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ISAF soldiers in Kabul

SAUDI SHAYKH SALMAN AL-AWDAH WARNS TERRORISM WILL FOLLOW MILITARY STRIKE ON IRAN

In an interview with the pan-Arab Quds Press news agency, Shaykh Salman bin Fahd al-Awdah warned that a wave of terrorism will follow any military attacks on Iran while also calling on Tehran to end attempts to expand its influence in the Sunni world (Quds Press, August 2).

Shaykh al-Awdah is one of the most popular religious scholars in Saudi Arabia. After making his mark through the once-popular use of cassette tapes to distribute sermons, al-Awdah has since moved on to more modern methods of communication as the director of the Islam Today website. He also makes frequent appearances on television and in the commentary sections of Arabic language newspapers.

Born in Qaseem Province from a Najdi family, Shaykh al-Awdah was one in a new generation of “political preachers” that emerged after the 1990-1991 Gulf War and the establishment of American bases in the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Awdah became associated with the religious opposition to the Saudi regime and suffered a five-year prison term as a result of his challenges to official fatwas permitting the regime to invite American troops to the Kingdom and his criticism of the expensive but ineffective Saudi military. Bin Laden was a supporter of al-Awdah in the 1990s and has quoted al-Awdah’s work in various communications. However, after his release al-Awdah devoted himself to a Ph.D. study of the Sunnah and transformed into a paragon of clerical respectability. He is now considered to be under the protection of the regime.

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Al-Awdah rejects the “stereotype” that ties the da’wah (“call,” i.e. to God) of the 18th century reformer Shaykh Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab to terrorism. The shaykh’s followers are best known as Wahhabists, though Salafists in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere do not use this term themselves. According to al-Awdah, al-Wahhab’s insistence on Koranic authenticity in life and worship provided stability in a region where disunity and tribal fighting were previously common. “When the events of September took place in the United States [i.e. 9/11], people started saying that these acts were the product of the da’wah of Shaykh Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab. The truth is that this da’wah is totally innocent of these acts...,” stated al-Awdah.

The preacher goes on to note that “misinterpretations happen, even in Islam.” In an apparent reference to those militants who insist jihad is an individual obligation for Muslims, al-Awdah says, “Some people rely on the Koran to say that Islam wants to send the whole world to the battlefield. Those people have a twisted understanding of those acts [of terrorism]. The countries of the Islamic world in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Somalia and others are victims of these acts.” He insists 99% of Muslims are “removed from extremism and violence.” The militant remainder should be engaged in an Islamic discourse based on religious texts, but one that also considers the reasons behind the creation of a climate of terrorism, such as foreign aggression against Muslim countries.

The Saudi preacher warns that any escalation of military activity targeting Iran will result in the expansion of terrorism in the region. He notes that Israel possesses hundreds of nuclear warheads, adding that “nuclear weapons could be possessed by correct methods and through international supervision. I think that the dialogue with Iran has not yet reached a dead end.” At the same time, however, al-Awdah calls on Tehran to stop “Shi’i penetration of the Sunni world:”

I fear Shi’i Iran. All those who are loyal to Iran should tell it that its expansionist approach will hurt it. Iran has the right to live peacefully and to obtain the latest technologies. However, it does not have to have the desire for expansion, as is the case in Africa and the so-called Shi’i penetration of the Sunni world. This does not serve the Iranian people.

Turning to Gaza, al-Awdah says the ongoing siege is an “international scandal.” The preacher is a member of the International Union for Muslim Scholars (led

by Egyptian Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi), which sent a ship to Gaza as part of the “freedom convoys.” Al-Awdah insists that all factions of the political spectrum in Palestine, including groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, should be part of the effort to find a resolution for Palestine. The shaykh stated that “it is difficult to deal with the Palestinian people while ignoring the forces of the resistance.”

FORMER INTELLIGENCE CHIEF ACCUSED OF TERRORISM CALLS FOR RWANDAN UPRISING

As Rwandan President Paul Kagame enjoys an easy triumph at the polls this week with 93% of the vote, he is sure to be casting a wary eye at a possible alliance between his former army chief-of-staff, Lieutenant-General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, and Rwanda’s former intelligence director, Colonel Patrick Karegeya. Both men fled Rwanda this year for Johannesburg, from where Kagame’s government claims they are involved in organizing grenade attacks in Rwanda’s capital of Kigali.

Despite police reports that suspects apprehended in the grenade attacks belong to the Hutu-based Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), Rwandan prosecutors claimed General Nyamwasa and Colonel Karegeya were behind the violence. Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga said the men had linked up in South Africa, where they are alleged to have “planned and started implementing acts aimed at creating state insecurity... these acts include hurling grenades in Kigali city and other places” (Rwandan News Agency, July 2).

Karegeya is one of many Tutsis born in exile to have become allied with Yoweri Museveni’s Ugandan National Resistance Army (NRA) before he played an important role in sweeping the Hutu out of power in Rwanda in 1994. After studying law at Kampala’s Makerere University, Karegeya became a member of Museveni’s NRA in 1982. He was arrested by Ugandan intelligence while trying to go to Libya for military training and remained in the Luzira Maximum Security Prison until he was released following the overthrow of Milton Obote in 1985. Karegeya rejoined Museveni’s forces as they toppled Obote’s successor, General Tito Okello.

Karegeya then served as director of Rwanda’s External Service Organization (ESO), the national intelligence service, from 1994 to 2004. Karegeya played an important part in intelligence operations against his

former Ugandan patrons in clashes with the Forces Rwandaises de Défense (FRD – the national defense force) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between 1998 and 2003. According to Karegeya, “Fighting the enemy you know [the Ugandan People’s Defense Force – UPDF] was especially very challenging” (*The Observer* [Kampala], August 2). In 2005 Karegeya was brought up on charges of insubordination and desertion. He was stripped of his rank in 2006 and spent 18 months in jail, mostly in solitary confinement in Kigali’s Mulindi Military Prison.

Some sources claim Karegeya fled to Uganda and then South Africa after learning of plans to have him killed (Radio Katwe [Kampala], November 28, 2007). Only days before the election Karegeya issued a call for Rwandans to bring down Kagame’s government:

We fought for the liberation of Rwanda so that Rwandans can enjoy peace and be delivered from dictatorship, but we have not seen that. A dictator can never step down, they are brought down. It’s only Rwandans who can stand up now and fight for their freedom. Kagame will have his breaking point and I think it will be very soon” (*The Observer* [Kampala], August 2).

General Nyamwasa was also a veteran of Museveni’s NRA before joining the Rwanda Patriotic Army in its post-genocide conquest of Rwanda in 1994. He served as army chief-of-staff until 2002 and then became national security chief. After reportedly being tied to a failed coup attempt in 2003, Nyamwasa went into a comfortable exile as ambassador to India.

Since fleeing to Johannesburg after his return to Rwanda earlier this year, Nyamwasa has been accused by the regime of financial improprieties, military incompetence and abandoning his comrades on the battlefield, though the intense criticism has led some to wonder how such a man could have been chief-of-staff for so many years.

In May General Nyamwasa told a Ugandan daily that Kagame’s focus was no longer on the Party and the country, but on Kagame himself. He stated, “[Our] disagreements are centered on governance, tolerance, insensitivity, intrigue and betrayal of our colleagues... I saved President Kagame’s life twice during the struggle when everyone else had abandoned him in Nkana and Kanyantanga. Where were all those who are telling him that I am a traitor?” Nyamwasa says he and Karegeya are both lawyers and are fully aware that Kigali has no

extradition treaty with South Africa, and that “there is no evidence whatsoever that links us to the bombing in Kigali” (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], May 30).

General Nyamwasa was shot twice in Johannesburg on June 19. Though shot in the stomach, he survived by grabbing the gunman when the third round jammed in the assailant’s weapon (*Daily Monitor*, June 19). South African prosecutors arrested five men in the assassination attempt but have refused to identify their nationality. Kigali has demanded their extradition while denying any role in the assault, but South Africa instead recalled its ambassador in Kigali on August 5 to express its displeasure over the incident (AFP, August 5; al-Jazeera, August 10).

Pakistan’s Bajaur Agency Emerges as New Hub for Islamist Militancy

By Tayyab Ali Shah

The Bajaur Tribal Agency in northwest Pakistan continues to be a hotbed of militancy despite being officially declared a “conflict free zone” by the Pakistan Army. Bajaur Agency has been under Taliban control since May 2007. The Pakistani military launched its first anti-Taliban operation in the area in August 2008 and six months later claimed that the area had been cleared of militants. However, many militant organizations remained active in the area and continued their activities both in Afghanistan and Pakistan (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 12). As a result, the military then launched a new phase of its anti-Taliban operation earlier this year that was considered to be the first serious government offensive in the area. In the third week of April, Bajaur was declared a “conflict free zone” by the Pakistan Army, and approximately 27,000 displaced families were asked to return to their homes (*Dawn*, April 20).

Army officials claimed that over 1,800 militants and approximately 200 soldiers were killed in the conflict, though the top leaders of the Bajaur Taliban remained at large, including its chief, Maulana Faqir Mohammad, a former close ally of the late Taliban leader Baitullah

Mahsud. After the capture of the strategic village of Damadola (hometown of Maulana Faqir Mohammad), local military commander Major General Tariq Khan declared that the entire Bajaur Agency had been cleared of militants up to the Afghan border, adding that 25% of the Taliban had fled to Afghanistan, 15% to Swat and other areas and the remainder had either been killed or captured (*The News*, April 21). General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, chief-of-staff of the Pakistan Army, visited Bajaur Agency in April and acclaimed the sacrifices of the tribal people against the Taliban. This was the second time within a one year period that Bajaur was declared secure (*The News*, April 21).

Subsequent events, however, belied these claims and have clearly shown that Bajaur is still infested with Taliban. In the first week of May, Pakistani troops killed 18 militants in a skirmish near Khar, the capital of Bajaur (*Dawn*, May 3). In mid-June, the Taliban distributed a Pashto language letter in the Mamond and Khar tehsils of Bajaur, warning the security forces and other officials to mend their ways or be ready to face the consequences. The letter added that the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) would continue its fight in Bajaur against the United States and its allies (*Daily Times*, June 16; *The News*, June 16). In the last week of June, four soldiers were killed when militants attacked an army patrol in the Kherkai area of Mamond tehsil (county). A few days later, the power supply to the entire agency was interrupted when militants blew up two towers of the main transmission line and left a note asking the authorities not to repair the damage (*Dawn*, June 29). In the first week of July, seven persons were injured when the houses of two local journalists in Bhai Cheena, near Khar, were attacked with hand grenades (*The News*, July 8). A week later, a group of suspected Taliban bombed a girls' school near Khar, raising the number of schools destroyed in Bajaur by the Taliban to 93. The same day, another group of Taliban fired two rockets onto Khar from an unknown direction. The rocket fire did not result in any physical damage but frightened the already terrified populace (*The News* July 13).

However, there have also been successes in counterterrorism operations in the agency. On July 19, there were reports of 21 militants laying down arms during a jirga of Mamond tribal elders (*The News*, July 19). There were reports of the death of local Taliban commander Irshad Khan and his aide on July 22 when a bomb they were constructing in the Taliban commander's home exploded, seriously injuring a number of Khan's

family members (*Dawn* [Karachi], July 22, *Daily Times*, July 23). Several days later, Dr. Ismail, chief of the Bajaur chapter of the Tanzim Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), surrendered, along with six associates, to the security forces and denounced terrorism at a grand tribal jirga of the Badan tribe in Khar. The event was attended by Bajaur Scouts commander Colonel Nauman Saeed, who praised the efforts of tribal elders in restoring order in the community (*Daily Times*, July 24; *The News*, July 25). Some of these elders have been targeted by militants who are eager to remove their influence – on July 23, three tribal elders, one of them the head of a local peace committee, were killed and two others injured in a bomb explosion in the Mamond tehsil of Bajaur Agency (*Daily Times* [Lahore] July 24).

The abovementioned incidents clearly show that declaring Bajaur “conflict free” has not ensured peace in Bajaur. One reason for this may be the inability of the civilian administration to rebuild and revive the economy and infrastructure of Bajaur. Another problem has arisen from the Taliban practice of buying off members of local anti-Taliban militias. The governor of Afghanistan's Kunar province, Fazlullah Wahidi, has also been blamed for the continued violence in Bajaur, as he is alleged to have provided sanctuary and support to the fleeing militants (*Express Tribune* [Lahore], July 12). As one analyst put it, “The Pakistan Army has captured Damadola, Sewai and some other areas of Mamond, but has left the Taliban relatively untouched” (*Express Tribune*, April 23, 2010).

The continued violence in Bajaur has a significant impact on areas of the nearby Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province and other Pakistani tribal areas. Bajaur is adjacent to Dir, Chitral and Mohmand Agencies and very close to Swat and Peshawar. It can thus provide a staging ground for attacks in all of these areas. The July 9 suicide bombing of the office of the assistant political agent in Mohmand Agency, which resulted in the death of over 100 people gathered for an anti-Taliban jirga, is also tied to the Bajaur Taliban (*Express Tribune*, July 12; *Dawn*, July 10). Local media have also suggested that the northern mountains of Bajaur and Chitral may provide a refuge for Osama bin Laden (*The Nation* [Lahore] June 20). Clearly, military operations conducted so far have yet to secure the Bajaur Tribal Agency.

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Al-Qaeda Ideologue Attiya Allah al-Libi Releases New Booklet Discussing Recruitment of Jihadis and the Use of Takfir

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

A senior al-Qaeda ideologue has issued a booklet addressing two of the most important issues for the jihadi community – the practice of *takfir* (labeling a group or individual as apostate or infidel) and the question of whether jihad is an individual obligation. Entitled *Ajwibatun fi Hukim al-Nafir wa Shart al-Mutasadi al-Takfir (Responses to the Ruling on Leaving for Battle and the Precondition of Takfir)*, the document was released on jihadist websites on August 1. The booklet includes responses from al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Abd al-Rahman Attiya Allah al-Libi (Attiya) to questions from jihadis about joining the jihad in Afghanistan and the rules of *takfir*.

The significance of the booklet comes from Attiya's status as a prominent al-Qaeda theorist, which makes his accounts relevant to the strategies and operations of al-Qaeda and the Salafi-Jihadist movement. Attiya's name is on the U.S. list of designated terrorists and he is the one of the leaders of the Jihadist movement in Libya. A graduate of Shari'a studies in Mauritania and an expert in explosives, he is considered close to Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. He was also close to al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi before the latter was killed in 2006. Attiya has also been described as a coordinator between al-Qaeda leaders and other Islamic groups. It was in this role that al-Libi spent two years in Algeria in the mid-1990s trying to reconcile the disputing parties in the Groupe Armée Islamique (GIA) before it split. For his efforts he was imprisoned there for several months and had a fatwa issued against him by Hassan Hattab's faction of the GIA. Attiya left for Afghanistan in 2000, where he was described as the "coordination officer between Afghanistan and Iraq." He became close to al-Zarqawi when the latter was running a training camp in Herat. Some reports have suggested that Attiya is currently based in Iran, but his responses to the jihadis' questions imply that he is located in Afghanistan. [1]

Attiya's responses indicate that al-Qaeda is keen to rely on local elements for waging jihad in the areas where the movement is currently active, such as Afghanistan and

Pakistan, but at the same time they want to escalate the conflict on other jihadi battlefields. A would-be jihadist asked Attiya whether jihad in Afghanistan is *fard ayn* (an individual duty) or *fard kifaya* (a collective duty, i.e. to be handled by existing community structures such as armies or militias), and also whether jihadis in Afghanistan need more men or funding. The questioner, who was concerned after hearing the experiences of a friend who had gone to Afghanistan, stated, "After he finished training he went for about six months without deploying to the battlefield but was asked to choose a martyrdom operation, but he did not want to and did not go to the battlefield." [2]

Attiya responded by stating that in "the battlefields of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the mujahideen do not need, at this stage (I stress the words 'at this stage' because this information may change from time to time), great numbers of combatant mujahideen... God willing, the numbers of *muhajireen* [foreign mujahideen] and Ansar (the people of the land) present there are very great." Attiya reminded the man that jihadi groups have to "absorb people in terms of their arming, training, teaching, education, as well as the development of their psychology and consciousness, etc., or even supporting their living: housing them (that is, providing for their residence), their livelihood (that is, paying for their food and drink, etc)." He admitted that "the mujahideen, whether the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [the Taliban], al-Qaeda, or others, do not have the capacity to provide for extremely large numbers."

Regarding the impatience of the questioner's friend to immediately join the fighting in Afghanistan, Attiya warned:

Living in Afghanistan and among the tribes is not all about operations, killing, and slaughtering the enemies of Allah. Rather, it is a full life that includes training and fighting according to the proper times and on the right occasions, which also takes into account the person's suitability for it, the need for him and so on. It also involves other activities that are necessary and that complement jihad, such as logistics and administrative activities, and many other various specializations. Mostly, anyone who has the opportunity, whether they are few or many, to engage in fighting (military combatant operations), will be given that opportunity. It is just that sometimes 'he needs some patience for it.'

Attiya explained that the mujahideen are selective in choosing new recruits. “So we call upon the specialized cadres that jihad requires first, and then the regular fighters according to need and according to what the leaders and those running the jihad decide. So we accept the numbers bit by bit through a process of selection and recommendation,” he said. However, according to Attiya, this is the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and “other battlefields are each according to their own measure. One battlefield may need numbers, while another does not, and so on and so forth.”

Attiya added that this opinion does not make jihad *farḍ kifāya*, “because *kifāya* (collectivity) has not occurred in reality on the ground,” in that collective measures are either absent or have been unsuccessful in “repulsing the enemy.” Decrying the failure of wealthy Muslims to fund the movement and the unwillingness of those with scientific and leadership skills to take up the challenge of jihad, Attiya declared, “Give me money and provide me with cadres, and you will see what fronts and training camps we will open and what we will do to the enemies of Allah.”

As Attiya emphasized that jihad is *farḍ ayn*, he urged jihadis to spread through various areas for jihad:

There is no doubt that many Muslim lands are occupied and seized by the infidels; some for centuries, may Allah provide assistance, from Andalusia in the west, parts of southern Europe, Central Asia, the Balkans, the Caucasus and nearby areas, to East Turkistan in China, to many countries in Southeast Asia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and others, and even India, or many parts of it. These were all some time ago the lands of Islam and Dar al-Islam and were taken by the *kāfir* [infidel] enemy. So Muslims must retrieve them and free them from the hands of the infidels. They must also free all Islamic territories among the lands of the Arabs and the foreigners, which are under the authority of the infidels and apostate governments who belong to our own race. It is a duty to fight them and wage jihad against them. It is the duty of every able person to do that.

On the subject of *takfir*, Attiya’s remarks suggest that the Salafist movement, a major proponent of the practice, may feel that the practice is getting out of hand. He asserted that *takfir* is the responsibility of the *ulama* (religious scholars), who are best situated to determine the requirements and impediments to such a judgment:

As for the general public and those who have no access to *Ilm* (religious knowledge), they are to be warned against making charges of *kufr* against anyone out of personal interpretation and inference. That is the work of the people of knowledge. The common person who is not specialized in knowledge says: *I do not know. Ask the Ulama...* In general, being reserved in this respect is compulsory and necessary. Otherwise, humans would be ruined.

Attiya’s booklet serves as an ideological underpinning for the new strategies that jihadis aim to implement: opening multiple fronts as well as integrating local elements into the wider global Jihadist movement.

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Notes

1. *Asharq al-Awsat*, September 4, 2008, see also: <http://akhbar.alaan.tv/ar/videos/video-global-news-ar/atyah.html>, April 20, 2009. For more details on the Algerian disputes then and al-Qaeda mediation see: Camille Tawil, *Al-Qaeda wa Akhawatuha: Kissat al-Jihadyeen al-Arab (Al-Qaida and its Sisters: the Story of Arab Jihadis)*, Saqi Publishers, London, 2007.

2. All quotes are from the translation of Ansar al-Mujahideen web forum: <http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=25592>.

Afghanistan’s “Militia” Problem: Can Local Defense Forces Replace Private Security Firms?

By Michael A. Innes

Afghanistan’s President, Hamid Karzai, gave a speech on August 7 at the Civil Services Institute in Kabul in which he discussed his government’s

reliance on foreign consultants and the role of private security firms. He proposed cuts to the former, and in the case of the latter, outright closure – heavily critical of what he argued is their role in perpetuating violence and instability in the country (Tolo TV, August 7). Karzai’s speech was hardly surprising in its content, and was illustrative of a longer-term concern, both in Afghanistan and in the West, with commercial providers of security and military services on the one hand, and their close cousins, warlords and private militias, on the other.

Karzai’s speech also came at a time of heightened sensitivity to several issues:

- Blurring of the conceptual lines between private militias, private security firms and local policing or self-defense units.
- Past damage caused to Afghanistan and its people by private armies and their potential to do more of the same now and in the future.
- American interest in bolstering local self-defense and policing capacity – with its clear potential as a militia feeder.
- Endemic Afghan government corruption.
- Anxiety over the withdrawal from ISAF of troop contributing states over the next few years.

There is little reason to expect, amidst all this, that legal, commercial and bureaucratic controls will prevent various security initiatives from eventually collapsing under the weight of private interests. There is every reason to expect that such tensions will continue to tug and pull at Afghanistan, perpetuating a vulnerable state of affairs much loved by insurgents. Ultimately, the elimination of surrogate forces – be they regulated, commercial providers of security and military services or illegally-armed groups in the service of individual warlords – is an experiment meant to favor both the state control of local militias and the timing of foreign troop withdrawal.

The Costs of Contracting

While U.S. strategy for Afghanistan is ostensibly focused on a 2011 withdrawal, attention has also recently turned to its sizeable contractor community. This is not a new story. A burgeoning Department of Defense contractor culture has been noted for several years now and in particular saw exponential growth following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Abroad, large basing operations - like that at Kandahar - also represent a significant jackpot

for local actors, who vie for access to base employment, service contracts and other economic vehicles. The expansion of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations in Afghanistan since 2006 is thus a major target for corrupt practice.

Provision of security and military services is a narrower subset of contracted activities, but it is by far the most contentious given that it comes equipped for violence and, if recent history is any indication, a propensity for getting caught in individual displays of indiscipline and criminal behavior. Presently, the focus is on limiting the potential for corporate malfeasance by ensuring more active and transparent management of contracts. In early July, for example, NATO/ISAF established Task Force 2010. Headed by Rear Admiral Kathleen Dussault (U.S. Navy), the unit is responsible for ensuring the effective distribution of contracting funds for their “intended purpose” in support of ISAF’s counterinsurgency strategy (Tolo TV, July 8). [1]

Task Force 2010 is part of the International Contracting Corruption Task Force, which gathers and provides evidence of corrupt practices to Afghanistan’s government for further handling. This wider interest is meant to be consistent with the “Afghan First Policy,” which stipulates that U.S. “procurement and contracted work services” in Afghanistan should go to Afghan companies first, and if no such local capacity exists, it should be developed. [2]

Corruption complicates development processes everywhere, of course, and is hardly unique to Afghanistan. It has, however, been a prominent part of the public debate on Western support for the Karzai government, widely considered to be shot through with nepotism, graft and corruption. In that light, moves to abolish private security firms in Afghanistan would require high-stakes maneuvering between government and business elites. In theory, shutting them down should help consolidate the means of violence under the banner of the state – a baseline condition for a bolstered, self-reliant Afghanistan. Given the commercial stakes involved, however, whose interests are served or harmed by such measures remains an open question.

Local Self-Policing

Since taking command of ISAF this summer, U.S. Army General David Petraeus has placed responsibility for self-defense and self-policing squarely on Afghan shoulders

– a move no doubt modeled on the successful use of tribal militias in Iraq and designed to foster Afghan self-reliance ahead of the withdrawal of U.S. and Allied forces. Statements made by various press officers and other sources suggest that there are challenges involved in effectively communicating this. One source explained the difference between Petraeus’ local policing project and private militias. The former, he explained, are “simple, local self-protection forces, more akin to a village security force,” whereas “militias or private armies operate at the behest of one individual.” Local self-protection forces would operate under Interior Ministry and local police control, and receive salaries from the government (*Dawn* [Karachi], July 13).

A number of cases have since been touted as success stories, but there is a degree of double-speak at work in how they are defined and promoted. Karzai, formerly critical of the creation of armed militias, has become an avid supporter of Petraeus’ local policing program, and ISAF officials have appeared in local media to press the case for it (Tolo TV, July 30). An ISAF press release in late July, for example, described the efforts of Afghans in the Pusht-e Rod district of Farah Province to repel insurgent elements from their villages. It went on to explain that “Pashtun communities have traditionally used a wide array of policing forces,” but “Coalition officials stressed these community watch programs are not militias; instead, they are defensive, village-level policing forces under the control of local shuras and jirgas, with a connection to the Afghan government.” [3]

Elsewhere, officials have provided contradictory or misleading details on the nature of a U.S. Army Special Forces program to train local self-defense units. This suggests that while such efforts may look good on paper, they may indeed, in practice, also live up to the fears of many Afghans who view them as little more than old wine in new bottles. [4] Afghan officials in Shindand district, for example, charged that they were not consulted in the formation of the “village defense forces,” and that such groups “had been deployed without coordination with local police.” Their counterparts in Kabul, on the other hand, have indicated otherwise - though not without qualification. By mid-July, a deal had been struck under which the village defense units would be subsumed” into Petraeus’ local police forces under Interior Ministry control. [5]

Conclusion

The Soviet-era experience with predatory militias (Arbaki) in Afghanistan will make the measure difficult to sell locally. Predictably, the creation of pro-government militias did not please existing armed groups at large in Afghanistan. A press release from the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan said the move to form militias was nothing more than a revival of “that notorious and failed plan” to create such forces under the rule of Najibullah, the late Communist president of Afghanistan. The notorious militias of that time “not only ignited the fire of thefts, killings, barbarism and ethnic prejudice but they also became the cause of the failure of that regime” (Benawa.com, July 27). Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami likewise said the formation of local militias would not yield any fruitful results (*Shahadat* [Peshawar], August 9).

In a commentary by Dr. Bashir Musa Nafi that appeared in pan-Arab daily *al-Quds al-Arabi*, the analyst noted:

Tribal militias are nothing but a resurrection of the warlords and the armed gangs that caused havoc in the country in the years of infighting and civil chaos in the period between the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the moment when the Taliban imposed their authority on most of Afghanistan in 1996. There are considerable and essential differences between the Iraqi situation and the situation in Afghanistan, and it is difficult to transpose the Iraqi Awakening experience to the Afghan scene effectively... If militias become stable entities with local material interests, in the end, it is most likely that they will contribute considerably to the eruption of a civil war that will be more or less long, depending on different objective factors (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, July 23).

Meanwhile, a broad range of Afghan media outlets has also roundly criticized the militia initiative. One Kabul newspaper asked who will guarantee that the militias will not attack people’s lives and assets, while a local weekly pointed out that the Arbaki were already a proven failure in Afghanistan (*Manedegar* [Kabul], July 20; *Mosharekat-e Melli Weekly* [Kabul], July 20). The proposal was also criticized as having benefits only for the Taliban and for allowing the possibility of the Taliban to exploit the plan to receive arms and other equipment (*Payam-e Mujahed* [Kabul], July 25; *Arman-e Melli* [Kabul], July 24).

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Notes

1. See ISAF Public Affairs Office, “New Task Force Stands Up To Combat Contract Corruption,” ISAF Press Release (8 July 2010), URL: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/new-task-force-stands-up-to-combat-contract-corruption.html>.

2. ISAF Public Affairs Office, “Linking Contracting in Afghanistan To A Winning COIN Strategy,” ISAF Press Release (30 July 2010), URL: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-conference-focus-linking-contracting-in-afghanistan-to-a-winning-coin-strategy.html>.

3. ISAF Joint Command - Afghanistan, “Afghans In Farah Take First Step Toward Stabilizing Communities,” ISAF Press Release (July 27, 2010).

4. “International Forces Deny Funding Afghan Militia,” *Afghan Crisis Report* (Institute for War & Peace Reporting, July 27, 2010).

5. Ibid.