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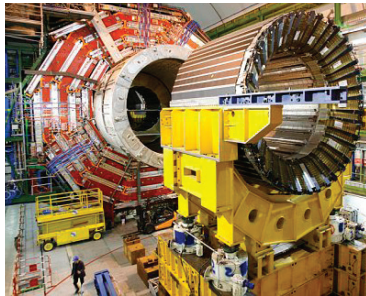
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Large Hadron Collider, CERN

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PAKISTANI SECURITY SWEEP SEIZES TALIBAN LEADERS IN KARACHI

Pakistani security forces have announced the arrest of Akhtar Zaman Mahsud, the alleged Amir of the Karachi branch of the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) as part of a major sweep of terrorist suspects in the strategically important port city.

Security forces claimed Akhtar Zaman was arrested in Karachi's eastern suburb of Sohrab Goth following an October 18 shootout with police. However, some police sources and members of the largely Pashtun Sohrab Goth community insisted Akhtar Zaman was actually arrested in a raid on a supermarket on September 14 (*The News* [Islamabad], October 21; PakTribune, October 20). The alleged TTP commander and three others arrested with him (including Samiullah, a.k.a. Shamim, Fazal Kareem and Munawar Khan) were charged with involvement in an unsuccessful attack on the Kemari Oil Terminal on the night of September 14. One Islamabad daily quoted an anonymous senior police source as saying, "If we produce an accused before the court after 24 hours of his arrest, it becomes a case of habeas corpus, so normally police show the arrests of accused a day prior to their production in the court" (*The News*, October 21).

A police official said the suspects also wanted to plant explosives in police installations and other sensitive points in Karachi. According to police, the men were armed with 75kg of cyclotrimethylene-trinitramine (RDX) explosives, three Kalashnikov assault rifles and a TT-model pistol, commonly used as a police sidearm in Pakistan but also made by the gunsmiths of the Khyber region.

The seizure followed a larger one last week, which netted two suicide jackets, four Kalashnikovs, 17 hand grenades, nine detonators and a variety of ammunition for mortars, RPGs and rifles. Police claim these weapons belonged to the same Karachi cell of the TTP (*Daily Times*, October 19).

Further raids by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) of the Sindh police on October 21 resulted in the arrest of Muhammad Sahib Khan (a.k.a. Qasai) in Sohrab Goth, as well as two accomplices in other parts of the city. According to police, Muhammad Sahib Khan confessed to being tied to a Swat-based TTP commander named Farooq. He was found in possession of a suicide vest and was already wanted by police for involvement in murders, assassinations, kidnappings and attacks on security services. Police charged Muhammad Sahib Khan and his accomplices with “trying to establish a Taliban network in Karachi,” as well as “plotting terrorist activities, including suicide bombings.” They were also accused of destroying schools in the Swat valley (*The News*, October 21; *Dawn* [Karachi], October 21).

According to Pakistan’s *Daily Times*, some 60 second-level Taliban leaders evaded the government’s offensive in Swat earlier this year by traveling by train in small groups to Karachi, where the Karachi TTP arranged for their transit by plane to various points in the Gulf states (*Daily Times* [Lahore], October 19). The transfer went unnoticed because many natives of Malakand work in these same Middle Eastern states.

Mahsudi tribesmen who have fled the turmoil in their native South Waziristan for Karachi suburbs like Sohrab Goth report shakedowns by local police who threaten to arrest them as TTP members, as well as marginalization by government agencies on the basis of ethnicity, which local elders claim threatens to drive peaceful Mahsudis into the arms of the Taliban (*The News*, October 21). Army Chief of Staff Ashfaq Pervez Kayani took the unusual step of writing an open letter to the Mahsud tribe, assuring them that the current operations in South Waziristan were aimed only at terrorists rather than the tribe as a whole (*The Hindu*, October 19).

Though it lies over 1,000 miles from the military operations in the tribal regions of northwestern Pakistan, the port of Karachi has become a target of Taliban and al-Qaeda associated militants since April, when members of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) terrorist group were detained while planning attacks on local transportation firms responsible for shipping supplies

destined for NATO forces in Afghanistan. A campaign of threats and bombings is intended to disrupt the NATO supply chain, which relies on Pakistani companies and drivers to transport supplies along the 1,200 mile route from Karachi to the Khyber Pass. Karachi, the starting point of the route, was once regarded as a safe port, but recently it has been subject to infiltration by Taliban and al-Qaeda sabotage units. Earlier this month security forces arrested five members of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) terrorist group who were planning attacks on transportation firms responsible for shipping NATO supplies to Peshawar. This followed a similar roundup of militants last January after they threatened transporters not to carry NATO supplies.

The new Karachi Taliban leader, who gave an interview to the *Daily Times* on condition of anonymity, said the local TTP chapter was in accord with the ideology of TTP leader Hakimullah Mahsud but was not authorized to carry out operations (*Daily Times*, October 19).

SENIOR AL-QAEDA COMMANDER ABU YAHYA AL-LIBI CONDEMNS PRESIDENT OBAMA AND THE “CRIMINAL ARMY OF PAKISTAN”

Establishing al-Qaeda’s battle is about establishing universal “servitude to God,” according to senior al-Qaeda commander Abu Yahya al-Libi who has expressed pride in the fact that his movement has no other agenda: “We are not a group that is concerned with finding economic solutions. We are not a group that is concerned with building skyscrapers. We are not a group that is concerned with finding solutions to social problems. All these problems were a result of people’s deviations, and occurred after the people agreed to become servants to other than God, the Great and Almighty.” The message was contained in a 45 minute video of al-Libi’s sermon on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr in September and posted to the web on October 27 (Al-Sahab Establishment for Media Production/Al-Fajr Media Center).

Typical of al-Qaeda and Taliban statements, al-Libi’s sermon heaped abuse upon President Obama, referring to him as a “black crow” who delivered a speech in Cairo while people clapped for him “as if he were Umar bin Abd al-Aziz” (an early 8th century Ummayyad caliph renowned for his piety). “Obama has become the holder of the slogan of ‘change’ and the owner of the slogan of ‘openness.’ Through this openness, scores of people are being killed in Afghanistan on a daily basis and nobody hears of them.”

Al-Libi expresses his disdain for those “insane and defeated people” who urge coexistence with the non-Islamic world and mocks Western perceptions of what constitutes “acceptable” Islam: “If you become democratic, modern, or Western, the people will be content with you and praise and recognize you as a moderate and balanced Muslim.” Al-Libi expresses astonishment that the Prophet Muhammad was never able to establish coexistence “among his people and in his house and homeland,” yet the means to coexistence have suddenly been “discovered in the 21st century.”

The senior al-Qaeda commander also condemned the “criminal Pakistani army that destroyed Swat,” asking why the army was fighting Muslims who wanted nothing more than the “Shari’a of Almighty God”

As he concluded the sermon, al-Libi called on the “mujahideen brothers all over the world” to trust in monotheism as a means of unifying their movement. Considering the source, al-Libi issued a rather surprising appeal for militant factions to be more conciliatory and less insistent in their belief that only they have the correct course of action and right to operate. “I say that there can be no possible agreement unless some groups are willing to concede some of their rights. That is a necessity. If a group holds fast to its right and the other group holds fast to its right, or what it claims to be its right, what kind of agreement or unity can be done after that?”

More specifically, al-Libi appealed to the Islamic State of Iraq and Ansar al-Islam to resolve their differences and “unite in one group and one rank.” Similarly, al-Libi also called on the Salafi mujahideen groups in Palestine to “get rid of the causes of division, disagreement, and dispute. There must be some kind of concession to make agreement and unity possible. Concession is necessary for the hearts to rejoin.”

Jihadis Debate Methods of Financing the Mujahideen Network in Iraq

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

The main objective of jihadi Websites and forums is to garner support for the Mujahideen on various levels, the most important of which is fundraising

and transferring money to the battlefields, essential for the continuity of terrorist operations. To that end, Jihadi forums intermittently appeal to Salafi-Jihadi supporters to donate money while explaining secure methods of transferring money. A recent posting entitled “The Fourth campaign: Conduct Jihad with Your Money,” describes methods used in a new campaign to finance Iraq’s mujahideen (hanein.info, Thread of September 15 to October 9).

A jihadi forum member, nicknamed Abdullah, began the posting with a long pep talk to fellow members regarding the religious virtue of donating money for jihad that quoted verses from the Quran that equate donations to jihad with active participation in the field. Abdullah calls upon the Iraqi mujahideen to support each other financially, logistically and through the sharing of information and intelligence: “Some Iraqi jihadi formations suffer from a lack of funding. They became the poorest mujahideen on Iraqi soil for refusing conditional support. They became day laborers and jihadi lions and monks at night.” Abdullah appealed to Muslim scholars and merchants everywhere to donate to jihad activities.

The new campaign has the following objectives:

- Deal with the shortfall in jihadi funding.
- Promote the exchange of financial support between jihadi formations. The well-funded groups must support the others. According to Abdullah, information from the inside confirms that some jihadi groups have not received a single dollar in the last 18 months while some jihadi forum members make one thousand dollars per month in salary.
- Revive the idea of financial support of jihad as a religious duty, a concept that was abandoned by many Muslim scholars and businessmen.
- Provide financial support to the families of martyrs.
- Provide financial support to jihadi media efforts.

This two-month campaign, according to Abdullah, was launched by two Iraqi jihadi factions, Jaysh al-Rashideen and Jaysh Sa’ad bin Abi Waqas, and will be managed

through their respective websites, al-rashedeen.info and saadarmy.com.

The first step in the fundraising process is to contact these factions through their websites to specify the amount of money to be donated and the name of the donor. The donor is given contact details for the faction's representative and a code word to identify himself to the representative through the website. After converting the money to dollars, the donor is instructed to go to a bank and specify the name of the recipient and his mobile phone number. Then the recipient is given a 10-digit wire number. Abdullah claims the banks will not question wire transfers of less than \$700. The smaller the amount, the better, says Abdullah, since wires for small amounts are not monitored.

Secondly, the money wires should be sent to jihadi representatives in Syria, Jordan and Turkey. The jihadi factions' representatives in these countries will then smuggle the money into Iraq.

Other forum chatters criticized Abdullah's instructions, saying intelligence services monitoring the websites could easily identify the recipient and the code word. Abdullah responded by arguing that this is only one of sixty other ways of sending money to the mujahideen that he cannot reveal over the internet.

From the comments and deliberations of other forum members on Abdullah's posting, it is obvious that jihadis are aware their websites are monitored by security agencies. When contacted by donors they will assuredly provide safer means of sending the donations, therefore it seems that this posting attempts to serve two purposes:

- Mislead security services into forcing further constraints on ordinary business transactions, consequently slowing down economic growth. Economic disruption is one of al-Qaeda's main goals.
- Identify possible financial donors and contact them by other safer methods.

Al-Qaeda has proven more capable of raising and transferring money than the Iraqi factions. In last year's Hajj (pilgrimage) season, al-Qaeda supporters collected cash donations from pilgrims by showing videotaped appeals for financial assistance from deputy al-Qaeda

leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, stored on mobile phones. The money was later carried in person through Saudi Arabia's busy borders as millions of pilgrims returned home (altwafoq.net September 28). A similar video message by Saeed al-Shahri, deputy al-Qaeda leader in Yemen, has been distributed by mobile phone in the lead-up to this November's Hajj season.

Another unsophisticated but difficult to track means of transferring money is what could be labeled as the "verbal wire" or the "unofficial wire," a method the jihadis call "hawala." Some jihadi websites and forums such as alnusra.net and alboraq.inf ask donors to contact them through their websites. Once contact is made, the donor is instructed to give the donation to a certain representative in the donor's country, then a phone call is made by that contact to another contact person in the recipient country requesting a cash payment to the jihadi group. No official wire records are made, with the whole system depending on trust between the two contact persons, both of whom usually run legitimate or front companies as part of the setup for jihadi fundraising. The verbal "hawala" is impossible to track unless the identity of the two contact persons is revealed and their calls monitored by security forces.

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Al Qaeda's Nuclear Scientist? The Case of Adlene Hicheur

By Raffaello Pantucci

Amidst much furor, French anti-terrorism judge Christophe Tessier announced that year-old Algerian-French scientist Dr. Adlene Hicheur had been brought up on charges of "association with terrorists" on October 12. Allegedly in contact with al-Qaeda's North African affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Dr. Hicheur was arrested with his 25-year old brother (later released) in Vienne, France on October 8 after an 18-month investigation headed by France's internal security service, the Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur (Central Directorate of Interior Intelligence - DCRI) (*Le Monde*, October 14).

A scientist involved in the Large Hadron Collider project (also known as the European Organization for Nuclear Research or CERN), Dr. Hicheur's arrest was met with a wave of speculation in the press that he might be at the center of a nuclear-focused al-Qaeda plot. [1] In an attempt to dampen such speculation, CERN published a press release which admitted that Dr. Hicheur was an employee, but categorically stated: "CERN does not carry out research in the fields of nuclear power or nuclear weaponry." [2]

The investigation into Dr. Hicheur was apparently initiated as a result of an American tip which had turned up on the periphery of a separate investigation into Afghan support networks in France (*Le Monde*, October 14). Having been alerted, the DCRI launched an extensive bugging operation tracking Hicheur's online activity to a degree described by the former Interior Minister as being on a par with "reading over someone's shoulder" (*Independent*, October 11). In his email traffic, watchers noticed messages apparently passing from Dr. Hicheur to known high-level contacts in AQIM in which he offered to assist them in plotting in France, though it was unclear whether these offers had anything to do with his work at CERN (*Le Figaro*, October 11).

Born in Seif, Algeria in 1976, Dr. Hicheur's family moved to France when he was two. A bright pupil, he obtained a Ph.D. in particle physics in 2003 from the University of Savoie in Annecy, France, which involved research in 2002 at Stanford University in the United States (*Le Monde*, October 14). British intelligence agencies investigated his possible links in the UK after a period of employment in 2005 at the sensitive Rutherford Appleton Laboratories in Oxfordshire and trips to universities in London, Manchester, Durham, Edinburgh, and St. Andrews (*Times*, October 13). Investigations into the case continue, though there has been some level of tension within the French security establishment that the arrest may have been premature, potentially driving Dr. Hicheur's contacts in AQIM underground before they can be intercepted.

As speculation around his "nuclear" connections died down, focus instead turned to the fact that a seemingly well integrated member of French society could be attracted to AQIM's violently anti-Western rhetoric. Unlike many of the other individuals incarcerated or otherwise detained in France on terrorism charges, Dr. Hicheur was a prominent and active member of the European scientific community, respected by

his colleagues and part of a large, religious and well integrated family. In his home of Vienne, France, he was apparently held up as something of a local celebrity thanks to his impressive academic achievements.

While the man described by colleagues as a "shy but brilliant young physicist" has reportedly confessed to some level of activity to French investigators, his family continues to protest his innocence, including his older brother Hashim who gave an interview to the academic journal *Nature* in which he stated that the high volume of email traffic back and forth with Algeria is normal for a family which retains deep connections to their homeland. He also stated that a recent large money transfer was intended for the purchase of land in Algeria, but was the likely cause of police interest in his brother (*Nature*, October 14). While the outcome of the case remains uncertain, the evidence of AQIM activity and the charge that a seemingly well-integrated member of French society could be so deeply involved in terrorist activity suggests that France remains at risk to al-Qaeda affiliated networks.

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Notes:

1. As established in 1954, the original name of the organization was Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN). Though this was soon changed to Organisation Européenne pour la Recherche Nucléaire, it was decided to retain the original acronym, CERN.
2. CERN Press Release, <http://press.web.cern.ch/press/>, October 12, 2009

Will Nigeria's Amnesty Campaign Have a Lasting Impact on the Delta Insurgency?

By Thomas Strouse

Soon after amnesty was offered in early August 2009, few seemed to take notice when Osama Bin Laden surrendered to authorities. Two weeks later, the leader led more than 20 of his militant followers to do the same. In an interview that day, Bin Laden said

that since he abandoned his life of militancy, he had found peace within himself. The local press on the scene suggested that the young followers “looked excited to be quitting militancy and other related crime.” This news failed to reach headlines and even those who noticed expressed their doubts of any further success for the amnesty program.

This is not fiction. The “Osama Bin Laden” in question is a Nigerian militant leader who went by that name. His real name is Solomon Ndigbara. Upon surrendering in August, Ndigbara let it be known that he now prefers to be addressed as Brother Solomon, shedding his infamous nom de guerre (*Vanguard*, October 2).

Nigeria’s Amnesty Program

When Nigerian President Umaru Yar’Adua first announced an amnesty plan for militants in the Niger Delta in late June, the Western press tended to dismiss the move as another Nigerian sham. The amnesty program ran from August 6 until October 4. The skepticism remained up until the October deadline, when the last of the major militant leaders ended their holdout and surrendered at the 11th hour. “There had been skepticism in the beginning as to the sincerity of the proverbial olive branch dangled before the freedom fighters, usually referred to as militants,” one Nigerian journalist wrote on the day after the amnesty deadline. “Many had viewed the arrangement as a cosmetic dressing of a deep wound and wondered what would make the initiative not go the way of others in the past. But the surprising flow of the combatants into the warm embrace of peace has, indeed, confounded critics, and given hope that the serenity the region needs would return” (*Daily Independent* [Lagos], October 5).

Nearly all of the major militant leaders who had been advertized as the core of Nigeria’s most notorious militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), accepted the amnesty program. However, MEND ended its 90-day ceasefire on October 16, threatening to resume its attacks on Nigeria’s oil industry. In the following days, MEND has temporized on its threats, while the Federal Government has taken the position that MEND may have been reduced to an email generating non-entity.

The MEND Umbrella

It can be difficult to differentiate between the various armed groups of the Niger Delta. In the Western press, the

groups are typically lumped together under the MEND name. However, this framework for understanding the militancy in the Delta can lead to flawed conclusions about the current situation. It is worth examining the splits in MEND and the effect that the government amnesty program has had on the movement’s leadership.

Since its creation in late 2005, MEND has never been a cohesive entity. It has largely operated as an umbrella group consisting of shifting alliances among the various militant factions, key militant leaders, and low-level fighters whose camps are in the creeks of the Delta. Despite its lack of cohesiveness, MEND carries significant weight as a symbol of the militant resistance in the region.

Post-amnesty, it remains unclear who speaks for MEND and how many supporters it maintains. If MEND continues to threaten massive attacks and does not carry through on its threats, it will begin to lose its credibility as a militant force. Likewise, if the Nigerian government does not follow through on its promises to develop the impoverished Delta region, MEND’s symbolic power could gain in popularity amongst disillusioned militants.

By accepting the amnesty offer, the key militant leaders have effectively been co-opted by the government. Among them are Victor Ben Ebikabowei (a.k.a. Boyloaf), Government Ekpemupolo (a.k.a. Tompolo), and Farah Dagogo. Although never a part of MEND, Ateke Tom, one of the most notorious and feared militant leaders, also accepted the amnesty plan.

It appears that President Yar’Adua came to the conclusion that he could no longer ignore these key militant leaders. However, it remains uncertain what level of loyalty and influence the former militant leaders have, and will be able to maintain among their followers. Their acceptance of amnesty will be a true test of their influence and it will have a major impact on the chances of success for the strategy implemented by the Nigerian government.

Ignoring MEND

With MEND threatening to resume its attacks on oil installations in the Delta, a number of former core MEND commanders have suggested that the group should be ignored. They argue that the remnants of the group consist of an insignificant number of individuals sitting at their laptops, free to write and send what they want to the Nigerian and Western press. They further

suggest that these individuals are trying to hijack the struggle, using the MEND brand as a way to further their own selfish interests (Reuters, October 8).

Two days prior to a scheduled meeting on October 9 between Nigerian government officials and key militant leaders who had accepted the amnesty, MEND released a statement to the press warning of future attacks. “In this next phase, we will burn down all attacked installations and no longer limit our attacks to the destruction of pipelines,” threatened MEND’s spokesman, Jomo Gbomo (*Vanguard*, October 11). One week later, MEND ended its 90-day ceasefire and warned of attacks to come.

According to Commander Boyloaf, MEND’s threats should not be taken seriously and what remains of the group is nothing but a “paper tiger” (*Vanguard*, October 11). In an interview with the Nigerian press, he was asked about the threats coming from MEND and their impact on the amnesty program. “My brother, forget about all these people who sit by their laptop and write rubbish on pages of newspaper... I have always advised the media to ignore them; if they want amnesty they should go and surrender their laptop and fill [out] the amnesty form and be part of the process. Who is Jomo Gbomo? And why is he still hiding? He should show himself if he [exists]” (*Vanguard*, October 11).

Finding Replacements

Boyloaf was the first of the big-name militant leaders to accept amnesty, doing so on August 7, the second day of the program (Reuters, August 7). After he surrendered, MEND announced that a replacement would take over for him (*Daily Independent*, August 6). Skeptics of the amnesty plan have suggested that new leaders may be found to replace all of the key commanders who have accepted the government amnesty.

Stephen Davis, Canon Emeritus at Coventry Cathedral and a former presidential envoy under President Yar’Adua, has been a vocal critic of the program in the Nigerian press. He warns that even though the key militant leaders have surrendered, this does not mean that MEND has collapsed. “The most likely scenario is that the next level of commanders will step up to the plate as they see the opportunity to make big money like those that have ‘surrendered.’ The problem for those that surrender is that when the payments run out, as they always do, their old command spot has been taken

by someone else,” Davis wrote on October 17. “They then usually try to start another group, but find they need a patron or have to do some contract work to earn some money so as to recruit new boys and grow quickly so as to be strong enough to claim space. And there will be plenty of patrons and contract work as we approach the next elections. That is the way the jungle works, as does politics in Nigeria” (*Next* [Lagos], October 17).

Post-Amnesty Deadline

The Nigerian government has announced that approximately 15,000 militants have accepted the amnesty offer. According to the amnesty plan, those who have surrendered their arms will enter into a rehabilitation program and be given a stipend of 65,000 naira (\$450) per month. (Reuters, October 8). Presumably the key militant leaders who surrendered were offered significant financial packages to provide them with the incentive to cooperate.

Post-amnesty, it is now the responsibility of the Nigerian government to follow through on monthly stipends to former militants, as well as to maintain the support of the former militant leaders who still command the loyalty of their followers. Monthly stipends were also a critical element used by the United States to enlist and successfully co-opt the Awakening (Sahwah) movement in Iraq’s Anbar Province. In Iraq, the United States was able to effectively place a wedge between the Sunni insurgency and al-Qaeda by finding key tribal and/or militant leaders with whom American forces could work. While admittedly in a very different context, a similar model has been used by the Nigerian government.

MEND and al-Qaeda as Brands

MEND as a brand and symbol of the militant struggle in the Niger Delta can be compared to the brand and symbol of an organization like al-Qaeda. Just as MEND carries the most weight as the leading militant group in the Delta region, al-Qaeda carries the greatest weight in the global community of militant jihadists. Beneath the appeal of the brand name of both groups, there are a number of tensions relating to militant ideology, organizational leadership, strategy, tactics, and short and long term goals.

Only time will tell, but it is possible that the Nigerian government has succeeded in delegitimizing the MEND brand in Nigeria, just as the most virulent elements of

the “Sunni insurgency” in Iraq’s Anbar Province, often branded as al-Qaeda in Iraq, were delegitimized by Sunni tribal leaders.

Prospects for Stabilization in the Delta

There are real grievances to be dealt with in the Delta region, yet a number of militant factions have been able to hijack the struggle for their own political and financial self-interest. If the Nigerian government can continue to engage, neutralize, and co-opt these factions as well as the remaining militants, follow through on its pledges to implement a Delta development program, and begin to address some of the root causes which have led to the rise of militancy in the region, the prospects for stabilization will improve greatly.

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Growth of Salafist Militancy in Palestinian Refugee Camps Poses Security Risks

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Force Commander Major General Claudio Graziano recently told *Al-Safir* newspaper that small groups of terrorists from Palestinian camps continue to represent a threat to security in southern Lebanon. Graziano said that the international peacekeepers were taking precautions against any extremist threats and were cooperating with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to ward off any attack. “There is limited information on the networks, and it is very difficult to identify them,” he said, adding that UNIFIL does not take the threats lightly. “We even consider the threat a terrorist activity, because it encourages carrying out such operations” (*Al-Safir* [Beirut], September 26).

The statements of Graziano paralleled reports suggesting that the Islamist militant group Fatah al-Islam is trying to infiltrate and operate in several Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The reports claim that camps

targeted by the militants include the al-Biddawi camp in the north and the al-Burj al-Shamali camp in the south. This information reinforces suspicions that Fatah al-Islam members are trying to form small cells that can be employed in future terrorist attacks. (*Al-Ra’y* [Kuwait Daily], September 22).

Background

These reports serve to indicate the increasing inclination towards the Salafi-Jihadi ideology and the growing radicalization of young Palestinians in the refugee camps in Lebanon as well as in Jordan and Syria. Socio-political conditions in these camps, which have been under the control of the secular Palestinian political organizations, play an important role in increasing the influence of Salafism. Conditions promoting this growth include the absence of any prospect of resolving the Arab-Israeli Conflict, rising poverty and unemployment, the political ramifications of the Fatah-Hamas conflict, and the deterioration of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its control over the refugee camps.

The Salafi-Jihadi ideology in the refugee camps has come in three phases:

- The first phase was the introduction of the ideology in the mid-1980s. The establishment of the Salafist militant group ‘Usbat al-Ansar (League of Partisans) in the Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp in southern Lebanon was typical of this phase. This period also witnessed the emergence of nationalist groups using Islamic slogans and the establishment of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.
- The second phase occurred when the Salafi-Jihadis started playing a larger role in hosting and training non-Palestinian jihadis. The 2003 bombing of a McDonalds and several other Western restaurants in Lebanon by Yemeni Muammar Abdullah al-Awami (a.k.a. Ibn al-Shahid) was an example of this development. Al-Awami prepared for the attack in the Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp and later returned there to hide from security forces.
- The third phase is the emergence of the Salafi-Jihadi ideology as the primary ideology for Palestinian youth in the camps. This phase is occurring now, as individuals and small groups are increasingly turning to Salafist militancy.

The Camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon

In Lebanon, for instance, there are 21 “official” refugee camps and the number of Palestinians living in these camps is a highly sensitive issue in a country where the political “sectarian balance” is at the core of the state. Those who live in these official camps represent about 10.5% of Palestinian refugees worldwide, while a further 20% live in 13 “unregistered” camps run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). In Lebanon there are 81 careers forbidden to Palestinians, with the socio-political situation playing a pivotal role in the growth of Salafist inclinations amongst Palestinian youth. According to analyst Omayma Abdel-Latif, the Palestinian camps are “fertile ground for radical Salafist groups” in the absence of official Lebanese control over the camps. [1] The 1969 Cairo Agreement gave the PLO administrative control of the refugee camps and the freedom to conduct military activities in southern Lebanon. Though the Lebanese government (with the encouragement of Syria) abrogated the Cairo agreement in 1987, the PLO conducts itself as if the agreement is still in force and government forces have been reluctant to assume direct control of the camps.

Ayn al-Hilwa has been the breeding ground for a number of leading jihadis in recent years. Abu Muhjin (a.k.a. Ahmad Abd al-Karim al-Sa’adi), the former leader of ‘Usbat al-Ansar and brother of current ‘Usbat al-Ansar leader Abu Tariq (a.k.a. Haytham Abd al-Karim al-Sa’adi) was reported to be one of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s deputies in al-Qaeda in Iraq. Another Palestinian from Ayn al-Hilwa, Salih al-Qiblawi, appeared in al-Zarqawi’s 2006 video and was reported by a militant Salafi ideologue to be responsible for a missile attack on north Israel in 2002 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 26). Further north, the Fatah al-Islam group which clashed with the Lebanese army at the Nahr al-Barid camp in 2007 is yet another example of the “jihadization” occurring in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

In Syria, there are nine refugee camps with a population of about 457,000, according to the UNRWA. The biggest refugee camp in Syria, al-Yarmouk, experienced clashes between militants and Syrian security forces last year (*al-Hayat*, October 10, 2008). When Syria became a transit point for Syrian and Arab fighters aiming to take up jihad against Americans between 2003 and 2007, there were several cases of young fighters passing through al-Yarmouk camp.

In Jordan, 19-year-old Tha’ir al-Wahidi, from Baqa’a camp, shot four Lebanese members of the Kaslik choir in 2008 in the capital city of Amman and then shot himself and died in the hospital (*ammannet.net Radio*, July 22, 2008). Baqa’a camp is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. On September 2, a Jordanian court launched the trial of three people (one still a fugitive) accused of planning to attack the Jordanian intelligence service office in Baqa’a (*al-Ghad*, September 2). Arrests after the Tha’ir al-Wahidi incident revealed the presence of the Salafi-Jihadi ideology in the Baqa’a camp. The trial also revealed that the group that recruited Tha’ir al-Wahidi consists of 12 members, all of whom are of Palestinian origin. The alleged leader of the group is Shaker Umar al-Khatib, who is originally from the Gaza Strip and now a resident of Irbid camp, north of the Jordanian capital of Amman (*Al-Hayat*, January 28).

Irbid camp is mentioned repeatedly when Salafi-Jihadi issues are raised. Irbid, being close to the Jordanian-Syrian border, emerged as a transit point for Salafi-Jihadis heading to Iraq or to Lebanon in the last few years (*al-Hayat*, June 29). Salafi-Jihadi movements in Jordan in the mid 1990’s were associated with cities like Zarqa, Salt and Maan. Convicted persons in such cases, since the mid 1990’s, were Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Most of them were residents of East Amman, Zarqa or the city of Irbid and not residents of the camps (*al-Hayat*, June 29).

Al-Wahidi and al-Khatib were not the only Salafi-Jihadi leaders who came from the refugee camps in Jordan. The number of Palestinian refugees in the camps in Jordan, according to UNRWA estimates, is around 1,930,000. [2] Among the local leaders of the Salafi-Jihadi movement is Jihad al-Qasheh, originally from Irbid camp, and Sulayman Ghayyad al-Anjadi, killed by the Jordanian authorities after an armed confrontation in 2007. Al-Anjadi was accused of attempting to help Azmi al-Jayousi escape from prison with the help of other persons and was also accused of planning to assassinate U.S. President George W. Bush during his visit to Jordan in 2006.

The ties between the Salafi-Jihadis across the Levant region show that some young men in the refugee camps are inspired and influenced by the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s ambition of creating a Levantine Salafi-Jihadi movement. The latter was started in Zarqawi’s Afghan training camp in 2000 before al-Zarqawi moved to Iraq and led al-Qaeda forces there until he was killed in June 2006.

Conclusion

The impasse that the Middle East peace process is currently experiencing in addition to the decline of the secular Palestinian organizations in the refugee camps has put Salafi-Jihadism in a position to become increasingly attractive to Palestinians in the refugee camps. There is also a growing focus in Salafi-Jihadi web statements on the Gaza Strip since the August clashes between Hamas and the Salafist Jund Ansar Allah faction that led to the death of Jund Ansar Allah founder Abu Nur al-Maqdisi (a.k.a. Dr. Abdul Latif bin Khalid al-Mousa).

Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden has devoted several speeches to the Palestinian issue (three of six statements issued so far this year were dedicated to the matter); in March 2008 he issued a speech entitled "The Way for the Salvation of Palestine" in which he urged Palestinians to take up jihad in Iraq before liberating Palestine:

My Islamic nation! You know that the nearest field of jihad today to support our people in Palestine is the Iraqi field, so it is necessary to be concerned with it, focus on it, and support it. The duty of providing support is most urgently needed from Muslims living in neighboring countries. It is necessary for all the people of the Levant, the people of that blessed land to recognize the power which Allah has bestowed upon them, and to support their mujahideen brothers in Iraq as they are obliged to do. It is a great opportunity and a great duty upon the arriving emigrant brothers from Palestine - who were prevented from waging jihad on the hills of Jerusalem - to shake off the illusions of political parties and other groups which are immersed in deception of the democracy. And they should hasten to take their positions among the ranks of the mujahideen in Iraq, and through support and trust in Allah...he will aid them by his will. Then, there shall be a move towards the blessed al-Aqsa [mosque in Jerusalem] and then the mujahideen coming from outside shall encounter their brothers within - and this moment will remind us of the legacy of Hittin [where Muslim leader Salah al-Din defeated the Crusaders in 1187], and the Muslims shall delight in their clear victory. [3]

Jihadi web forums such as alflojaweb.com, hanein.info and muslm.net have devoted special sections to al-Maqdisi and his criticism of Hamas for being too liberal.

The spread of such materials can be expected to play a role in reshaping the thinking of young Palestinians in the refugee camps as they come under their influence. If training and organization become available to these young people they have the potential to become a threat to not only the countries in which they reside, but to the region as a whole.

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Notes:

1. Omayma Abdel-Latif, Lebanon's Sunni Islamists: A Growing Force, Carnegie Endowment, Carnegie Paper, January 2008, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19882>.
2. <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/index1.htm>
3. Al-Sahab Media, March 21, 2008. For full translation, see, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefabinladen0308-2.pdf>.