both domestic and foreign.

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The Upcoming Peace Talks in Southern Thailand's Insurgency

By Zachary Abuza

SINCE 2004, INSURGENTS in southern Thailand have fought to achieve an independent state for the region's 1.8 million Muslim ethnic Malays. The conflict, which is the most lethal in Southeast Asia today, has left approximately 5,500 people dead and nearly 10,000 wounded.¹ Although it has settled into a stalemate, a recent political development has given rise to hope that peace is possible. On February 28, 2013, the chairman of the Thai National Security Council (NSC), Lieutenant-General Paradorn Pattanabutra, and a representative of the separatist Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), Ustaz Hassan Taib, signed an agreement to begin formal peace talks.² The agreement, which garnered significant media attention, was the result of Malaysian³ mediation following nearly a year of back-channel talks that were started by ousted Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the brother of current Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.⁴

1 The majority of the statistics in this article are drawn from the author's incident database. The author's data is based on open source reporting and as such is lower than official figures; not all casualties are reported in the media, and many people reported as wounded later die. The author indicates when official data is used. The author does not have access to official data on a regular basis, and when he does it tends to be aggregate numbers. By carefully coding open source data, the author was able to do much more detailed statistical analysis on victim types, location of attacks, trends in how people were killed, size of improvised explosive devices, and more. This database will henceforth be cited as "Abuza, Incident Database." Also, for confirmation of the number of casualties since 2004, see "Bomb Kills Two, Wounds 12 in Thai South," Agence France-Presse, March 2, 2013.

2 The text of the agreement can be found at "Text of the Agreement between Thailand and the BRN," *Bangkok Post*, February 28, 2013.

3 The role of Malaysia in the negotiations is important, since the insurgents in southern Thailand allegedly stage some of their attacks from across the border in Malaysia. For more on Malaysia's role, see "Malaysia to Assist Dialogue Process for Peace in Southern Thailand," Thai News Agency, March 1, 2013.

4 "Thaksin and Army Chief Differ Over Peace Move," *Bangkok Post*, March 3, 2013.

While there have been various attempts to negotiate an end to the conflict in southern Thailand since 2004, this marks the first time that there has been optimism that the talks between the Royal Thai Government and the shadowy insurgents will achieve progress. There are many reasons to question this optimism, however. The Royal Thai Army (RTA) chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, and many analysts have expressed skepticism that Taib and the BRN have any command-and-control over the horizontal network of insurgents.⁵ Moreover, few political analysts see any meaningful concessions from the government on the issues of devolution of power and autonomy. Nonetheless, this marks the first time that a Thai administration has been willing to publicly commit itself to the notion that the conflict can only be resolved through the implementation of meaningful political reforms. Although the talks may not result in a durable peace immediately, they do lay the foundation for a negotiated political agreement.

This article provides background on the insurgency in southern Thailand, examines the recent political agreement, and then explains how the negotiations will likely proceed.

Background

The current iteration of the insurgency in southern Thailand is now in its 10th year, although the origin of the insurgency dates back to the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty that demarcated the border between Thailand and Malaysia and left three provinces, of which 80% of the population is comprised of Muslim Malays, in Thailand—Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani. Thailand spent much of the century trying to assimilate the Malay into Buddhist Thai society. Low-level insurgencies smoldered from the early-1970s to the mid-1990s, yet the insurgents were divided on ideological grounds (ethno-nationalists, Islamists, or those tied to the Malayan Communist Party) and differences over their ultimate political

5 The insurgent movement is spread across three-and-a-half provinces in southern Thailand. Beneath the field commanders (*juwae*) are fairly autonomous cells. There is no evidence that it is a "top-down" insurgency. See "Deep South Attacks Won't Cease: Prayuth," *The Nation*, March 4, 2013.

objectives (independence, union with Malaysia or autonomy).

Violence during this period remained in the countryside, and insurgents rarely targeted civilians. The Thai government exploited the insurgents' inability to work together, and quelled the insurgency by the mid-1990s through a mixture of general amnesties, economic development programs, burgeoning

“The newly-announced peace talks are significant because it is the first of seven Thai governments since 2004 to publicly acknowledge the need for a political solution to the most violent conflict in the heart of economically-vibrant Southeast Asia.”

economic growth on both sides of the border, and the establishment of a durable interagency institution, the Southern Border Province Administrative Committee (SBPAC).⁶ While moderate and more mainstream dissident groups such as the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) accepted amnesty and surrendered in large numbers, by the mid-1990s hardliners went underground where they indoctrinated and recruited a new generation of insurgents.

The insurgency that erupted in January 2004 is both quantitatively and qualitatively different than its predecessors. While it began at a low level, the movement grew following the implementation of a series of failed counterinsurgency policies, while the Thai government remained largely in denial about the insurgents' goals.⁷

6 For more on the history of the conflict, see Zachary Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009).

7 Then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his senior cabinet members attributed the violence to drug gangs and other smugglers. See Seth Mydans, “Thai Security Forces Kill Scores of Rebels,” *New York Times*,

Violence peaked in mid-2007, when the Thai army surged the region with some 60,000 troops, and the number of incidents and casualties fell steadily through the first half of 2008.⁸ Yet by the end of 2008, violent incidents had risen. Since January 2009, the violence has remained steady.⁹

Between January 2009 and February 2013, an estimated 1,473 people have been killed and 3,241 have been wounded, an average of approximately 30 deaths per month and 65 wounded per month.¹⁰ The victims since the start of 2009 include approximately 118 soldiers, 68 police, 227 rangers and defense volunteers, 128 village headmen or their deputies, 885 civilians, 39 teachers and four monks.¹¹ Security forces including RTA regulars, police, paramilitary rangers and village defense volunteers represent 28% of those killed and 38% of those wounded since 2009.¹² Approximately 158 teachers have been killed, a category of targets that puts additional pressure on the Thai state as they lead to prolonged closures of schools.¹³ There have been more than 40 beheadings, including the most recent one in August 2012.¹⁴

While most of those killed are the victims of shootings, since January 2009 there have been 595 improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, an average of 12 per month.¹⁵ Most IEDs are small, in the 11 pound range, although 50-100 pound IEDs are not unusual.¹⁶ IEDs are typically hidden alongside or buried under the road to target passing security details, although they are frequently employed in the cities, often concealed in motorcycles. Insurgents use grenades when they acquire them, and engage in frequent arson attacks. There have been no suicide bombers in southern Thailand.

April 28, 2004.

8 Abuza, Incident Database.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

While there are months where the violence spikes, the rate of violence is surprisingly consistent, as if the insurgents have calculated the appropriate frequency of attacks to assure their immediate goals of driving the Buddhist population out of the region and discrediting the government and weakening public institutions. To date, Thai security forces have been unable to stop the violence.

While the exact number of insurgents is unknown, in an August 2012 order of battle, the RTA estimated that there are 9,600 militants.¹⁷ According to open source reporting, there have been 127 insurgents killed and 315 captured since early 2009.¹⁸

There are a number of insurgent organizations besides the BRN. The BRN-Coordinate (BRN-C), which split from the BRN in the 1980s, is a *madrassa*-based movement under the leadership of Masae Useng and Sapaeng Basor, to which much of the violence is attributed.¹⁹ The Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Pattani (GMIP) began as a gun smuggling group that supplied the Acehese independence movement, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), and then became an extortion and enforcement arm for local politicians in southern Thailand.²⁰ The group changed course when two of Thailand's few veterans from the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s took command.²¹ Other cells emerged out of New-PULO. The media often reports on the Runda Kampulan Kecil (RKK), but this is inaccurate because there is no RKK “organization”—the RKK refers to small group guerrilla tactics that militants from groups such as the BRN-C acquired through training in Indonesia.²²

17 “10,000 Named in Insurgency Handbook,” *Bangkok Post*, August 25, 2012.

18 Abuza, Incident Database.

19 “Pattani Blast During Sukampol Visit to South,” *The Nation*, March 23, 2013.

20 “Muslim Group Linked to Attacks in Thailand,” *Straits Times*, March 25, 2002.

21 Ibid.; “Thailand Islamic Insurgency,” GlobalSecurity.org, undated.

22 This statement is based on the author's interviews and research trips to southern Thailand. Also see *ibid.*

Many insurgent leaflets and night letters are simply signed “Warriors of Pattani,” which highlights the horizontal nature of the insurgency. What is more important than the names of the groups is how they are organized. According to a Thai journalist, the

“Critically, two of the senior-most insurgents, Masae Useng and Sapaeing Basor, will send representatives to the talks.”

RTA said that there are approximately 35 regional commanders, known as *juwae*, who run operations at the district level.²³ The RTA asserts that there are roughly 20 individuals above the *juwae*, who meet roughly every two months to set broad policy.²⁴ This grouping, which includes members of many different organizations, is known as the *Dewan Pimpinan Usat*.²⁵

The Agreement

The February 28, 2013, agreement stated that the Thai government is “willing to engage in peace dialogue with people [the BRN] who have different opinions and ideologies from the state as one of the stakeholders in solving the Southern Border Provinces problem under the framework of the Thai Constitution while Malaysia would act as facilitator.”²⁶

This is a tacit acknowledgement that despite soaring military budgets since 2006—Bt3-4 billion (\$110-135 million) for security operations in the south alone—large earmarks for development in the south, and some 60,000 security forces deployed in the deep south, the insurgency cannot be defeated militarily.²⁷

23 Personal interview, Thai journalist, Yala Province, Thailand, July 3, 2010.

24 Ibid.; “10,000 Named in Insurgency Handbook.”

25 Ibid.; “Pattani Blast During Sukampol Visit to South.”

26 “Text of the Agreement between Thailand and the BRN.”

27 SBPAC had requested Bt3.974 billion (\$133 million) for its operations in the south. See “Army Chief: Prolonged Southern Violence not Linked to Military Bud-

On the insurgents’ side, it may be an acknowledgement that violence is not bringing them closer to their desired goals. On September 14, 2012, a senior *juwae*, Wae Ali Copter Waeji, of the GMIP surrendered with 90 of his men, signing a letter in which they acknowledged that their current strategy (i.e., violence) was not achieving their objectives.²⁸ While there have not been the subsequent mass defections from the insurgency that Thai authorities expected, that may have more to do with the fact that there is no blanket amnesty for those who surrender, and the Emergency Decree that governs most of the deep south gives authorities little discretion in dropping charges against suspects who have been indicted for particular acts of violence.²⁹ Indeed, since September’s mass defection, only 13 insurgents have surrendered to authorities, according to Thai media reports.

Wae Ali Copter Waeji and two of the 90 who surrendered face criminal charges, while the others were forced into a six month re-education program run by the military. The deputy prime minister for security affairs at the time, General Yutthasak Sasiprapa, acknowledged that the amnesty process needed to be amended if the government wanted to encourage defections, while 4th Army Commander Lieutenant General Udomchai Thammasaroratch requested the Ministry of Justice formally amend the legal process and reduce or drop punishments of those who have surrendered.³⁰ To date, no formal process has been amended, and therefore many insurgents are likely unwilling to surrender.

There is also a sense of hubris that could be prodding the insurgents to the table. Militants suffered their single worst loss since 2004 on February 13, 2013, when a group of 50-60 insurgents launched an attack on a Thai Marine base in Narathiwat Province’s Bacho district. The Marines expected the attack, as they recovered a map of their military

get,” MCOT, October 31, 2012.

28 “91 Rebel Defectors Surrender,” *Bangkok Post*, September 12, 2012; “Talks with RKK ‘Separatists in South,” *The Nation*, September 12, 2012.

29 “Isoc to Plot Amnesty Strategy in South,” *Bangkok Post*, February 22, 2013.

30 “More Insurgents Ready to Defect,” *Bangkok Post*, September 18, 2012.

base in the pocket of an insurgent that they had killed three days earlier.³¹ Sixteen militants were killed, and four were later arrested.³² Militants who once could attack at will are presently confronted by a more professional and better equipped security force whose counterinsurgency operations have

“The insurgents have an incentive to maintain a certain level of violence to pressure the government to make concessions under fear of renewed attacks.”

improved in the past few years.³³ By 2012, authorities had increased their security presence in the south, especially in the cities and along the major roads.³⁴ As a result of increased patrols and checkpoints, insurgents do not have as much freedom of movement. Moreover, they have not staged mass simultaneous attacks, which were common at the height of the insurgency in the first half of 2007.

How Negotiations Will Proceed

Formal talks are set to begin on March 28, 2013.³⁵ The Thai negotiators will be from the NSC headed by Lieutenant General Paradorn Pattanatabut. Malaysia has appointed Dato Sri Ahmad Zamzamin bin Hashim, the former director of the Malaysian External Intelligence Organization, as the facilitator. While Taib will represent the BRN, it is important to note that the Thai government acknowledges that the BRN is only one of many groups involved in the conflict. Indeed, the February 28 agreement described them as “one of the stakeholders.” To that end, the Thai side has encouraged the BRN to invite other

31 “16 Die in Attack on Thai Marine Base,” *Bangkok Post*, February 13, 2013; “Four Rebel Raid Suspects Nabbed,” *Bangkok Post*, February 15, 2013.

32 Ibid.

33 This observation is based on the author’s visit to Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani Provinces in southern Thailand in July 2012.

34 Ibid.

35 “Thai Government, Southern Insurgents set March 28 for Talks,” MCOT, March 6, 2013.

militants to the talks.³⁶ To date, the BRN has not made their 15 person list public. The Thai NSC, however, announced that representatives from a total of nine groups will attend—the BRN, New PULO, PULO 88, BRN-Congress, BRN-C, Barisan Islam Pembangunan Pattani, as well as the GMIP, Gerakan Mujahidin Pattani and Ulama Pattani.³⁷ Critically, two of the senior-most insurgents, Masae Useng and Sapaeing Basor, will send representatives to the talks.³⁸

There are a number of challenges going into the negotiations. The first is that violence has continued since the February 28 agreement. Based on open source reporting, in the 25 days following the agreement, there have been eight bombings, one grenade attack, and 20 separate shootings that left four police, four rangers, nine headmen, two village defense volunteers and six civilians dead.³⁹ The RTA is concerned that the BRN has no command-and-control over local insurgent cells, with General Prayuth describing them as an “old-guard outfit.”⁴⁰ The BRN split into three factions in the 1980s, and most of the current violence is perpetrated by the BRN-C and groups such as the GMIP. The NSC chief acknowledged this is a problem but spoke of the BRN’s role as elders: “it’s important that we talk with spiritual leaders who, after all, were militants before. These are the people who can communicate with their operative cells.”⁴¹

Paradorn asked Taib “if he could send a signal to militant operatives in the three southern border provinces to reduce the level of their insurgent activities,”⁴² but all parties on the Thai side acknowledged that the insurgency is not a top-down movement, and instead consists of many groups and highly autonomous cells. Therefore, they anticipate violence to

continue despite the upcoming peace talks. As southern-based journalist Don Pathan noted, “According to Malaysian and BRN-C sources, Hasan has not received the DPP’s [*Dewan Penilian Party*] blessing.”⁴³ One BRN-C member told Pathan: “We knew Hasan was up to something but nobody took him seriously because he doesn’t have any clout with the militants on the ground. But nobody thought he would go as far as to enter an agreement with the Thais.”⁴⁴ In short, the BRN could be trying to leverage a leadership position at the table by entering into talks, just as PULO has tried to do repeatedly since 2004.⁴⁵

On the other hand, the persistent violence leading up to the peace talks could also be part of the militants’ strategy, and does not necessarily mean that the talks will fail. The insurgents have an incentive to maintain a certain level of violence to pressure the government to make concessions under fear of renewed attacks.

The second issue is that it is unclear what the insurgents can realistically hope to gain from negotiations. For the Thai state, granting independence to militant groups operating in southern Thailand is not an option. Indeed, General Prayuth warned that even autonomy was unacceptable to the RTA: “It is impossible to give up [territory] to anyone. Everything must be discussed at the negotiation table, under the law and constitution.”⁴⁶ The RTA remains the kingmaker in Thai politics and Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra has spent the past 18 months assuring them that she will not push forward policies that threaten their interests. Even Yingluck’s NSC chief acknowledged that autonomy is not on the table: “We

will have to work out what the term entails for us and for them. Certainly it won’t mean an autonomous zone or another state. Allowing these border provinces to elect their own governors might be in the picture.”⁴⁷ Yet Thailand has for years equivocated on even making Malayu an official language in the deep south for fear that it would fuel separatism.

In early March 2013, Thai security agencies approved a proposal to replace the draconian Emergency Decree that governs most of the deep south with the Internal Security Act in five more

“A successful peace process that started through Thaksin’s back-channel negotiations would put pressure on the military and royalist stalwarts to accede and grant amnesty to the polarizing former prime minister.”

districts.⁴⁸ While the ISA continues to give security forces blanket immunity, a practice that has long been an irritant to the Malay, Article 21 of the ISA gives authorities much more discretion in dropping existing charges and implementing a more meaningful amnesty program.⁴⁹ Yet days later, the

47 The irony that Bangkok just completed its gubernatorial election while every other province has their governor appointed by the Ministry of Interior is not lost on observers. Yet there is little political support by any party to amend the constitution to change that. See “BRN to Send Peace Signal”; Chularat Saengpassa, “Democrats Ride to Victory on Loyal Voters,” *The Nation*, March 4, 2013.

48 The ISA is already in place in Songkhla’s four districts of Chana, Nathawi, Saba Yoi and Thepha, as well as Pattani’s Mae Lan district. See “Security Agencies to Flesh Out ISA Expansion Plan,” *Bangkok Post*, February 22, 2013.

49 Article 21 offers amnesty to militants if they confess and agree to a mandatory six-month retaining/rehabilitation course run by ISOC. The proposal came out of the NSC, but seems to have broader bureaucratic support, including from the Justice Ministry and the RTA. Only two militants have gone through the Article 21 process since it was introduced by the Democrats in December

36 “NSC Reveals Talk with BRN,” *Bangkok Post*, March 6, 2013.

37 “NSC to Insist Rebel Groups Curb Violence,” *Bangkok Post*, March 23, 2013.

38 “Core Rebel Bosses, Pulo to Join Peace Talks,” *Bangkok Post*, March 26, 2013.

39 Abuza, Incident Database.

40 “Thaksin, Prayuth Divided over BRN’s Influence,” *Bangkok Post*, March 4, 2013.

41 “BRN to Send Peace Signal,” *Bangkok Post*, March 7, 2013.

42 “NSC Reveals Talk with BRN.”

43 According to Don Pathan, “There is general agreement that the BRN-C is ruled by a council known as the *Dewan Penilian Party*, or DPP, not by a single individual leader.” See Don Pathan, “It’s Unclear who Speaks for who in Thailand’s Deep South,” *The Nation*, March 13, 2013; “Pattani Blast During Sukampol Visit to South.”

44 Ibid.

45 See, for example, the NSC’s and 4th Army’s condemnation of PULO President Kasturi Mahkota’s call for southern “autonomy” and bid for media exposure at “Malaysia Key to South Fight, NSC Chief Says,” *Bangkok Post*, February 27, 2013.

46 “Paradorn to Endorse Pact with BRN on Talks,” *Bangkok Post*, March 6, 2013.

cabinet extended the Emergency Decree through the next quarter, without taking up the issue of expanding the territory under the ISA.⁵⁰ This decision was made only days before the peace talks were to begin, sending a negative signal to the militants. The Emergency Decree is a major source of contention and an issue that likely engenders broad support for the insurgents' cause, while at the same time making uncertain the legal proceedings against any potential insurgent who surrenders.

Finally, there is considerable suspicion on the part of the military that the talks are a political façade that have nothing to do with resolving the conflict in the south. The governing Pheu Thai Party has tried to push a highly contentious national reconciliation bill through parliament since coming to power in mid-2011.⁵¹ The bill is controversial, and the potential for judicial action or a coup is so real that even with a parliamentary majority the Pheu Thai Party has repeatedly backed down. What makes it so divisive is that the centerpiece of the bill is an amnesty for former politicians, including Thaksin Shinawatra, now a fugitive from Thai justice. A successful peace process that started through Thaksin's back-channel negotiations would put pressure on the military and royalist stalwarts to accede and grant amnesty to the polarizing former prime minister, something neither can countenance.⁵²

As Don Pathan noted, "The role of the Army is still unclear, but a meaningful buy-in from the military has yet to be secured" in large part because of questions over what this will mean for Thaksin's return.⁵³ Indeed, the RTA appeared to be cut out of the upcoming

peace talks, with only one delegate on the 15-member panel.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The newly-announced peace talks are significant because it is the first of seven Thai governments since 2004 to publicly acknowledge the need for a political solution to the most violent conflict in the heart of economically-vibrant Southeast Asia.

For the militants, who have never been a mass-based organization and are clearly not losing the struggle, there is no great incentive to negotiate. The rate of violence has plateaued to an "acceptable" level, and there is not widespread pressure on them to settle. To date, many insurgent cells seem reluctant to halt the violence. Taib and the BRN seem to be leveraging a position for themselves. Can they bring the younger militants to the table? For now, that seems unlikely unless the Thai government is willing to make critical concessions.

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The Role of Converts in Al-Qa`ida-Related Terrorism Offenses in the United States

By Robin Simcox and Emily Dyer

WITH AL-QA`IDA'S ABILITY to carry out attacks in the United States seemingly diminishing, there will be increased focus on the threat posed by individuals not in contact with its leadership, but inspired by its ideology. At least part of this threat is from converts to Islam who might become radicalized to commit violence. Between 1997 and 2011, 171 individuals were either convicted of al-Qa`ida related offenses (AQROs) within the U.S. civilian or military court system or committed a suicide attack on U.S. soil. Converts to Islam comprised almost a quarter of these individuals, or 40 out of the 171 convicted.¹

In fact, in three of the years between 2007 and 2011, and in eight of the years between 1997 and 2011,² converts committed a higher proportion of AQROs than non-converts. Tracking the backgrounds of these converts—and how they differ from non-converts—is beneficial in obtaining a greater understanding of the terrorism threat to the United States.

This article assesses the differing trends between convert and non-convert offenders in the United States in 10 specific fields: gender, age, nationality, ancestry, place of residence, education, occupation, terrorist training, combat experience and links to designated terrorist organizations (DTOs). The article then draws conclusions from the data gathered, and suggests how the threat may develop in the future.

Context and Methodology

The data extracted for this article comes from a larger study into al-Qa`ida terrorism trends over a 15-year period. That study, *Al-Qa`ida in the United States: A Complete Analysis of Terrorism Offenses*, examined all 171 individuals

2009. See "Security Agencies Float New Peace Process for South," MCOT, February 22, 2013.

50 "NSC Seeks to Extend Emergency Law," *Bangkok Post*, March 4, 2013. For more on the RTA's position and resistance to lifting the Emergency Decree, see "Prayuth: Insurgents Must Stop Violence First," *Bangkok Post*, March 14, 2013.

51 Attayuth Bootsriboom, "Government Unlikely to Push Forward with Amnesty Law," *The Nation*, March 11, 2013; "Activists Cast Doubt on Successful Talks," *Bangkok Post*, March 23, 2013.

52 Thitanan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand's Stalemate and Uneasy Accommodation," *Bangkok Post*, February 15, 2013.

53 Pathan.

54 The NSC at first said that there would be no RTA presence. See "Army to Join March 28 Peace Talks with BRN," Thai News Agency, March 14, 2013.

1 All converts were convicted in the U.S. court system. There is yet to be an example of a convert who committed a suicide attack on U.S. soil.

2 These years were: 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2011.

who committed AQROs and provided a statistical breakdown of key trends.³ This article provides the condensed findings from that larger report, yet focuses more specifically on the role of converts to Islam.

To determine which cases to include in the study, the authors started with the largest possible number of individuals who could have been interpreted as connected to al-Qa`ida or inspired by al-Qa`ida. Each of these cases was analyzed, with a strict methodological definition of terms and a high burden of proof in the criteria for inclusion. There were hundreds of perpetrators who may have appeared to be inspired by al-Qa`ida, yet when the information in the actual trial was analyzed closely, their primary motivation was nationalist or for financial gain. Therefore, the 171 figure relates to cases that could confidently be called al-Qa`ida or al-Qa`ida-inspired terrorism.⁴

In both the larger report and in this article, all data was gathered by analyzing official government documentation, court records and court transcripts when available. Additional data was acquired using an online

3 Robin Simcox and Emily Dyer, *Al-Qaeda in the United States: A Complete Analysis of Terrorism Offenses* (London: Henry Jackson Society, 2013). This study is available at www.henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Al-Qaeda-in-the-USAbridged-version-LOWRES-Final.pdf.

4 Government agencies and non-governmental organizations give widely differing figures as to the total number of terrorism or al-Qa`ida-inspired convictions in the United States. This is largely due to problems of classification. A deputy attorney general acknowledged in 2006 that some individuals in "terrorism or terrorism-related cases" since September 11, 2001 actually had no established links to terrorism. A Department of Justice's inspector general also criticized his department's classifications, with cases initially filed as terrorism-related simply not updated if no evidence of terrorist motivation was found. As a result, a recent Department of Justice list of 494 terrorism-related convictions from 9/11 included members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the Tamil Tigers alongside jihadist-related crimes and other cases which are only exceptionally loosely tied to terrorism. See "F.B.I. Killed Plot In Talking Stage, A Top Aide Says," *New York Times*, June 24, 2006; "Terror Conviction Rate High in US, with Questions," Associated Press, September 3, 2011; "Introduction to National Security Division Statistics on Unsealed International Terrorism and Terrorism-Related Convictions," U.S. Department of Justice, 2011.

media database with exhaustive records of local and national press sources, and academic texts.⁵

The Findings

Gender

In the 171 cases, 97% of non-converts were men and 3% women. In the case of converts, however, only 90% were men while 10% were women. Overall, eight women committed AQROs, and half of these were converts.

Women converts occasionally acted in support roles to male plotters. For example, October Lewis wired money to her ex-husband, knowing that it would be used in his efforts to join the Taliban.⁶ Nadia Rockwood provided false statements to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), having denied delivering a letter containing a list of targets for assassination, composed by her husband Paul Rockwood, to another individual.⁷

One exception was Aafia Siddiqui, an al-Qa`ida associate convicted in 2010 for attempting to murder U.S. officers and employees in Afghanistan, and for assaulting the FBI agent, U.S. Army officer, and interpreter who tried to stop her.⁸ Colleen LaRose also played a more active role in conspiring to kill Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist, in February 2011.⁹ Jamie Paulin-Ramirez was charged alongside Colleen LaRose and pleaded guilty in March 2011 to providing material support to terrorists.¹⁰

Age

Converts were significantly older at the time of charge than non-converts. Converts were most commonly aged 32,

5 Simcox and Dyer.

6 "October Martinique Lewis Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering Charges in 'Portland Cell' Case," U.S. Department of Justice, September 26, 2003.

7 "Alaska Man Pleads Guilty to Making False Statements in Domestic Terrorism Investigation," U.S. Department of Justice, July 21, 2010.

8 "Aafia Siddiqui Found Guilty in Manhattan Federal Court of Attempting to Murder U.S. Nationals in Afghanistan and Six Additional Charges," U.S. Department of Justice, February 3, 2010.

9 *U.S.A. v. Colleen R. LaRose*, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 2011.

10 "Colorado Woman Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Provide Material Support to Terrorists," U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, March 8, 2011.

compared to 24 for non-converts, while the median age of converts (31.2) was slightly older than that of non-converts (29.1). The most common age at the time of offense for all 171 individuals was between 20 and 24 (33%).

One explanation as to why convert offenses commonly fell outside this age range is that at least seven offenders were already over 24-years-old by the time they had converted to Islam.

Nationality

The vast majority of converts (95%) were U.S. citizens, significantly higher than the 54% of U.S. citizens among all AQRO perpetrators. The remaining 5% of converts were British (for example, the "shoe bomber," Richard Reid¹¹) or Australian (for example, David Hicks, who was found guilty in a military court of providing material support to al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan¹²). By contrast, 45% of non-converts were U.S. citizens.

When disaggregated further, 83% of converts were born in the United States, significantly higher than the 21% among non-converts. Of all U.S.-born individuals, 54% were converts. Examples of U.S.-born converts include Hassan Abu-Jihaad, who provided classified information concerning the movements of a U.S. Navy battle group,¹³ and Daniel Maldonado, who received military training at a camp in Somalia where members of al-Qa`ida were present.¹⁴

Ancestry

Nearly two-thirds of converts were of African American (40%) or American White Caucasian (25%) ancestry, while the only non-convert to have either of these ancestries was Tarik Shah, who was the son of one of Malcolm X's aides and pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to al-Qa`ida.¹⁵

11 "Richard Reid Pleads Guilty," CNN, October 4, 2002.

12 "Australian Gitmo Detainee Gets 9 Months," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2007.

13 "Former Member of U.S. Navy Sentenced to 10 Years in Federal Prison for Disclosing Classified Information," U.S. Department of Justice, April 3, 2009.

14 *U.S.A. v. Daniel Joseph Maldonado*, Southern District of Texas, 2007.

15 "Bronx Martial Arts Instructor Pleads Guilty to Conspiring to Support Al Qaeda," U.S. Department of Justice, April 4, 2007.

African American converts included Abdulhakim Muhammad, who used a rifle to shoot two U.S. soldiers at a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas,¹⁶ and Barry Walter Bujol, who was convicted in November

“Converts did not differ greatly to non-converts in their level of education. In both categories, 52% of individuals had attended some form of college.”

2011 for attempting to aid al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and who had been e-mailing its influential cleric, Anwar al-`Awlaqi.¹⁷

American White Caucasian converts included Randall Royer, a member of a Virginia cell seeking to assist Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT),¹⁸ and Zachary Chesser, who attempted to travel to Somalia to join al-Shabab as a foreign fighter on two occasions.¹⁹ Three of the four female converts were also American White Caucasians.

Place of Residence

Within the United States, the highest proportion of offenders lived in New York (14%) at the time of charge or attack, followed by Florida (11%) and New Jersey (9%). Converts, however, tended to be based elsewhere, with only two convert offenders residing in New York, one in New Jersey and none in Florida.²⁰

16 “Accused Gunman Sentenced in 2009 Arkansas Shooting,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 2011.

17 “Texas Man Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison for Attempting to Provide Material Support to al Qaeda,” U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, May 24, 2012.

18 “Randall Todd Royer and Ibrahim Ahmed al-Hamdi Sentenced for Participation in Virginia Jihad Network,” U.S. Department of Justice, April 9, 2004.

19 “Virginia Man Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Encouraging Violent Jihadists to Kill U.S. Citizens,” U.S. Department of Justice, October 20, 2010.

20 A convert who had significant links to Florida was Jose Padilla, who was convicted in August 2007 for conspiring to provide and providing material support to al-Qa`ida and conspiring to murder, kidnap, and maim people abroad. Padilla lived in Florida between 1990 and

Instead, converts comprised all of the offenders in Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas and Washington, D.C., and half the offenders in Washington, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas.²¹ The highest convert presence was in Oregon, where converts (all in a cell seeking to assist the Taliban post-9/11) made up four out of the five offenders (80%), and in Virginia, with four out of nine offenders (44%). A disproportionately high number of converts lived in the western United States (36%) compared to non-converts (16%).

Education

Converts did not differ greatly to non-converts in their level of education. In both categories, 52% of individuals had attended some form of college. Converts, however, had a higher proportion of college graduates or above (28% vs. 21%), and proportionally more converts were known to have achieved a college degree than non-converts (20% vs. 8%).

Occupation

Of converts, 63% were employed or attending school at the time of offense (55% employed, with 35% in skilled²² employment, and 8% receiving an education). Skilled convert employees included Paul Rockwood, a meteorological technician.²³

Of non-converts, 55% were employed or receiving an education (40% employed, with 15% in skilled employment, and 15% receiving an education). Non-converts were also more likely to be unemployed than converts (30% vs. 23%). This did not, however, necessarily mean that they were impoverished. For example, “American Taliban” John Walker Lindh was technically unemployed, yet he came from an affluent background.²⁴

1997. He had not been living there, however, for the five years up to his eventual arrest, and so he was not classified as a Florida resident in the study.

21 The exact numerical breakdown is as follows: Alaska (two offenders); Arizona, Arkansas, Tennessee, Washington, and Washington, D.C. (one offender in each state/district); Pennsylvania (two offenders); and Texas (three offenders).

22 Skilled employment was defined as a job where formal educational or a technical qualification and/or experience was required.

23 “Terrorism Case Baffles Remote Alaska Town,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 2010.

24 “Profiles of John Walker Lindh, Osama bin Laden,” CNN, July 20, 2002.

Terrorist Training

Converts were less likely to have received terrorist training²⁵ than non-converts. A quarter of converts had received terrorist training, compared to 51% of non-converts.

While a higher proportion of non-converts received training in 2000 (33% vs. 20%), a higher proportion of converts received training in 2001 (40% vs. 16%). This suggests that the events of 9/11 disproportionately inspired converts to receive terrorist training abroad. Converts were most likely to have trained in Afghanistan.

Combat Experience

Proportionally, converts and non-converts were equally as likely to have had combat experience (18% in both categories). Of converts with combat experience, the majority (71%) had fought in Afghanistan, such as Wadih el-Hage (convicted for his role in the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings).²⁶ Non-converts were also most likely to have fought in Afghanistan (52%), yet there was a broader range of locations, including Pakistan, Somalia and Iraq.

Converts were more likely than non-converts (54% vs. 33%) to have received terrorist training and then to have moved on to actual combat. Converts with both training and combat experience included Randall Royer, who fought in Bosnia and Pakistan.²⁷

Links to Designated Terrorist Organizations

Converts were significantly less likely to be connected to DTOs²⁸ than

25 Terrorist training was defined as attendance at a camp specifically designed and organized to train “mujahidin” fighters, and which was formally run by al-Qa`ida or al-Qa`ida-inspired groups. These were all abroad, with the exception of a training camp established in Bly, Oregon, in 2000. Despite its lack of success, the Oregon camp constituted inclusion because the primary trainer, Ousama Kassir, had trained in Afghanistan himself and was well connected to the broader jihadist network.

26 *U.S.A. v. Wadih El Hage et al.*, Southern District of New York, 2000.

27 Chris Heffelfinger, *Radical Islam in America: Salafism’s Journey from Arabia to the West* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books Inc., 2011), p. 97; *U.S.A. v. Randall Todd Royer*, Eastern District of Virginia, 2004.

28 A DTO is defined as being on either the U.S. Department of State’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations or the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List.

non-converts (38% vs. 63%). Of the relatively small number of converts who were connected to a DTO, 60% were connected to al-Qa`ida, 27% to the LeT, 13% to AQAP, 7% to al-Shabab and 7% to the Pakistan-based Harkat-ul-Mujahidin (HuM). Only two converts had connections to more than one DTO: John Walker Lindh (al-Qa`ida and HuM) and David Hicks (al-Qa`ida and the LeT).

Of the larger number of non-converts who were connected to a DTO, 63% were connected to al-Qa`ida, 12% to the LeT, 10% to al-Shabab and 1% to AQAP. While there were no non-converts connected to HuM, there were a variety of organizations that only had non-converts connected to them: Makhtab-al-Khidamat, the al-Haramain Foundation, the Armed Islamic Group,

“There tended to be several years between conversion to Islam and the criminal’s decision to commit a terrorist offense.”

Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Jemaah Islamiya, al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya, Ansar al-Islam, al-Ittihad al-Islami and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. There were also six individuals connected to multiple groups.

This shows that while converts were less likely to have been connected to DTOs than non-converts, those who were often had connections to al-Qa`ida, displaying the seriousness of some of these cases. For example, Bryant Neal Vinas consulted with senior al-Qa`ida members, providing them with information as part of a plot to attack New York’s Long Island Rail Road system.²⁹

²⁹ “U.S. Citizen Admits al Qaeda Ties,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 2009.

Mass Casualty Operatives

Overall, 21% of all individuals were mass casualty operatives (MCOs): individuals who committed an AQRO and were part of a major plot. This included any kind of planned or premeditated attack that led to multiple deaths; a terrorism conspiracy that led to a successful, mass casualty attack; an attempted mass casualty attack that took place without the state’s knowledge yet led to no fatalities; a plot with operational involvement from al-Qa`ida or another DTO; or a plot in which components for a bomb were purchased or assembled without an undercover investigation taking place. These plots included the “millennium bomb” plot, the “shoe bomb” plot and the suicide attacks of 9/11.

There was a lower proportion of individual converts (11%) involved in the 10 most serious terrorism plots against the United States than there were in the total number of overall offenses (23%).³⁰ Convert MCOs included two members of al-Qa`ida: Wadih el-Hage and Richard Reid. Both had received terrorist training. There has only been one convert MCO since 2003 (Abdulkhakim Muhammad), however, and he did not receive terrorist training.

Comparison and Process

Out of the 171 individuals who were either convicted of AQROs within the U.S. civilian or military court system or who committed a suicide attack on U.S. soil between 1997 and 2011, 23% were converts to Islam. This number is high in comparison to the United Kingdom, where only 15% of individuals who committed Islamism-related offenses were converts.³¹ The U.S. statistic, however, is exactly in line with the proportion of converts residing in the United States. According to 2007 data from the Pew Research Center, 23%

³⁰ The 10 major plots were: the East African embassy bomb attacks in 1998; the “millennium bomb” plot in 2000; the “shoe bomb” plot in 2001; the suicide attacks of 9/11; the Camp Pennsylvania murders in 2003; the University of North Carolina plot in 2006; the “underwear bomb” plot in 2009; the New York City subway plot in 2009; the Florence Army Recruitment Center shootings in 2009; and the Times Square car bomb plot in 2010.

³¹ Data extracted from Robin Simcox, Hannah Stuart & Houriya Ahmed, *Islamist Terrorism: The British Connections* (London: Henry Jackson Society, 2011)

of Muslims in the United States are converts to Islam.³² In comparison, only 4% of the UK Muslim population are considered converts, making the British figure disproportionately high.³³

In terms of process, there tended to be several years between conversion to Islam and the criminal’s decision to commit a terrorist offense. Among the cases, offenses committed immediately after conversion were rare. Exceptions to this included LaRose and Ramirez,

“The data suggests that it is not necessarily socioeconomic factors that may inspire some converts to Islam to commit AQROs. Converts who were convicted of AQROs were by no means all socially disenfranchised, impoverished individuals who turned to extremism out of desperation.”

who committed offenses in the same year that they converted. It was more common, however, for the individuals in this study to commit offenses between three to seven years after conversion. This was the case with almost half of all the convicted converts. This suggests that there was rarely an inevitability of converts committing offenses, and factors other than religion pushed individuals toward committing terrorist acts.

³² “Converts to Islam,” Pew Research Center, July 21, 2007.

³³ The number of converts in the United Kingdom has not been statistically measured by the government. This figure is based on research conducted by the interfaith group Faith Matters, which suggested there could be as many as 100,000 converts in the United Kingdom. See “The Islamification of Britain: Record Numbers Embrace Muslim Faith,” *Independent*, January 4, 2011.

Conclusion

The data suggests that it is not necessarily socioeconomic factors that may inspire some converts to Islam to commit AQROs. Converts who were convicted of AQROs were by no means all socially disenfranchised, impoverished individuals who turned to extremism out of desperation. Instead, they were likely U.S.-born young men with a good education who had since found regular work.

The fact that American Muslims are generally affluent has been identified as one reason limiting incidents of homegrown extremism. Yet this study's findings should serve as a reminder that other factors—such as ideology or the suffering of Muslims abroad—can be just as significant as poverty in placing individuals on a path to radicalization.

The data should also have an impact on the response from European policymakers. While enhancing the socioeconomic prospects of Europe's Muslim communities remains worthwhile, the data suggests that it will not be a panacea to preventing radicalization at home.

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The Threat from Rising Extremism in the Maldives

By Animesh Roul

THE INDIAN OCEAN archipelago state of the Maldives is best known for its scenic and secluded tourist resorts. An estimated 400,000 people live on approximately 1,200-2,000 small islands, grouped into 26 atolls.¹ The tourism industry accounts for 30% of its gross domestic product, with an estimated 900,000 foreigners visiting the country each year.² In the past decade, however, the Maldives has experienced political uncertainty and growing religious extremism.

In 2008, the Maldives held its first democratic presidential elections. Mohamed Nasheed defeated Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had ruled the country for 30 years, winning 54% of the vote.³ During the election campaign, Gayoom and his supporters accused Nasheed, a Sunni Muslim, of spreading Christianity in the Maldives.⁴ In December 2011, after three years in power, Nasheed and his Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) faced massive protests by opposition parties, religious groups and their thousands of supporters in the capital Male.⁵ Called the "Defend Islam" protests, the organizers accused the Nasheed administration of defiling Islam, arguing that Nasheed promoted Western ideals and culture and restricted the spread of more austere Islamic practices.⁶ The protests continued into

1 Simon Denyer, "Deposed Maldives President Says Coup has Fueled Radical Islam," *Washington Post*, April 19, 2012.

2 Neil Merrett, "Maldives Ranked World's 22nd 'Most Miserable Place' by Business Insider," *Minivan News*, February 25, 2013; Tom Wright, "Islamism Set Stage for Maldives Coup," *Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2012.

3 During his 30-year rule, Gayoom, an autocrat, held elections, winning six of them, yet he never before faced an opponent. See Randeep Ramesh, "Maldives Human Rights Activist Wins Presidential Election," *Guardian*, October 29, 2008.

4 Vikas Bajaj and Sruthi Gottipati, "Maldives' Former Leader Calls for Early Elections," *New York Times*, February 10, 2012.

5 Ibid.

6 Wright. The "Defend Islam" banners displayed slogans such as "We stand united for Islam and the nation," "No idols in this holy land," "No to the Zionist murderers," and "No to El Al (Israeli) Airlines."

2012. On February 7, 2012, a bloodless coup toppled the Maldives' first democratically-elected government.⁷

Since Islam was introduced in the Maldives in the 12th century, religious practices in the country have been moderate. Yet in the past decade, the country has grown increasingly religiously conservative. This became especially evident following the implementation of political reforms and the transition to multiparty democracy in 2008, which gave a greater voice to religious conservatives and those calling for the rigid implementation of Shari`a (Islamic law) in the Maldives.⁸

This article examines religious conservatism and extremist violence in the Maldives, as well as cases of Maldivians joining jihadist groups. It finds that religious conservatism is on the rise in the Maldives, which could result in more violence and affect the country's lucrative tourism industry.

A Move Toward Religious Conservatism

For hundreds of years, Sunni Muslims in the Maldives have largely practiced a more liberal form of the religion. Yet during Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's three-decade autocratic rule, the Egyptian-trained religious scholar enacted a number of measures that, at least inadvertently, encouraged more hard line Islamist elements in the country. In 1994, the Protection of Religious Unity Act was passed, which restricted the freedom to practice any other religion besides Islam.⁹ In 1996, Gayoom constituted the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (which was renamed the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in 2008) charged with overseeing religious affairs in the country. This body of clerics pressured the government to carry out moral and cultural policing of alleged "anti-Islamic activities."¹⁰ In 2008, it asked the police to ban night clubs and discotheques for New Year's Eve celebrations, saying that they were contrary to Islam.¹¹

7 Jim Yardley, "Amid Outcry, President of Maldives Steps Down," *New York Times*, February 7, 2012.

8 Wright.

9 "2010 Report on International Religious Freedom - Maldives," United Nations, November 17, 2010.

10 "Ministry Asks Police to Ban Discos," *Minivan News*, December 31, 2008.

11 Ibid.

By the end of Gayoom's time in office in 2008, the dress code for women had grown increasingly conservative, and more and more men grew out their beards.¹² Whereas women used to dress in bright colored clothes, they increasingly wear black robes and headscarves today.¹³ On more conservative islands such as Himandhoo, women wear black *abayas* and face veils.¹⁴ Ahmed Naseem, the Maldivian foreign minister until the coup in 2012, said that the Maldives "had no one wearing headscarves 10 years ago," but it is common now.¹⁵ From imposing a ban on Christian missionary radio to apprehending migrant service providers for allegedly preaching and practicing their own religion, Gayoom's regime initiated an era of state-backed religious intolerance and radicalization in the Maldives.¹⁶

Another factor contributing to extremism has been the role of foreign *madrasa* education.¹⁷ The offer of free education in *madrasas* in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is widely acknowledged as a core means of radicalizing Maldivians locally, with well-meaning parents sending their children off on scholarships to "study Islam."¹⁸ Students who unwittingly attended more radical *madrasas* may have returned home to the Maldives, preaching their newly-acquired views. After the Maldives suffered its first terrorist attack in 2007, Gayoom himself warned of this problem, stating, "Maldivians

are influenced by what is happening in the world. They go to Pakistan, study in *madrasas* and come back with extreme religious ideas."¹⁹

Azra Naseem, a Maldivian academic and author, argues that grassroots radicalization is happening at a fast rate.²⁰ Naseem said that the contemporary Maldivian political environment favors radical and political Islam taking root in Maldivian society, especially when political parties and civil society increasingly take refuge in religion.²¹ In May 2010, for example, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs published a new set of regulations under the Protection of Religious Unity Act of 1994. The new legislation prohibited "talking about religions other than Islam in Maldives, and propagating such religions," as well as reinforcing that it is illegal "to use any kind of medium to propagate any religion other than Islam."²² Some newly added regulations also made it "illegal to show or spread sound bites of programs on religions other than Islam, and any such literature, drawings, advertisements, music, and songs," as well as use "any Internet website, blog, newspaper, or magazine to publish such material."²³

A major force behind more austere religious practices in the Maldives is the Adhaalath Party (Justice Party). It has controlled the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, with Shaykh Shaheem Ali Saeed as its current minister. The party supports the strict implementation of Shari`a, and it has outspokenly argued that music and singing are *haram* (forbidden) in Islam.²⁴ The party has called for an end to the sale of alcohol at the country's hundreds of luxury

resorts, the only places where it is served in the country.²⁵ It is widely considered the greatest force behind the Maldives' movement toward religious conservatism. Most recently, Islamic Affairs Minister Saeed, a leading member of the Adhaalath Party, has started a campaign against Christians and what he termed "Freemasons," alleging that they want to "wipe

"In the past decade, the Maldives has experienced an increase in religious conservatism, and this has coincided with a number of violent attacks on liberal activists and other citizens who have expressed outspoken support for moderate religious practices."

out" Islam from the Maldives.²⁶ In February 2013, Saeed warned that "various Christian organizations and missionaries are strongly involved and active in our society. They are working within us and outside, trying to create doubts on Islam within the hearts of young people."²⁷

There are also two religious conservative non-governmental organizations known as Jamiyyathu Salaf (JS) and the Islamic Foundation of Maldives (IFM). These two groups, both considered Salafist, work with the country's political parties to further the cause of Islamism in the Maldives.²⁸ The leader of the IFM, for

12 John Lancaster, "Islamism Comes to Paradise," *Slate*, May 28, 2007.

13 Mahwish Hafeez, "Growing Islamic militancy in Maldives," Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan, 2006.

14 Ibid.; Lancaster.

15 Wright.

16 "Christians Expelled from Maldives," *Christianity Today*, September 7, 1998. For information on the deportation of migrant workers suspected of preaching and conversions, see "Prospects of Religious Freedom Appear Grim in Islamic Maldives," *Compass Direct/World Watch Monitor*, August 10, 2010; "Maumoon Abdul Gayoom - the Father of Maldivian Extremism," *Dhivehi Observer*, October 10, 2007.

17 Other observers point to the role of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which built religious facilities in the country that some allege further intolerance. These facilities include the Islamic Studies Institute, a seven-story-high school in Male built by Saudi Arabia. See Lancaster.

18 Wright; Denyer; personal interview, JJ Robinson, editor, *Minivan News*, March 2, 2013.

19 "Maldives Cracks Down on Islamic Extremists," *Radio Australia*, October 22, 2007.

20 Personal interview, Azra Naseem, Maldivian author and academic, November 6, 2012.

21 Ibid.

22 "New Religious Unity Regulations: English," *Minivan News*, May 9, 2010.

23 Ibid.

24 "No One Has the Right to Criticise the Rulings of the Islamic Sharia - Adhaalath," *Miadhu*, March 1, 2013; "Adhaalath Party Requests Education Ministry Cancel Inter-School Singing Competition," *Minivan News*, April 12, 2012; "Adhaalath was Formed to Work Against the Anti-Religious Activities of MDP - Imran," *Miadhu*, January 29, 2013.

25 "Maldives Shuts Down Spa Resorts Over 'Anti-Islamic' Activities," *Associated Press*, December 30, 2011.

26 "Islamic Ministry Claims Christians, Freemasons Secretly Working to 'Eradicate' Islam in the Maldives," *Minivan News*, February 12, 2013.

27 Ibid.

28 The links between political parties and religious NGOs like IFM and JS are clear as they work together in organizing preaching events in the Maldives. Even the outgoing Nasheed-led MDP party worked with these religious NGOs through the Islamic Affairs Ministry to carry out religious activities. For details on the Salafist nature of the IFM and JS, see JJ Robinson, "Islamic Foundation Calls for Death Sentence if Apostate Fails to Repent,"

example, is former Guantanamo Bay prisoner Ibrahim Fauzee. In May 2002, Fauzee was arrested in Karachi while living in a suspected al-Qa`ida safe house.²⁹ He was eventually released from Guantanamo Bay and repatriated to the Maldives in 2005, where he established the IFM in 2009.³⁰

These parties and organizations were all part of the “Defend Islam” protests in December 2011, which unleashed a chain of events that culminated in the fall of Nasheed’s government.³¹

Extremist Incidents

Intolerance toward other religious and cultural symbols were manifested during the annual summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in November 2011, when Islamist protestors damaged monuments gifted to the Maldives by SAARC member countries.³² Protestors targeted a Pakistani monument that was given to the Male government because it depicted objects of worship which, according to the protestors, were “anti-Islam” as they negated “the oneness of God.”³³ Protests eventually led to the removal of both Bhutan’s and Sri Lanka’s monuments as well.³⁴

On February 7, 2012, a group of Islamist radicals vandalized archaeological artifacts that were mostly ancient Hindu and Buddhist relics in the National Museum. According to the museum’s director, the vandals destroyed “99%” of the evidence of the Maldives’ pre-

Islamic history prior to the 12th century.³⁵ Another official at the museum said that the group “deliberately targeted the Buddhist relics and ruins of monasteries exhibited in the pre-Islamic collection, destroying most items beyond repair.”³⁶

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has, at least indirectly, encouraged such extremism. It has, for example, initiated crackdowns on media outlets for anti-Islamic content.³⁷ The Communications Authority of the Maldives, on the order of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, blocked the blog of prominent free speech and religious freedom campaigner Khilath Rasheed (also known as Hilath) in November 2011.³⁸ The communications authority was told by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs that the blog contained anti-Islamic material.³⁹ In a country where the constitution says that every citizen is a Sunni Muslim, Rasheed’s claim of being a Sufi was viewed as a possible reason for the site’s closure.⁴⁰ One month later, in December, 10 men attacked Rasheed, throwing stones at him during a peaceful rally he organized in Male.⁴¹ One of the stones fractured his skull.⁴² A few days after the incident, Rasheed was arrested and jailed for 24 days due to his participation in the rally.⁴³ Rasheed said that he was arrested for “disrupting the religious unity of the Maldives, and was a threat to society.”⁴⁴

35 “Footage Leaked of Museum Vandals Destroying Pre-Islamic Artifacts,” Minivan News, January 14, 2013.

36 Ibid.

37 It asked the authorities to remove the “irreligious” SAARC monuments to pacify religious protestors. See Shahidul Islam Chowdhury, “Maldives Removes Idolatrous Monuments from SAARC Countries,” *New Age*, January 15, 2012; Johnstone, “Hithadhoo Court Orders Removal of SAARC Monuments on Religious Grounds.”

38 “Slashed Journalist Claims Attack was Targeted Assassination by Islamic Radicals,” Minivan News, July 2, 2012.

39 Eleanor Johnstone, “Blog Crack-Down ‘is Just the Beginning,’ Warns Censored Blogger,” Minivan News, November 21, 2011.

40 Ibid.

41 JJ Robinson, “Prison Conditions ‘Unchanged Since Gayoom’s Time’: Detained Blogger,” Minivan News, January 11, 2012; Eleanor Johnstone, “Moosa Calls for Investigation of Protesters who Called for Religious Tolerance,” Minivan News, December 14, 2011.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

In addition to the attack on Rasheed, extremists have directly targeted liberal intellectuals, writers and activists. On January 3, 2011, assailants attempted to kill Aishath Velezinee, an activist fighting for the independence of the country’s justice system, by stabbing her in the back in broad daylight.⁴⁵ In November 2010, Aishath acted as a whistleblower when she said that some members of the Judicial Service Commission were conspiring with key political figures to hijack the judiciary and bring down the country’s first democratically-elected government.⁴⁶ Authorities never identified the motive behind the attack.

On June 4, 2012, extremists again attacked Khilath Rasheed. In this incident, however, Rasheed almost died after extremists cut his throat open with a box cutter.⁴⁷ After the attempt on his life, Rasheed named three political leaders—Islamic Affairs Minister Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed, Adhaalath Party President Imran Abdulla and Jumhooree Party lawmaker Ibrahim Muttalib Shaheem—as being indirectly responsible for the attempt on his life.⁴⁸ In July 2012, Rasheed wrote,

When they were slashing my throat, they uttered the words “*Mee Shaheem, Imran, Muttalib faraathun badhiyaaeb*,” meaning “Compliments from Shaheem, Imran and Muttalib.” Even though the three politicians may not have directly ordered the three attackers to murder me, their calls for killing me somehow had a psychological influence on the three attackers to the extent that they did attack me.⁴⁹

45 “ICJ Says Velezinee Attack Politically Motivated,” Haveeru Online, January 6, 2011.

46 “Velezinee’s Insider Account of How JSC Hijacked Judicial Independence,” Dhivehi Sitee, September 10, 2012.

47 “Slashed Journalist Claims Attack was Targeted Assassination by Islamic Radicals.”

48 For details, see www.hilath.com/?p=16661.

49 He further wrote, “Now how could that happen? An MDP Member of Parliament has confirmed to a Maldivian writer (who is a friend of mine) that after the attack on me, Muttalib commented in Parliament House in front of other Parliament Members: ‘*Buneemenu Velezinee aai Hilath maraalaanamey. E othee Hilath maraalaafa*’ which means something to the effect: ‘See I told you we’ll murder Velezinee and Hilath. We have already murdered

Rasheed has since fled the country.⁵⁰

On October 1, 2012, Afrasheem Ali, a liberal religious scholar and lawmaker, was stabbed to death at his home.⁵¹ He was stabbed four times in the back of the head after he returned home from appearing on a weekly television show.⁵² Considered an Islamic moderate, Afrasheem was outspoken in his controversial positions on issues such as the permissibility of playing music and praying next to the deceased.⁵³ Authorities said that his murder was well-planned, although they denied that it was religiously motivated.⁵⁴

Most recently, a reporter for the MDP-aligned Raajje TV station, Ibrahim "Aswad" Waheed, was beaten unconscious with an iron bar while riding on a motorcycle near the beach area of Male on February 23, 2013.⁵⁵ Authorities were still investigating the motive for the crime, but were confident that it was a "targeted attack."⁵⁶

These incidents, which have all occurred in the past few years, reveal an environment in which moderate voices have been targeted in the Maldives. In addition to this violence, there is also evidence that a jihadist undercurrent may exist in the country.

The Sultan Park Bombing and the Role of Maldivians in Jihadist Groups

Unlike its larger South Asian neighbors, the Maldives has only experienced one terrorist attack perpetrated by Islamist terrorists. A bomb exploded in Sultan Park in Male on September 29, 2007. The explosion wounded at least 12 foreigners, including British, Japanese

Hilath." See *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Rasheed is presently living in France (self exile). He said he is hoping to return to the Maldives when democracy and a more tolerant atmosphere prevail. See personal interview, Khilath Rasheed, February 2013.

⁵¹ "MP Afrasheem Stabbed to Death," Haveeru Online, October 2, 2012.

⁵² "Moderate Islamic MP Stabbed to Death," *The Times*, October 3, 2012.

⁵³ Mohamed Naahee, "Afrasheem's Murder was Well Planned, Worth MVR 4 Million, Claims Police Commissioner," *Minivan News*, December 4, 2012.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Neil Merrett, "Police Reject Claims that Assault of Raajje TV Journalist was Politically Motivated," *Minivan News*, March 13, 2013.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

and Chinese tourists.⁵⁷ The attack was aimed at the tourism industry, the lifeline of the country's economy. Three men—Mohamed Sobah, Moosa Inaz and Ahmed Naseer—were sentenced to 15 years in jail.⁵⁸ The men confessed to their roles in the incident and admitted their goal was to "target, attack and injure non-Muslims to fulfill jihad."⁵⁹ Terrorism charges were laid against 16 suspects, but many of them had already fled to Pakistan and Sri Lanka.⁶⁰

After the Sultan Park bombing, authorities attempted to search the Dar-ul-Khair mosque on Himandhoo Island as part of the investigation. Upon arriving at the mosque on October 7, 2007, some 90 masked and helmeted members of the mosque confronted police, wielding wooden planks and refusing to let the police enter.⁶¹ Eventually the Maldivian army took over from the police, and established control of the mosque facility. The stand-off resulted in a number of injuries, and one police officer had his fingers cut off.⁶²

One month after the stand-off, a video appeared on the al-Qa`ida-linked al-Ekhlaas web forum posted by a group called Ansar al-Mujahidin.⁶³ The video, which flashed the message "Your Brothers in the Maldives are Calling You," contained footage recorded inside the Dar-ul-Khair mosque during the confrontation with police.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ "Bomb Blast Injures 12 Tourists in Maldives," Reuters, September 30, 2007.

⁵⁸ Ali Naafiz, "Sultan Park Bombing Suspect Arrested in Sri Lanka," *Haveeru Online*, October 15, 2011.

⁵⁹ "Sultan Park Suspects On Run In Pakistan," *Minivan News*, November 8, 2007; "Maldives Suspects 'in Pakistan,'" *BBC*, November 8, 2007. In August 2010, the Maldivian government commuted the sentences of Ahmed Naseer and Mohamed Sobah to three year suspended sentences under observation.

⁶⁰ Two suspects, Mohamed Ameen and Abdul Latheef Ibrahim, were arrested subsequently on their return from Pakistan. Ameen was arrested in Sri Lanka in mid-October 2011 after he traveled to the country from Pakistan on a fake passport. In August 2012, Latheef Ibrahim was arrested after arriving in the Maldives on a flight from Pakistan.

⁶¹ "Policeman's Hand Severed In Himandhoo Mosque Raid," *Minivan News*, October 7, 2007.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Ajay Makan, "Video Raises Fears of al Qaeda Expansion to Maldives," Reuters, November 19, 2007.

⁶⁴ "Ansar Al Mujahideen Targets the Maldives," *Threats Watch*, November 18, 2007; "Ansar Al Mujahideen

Counterterrorism analysts at the time suggested that the video was an attempt to attract financing and recruits for jihadist activity in the Maldives.⁶⁵

Even before the Sultan Park bombing in 2007, a number of Maldivians had engaged in violent jihadist activities. In April 2006, a Maldivian national, Ali Jaleel, and a small group of jihadists from the Maldives attempted to travel to Pakistan to train for violent jihad in Afghanistan or Iraq.⁶⁶ They were detained, however, and returned to the Maldives.⁶⁷ Jaleel later managed to travel to Pakistan, where he and two others launched a suicide attack at the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) headquarters in Lahore in May 2009.⁶⁸ An al-Qa`ida video featuring Jaleel's martyrdom was subsequently circulated as propaganda material.⁶⁹

Jaleel allegedly had connections in the United States. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Reaz Qadir Khan, a naturalized U.S. citizen residing in Portland, Oregon, conspired to provide material assistance to Jaleel in his suicide attack in Lahore.⁷⁰ As stated by the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of Oregon,

According to the indictment, from December 14, 2005 through June 2, 2009, Khan conspired with an individual named Ali Jaleel and others to provide material support and resources and to conceal the nature of such support and resources, knowing they would be used in a conspiracy to kill, maim, or kidnap persons abroad. Jaleel was a Maldivian national who resided outside the United States. Jaleel died while

Targets the Maldives," available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZipCV7-EXk.

⁶⁵ *Makan*.

⁶⁶ "Oregon Resident Charged with Conspiring to Provide Material Support to Terrorists in Connection with Suicide Bombing of ISI Headquarters in Pakistan," U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, March 5, 2013.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ "Terrorists Attack Lahore ISI Office," *The Nation*, May 28, 2009. For the video featuring Ali Jaleel, see www.liveleak.com/view?i=ela_1257529338.

⁷⁰ "Oregon Resident Charged with Conspiring to Provide Material Support to Terrorists in Connection with Suicide Bombing of ISI Headquarters in Pakistan."

participating in the suicide attack on the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Headquarters in Lahore on May 27, 2009, according to the indictment.⁷¹

Khan, who has not been convicted, is currently awaiting trial in the United States.

There is also evidence that three jihadists from the Maldives “planned to create a terrorist group in the Maldives [in 2007-2008] and to send the group’s members to Pakistan for military training,” as stated by the Maldivian news website *Haveeru Online*.⁷² They were identified as Yoosuf Izadhy, Easa Ali, and Hasnain Abdullah Hameedh.⁷³ At least one of these individuals did in fact travel to Pakistan, as Yoosuf Izadhy was arrested in Pakistan’s South Waziristan Agency in March 2009, along with eight other Maldivians.⁷⁴

Underscoring the threat, former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed warned in 2009 that “Maldivian people are being recruited by Taliban and they are fighting in Pakistan. It’s a serious issue.”⁷⁵ When asked how many Maldivians had traveled to Pakistan for this purpose, Nasheed put the number at “a few hundred.”⁷⁶ In a country of less than 400,000 people, such numbers are not insignificant.

Conclusion

Despite its reputation as an idyllic paradise popular among Western tourists, political and religious developments in the Maldives should be monitored closely. In the past decade, the Maldives has experienced an increase in religious conservatism, and this has coincided with a number of violent attacks on liberal activists

and other citizens who have expressed outspoken support for moderate religious practices.

The country has already suffered one terrorist attack targeting foreign tourists, and a number of Maldivians have traveled to Pakistan’s tribal areas to receive jihadist training. Moreover, evidence exists that jihadists tried to form a terrorist group in the country in 2007-2008.⁷⁷

If the country continues down its current path, extremist incidents may rise, with violence targeted against the country’s more liberal citizens. There is also the risk that extremists could target the country’s tourism industry. The loss of this revenue source would be devastating to the Maldives.

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Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

February 1, 2013 (TURKEY): A suicide bomber attacked the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, killing a Turkish security guard outside the facility. Turkish authorities blamed the attack on the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front, an outlawed Marxist-Leninist group that was involved in attacks on U.S. targets in Turkey in the early 1990s. The United States announced that it was launching its own investigation. – *New York Times, February 1*

February 1, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed at least 23 people outside a Shi`a mosque in Hangu District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – *CNN, February 1; BBC, February 1*

February 1, 2013 (MALI/NIGERIA): A report in the *Wall Street Journal* suggested that hundreds of Boko Haram group militants trained in Mali’s Timbuktu, learning to repair Kalashnikovs and launch shoulder-fired weapons. The report, which was based on interviews with locals in Timbuktu, said that Nigerian Boko Haram fighters trained in the city for about 10 months, working with the local al-Qa`ida-linked militant group Ansar Eddine. “The presence of Nigerian trainees here [Timbuktu] validates recent fears among regional and Western intelligence officials that parts of the Sahara have become incubators where al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is training Africans to fight jihad,” the article said. Islamist militants controlled Timbuktu for much of 2012, but in January 2013 French forces regained control of the city. – *Wall Street Journal, February 1*

February 2, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants attacked a Pakistani Army base in Lakki Marwat District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing at least nine army soldiers and four paramilitary soldiers. During the attack, 10 civilians were also killed. According to a TTP spokesman, the attack was in retaliation for the killings of two Taliban commanders in U.S. drone strikes. – *New York Times, February 2*

71 Ibid.

72 “Al-Qaeda Associates Active in Maldives: State Department Cable,” *Haveeru Daily*, December 6, 2010; JJ Robinson, “Leaked Cable from 2008 Reveals US Concerns about Maldivian National’s ‘Unspecified Links to al-Qaida,’” *Minivan News*, December 7, 2010.

73 Ibid.

74 “Maldives-Based al-Qa`ida Associates Plan to Create a Terrorist Group in the Maldives – WikiLeaks,” *Miadhu*, December 8, 2010; “9 Armed Maldivians Arrested in Waziristan,” *Miadhu*, April 2, 2009.

75 Sumon K. Chakrabarti, “Taliban in Pak Recruiting our Youth: Maldives,” *CNN-IBN*, February 8, 2012.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

February 3, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle filled with explosives attacked the police headquarters in Kirkuk. After the explosion, militants wearing police uniforms tried to storm the building. According to one police officer, "I saw the three suicide bombers running into the police building. They were throwing hand grenades at us. We opened fire on them and killed them immediately." At least 30 people were killed in the assault. - *CNN, February 4; Reuters, February 3; New York Times, February 3*

February 4, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber attacked a government-supported militia in Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad. The explosion killed at least 22 people. According to Reuters, "It was the seventh suicide bombing in a month in Iraq, indicating insurgents are intent on stepping up violence a year after U.S. troops pulled out of the country, where Shi'ite, Sunni and ethnic Kurdish factions still struggle over how to share power." - *Reuters, February 4*

February 4, 2013 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab said that they opened a new Twitter account in English, less than two weeks after Twitter suspended its previous account. According to the BBC, "The new al-Shabab account has 280 followers, compared to the previous account which had more than 20,000 followers. It was closed on 25 January, about a week after it announced the killing of a French spy, Denis Alex, it was holding hostage." - *BBC, February 4*

February 5, 2013 (BULGARIA): The Bulgarian government completed its six-month inquiry into the bus bombing that killed five Israelis in Burgas, Bulgaria, in July 2012. The inquiry found that two suspects—who held Australian and Canadian passports—were directly linked to the militant wing of Iranian Hizb Allah. The report also found that "initial investigations—including the discovery of the bomber's head at the scene of the attack—suggested the strike may have been a suicide bombing. But officials now believe the device may have been remote-controlled, or accidentally detonated by the bomber." - *BBC, February 5*

February 5, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked an Iraqi Army checkpoint in Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad, killing at least three people. It was the second suicide attack in two days in the town. - *Reuters, February 5*

February 6, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb exploded in a military intelligence compound in Palmyra in eastern Syria, causing at least a dozen casualties among security personnel. - *Reuters, February 6*

February 6, 2013 (SOMALIA): An improvised explosive device struck a vehicle carrying Ethiopian soldiers in Baidoa, reportedly killing two of them. - *Garowe Online, February 7*

February 7, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A new report in Pakistan's *The News International* claims that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have created a joint special unit with the prime mission to attack prisons and free jailed militants. The unit, called Ansar al-Aseer (Supporters of Prisoners), is reportedly led by Adnan Rasheed, who himself escaped from prison in April 2012 after 200 Taliban militants attacked the Central Jail in Bannu, where he was held. Rasheed was in prison for trying to assassinate former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. - *The News International, February 7*

February 7, 2013 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab fighters ambushed Ethiopian troops between El Barde and Hudur, resulting in an unspecified number of casualties. - *Garowe Online, February 7*

February 8, 2013 (IRAQ): Two car bombs exploded at a vegetable market in the Shi'a city of Hilla, Babil Province, killing 15 people. - *Reuters, February 8*

February 8, 2013 (IRAQ): Two car bombs exploded at a bus stop near a street market in a Shi'a area of Baghdad, killing at least 16 people. - *Reuters, February 8*

February 8, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. drone killed nine alleged militants in South Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Seven of the dead were

reportedly members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, while two were allegedly members of al-Qa`ida. - *Dawn, February 8*

February 8, 2013 (MALI): Former U.S. Ambassador to Mali Vicki Huddleston said that France paid \$17 million in ransom to free hostages seized from a French uranium mine in Niger in September 2010, money that allowed groups such as al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb to "buy weapons and recruit." In February 2011, three of the hostages, including a Frenchwoman, were freed. According to the Associated Press, Huddleston's allegations "strengthened the view that the Mali rebellion was funded largely by ransoms paid in recent years." French officials have denied paying ransoms. - *AP, February 9*

February 8, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle attacked a military checkpoint in Gao in northern Mali, wounding one Malian soldier. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), a group linked to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, took responsibility. The incident marked the first suicide bombing in northern Mali since the start of the French-led military offensive in January 2013. - *Voice of America, February 8; AFP, February 8*

February 8, 2013 (NIGERIA): Suspected gunmen from the Boko Haram group killed at least nine women vaccinating children against polio in Kano in northern Nigeria. - *Guardian, February 8*

February 9, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber in military fatigues detonated explosives near a checkpoint at the entrance to Gao, wounding one soldier. Authorities said that the bomber was Arab and a suspected member of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). A suicide bomber attacked the same checkpoint the previous day. - *AP, February 10*

February 10, 2013 (GLOBAL): Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the brother of al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, told a reporter that "if America does not stop (its) violations or attacks, there will not be just one Ayman al-Zawahiri, but all Muslims will

(become like) Ayman al-Zawahiri.” Muhammad, who denies he is a member of al-Qa`ida, was freed from prison following the revolution that unseated Hosni Mubarak. He was in jail for 13 years on militancy charges. According to *USA Today*, Muhammad al-Zawahiri, who is 61-years-old, “is portrayed by Egyptian newspapers as a leader of some of Egypt’s Salafis, who follow a radical ideology.” Muhammad defended his brother in the interview, saying that the al-Qa`ida leader “is trying to defend against part of the aggression. We didn’t attack the United States first, but they attacked us.” Muhammad publicly supported the Islamist insurgency in Mali and said that those who refuse to support it are traitors to their religion, according to the Associated Press. – *USA Today, February 10*

February 10, 2013 (THAILAND): A car bomb killed five soldiers in Yala Province in southern Thailand. – *Voice of America, February 10*

February 11, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least eight people at a military checkpoint in Mosul, Ninawa Province. – *RFE/RL, February 11*

February 11, 2013 (SOMALIA): An al-Shabab suicide bomber in a vehicle targeted a senior police official in Galkayo, wounding the official and killing four people. – *Voice of America, February 11; AFP, February 11*

February 12, 2013 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) reportedly said that a drone strike last month killed the group’s top religious cleric, Shaykh Adel al-Abab, in Shabwa Province. “A drone strike had targeted Sheikh Adel al-Abab’s vehicle but he escaped and fled to a mountainous region where a raid by another drone killed him immediately,” a source close to AQAP told Agence France-Presse. – *AFP, February 12*

February 13, 2013 (THAILAND): At least 60 insurgents attacked a military base in Narathiwat Province in southern Thailand. The military, which reportedly knew of the attack in advance, killed at least 16 of the militants. The military said it suffered

no casualties. – *Deutsche Welle, February 13; BBC, February 13*

February 14, 2013 (GLOBAL): The U.S. Treasury Department announced that it was freezing any assets of Yahya Abu al-Hamman, identified as the leader of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb’s Sahel branch. – *Reuters, February 14*

February 14, 2013 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least four police officers in Dagestan, located in Russia’s North Caucasus region. As stated by the Associated Press, “Russia’s North Caucasus and Dagestan in particular has for years been plagued by Islam-inspired insurgency which spread throughout the area after two separatist wars in Chechnya.” – *RFE/RL, February 14; AP, February 14*

February 14, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed seven people at a Frontier Corps checkpoint in Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – *The News International, February 14*

February 16, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden water tanker targeted Shi`a Muslims at a crowded marketplace in Hazara, on the outskirts of Quetta. The explosion killed 83 people. According to a Quetta police official, the water tanker carried between 1,760-2,200 pounds of explosives. The sectarian militant group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi claimed responsibility. – *CNN, February 17*

February 16, 2013 (SOMALIA): A car bomb exploded at a restaurant near Mogadishu’s Liido beach, causing an unknown number of casualties. – *Garowe Online, February 16*

February 16, 2013 (NIGERIA): The Nigerian militant group Ansaru, which broke from Boko Haram, attacked a local prison in Bauchi State, and then targeted a worker’s camp for construction company Setraco, kidnapping seven foreign workers from the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy and Lebanon. The militants shot and killed one guard at the camp. On March 9, Ansaru said

that they had killed all seven hostages in response to attempts by the United Kingdom and Nigeria to free them. The statement included screen shots of a video purportedly showing a number of dead hostages. – *AP, February 17; Vanguard, February 23; Reuters, March 9*

February 17, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan authorities captured Pakistani Taliban leader Maulvi Faqir Muhammad in Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan. According to the *New York Times*, “Muhammad, believed to be in his 40s, fled to Afghanistan in 2010 after an offensive by Pakistan’s military on his stronghold in the Bajaur tribal agency...Muhammad continued to attack Pakistani forces in Bajaur after taking refuge in the isolated valleys of Kunar and Nuristan Provinces in northeastern Afghanistan.” – *New York Times, February 19*

February 17, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber killed Ali Aouni, the head of Iraq’s intelligence academy, outside his home in Tal Afar. The explosion also killed three of his bodyguards. – *Global Post, February 16*

February 17, 2013 (IRAQ): At least eight car bombs tore through Baghdad, killing 28 people in Shi`a districts in the city. The Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility. According to Reuters, “Insurgents are stepping up attacks at a time when [Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki] is facing two months of protests by thousands of Sunni Muslims in western provinces, who accuse his government of marginalising their sect.” – *Reuters, February 18*

February 19, 2013 (CAMEROON): Boko Haram kidnapped seven French tourists, including four children, in northwest Cameroon. According to Agence France-Presse, “A Western diplomat in the region told AFP that six armed kidnapers on three motorbikes abducted a couple, their four children and an uncle in the northern [Cameroon] village of Dabanga near the Nigerian border.” Boko Haram later claimed responsibility. On February 26, Boko Haram released a video showing the kidnapped family, saying that if the group’s demands are not met, “we

will kill these hostages.” Boko Haram demanded that Nigeria and Cameroon release jailed members of the group. – *Telegraph, February 19; Premium Times, March 18; CNN, February 26*

February 21, 2013 (UNITED KINGDOM): A UK court found three men guilty of planning a terrorism campaign in the United Kingdom, raising money for terrorism and recruiting others for a terrorist act. The men, Irfan Naseer, Irfan Khalid and Ashik Ali, were based in Birmingham and planned to use eight suicide bombers, armed with guns, to cause “carnage” in the United Kingdom. According to the *Telegraph*, “Naseer, a pharmacy student, had planned to extract ammonium nitrate—used as [the] main explosive—from sports injury cold packs...They also considered other forms of attack such [as] putting poison in hand cream to rub on car and door handles or even putting blades on the front of a vehicle and driving it into a crowd of people.” – *Telegraph, February 21*

February 21, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed at least 53 people near Syria’s ruling party headquarters in Damascus. – *AP, February 22*

February 21, 2013 (KENYA): Gunmen shot and killed seven people—five men and two women—in an attack on a mosque in northeastern Kenya near the Somali border. – *BBC, February 21*

February 22, 2013 (IRAQ): Gunmen wearing Iraqi army uniforms shot and killed seven members of a government-backed militia in Tuz Khurmato, 105 miles north of Baghdad. – *Reuters, February 22*

February 22, 2013 (MALI): Two suicide bombers in separate vehicles targeted civilians as well as members of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) near Tessalit in northern Mali, killing three people. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. The MNLA is a Tuareg separatist group that is now working with the French military in northern Mali. – *AFP, February 22; Voice of America, February 22*

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a police checkpoint in Pul-i-Alam on the main highway between Kabul and Logar Province, killing one policeman. – *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24*

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked the National Directorate of Security compound in Jalalabad, killing two Afghan intelligence agents. – *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24*

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle was shot to death before he could trigger his explosives in Kabul’s diplomatic enclave of Wazir Akbar Khan. – *Dawn, February 24; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24*

February 24, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives vest while being searched at the entrance to the police headquarters for Baraki Barak district in Logar Province, wounding one policeman. – *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 24*

February 26, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): The U.S.-led military coalition in Afghanistan said that it mistakenly reported a decline in Taliban attacks for the year 2012. According to a report in Fox News, “The U.S.-led coalition had incorrectly reported a 7 percent decline in Taliban attacks last year. In fact, there was no change in the number of attacks on international troops from 2011 to 2012...A spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition said the mistakes were noticed ‘during a quality control check.’” – *Fox News, February 26; BBC, February 26*

February 26, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban militants poisoned members of a government-backed militia at an outpost in Ghazni Province. After the militia members became incapacitated, the militants shot and killed them. The attack left 10 militia members and seven of their civilian friends dead. The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility, but said that the men were shot and killed in their sleep and that no poison was involved. – *Guardian, February 27*

February 26, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber slid underneath a bus filled with Afghan soldiers in Kabul, wounding six soldiers and four civilians. According to the *Guardian*, “The man, wearing a black overcoat, approached the bus purposefully in heavy morning snow as soldiers were boarding, set down his umbrella and went under the chassis as if to fix something, according to a witness.” He then detonated his explosives. – *Guardian, February 27*

February 26, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives at a checkpoint run by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in Kidal, killing at least six MNLA fighters. The MNLA is a Tuareg separatist group that is now working with the French military in northern Mali. – *Voice of America, February 27*

February 28, 2013 (LIBYA): Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan demanded that militias evacuate their buildings and headquarters, promising that the government would be decisive in dealing with armed groups that have hijacked the country. He said that Libya “will not be lenient and we will not permit hijacking of Tripoli or Benghazi or any other city.” – *AP, February 28*

February 28, 2013 (TURKEY): A Turkish news agency reported that police have arrested 11 people with suspected links to al-Qa`ida, as well as seizing 55 pounds of plastic explosives, in simultaneous raids in Istanbul and Tekirdag Province. The police reportedly recovered photographs of the U.S. Consulate, a synagogue and a church in Istanbul. – *AP, February 28*

February 28, 2013 (PAKISTAN): Militants bombed four boys’ schools in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. There were no casualties. According to a Pakistani official, Taliban attacks have now destroyed more than 100 schools in Mohmand Agency. – *Dawn, February 28*

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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.

February 28, 2013 (THAILAND): For the first time since the start of the current insurgency in southern Thailand in 2004, Thailand's government said that it will hold formal peace talks with a major Muslim rebel group in March. According to Reuters, "The talks follow a shift in Thailand's stance last year when it acknowledged the conflict's 'political nature' for the first time after years of relying on military action... in the southern provinces." Since 2004, the insurgency in southern Thailand has claimed more than 5,000 lives. According to Reuters, "Resistance to Buddhist rule from Bangkok has existed for decades in the predominantly Muslim provinces in the south, waning briefly in the 1990s before resurfacing violently in January 2004." - *Reuters, February 28*

February 28, 2013 (MALI): Algerian television reported that French forces in Mali have killed Abdelhamid Abu Zeid, a leading commander in al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The station said that Abu Zeid was killed three days earlier in the region of Tigargara in northern Mali. On March 23, France confirmed "with certainty" that Abu Zeid was killed during a French offensive at the end of February. - *Reuters, February 28; Reuters, March 23; New York Times, March 23*