



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 25 ♦ JUNE 24, 2010

IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....1

IS YEMEN CONTEMPLATING A MILITARY OFFENSIVE IN THE SECESSIONIST SOUTH?
By Ronan McGee.....3

TALIBAN SPOKESMAN DISCUSSES RELATIONS WITH AL-QAEDA AND OPIUM PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN
By Abdul Hameed Bakier.....4

ALGERIA'S AQIM BECOMES A REGIONAL THREAT DESPITE SURRENDER OF SENIOR LEADERS
By Dario Cristiani.....6



Members of AQIM

Terrorism Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jamestown Foundation.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.

NIGERIA'S IMAMS WARN OF THREAT FROM KALA KATO ISLAMIST MOVEMENT

A group of Muslim imams in Nigeria's northern Niger state have warned state governor Dr. Muazu Babangida Aliyu of the threat posed by a radical Islamic group known as Kala-Katu. The Imams urged the state government to take action to defuse the threat before the group begins a new campaign of sectarian violence (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 16; *Daily Trust* [Lagos], June 16). According to the chairman of the group of Islamic scholars, Mallam Isah Fari, "If action is not taken immediately and the sect is allowed to spread and strike, it will affect everybody irrespective of religious beliefs and this will be termed...a religious war." [1] The group is said to be concentrated in the Sauka Kahuta area of Minna Township (*Daily Trust*, June 16).

Following the teachings of Mallam Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine, Kala-Kato rejects the Hadiths and Sunna (sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad), considered by most Muslims to be integral parts of Islamic belief and jurisprudence along with the Quran. The Quran is the only book Kala-Kato followers are allowed to read. The movement considers everyone who fails to follow their unorthodox beliefs an infidel.

Friction between Nigerian security forces and Kalo-Kato members erupted into violence late last year in Bauchi State. When police tried to stop them from



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to pubs@jamestown.org, or contact us at:

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320
Washington, DC • 20036
Tel: (202) 483-8888
Fax: (202) 483-8337

Copyright ©2009

preaching, Kalo-Kato members responded with attacks using bows and arrows and automatic weapons seized from security forces (Bloomberg, December 29, 2009). 38 people were killed, including at least one soldier, several children and the local leader of the group, Mallam Badamsi. A subsequent police investigation suggested the violence had its origin in a crisis that erupted within the sect, when Mallam Badamsi accused some members of being responsible for an ailment from which he was suffering (*Punch* [Lagos], January 10). Police Commissioner Atiku Kafir reported that a search of Badamsi's home revealed a cache of bomb-making materials and explosives, two AK-47 rifles and "a large quantity of swords, daggers and gunpowder" (*Daily Independent* [Lagos], December 30, 2009).

Kala-Kato, like a number of other sectarian groups in northern Nigeria, often uses juveniles in its front lines. The young members are typically released after their arrest, and by the time they come of age they are highly experienced in street violence. In the Bauchi rioting, children between the ages of 10 and 15 were reported to have set homes and buildings on fire with adults providing support (*Daily Independent* [Lagos], December 30, 2009).

The movement's inspiration is Mallam Muhammadu Marwa "Maitatsine" (Hausa for "He who curses others"). A Cameroonian preacher who relocated to Nigeria's Kano State, Maitatsine forbade his followers from using automobiles, bicycles, watches, radios and from possessing any more than the absolute minimum amount of money needed to survive. Relations with fellow Muslims, whom the movement regarded as pagans, reached their breaking point in 1979 when Maitatsine declared himself a prophet and successor to Muhammad. Maitatsine and his followers began to clash with their neighbors, police and the military, leading in 1980 to the loss of thousands of lives, including that of Maitatsine himself. Under his successor, Musa Makiniki, the movement erupted into violence again in 1982, 1984 and 1985, with the further loss of thousands of lives. One Nigerian daily suggested that sectarian violence was encouraged in the country's north by religious-minded politicians who intervened to shield culprits from prosecution (*Daily Sun* [Lagos], January 8).

1. Mallam is the Hausa language adaptation of the Arabic mu'allim – Islamic scholar or teacher.

U.S. DIPLOMAT'S ASSASSINS ESCAPE FROM NOTORIOUS SUDANESE PRISON

The four condemned killers of both American USAID officer John Granville and his driver Abdel Rahman Abbas shocked most Sudanese when they made a dramatic escape from North Khartoum's Khober Prison, the first escape since the notorious prison's construction by British imperialists in the late 19th century. The four escapees, who were awaiting execution, were supposedly shackled hand and foot (as are all condemned men in the prison), but nonetheless escaped through a sewage pipe leading to a main street. The men were then picked up by a Toyota Land Cruiser which fled with the fugitives. When the vehicle reached a police checkpoint on the northern outskirts of Omdurman the fugitives opened fire, killing one police officer. A second police car tried to follow the Land Cruiser at high speed, but rolled off the road. The Land Cruiser was later recovered with four flat tires, deflated by police bullets (*Sudan Tribune*, June 12; June 13). The driver of the car was reported to have been arrested, but the four escapees managed to flee on foot (Reuters, June 11). Though the search has focused locally on the Abu Halif area southwest of Omdurman, Sudanese authorities have also asked Interpol for assistance, suggesting investigators may believe the men have left the country (*Sudan Tribune*, June 13).

Granville and Abbas were killed while returning from a Khartoum New Year's Party in the early hours of January 1, 2008. The attack on Granville came only one day after then U.S. President George Bush signed the "Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act," a bill drafted in response to Khartoum's alleged genocide in Darfur. The Granville family's Sudanese lawyer, Taha Ibrahim, claimed the escape was a "political partnership that took place from inside and outside Sudan" and suggested the four fugitives might be headed for lawless Somalia (*Asharq al-Awsat*, June 12). The condemned men had the opportunity under Islamic law of having the death penalty waived if the consent of the aggrieved families could be obtained. While the Abbas family consented, the Granville family did not, saying that Sudanese law did not provide the alternative of a life sentence and was thus unable to ensure the men would not kill again.

The exact allegiance of the fugitives (if any) has never been determined. In the days after the dual murders, claims of responsibility were issued by both Ansar al-Tawhid (Supporters of Monotheism) and the previously

unknown al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Niles (AFP, January 4, 2008; *Asharq al-Awsat*, October 12, 2008). The government disputed the existence of both organizations and the suspects were never charged with belonging to either one during the trial (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 6, 2009). One of the fugitives, Abdul Raouf Abu Zaid Muhammad, is the son of the leader of Sudan's Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiya, a Salafist religious group whose mosques have been the target of bloody assaults by rival Islamists. The movement has difficulties with the regime, but is largely non-political and was not implicated in the murders.

After the escape, a joint investigation committee was formed between officials of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice and there are reports that the investigation is now focusing on the warden of Kober Prison (al-Ayyam [Khartoum], June 15). Few in Khartoum believe an escape from Kober Prison could be managed without some type of inside cooperation. Though the brick-built prison by the Blue Nile is well-known in Sudan for its executions and amputations, the staff is generally regarded as professional. Despite overcrowding and infernal summer heat in the cells, the prison is still considered a safe alternative to the regime's infamous "ghost houses"—off-the-books detention centers with no accountability for the treatment or even survival of their inmates. A wing of Kober Prison is dedicated to high-profile political prisoners who are better treated and separated from criminal inmates by a wall. Some of the nation's most famous politicians have spent time in Kober, including Islamist Hassan al-Turabi, current vice-president Ali Osman Muhammad Taha, Umma Party leader and former president Sadiq al-Mahdi, and Democratic Unionist Party leader Muhammad Osman al-Mirghani. Roughly 100 members of Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are in Kober Prison awaiting execution for their role in the 2008 raid on Omdurman.

Is Yemen Contemplating a Military Offensive in the Secessionist South?

By Ronan McGee

The secessionist movement in southern Yemen has become increasingly violent in recent months and has gained considerable momentum since it

first attained a loose organizational structure in 2007. The prospect of a renewed civil war ensuing between southern forces and the central government in Sana'a, Yemen's capital, seems highly possible. There are also concerns that the movement may eventually decide to cooperate with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in an attempt to undermine President Ali Abdullah Saleh, despite the dismissal of such assertions by some southern leaders.

Since North and South Yemen united in 1990, unemployment and poverty have risen in the south, a region which contains the majority of Yemen's land and its most important oil facilities. Many southerners believe they are deliberately discriminated against in areas of employment, government services, economic development and political governance. Tribal law and some previously outlawed traditions such as child marriage have also resurged in the south, in stark contrast to the secularism and relative gender equality of South Yemen's earlier socialist rule (*The National* [Abu Dhabi], March 6).

Calls for secession and anti-government demonstrations have intensified amid growing violence. Ali Salim al-Beidh, a former leader of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) who has resumed his political career in exile to become one of the southern movement's leading figures, recently demanded that a U.N. commission recognize an independent South Yemen with Aden as its capital. He also warned that Yemen would suffer "catastrophic consequences" if the Arab world – particularly the Gulf States – fail to intervene on behalf of southern Yemenis in their pursuit of sovereignty (AFP [Dubai], May 21).

Violent clashes between security forces and separatists are occurring more frequently:

- Eight people were wounded in clashes with Yemeni security forces in al-Daleh governorate during the funeral of four civilians killed on June 6 (Middle East Online, June 15).
- Gunmen assassinated senior security official Jalal al-Uthmani in Abyan governorate on June 13. Two soldiers were also killed trying to defuse a bomb left at the gate of an army camp (Reuters, June 13).
- On June 10, between 10 and 12 people were wounded when government troops fired on southern protestors in al-Daleh (AFP, June 10).

- Just three days earlier, on June 7, six people were killed and 17 wounded in what witnesses described as “indiscriminate” shelling by the Yemeni army in al-Daleh (*al-Sahwa*, June 10; *Gulf Times*, June 8).
- Al-Daleh was also the site of rocket-propelled grenade assaults against military targets and an assassination attempt against Ghazi Ahmed Ali, al-Daleh’s security director (*Yemen Times*, May 24; *Yemen Post*, May 19).
- Another attempted assassination occurred in Shabwah governorate against Sadiq Ameen Abu Ras, the Deputy Prime Minister for Interior Affairs, and President Saleh’s convoy was attacked near the town of al-Habileen in Lahij governorate (*Yemen Times*, May 17).
- An ambush in Jada’a (Lahij governorate) killed one soldier. Two other soldiers were abducted, with secessionists setting a 48-hour deadline for the release of southern leaders in exchange for their release (Aden News, May 1; *Yemen Post*, May 29; *Yemen Times*, May 20; *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 2).

The Yemeni government has attempted to suppress the movement by setting up regional checkpoints blocking the flow of people and goods, but such measures have only exacerbated tensions. President Saleh has also sought the use of political means. He announced in a speech on Unification Day (May 22) that amnesty would be given to approximately 300 imprisoned southern separatists, Houthi rebels and journalists. Saleh also hinted at creating a unity government to open up Yemen’s political process and begin talks on setting the first parliamentary elections since 2003 (Aden Press, May 24).

Opposition forces welcomed the amnesty, but skepticism remains about the seriousness of the government’s intentions. Although approximately 134 southern separatists have reportedly been released, the arrests of activists continue, according to southern leader Yahya Ghaleb al-Shuaybi (*Gulf Times*, June 8). Moreover, some leaders within the umbrella opposition organization al-Liqa’a al-Mushtarak (which includes the YSP) believe talks about political inclusion are simply an attempt to appease U.S. concerns (Aden Press, May 24). Analysts also maintain that Saleh’s recent proposals are not enough to ensure Yemen’s stability, as the core grievances

of the southern movement in particular continue to fail to be addressed. Indeed, secessionist leader Tariq al-Fadhli detailed the south’s concerns in a recent interview and claimed that the prisoner amnesty would not suffice to meet southern demands (*Yemen Times*, May 27).

Speculation has begun that President Saleh may ultimately initiate a large-scale military offensive, similar to the one launched against the Houthis last year. Such a move would likely cause Yemen’s stability to deteriorate drastically. Although southern leaders have so far rejected offers of support from AQAP leader Nasir al-Wahayshi, the two groups could conceivably join forces if the Saleh regime were to engage the southern movement militarily under the guise of a “counterterrorism” initiative. Yemen’s future therefore hinges largely on whether or not Saleh decides to finally address the grievances of the south. If he instead opts for a massive military response to the movement, the potential for the country to become violently torn apart through civil war is alarmingly plausible.

Ronan McGee is an M.A. candidate in Middle East Studies at George Washington University. He studied Arabic in Yemen in 2007 and has several publications on current economic and security trends in the country. He works for a global risk consultancy in the Washington, DC area.

Taliban Spokesman Discusses Relations with al-Qaeda and Opium Production in Afghanistan

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Taliban spokesman Qari Yusuf Ahmadi recently gave an interview to the pan-Arab newspaper *Asharq al-Awsat* in which he discussed the Taliban’s relations with al-Qaeda, the sources of opium production in Afghanistan, and the impact of the arrest of the second man in the Taliban leadership, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (*Asharq al-Awsat*, June 10). In the internet-conducted interview, the Taliban spokesman answered questions addressed originally to the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, who was said to have been too busy to participate in the online interview. Ahmadi’s

interview was widely discussed in jihadi internet forums, where it received a mixed reaction.

Mullah Baradar is considered responsible for reviving and reorganizing the Taliban's jihadi forces in Afghanistan in 2003. Mullah Baradar's duties covered a wide range of Taliban activities such as funding, strategic planning, and the conduct of political and military operations. Baradar also headed the first Shura (consultative) council set up by the Taliban. Under Baradar, the Shura council released a jihadi organizational manual that examined past mistakes committed by the mujahideen during the Soviet occupation and urged an unrelenting fight against the enemy. Mullah Hamad Allah, a Taliban intelligence operative in Ghazni region, was cited as saying, "Mullah Baradar is not an extremist like the rest of the Taliban leaders. In any possible peace negotiations, he is the right man to talk to" (almokhtsar.com February 18).

Ahmadi claimed the Taliban is in control of three quarters of Afghanistan and rules Kabul and Kandahar 21 hours a day. Asked whether there are talks ongoing between the Taliban and Afghan president Hamid Karzai in the Maldives Islands—and pressed as to what transpired in the Jeddah talks conducted last year under the auspices of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah—Ahmadi said peace negotiations with Afghani president Hamid Karzai are being conducted by ex-Taliban leaders who have been expelled from the movement (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 12).

On the arrest in Karachi last February of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Ahmadi said any information Baradar might reveal to his interrogators is outdated and harmless to the Taliban "because the Taliban made comprehensive tactical changes since the arrest." The impact of the arrest was exaggerated by the western media in order to undermine mujahideen morale. Ahmadi admitted that Arab Muslims are still participating in the war in Afghanistan. The Taliban spokesman downplayed the existence of the Shura council (alleged to control Taliban activities in Afghanistan) in the Pakistani city of Quetta, saying there is no need for the jihad command to be located outside of Afghanistan since the Taliban controls 70% of the country.

Asked whether a number of Taliban leaders that were arrested or surrendered to Coalition forces and the Afghan government had turned against the Taliban, Ahmadi said Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef (formerly incarcerated by the United States at Guantanamo Bay) has been under house arrest since his release in 2005

and former Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil met a similar fate, but Mohammad Qasim Halimi is currently working in Karzai's government and is not a mullah (Islamic scholar), according to the Taliban. None of the men continue to have influence in the Taliban.

Ahmadi insists the Taliban's strategic goals haven't changed and the movement will fight until the foreign forces are expelled and Islamic Shari'a is applied in Afghanistan. Ahmadi said individuals from the Gulf States and other places in the Islamic world fund Taliban operations against the occupation, but claimed the Taliban seize large quantities of spoils from the enemy itself after each victorious confrontation, adding "the spoils of food, weapons and ammunition won from the enemy amount to millions of dollars. Also, a steady supply of funds comes from our Afghan people." Ahmadi refused to give the number of Taliban fighters, saying rather that they number 24 million – the population of Afghanistan - minus the number of Karzai government members.

On the progress of the "Money for Arms" initiative, Ahmadi said:

We believe that these illusory U.S. plans are ridiculous. What money, and what arms? They are simply deceiving their peoples. As far as we are concerned, the equation is: "Arms against arms." This means that with the weapon of faith and our rifles we face up to the arms of the U.S. aggression and tyranny. Similarly, with our arms we disarm their soldiers, use their arms against them, and kill the rest of them.

Ahmadi believes the United States is trying to come up with a scenario to justify its defeat in Afghanistan. The United States accuses Iran of training the Taliban to pressure Iran further and of rationalizing its defeat in Afghanistan, a reference to an unverified press report based on interviews with "unnamed low-level Taliban commanders" who allegedly claimed Iran trained Taliban fighters on the use of roadside bombs (*Sunday Times* [London], March 21; see also *Telegraph* [London], March 21). Ahmadi said Afghans acquired their fighting experience through three decades of fighting superpowers and do not need military training from Iran. Ahmadi insists the Taliban never ceased to rule Afghanistan and that Afghans pledge full allegiance to the Emir of the Islamic Emirate, Mullah Mohammad Omar. Concerning Osama Bin Laden, Ahmadi said

the U.S. decision to invade Afghanistan was taken long before 9/11 to control oil pipeline routes from Asia and to end the Emirate's ban on opium farming. Ahmadi asserts the Taliban has no proof of Bin Laden's involvement in the 9/11 attacks, but said the Taliban favors the establishment of an independent investigative commission to determine who was behind the attacks.

Ahmadi denied reports accusing the Taliban of selling heroin to fund its operations. The spokesman claims Afghan opium production was only 185 tons in 2001, mostly in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance. Since then, however, the U.S. occupation has "turned Afghanistan into the largest opium farm in the world, with a production exceeding 9,000 tons at this moment... The United States and Britain have many heroin manufacturing plants in Afghanistan. They are all located within military bases where the strictest protection and security measures are in force... We do not know to date what prevents the U.S. forces from destroying the opium crops by spraying them with special chemicals from the air. In fact, they threatened to do just this before the outbreak of the war in 2001."

Jihadi forum chatters were reserved in their appreciation of the interview with Ahmadi because it was released in *Asharq al-Awsat*, considered by many jihadi forum members to be a pro-Saudi publication. One member said, "Good interview with my objection to the dirty, secular and anti-Islamic evil newspaper it was published in. I think the newspaper distorted the part about Saudi Arabia" (ikhwan.net, June 6). The London-based pro-jihad AlMaqreze Centre for Historical Studies (operated by Egyptian Islamist Hani al-Sibai) warned jihadis that Ahmadi's answers could have been distorted by the newspaper (almaqreze.net, June 5).

Some jihadi forum members rejected news reports of Mullah Baradar's arrest by Pakistan, saying they insinuate an ongoing war between the Taliban and Pakistan. One forum member suggested there are two types of Taliban. One is run by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency and the other is the extreme Salafi-Jihadi Taliban loyal to Arabs and Uzbeks. Others are confident jihad will not be affected by the arrest of Mullah Baradar as it wasn't affected by the death of Mullah Dadullah (hanein.info June 5).

Abdul Hameed Bakier is an intelligence expert on counter-terrorism, crisis management and terrorist-hostage negotiations. He is based in Jordan.

Algeria's AQIM Becomes a Regional Threat Despite Surrender of Senior Leaders

By Dario Cristiani

The Algerian-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) organization is facing new challenges to its leadership and its mission as a result of Algerian counterterrorist measures. The loss of a number of AQIM's commanders to defections or arrest during security sweeps is beginning to have a major impact on the future direction of al-Qaeda activities in North Africa.

Attrition of the AQIM Leadership

One of the most important AQIM senior leaders, Abou el-Abbes (a.k.a. Athmane Touati), surrendered on May 25 after Algerian security forces captured him during a security sweep in Boumerdès Province. On that same day another major jihadi operative, Grig-Ahsine Abdelhalim (a.k.a. Abdelkader), also surrendered to the Algerian security forces (*L'Expression*, June 1; AFP, June 1).

El Abbes was a high-profile personality within the organization. He was among the oldest and most important members of the group. As a member of AQIM's Majlis al-Ayan (Council of Notables) he was considered to be among those members closest to Abdelmalek Droukdel, the current leader of the organization. Originally from the town of Bordj Menaïel in the province of Boumerdès, El-Abbes led terrorist operations in Boumerdès as well as in the area of Tizi-Ouzou and Bouira. He joined the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) in 1993. El Abbes was among the supporters of Hassan Hattab in his split with the GIA over the group's tactic of killing civilians, a tactic that was increasingly viewed as unacceptable by many members of the organization. The split led to the creation of the new Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), which in turn became AQIM after it received the al-Qaeda "brand" from Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2006. Grig-Ahsine Abdelhalim joined the jihad in 1994 after escaping from a jail in the Batna Province city of Tazoult and became a member of the Kabilya based Ain el-Hammam cell (*Le Courrier d'Algérie*, June 1).

These are only the two latest detentions to affect the organization in the past few months. The former emir

of the “El Farouk” brigade, Mansouri Ahmed (a.k.a. Abdeldjebbar), surrendered on April 16 and two days later, Mokadem Lounis (a.k.a. Abou Naamane), a member of the GSPC’s Central Zone command and former head of the medical committee, made the same decision (*La Tribune*, June 1). According to officials from Algerian security services, the two have given important information since then on the structure of the organization and its cells (*Le Soir D’Algérie*, June 1). El-Abbes is also reported to have provided important information. He was quoted as saying that many AQIM members are considering surrender because of an increasing lack of public support as well as a shortage of recruits. El Abbes also claimed that AQIM is trying to recruit mercenaries for its activities (*Echourouk* [Algiers], June 1). According to a local newspaper, the first operation made on the basis of this new information led to the killing of three alleged terrorists in the city center of Draâ El Mizan in the province of Tizi Ouzou (*Al-Watan* [Algiers], June 1).

AQIM Responds

A response to these operations was recently given by AQIM. On June 9, a terrorist attack was carried out against a police station in the area of Ammal, where a Hyundai truck driven by a suicide bomber exploded in front of the facility. The attack caused six deaths (including three gendarmes) and left several injured. This attack represents the first response of the organization to the recent arrests of some of its main and oldest members. It is also an effort to strengthen the morale of the group at a difficult time, when pressure from the Algerian government as well as regional and international players is increasing steadily (*Le Temps d’Algérie*, June 11). A few days later there was retaliation from the Algerian security forces, which killed two persons alleged to be involved in the attack (*Le Temps d’Algérie*, June 16).

The Regionalization of a Weakened and Transformed Organization

There are many examples of surrenders in the recent history of Algerian counterterrorism, but in many cases a blanket of opacity has obscured their true nature. The cases of three main leaders of GSPC/AQIM - Hassan Hattab, Amari Saifi Abdelrazzak (a.k.a. “El Para”) and Mokhtar Belmokhtar – are entangled in contradictory and often false announcements of surrenders, convictions in absentia, calls for reconciliation, and long periods of silence from the terrorist leaders, leading to a latent sense of public uncertainty about their fates.

A deliberate attempt to obscure the line between reality and fiction may be an element of psychological warfare deliberately pursued by the Algerian security forces.

Regardless of these considerations, it is clear that the recent arrests and surrenders represent a major blow for the organization. Even though there is always the suspicion that the reality is not as positive as that described by the Algerian security forces, it is certain that the detention and the arrest of these major AQIM leaders will weaken the organization. The fact that the security forces have been able to capture these leaders shows how they have been able to infiltrate the organization. These successful attempts to weaken the organization arrive at a time when AQIM is already facing an internal struggle for power between its different “internal souls,” characterized by the alleged split between Amir Abdelmalek Droukdel and Mebarek Yazid (a.k.a. Abou Obeida Youcef). Yazid accuses Droukdel and the AQIM leadership of being ineffective in carrying out operations and of being too close to core al-Qaeda.

Speculation has emerged regarding the possible overthrow of Droukdel. These rumors claim that he could be replaced by Yazid (*Ennahar* [Algiers], March 9). In this sense, the recent surrenders could further weaken Droukdel’s position, since some of them involved a number of his closest allies. The surrenders have also become a major element of Algerian government propaganda efforts - they are used as an example to the Islamist activists of the benefits of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, implemented in 2006 after a referendum.

Such a situation of weakness, within a wider context of pressure on al-Qaeda globally, seems to be leading the organization to change its inner nature. From being a group focused on an insurgency based on political as well as religious elements, it is shifting toward a more criminal type organization that uses Islamism in a superficial sense, on the model of the Philippine based organization Abu Sayyaf (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 18).

AQIM – Algerian or Regional Organization?

These recent and intensified Algerian efforts to deal with AQIM are likely connected to wider regional geopolitical developments. The U.S.-led North African counterterrorist exercises (“Operation Flintlock”) as

well as the diplomatic and military meetings on regional threats linked to terrorism held in Algeria in the past few months clearly demonstrate the importance that the issue has for both the regional chessboard and for the interests of external actors in the area such as the United States or the European Union. Algeria's strategy is to rapidly become a leader in the struggle against terrorism in the area. In spite of its "regionalization," AQIM remains a group whose soul is still rooted in Algerian dynamics. Although AQIM is progressively losing credibility as the main security threat for Algeria, the other governments of the Sahel-Sahara region are increasingly concerned about the threat that AQIM could represent for the stability of their own countries, which are largely characterized by porous borders, low levels of statehood and chronic social, economic, and political instability (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 23).

Algeria wants to use its considerable economic and military weight and its intimate knowledge of the Salafist threat to increase its overall regional status. Such a campaign could help Algeria improve its relationship with the United States, a constant aim of Algerian foreign policy for the past few years. Many times, the terrorist threat card has been played by Algiers to get the attention of Washington, even though the United States has always been cautious in providing full military assistance because of Israeli concerns. Moreover, improving its regional status will clearly better serve Algerian interests in the latent geopolitical confrontation with the other Maghreb "great power," Morocco. Although Morocco is a country concerned with the "regionalization" of AQIM, it was not invited to regional security meetings held in Algiers in March and April. Rabat protested vigorously against this exclusion (*Agence Maghreb Arab Press*, March 16).

Conclusion

On a domestic scale, the latest arrests and surrenders have shown how the Algerian government seems to be able to tame internal terrorist threats. Although there is always a certain degree of opacity surrounding these surrenders, confessions, and public redemptions, the efforts of Algeria's security forces seem to be relatively successful and they are effectively weakening AQIM in the country. Moreover, the internal conflicting dynamics of the group contribute to such a weakening. AQIM looks more like a normal criminal organization, involved in trafficking and other illegal activities. As such, it is emerging as a regional threat for the governments of the Sahel and Sahara regions. There is a shared interest

of these governments to keep the focus on the "Islamist nature" of such a threat in order to get greater attention from those actors concerned with the global spread of jihadism, primarily the United States. Moreover, these internal successes can project a stronger image of Algeria as a leader in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel-Sahara region, thereby increasing its overall regional and international status.

Dario Cristiani is a PhD Candidate in Middle East and Mediterranean Studies at King's College London.