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# CTC SENTINEL

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## About the CTC Sentinel

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

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# Syria Proving More Fertile Than Iraq to Al-Qa`ida's Operations

By Brian Fishman



Members of Jabhat al-Nusra take part in a parade in Aleppo calling for an Islamic state in Syria. - Photo by Karam al-Masri/AFP/Getty

**A**L-QA`IDA'S OPERATION IN Syria is both its most dangerous and dysfunctional. Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri's rebuke of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in which he ordered it to focus solely on Iraq and defer authority in Syria to Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), is evidence that terrorist groups can still pose a significant threat even when plagued by internal divisions.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, despite al-Qa`ida's internal strife in Syria, the context in which it operates is deeply advantageous compared to other environments, including Iraq.

The dramatic growth of al-Qa`ida affiliates in Syria is a direct result of its preexisting networks in Iraq. These networks were built in 2004 and 2005,

became nearly dominant in 2006 and 2007, and then suffered a dramatic series of setbacks at the hands of the U.S. military and the famed Sunni Awakening. Those setbacks were a result of endogenous conditions and exogenous factors.<sup>2</sup> They were enough to deeply damage al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI),<sup>3</sup> but not enough to destroy it. As a result, when the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad turned violent in Syria, AQI was ready

<sup>2</sup> This framing borrows heavily from Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman eds., *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of clarity, this article refers to the 2006-2007 al-Qa`ida affiliate in Iraq as al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) rather than the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which was its formal appellation from October 2006 until changing its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2012.

<sup>1</sup> "Al-Qaeda's Zawahiri Disbands Main Faction Operating in Syria," al-Arabiya, November 9, 2013.

to take advantage in a country where the context was quite different than Iraq.

This article compares the AQI of 2006-2007 to JN and the ISIL<sup>4</sup> today with the objective of estimating the relative danger of the latter two groups. It first looks at the endogenous and exogenous constraints on AQI during its zenith, before examining whether those same factors will weaken JN and the ISIL in Syria. The article finds that the growth of JN and the ISIL in Syria poses a significantly larger global threat than their precursor, AQI, during the height of its strength in 2006-2007. Moreover, there are signs that JN and ISIL are likely to remain powerful militant actors for a sustained period, unlike the earlier iteration of AQI, which was significantly weakened by the Sunni Awakening just as its power was peaking. Compared to AQI's earlier incarnation, JN and the ISIL are more likely to sustainably control territory, project power around the region, possibly sponsor global terrorist attacks, and catalyze a new generation of jihadist insurrection.

#### AQI's Endogenous Weaknesses

AQI suffered from three primary endogenous weaknesses that constrained its operations: ideological extremism, expansive and shifting strategic goals and limited operational capacity.

#### *Ideological Extremism*

From its founding in 2004, AQI embraced an expansive notion of *takfir*—excommunication, or the act of declaring that a Muslim is not truly a Muslim—both in terms of the types of people who were eligible for this designation and by virtually eliminating any standard for who was qualified to make that weighty declaration.<sup>5</sup> By doing so, AQI established a predilection for extreme violence conducted by largely independent operating commanders.<sup>6</sup>

4 This article uses the name the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant to refer to the Iraq-based al-Qa`ida organization that operates in both Iraq and Syria and was recently chastised by al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri.

5 For more, see Mohammed Hafez, "Tactics, Takfir, and Anti-Muslim Violence," in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions Within al-Qa`ida and Its Periphery* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010).

6 Mohammed Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (Washing-

ton, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2007).

For obvious reasons, federating what it meant to define ideological purity made it difficult for AQI to build coalitions with other militant groups—even those with similar ideologies, such as Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna—or tribal factions. This isolation deeply undermined AQI's ability to govern territory that it seized.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Expansive and Shifting Strategic Goals*

AQI had expansive strategic goals. After October 2006, AQI aimed to govern areas it controlled in Iraq, and celebrated that shift by changing its name to the Islamic State of Iraq (an obvious precursor to the ISIL).<sup>8</sup> The determination to build an Islamic state, however, put AQI out-of-step with many Iraqi Sunnis who felt a sense of nationalism even as they were isolated from governing institutions. AQI's attempts to impose draconian social policies on a population unaccustomed to them alienated AQI from their would-be constituency, and that led the group to spend as much time fighting its potential allies as it did trying to overthrow the Shi`a-led government of Iraq. AQI's strategy aimed to provoke a Shi`a backlash against Sunnis that AQI would rebuke, thereby winning the hearts and minds of that constituency. Yet attempting to establish a jihadist state in a majority Shi`a country by challenging the existing tribal social framework was a course fraught with risk from the start.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Limited Operational Capacity*

AQI's strategy was ultimately undermined by its operational weakness. Although AQI was strong enough to provoke a Shi`a backlash, it was too weak to adequately defend Iraqi Sunnis. Additionally, AQI had few mechanisms to improve its human capital. AQI depended on foreign fighters for the suicide bombers that were central to its

ton, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2007).

7 Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

8 Brian Fishman, "Fourth Generation Governance: Sheikh Tamimi Defends the Islamic State," Combating Terrorism Center, March 23, 2007.

9 See Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi's letter to al-Qa`ida's leadership, which was released to the media in February 2004. The relationship between Ansar al-Sunna and AQI was occasionally hostile. For example, see Brian Fishman, "Ansar al-Sunnah Threatens al-Qa`ida in Iraq," Combating Terrorism Center, February 26, 2007.

operational success, and its personnel vetting and training programs were inadequate despite collecting a wide range of information on its volunteers.<sup>10</sup> When fighters with Western passports entered Iraq, they were funneled directly into the suicide bomber pipeline, just

**“Compared to AQI's earlier incarnation, JN and the ISIL are more likely to sustainably control territory, project power around the region, possibly sponsor global terrorist attacks, and catalyze a new generation of jihadist insurrection.”**

like others with less useful credentials.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, AQI's lack of safe haven in Iraq meant that foreign fighters posed serious security risks because their accents and lack of local knowledge stood out.<sup>12</sup>

#### AQI's Exogenous Weaknesses

The U.S. strategy to apply exogenous pressure on AQI exploited these endogenous weaknesses. The United States succeeded in four key areas to limit AQI's success: seizing operational initiative and battlespace control, limiting foreign support, giving AQI allies alternatives, and reining in the sectarian fight.

#### *Seizing Operational Initiative and Battlespace Control*

The U.S. Special Operations Forces campaign against AQI meant that no AQI base or safe house was secure. From 2006 to 2008, AQI did not have an operational safe haven in Iraq, let alone a strategic one. By killing

10 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qaeda's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007).

11 Ibid.

12 For example, see the Combating Terrorism Center's Harmony document collection, including: NMEC-2007-657700, NMEC-2007-657739, NMEC-2007-612449. These documents are available at [www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program).



key AQI leaders and disrupting communications, the United States denied AQI the ability to effectively train its recruits or communicate with its operational leaders, which exacerbated the extremist tendencies built into AQI's ideology.<sup>13</sup> This was true even after AQI's leadership intended to moderate its interaction with other Sunni groups in Iraq. Without such guidance, and considering AQI's ideological disposition, it is not surprising that operational leaders often defaulted toward radical—and often counterproductive—conflict with other Sunni groups. In other words, AQI's operational extremism—and the backlash it caused—was likely the result of both endogenous ideological radicalism and bad training and guidance encouraged by exogenous pressure from counterterrorism forces.

#### *Limiting Foreign Support*

Despite widespread opposition to the invasion of Iraq, foreign fighters joining AQI were engaged in an illicit endeavor. Governments allied with the United States criticized the U.S. invasion, but intelligence around the region worked to stem the flow of fighters and funds, often at U.S. urging.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Giving AQI Allies Alternatives*

The Sunni Awakening in Iraq did not destroy AQI, but U.S. financial and military support for tribal groups did encourage rebellion against jihadist elements.<sup>15</sup> The efforts by the United States were productive, just not decisive.

#### *Reining in the Sectarian Fight*

AQI's ideology was inherently sectarian, and the specter of Shi'a-supremacist and Iran-affiliated elements in the Iraqi government was useful for AQI's outreach strategy to recalcitrant Sunnis, pushing a narrative that saw Sunnis defending

themselves against Shi'a oppressors who would kill their families. The Baghdad security plan that separated Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods, targeted Shi'a militias along with AQI, and efforts to cleanse key Iraqi state institutions—such as the Ministry of Interior—weakened AQI's argument to Iraqi Sunnis that they were the only counterforce to Shi'a domination.

#### **The ISIL's and JN's Endogenous Weaknesses**

When comparing AQI's weaknesses in Iraq with the ISIL's and JN's in Syria, it becomes clear that the combination of endogenous weaknesses and exogenous pressure that led to AQI's setbacks in 2008 was unlikely to be replicated in the near-term. Although the jihadist groups in Syria have significant endogenous weaknesses, they generally operate in a more permissive environment, and applying effective exogenous pressure against them is proving more difficult.

#### *Ideological Extremism*

JN and the ISIL are both disposed to extreme ideological positions out of step with Syria's more secular traditions.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, neither has engaged in mass declarations of *takfir* and systematic repudiation of Syrian social structures like AQI did in Iraq. Although this may be simply a temporary tactical effort, it nonetheless illustrates a predilection for moderation not often shown by AQI. JN in particular touts a hybrid Syrian and jihadist character. Nevertheless, the ISIL continues Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's tradition of conflict with other jihadists, both asserting control over JN in Syria and repudiating Ayman al-Zawahiri's authority over its actions.<sup>17</sup> This intransigence has led to the ISIL falling out with Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, although JN, and even the ISIL, have surpassed AQI's efforts to relate to non-jihadists, they nonetheless fall into the same fighting against other militants, such as the Free

Syrian Army (FSA), that has hampered jihadists from Algeria, Kunar Province, and Iraq.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Expansive and Shifting Strategic Goals*

In Syria, the problem is less that al-Qa`ida's affiliates have expansive goals, but that they have divergent ones. Whereas JN remains focused primarily on evicting Bashar al-Assad from power, the ISIL is increasingly content to consolidate governing control over areas of Syria outside of al-Assad's control.<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with AQI's approach to state building in Iraq, but is being implemented in an environment much more conducive to that goal. Whereas Iraq's population was 60% Shi'a, Syria's population is 74% Sunni.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the ISIL's strategy of partition seems out-of-step with Syrians who initiated the uprising with the nationalist goal of keeping Syria unified by evicting al-Assad.

#### *Limited Operational Capacity*

Perhaps the simplest and most obvious explanation of JN's and the ISIL's prospects for power projection and sustainability is that these groups are stronger than AQI was in Iraq. They now include up to 12,000 fighters combined.<sup>22</sup> The ISIL is also bringing in much larger numbers of foreign fighters—including Europeans—many of whom are learning to use sophisticated weapons and small unit tactics rather than simply being ushered into suicide

13 See NMEC-2007-612449 in particular. Also see the story of AQI's clash with the Islamic Army of Iraq in Brian Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside al-Qa`ida in Iraq* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2009).

14 Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq and Foreign Volunteers* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005).

15 See, for example, David J. Kilcullen, "Field Notes on Iraq's Tribal Revolt Against Al-Qa`ida," *CTC Sentinel* 1:11 (2008).

16 Kristen Chick, "Veil Ban: Why Syria Joins Europe in Barring the Niqab," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 20, 2010; "In Secular Syria, Top Muslim Cleric Picks Sides in Civil War," National Public Radio, March 12, 2013; Omar Hossino, "Syria's Secular Revolution Lives On," *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2013.

17 Despite al-Zawahiri's order that the ISIL should be abolished, the group continues to operate in Syria under that name.

18 "Al-Qaeda's Zawahiri Disbands Main Faction Operating in Syria," al-Arabiya, November 9, 2013.

19 Lauren Williams, "Islamist Militants Drive Free Syrian Army Out of Raqqa," *Daily Star* [Beirut], August 15, 2013.

20 See, for example, Bruce Hoffman's quote: "They want to carve out a jihadi state or a jihadi territory and obviously anything above that is gravy, like overthrowing the Assad regime. I don't think they have ambitions of taking over the entire country, although they'd be happy to." See Ben Hubbard, "Qaeda Branch in Syria Pursues Its Own Agenda," *New York Times*, October 1, 2013.

21 "The World Factbook: Iraq," Central Intelligence Agency, November 5, 2013; "The World Factbook: Syria," Central Intelligence Agency, October 25, 2013.

22 Charles Lister, "Syria's Insurgency Beyond Good Guys and Bad Guys," *Foreign Policy*, September 9, 2013. Estimates of AQI fighters range considerably, from about 1,000 up to several thousand. See Ned Parker, "Iraq Insurgency Said to Include Many Saudis," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2007. Thomas Hegghammer estimated that 4,000 foreign fighters entered Iraq. See Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35:3 (2010/2011).

attacks.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, it is far easier for foreign fighters to enter Syria than it was Iraq.<sup>24</sup> Larger numbers, better training and a higher survival rate are likely to produce a larger “bleedout” of foreign fighters from Syria than Iraq. Despite reasoned claims that the vast majority of foreign fighters will not go on to become active jihadists, the

## “Larger numbers, better training and a higher survival rate are likely to produce a larger ‘bleedout’ of foreign fighters from Syria compared to Iraq.”

scale of jihadist veterans from Syria significantly raises the risk that some will pursue al-Qa`ida’s ends in the future.<sup>25</sup> The ISIL’s command-and-control capability is mixed. The group increasingly clashes with other militants in a manner reminiscent of the ISI, but it has also avoided such confrontation and engaged in a coherent public relations strategy to improve its image among Syrians and outsiders alike.<sup>26</sup>

### The ISIL’s and JN’s Exogenous Weaknesses

On balance, AQI’s Syrian descendants face fewer endogenous weaknesses when compared to AQI: demographics favor them, external support is more forthcoming, and they are perceived as legitimate actors outside of al-Qa`ida’s usual band of narrow supporters. The

23 Michael Birnbaum and Souad Mekhennet, “As Son Heads to Syrian Front, Family in Germany Plots Kidnapping to Bring Him Back,” *Washington Post*, November 11, 2013. In July 2013, Hegghammer and Zelin estimated that more than 5,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria, a number that has certainly increased since then. See Thomas Hegghammer and Aaron Zelin, “How Syria’s Civil War Became a Holy Crusade,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 7, 2013.

24 There are a number of reasons for this. Europeans and other foreign fighters are able to take a train or airplane to Turkey, and then enter across the Turkey-Syria border. The Iraq-Syria border is another major crossing route.

25 Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,” *American Political Science Review* 107:1 (2013).

26 Ben Hubbard, “Rebels Push for Ceasefire in Border Stand-Off,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2013.

real difference, however, is that they face much less exogenous pressure.

### Seizing Operational Initiative and Battlespace Control

JN and the ISIL have more safe havens than AQI ever had in Iraq. The Syrian military has been denied access to vast swaths of Syria for months and there is not a U.S. Special Operations campaign or drone program to keep JN and the ISIL unbalanced. Those safe havens mean that JN and the ISIL can mitigate their ideological extremism through better training, and foreign fighters can be vetted and trained more thoroughly because they are less of a security hazard than foreign fighters were in Iraq. That capability both improves JN’s and the ISIL’s effectiveness in Syria, but it also increases the possibility that elements in these groups will attempt to operate outside of Syria and Iraq. In the past, pressure from al-Qa`ida’s core leadership prevented AQI from expanding its area of operations—most notably in late 2005 after AQI attacked Western hotels in Jordan. The ISIL in particular has rejected Ayman al-Zawahiri’s authority and implicitly asserts that their vision extends to the entire Levant.<sup>27</sup>

### Limiting Foreign Support

Whereas U.S. allies generally supported efforts to prevent foreign fighters from flowing to Iraq (Bashar al-Assad, ironically, turned a blind eye as jihadists flowed through Damascus airport to Iraq), even close U.S. allies such as Turkey, which has allegedly backed JN skirmishes against Kurds in Syria, and Qatar have tolerated or supported jihadist activity in Syria.<sup>28</sup> This policy dramatically increases the risk of bleedout in the future and has bolstered Bashar al-Assad politically by allowing him to use the threat of sectarian jihadists to maintain cohesion within his regime.

27 For more on this argument, see Brian Fishman, “Redefining the Islamic State of Iraq: The Fall and Rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq,” *New America Foundation*, August 18, 2011.

28 Dan Murphy, “US Designates Syria’s Jabhat al-Nusra Front a ‘Terrorist’ Group at Lightning Speed,” *Security Watch*, December 10, 2012; “Turkey and the Syrian Kurds: A Little-Notice Battle,” *Economist*, September 25, 2013.

### Giving JN/ISIL Allies Alternatives

In Iraq, providing alternatives to Sunni militants meant providing military support for tribal militias, which was both useful practically and an important symbol of U.S. intent, while simultaneously working with the Iraqi government to legitimize their role in society.<sup>29</sup> In Syria, fear of accidentally supporting jihadist groups has restrained U.S. policymakers from providing weapons and there is no indication that a sustainable accommodation between FSA units and the al-Assad government is near. A program to support the FSA with weapons would be useful, although it would be prone to abuse by jihadist groups.

### Reining in the Sectarian Fight

Much of the U.S. effort to prevent sectarian war in Iraq boiled down to segregation. The United States has no ability to separate the combatants in Syria, but a de facto—and very bloody—separation is occurring.<sup>30</sup> Despite the ISIL’s focus on consolidating governance in territory it controls, the group will not allow for a cease-fire with the al-Assad regime. The specter of continued conflict with al-Assad significantly bolsters al-Qa`ida in Syria, contrary to the notion advanced by some that the conflict bleeds and weakens jihadist groups.

### Conclusion

Al-Qa`ida in Iraq was always fighting an uphill battle: it “incorporated” in a country dominated by a sect it despised, while 100,000 of the most capable soldiers in the world vigilantly attempted to crush it. The dissolution of Syria has dramatically changed that context.

JN and the ISIL are far more likely than AQI was during the U.S. occupation of Iraq to sustain control of territory. Safe havens—such as those in Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example—have notably been a precondition for well-organized al-Qa`ida attacks against Western targets. Indeed, the controversial drone tactics used in Pakistan and Yemen were designed to prevent the sort of safe

29 Greg Bruno, “The Role of the ‘Sons of Iraq’ in Improving Security,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 2008.

30 Arthur Bright, “Baghdad’s Sunni/Shiite Security Wall,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 2007.

haven now developing in northeastern Syria.

These safe havens increase the risk that al-Qa`ida affiliates in Syria will project power abroad. The ISIL's regional re-branding, despite Ayman al-Zawahiri's determination to roll that back, means it now publicly acknowledges regional aspirations in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. These aspirations have always been latent in AQI, but were suppressed in earlier years when al-Qa`ida central ordered the group to focus on Iraq.<sup>31</sup> Bleedout from Syria is likely to be significantly worse than Iraq as well. Not only are far more foreign fighters entering the conflict, they are playing much more complex roles as fighters and commanders rather than simply as fodder for suicide attacks. Considering that the most important role of a veteran jihadist is as a trainer and motivator, this outflow is worrisome. Although the worst fears of Iraq in 2006 were avoided, they have the potential to be realized in Syria.

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## Tracking Australian Foreign Fighters in Syria

By Andrew Zammit

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR has resulted in one of the largest mobilizations of foreign fighters since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Western countries were largely unaware of the threat that foreign fighters could pose to their own security. Today, governments in Europe and North America have expressed fears that foreign fighters in Syria will return to their home countries as committed jihadists with deadly skills and violent intent. This concern extends to Australia, where the Australian Federal Police have described the activities in Syria as "a real game changer" that will dramatically increase the threat of violent jihadism at home.<sup>2</sup>

This article examines the role of Australians in the Syrian insurgency, including the impact on Australia's domestic threat environment. It gathers what is currently known about the Australians involved in Syria, places this in the context of past Australian jihadist activity, and shows how the Syrian conflict has the potential to increase the domestic terrorism threat to Australia.

### The Australians in Syria

There have been six reported cases of Australians dying while fighting in the Syrian insurgency, but current information is limited and fragmentary. In most cases, it is difficult to confirm whether the six individuals were in fact involved in combat, and in some cases whether they were actually Australian.<sup>3</sup>

1 For Malet's definition of foreign fighters as "noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts," see David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identities in Civil Conflicts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 9. Also see Thomas Hegghammer and Aaron Zelin, "How Syria's Civil War Became a Holy Crusade," *Foreign Affairs*, July 7, 2013.

2 Cameron Stewart, "Is Syria Turning our Idealistic Youth into Hardened Jihadis?" *Australian*, April 27, 2013.

3 Much of the information about their alleged combat roles comes from jihadist forums and social media. Scholars in the area tend to consider information derived from the official jihadist forums and social media accounts as often reliable, but not authoritative. Consequently, sec-

The three most plausible cases are those of Roger Abbas, Yusuf Toprakkaya and a suicide bomber known only as "Abu Asma al-Australi."

Roger Abbas was an Australian citizen killed in Syria in October 2012.<sup>4</sup> He was 23-years-old, from Melbourne, of Lebanese background, and had been a champion kickboxer.<sup>5</sup> He was initially reported to have entered Syria through Turkey to carry out aid work.<sup>6</sup> A martyrdom notice, however, referring to him as "Abbas Rajah al-Tartousi," was placed on official jihadist forums such as Ansar al-Mujahidin and Shumukh al-Islam and claimed he fought with the al-Qa`ida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>7</sup> A documentary exploring the circumstances of his death found evidence supporting the claim that he was carrying out aid work, and arrived without prior connections to Syrian armed groups, but also found evidence that he had become involved with Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>8</sup>

In December 2012, another man from Melbourne, Yusuf Toprakkaya, was killed in Syria.<sup>9</sup> He was 30-years-old, married, of Turkish background and had been monitored by Australian authorities since at least 2010.<sup>10</sup> A YouTube clip posted by the al-Farouk Brigades referred to him as "Abu al-Walid al-Australi" and showed him handling weapons and priming detonators.<sup>11</sup> Toprakkaya arrived in Turkey in mid-2012, and like Abbas appears to have had no prior connections to Syrian rebel groups

tions in this article about the activities of particular individuals may require revision as more information comes to light.

4 Angus Thompson, "Melbourne Kickboxing Champion Roger Abbas Killed in Crossfire in Syria," *Australian Associated Press*, October 31, 2012.

5 Ibid.; "Lost in Syria," *Head First*, ABC Television, May 15, 2013.

6 Thompson.

7 Personal interview, Aaron Zelin, May 2013. On the importance of such forums for the global jihadist movement, see Aaron Zelin, "The State of Global Jihad Online: A Qualitative, Quantitative and Cross-Lingual Analysis," *New America Foundation*, January 2013.

8 "Lost in Syria."

9 Stephen Drill, "Mother's Grief After Yusuf Toprakkaya's Death in Syria Battle," *Herald Sun*, January 3, 2013.

10 Ibid.; Dan Box and Pia Akerman, "Syrian Rebels Eulogise Aussie 'Martyr,'" *Australian*, January 2, 2013.

11 Ibid.

31 Brian Fishman, "Redefining the Islamic State: The Fall and Rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq," *New America Foundation*, August 18, 2011. Al-Qa`ida in Iraq also had regional aspirations, attacking outside of Iraq five times before it was compelled by al-Qa`ida central to focus on Iraq: the failed chemical attack in Amman, Jordan, in April 2004; the attempted cross-border suicide attack in Jordan in December 2004; rockets fired at the Red Sea port of Aqaba; the attack on Western-owned hotels in Amman in November 2005; and a rocket strike from southern Lebanon into northern Israel in December 2005. See "Jordan Was 'Chemical Bomb' Target," *BBC News*, April 17, 2004; Sahar Aloul, "Zarqawi Handed Second Death Penalty in Jordan," *Lebanon Wire*, December 18, 2005; "Al-Zarqawi Group Claims Attack on U.S. Ships," *MSNBC*, August 23, 2005; "Al-Zarqawi Group Claims Attack on U.S. Ships," *MSNBC*, August 23, 2005; Ilene Prusher and Nicholas Blanford, "Al-Qaeda Takes Aim at Israel," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 13, 2006.



before his arrival.<sup>12</sup> Once in the region, he wandered along the border with Syria until he found a group willing to smuggle him into the warzone. He then hitched a ride to a village near the city of Maarat al-Numan, met members of a local brigade and declared his willingness to fight.<sup>13</sup> He had no

### **“In all, six Australian men so far are reported to have died in the Syrian conflict, some while fighting for Jabhat al-Nusra.”**

previous military experience but over the following months developed skills as a marksman and bomb-maker, before being killed in battle by a sniper.<sup>14</sup>

The most controversial incident involving an Australian in Syria occurred in mid-September 2013, when Jabhat al-Nusra stated that a man known as “Abu Asma al-Australi” executed a suicide bombing in the town of al-Mreiya, near Deir al-Zour.<sup>15</sup> The martyrdom notice claimed the man drove a truck loaded with 12 tons of explosives into a school with soldiers stationed in it,<sup>16</sup> and that the attack killed 35 Syrian soldiers and helped Jabhat al-Nusra seize the city’s military airport.<sup>17</sup> Australian Attorney General George Brandis confirmed that

12 Tracey Shelton, “An Australian in Syria: The Journey of a Foreign Fighter,” *Global Post*, March 4, 2013.

13 Ibid.

14 His death occurred during a battle for the Wadi al-Dayf military base. The assault against the base was led by Jabhat al-Nusra, but Toprakkaya was reported to be part of a separate group involved in the offensive. See Shelton. Also see “Australian Killed Fighting Alongside Syrian Rebels: Activists,” *Daily Star* [Beirut], January 2, 2013.

15 Natalie O’Brien and Nick Ralston, “Australian Man in Syria, ‘Abu Asma al-Australi,’ Suspected to be Suicide Bomber,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 14, 2013; Paul Maley and Dan Box, “Aussie in Syrian Suicide Attack as Fears Mount over Terror Training,” *Australian*, September 13, 2013.

16 O’Brien and Ralston; Michael Brissenden, “Australian Man Reportedly Blew Himself up in Suicide Bombing at Syrian Military Airport,” ABC News, September 14, 2013.

17 Ibid.

security agencies believe the bomber was Australian.<sup>18</sup> He is reported to be a 27-year-old man from Brisbane, of Lebanese background, who was married, and was already the subject of a terrorism investigation.<sup>19</sup>

There have been three other reported cases of Australians dying while actively supporting Syrian rebels, but less information is available for these incidents. In August 2012, for example, a well-known Sydney shaykh, Mustapha al-Majzoub, was killed in Syria.<sup>20</sup> Al-Majzoub was of Syrian heritage but born in Saudi Arabia, and his brother, Shaykh Fedaa al-Majzoub, was the only Australian member of the opposition Syrian National Council.<sup>21</sup> It was initially reported that he was killed in a rocket attack while delivering humanitarian aid.<sup>22</sup> Syrian rebel sources online, however, claimed that he died while commanding a military unit.<sup>23</sup> Reports also suggested that Australian authorities had monitored him prior to leaving Australia.<sup>24</sup> In November 2012, a man named Marwan al-Kassab died in an explosion in northern Lebanon while making bombs for Syrian rebels.<sup>25</sup> There were claims that the man was Australian, and a man by that name had previously been monitored by Australian authorities, but whether it was the same person remains unconfirmed.<sup>26</sup> In April 2013,

18 Paul Maley, “Terror Fight Returns as A-G’s Focus,” *Australian*, November 18, 2013.

19 Ibid.; Paul Maley and Dan Box, “Australia’s First Suicide Bomber Believed to be 27-Year-Old Brisbane Man Named on Social Media as ‘Abu Asma al-Australi,’” *Australian*, September 20, 2013; Renee Viellaris, Kris Crane and Kate McKenna, “Muslim Community in Logan Denies Suicide Bomber in Syria Was One of Their Own,” *Courier-Mail*, September 21, 2013.

20 Will Ockenden, “Sydney Sheikh Dies in Syria,” *ABC AM*, August 22, 2012; Leesha McKenny, “Sydney Sheikh Killed in Syria: Reports,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 21, 2012.

21 Ibid.

22 McKenny.

23 Mansour al-Hadji, “Contradicting Statements On The Mission Of Slain Prominent Australian Sheikh Mustapha Al-Majzoub In Syria,” Middle East Media Research Institute, August 30, 2012.

24 Paul Maley, “Sydney Sheikh Killed in Syria ‘An Extremist,’” *Australian*, August 22, 2012.

25 Paul Maley, “Death of Extremist Second Syria Link,” *Australian*, November 1, 2013.

26 Paul Maley, “Dual-National Aussies Answer Syria Rallying Call,” *Australian*, November 7, 2012.

a 22-year-old Melbourne man named Sammy Salma, who had traveled to Syria with Roger Abbas, was killed.<sup>27</sup> He was described as a martyr on jihadist websites but there is little to confirm that he had a combat role.<sup>28</sup>

In all, six Australian men are reported to have died in the Syrian conflict thus far, some while fighting for Jabhat al-Nusra. They have tended to be 30-years-old or younger, of Turkish, Syrian and Lebanese heritage, and several were known to authorities before leaving. They generally entered Syria through Turkey.

There are reportedly many other Australians fighting in Syria, with estimates ranging from 70 to over 200. The 200 figure first appeared in a newspaper article in April 2013,

### **“In the case of Syria, many of the Australian fighters appear to be entering via the Turkish border with few pre-existing connections to Syrian armed groups.”**

which cited an Australian government official, and has been used widely by the media since, but it was later disavowed by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) and former Foreign Minister Bob Carr.<sup>29</sup> A more credible estimate, reported in September 2013 and attributed to an anonymous senior official, is that 80 Australians are fighting or “involved in on-the-ground organisational

27 Nino Bucci, “Father’s Anguish Over Son’s Death in War-Torn Syria,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 19, 2013.

28 Nino Bucci, “Claims Australians Killed in Syria Were Fighters, Not Aid Workers,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 12, 2013; Caro Meldrum-Hanna, “Are Young Australian Muslims Being Radicalised on Home Soil?” *ABC* 7:30, May 30, 2013.

29 Paul Maley and Cameron Stewart, “Australians Answer the Syria Jihad Call,” *Australian*, April 13, 2013; Andrew Zammit, “About the Estimated 200 Australian Fighters in Syria Again,” The Murphy Raid blog, July 18, 2013; Sam Caldwell, “‘G’Day Damascus’: Does Australia Really Have the Biggest Contingent of Rebel Fighters in Syria?” *The Point Magazine*, August 2013.

roles” and that up to 20 are fighting with Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>30</sup> The fighters are reported to be primarily Lebanese-Australian dual citizens, with 70% of them previously known to authorities, and as having entered mainly through Turkey but some through Lebanon—all of which is consistent with the above information on those killed.<sup>31</sup>

### The Syrian Jihad in the Context of Past Australian Jihadist Activity

The Syrian conflict is not the first foreign fighter mobilization to involve Australians. From 1998-2003, roughly 20 Australians traveled to train in al-Qa`ida camps in Afghanistan and Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT) camps in Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> From 2002-2012, at least 16 Australians have been arrested in Lebanon, or charged in absentia, for alleged jihadist activities, mainly for involvement with Asbat al-Ansar and Fatah al-Islam.<sup>33</sup> Following the 2006 invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia, several Australians traveled to Somalia to fight for al-Shabab, with estimates ranging from 10 to 40.<sup>34</sup> There are also indications of Australians being involved in jihadist activity in Yemen, mainly during 2010.<sup>35</sup>

30 A small portion of the fighters, however, are reported to be fighting for the al-Assad regime. See Paul Maley and Dan Box, “Aussie in Syrian Suicide Attack as Fears Mount Over Terror Training,” *Australian*, September 13, 2013.

31 Maley and Box, “Aussie in Syrian Suicide Attack as Fears Mount Over Terror Training”; Maley and Stewart, “Australians Answer the Syria Jihad Call.”

32 David Irvine, “Protecting Secrets, Protecting People,” speech delivered at the Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria, November 10, 2013; Andrew Zammit, “Explaining a Turning Point in Australian Jihadism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36:9 (2013).

33 Fatah al-Islam is a militant Sunni Islamist group that is inspired by al-Qa`ida’s ideology. Its members are mostly Arabs from various Middle Eastern countries. It emerged in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in November 2006. Its goals are unclear but include the establishment of an Islamic state in northern Lebanon. Asbat al-Ansar is a Palestinian Salafi-jihadi group that was involved in a number of terrorist operations against Lebanese official targets in the past. Also see Shandon Harris-Hogan and Andrew Zammit, “The Unseen Terrorist Connection: Exploring Jihadist Links Between Lebanon and Australia,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, in press, 2014.

34 Richard Kerbaj, “Somalia ‘Jihad Drive’ Probed,” *Australian*, December 5, 2007; Alison Caldwell, “Somali Refugees Being Recruited by Terrorists: Islamic Expert,” *ABC PM*, April 13, 2007.

35 Andrew Zammit, “Sabirhan Hasanoff and Australia-

With the Syrian conflict, however, the scale is far greater. Even the lower estimates of Australians fighting exceed the highest estimates of Australian jihadists previously involved in conflicts overseas. This is unusual because Australia does not tend to have many people involved in jihadist activity (less than two dozen people in Australia have been convicted over involvement in jihadist terrorism plots).<sup>36</sup>

Several factors contribute to the unusually high level of Australian involvement with Syrian jihadist groups. First, jihadist activity in Australia has strong historical links with Lebanon, demonstrated by the familial connections of many previously convicted men as well as the numerous cases of Australians involved in such activity in Lebanon.<sup>37</sup> The Lebanon connection means that the conflict in Syria, a state that shares a border with Lebanon, has had greater relevance for potential Australian jihadists than insurgencies in Kashmir, Somalia, or Yemen.

Second, the Syrian theater is much easier to access because Turkey has been functioning as a “launching pad.”<sup>38</sup> In Australia’s previous foreign fighter mobilizations, well-connected individuals were usually needed to facilitate access to camps and conflict zones.<sup>39</sup> In the case of Syria, however, many of the Australian fighters appear to be entering via the Turkish border

Yemen Jihadist Connections,” The Murphy Raid blog, June 10, 2012.

36 Shandon Harris-Hogan, “The Australian Neojihadist Network: Origins, Evolution and Structure,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 5:6 (2012); Andrew Zammit, “Who Becomes a Jihadist in Australia? A Comparative Analysis,” ARC Linkage Project on Radicalisation – Conference 2010, Monash University, 2011.

37 Harris-Hogan and Zammit, “The Unseen Terrorist Connection: Exploring Jihadist Links Between Lebanon and Australia.”

38 “Turkey a Launching Pad for Syria-Bound al-Qaeda Jihadists, Experts Say,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 31, 2012.

39 On the need for facilitators in past cases of Australians engaging in jihadist activities overseas, see Zammit, “Explaining a Turning Point in Australian Jihadism.” Only in rare cases, such as David Hicks in Pakistan, did an Australian turn up with no known previous connections and manage to join a jihadist group. See Leigh Sales, *Detainee 002: The Case of David Hicks* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007), pp. 20, 24–25.

with few pre-existing connections to Syrian armed groups.

Third, the Syrian conflict has broad appeal. The continuing massacres and the clear failure of the international community to prevent them has generated widespread outrage and allowed jihadist groups, including the

**“While the overwhelming majority of jihadist foreign fighters globally do not end up attacking their home countries, a small number do, and they prove more capable than those without military experience.”**

al-Qa`ida affiliates Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), to present themselves as the best capable forces to defend Sunni Muslims and to attract people who may initially have had no intention of joining these groups. This can draw new people into jihadist activity, broadening the Australian jihadist scene beyond the previous cluster of small, interconnected and closely monitored networks.

### The Threat at Home

The involvement of Australians in the Syrian insurgency has increased the potential for violent extremism on Australian soil in two ways. First, the conflict has already prompted sectarian violence in Australia, with Shi`a and Alawites being targeted by supporters of the rebellion and Sunnis being targeted by its opponents.<sup>40</sup> There have been 17 publicly reported incidents of Syria-related violence in Australia since early 2012.<sup>41</sup> The violence has mostly been by Sunni supporters of the insurgency

40 Sunni-Shi`a violence was rare in Australia prior to 2012.

41 Andrew Zammit, “List of Syria-Related Violent Incidents in Australia,” The Murphy Raid blog, June 30, 2013. As this list is based on events reported in the media, it may miss some incidents that were unreported, and there is also a chance that some incidents were misreported as being Syria-related when they may have had other motives.

targeting Shi'a and Alawite businesses, homes, and places of worship. The attacks have mainly occurred in Sydney and Melbourne and involved members of the Syrian, Lebanese and Turkish communities.<sup>42</sup> The incidents include assaults, property damage, arson and shootings. This violence decreased in 2013, but communal tensions and fears remain.<sup>43</sup>

The second danger is that some veterans of the war in Syria may attempt domestic terrorist attacks. While the overwhelming majority of jihadist foreign fighters globally do not end up attacking their home countries, a

**“Given the greater scale of the Syria mobilization, it has the potential to have an even greater impact on the domestic security threat.”**

small number do, and they prove more capable than those without military experience.<sup>44</sup> Australia's past jihadist terrorism plots were all closely tied to the earlier foreign fighter mobilizations. An al-Qa`ida plot in Sydney during the 2000 Olympics, an LeT plot in Sydney in 2003, and two self-starting cells disrupted in Melbourne and Sydney in 2005 all included individuals who had trained in al-Qa`ida and LeT camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>45</sup> A plot to carry

42 Zammit, “List of Syria-Related Violent Incidents in Australia.”

43 Of the 17 incidents reported in the media, if the four events for which the year of occurrence is unclear are excluded, 11 incidents occurred in 2012 and only two occurred this year. This suggests that 2012 was the peak year and the violence has not escalated since. There have been several arrests and prosecutions, and ASIO has noted that “strong leadership by the Islamic community leaders has so far helped largely contain communal tension of this sort in Australia.” See Zammit, “List of Syria-Related Violent Incidents in Australia”; “ASIO Report to Parliament 2012-13,” Australian Security Intelligence Organization, October 2013, p. 3.

44 Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,” *American Political Science Review* 107:1 (2013).

45 For the 2000 Sydney plot, see *R v. Roche*, 2005. For

out a mass shooting against Sydney's Holsworthy Army Barracks in 2009 involved Melbourne men who had functioned as a support network for al-Shabab, and who had dispatched others to train and fight in Somalia.<sup>46</sup> Given the greater scale of the Syria mobilization, it has the potential to have an even greater impact on the domestic security threat.

Several options have been posited to address this risk. The Federal Police's Deputy Commissioner for National Security Peter Drennan has said that control orders, which place various restrictions on liberty and have only been used twice in Australia before, may be necessary against some suspected returning fighters.<sup>47</sup> Both the Federal Police and the Attorney General's Department have released official statements warning that it is illegal to join the fighting, and in June 2013 the government proscribed Jabhat al-Nusra as a terrorist organization.<sup>48</sup> ASIO continues to confiscate passports from Australians suspected of traveling for terrorist purposes, and it confiscated 18 passports from mid-2012 to mid-2013, the largest number in any year.<sup>49</sup> Former Foreign Minister Bob Carr had explored ways of banning suspected fighters from returning, and the current immigration minister, Scott Morrison, has expressed support for the idea.<sup>50</sup>

the 2003 Sydney plot, see *R v. Lodhi*, 2006; Stuart Koschade, “The Internal Dynamics of Terrorist Cells: A Social Network Analysis of Terrorist Cells in an Australian Context,” Ph.D. dissertation, Queensland University of Technology, 2007, pp. 222-247; Sebastian Rotella, “The Man Behind Mumbai,” *ProPublica*, November 13, 2010. For the 2005 Melbourne cell, see *R v. Benbrika & Ors*, 2009; *R v. Kent*, 2009. For the 2005 Sydney cell, see *R v. Elomar & Ors*, 2010.

46 *R v. Fattal & Ors*, 2011.

47 Paul Maley and Cameron Stewart, “Federal Police Braces for New Terror Phase,” *Australian*, June 22, 2013.

48 “The Syrian Conflict: Australian Government Advice,” Australian Federal Police, August 29, 2012; “Ongoing Violence in Syria: Important information for Australian communities,” Australian Attorney General's Department, 2012; “Syria Group Listed Under Local Terror Laws,” Australian Associated Press, June 28, 2013.

49 “ASIO Report to Parliament 2012-13,” p. 16.

50 Paul Maley, “Carr Considered Banning Syria Fighters from Returning to Australia,” *Australian*, October 28, 2013; Jared Owens, “Morrison Flags Move to Shut Out Australian Veterans of Syrian War,” *Australian*, October 29, 2013.

There is no apparent legal basis for such a ban, however, and Australia has the intelligence capabilities and legal tools to take a more targeted approach.

**Conclusion**

The Syrian conflict is having an impact well beyond its borders, by drawing in neighboring countries like Turkey and Lebanon, becoming a magnet for jihadists around the world, and exacerbating sectarian tensions. For Australia, this has resulted in a foreign fighter mobilization on a scale not previously seen, sparked sectarian violence in Sydney and Melbourne, and provided a cause that could expand the country's traditionally small jihadist scene. This has been a dramatic development for jihadist activity in Australia, and therefore poses a key concern for security agencies.

The actual extent of the threat, however, remains unclear. For example, local sectarian violence has recently declined despite continuing tensions. The most serious threat posed is that some returning fighters will have the intention, and increased capability, to attack Australia. This possibility, however, depends on the numbers of people actually fighting, the groups with which they are fighting, and to who else they may be connected. Reliable information on these details is currently limited. What is clear is that the Syria mobilization could radically reshape jihadist activity in Australia, a security concern that needs to be closely monitored.

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## The Capture of Abu Anas al-Libi: Reactions and Militancy in Libya

By Alison Pargeter

THE APPREHENSION OF LIBYAN militant Nazih al-Ruqai, better known as Abu Anas al-Libi, by U.S. forces from outside his Tripoli home on October 5, 2013, shook Libya to its core. Not only were many Libyans outraged at what they perceived to be an infringement of national sovereignty, but many also turned their wrath against their own government, assuming that it must have played some kind of role in the operation.<sup>1</sup> The government's notably muted response to the incident, as well as assertions by al-Libi's wife that some of the commandos who seized her husband had local accents,<sup>2</sup> only fueled such perceptions and prompted a proliferation of angry responses.

Predictably, some of the most vocal responses came from within the Islamist camp. The ultraorthodox Dar al-Ifta—Libya's most senior official religious authority—issued a statement condemning the capture and hinted at possible government collusion.<sup>3</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood and its Justice and Construction Party took a similar line, both condemning the operation, but also demanding that the government explain rumors that it had prior knowledge of the incident. Indeed, it was notable that the criticisms by these organizations were directed more against the Libyan government than at the United States,

1 Condemnations came from an array of groups and individuals. The National Council for Public Freedoms and Human Rights—a civil society organization—for example, condemned the incident, which they described as a violation of national sovereignty and for which they held the government responsible. Abdelbaset al-Shehawi, a senior member of the Libyan intelligence service, meanwhile, accused the government, declaring, “I can't imagine that America would do such a thing without the knowledge of the Libyan state.” The spokesman of the General National Congress read a statement on behalf of the 200-seat parliament, describing the incident as “a flagrant violation of national sovereignty.” See *Libya Focus*, Menas Associates, October 2013.

2 “Libya Demands Explanation for US ‘Kidnapping’ of al-Qaida Leader al-Libi,” *Guardian*, October 7, 2013.

3 “Libya: Dar Al-Ifta Demands that the Transitional Government and the GNC Protect Libyans,” al-Manara, October 10, 2013.

suggesting that they saw in al-Libi's apprehension another means by which to attack the prime minister.

Wider and more forceful condemnations emanated from those of a more militant bent. Most notably, Libya's Ansar al-Shari'a<sup>4</sup> issued a strident statement on October 8, asserting, “we must seek to free the captive brother Abu Anas Nazih al-Ruqai from those unjust disbelievers who have seized the lands and violated the sanctities, with every legitimate way allowed by the pure Shari'a.”<sup>5</sup> The group also attacked the government, stressing, “The Libyan government today seeks only to strengthen its existence and power through presenting loyalty to these belligerent countries and offering them facilities in the country... Their planes watch us and violate our sanctities and spy on the private lives of Muslims without supervision as if this government forgot what happened to Qadhafi after he abandoned the Shari'a and allied with the disbelievers and fought against Islam.”<sup>6</sup>

This article examines the response of Ansar al-Shari'a and other Libyan Islamists to the apprehension of Abu Anas al-Libi. It finds that while much of the international focus has been on Ansar al-Shari'a, there are in fact many different groups and brigades operating across the country whose ideological outlook is not altogether dissimilar. More importantly, some of these groups are bound deep into the tapestry of the Libyan state. While these elements may have condemned al-Libi's seizure, their main preoccupation—for the time being, at least—is with entrenching themselves deeper in their own local areas, a development that may have serious repercussions for the country

4 Ansar al-Shari'a (Partisans of Shari'a) has emerged as a significant force in eastern Libya since the toppling of the former regime. It is more of a group or current than a specific militia or brigade. Like its counterparts in Tunisia and Yemen, its adherents follow an extremist ideology. Although the Libyan group insists it is not linked to al-Qa'ida, its leader in Benghazi, Mohammed Ali al-Zahawi, has expressed his approval of al-Qa'ida's strategy as well as statements issued by Ayman al-Zawahiri. See “Meeting Mohammad Ali al-Zahawi of Libyan Ansar al-Sharia,” BBC, September 18, 2012.

5 The statement, dated October 8, 2013, is available at [www.tinyurl.com/nldktm4](http://www.tinyurl.com/nldktm4).

6 Ibid.

as it struggles to pull itself through the political transition.

### Ansar al-Shari'a's Local Preoccupations

Ansar al-Shari'a members staged a demonstration in Benghazi against al-Libi's capture, and the group dedicated its Eid al-Adha charitable drive to the former al-Qa'ida operative. The Benghazi branch erected a large tent sporting a banner emblazoned with al-Libi's name above it in the city, to which impoverished locals were expected to come to pay their respects in return for receiving a sheep.<sup>7</sup> The group also posted videos dedicated to al-Libi on its Twitter feed and Facebook page showing its members distributing sheep, as well as foodstuffs and glossy leaflets packed up in branded plastic bags, to the poor.<sup>8</sup> In some ways, therefore, al-Libi's capture seemed to serve primarily as a tool in Ansar al-Shari'a's latest publicity drive.

Indeed, given the forcefulness of Ansar al-Shari'a's rhetoric over al-Libi's seizure, it is perhaps surprising that it has not launched a more robust response to the incident, especially given that it is operating in such a lawless environment. It is true that a bomb exploded outside the joint Swedish-Finnish consulate in Benghazi on October 11; however, there is no evidence to suggest that the attack was the work of Ansar al-Shari'a or that the blast had any direct link to al-Libi's capture.<sup>9</sup> In addition, like many of the other bomb attacks carried out in Libya in recent months, this explosive was detonated around 11:30 PM—suggesting that it was not meant to inflict mass casualties. Its likely purpose was to serve as a message, reminding foreign entities that they could be targeted at any time.

Ansar al-Shari'a's limited response may be attributable to the fact that while still a symbolic figure, al-Libi did not appear to be an active member of the Libyan militant scene or al-Qa'ida. He returned to Libya at the time of the 2011 revolution, but according to his family

7 Personal interview, former Libyan Islamist, London November 2013.

8 For Ansar al-Shari'a's Twitter feed, see [www.twitter.com/AnsarShariaa\\_ly](http://www.twitter.com/AnsarShariaa_ly).

9 Esad Mohamed, “Car Bomb Hits Swedish, Finnish Consulates in Libya,” Associated Press, October 11, 2013.

had not been involved with militant groups since his return. Rather, he seems to have wanted to put his militant past behind him. Former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) *amir*-turned-politician Abdelhakim Belhadj told the media in November that after Libya's liberation, al-Libi went to the general prosecutor to inform him that his name was on the list of those wanted by the U.S. government and that he wanted to hand himself over to the Libyan authorities so that his file could be closed.<sup>10</sup> According to Belhadj, al-Libi wanted to deal with his past and live a normal life.

More importantly, Ansar al-Shari`a appears for the moment to be far more preoccupied with developing its presence and entrenching itself further in the areas where it is dominant. While it has had bases in Benghazi and Derna more or less since the fall of the former regime, it has expanded in recent months into Qadhafi's former hometown of Sirte. The group is clearly making use of the space it is being allowed to focus its activities on the kind of charitable and preaching work traditionally associated with groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood. It recently established a cultural and preaching center for women in Benghazi, for example, that runs courses in religious teaching, English and computing.<sup>11</sup> In an indication of the extent to which the group is accepted among some parts of the local community, more than 400 women are reported to have enrolled at the center on its first day.<sup>12</sup> Ansar al-Shari`a has also set up a women's and children's health clinic behind the Jala'a hospital in Benghazi where services are provided free of charge, as well as a clinic for countering magic, *jinn*s (genies) and infertility through use of the Qu'ran.<sup>13</sup>

Ansar al-Shari`a is also heavily preoccupied with issues of morality. It runs anti-drug and anti-alcohol

campaigns in Benghazi and promotes "Islamically appropriate" behavior on university campuses. As the head of preaching of the Benghazi group explained, "We noticed a lot of people in the university not wearing proper clothes and violating what Allah has banned and not following religious rulings...We demand that women wear religious clothes, that the youth wear respectable clothes, and that women are segregated."<sup>14</sup>

Ansar al-Shari`a, however, is going further than simply urging Libyans to conform to its rigid interpretation of the faith. The group is also fully engaged in running rehabilitation centers for those who have strayed from the "straight path." This rehabilitation is generally undertaken with the agreement of the families concerned, who call on Ansar al-Shari`a to "arrest their sons" and "revive them from their drunkenness."<sup>15</sup>

More interestingly, and in a further example of just how far Ansar al-Shari`a has been able to root itself in the local community, the group has allegedly even been tasked with rehabilitating some members of the official security establishment. According to one Libyan special forces commander writing in *Libya al-Mostakbal*, special forces personnel are being sent to Ansar al-Shari`a to be cured of their vices and to be "qualified religiously."<sup>16</sup> The commander explained that these individuals are detained by Ansar al-Shari`a for a minimum of two weeks during which time they undergo intensive religious teaching.<sup>17</sup> The commander described, "We found amazing results. Those we sent told us about their psychological relief."<sup>18</sup> It is unlikely that the Libyan government approves of such "rehabilitation," and it highlights how the government does not effectively control its individual forces and brigades.

Thus, while the leaders of the various Ansar al-Shari`a branches in Libya may have a more transnational agenda, as reflected in the group's official discourse,<sup>19</sup> it seems that on the ground its main focus is on expanding its presence locally and on pushing for the implementation of Shari`a—its primary concern. As one witness attending a graduation celebration for 150 "reformed" individuals at the group's al-Dawa Wal Ihsane Rehabilitation Center in Derna declared, "Their main demand is that Libya is ruled by Islam."<sup>20</sup>

It is not clear whether the bloody clashes that erupted between Ansar al-Shari`a and members of Libya's special forces in Benghazi on November 25, 2013, will have any sustained impact on the group or the extent to which it is tolerated.<sup>21</sup> It is still too early to determine exactly what sparked the violence. If the violence heralds a new push by Libyan authorities to try to curtail Ansar al-Shari`a's activities, then the group may decide to strike back, creating further instability in the east.

#### Ansar al-Shari`a Not Alone in Calls for Shari`a

Ansar al-Shari`a is not alone in its calls for Shari`a. Libya's chaotic Islamist scene is full of groups demanding the full implementation of Islamic law. Some of these groups are waiting to see what will happen in this respect when Libya's constitution is finally crafted, which is proving to be a long, protracted process.<sup>22</sup> While there is a broad consensus across the country that Shari`a should be the main basis of the new legislation, some Islamist groups are demanding that Shari`a be the sole source.

19 In some of its official discourse, Ansar al-Shari`a and its members voice support for Usama bin Ladin and maintain a typically anti-Western stance.

20 "A Report About the Situation in Derna," *Aroos El-Babr*, August 15, 2013.

21 David D. Kirkpatrick, "Militia in Benghazi Flees After Deadly Gun Battle," *New York Times*, November 25, 2013.

22 Elections have still to be held to select the 60-member committee that will draw up the draft constitution. These elections are proving fractious already given that the country's Amazigh population is boycotting them on the grounds that they have not been given a guarantee that their linguistic and cultural rights will be enshrined in the text.

10 "Belhadj: The Absence of the Government Contributes to the Proliferation of Al-Qa'ida," Correspondents, November 6, 2013.

11 This was posted on the Ajwa al-Bilad Facebook page in October 2013, available at [www.facebook.com/ajwanews](http://www.facebook.com/ajwanews).

12 Ibid.

13 "The Absent Fact," *Libya al-Mostakbal*, September 11, 2013.

14 This was posted on the Ajwa al-Bilad Facebook page in October 2013, available at [www.facebook.com/ajwanews](http://www.facebook.com/ajwanews).

15 "The Absent Fact."

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

The Abu Slim Martyrs Brigade in Derna, for example, which was established by former LIFG militant Salim Derbi but brought itself, nominally at least, under the command of the Interior Ministry in 2012, is still intent on seeing Shari`a implemented in its fullest sense. In an uncompromising statement issued on October 29, 2013, the brigade declared,

You patient, courageous people, in this critical stage you have to embrace your genuine jihadist sons and real revolutionaries... Take support from your Lord, put support for Shari`a at the front of your mind and be prepared for death for the sake of its implementation, not just in the punishment side, but in every field. Only by Shari`a can we rise with the country and preserve blood, honor, wealth and sovereignty.<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, the recently established Army of the Islamic State of Libya in Derna that is headed by Yousef Ben Taher, which the Abu Slim Martyrs Brigade dismisses on its Facebook page as “fighters mounted on donkeys rather than horses,” aspires to an Islamist state under Shari`a law.<sup>24</sup>

Even some of the Libya Shield brigade, forces that come nominally under the Ministry of Defense and that receive huge amounts of state support and funding, are open about their desire to see Shari`a as the sole source of legislation. Wissam Ben Hamid, the Islamist commander of the Libya Shield One brigade that is based in Benghazi and that in June 2013 opened fire on a crowd of allegedly unarmed protestors calling for its dissolution,<sup>25</sup> is alleged to have declared in October 2011, “The Islamic Shari`a is a red line, we will not cede one rule of it, and Islam is the only law-giver and not (merely) the foundation (of the law).”<sup>26</sup> Although the

Libya Shield brigade may not have such a rigid ideological outlook as some of the above-mentioned groups, and may, for pragmatic reasons, be more willing to work within the framework of the state than groups such as Ansar al-Shari`a, some of their leaders, such as Ben Hamid, are clear that they want Shari`a to be the sole source of legislation for the new state.

To this end, some of these groups in the east are working to prevent the establishment of a national armed forces. Islamist brigades and groups are widely believed to be behind the weekly assassinations of official security personnel in Benghazi.<sup>27</sup> This is certainly the view taken by some Libyans. In October 2013, members of the Barghathi tribe in Benghazi attacked and torched the home of Wissam Ben Hamid after gunmen assassinated a member of their tribe, military police chief Colonel Ahmed al-Barghathi.<sup>28</sup>

Others, however, hold the view that more shadowy, *takfiri*-style<sup>29</sup> groups are carrying out these attacks. Ultraconservative member of the General National Congress, Shaykh Mohamed Bu Sidra, who is from Benghazi and is allegedly close to hard line Islamist groups in the east, spoke of the presence of a rejectionist group that he described as “extremist” that had a list of names of military personnel that it wanted to eliminate. Bu Sidra is quoted as having remarked, “If they worked their way through that list... Libya wouldn’t stand on its feet.”<sup>30</sup>

It is not only in the east that Islamist brigades are asserting their authority on the ground. Other cities, including the capital, are also host to an array of brigades, some of which are Islamist in orientation. This includes the powerful Libyan Revolutionary Operations Chamber (LROC), a body comprising revolutionaries from across the

country that was mandated by Head of the National Congress Nouri Abu Sahmaine in July 2013 to bring security to Tripoli.

The commander of the chamber is Shaykh Shaban Masoud Hadia, known as Abu Obeida Zawi, a jihadist preacher who lived in Yemen for many years.<sup>31</sup> According to Libyan sources, Hadia is a well-known Islamist extremist and is particularly influential among the revolutionaries of Zawia.<sup>32</sup> In an article in January 2012, Hadia insisted, “We won’t accept anything other than Islam. It is our life, our constitution and our leader.”<sup>33</sup>

Given the orientation of its leader, it is perhaps unsurprising that the LROC reacted to the capture of al-Libi in a fashion that was almost as extreme as that of Ansar al-Shari`a. The group declared a state of high alert in all Libyan cities “because foreign powers are infringing the sovereignty of the state.”<sup>34</sup> It also called on its members to “go into the streets to kick out all foreigners who are in Libya illegally,” warning, “whoever was complicit with foreign intelligence [services] has to bear full responsibility.”<sup>35</sup> It then threatened to go after all such accomplices.<sup>36</sup>

It is also perhaps unsurprising that it was elements from the LROC that were allegedly responsible for the kidnapping of Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan from the Corinthia Hotel on October 10 (Hadia has denied that the leadership of the chamber had anything to do with the abduction).<sup>37</sup> While it is

23 See the Facebook page for the Abu Slim Martyrs’ Brigade, available at [www.tinyurl.com/p37dhap](http://www.tinyurl.com/p37dhap).

24 Ibid. While both of these Derna-based groups are calling for Shari`a, they are engaged in a kind of turf battle for local influence. This is reflective of the relationships between many of the brigades and forces operating in post-Qadhafi Libya.

25 “Benghazi Libya Shield Protests: At Least 27 Dead,” *Libya Herald*, June 9, 2013.

26 John Rosenthal, *The Jihadist Plot* (Jackson, TN: En-

counter Books, 2013).

27 See the many articles in the *Libya Herald* detailing these attacks.

28 “Benghazi Tense as Shield Commander’s Home Torched Following Barghathi’s Assassination,” *Libya Herald*, October 18, 2013.

29 In this instance, “*takfiri*” refers to hard line Islamist groups that act as political rejectionists.

30 “Is Ansar Al-Sharia Behind What is Happening in Benghazi?” *Libya al-Mostakbal*, November 10, 2013.

31 “Libya: Militias, Politicians Meld in Explosive Mix,” Associated Press, October 22, 2013.

32 “The Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Chamber and Anti-Crime Commission...Mysterious Entities in the Libyan State,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 11, 2013.

33 “The Danger of Scarecrow Islamists,” al-Manara, January 8, 2012.

34 This is from statement #12 issued by the LROC and posted on their official Facebook Page on October 7, 2013, available at [www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=492193937543499&set=a.433642643398629.1073741828.427077124055181&type=1&theater](http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=492193937543499&set=a.433642643398629.1073741828.427077124055181&type=1&theater).

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Although both Nouri Abu Sahmaine and Shaban Masoud Hadia have denied that the leadership of the chamber had any involvement in Zidan’s apprehension, elements from this chamber identified themselves to hotel staff and were also present when Zidan was being



impossible to ascertain whether Zidan's kidnapping was a direct response to al-Libi's capture or whether it was simply part of the ongoing and bitter political struggle between Islamist and liberal forces, al-Libi's seizure is likely to have served as an additional incentive to attack the prime minister.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Security Committee (SSC) that comes nominally under the Interior Ministry and whose Tripoli branch was headed until recently by Islamist Hisham Bashar, continues to comprise brigades that are militant Islamist in orientation. Some of these brigades are engaged in their own vigilante style practices. This includes the Nawasi Brigade that used to be headed by hard line militant Abdul Raouf Kara, who now heads the Support and Backing Battalions in the SSC and whose base is at the Mtigha Airport in Tripoli. In January, the Nawasi Brigade clashed with locals from the Souq al-Juma'a and Fashloum areas of Tripoli after a man it had arrested for dealing drugs was tortured to death.<sup>38</sup>

Following the events of Bloody Friday on November 15, 2013, however, when brigades from Misrata opened fire on protestors in Tripoli, the Nawasi Brigade along with other militias agreed to hand over their headquarters to the state. This followed the agreement by the Misrata brigades to withdraw from the capital in response to a public outcry. It is too early to tell whether this new realignment of forces in Tripoli will hold. It seems unlikely that any of these forces, including those of an Islamist bent, will be willing to remain outside of the heart of affairs for too long. It may well be that, just as occurred in Benghazi in 2012 after the Islamist brigades were chased out of their headquarters, these forces will also either return or reinvent themselves.

### Conclusion

These hard line Islamist figures and forces are woven deep into the fabric of the new Libya and their presence demonstrates the complexity and fluidity of Libya's Islamist scene.

detained. See "The Prime Minister and the Militant: Two Kidnappings Spark Crisis," *Libya Focus* 16:10 (2013).

38 "Fashloum Youth Demand Government Action against Nawasi Brigade; Others Support It," *Libya Herald*, January 12, 2013.

With power in post-Qadhafi Libya atomized to such an extent, it is still difficult to make sense of these different forces and their agendas, as well as their relationship to each other. For the most part, however, these groups appear preoccupied primarily with their own local issues. That is not to say that some of these groups are not involved in training and sending recruits to the Syrian conflict. Evidence suggests that there is a flow of recruits to the Syrian opposition that have come through Libya.<sup>39</sup> In general, though, these Islamist brigades and militias appear to be focused mainly on entrenching themselves further in their local areas and in playing out local power struggles.

Yet while many of these elements do not have a transnational agenda or do not voice support for al-Qa'ida in the same way that Ansar al-Shari'a does, they continue to pose a serious challenge to Libya and its future. This challenge is likely to become all the more apparent when the constitution writing process finally begins and when the role of Shari'a in the new state is decided.

More importantly, if the state collapses, an outcome that is not unimaginable in light of the crises that are fast closing in on the political arena, there is a real risk that some of these militant groups may seek to demonstrate their power in an ever greater fashion. Given that they are so embedded in their own areas and that they are determined to see nothing short of an Islamic state, this could spark serious conflict, dragging Libya even deeper into the quagmire.

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39 "Rami Bil Tayebi: 100 Tunisian Terrorists Trained in Libya in Abu Ayadh's Camp," *al-Jarida*, November 12, 2013.

## Increase in Taliban Efforts to Recruit from Afghan Government and Security Forces

By Jami Forbes and Brian Dudley

ON OCTOBER 13, 2013, in his annual message marking the holiday of Eid al-Adha, Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar offered an olive branch to Afghans who oppose the Taliban, saying that the Taliban would welcome them into their ranks.<sup>1</sup> Media coverage of the statement largely ignored these words, instead focusing on Mullah Omar's denunciation of the upcoming presidential elections and the prospect of international forces remaining in Afghanistan post-2014.<sup>2</sup> Since 2010, however, the Taliban have increasingly emphasized their efforts to recruit Afghan government officials, particularly members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). This includes repeated public statements detailing an amnesty program, which provides forgiveness for these individuals' previous support for the government and the opportunity to join the insurgency without retribution. The Taliban have not always pursued such initiatives. For instance, in 2006, Taliban public statements indicated that they preferred to bring Afghan government supporters "to justice" rather than offering them an opportunity for engagement.

There is a limited understanding of the evolution of the Taliban's campaign to steal manpower from their enemies because Western forces have mostly focused on analyzing and preventing Taliban attacks. This article, therefore, identifies how the Taliban's efforts to recruit and extend amnesty to Afghan government officials and members of the security forces have expanded since 2010. It finds that these activities are

1 Mullah Omar's statement read, "We call on all those who support the invaders, or who have joined their ranks but not deliberately, to disband their support like thousands of your fellows have done so far. The vast embrace of the Islamic Emirate is always open to you. Is it not rational to side with your people where your death and life will become a symbol of pride for all, instead of losing your life in the ranks of the non-believers, where you will lose both your faith and your worldly life?"

2 Bill Chappell, "Taliban Rejection of US-Afghan Security Deal," National Public Radio, October 14, 2013.

becoming an increasingly important component of the Taliban's strategic plan for recapturing control of Afghanistan, as evinced by the creation of a senior Recruitment and Amnesty Commission to oversee the effort. As such, it is a strategy that warrants greater research, not only with regard to the current conflict, but for insurgencies globally.

#### Limited Understanding of Insurgent Efforts to Recruit Government Officials

Insurgencies throughout history have sought to recruit from the local populace, particularly among young men. A body of research has been devoted to understanding how insurgents accomplish this, and numerous academic models are available to estimate which civilians are the most likely to be recruited into insurgent ranks. Less attention, however, has been placed on understanding how an insurgency specifically targets and mobilizes recruits from within government forces—despite the cues from authorities on insurgency such as Mao Tse-tung.<sup>3</sup>

Within Afghanistan, this lack of attention could be problematic for NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), as the Taliban have increased their efforts to extend amnesty to Afghan government officials, even as the ANSF has taken the lead in providing security. The Taliban's efforts to recruit Afghan government officials have been overshadowed by their efforts to attack or intimidate such officials. Yet some data released by ISAF indicates that as many as 5,000 Afghan soldiers are quitting their posts every month, calling into question the ability of the Afghan government to sustain its forces.<sup>4</sup>

3 In *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao outlined the benefits of turning opposition forces into recruits. He wrote, "it is always possible to produce disaffection in their (enemy) ranks, and we must increase our propaganda efforts and foment mutinies among such troops. Immediately after mutinying, they must be received into our ranks and organized. The concord of the leaders and the assent of the men must be gained, and the units be rebuilt politically and reorganized militarily. Once this has been accomplished, they become successful guerrilla units. In regards to this type of unit, it may be said that political work among them is of the utmost importance."

4 Brian Brady and Jonathan Owen, "NATO Alarm Over Afghan Crisis: Loss of Recruits Threatens Security as

How much of an impact the Taliban's recruitment and amnesty programs have on this attrition is unclear. The Taliban leadership's increased emphasis on these programs during the past year, however, indicates that they see them as effective.

#### Taliban Increasing Emphasis on Amnesty and Recruitment

Since 2010, the Taliban have called on government officials to join the insurgency with increasing frequency. This includes offers of amnesty for officials who wanted to either quit their positions, stay in the government to support the Taliban, or seek new positions with the insurgency. This has not always been a tactic emphasized by the Taliban. For instance, in his Eid al-Fitr message in 2006, Taliban leader Mullah Omar said of government officials: "We will never give them exit. They will be brought to Islamic justice."<sup>5</sup>

Exactly why the Taliban changed their position remains unclear. The new strategy, however, has clear advantages. First, "turning" Afghan government officials and enemy soldiers is more cost effective than attacking them. Second, recruiting from the ANSF weakens the Taliban's most enduring enemy while simultaneously providing the insurgency with well trained (and possibly equipped) recruits. Finally, the strategy has the potential to foster or inspire "insider attacks."

In 2010, the Taliban's senior leadership published an updated version of the *layeha*, or code of conduct, which included guidance regarding the offering of amnesty to those who surrendered to the Taliban. This was the first known instance of Taliban leaders providing specific instructions concerning the recruitment of government officials and ANSF soldiers to the lower echelons of the Taliban leadership.<sup>6</sup> This was followed by the formalization and expansion of amnesty and recruitment initiatives in 2012. At this

Handover Looms," *Independent*, March 31, 2013.

5 "Taliban Leader Eid Message," Afghan Islamic Press, October 22, 2006.

6 Thomas Johnson and Matthew DuPee, "Analyzing the New Taliban Code of Conduct," *Central Asian Survey* 31:1 (2012).

time, the Taliban's recruitment and amnesty effort received a new level of command emphasis when the Taliban leadership announced the creation of a special commission tasked with handling these issues, referred to as the Taliban Recruitment and Amnesty Commission.<sup>7</sup>

The Taliban have publicized the defection of government soldiers and police to its ranks since early 2012. Over the past year, however, the organization's messaging has increasingly attributed these defections to the efforts of the Recruitment and Amnesty Commission. This commission was highlighted in the Taliban's Khalid bin Walid campaign announcement in April 2013, which stated:

During this year's Khalid bin Walid operation, all the stipulations, guidance and statements of Call and Guidance/Recruitment Commission will also be exercised in which protection has been guaranteed for those workers of the stooge regime who surrender or join up with the mujahidin just as the life, property and honor of the large group of people was protected who left the ranks of the enemy and joined up with mujahidin during the previous year.<sup>8</sup>

After announcing the Recruitment and Amnesty Commission's creation on May 3, 2012, the Taliban's press releases mentioned it an average of 1.57 times per month for the rest of 2012.<sup>9</sup> In 2013, the Taliban have mentioned the commission an average of 3.18 times per month, marking a 103% increase.<sup>10</sup>

Of particular note are several monthly summaries published by the Taliban which advertise the commission's success by enumerating the purported number of defectors the Taliban have

7 "Statement of Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate Regarding the Inception of al-Farooq Spring Operation," Voice of Jihad, May 3, 2012.

8 "Statement of Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate Regarding 'Khalid bin Waleed' Spring Operation," Voice of Jihad, April 27, 2013.

9 This is according to analysis of the statements released by the Afghan Taliban via its official website.

10 Ibid.

received into their ranks that month.<sup>11</sup> In the early months of 2013, the Taliban's public statements also sought to associate insider attacks—then a major theme of Taliban propaganda—with the actions of the commission.<sup>12</sup>

### Analyzing Taliban Public Statements

An analysis of the Taliban's public messaging regarding these recruitment efforts indicates that the campaign has two basic goals. The first goal is to highlight the Taliban's increasing strength and organizational depth and to contrast it with the government's weakness. Publicizing the defection of government officials, soldiers, and policemen contributes to an overall narrative that portrays the Taliban's power as steadily increasing while the government's power weakens.

Additionally, since 2006 the Taliban have regularly announced the formation of new administrative bodies and published in-depth interviews with commission heads, "governors" of various districts and provinces, and other insurgent leaders. Such messaging helps propagate the image of the Taliban as a sophisticated, coherent organization with specialized departments all answering to a central authority. The emphasis the Taliban currently place on the actions of the Recruitment and Amnesty Commission should be seen in this context. The Taliban have an obvious interest in communicating these messages to both an international and an Afghan audience—including, of course, to more potential defectors in the government and in the security forces. The Taliban's desire to reach an international audience is underscored by the publication of an article about the rising number of government defectors in the Taliban's Arabic-language magazine *al-Sumud* in

<sup>11</sup> In a January 2013 statement via its publication *al-Sumud*, the Afghan Taliban claimed that 1,300 Afghan government officials had left their positions as a result of the efforts of the Recruitment and Amnesty Commission. Separate monthly accounts of those the Taliban claimed it had inspired to defect have oscillated between tens and hundreds of individuals.

<sup>12</sup> "Zabiullah Mujahid: The Invaders Are On Practical Abscondence [sic]," *Voice of Jihad*, January 5, 2013; "Extensive al-Sumud Interview Given With the Official Spokesman of the Islamic Emirate," *al-Sumud*, January 15, 2013; Imran Khalil, "New Film Dawat Released by al-Hijra Studio," *Voice of Jihad*, March 29, 2013.

June 2013.<sup>13</sup> The video posted on the Taliban's official website on March 28, 2013, meanwhile, was specifically addressed to "those Afghans who work with foreign invaders."<sup>14</sup>

Although it is difficult to say with certainty, a second goal of the Taliban's messaging campaign may be to publicize the work of the Recruitment and Amnesty Commission to a Taliban audience, reiterating the senior leadership's policy of recruiting from the ranks of the government and the security forces, and building internal support for those policies. Stories of government officials, soldiers, and policemen joining the insurgency are undoubtedly encouraging to most Taliban commanders and fighters. Nevertheless, there are also strong reasons that Taliban commanders may be reluctant to recruit from the government or the security forces. The act of approaching a potential recruit exposes the recruiter to the threat of capture or death. Individuals defecting from the government or especially the security forces may in fact be double agents.<sup>15</sup> On an emotional level, Taliban commanders may be personally reluctant to welcome former enemies into their ranks. The increased emphasis on the Recruitment and Amnesty Commission in the Taliban's public messaging, therefore, may also be an attempt to quell some internal controversy.

### Conclusion

Insurgents look to overthrow a government through a variety of means, including both armed conflict and non-violent efforts aimed at undermining an opponent's authority and legitimacy. With regard to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, much is known about the methods and tactics the Taliban use against the government militarily. Less is known, however, about how they use subversion to diminish the effectiveness

<sup>13</sup> "Extensive al-Sumud Interview Given With the Official Spokesman of the Islamic Emirate," *al-Sumud*, January 15, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Imran Khalil, "New Film Dawat Released by al-Hijra Studio," *Voice of Jihad*, March 29, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> These possibilities and the ways that militant groups might avoid them are considered in Thomas Hegghammer, "The Recruiter's Dilemma: Signalling and Rebel Recruitment Tactics," *Journal of Peace Research* 50:1 (2012).

of their opponents. As the Taliban shift their focus to the ANSF (which they likely perceive to be their greatest and most enduring military challenge in the post-ISAF period), they are embracing a variety of methods, including recruitment and amnesty initiatives, to undermine the ANSF. As a consequence of the limited focus on non-violent Taliban initiatives, it is likely that the Afghan government has done little to counteract the Taliban's recruitment and amnesty efforts.

Although it is difficult to determine exactly how much the Taliban's efforts to subvert the ANSF through recruitment and amnesty initiatives are affecting ANSF readiness, the initiatives could play a role in causing attrition. This could become increasingly problematic for units with low morale, or confidence, particularly as the ISAF withdrawal comes to a close. Members of the Afghan government will likely do a cost-benefit analysis of the Taliban program compared to their current positions. Should they perceive that joining the Taliban or at least complying with their demands is more advantageous, they could change their allegiances. As such, monitoring how the Taliban proceed with this line of effort could provide valuable insight into not only the progress of the insurgency, but the viability and sustainability of the ANSF.

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*The views presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Army, or any of its subordinate commands.*



## The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters: The Newest Obstacles to Peace in the Southern Philippines?

By Peter Chalk

IN SEPTEMBER 2013, approximately 150 militants from the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) joined forces in an attack against government troops in the village of Lamitan on Basilan Island in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Although much is known about the former organization, the latter is a relative newcomer to the conflict in the southern Philippines and could serve to heighten the tempo of violence in the region.

This article provides background on the BIFF, its cadre and weapons, and the implications of its formation. It finds that the group could play a decisive role in determining the future status of Mindanao, irrespective of any peace deal that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) concludes with the Aquino administration.

### Background

The BIFF, also known as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM), is the latest manifestation of organized militancy derived from Bangsamoro Muslim grievances in Mindanao.<sup>1</sup> Although constitutionally part of the Philippine state, the Islamic population of this region has never subscribed to the concept of an integrated Catholic polity, defining themselves, by contrast, on the basis of a unique ethno-religious identity. This sense of separation has been exacerbated by blunt attempts to alter the historically Muslim centric demographic balance in the southern Philippines through Christian transmigration as well as by economic neglect and crushing poverty. Combined, these factors have ingrained a sense of victimization and oppression

1 The Bangsamoro people, or Moros, are a population of indigenous ethnic Muslims in the southern Philippines who constitute the country's largest non-Catholic demographic sector (10%). For further details, see "Muslim Filipinos," U.S. Library of Congress, undated.

that has fueled violence in the region since 1972.<sup>2</sup>

The BIFF emerged as a splinter faction of the MILF in December 2010. The parent movement is, itself, a breakaway group from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), originally established in 1984 under the hardline leadership of Hashim Salamat with the aim of creating an independent Islamic state in all areas of the southern Philippines where Muslims have traditionally been a majority.<sup>3</sup>

Following Salamat's death in 2003, this objective was gradually moderated under the more pragmatic and politically astute guidance of Salamat's successor, Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. The new leader appreciated that a guarantee of comprehensive autonomy—rather than outright independence—was the most realistic concession that could be extracted from Manila. To this end, he committed to a mutual cessation of hostilities agreement in 2003 and has since participated in Malaysian-sponsored talks aimed at resolving a broad array of concerns pertaining to a future self-governing Moro homeland.<sup>4</sup>

Most of these issues have since been worked out with the two sides reaching agreement on a number of consensus points that are meant to eventually form the basis of a so-called Bangsamoro Judicial Entity (BJE)—a final autonomous region for Muslims created and operating within the constitutional ambit of the Philippine state.<sup>5</sup>

2 Peter Chalk et al., *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), pp. 33-34. Fighting in the southern Philippines has left more than 150,000 people dead and plunged many provinces into deep poverty.

3 Salamat broke from the MNLF in opposition to the latter's more nationalist (as opposed to Islamist) stance and willingness to negotiate for autonomy rather than full independence in the southern Philippines.

4 For background on the evolution of these talks, see Benedicto R. Bacani, *The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2005); "Southern Philippines Background: Terrorism and the Peace Process," International Crisis Group, July 13, 2004.

5 Chalk et al., *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment*, p. 37.

It was in reaction to this more compromising and accommodating stance that the BIFF was established. Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato, a Saudi Arabia-trained scholar and the former leader of the MILF's 105<sup>th</sup> Command (which now falls under the responsibility of Zacaria Goma, a member of the Front's Central Committee), formed the new organization.<sup>6</sup> He had defected from the MNLF along with Salamat—a committed Salafi-jihadi ideologue who was strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood's Sayyid Qutb—and had consistently sought to bring about an Islamic state for Muslims in the southern Philippines.<sup>7</sup>

Kato charged that Al Haj Murad Ebrahim had departed from the original goals of the Bangsamoro movement and had effectively sold out the Moro Islamic cause by negotiating for Mindanao's autonomy rather than full independence.<sup>8</sup> He further accused the MILF leadership of undercutting his own position by: 1) refusing to insist that Manila lift a bounty of 10 million pesos for his arrest as a condition for continuing with peace talks; and 2) by failing to support his troops from concerted onslaughts by government troops in the area around Tubag Alisan in North Cotabato.<sup>9</sup> In addition, he asserted that the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF)—the armed wing of the MILF—were no longer worthy of the title "mujahidin" given their increased involvement in anti-jihadist activities such as kidnapping and drug trafficking.<sup>10</sup>

6 Datu Unsay, "Hardline Philippine Rebel Vows to Derail Peace," al-Arabiya, August 29, 2011; "7 Reported Dead in Ambush," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 14, 2013; Jacob Zenn, "Rebel with a Cause in Mindanao," *Asia Times Online*, September 13, 2011; Eid Kabulu, "BIFF: Origin and Prospect," *kampilantroopers.com*, undated, available at [www.kampilantroopers.com/news.php?readmore=224](http://www.kampilantroopers.com/news.php?readmore=224).

7 Zenn; "MILF Leader to Nida'ul Islam: 'Perhaps the Moro Struggle for Freedom and Self-Determination is the Longest and Bloodiest in the Entire History of Mankind,'" *Nida'ul Islam*, April-May 1998.

8 Kabulu, "BIFF: Origin and Prospect."

9 Ibid.; "Philippines: BIFF Gets Banged Around," Strategy Page, August 22, 2012; "A Day With the Mujahideen of the BIFF (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters) - 2," *Jamadi-Us-Sani*, April 24, 2012; Kabulu, "BIFF: Origin and Prospect."

10 "The Philippines: Back to the Table, Warily, in Mindanao," International Crisis Group, March 2011.

### BIFF's Cadre and Weapons

On announcing the emergence of the BIFF, Kato claimed that as many as 5,000 members of the MILF had followed him, although most commentators believe this number was considerably inflated and that the true figure was probably no more than 300 fighters.<sup>11</sup> The movement was originally based mostly in North Cotabato, Maguindanao and strategic areas around the Ligusan Marsh (which is valuable territory because it holds abundant gas reserves).<sup>12</sup> Following the capture of its main stronghold at Camp Omar in 2012, however, the organization has regrouped around two main *barangays* (hamlets): Ganta in Shariff Saydona Mustapha town and Damabla in Datu Piang town (Kato's birthplace), both in Maguindanao.<sup>13</sup>

BIFF is thought to have access to a relatively large armory composed of pistols, M-60 machine guns, modified long-arm sniper rifles, .50 caliber heavy weapons, mortars, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), landmines and various types of automatic assault weapons.<sup>14</sup> Kato siphoned off most of these munitions after he defected from the 105<sup>th</sup> Command—the largest and best equipped of the MILF's various field divisions.<sup>15</sup>

When BIFF first emerged, a number of commentators in Manila alleged that MILF leader Murad had tacitly endorsed its formation as leverage in ongoing peace talks with Manila.<sup>16</sup> According to this line of reasoning, the MILF chairman was calculating that the government would show greater flexibility in acceding to the demands of his group for fear that not doing so would

merely empower Moro hardliners.<sup>17</sup> No evidence has ever surfaced to support these speculations, however. Indeed, in February 2011, MILF's chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal publicly acknowledged Kato as a problem, which, if not dealt with, would result in his permanent expulsion from the front's fold.<sup>18</sup>

On the part of the MILF, we have problems. Ustadz Ombra Kato is one of those problems, but the MILF leadership is still hopeful that we can manage and solve this problem; otherwise we will tell the government, the facilitator and the international community that he has already burned his bridges with the MILF. He is not one of us; he is not with the MILF.<sup>19</sup>

BIFF has also periodically clashed with the BIAF—the armed wing of the MILF—particularly for control over territory around Datu Piang, with one confrontation in August 2011 leaving several guerrillas dead on both sides.<sup>20</sup> These skirmishes would strongly suggest that the splinter group's formation was no ploy.

In November 2011, BIFF was hit with an important setback after Kato suffered a major stroke. A replacement, Ustadz Mohammad Ali Tambako, was quickly appointed, an ulama and graduate of religious studies undertaken in Sudan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup> Despite a challenge from Mohiden Ananimbang (also known as Kagi Kadialen), the group's chief of staff, the transition was relatively smooth and Tambako appears to have since consolidated his rule.<sup>22</sup>

### Implications of BIFF's Formation

BIFF carries important implications for both the MILF and the general peace process in the southern Philippines despite the small size of the group. Kato was well respected and there is a realistic possibility that others in the MILF hierarchy will subscribe to his non-compromising stance of full independence should talks with the present Aquino administration breakdown or fail to deliver promised dividends within the next couple of years.<sup>23</sup> No less importantly, the BIFF raises legitimate questions about

**“The BIFF raises legitimate questions about Murad's overall control of fighters under his command, which could cause potential spoilers to challenge his credibility as a representative of the Bangsamoro people.”**

Murad's overall control of fighters under his command, which could cause potential spoilers to challenge his credibility as a representative of the Bangsamoro people.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly true of the MNLF, which has become increasingly concerned that a settlement with the MILF will come at the expense of its own autonomous region (the ARMM).<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, BIFF has shown itself willing and capable of engaging Philippine security forces, targeting both military and police outposts. In line with its *raison d'être*, the stated objective of these attacks is to sabotage the peace process between the government and the MILF as part of the

11 Zenn; “Rogue MILF Commander Forms Splinter Group,” Associated Press, August 19, 2011; “Rebels Armed with Chainsaws Attack Maguindanao Towns,” Agence France-Presse, June 8, 2012.

12 Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Non-Traditional Threats and Maritime Domain Awareness in the Tri-Border Area of Southeast Asia: The Coast Watch System of the Philippines* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), p. 13; Kabulu, “BIFF: Origin and Prospect.”

13 Alexis Romero, “86 Dead in Army-BIFF Clashes in Maguindanao,” *Philippine Star*, July 8, 2013.

14 Personal interview, Manila, Philippines, August 2011.

15 “A Day With the Mujahideen of the BIFF (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters) – 2.”

16 Personal interviews, Moro sources, Manila, Philippines, January 2008.

17 Rabasa and Chalk, p. 15.

18 “The Philippines: Back to the Table, Warily, in Mindanao,” p. 6; “The Philippines: A New Strategy for Peace in Mindanao?” International Crisis Group, August 2011, p. 7.

19 See “Every Step Brings Us Closer to Our Destination,” opening statement of Mohagher Iqbal, chairman, MILF peace panel, during opening program of the 20th GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, February 9-10, 2011.

20 “6 Killed in Maguindanao Clash Between MILF, Splinter Group,” GMAnews.tv, August 10, 2011; Zenn.

21 “A Day With the Mujahideen of the BIFF (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters) – 2.”

22 Kabulu, “BIFF: Origin and Prospect.”

23 Zenn.

24 “The Philippines: Back to the Table, Warily, in Mindanao,” p. 8; “The Philippines: Breakthrough in Mindanao,” International Crisis Group, December 2012, p. 16.

25 See, for instance, “MNLF May Quit the Peace Process in the Philippines,” *Terrorism Focus* 4:3 (2007). For more on the ARMM agreement and what it entailed, see Peter Chalk, “The Davao Consensus: A Panacea for the Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao?” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9:2 (1997).

long-term goal of achieving Bangsamoro independence. One especially intensive and prolonged clash occurred in August and September 2012 when the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Mechanized Brigade attempted to retake several key highways that rebels under the command of Ustadz Cerialan had seized to temporarily seal off Maguindanao Province. Hostilities dragged on for weeks (amid suspicions that Kato's forces were receiving material assistance from local politicians),<sup>26</sup> causing 7,865 families, or 39,325 people in 18 barangays, to flee their homes.<sup>27</sup> Fighting and confrontations typically escalate in the run-up to the holy month of Ramadan, and violence in 2013 involved strikes against both civilian communities and military detachments, with one landmine attack in Shariff Saidona Mustapha town leaving six soldiers dead.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, there are indications that BIFF has made common cause with members of the ASG. The latter entity is another splinter of the MNLF that emerged in 1991 under the leadership of Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani. The organization similarly claims to be fighting for the creation of an Islamic state in Mindanao, although since the death of Janjalani in 1998, and later his brother Khadaffy in 2006, it has increasingly devolved into more of a decentralized criminal kidnap-for-ransom outfit than an integrated, truly religiously-inspired movement. That said, the ASG continues to engage in periodic acts of political violence, allegedly retains ties with fugitives of Jemaah Islamiyya (JI) hiding in the southern Philippines and has yet to be removed from the U.S. list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations.<sup>29</sup>

26 See, for instance, "MILF: 2 Maguindanao Polls Support Kato," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 11, 2012; Ferdinand B. Cabrera, "'A Big Lie,' Mayor Ampatuan Says of Reports they Abandoned Towns and Supported BIFF," *Minda News*, August 18, 2012.

27 Rene Acosta, "Philippines Rebel Group Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters Undermines Peace Talks," Asia Pacific Defense Forum, September 24, 2012; "The Philippines: Breakthrough in Mindanao," p. 16; "MILF: 2 Maguindanao Polls Support Kato."

28 Romero. It should be noted that overall, the bulk of fatalities were on the side of the rebels.

29 Chalk et al., *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment*, pp. 49-52; "Annual Country Report on Terrorism 2012," U.S. Department of State, 2013.

The existence of potential ties between the ASG and BIFF became apparent in the aforementioned attack in September 2013, when around 150 rebels besieged army positions in the village of Lamitan on the restive island of Basilan. According to Philippine Colonel Rodrigo Gregorio, a military spokesman in the area, the assault came on the heels of an earlier tactical alliance that had been concluded between the two groups.<sup>30</sup> Ominously, there has been speculation that the ASG/BIFF attack may have been connected to the simultaneous seizure of Zamboanga City, an important trading hub of 800,000 people just off Basilan that was stormed by 300 MNLF rebels.<sup>31</sup> If confirmed, this could indicate that the two groups have additionally forged ties with renegade elements in the MNLF. The existence of a tripartite union of this sort would represent a major obstacle to peace in Mindanao and would potentially position the BIFF to play a decisive role in determining the province's future—irrespective of any settlement that is concluded between the Philippine government and the MILF.

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30 Floyd Whaley, "New Clash in the Philippines Raises Fears of a Wider Threat," *New York Times*, September 12, 2013.

31 For more on the seizure, Floyd Whaley, "Fighting in Southern Philippines Kills 8," *New York Times*, September 9, 2013; *ibid*.

## The Evolution of Jihadism in Italy: Rise in Homegrown Radicals

By Lorenzo Vidino

JIHADIST TERRORISM IN ITALY has recently undergone significant demographic and operational changes. The first generation of foreign-born militants with ties to various jihadist groups outside Europe is still active in Italy, albeit with less intensity than in the past. During the last few years, however, Italian authorities have increasingly noticed a shift toward forms of homegrown radicalization similar to that experienced in other Western European countries. Two recent incidents highlighted this trend: the conviction of a young man from Brescia who, without any connection to established jihadist groups, formed an online network of jihadist enthusiasts; and a Genoa-born convert to Islam who was killed in Syria. These two incidents marked some of the first cases of homegrown jihadist radicalization in Italy.<sup>1</sup>

This article looks at the first generation of jihadists in Italy, and then shows how the jihadist scene in Italy has progressively changed with the formation of a new generation of homegrown radicals. It finds that although the recent instances of homegrown jihadist radicalization are worrisome, it still remains a small phenomenon in Italy compared to some other European countries.

### The First Generation

Jihadist networks have been active in Italy since the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Even though small clusters of militants from several North African countries established themselves in various areas of the country, the northern city of Milan has always been the undisputed hub of jihadist activity in Italy. The city's Islamic Cultural Institute (ICI), a former garage turned mosque, was controlled by members of

1 With the exception of Domenico Quaranta, which was an isolated incident, every case seen in Italy from 1995 until Mohamed Jarmoune in 2012 involved first generation immigrants (and most linked to established jihadist networks).

2 Lorenzo Vidino, "Islam, Islamism and Jihadism in Italy," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 7 (2008).



Egyptian Jama'at al-Islamiyya after its foundation in 1988.<sup>3</sup> The ICI acquired importance for the global jihadist movement when the conflict in Bosnia erupted in 1992. Not only was the ICI's imam, Anwar Shabaan, the commander of foreign mujahidin in Bosnia, but the network in Milan was an important node supplying documents, money and other forms of logistical support for volunteers worldwide seeking to reach the battlefield in the Balkans.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, the ICI remained, in the words of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, "the main al Qaeda station house in Europe."<sup>5</sup> The ICI established various businesses, which provided money and the possibility to sponsor visa applications for militants.<sup>6</sup> Radical preachers of global stature routinely visited the ICI.<sup>7</sup> Forged documents, funds and recruits from Milan went to support jihadist groups from Algeria to Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Particularly noteworthy was the contribution of Milanese jihadists in Iraq, where several individuals recruited within the ICI scene carried out suicide operations.<sup>9</sup>

3 See the report on the searches at the ICI, published by the Italian General Investigations and Special Operations Division (DIGOS), September 15, 1997; "DIGOS Memorandum on the ICI," Italian General Investigations and Special Operations Division, May 20, 1994. The ICI is also known as the Viale Jenner mosque from the street on which it is located.

4 See the report on the searches at the ICI, published by the Italian General Investigations and Special Operations Division (DIGOS), September 15, 1997. Also see Evan F. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

5 David S. Hilzenrath and John Mintz, "More Assets on Hold in Anti-Terror Effort; 39 Parties Added to List of Al Qaeda Supporters," *Washington Post*, October 13, 2001.

6 "DIGOS Memorandum on the ICI." Also see the DIGOS reports on Muhajiroun 2, dated October 5, 2001, and Muhajiroun 3, dated November 21, 2001.

7 Ibid.; Stefano Dambruoso, *Milano Bagdad: Diario di un magistrato in prima linea nella lotta al terrorismo islamico in Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004).

8 See, for example, the indictment of Lased Ben Heni and others, Tribunal of Milan, October 1, 2001; verdict against Essid Sami Ben Khemais and others, Tribunal of Milan, May 13, 2002; indictment of Abdelhalim Hafed Remadna and others, Tribunal of Milan, November 21, 2001; indictment of Muhamad Majid and others, Tribunal of Milan, November 21, 2003.

9 Indictment of Muhamad Majid and others, Tribunal of Milan, November 21, 2003; indictment of Osama Mostafa Hassan Nasr, Tribunal of Milan, April 4, 2005; Giulio Meotti, "Italian Jihad," *Il Foglio*, February 26, 2009;

By the late 1990s, jihadist networks, many of which had connections to the ICI, were present in various Italian cities, particularly in the north.<sup>10</sup> Most of these networks were involved in quintessential logistical support activities for various jihadist outfits operating outside of Europe. Their demographics mirrored migration patterns, as the vast majority of individuals were first generation immigrants from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.<sup>11</sup> Many of them were in the country illegally and lived in conditions of socioeconomic disenfranchisement.

### The Scene Changes

By the mid-2000s, several aggressive security investigations that led to the dismantling of dozens of cells and the voluntary departure from Italy of many hardened jihadists caused a significant decrease in jihadist activity. Some of the long established networks and some new actors (Pakistanis, for example) continued their activities, but with a markedly lower intensity. In that regard, it is noteworthy that other than a few improbable plots, no attacks against Italy were planned by established networks in this period despite a number of plots targeting other European countries.

Yet, somewhat preceding a trend later seen in the rest of Europe, Italy in the early 2000s witnessed a handful of lone actor plots.<sup>12</sup> In July 2002, authorities arrested Domenico Quaranta, a handyman who had converted to Islam in prison, for detonating four primitive explosive devices in the vicinity of various targets in the Sicilian city of Agrigento

Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus, 2005), pp. 215-290; "Milano, l'imam di via Jenner condannato a 3 anni e 8 mesi," *La Repubblica*, December 20, 2007.

10 See the DIGOS reports on Muhajiroun 2, dated October 5, 2001, and Muhajiroun 3, dated November 21, 2001.

11 Mass immigration to Italy is a recent phenomenon in comparison to most other Western European countries, as it began in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

12 With a few exceptions, most European countries were targeted by "lone actor" plots beginning in the second-half of the 2000s until the present. See, for example, the lone actor attacks in Stockholm (Taimour Abdulwahab, 2010), London (Roshonara Choudhry, 2010), Frankfurt (Arid Uka, 2011) and Toulouse (Mohammed Merah, 2012).

and in a Milan metro station in the span of seven months.<sup>13</sup> Quaranta left at the scene messages threatening to continue his actions until "you will submit to worshipping the one God."<sup>14</sup> Two similar incidents took place in Modena in 2003 and Brescia in 2004. In each case, a Muslim man detonated

**"A handful of cases that have surfaced over the last few years present clear characteristics of homegrown radicalization, underscoring how the phenomenon has arrived in Italy."**

explosive materials in a car in front of a synagogue and a McDonalds respectively.<sup>15</sup> Both men died in the ensuing blast, but there were no other injuries.<sup>16</sup> All three episodes were characterized by the rudimentary nature of the explosive devices and by the fact that the perpetrators were not connected to any known militant circle.<sup>17</sup>

13 "Arrestato presunto responsabile attentati Milano e Agrigento," *La Repubblica*, July 17, 2002; Francesco Cascini, "Il fenomeno del proselitismo in carcere con riferimento ai detenuti stranieri di culto islamico," in *La Radicalizzazione del Terrorismo Islamico*, June 2012.

14 "Arrestato presunto responsabile attentati Milano e Agrigento," *La Repubblica*, July 17, 2002.

15 For the Modena incident, see Stefano Dambruoso and Vincenzo R. Spagnolo, *Un Istante Prima* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), p. 121. For Brescia, see the Brescia DIGOS report on Mostafa Chaouki, July 12, 2004.

16 Ibid.

17 Some have questioned whether these incidents should be labeled "terrorism." On the one hand, it is apparent from their modus operandi, possible targets and, at least in the Brescia case, from the letter claiming responsibility for the attack sent by the perpetrator to the police that there was a political/religious nature behind the actions. On the other hand, the psychological conditions of mental instability and deep depression of the perpetrators cannot be ignored and are possibly the main reasons for their actions. It is difficult to fully understand these dynamics ex post facto.

Then, in October 2009, Libyan national and long-time Milan resident Mohammed Game attempted to enter a military base in Lombardy.<sup>18</sup> When confronted by a guard, he detonated an explosive device, severely injuring himself and lightly wounding the guard.

### **“Italian authorities considered the attack on the barracks in Lombardy a watershed event.”**

The ensuing investigation led to two Milan-based North African men who had helped Game with his plot.<sup>19</sup> Game, who had recently begun attending the ICI, operated mostly independently and his radicalization process had occurred largely online.<sup>20</sup>

Italian authorities considered the attack on the barracks in Lombardy a watershed event. The 2009 annual report sent by Italian intelligence to parliament clearly stated that “in the proximity of structured groupings active in logistics and propaganda can operate isolated individuals or micro-clusters ready to act in complete independence.”<sup>21</sup> It also raised concerns about the arrival of the phenomenon of internet-driven homegrown radicalization in Italy—in this case, mirroring a dynamic seen in Europe years before.<sup>22</sup>

18 “Libyan in Milan Bomb Attack,” ANSA Press Agency, October 12, 2009.

19 Verdict against Mohamed Game and Hady Abdelaziz Mahmoud Abdel Kol, Tribunal of Milan, verdict 10/1583, October 4, 2010.

20 Personal interview, Italian Interior Ministry official, Milan, Italy, July 2013; verdict against Mohamed Game and Hady Abdelaziz Mahmoud Abdel Kol, Tribunal of Milan, verdict 10/1583, October 4, 2010.

21 2009 Annual Report to the Italian Parliament (Relazione sulla politica dell’informazione per la sicurezza), pp. 19-21.

22 Cases predating Game’s attack in which the internet played a key role in the radicalization process included that of the so-called “Irhabi O07” network, a network of jihadist sympathizers spanning several countries that formed online, and the Hofstad group, the Dutch network of militants that was behind several failed attacks and one successful attack (the Theo van Gogh assassination) in the early 2000s.

It is debatable whether Game can be considered a case of homegrown radicalization. Although his radicalization may only have taken place in Milan, Game grew up in Libya and moved to Italy only as an adult. Yet a handful of cases that have surfaced over the last few years present clear characteristics of homegrown radicalization, underscoring how the phenomenon has arrived in Italy.

#### **The Brescia Cases**

By the second half of the 2000s, Italian authorities had begun monitoring an online-based network of jihadist sympathizers.<sup>23</sup> The cluster was led by a handful of Italian converts based in various Italian cities and in London.<sup>24</sup> In 2012, authorities decided to act, and charged some of the network’s most active members under article 270 *quinquies* of the penal code. The article criminalizes the provision of terrorist training and has been used with increasing frequency to prosecute cases in which more or less operational materials are exchanged online. Members of the network had translated into Italian and disseminated online texts ranging from jihadist philosophy to manuals on weapons and explosives.<sup>25</sup>

The investigation led authorities to Mohamed Jarmoune, a young Moroccan-born man living in Niardo, a quiet mountain town in the province of Brescia.<sup>26</sup> Living a secluded life between work and his parents’ house (and not attending a mosque), Jarmoune spent all his time—up to 15 hours a day—online, disseminating jihadist materials and connecting with like-minded individuals around the world.<sup>27</sup> Together with the London-based wife of a known Algerian militant, he administered a private

23 Personal interviews, Italian Interior Ministry officials, Milan, Italy, August 2013; 2009 Annual Report to the Italian Parliament (Relazione sulla politica dell’informazione per la sicurezza), pp. 19-21.

24 Personal interviews, Italian Interior Ministry officials, Milan, Italy, August 2013; attachment number 1 in the Jarmoune case, Brescia DIGOS, p. 3.

25 Verdict in the Jarmoune case, Tribunal of Brescia, verdict 613/13, May 16, 2013.

26 Personal interviews, Italian police and Interior Ministry officials, Brescia and Milan, Italy, September and October 2013; verdict in the Jarmoune case, Tribunal of Brescia, verdict 613/13, May 16, 2013.

27 Indictment of Mohamed Jarmoune, Tribunal of Cagliari, case 984/2012, March 13, 2012.

Facebook group and openly discussed his jihadist sympathies.<sup>28</sup>

In an essay, Jarmoune summarized his life as follows:

I am 20, I have lived in Italy since I was 6 and I started following Islam when I was 16 and initially found only books and files in Italian, written by modern, phony and moderate Muslims...I read them in depth and later I found the truth thanks to God and so I began translating books and files for Italian Muslims but later these Italian brothers abandoned me and I don’t know why. Maybe they are afraid...and so I stopped speaking to Italian Muslims...and I began helping Muslims and the nation all over the world. And later I worked with important jhd [jihad] as video producer and other important projects. Now I am the moderator of the jhd forum of God, a great challenge for me and I am very happy about this.<sup>29</sup>

After months of monitoring, authorities arrested Jarmoune after he conducted online surveillance of Jewish targets in Milan.<sup>30</sup> In May 2013, Jarmoune was sentenced to five years and four months in prison for disseminating terrorist propaganda.<sup>31</sup>

As they wrapped up the case against Jarmoune, authorities stumbled upon another young man of Moroccan descent who, like Jarmoune, lived with his well-integrated family in a small rural town near Brescia. Anas El Abboubi, who idolized Jarmoune but had no connections to him, had allegedly embraced jihadist ideology and spent most of his time online communicating with kindred spirits.<sup>32</sup> Without ever leaving Italy, El Abboubi had managed to build contacts with the

28 Personal interviews, Italian police and Interior Ministry officials, Brescia and Milan, Italy, September and October 2013; verdict in the Jarmoune case, Tribunal of Brescia, verdict 613/13, May 16, 2013.

29 Verdict in the Jarmoune case, Tribunal of Brescia, verdict 613/13, May 16, 2013, pp. 10-11.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Personal interviews, Italian police officials, Brescia, Italy, October 2013; indictment of Anas El Abboubi, Tribunal of Brescia, case 28496/12, June 10, 2013.

leaders of various extremist groups, from Germany-based Millatu Ibrahim to Sharia4Belgium.<sup>33</sup> El Abboubi had apparently taken it upon himself to establish the Italian branch of the franchise, starting the blog Sharia4Italy and involving a handful of local friends. Authorities decided to arrest El Abboubi after becoming concerned by the increased militancy of his online activities and by the fact that he had allegedly used the internet to research various iconic sites in Brescia.<sup>34</sup> He was later released, as the court did not deem his behavior a violation of article 270 *quinquies*.<sup>35</sup> There are indications that, upon release, El Abboubi traveled to Syria, where he reportedly remains.<sup>36</sup>

### From Genoa to Syria

Another active member of the Italian online jihadist scene gained the spotlight in June 2013 after news broke that Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo had died in Syria. Born in Genoa in 1989, Delnevo had grown up in a middle class family and had converted to Islam in 2008.<sup>37</sup> He had been active in the local Islamic scene, but as his views radicalized he could not find like-minded individuals in Genoa. He sought them online and in European countries with a more

developed Salafi-jihadi scene. By 2011, Delnevo was actively seeking to join jihadist groups, yet was struggling to find the right contacts.<sup>38</sup> After an initial, unsuccessful attempt in the summer of 2012, Delnevo managed to enter Syria a few months later. He reportedly died while fighting alongside a Chechen-led brigade of foreign fighters.<sup>39</sup>

Like Jarmoune and El Abboubi, Delnevo's profile is not characterized by any socioeconomic marginalization. Rather, it seems more appropriate to search for the roots of their radicalization in their psychological profiles and their quest for a personal identity.<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that all three individuals had been at some point fascinated by other alternative ideologies and lifestyles (including fascist militancy and hip hop culture).<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

The arrival of homegrown jihadist radicalization in Italy does not mean that "traditional" networks are no longer operating.<sup>42</sup> Yet lone operators and small clusters of "sociological Italians"<sup>43</sup> who radicalize on their own, operate independently from mosques and traditional groups, and are prolific online are active in Italy. Nevertheless, they still represent a smaller threat than in other Western European countries.<sup>44</sup>

Authorities have so far contained this developing threat with remarkable success. Yet the phenomenon of homegrown terrorism, as the experience of other Western countries has shown, is by nature unpredictable and extremely difficult to control.

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33 Personal interviews, Italian police officials, Brescia, Italy, October 2013; Laura Damiani, "Manette al padre di 'Sharia4Italy,' terrorista internazionale," *Corriere della Sera*, June 12, 2013; Wilma Petenzi, "L'aspirante bombardolo sgridato dal padre per cento euro spariti," *Corriere della Sera*, June 14, 2013.

34 Indictment of Anas El Abboubi, Tribunal of Brescia, case 7456/11, June 10, 2013; Wilma Petenzi, "Nel mirino dello studente pure questore e piazza Loggia," *Corriere della Sera*, June 13, 2013.

35 In November 2013, the Italian Supreme Court affirmed the decision. See personal interviews, Brescia prosecutor Antonio Chiappani and El Abboubi's lawyer, Nicola Mannatrizio, Brescia, Italy, September and October 2013; Wilma Petenzi, "'Terrorista' a Vobarno, la procura pronta a ricorrere in Cassazione," *Corriere della Sera*, July 2, 2013; "El Abboubi resta libero, ma è 'scomparso,'" *Brescia Oggi*, November 9, 2013.

36 Personal interviews, Italian police officials, Rome and Brescia, Italy, October 2013; "El Abboubi resta libero, ma è 'scomparso.'"

37 Personal interview, Carlo Delnevo, Giuliano's father, Sestri Levante, Italy, October 2013; Marco Imarisio, "Quei 40-50 jihadisti partiti per la Siria dalle città italiane," *Corriere della Sera*, June 19, 2013; Bruno Persano, "Mio figlio è morto da eroe e oggi sono orgoglioso di lui," *La Repubblica*, June 19, 2013; personal interviews, Italian police and judicial officials, Genoa, Italy, September 2013.

38 Personal interviews, Italian police and judicial officials, Genoa and Rome, Italy, September and October 2013.

39 Personal interviews, Italian police and judicial authorities, Genoa, Italy, September 2013; personal interview, Carlo Delnevo, Giuliano's father, Sestri Levante, Italy, October 2013; Gabriele Piccardo, "Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo: l'amico Umberto Marcozzi: 'Mi scrisse che in Siria i martiri profumano,'" *Huffington Post*, June 18, 2013; Andrea Cortellari, "Siria, Delnevo indagato per terrorismo a Genova già dal 2009," *Il Giornale*, June 18, 2013.

40 Fernando Reinares, "Es que integración social y radicalización yihadista son compatibles?: una reflexión sobre el caso de Mohamed Jarmoune en Brescia," *Real Instituto Elcano*, April 17, 2012.

41 Since an early age, Delnevo was fascinated with fascism and some of his closest friends upon converting were former right-wing activists who had converted. See personal interview, Carlo Delnevo, Giuliano's father, Sestri Levante, Italy, October 2011; personal interview, Italian police, Genoa, Italy, September 2013. Jarmoune collected Nazi memorabilia. See "Woman, 40, Arrested in London Terror Raid as Police Probe 'Secret Facebook Plot to Blow up Italian Synagogue,'" *Daily Mail*, March 15, 2012. El Abboubi was a rapper in his teens under the pseudonym Mckhalif. Under that name he operated a YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/user/MCKHALIF](http://www.youtube.com/user/MCKHALIF)) that, after radicalizing, he used to post religious lectures instead of rap videos. One of El Abboubi's old rap performances can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPjXqAsUEPE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPjXqAsUEPE).

42 In May 2013, for example, the Carabinieri ROS dismantled a cell of North African militants between Apulia and Sicily. The men were first generation immigrants with connections to Milan's ICI. Authorities accused them of recruiting and planning attacks against American, Israeli and Italian targets. See "Italian Police Arrest Four Suspected Islamist Militants," *Reuters*, April 30, 2013.

43 Since Italy's current legislation does not automatically give citizenship to individuals born on Italian soil if at least one of their parents is not Italian and it is very difficult to obtain Italian citizenship, few individuals of immigrant origin are Italian citizens. The term "sociological Italians" is therefore used to describe all those individuals who have grown up in Italy, irrespective of their citizenship status.

44 There are only a handful of court cases against "homegrown" jihadists in Italy, and most of them have been charged with article 270bis, a very broad charge of disseminating propaganda that does not exist in many European penal codes. Moreover, counterterrorism authorities in Italy estimate that only a handful of Italians are fighting in Syria, a smaller number when compared to the participation rate of foreign fighters in Syria from other European countries.



## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

October 1, 2013 (IRAQ): According to the United Nations, 887 civilians and 92 members of the Iraqi Security Forces died in Iraq during the month of September. The death toll was one of the highest in years, but still lower than July's, which stood at 1,057 killed. - *BBC, October 3*

October 1, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber attacked the counter-explosives police headquarters in Tikrit, Salah al-Din Province, killing five police officers. - *AFP, October 1*

October 1, 2013 (FRANCE): French intelligence officers arrested a 21-year-old Paris woman suspected of having links to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. - *AFP, October 1*

October 2, 2013 (KENYA): Al-Qa`ida affiliate al-Shabab threatened to increase attacks against Kenya after the country refused to withdraw its troops from Somalia. "We will strike Kenyans where it hurts the most, turn their cities into graveyards...The Kenyan government's decision to keep its invading force in Somalia is an indication that they haven't yet learnt any valuable lessons from the Westgate attacks," the group said. - *al-Arabiya, October 2*

October 2, 2013 (SYRIA): The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is an al-Qa`ida affiliate, fought rival Syrian rebels from the Northern Storm brigade on the outskirts of Azaz, near the border with Turkey. - *Reuters, October 2*

October 2, 2013 (IRAQ): Militants shot down an Iraqi military helicopter between Kirkuk and Salah al-Din Province, killing all four crew members. - *New York Post, October 2*

October 2, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed eight people at Pakistan's southwestern Chaman border crossing in Baluchistan Province. The bomber arrived at the border from neighboring Afghanistan. - *Dawn, October 2*

October 3, 2013 (UNITED STATES): Nizar Trabelsi, a former Tunisian professional soccer player who was later convicted of being a member of al-Qa`ida, was extradited from Belgium to the United States to face suicide bombing charges. Trabelsi was arrested in Belgium only two days after the 9/11 attacks, and he was sentenced to 10 years in jail in 2003 for planning a suicide truck bombing against a Belgian air base where U.S. soldiers were stationed. - *AFP, October 3*

October 3, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle targeted the headquarters of rival Taliban commander Mullah Nabi Hanafi in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The explosion killed 15 people and destroyed the headquarters. Hanafi was not present at the time of attack. - *Dawn, October 3; Guardian, October 3*

October 4, 2013 (UKRAINE): A man being interviewed by guards at the Russian-Ukraine border blew himself up, wounding two guards. The incident occurred on the Ukrainian side of the border, close to the village of Bachevsk. - *UPI, October 4*

October 5, 2013 (LIBYA): U.S. forces launched a raid in the Libyan capital, apprehending Abu Anas al-Libi, a suspected al-Qa`ida operative wanted for his role in the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Al-Libi's legal name is Nazih al-Ruqai. He is to face trial in the United States. - *Reuters, October 5; New York Times, October 5*

October 5, 2013 (SOMALIA): U.S. military forces launched a raid in the Somali coastal town of Barawe against an al-Shabab terrorist known as Ikrima. The operation, however, failed to capture or kill the al-Shabab target, and U.S. forces disengaged after causing some al-Shabab casualties. Ikrima, considered a top al-Shabab leader, reportedly planned the recent terrorist attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. No U.S. personnel were wounded or killed in the military operation. - *Reuters, October 5; CNN, October 7*

October 5, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a checkpoint in Baghdad, killing 48 Shi`a pilgrims on their way to visit a shrine. - *Reuters, October 5*

October 5, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives inside a café in the mainly Shi`a town of Balad, killing 12 people. - *AP, October 5*

October 5, 2013 (IRAQ): Gunmen killed two Iraqi television journalists as they were filming in Mosul. - *Reuters, October 5*

October 6, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden truck into the playground of a primary school in Tal Afar, Ninawa Province, killing 14 children and their headmaster. According to Reuters, "The majority of Tal Afar's residents are from Iraq's Shi'ite Turkman minority, which in recent years has been the target of killings and kidnappings." Authorities suspect that al-Qa`ida's Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was responsible. - *Reuters, October 6*

October 6, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber targeted a group of Shi`a pilgrims heading to a shrine in Baghdad, killing at least 14 people. - *Reuters, October 6*

October 7, 2013 (IRAQ): Militants executed a wave of attacks across Iraq, including a series of coordinated evening bombings in Baghdad, killing at least 45 people. - *AP, October 7*

October 7, 2013 (EGYPT): A suicide bomber wearing a police uniform detonated an explosives-laden car inside a security base in el-Tor town in the Sinai Peninsula, killing four policemen. The town is close to the resort area of Sharm el-Sheikh. The Salafi-jihadi group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis later claimed responsibility. - *AP, October 7; Bloomberg, October 8*

October 8, 2013 (EGYPT): Gunmen on a motorbike opened fire at customs police in Port Said near the Suez Canal, killing one person. - *Bloomberg October 8*

October 8, 2013 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded in front of a restaurant in the mainly Shi`a neighborhood of Zafaraniyya, killing three people. - *AP, October 8*

October 9, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed two civilians and two policemen in Helmand Province. – *AP, October 9*

October 9, 2013 (SYRIA): A French Muslim man reportedly carried out a suicide attack on a Syrian army position near Aleppo on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat al-Nusra. The attack allegedly killed 10 Syrian soldiers. According to Radio France Internationale, this was “not the first French national to die fighting against Assad. A French convert to Islam was killed in 24 September and another, a 22-year-old identified as Jean-Daniel, was killed last August. French Interior Minister Manuel Valls said last month that as many as 300 French citizens or residents were currently fighting in Syria, planning to go and fight or had recently returned.” – *RFI, October 11; AFP, October 11*

October 9, 2013 (EGYPT): Suspected militants bombed an empty military intelligence office in Rafah in the Sinai Peninsula. The Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis Salafi-jihadi group claimed responsibility. – *AFP, October 9*

October 9, 2013 (THAILAND): Explosions tore through more than 20 locations in southern Thailand. Many of the bombs occurred at ATM machines. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “For years, Thailand’s three southernmost provinces have been under attack by insurgency groups who seek to establish an independent Malay speaking, Muslim state in the predominately Buddhist country.” – *Wall Street Journal, October 9*

October 10, 2013 (UNITED STATES): The New York City Police Department arrested two men from Queens on charges that they attempted to help send supplies to Taliban-linked operatives in Afghanistan. According to NBC, “One suspect was recorded telling an NYPD informant he wanted to help kill U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan because he hated the United States and ‘wanted to take a stand.’” The two men were identified as Humayoun Ghoulam Nabi and Ismail Alsarabbi. Court papers said that Nabi is an immigrant from Pakistan while Alsarabbi is a Palestinian immigrant. – *NBC, October 10*

October 10, 2013 (EGYPT): A suicide bomber drove a vehicle packed with explosives into a checkpoint outside el-Arish in the Sinai Peninsula, killing three soldiers and one policeman. According to authorities, the bomber waited for soldiers and police to start searching his vehicle before he detonated the explosives. – *Daily Star, October 10*

October 10, 2013 (YEMEN): Gunmen killed a Yemeni intelligence officer in Mukalla, Hadramawt Province. – *AFP, October 11*

October 10, 2013 (TURKEY): Turkish authorities announced that they have imposed financial sanctions on approximately 350 people and dozens of organizations that are on the UN blacklist for entities having links to al-Qa`ida or the Taliban. – *AP, October 11*

October 11, 2013 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audiotape, in which he blamed moderate Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia for their recent political setbacks, saying that they have been too conciliatory. He also said that jihadists in Syria must “rise above organizational loyalties and party partisanship” and unite around the goal of establishing an Islamic state. – *AFP, October 11; AP, October 12*

October 11, 2013 (UNITED STATES): U.S. authorities arrested Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen at a Santa Ana bus station in California and charged him with supporting al-Qa`ida. Nguyen, 24-years-old, is a Garden Grove resident who is also known as Hasan Abu Omar Ghannoum. He was about to board a bus bound for Mexico at the time of his arrest. He was raised Catholic but reportedly recently converted to Islam. – *CBS, October 11*

October 11, 2013 (FRANCE): French authorities charged Naamen Meziche, who was once connected to al-Qa`ida’s Hamburg cell that planned the 9/11 attacks on the United States, with terrorism offenses. Meziche was recently deported from Pakistan. According to *Dawn*, “Meziche had been in Pakistani custody since being arrested in May 2012 in the southwest of the country along with three other suspected French jihadis, who were sent back to France in April and charged on the same count.” – *Dawn, October 11*

October 11, 2013 (LIBYA): A car bomb exploded outside a building housing the Finnish and Swedish consulates in Benghazi. The building was damaged, but there were no casualties. – *AP, October 11*

October 11, 2013 (PAKISTAN/AFGHANISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) confirmed that one of its top leaders, Latif Mehsud, was apprehended in Afghanistan’s Khost Province four days earlier. The U.S. Department of State said that U.S. forces captured Latif. – *CNN, October 12*

October 11, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden car into a Pakistani military convoy, killing at least two soldiers in Wana, South Waziristan Agency. – *AFP, October 11*

October 11, 2013 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber wounded three members of the separatist Southern Movement in Lahij Province in southern Yemen. – *AFP, October 11*

October 12, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden vehicle into a police headquarters in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, killing two policemen. – *Dawn, October 12*

October 13, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden truck killed at least 31 people on a busy road in Hama. The intended target was reportedly a Syrian army checkpoint, but most of the dead were civilians. – *Reuters, October 20*

October 13, 2013 (SYRIA): Two car bombs—possibly with suicide bombers at the wheel—exploded near the Syrian state television headquarters in Damascus. The building was damaged, although it is not clear if anyone was injured. – *Time, October 14; Business Standard, October 14*

October 13, 2013 (ETHIOPIA): A bomb exploded in Addis Ababa, killing at least two people. The incident occurred in the city’s Bole district, home to a large Somali population. – *Voice of America, October 13*

October 14, 2013 (IRAQ): A series of car bombs and roadside explosions across Baghdad killed at least 34 people. According to CNN, the explosions

primarily targeted “amusement parks where families and children typically go to celebrate the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha.” – *CNN, October 18*

October 14, 2013 (SYRIA): A car bomb exploded at a market in the rebel-held town of Darkoush, Idlib Province, killing at least 15 people. – *Time, October 14*

October 15, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb planted inside a mosque microphone killed Arsala Jamal, the governor of Logar Province. – *al-Jazira, October 15*

October 15, 2013 (IRAQ): A bomb exploded near a Sunni mosque in Kirkuk, killing 12 worshippers. – *al-Jazira, October 15*

October 16, 2013 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a provincial government minister and seven other people near Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. – *al-Jazira, October 16*

October 17, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber driving an explosives-laden truck killed at least 15 Shabak in Ninawa Province. The Shabak are ethnic Turkmen and Shi`a Muslims. – *Reuters, October 17*

October 17, 2013 (IRAQ): Ten bombs exploded in primarily Shi`a areas of Baghdad, killing at least 44 people. – *Reuters, October 17*

October 18, 2013 (UNITED STATES): U.S. authorities arrested Marcos Alonso Zea (also known as Ali Zea), a Long Island man, for allegedly trying to join al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula to carry out jihadist attacks overseas. According to U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch, “Despite being born and raised in the United States, Zea allegedly betrayed his country and attempted to travel to Yemen in order to join a terrorist organization and commit murder.” The case involved a co-conspirator, who was identified as Justin Kaliebe—also a U.S. citizen. Kaliebe is scheduled to be sentenced in December 2013. – *CBS, October 18; Voice of America, October 18*

October 18, 2013 (YEMEN): Dozens of militants from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula attacked a military base in Abyan Province, killing seven soldiers. According to CNN, “the militants attacked the compound from three sides, drove a bomb-laden vehicle inside and detonated it. The compound’s main building was heavily damaged.” – *CNN, October 18*

October 18, 2013 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle outside a compound where many foreign workers are based in Kabul, killing at least two Afghan civilians. – *The News International, October 18*

October 19, 2013 (EGYPT): A car bomb exploded outside a military intelligence headquarters in the Suez Canal city of Ismailia, injuring six military personnel. The Salafi-jihadi group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis claimed responsibility. – *Washington Post, October 19; AFP, October 21*

October 19, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed approximately 16 soldiers at a checkpoint in a pro-government suburb of Damascus. Activists said that Jabhat al-Nusra was responsible. – *CBC, October 19*

October 19, 2013 (SOMALIA): A suicide bomber killed at least 15 people in a crowded restaurant in Beledweyne. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility. The restaurant is popular with foreign troops, and at least four Ethiopian soldiers were among the dead. – *Voice of America, October 19; New York Times, October 19*

October 20, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a minibus detonated explosives outside a café in a mainly Shi`a Muslim district of Baghdad, killing at least 38 people. – *Reuters, October 20*

October 20, 2013 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber detonated a truck filled with propane tanks at a military checkpoint in Hama, killing more than 30 people. Activists said that Jabhat al-Nusra, which is linked to al-Qa`ida, was responsible. – *New York Times, October 20*

October 20, 2013 (NIGERIA): Boko Haram gunmen on motorcycles and wearing military uniforms shot and hacked to death 19 people on Nigeria’s border with Cameroon. – *AFP, October 20*

October 21, 2013 (RUSSIA): An explosion, possibly caused by a female suicide bomber from Dagestan, tore through a passenger bus in Volgograd, killing at least five people. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but Russian authorities suspect that the incident was related to the Islamist insurgency in the North Caucasus region. – *Telegraph, October 21; CNN, October 21*

October 22, 2013 (IRAQ): A wave of suicide bombings and other attacks targeting security forces across Iraq left at least 17 people dead. – *RT, October 22*

October 23, 2013 (MALI): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed two UN peacekeeping soldiers from Chad and a civilian at a checkpoint in Tessalit in northern Mali. Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility. – *New York Times, October 24; AFP, October 24*

October 26, 2013 (LIBYA): A car bomb exploded outside a school used as a training center for local municipal elections in Benghazi, but there were no injuries. – *CNN, October 26*

October 27, 2013 (IRAQ): At least six car bombs exploded across primarily Shi`a districts of Baghdad, killing at least 21 people. – *Reuters, October 27*

October 28, 2013 (CHINA): A car slammed into a crowd of tourists in Beijing, and then burst into flames. Two civilians and all three people in the vehicle were killed. Chinese police described the incident as a “carefully planned terrorist attack,” and they blamed Muslim separatists from Xinjiang Province. According to Voice of America, “It remains unclear if Monday’s incident was an accident or an intentional act carried out at the politically symbolic heart of Beijing.” – *Australian Broadcasting Corporation, October 31; Radio Australia, October 31; Voice of America, October 28*

October 28, 2013 (SOMALIA): A suspected U.S. drone strike killed a top bomb expert for al-Shabab in southern Somalia. Somali authorities identified the man as Ibrahim Ali Abdi, also known as Anta-Anta. – *Sydney Morning Herald, October 29*



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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.

October 28, 2013 (EGYPT): Masked men killed three Egyptian policemen at a checkpoint in the Nile Delta city of Mansura. – *Reuters, October 28*

October 29, 2013 (NORTH AFRICA): The French government announced that four French hostages kidnapped by al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb three years ago in Niger have been released. France denied that a ransom had been paid. – *Guardian, October 29*

October 29, 2013 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle attacked a police checkpoint in Mosul, killing at least eight people, including three policemen. – *Voice of America, October 30*

October 29, 2013 (IRAQ): Two suicide bombers detonated their explosives outside the Baghdad home of a leader of an anti-al-Qa`ida Sunni militia, killing at least 11 people. – *Voice of America, October 30; AP, October 30*

October 30, 2013 (EGYPT): A car bomb exploded in the Sinai Peninsula, but there were no injuries. The bomb was intended to kill Egyptian troops. – *AFP, October 30*

October 30, 2013 (TUNISIA): A suicide bomber detonated explosives on a beach near the resort of Sousse, an important tourist destination close to Tunis. There were no casualties. Thirty minutes later, in the neighboring town of Monastir, Tunisian security forces avoided another suicide attack by a different man. Officials described the two bombers as “Salafi-jihadis.” According to Agence France-Presse, the bombing was the “first in Tunisia since 2002, when an attack claimed by al-Qa`ida killed 21 people at the ancient Ghriba synagogue on the resort island of Djerba.” – *Reuters, October 30; AFP, October 30*