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LEADING PAKISTANI ISLAMIST ORGANIZING POPULAR MOVEMENT AGAINST SOUTH WAZIRISTAN OPERATIONS

As the Pakistani Army pushes deeper into South Waziristan, a vocal political challenge to Islamabad’s cooperation in the War on Terrorism has emerged in the form of Syed Munawar Hasan, the Amir (leader) of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)—the leading party in the religious coalition that rules Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (NWFP)—and a member of the ruling coalition in Balochistan Province. Syed Munawar was a student of JI founder Maulana Syed Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979), one of the leading theorists of political Islam. A member of JI-Pakistan since 1967 and the party’s Secretary General since 1993, Syed Munawar has begun a very public campaign to rally support among Pakistan’s conservative religious community against the U.S. role in the region and Islamabad’s offensive against Taliban extremists in South Waziristan. He is also calling for a diplomatic campaign against India for its alleged role in terrorist activities within Pakistan. In recent well-publicized rallies and Friday sermons, Syed Munawar has issued a series of provocative statements and demands. According to the JI’s Amir:

- Pakistan should sever all ties with India and begin a diplomatic campaign against the country at the United Nations in response to the discovery of Indian arms in South Waziristan and Balochistan. The government has failed to do this because India is backed by the United States. Indian Hindus are organizing atrocities against India’s Muslim, Sikh, Christian

and Buddhist communities (*Jasarat* [Karachi], November 15; *The News* [Islamabad], November 14). JI is organizing “black days” of protest against India in mid-December.

- Muslim Kashmiris have been waging a struggle for freedom from India for 62 years. India has responded by sending a 700,000 man “army of savages” (*Jasarat* [Karachi], November 15). Though JI claims it is dedicated to a peaceful and democratic process, the exception is Kashmir, in which case the movement actively supports armed groups fighting Indian rule.

- State terrorism is the real form of terrorism due to the massive firepower available to modern states. Millions of people have died in the “unprecedented” destruction caused by state terrorism (*Jasarat* [Karachi], November 15)

- The United States is seeking to create a “mini-Pentagon” in Islamabad by expanding its embassy there. Islamabad is “under the occupation of Blackwater [renamed Xe Services LLC in February]” and Washington is pushing for an expansion of the counter-insurgency operations to North Waziristan. The ongoing drone attacks on insurgent leaders are an assault on the sovereignty of Pakistan but come as part of a campaign to change the borders of Pakistan (*The News* [Islamabad], November 19). Syed Munawar called on Army Chief of Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani to write a letter to President Barack Obama demanding a halt to the drone attacks (*The Nation* [Lahore], November 20).

- The October attack on the Army’s GHQ in Rawalpindi was not the work of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (as the movement claimed in an October 12 TTP statement), but was instead the work of the United States and India. “I am not ready to believe that the Taliban are so powerful that they would dare attack the GHQ” (*Dawn* [Karachi], October 12; *The News* [Islamabad], November 19). He identified “the secret terrorist force, Blackwater” and India’s Research and Analysis Wing (RAW – India’s external intelligence agency) as the perpetrators (*The Nation*, November 20; *Jasarat*, November 12).

SURRENDERED COMMANDER SAYS LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY SPONSORED BY KHARTOUM

Senior Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) commander Lieutenant Colonel Charles Arop has given an interview to a Kampala daily after having been sent to the Ugandan capital following his surrender to Ugandan troops operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (*New Vision* [Kampala], November 23). Arop is best known for directing a massacre of 143 Congolese civilians in the village of Faradje on Christmas Day, 2008 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 13). He is now engaged in helping Ugandan forces convince other LRA fighters to surrender. During the interview, he showed reporters wounds from nine bullets, three of which are still inside his body.

Following rumors circulating in October that the LRA had crossed into south Darfur, Arop said it was the intention of LRA leader Joseph Kony to move along the Central African Republic border to Chad and then into Darfur to meet officers of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), long reputed to be the LRA’s sponsors. Kony “told me he was going to meet Fadil, the SAF officer who coordinates LRA activities. He wants the Arabs to give him logistical support and a safe haven” (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 23). Arop says Kony urged all LRA units to make their way to Darfur and report to the first “Arab” military post they came across.

Despite a disastrous start to last year’s Operation Lightning Thunder, a joint operation of the militaries of Uganda, the DRC and Southern Sudan, continuous pressure by the Ugandan People’s Defense Force (UPDF) has eliminated many LRA fighters and compelled others to turn themselves in after suffering from exhaustion and hunger. Arop estimates only half of the force of 500 LRA fighters that existed last December are still in the field. “Kony is desperate. Things are really hard. We were constantly on the move. Sometimes we would not rest for a week. The UPDF was pursuing us everywhere.”

Arop suggests it was only a delay by the UPDF in following the LRA into the Central African Republic (CAR) that allowed the LRA a chance to regroup and abduct more people for use as fighters, laborers or sex slaves. Like most LRA fighters, Arop was himself an abductee, taken from his home in Gulu at age 16. Though the LRA began as a Christian fundamentalist/Acholi nationalist movement, there are few Acholis still left in the LRA ranks, with most fighters representing a

hodgepodge of individuals abducted from various tribes in Uganda, South Sudan, the DRC and the CAR.

Arop describes LRA leader Joseph Kony as a man obsessed with his own survival. Since Operation Lightning Thunder began, Kony has stopped communicating by phone, sending messages only by couriers on foot or by sending his aides up to 20 kilometers away before they are allowed to use their phones. Arop confirmed earlier reports that Kony never takes part in battles. “Whenever attacked, he runs away and leaves his fighters to fight back. I have never seen him fight.”

The LRA commander elaborated on last year’s horrific Christmas Day massacre at Faradje, describing the attack as retaliation ordered by Kony for the participation of Congolese troops in Operation Lightning Thunder. Arop claims his own role was carried out under duress. “Kony gave 30 of his bodyguards to join my group. There was no way I could not execute the mission. They had a phone and were constantly reporting to him. If I had refused, I would have been killed... It was painful, but you have to do it. I want to ask the relatives of those we killed to forgive me. Whatever we did, we did it under orders.”

According to Arop, the LRA received most of its weapons and military supplies from the SAF. Large caches of arms were concealed in the river banks and hills of South Sudan. “There are still a lot of arms caches the UPDF has not yet unearthed.” Other weapons and supplies were recently seized from UN troops in the DRC and game rangers in Garamba National Park, where the LRA took refuge after the start of Operation Lightning Thunder.

Ibrahim al-Rubaish: New Religious Ideologue of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia Calls for Revival of Assassination Tactic

By *Murad Batal al-Shishani*

The Mufti, or religious leader, plays an essential role for al-Qaeda and affiliated Salafi-Jihadi groups, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where the government’s counterterrorism strategy involves

denouncing al-Qaeda’s religious credentials. There have been several al-Qaeda Muftis since the group began attacks on the Saudi establishment in 2003. Issa bin Sa’ad al-Oshan was killed by Saudi forces in Riyadh on July 21, 2004; Abdullah al-Rashoud was declared dead in Iraq on June 23, 2005 by the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (then-leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq); and Faris Shuwayl al-Zahrani (a.k.a. Abu Jandal al-Azdi), who has been in a Saudi prison since August 2004.

Since the Saudi al-Qaeda movement shifted to Yemen after the government crackdown of 2003-2006, the religiously trained Ibrahim al-Rubaish has been presented as the new religious ideologue of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, responsible for issuing the latest statements of the organization, especially those related to Saudi Arabia. Most significant was an audiotape that addressed the attempt last August on the life of Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayif (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 17).

Al-Rubaish justified the assassination attempt in a tape entitled, “Why Muhammad bin Nayif ?,” stating that Bin Nayif is responsible for a war against the Mujahideen and wages that war against them on behalf of the United States. Al-Rubaish considers assassination to be a legitimate tactic as it was used in the early history of Islam. He cites a Sunnah authorizing the murder of “polytheists” and several examples of the Prophet Muhammad calling for the assassination of “enemies of Islam”:

We are in dire need of reviving this Sunnah against the enemies of Allah, for it instills terror and fear in the ranks of the enemy. It also is a factor which leads the mercenaries in the ranks of the enemy to re-evaluate their work, for even though they are slaves of money, their lives are more important to them than their salaries. It also makes those given orders amongst the soldiers think about the assassination teams before they think about fulfilling their commands. Through them, the enemies live in fear, even in their own houses amongst their families, for they do not know when they will be attacked by the predator lions. They know that they are doing their best to seek revenge, even if it leads to their own death, making the matter even more fearful and terrorizing.

Al-Rubaishi went on to describe the reasons behind the failed assassination attempt against Prince Muhammad

bin Nayif, the Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security Affairs and the leader of Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism campaign since 2003:

Why Muhammad bin Nayif? Allah has favored me in the fact that I have never met Muhammad bin Nayif, may Allah deal with him as he deserves, but I have been in his prisons, I have dealt with his wardens and I have lived with those charred by the fire of his tyranny. I along with others have witnessed, while we are the witnesses of Allah on His earth, how he has waged war against jihad and the Mujahideen, something that even the media affirms. Muhammad bin Nayif stood alongside his troops guarding and protecting the Americans, preventing the Mujahideen from reaching them. He could have assumed the role of a bystander, but instead defended them, just as a good child defends his father's possessions. [1]

Al-Rubaish was born in the ultra-conservative region of Buridah in al-Qasim in 1980, where he studied until graduating from Imam Muhammad bin Sa'ud University with a BA degree in Shari'a. He then moved to Afghanistan, where he was arrested by American troops and shipped to Guantanamo Bay, where he spent five years in prison (*Okaz* [Jeddah], October 10; Al-Riyadh.com, February 4). A poem he wrote about his imprisonment was published by *al-Hayat* newspaper and reprinted in a variety of Arabic language websites. [2]

In December, 2006, al-Rubaish and a number of other Saudis were released from Guantanamo and enrolled in the Saudi rehabilitation program. He decided to complete his Master's degree, but suddenly disappeared. Eventually his name was included in the so-called "85 Most Wanted" list released by Saudi authorities in February (Al-Riyadh.com, February 4).

In the meantime, al-Rubaish left his wife and three children behind to join al-Qaeda in Yemen in April 2008, along with 11 other Saudi ex-Guantanamo prisoners leaving the Kingdom (*Okaz*, October 10).

To demonstrate his religious abilities, al-Rubaish released a book criticizing Shaykh Salman al-Ouda because of the latter's "alliance" with the Saudi regime. The shaykh, who directs the website Islam Today, has condemned the 9/11 attacks and used his media access to rebuke Osama bin Laden as a killer of innocent people. Al-Rubaish stated that al-Ouda has revised his

ideas since inspiring young Saudis in the mid-1990s (almedad.com, October 12).

In early November, al-Rubaish released an audiotape entitled "And the Mask Falls Down," criticizing Saudi King Abdullah's decision to allow mixed-sex education at the new King Abdullah University of Science and Technology near Jeddah (hanein.info, October 24). Al-Rubaish wrote an article in the latest issue of al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula's journal *Sada al-Malhim* warning about Shiites (Rafidha, or "rejectionists" as the jihadis refer to them) who are fighting Sunnis everywhere and who are supported by Iran. Al-Rubaish also warned of the consequences of a victory by the Zaydi Shiite Houthis who are fighting the Yemeni government, suggesting that they will fight against Sunnis if they finish with the government (hanein.info, March 20, 2008).

The emergence of al-Rubaish and the ideas he promulgates show that al-Qaeda, through propaganda and media vehicles, can generate new leaders to serve in its continuing battle against "infidels and hypocrites." At the same time, the work of a religious ideologue like al-Rubaish reveals that al-Qaeda still cares about Muslim public opinion, especially in areas of religious significance like Saudi Arabia.

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Notes:

1. See the English transcript of the audio: <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f18/why-muhammad-ibn-naif-shaykh-ibrahim-al-rubaish%7Ballah-preserve-him%7D-28847>
2. See http://www.al-asra.com/f6/p6_15.htm

Al-Qaeda in Iraq Operations Suggest Rising Confidence Ahead of U.S. Military Withdrawal

By Ramzy Mardini

On August 19, coordinated explosions rocked downtown Baghdad, resulting in over 120 deaths. Similarly, in the midst of heightened

security measures, twin bombings on October 25 killed over 155 people in Baghdad, marking the deadliest attack since August 2007. Involving the participation of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the operations suggest militants' effectiveness in carrying out coordinated and high-profile attacks on supposedly secured targets. With the gradual disengagement of the U.S. military and all combat forces by August 2010, AQI and like-minded insurgents appear to have a growing level of confidence in their operations.

Among the targets of the attacks were various government ministries, along with the Baghdad provincial headquarters. The bombings suggest an attempt to undermine Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's reelection bid in the 2010 parliamentary election by demonstrating the government's failure to provide security. Al-Maliki is campaigning as the national leader who brought both security and sovereignty to Iraq, but insurgents are becoming increasingly aware that their high-profile operations are succeeding in undermining the population's confidence.

At the moment, the goals for the insurgents are less territorially defined and more aimed at encouraging the anarchical conditions that support the survival and influence of their organizations. Today, several factors contribute to a growing operational space for insurgent activity by promoting discouragement and subverting reconciliation efforts:

- The U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq's urban areas on June 30, in accordance with the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), has left behind a less capable Iraqi Security Force (ISF) to carry on the mission of ensuring protection and confronting terrorists.
- The growing Arab-Kurdish divide over the ownership of "disputed territories," especially in Ninawa province, has provided an effective venue for insurgents to exploit security disparities and ethnic divisions (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 23).
- The continued reluctance of the Shi'a-dominated government to integrate Sunni fighters from the Awakening (Sahwa) Movement into the Iraqi security and civilian sectors has led to growing suspicions and uncertainty amongst some Sunnis over Baghdad's long term intentions vis-à-vis their status and use.

Originating in 2006, the Awakening Movement was spearheaded by Sunni residents in the al-Azamiyah area of al-Anbar province who sought to protect and defend their neighborhoods from the brutal intimidation tactics practiced by AQI (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 29, 2007). During this time, the AQI leadership waged a vicious campaign to claim leadership over the Iraqi insurgency while demanding the loyalty of other insurgent groups. The foreign jihadists attempted to dominate the economic interests of various indigenous Sunni Arab tribes through smuggling and kidnapping while forcing marriages to tribal women as a way of legitimizing their status within the Iraqi tribal structure.

With support and funding from the U.S. military, the Sunni-dominated Sahwa developed into a 100,000-member force across Iraq, consisting of various tribes and former armed insurgents who once fought against Coalition forces. The Shi'a government in Baghdad views the Sahwa with suspicion (i.e. Sunni-dominated, mainly former insurgents, reports of AQI infiltration). Falih Abdul Jabbar, a sociologist and director of Iraqi Studies Institute in Beirut claims, "There is kind of what we call "coup d'état syndrome" – you can see it clearly in the statements of so many Shi'a Islamic leaders who fear that the [Awakening] groups intend to get incorporated into the army in order to stage a coup d'état and to bring Ba'ath back to power..." (RFE/RL, April 7).

In October 2008, the control and payroll of the Sahwa fighters had been handed over by the U.S. military to the al-Maliki government. But Baghdad has promised only that 20% of the Sahwa would be integrated into the security forces, while the remainder would be financially supported until integration into the civilian and private sector. Yet the integration has been slow, allowing for suspicions to grow amongst Sunnis as the U.S. military gradually withdraws. Moreover, Baghdad has often delayed monthly payments, leading the Sunni fighters to protest in dissatisfaction (*Awsat al-Iraq*, October 6). In late July 2009, the U.S. Department of Defense reported that the al-Maliki government was unlikely to meet the objectives set for Sahwa integration before August 2010 (Reuters, July 31). Strong evidence also suggests that al-Maliki's government has exercised sectarian motives when favoring the placement of Sahwa fighters who are Shi'a, not Sunni.

AQI's deadly harassment of the Awakening Movement has long been an effort to provide a strong incentive to disgruntled and fearful Sunnis to opt out of the fight

against AQI or rejoin the insurgency. Recent operations against the Sahwa have contributed to growing concern about AQI's reconstitution in Iraq. In a pre-dawn raid on November 16, gunmen disguised in Iraqi army uniforms apprehended 17 individuals, later killing them with execution-style gunshots to the head near Abu Ghraib district on the western outskirts of Baghdad (*Awsat al-Iraq*, November 18). The operation, reportedly carried out by AQI operatives, appears to have targeted Sunni members of the Awakening. Among those executed were three sons and four cousins of Attala Ouda al-Shuker, a well known anti-AQI Sahwa leader. A statement issued by the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) suggested the incident was a "worrisome indication that the situation might be deteriorating and it represents a revenge against the people who had helped stabilize the area" (CSM, November 17). The massacre came a month after coordinated bombings targeted a reconciliation meeting in al-Anbar involving the participation of Sunni tribal leaders, resulting in over 80 casualties.

While AQI has targeted Sahwa leaders in Salah ad-Din, al-Anbar, Baghdad, and other governorates, Diyala remains one of the most dangerous provinces for the former Sunni insurgents. Diyala's Sahwa council has demonstrated serious dissatisfaction with al-Maliki and government security forces, and hence, may be susceptible to coercing by AQI. According to Major General Abdul Hussein al-Shammari, the Diyala chief of police, "Security investigations with Arab detainees who were recently arrested confirmed the intention of al-Qaeda to destabilize the security situation in the province" (Niqash.org, October 5). The statement comes after a September announcement by AQI of the reformation of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) in Diyala, suggesting AQI intends to launch a new offensive.

AQI has recently opened a campaign of assassinations in Diyala. On November 17, AQI-associated operatives assassinated Hameed Khaleel al-Obeidi, the leader of the Sahwa council of the Bab al-Darb district of Baaquba, the capital city of Diyala province. The next day, AQI affiliates fired upon Shaykh Houssam Ulwan al-Majmaai, the commander of Sahwa forces for all of Diyala, after intercepting his vehicle on the major road leading to the Kanaan district (*Awsat al-Iraq*, November 18). Though the operation failed to kill al-Majmaai, it was the second assassination attempt on his life within a month. In late October, a bomb wounded the Sahwa leader in the Bahraz district, south of Baaquba (*Awsat al-Iraq*, October 22). Only days earlier a suicide bomber killed the Bahraz Sahwa leader

Leith Mashaan and other members of the Awakening movement. Mashaan was reported to have contributed to the arrests of numerous AQI leaders, including the individual the Iraqi government claims to be Abu Omar al-Baghdadi – the alleged commander of the ISI (*Awsat al-Iraq*, October 13).

There is evidence that AQI is confronting the challenges of a renewed offensive against the Iraqi state. The engagement of the Iraqi public in providing intelligence to Iraqi and U.S. forces resulted in a higher demand for secrecy for militants in avoiding exposure. This, coupled with limited resources (i.e. fewer safe houses, fighters), means AQI and other insurgent groups are likely to better utilize their force-multiplier advantages and existing assets, while adopting cautious assessments of their own operational capability.

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French Operation in Afghanistan Aims to Open New Coalition Supply Route

By Andrew McGregor

Not far from the site of a disastrous encounter with Afghan insurgents last year, French forces have now mounted an offensive to clear the strategic Tagab valley of Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami fighters. An important mission lies behind "Operation Avalon" – the construction of a new road through the valley as part of a larger effort to create secure supply routes for NATO forces in Afghanistan. The operation is being carried out by the newly created Task Force La Fayette (TF La Fayette).

The French forces include roughly 700 men from the 3e Régiment d'Infanterie de Marine (3e RIMa), with smaller units from the 2e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie (Foreign Legion). In recent years the 3e RIMa has taken part in operations in Chad, the 1991 Gulf War, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Albania and the Central African Republic. The French troops are accompanied by 100

men of the Afghan National Army (ANA) with air support from French and American attack helicopters. The advancing troops have been met with sniper fire and rocket-propelled grenades. A November 15 Taliban rocket attack on the town of Tagab killed three people and wounded dozens more only 300 meters from a meeting between Task Force commander General Marcel Druart and a group of tribal elders (Radio France Internationale, November 15).

TF La Fayette operates from four forward bases in Kapisa and Surobi provinces, with support detachments in Kabul. Most operations are conducted jointly with ANA units. With a command post at Nijab, TF La Fayette is composed of two Groupements tactiques interarmes (GTIA); GTIA Kapisa (currently drawn largely from Foreign Legion infantry, armor and engineering units) and GTIA Surobi (currently drawn largely from Marine infantry and artillery units). The Task Force also includes a command and support battalion in Kabul and a battalion of 11 helicopters based at Kabul International Airport. Within the task force's zone of operations, French Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT) are attached to units of the 3rd Brigade of the ANA's 201st Corps.

The French Deployment in Afghanistan

French military involvement in Afghanistan began in late 2001 with the arrival of French Special Forces and the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*. The first French Special Forces unit to deploy was the 13e Régiment de Dragons Parachutistes (13e RDP), specializing in long-range reconnaissance missions. The 13e RDP was soon joined by the 1er Régiment de Parachutistes d'Infanterie de Marine (1er RPIMa), the other component of the Brigade des Forces Spéciales Terre (BFST), the French army's Special Forces component. The 1er RPIMa began its existence as a Free French unit of the British Special Air Service (SAS) during World War II. Other French troops began to deploy in 2002 and formed the Kabul Battle Group in 2003. To date, 36 French soldiers have died in Afghanistan.

An air transport detachment is based at Dushanbe in Tajikistan. Security for French air operations in Dushanbe is provided by the Commandos Parachutistes de l'Air no.10, specially trained in assaulting or defending airfields. In October, Spain and France were forced to relocate supply aircraft and personnel from the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan when permission was withdrawn after the expiration of an earlier agreement. The French

aircraft and personnel were transferred to the airbase at Dushanbe (AFP, October 25). France also operates a detachment of drones based at Bagram air base. The drones provide surveillance and reconnaissance services, mainly in northeast Afghanistan. Six French warplanes providing support to Afghan and Coalition forces have been based in Kandahar since 2007. Further combat air support has at times been available from the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, operating in the north Indian Ocean. As part of Operation Enduring Freedom, France contributes naval forces to Task Forces 150 and 57 operating in the north Indian Ocean.

The French military in Afghanistan works closely with reconstruction teams in developing their area of operations. According to the commander of the 3e RIMa, Colonel Francis Chanson, "Success in Kapisa will hinge on development more than the destruction of insurgents... I'm not trying to gain their heart, but their confidence" (*Stars and Stripes*, October 31).

Battles in Sarubi and Alasay

Last August French troops in the Surubi district of Kabul province were hit by a massive combined Taliban/Hizb-i-Islami ambush that left ten French soldiers dead and 21 wounded (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 2, 2008). A political firestorm followed in France amidst allegations of inadequate planning, possible Taliban execution or mutilation of French prisoners and a *Paris Match* interview with the Taliban commander who led the ambush, complete with photos of Taliban fighters wearing the military equipment and personal effects of dead French soldiers.

In March, French troops from GTIA Kapisa and a battalion of the ANA were involved in the Battle of Alasay, a successful attempt to drive the Taliban out of the Alasay valley, which insurgents had controlled since 2006. The French troops belonged to the Chasseurs Alpains 27e Battalion, an elite mountain warfare unit. With the aid of U.S. air support in the form of F15-E fighters, A-10 Thunderbolts, AH-64 Apache helicopters and Predator drones, the operation was able to establish two new ANA bases in the valley despite the refusal of Afghan troops to advance at one point in the battle (*Le Point*, March 24).

Italy's Role in Sarubi in Question

While a French intelligence report was highly critical of the August 2008 Sarubi operation that led to 10

French deaths, media investigations have indicated that an Italian policy of paying off Taliban fighters while Italian troops operated in Sarubi prior to the arrival of the French may have played a major role in the disaster (RFI, September 5, 2008). An October 15 report by the *Times* revealed Italy's secret service had been paying Taliban commanders and local warlords to keep the region quiet and avoid Italian casualties. The U.S. ambassador in Rome was reported to have made an unpublicized démarche (diplomatic protest) over the Italian policy after American communications intercepts of conversations between Italian intelligence agents and Taliban commanders disclosed the existence of the payoffs. The payments were not revealed to French forces when they took over from the Italians in Sarubi in July 2008. The result was an entirely inaccurate French threat assessment based on the Italian experience in the area. When hundreds of insurgents attacked the French column in Sarubi, it came as a complete surprise to the lightly armed force. [2]

Italian officials have denied the reports, saying the alleged démarche was merely a "request for information." U.S. embassy officials would neither confirm nor deny the report. Italian Defense Minister Ignazio La Russa described the allegations as "complete rubbish," suggesting the insurgents had failed to mount attacks because of "the behavior of our military, which is very different compared to that of other contingents" (*Times*, October 16).

The *Times* has stood by its report, citing the American intercepts. It also received confirmation of the payments from Afghan government officials, senior ANA officers and a Sarubi Taliban commander, Mohammad Ishmayel (*Times*, October 16). Families of French soldiers killed in the Sarubi operation are asking if the Italian payments were used to buy the arms used by insurgents in the ambush (France 24, October 16).

Sarkozy's Balancing Act

With pressure from the U.S. to increase its deployment on one hand—but polls suggesting a majority of French voters oppose French participation in the Afghanistan conflict on the other—President Nicolas Sarkozy declared in late October that French participation was "necessary," but "France will not send a single soldier more" (*Le Parisien*, August 22; *Le Figaro*, October 14). Sarkozy noted it was France's goal to see Afghan troops

step up to combat the Taliban. "They will be the most effective in winning this war because it is their country. But we need to pay them more to avoid desertions that benefit the Taliban."

Nevertheless, France has increased the number of vital combat troops engaged in Afghanistan without increasing total numbers by turning over guard duties in Kabul to a Georgian unit, allowing one company to join frontline operations. 150 sailors currently part of Operation Enduring Freedom will no longer be counted as part of the French deployment in Afghanistan, allowing an increase in the same number of combat troops. A detachment of 150 gendarmes trained and equipped as infantry will train Afghan police but will not be counted in the military deployment (*Le Monde*, November 18). [1] The operational reclassification of 150 sailors will allow the return of 150 members of France's Special Forces, which have not deployed in Afghanistan since being withdrawn in 2007.

Besides public opposition, the French war in Afghanistan is also facing challenges from French courts. Under a 2005 law, French officers can now be tried in criminal proceedings before the Armed Forces Tribunal in Paris for "unintentional acts committed in the exercise of their duties" if it is established "that they failed to display normal diligence, on account of the power and resources available to them and the difficulties inherent to the missions entrusted to them by the law" (*Le Monde*, November 12). The latest case has been filed on behalf of two families of French soldiers killed in the Sarubi ambush of August 2008. Senior officers are naturally disturbed by the new role of civilian judges in reviewing military decisions.

Conclusion

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner recently criticized the German contingent of NATO in Afghanistan, saying they "are not there to fight" (AFP, November 5). France, on the other hand, has indicated through its military reorganization in Afghanistan a commitment to a greater emphasis on combat operations. The professional soldiers of the French Marine and Foreign Legion units are no doubt determined to reverse the damage done at Sarubi and the Special Forces are eager to return to Afghanistan. Though Kouchner has acknowledged that Afghan president Hamid Karzai is "corrupt," he has resisted setting a date for an eventual French withdrawal from Afghanistan, saying only that

“Four to five years [from now] seems to me to be a reasonable prospect” (AFP, November 16).

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Notes:

1. La Libération - <http://secretdefense.blogs.liberation.fr/defense/2009/09/la-fayette-la-future-brigade-fran%C3%A7aise-en-afghanistan.html>
2. Jean Dominique Merchet, Mourir pour l'Afghanistan, Éditions Jacob Duvernet, Paris, 2008

Taliban Expand Insurgency to Northern Afghanistan

By Wahidullah Mohammad

Northern Afghanistan, a secure and stable area until last spring, is now an insecure and fearful place. Although Taliban and al-Qaeda activities have been limited mostly to southern Afghanistan over the past eight years, the Taliban were able to expand their terrorist activities to central Afghanistan and since spring 2009, the insurgents have focused their efforts on the most secure place in the country, expanding their terrorist activities to northern Afghanistan.

The expansion of Taliban activities to northern Afghanistan shows that the terrorist networks are getting stronger day to day, causing fear in ordinary Afghans. Taliban attacks on Afghan and international forces are frequently reported from Kunduz and some other northern provinces. Kunduz was the main stronghold of the Taliban in northern Afghanistan during the course of their rule, until 2001. Throughout this period the Taliban organized their raids in other northern provinces from Kunduz. This may be the reason that the insurgents once again want to use this province as a center for organizing terrorist attacks in the northern provinces.

The Taliban Return to Kunduz

The chief of police in Kunduz province, General Abdul Razaq, says the Taliban selected Kunduz as a center for their activities in northern Afghanistan because Kunduz was their stronghold in Afghanistan and they already had some old friends in this province. Though they were dispersed after the U.S. attack on Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban wants to reorganize them and use their power to make northern Afghanistan insecure. [1]

According to General Abdul Razaq, the Taliban came to northern Afghanistan while NATO and Afghan forces carried out operations against the insurgents in southern Afghanistan. With the Pakistani government conducting an offensive against the terrorists in southern Waziristan at the same time, the Taliban had no place to hide along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The Taliban therefore came to northern Afghanistan to expand their activities and switch Afghan and NATO attention from the south to the north.

General Abdul Razaq says Afghan and NATO forces have strengthened their military operations against the insurgents in northern Afghanistan and reduced their terrorist activities. According to the General, an ongoing, three-month-long offensive by NATO and Afghan forces has killed most of the terrorists. Others have been arrested while some have again fled to the southern provinces or Pakistan. “We were able to scatter the insurgents from northern Afghanistan. More than 200 terrorists were killed. A number of them were arrested and some of them fled back to other places. Now the security situation is getting better, only in some of remote areas of some districts we still have some insurgency problems which will be solved soon” said General Abdul Razaq.

Northern Afghanistan has borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. According to Afghan security officials and analysts most of the terrorists in northern Afghanistan belong to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the network of Taliban leader Jalaludin Haqqani (who has strong connections with al-Qaeda) or Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic Party), the biggest and most influential mujahideen party during the war against the Soviet Union.. According to General Abdul Razaq, natives of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Chechnya are present among Taliban in northern Afghanistan and are always on the frontline of battles with Afghan and NATO forces.

A Lack of Political Will?

Fatima Aziz is a female member of Afghan Parliament from Kunduz province. She blames the government for the insecurity in northern Afghanistan and says that in the beginning, Taliban activities were very limited in northern Afghanistan but the government did not care to keep the Taliban from reaching the northern provinces. “The government could very easily keep the terrorists from reaching the north of the country but they did not. They let the insurgents become very strong and when they made Kunduz and other northern provinces insecure the government and ISAF conducted military operations against them.” [2]

General Abdul Razaq denies charges the government did not take serious steps to counter insurgency in the north, saying that the security forces always used all their facilities to counter insurgency and ensure security for people. According to General Abdul Razaq, terrorism is a regional problem and needs a regional solution, adding, “By the assistance of local people we were able to destroy all those terrorist groups that were active in the north of the country and we exterminated all their plans.”

The Deputy Director of the counterterrorism department at the Ministry of the Interior, Sayed Anwar Ahmadi, agrees with General Abdul Razaq and says that most of the insurgent groups have been destroyed in northern provinces. “Fortunately, due to the last military operations the insurgents are now too weak.” [3]

According to Ahmadi, the Taliban have some forces in northern Kunduz and Baghlan provinces as well as some districts of Faryab province. Ahmadi says that the Taliban is trying to expand their terrorist activities to the north to enable them to attack NATO supply convoys coming through Central Asia and northern Afghanistan.

Cold Weather or Counter-Insurgency Operations?

The security situation is improved in the northern provinces nowadays, but according to Fatima Aziz, the situation improved because the insurgents left the area and went to Pakistan and the southern provinces due to cold weather in the north. She says that the situation will get worse if the insurgents return next spring.

Deputy Director of counterterrorism Sayed Anwar Ahmadi says that before the weather became cold they conducted an offensive against the insurgents and

the Taliban fled the area. “The security personnel are always ready to defeat the insurgents. We were never heedless about the insurgency...Cold weather also can be a natural reason for the improving security situation in the north, but [the Taliban] became very weak and had no alternative but to leave the area.”

According to Ahmadi, the insurgents in the north are organizing attacks in small groups against security forces. “There are 15 to 20 groups of insurgents in each province, like Kunduz, Baghlan and some bordering districts of Faryab province. Each group has around twenty people. Besides the networks of Hekmatyar, Tahir Yuldash and Juma Namangani, they have [a] very close connection with the Quetta and Peshawar councils of Taliban in Pakistan.” [4]

Threatening NATO Supply Lines

Political analyst and member of the Afghan Parliament from Kunduz, Moeen Marastyal, sees the NATO decision to ship supplies from Central Asia through Tajikistan to Afghanistan as the main reason for the Taliban presence in northern Afghanistan. [5] Marastyal says that the Taliban want to expand their network first to northern Afghanistan and then to Central Asia where the Uzbek and Tajik Taliban are already active. “By reaching northern Afghanistan they can easily attack NATO supply convoys. Besides reaching their targets in the north they also want to expand their network to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan,” said Marastyal, who claims that local people played a major role in removing terrorists from the northern provinces.

Kunduz province was the first in northern Afghanistan to be captured by Taliban after they seized Kabul in 1996. It remained a Taliban stronghold until October 2001, when U.S. forces attacked Afghanistan and the Taliban regime collapsed. Kunduz was the last province to be cleared of the Taliban and their al-Qaeda allies. Kunduz was a strategic province in northern Afghanistan for the Taliban regime and could again become a place for insurgents to organize their attacks in the north.

Afghan journalist and political analyst Mohammad Qasim Akhgar says that NATO supply convoys from Central Asia through northern Afghanistan are one of the reasons for the Taliban presence in the north. [6] According to Akhgar, there are some countries that want to make Afghanistan insecure and are helping the Taliban to expand their presence to the north of Afghanistan and then to Central Asian nations. Akhgar

did not name any of the countries that are helping the insurgents to reach their targets in the north except Pakistan. “Regretfully there are some countries like Pakistan that are helping the Taliban make Afghanistan insecure. Besides foreign countries, there are some people in the Afghan government who also help the Taliban,” said Akhgar.

According to Akhgar the insurgency cannot be solved simply by conducting military operations. “The Afghan insurgency problem needs an economic, political, cultural and military solution. It cannot be solved only by military operations. In Afghanistan the overall situation needs to be changed and become better.”

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Notes:

1. Author’s interview with Kunduz chief of police General Abdul Razaq, November 16, 2009
2. Author’s interview with Kunduz MP Fatima Aziz, November 12, 2009
3. Author’s interview with Ministry of the Interior deputy director of counterterrorism Sayed Anwar Ahmadi, November 15, 2009
4. Tahir Yuldash was reported killed by a drone attack in August 2009. Juma Namangani was killed by an airstrike in Afghanistan in late 2001. Both were leaders of the IMU.
5. Author’s interview with Kunduz MP Moeen Marastyal, November 17, 2009
6. Author’s interview with political analyst Mohammad Qasim Akhgar, November 17, 2009