



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME VII, ISSUE 23 ♦ JULY 30, 2009

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SOMALI EXTREMISTS FIGHT OVER FRENCH INTELLIGENCE AGENTS KIDNAPPED IN MOGADISHU

France’s growing involvement in Somalia suddenly drew attention when two French intelligence agents were kidnapped from a supposedly secure hotel in Mogadishu on July 14. The men, posing as journalists, were eating breakfast at Mogadishu’s Sahafi Hotel when gunmen wearing Somali government uniforms burst into the restaurant and seized them. The success of the operation and the absence of any resistance from security personnel led some to speculate it was an inside job.

Among those arrested were a number of hotel staff and bodyguards belonging to the Minister of the Interior, Shaykh Abdulkadir Ali Omar. A former deputy chairman of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) before the Ethiopian invasion of December 2006, and still a leader of his own militia, Abdulkadir’s appointment as Somalia’s new interior minister was controversial. Abdulkadir, however, is loyal to President and former ICU chairman Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad and served as the ICU’s operations commander during the Ethiopian invasion (Reuters, February 21). Shaykh Abdulkadir was wounded and his personal secretary was killed in a targeted IED explosion near Mogadishu’s Bakara market in March (Garowe Online, March 27). No one claimed responsibility for the assassination attempt.



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Abdulkadir's bodyguards were accused of snatching the French agents before turning them over to Somali insurgents, but a government commission of inquiry said a few days later that they had found no evidence for the involvement of government officials (Horseed Media, July 21). The hotel, favored by Transitional Federal Government (TFG) officials, is located in an area tightly controlled by government troops and Ugandan and Burundian peacekeepers belonging to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Whether the abducted men were then turned over (or sold) to the Islamist Hizb al-Islam militia of Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys remains uncertain. Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke maintains the two were abducted by Hizb al-Islam operatives (Shabelle Media Network, July 16). At some point during their transportation to a safe location, Hizb al-Islam's al-Shabaab allies turned up and demanded custody of both prisoners. Hours of heated argument followed, with al-Shabaab eventually being persuaded to take only one of the pair (Shabelle Media Network, July 16; AFP, July 16).

A Somali news site reported receiving information that the two men had been transported to Lower Shabelle in a convoy of battle wagons (armored pick-up trucks) where they were turned over to the forces of Shaykh Hassan Abdullah Hirsi al-Turki for concealment under heavy guard in the forests of the Juba region (AllPuntland, July 20). Al-Turki is an Islamist warlord who has close ties to al-Shabaab.

By some accounts, the agents will be tried for spying under Islamic law, though senior commanders have said the penalty may be a "fine," suggesting the insurgents are badly in need of funds as American military equipment continues to flow to the TFG (Midnimo.com, July 19).

Eventually French officials admitted the two men were not journalists; the secretary-general of the Elysée Palace (office of the French president) declared that the men were provided by the Defense Ministry "under international authority, in the preparation of a security unit for the Somali president... They were the precursors of a training unit for the praetorian guard" (AFP, July 19).

Earlier this month, France's U.N. representative told the Security Council: "The training of Somali security forces is key to building the country's military capacity." [1] France started training an initial force of 150 TFG

soldiers at the French military base in Djibouti this month, two months ahead of schedule (AFP, July 21). They are the first of a battalion of 500 men scheduled to receive military training. France has sought the participation of other European nations in training as part of a full-fledged mission under the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), but other European parties have expressed concern about whether the trained troops would remain loyal to the TFG after returning to Somalia (EuropeanVoice.com, May 20).

Besides training TFG troops in Djibouti, the French military has made its presence felt in Somalia in other ways. A joint French-Spanish naval mission, "Atalante," has been providing security against piracy in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008 and France has also provided military training to the Ugandan and Burundian troops of AMISOM, who are now battling al-Shabaab and Hizb al-Islam fighters in Mogadishu.

The choice of the intelligence agents to disguise themselves as journalists has drawn condemnation from Somalia's much-threatened journalist community. Eight Somali journalists have been murdered in the last two years and scores beaten or imprisoned. The Somalis fear such impersonations will only fuel the popular conception of journalists as agents of foreign powers.

[1] Security Council: Somalia - Statement made by Mr. Jean-Maurice Ripert, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, July 9, 2009 <http://www.franceonu.org/spip.php?article4057>

MAURITANIA STEPS UP CAMPAIGN AGAINST AL-QAEDA AFTER DISPUTED ELECTIONS

According to Algerian security sources, an ambush set by the Mauritanian army along the border with Algeria narrowly missed killing a number of high-profile members of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (al-Jazeera, July 25). The Mauritians launched the operation after receiving intelligence information suggesting AQIM operatives were present in Mauritania's eastern desert, preparing new attacks to divert pressure on AQIM fighters in northern Mali and Niger. Mali is in the midst of an offensive using Tuareg and Arab militias against the AQIM presence in Mali's difficult northern desert. Among those in the AQIM force who escaped the ambush near the Algerian border were the so-called "Amir of the Sahara," Yahya Jouadi (a.k.a. Yahya Abu Ammar), AQIM's chief qadi (judge) in Algeria, Abelrahman al-Tantaghi (a.k.a. Abu Anas al-Mauritani) and three other senior members, including two Mauritians and a Moroccan.

Two Islamist militants believed to be AQIM operatives were arrested in Nouakchott on July 17, following a shoot-out with security forces. State security chief Mohamed Lemine Ould Ahmed said the pair had come from Mali and were responsible for the June 23 murder of American citizen Christopher Leggett, who ran a computer and language school in the Mauritanian capital (Le Mali en Ligne, July 2; AFP, July 18). AQIM claimed responsibility for the murder. The remaining two members of the four-man cell, Didi Ould Bezeid and Mohamed Abdallahi Ould Hmeimed, were arrested in the following days (AFP, July 25).

Mauritania, Mali and Algeria have agreed on greater military cooperation to deal with AQIM, which exploits national borders and hostile terrain to maintain their activities in the Saharan region.

Following his victory in the July 18 presidential elections disputed by the opposition, General Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz vowed to renew efforts to eliminate terrorism in Mauritania. General Abdelaziz took power in an August 2008 coup, using the threat posed by terrorism as one of his main justifications for seizing power from a democratically elected president, Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. The General has pledged to increase the size and efficiency of the army but has also promised to address the causes of terrorism. “We need to fight terrorism in terms of security but also by improving the living conditions of the people and fighting ignorance” (BBC, July 20).

Britain Jails “Lone Wolf” Terrorist Isa Ibrahim

By Raffaello Pantucci

A jury at Winchester Crown Court in the U.K. returned a guilty verdict on July 17 in the case against “lone wolf” terrorist Andrew “Isa” Ibrahim, a 20 year-old British citizen accused of plotting a suicide bombing at a mall in Bristol, a large city west of London. Accused of “making an explosive substance with intent,” “preparation of a terrorist act” and having already pled guilty to “making an explosive substance,” Ibrahim was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to 10 years of incarceration (Crown Prosecution Service News, July 17; *Bristol Evening News*, July 17).

Andrew “Isa” Ibrahim is the son of a British woman and an Egyptian Coptic Christian father, and he either converted to Islam in the summer of 2006 around the anniversary of the July 7 bombing of a Birmingham mosque, or converted in 2005 and changed his name by deed poll from Andrew to Isa in February 2007 (*Telegraph*, July 18; *Bristol Evening News*, July 18, 2009). Prior to his conversion, Ibrahim had a troubled childhood, including repeated expulsion from schools and a heavy drug habit which dated back to cannabis use at the age of 12, before he moved on to crack and heroin (*Telegraph*, July 18; *Times*, July 18; *Bristol Evening News*, 18 July 2009).

In what was described by a senior officer involved in the case as a classic case of “nature versus nurture,” Ibrahim’s brother excelled at school and is currently a legal student at Oxford University, while Ibrahim battled addiction and lived on the streets (*Telegraph*, July 18). With an addictive personality which drew him variously to drugs, steroids, computer games, rave music and a bizarre foot fetish, Ibrahim appears to have wandered into extremist Islam in much the same way he fell into these other activities (*Bristol Evening News*, June 24). According to one report, his mother’s reaction on learning of his interest in Islam was “Don’t start that now!” (*Telegraph*, July 18).

Having become interested in Islam, Ibrahim rapidly moved towards extremism – according to his testimony on the stand, he “wasn’t so much interested in Islam as the politics,” and he became fixated with sermons he found online by infamous extremist clerics like Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri Mohammed, talking about them with friends and calling the U.K. a “dirty toilet” (*Bristol Evening News*, July 18; *Telegraph*, July 18). The internet played a major role in his radicalization; in the period running up to his arrest he grew particularly obsessed with suicide bombers, including the leader of the July 7, 2005 London bombings, Mohammed Siddique Khan, and the April 2003 Tel Aviv bomber Asif Hanif, whose martyrdom videos he watched repeatedly (*Telegraph*, July 18; BBC, July 18, *Times*, July 18).

One of the most significant aspects of the case was the fact that the original tip-off regarding Ibrahim appears to have come from members of the Muslim community in Bristol who had grown concerned about his behavior. According to one report, a community member called a Special Branch police officer to alert him about his particular concerns with Ibrahim (*Times*, July 18). Other reports stated that his burned hands (the result

of an incident while testing explosives) were spotted by someone at his local mosque who alerted the police (*Telegraph*, July 18). According to senior investigating officer Detective Superintendent Nigel Rock, “He was unknown to us - the first thing we knew about his [explosive] device was from the Muslim community” (*Bristol Evening News*, July 18).

Having received the tip, Avon and Somerset Police were quick to respond and immediately initiated a major investigation into Ibrahim. This was followed by a series of arrests on April 17, 2008, of Ibrahim and another friend, Hashi Omer (a local young man of Somali origin), while bomb disposal units undertook an operation to render Ibrahim’s potential explosive device safe. In addition to a considerable amount of radical literature, police found a biscuit tin full of Hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (HMTD – a highly explosive substance) in his refrigerator, a functioning detonator and a half-finished suicide vest hanging behind a door. Footage was also recovered from Ibrahim’s mobile phone which showed him testing out his explosives at home, as well as footage of his likely intended target (a local mall) and detailed notes about the most crowded places and distances between locations. Omer faces trial later in the year on charges of failing to inform police of Ibrahim’s activities (*Bristol Evening News*, April 7).

Ibrahim’s case is not the first of its kind in the United Kingdom. In May 2008 (almost exactly a month after Ibrahim’s arrest), a mentally disabled young man named Nicky Reilly (a.k.a. Mohammed Rasheed) attempted to carry out a suicide bombing in nearby Exeter in the name of Islam. The bomb blew up in his face as he tried to assemble it in the toilet of the restaurant he was targeting (*Times*, January 31). He was the only person charged in the case (though suspicions exist about local demagogues’ influences upon him) and it appears as though the internet played a major part in his radicalization. Then there are the odd cases of Owen Dodds and Nicholas Roddis, two young British men who were separately charged under the terrorism act on bomb-related charges and who also had Islamist material, though in neither case does it appear as though it was a focused interest (both appear to have serious mental health issues as well). [1]

When he was arrested, Ibrahim’s response was both fearful and boastful in equal measure, saying, “my mum’s going to kill me,” and asking whether he could be “sent to Belmarsh” – a high security prison where many prominent Islamist terrorists are held (*Bristol*

Evening News, July 18). He later claimed on the stand to have planned to state he was a terrorist when in prison to gain notoriety. It is ultimately the pursuit of celebrity that appears to have been his motivation in carrying out his plot, with extremist Islam really being little more than a useful tool in his desire to validate his existence. Nevertheless, he was on his way to constructing a viable terrorist plot which would have doubtless killed many, had he managed to carry it out, highlighting the very real danger posed by such “lone wolf” terrorists.

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Notes:

1. The Counter-Terrorism Division of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/ctd.html#_27

Jihadis Offer Training in Evasion of Police and Security Forces

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

The July issue of *Sada al-Jihad* (Echo of Jihad), a jihadi e-magazine published by the Global Islamic Media Front, contains religious research, analytical articles on ongoing jihadi operations and an interview with the spokesman of the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. On the practical side, the e-magazine usually includes training material for the mujahideen in the field. In this latest issue, *Sada al-Jihad* carries an article entitled “Security Precautions: The Negatives” (hanein.info, July 15).

The “security precautions” training article, prepared by the Abi Zubaydah Center, advises jihadis to neither exaggerate nor underestimate the importance of security procedures and cover stories to evade capture by infidel intelligence services. Abi Zubaydah warns the training does not guarantee complete protection from exposure because no matter how thorough the precautions are, things could still go wrong for the slightest reasons. The training cites real life incidents where jihadis were almost caught because of slack security precautions. After emphasizing the importance of security procedures, the training elaborates on specific procedures the jihadis are allowed to practice regardless of religious

permissibility, but warns jihadis not to drift into sinfulness and to refrain from applying these unreligious practices in safe environments. The list of un-Islamic practices jihadis are allowed include:

- Shaving the beard. Unmistakable security necessity lifts the religious taboo on shaving the beard but this must not become a habit. This measure would throw off secret services only in cases where they are acting on an unconfirmed tip and/or have a wide range of suspects.
- The training recommends chewing gum and wearing gold jewelry (both forbidden for men in Islam) at border checkpoints or in any high risk security environment. In some underdeveloped countries, police patrols very often stop and screen people traveling after midnight. There are cases when the highway patrols' suspicions led to the arrest of very dangerous terrorists, such as the case of three Hezbollah operatives caught in possession of Katyusha rockets in Jordan (*Al Sharq al-Awsat*, March 9, 2002). Bearded men usually attract the attention of regular police in countries hit by jihadi terror attacks.
- Holding a cigarette without lighting it or possessing a pornographic magazine without looking at it is also enough to disguise the jihadi's religious identity, though the training urges jihadis to get rid of these items immediately after achieving the intended purpose.
- If the jihadi has to take alcohol, he must be careful not to drink too much. In this case, even the smallest amount of alcohol could expose the jihadi because jihadis have a very low tolerance for alcohol.
- Cursing religious figures or Islamic practices is allowed.
- Preaching (da'wa) is not mandatory in Islam as long as others do it. It becomes religiously mandatory if no other Muslims are taking up the task, but in high risk security environments, jihadis are allowed to drop that religious duty.
- When in an internet café, the jihadis should listen to music while communicating through the internet for jihadi purposes (Salafi-Jihadis are often opposed to the playing of musical instruments).

- It is prohibited to change a person's God-given features using plastic surgery or wearing a wig unless it is necessary to escape capture.
- When communicating through email, jihadis must refrain from using Islamic greetings such as "Assalam Aleikum." Instead, jihadis should open the emails with "Good day," or "Hi." At the same time, two email addresses should be used, one for sending emails and the other for receiving.
- Before leaving for jihad, the jihadi must leave behind fake love letters to mislead any investigation regarding his destination.
- To avoid physical torture in the prisons, jihadis are allowed to bribe the prison guards, but if bribing the guards with cigarettes does the job they should not give the guards a bottle of wine; meaning jihadis should commit the lesser sin when they can.

Throughout this security training, the author reminds jihadis not to commit the sin of lying unless absolutely necessary (such as in cover stories), but security services have long known that jihadis follow a fatwa (religious ruling) that allows them to commit perjury under oath. In the same context, another jihadi forum posted security instructions for jihadis to avoid capture, entitled "The Security Plan" (hdrmut.net, July 16). "The Security Plan" offers advice on how to evade capture when security forces raid jihadis' safe houses:

- Security forces usually do not know the suspect they want to arrest, therefore the jihadi must impersonate someone else and have a cover story to hide his identity.
- Jihadis must have fake ID using their real pictures.
- Jihadis could stand outside and pretend they are not the residents of the raided house.
- The entrances and exits of the safe house should be studied carefully and escape routes planned in advance.
- Jihadis must not enter and exit the safe house at regular times and should use different vehicles to travel.

- Religious discussions that would reveal Salafi-Jihadi convictions should be avoided.
- Counter-surveillance measures should be applied every time the jihadi leaves the safe house. A different route should be used each day.

The “Security Plan” is very basic on the professional intelligence level, but distributing the knowledge on the internet educates novice jihadis on the basics of evading capture, depriving intelligence services from gaining a useful asset in terror organization. It is easier to dissuade or neutralize beginners than seasoned militants.

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

Afghan Officials Say Security Forces Must Secure and Develop Helmand Province if Offensive is to Succeed

By *Wahidullah Mohammad*

Officials in Helmand say that the military’s U.S.-led Operation Khanjar (Dagger) is completely different from previous operations. Mohammad Davoud Ahmadi, spokesperson for the Helmand governor, says that this time they have launched the biggest operation ever against the insurgents in Helmand province. “This time we will move the Taliban from all Helmand districts and after that the plan is to conduct major reconstruction projects in all districts to provide people with jobs. We will ensure permanent security for Helmand residents.” [1]

According to Ahmadi, the operation, which is led by American Marines and supported by the Afghan National Army (ANA), is going smoothly in many districts of Helmand. According to Ahmadi, no civilian casualties have been reported during this operation, except for one small girl who received a small injury in Nawa district but soon recovered.

Mir Wali, a member of parliament from Helmand, says that in some places where large numbers of people were living, residents were displaced because of the military

operation. “Most of the people left their houses and are living under the sky. They have no shelters and it is too hot in Helmand now. They were not able to take their possessions with them - they just left everything at their houses.” [2] Mir Wali says that civilian casualties have been reported; “Fourteen people were killed in the Malgir area of Grishk district when the area was bombed by U.S. airplanes. Women, children and old people were among those killed,” said Mir Wali in Kabul.

According to the Helmand MP, if the government and international forces really keep their promises to the people of Helmand, the situation can be changed and local residents will help the government defeat the Taliban in their home regions. If not, the situation will again be like it was in the past. “Time will make clear how the government and international forces can keep their promises. I cannot say anything now about their promises, because they gave many times the same promises but later did nothing for the people.”

Operation Panther’s Claw

In the meantime, another operation, “Panther’s Claw,” is also being conducted in Nad Ali and some other parts of Helmand, led by British forces with support from Danish troops, the ANA and the Afghan National Police. British troops leading the operation have suffered significant casualties, with 11 killed and over 100 wounded since the operation began in early July (*Telegraph*, July 28).

Ms. Nasima Niazi, a member of parliament representing Helmand, says that local people are suffering many difficulties because of the operation, especially in the areas where the operation is ongoing. [3] “The weather is very hot and people have no homes to live in. People are displaced - they are living in tents but they still hope that security will come to their areas. That is why they have patience,” said the MP in a telephone interview from Helmand.

Nasima said that even in those areas where the Taliban have been removed, the insurgents are still infiltrating to plant roadside bombs. This activity presents people with many problems; “People cannot travel from one place to another. The Taliban are putting roadside bombs everywhere; they don’t care whose car will be exploded. It now takes four hours to travel to a destination normally reached in an hour and a half.”

According to Nasima, in those areas where the operation has ended it seems that security is better and people are returning to their homes. She says that most Helmand residents are against the military operations. "People are afraid that the government and international forces will once again leave and the Taliban will be back. They say that if they are conducting military operations they should do it in a proper way - they should stay in the areas captured by the government and foreign forces from the Taliban and increase the number of police and soldiers based in the area. If [the security forces] leave the areas again, the Taliban will be back in a day."

Helmand police Chief Asadullah Shirzad says the Taliban have become very weak and are not able to fight Afghan and foreign forces. "The only thing the Taliban are able to do now is to place roadside bombs. During the past few days we have removed more than 100 bombs from different places." [4] Shirzad says security forces have killed more than 200 Taliban in the latest operation with no casualties to the police, but Ahmadi confirmed four dead ANA soldiers.

Rural Development or Military Infrastructure?

Helmand Governor spokesperson Ahmadi says that American envoys along with Afghanistan Ministry of rural rehabilitation and Development came to Helmand on July 16 and promised the people they will conduct major development projects in the province. "Paving the road from Lashkar Gah (the Helmand provincial capital) to Grishk district and also from Lashkar Gah to Garamsir district is a serious plan which will be conducted soon. Other development projects will come later when the area is completely cleansed of insurgents."

But Afghan political analyst Fazal Rahman Orya says that paving roads cannot be counted as a development project in the areas where military operations are ongoing. "They are paving roads for their own benefit because the Taliban are planting roadside bombs in unpaved roads and, from the other side, paved roads are good for military convoys. We cannot count that as a development project for the local residents." [5]

According to Orya, this operation is no different from operations in the past – the authorities always give people promises but they never keep them. The people do not trust the authorities anymore. Orya says that because of the military operations, a huge number of local residents have been displaced and are living in very bad conditions. The Helmand governor's spokesperson

claims only 160 families have been displaced during military operations and they are working together to provide the displaced families with better living conditions.

The Experience of Musa Qala

Orya says the government and international forces gave the same promises regarding stability and security when they recaptured the Musa Qala district of Helmand from the Taliban two years ago. At that time they promised the people they would pave roads, build mosques, schools and clinics and provide people with jobs, but later it became clear these pledges would not be honored. "After a while the Taliban were back and government control was limited to the center of the district. Now the government is unable to support its 200 police there because all the ways to Musa Qala are controlled by the Taliban."

Orya believes the government and Coalition forces will be able to move the Taliban from the rural districts, but they will not be able to ensure security in all remote areas and villages:

They can move the Taliban from the centers of the districts but they cannot move them from the villages. The government will not be able to control entire districts - they will only remain in the centers of the districts and the remote villages will be again controlled by the Taliban. That is why the government and international forces are losing their trust among the people.

But Ahmadi, the governor's spokesperson, disagrees with Orya. Ahmadi says this time the government will keep its promises and they will expel the Taliban from all remote villages and ensure security for the whole province:

When Musa Qala was recaptured from the Taliban the roads to Musa Qala were controlled by Taliban. That is why the government was not able to keep their promises, but this time we are keeping open all ways to all districts to support the district authorities and development projects. This time we are not only ensuring security; we promise the people that they will witness a lot of reconstruction and development projects in their districts.

MP Nasima said that some reconstruction projects have already started in Lashkar Gah and other places, which gave future hope to the local residents.

In the meantime, the Taliban has issued its own view of the Helmand offensive, describing it as the last nail in the coffin of President Barack Obama's strategy for Afghanistan:

The mujahideen and Taliban, who act like hunters in the face-to-face battles, swift campaigns, ambushes, and roadside mines, sent back to the West dozens of enemy aircraft full of the bodies and coffins of their dead sons. Almost 1000 soldiers who have always led a life in comfort and luxury passed out because of the hot climate of the grueling sun in the vast deserts of Helmand, suffering from sun stroke... We would like to declare our stance once again that your advanced and sophisticated weapons will not protect you from death. You will achieve nothing by increasing your forces. They will not make you safe from the wrath of the mujahideen. Do not stick to stubbornness. There is still time to hammer out a logical exit strategy. Listen! The operation of Helmand will prove to be the last nail of the mujahideen in the coffin of Obama's bloated strategy (Alemarah, July 15).

Helmand MP Mir Wali says that if the government really provides jobs to Helmand residents, the people will not let the Taliban use their villages against the government and foreign troops. "People hope to find jobs. Most of the people are jobless and have nothing to support their families. If the government provides them with jobs they will absolutely avoid Taliban activities in their villages and support the government, but now they don't trust the government."

Wahidullah Mohammad is a freelance journalist in Afghanistan.

Notes:

1. Mohammad Davoud Ahmad, Spokesperson for the Governor of Helmand Province, was interviewed on July 16, 2009.
2. Helmand Member of Parliament Mirwali was interviewed on July 26, 2009.
3. Helmand Member of Parliament Nasima Niazi was interviewed on July 26, 2009.
4. Helmand Chief of Police Asadullah Shirzad was interviewed on July 16, 2009.
5. Political analyst Fazal Rahman Orya was interviewed in Kabul on July 16, 2009.

Jamaat al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago

By Chris Zambelis

On July 27, 2009 Trinidadians marked the nineteenth anniversary of the failed attempt by the Jamaat al-Muslimeen (JAM - Muslim Association, known colloquially as "the Jamaat") to overthrow the government in Trinidad and Tobago in a violent coup. Although JAM made international headlines in June 2007 when one of the suspects in an alleged plot to attack New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport was reported to have ties to the group, the enigmatic Caribbean militant group, composed mostly of Afro-Trinidadian converts to Islam, has received scant attention outside of Trinidad in recent years (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 21, 2007). In contrast, nearly two decades after the coup attempt, Trinidadian society still bears the scars of that infamous day; media coverage and public discussion of domestic politics continue to be fraught with tales of intrigue and conspiracy involving JAM and the highest levels of power in the twin island nation. JAM's history of political militancy is only matched by the group's criminal activities—JAM is implicated in gangland-style slayings, narcotics and arms trafficking, money laundering, extortion, kidnapping, and political corruption.

In spite of its record, ranking JAM members have escaped serious prosecution for their most egregious actions. For many Trinidadians, the state's failure (or what some believe is its reluctance) to bring closure to the 1990 revolt that left scores dead and injured and caused millions of dollars in damages continues to provoke heated controversy. The ability of senior JAM members to evade justice for their involvement in the uprising and an array of other militant and criminal acts also continues to astound observers who follow the group. The present status of the government's ongoing legal battles against JAM and, in particular, the group's leader, Yasin Abu Bakr, is a case in point.

Legal Wrangling and Controversy

Abu Bakr currently faces a series of charges ranging from sedition and terrorism to incitement to commit violence, all stemming from videotaped statements he

made during his November 4, 2005 Eid al-Fitr sermon at JAM's mosque complex in the St. James section of Port of Spain. Among other things, Abu Bakr called on all Trinidadian Muslims, especially wealthy Muslims, to donate *zakat* (alms) to his mosque or face "bloodshed" (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, November 8, 2005). From the onset, Abu Bakr's reference to "wealthy Muslims" was widely understood as a threat directed towards Trinidad's East Indian Muslim community, a frequent object of JAM's ire over the years. During his high-profile arrest on November 8, 2005, Trinidadian authorities demolished a section of the JAM mosque complex and conducted searches in a number of JAM-led mosques across the country in a search for weapons and explosives, an effort likely staged as a show of force by the authorities in the face of public pressure to rein in the group. The search yielded guns, ammunition, and one grenade (*Trinidad and Tobago Express*, November 11, 2005).

In an unprecedented move, Abu Bakr's requests for bail following his incarceration were denied, at least initially, suggesting that the state was serious about putting him away once and for all. In spite of reaping the economic benefits of an energy boom in recent years, a dramatic upsurge in violent crime across Trinidad, including a surge in brazen gangland-style violence involving current and former JAM members, may have created a sense of urgency for action against JAM (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, May 14; December 28, 2008). According to some estimates, violent crime rates in Trinidad exceed those in countries long regarded as among the most violent in the region, including Jamaica (*Nation* [Bridgetown], May 20). At the time of his arrest, Abu Bakr was facing separate conspiracy charges alleging that he ordered the murder of two former JAM members who were expelled from the group, including his son-in-law. A Trinidadian court exonerated Abu Bakr for these charges on December 4, 2006 (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, December 5, 2006).

In addition to the charges laid in 2005, the focus of the state's current efforts against JAM center on recovering an estimated \$32 million in damages to public property caused by the 1990 rebellion. In doing so, the state is determined to assume control of 11 properties owned by Abu Bakr and other ranking JAM members valued at approximately \$10 million (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, May 6). Abu Bakr appealed the state's efforts by issuing a sworn affidavit that he and Prime Minister Patrick Manning had concluded an agreement whereby JAM's debts to the state would not be enforced (*Trinidad*

and Tobago Guardian, July 11). A May 5 ruling by Great Britain's Privy Council (an advisory committee that serves as the court of highest appeal for a number of Commonwealth countries such as Trinidad) denied Abu Bakr's appeal, paving the way for the state to go forward with its efforts to confiscate the properties in question (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, May 6). The JAM leader had previously challenged the state's case unsuccessfully through a number of earlier appeals, including a constitutional motion challenging Trinidad's Anti-Terrorism Act, under which Abu Bakr has been charged (*Trinidad and Tobago Express*, January 14, 2009).

Abu Bakr and 113 others involved in the coup evaded prosecution and lengthy incarceration after talks between JAM and the authorities to end the hostage standoff resulted in a general amnesty for Abu Bakr and his organization. Abu Bakr and the coup plotters would serve only two years in prison (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, February 11, 2009). Many Trinidadians believe that JAM's uncanny ability to evade prosecution for their role in the coup and other offenses is emblematic of the power and influence Abu Bakr wields among a narrow but nevertheless significant demographic within the Afro-Trinidadian community in impoverished areas of Port of Spain. Abu Bakr's political influence is an important asset come election time for politicians seeking an advantage in key electoral districts where a few hundred votes can mean the difference between victory and defeat. Abu Bakr himself has boasted of his ability to play the role of kingmaker during tight Trinidadian elections (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, May 5, 2009).

Other observers suggest that JAM's continued ability to function amid overwhelming evidence implicating the group in violence, terrorism, and crime stems from the group's links to the security services and the political establishment, including all of Trinidad's major political parties. In theory, such access would leave Abu Bakr and his associates immune from prosecution out of fear they would disclose the exact nature of their corrupt dealings with prominent politicians, security officials, and business leaders in Trinidad.

Origins and Ideology

In spite of its dogmatic rhetoric and revolutionary discourse, JAM today is widely regarded as a criminal gang more than anything else. And while many observers continue to mistakenly link JAM to

international extremist movements with a transnational agenda such as al-Qaeda, the evidence suggests that JAM's brand of militancy has played out solely within a local Trinidadian context to further narrow objectives and there are no indications to suggest that this will change. That aside, a glimpse at JAM's origins and early ideology provide insight into some of the factors that may have contributed to the violent coup attempt and other aspects of the group's behavior.

JAM emerged in the early 1980s during a period of severe social and economic crisis and heightened racial and ethnic tensions between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians (often referred to as East Indians due to their South Asian roots), the multiethnic country's two dominant communities. The group's founder and leader, Yasin Abu Bakr, is a 68 year-old Afro-Trinidadian convert to Islam. Formerly a police officer under the name Lenox Philip, he is now known as "the Imam" by his followers. Abu Bakr founded JAM along with a core group of likeminded associates as a movement to advocate on behalf of all Afro-Trinidadians, the overwhelming majority of whom are Christians. Owing to its origins, JAM has always been an essentially Afro-Trinidadian movement. The group has, however, been known to attract a small number of East Indian Muslims and members of other ethnic and racial groups drawn to its social agenda. [1]

While JAM may be characterized as an Islamist group, the pan-African nationalist ideals that gave rise to a heightened sense of black consciousness and ultimately the "Black Power" movement in the 1960s and 1970s profoundly impacted the outlook of the organization's founders. [2] Abu Bakr has claimed, for instance, that his worldview was inspired by the popular turmoil in February 1970 that came to be known in Trinidad as the "Black Power Revolt." [3] JAM's discourse mirrors the rhetoric used by the most militant strains of pan-African nationalist movements such as the Nation of Islam who claim to advocate on behalf of all black people, not just Muslims. Leftist populism and the anti-imperialist narratives that fueled national liberation movements during the Cold War have also influenced JAM's ideology.

Islam has always had a special resonance among adherents of the Black Power movement, including non-Muslims. [4] The harsh legacy of slavery in the Americas has profoundly impacted how Afro-Trinidadians perceive their identity. The ethnicities, languages, and

religions of African slaves were essentially replaced with the cultures, languages, and religions of their slave owners. In this context, Christianity became associated with slavery and colonialism. [5] Therefore, for many Afro-Trinidadians, conversion to Islam signified an affirmation of cultural identity, resistance, and empowerment.

In the years preceding the coup attempt, JAM's discourse dwelled on issues of social justice, poverty, racism, and government corruption. The group also operated an extensive social service network catering to Trinidad's poor. JAM was outspoken against the scourges of drug abuse and alcoholism the group believed were encouraged by what it saw as the loose morals of Trinidad's "Carnival" society. [6] To insulate themselves from these societal ills, JAM organized a commune-style village where members could live and worship. Government efforts to evict the group from its mosque complex in Port of Spain played a major role in prompting the group to take up arms.

On July 27, 1990, 114 members of JAM stormed the Red House (National Parliament) in downtown Port of Spain taking Prime Minister A.N.R. Robinson and most of his cabinet hostage. [7] With JAM in charge of the major communications outlets, the country was plunged into chaos. The siege lasted six days, caused many casualties and left an estimated \$32 million in damages to public and private property (*Terrorism Monitor*, June 21, 2007; *Terrorism Monitor*, March 9, 2006).

International Allies

JAM's international allies reflect the revolutionary underpinnings of JAM's ideology, particularly those non-Islamist aspects that emphasize social justice and anti-imperialism. During the 1980s, JAM had friendly relations with Libya, which maintained close ties with a number of radical leftist and violent revolutionary movements in the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America. [8] Libyan leader Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, whom Abu Bakr counts as a close friend, has always fashioned himself as an advocate for revolutionary struggle. In this regard, JAM's Sunni Islamist pedigree had little to do with Libyan support for the group. Libya provided JAM with financial support under the auspices of its World Islamic Call Society (WICS) to bolster its social service efforts in Trinidad. Libya also provided members of JAM with paramilitary training on Libyan soil. [9] In spite of Libya's documented support for

JAM and initial questions regarding possible Libyan involvement in the 1990 coup attempt, there are no indications that Tripoli had a hand in the 1990 revolt.

The international connections of Abu Bakr and other JAM members also reached Sudan in the 1990s, when Abu Bakr and other JAM members attended Islamic conferences and other events hosted by the Sudanese government. Some sources claim that Sudan provided JAM with funding and other forms of support (*Associated Press*, November 1, 2001). Abu Bakr was even known to have a ceremonial sword he received as a gift from Sudanese president Omar Hassan al-Bashir (*Trinidad and Tobago Express*, November 11, 2005).

JAM lauds Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and his Bolivarian Revolution for what it sees as his advocacy on behalf of the poor in Venezuela and the wider region and his opposition to a dangerous U.S. hegemony in the Americas. [10] The ties between JAM and Caracas, however, extend beyond feelings of mutual admiration. A number of ranking JAM members, including Abu Bakr, spent four days in Caracas in September 2004 at the invitation of the Venezuelan leader (*Trinidad and Tobago Express*, September 5, 2004). In spite of JAM's relations with Chavez, there are no indications that Venezuela supports JAM's criminal and militant activities. Similarly, JAM has also been a vocal supporter of other leftist leaders in the Americas that the group sees as positive forces, including former Cuban president Fidel Castro. [11]

Conclusion

On the surface, the failure of Abu Bakr's latest appeal may have sounded the death knell for JAM as an influential player in Trinidadian society and politics. While JAM has always been a fringe movement among both Trinidadian Muslims and non-Muslims alike, the overwhelming financial burdens of potential property losses coupled with growing defense fees may devastate the organization once and for all. As the face and heart of the organization for decades, Abu Bakr's modest but loyal following is likely to dwindle in the face of further state pressure. JAM has, however, proved to be a resilient force; Abu Bakr's repeated attempts to appeal the state's case against him and JAM demonstrate that he will not surrender without a fight.

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opinions expressed here are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of Helios Global, Inc.

Notes:

1. It is also worth noting that at least six East Indian members of JAM participated in the 1990 coup attempt.
2. For an overview of the ideological influences of Yasin Abu Bakr and JAM, see Selwyn Ryan, *The Muslimeen Grab for Power: Race, Religion, and Revolution in Trinidad and Tobago* (Port of Spain: Imprint Caribbean Ltd., 1991).
3. For background on what has come to be known as the 1970 Black Power Revolt in Trinidad, see Victoria Pasley, "The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the Development of a Feminist Consciousness," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001).
4. For an overview of the influence of Islam in black identity politics, see Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); see also Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
5. Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
6. Author's conversation with senior ranking member of JAM, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, October 2007.
7. Many of the weapons used in the coup attempt were procured in the south Florida area by JAM members living in the United States. For more details, see Loren Berger and Denis Henigan, "Guns and Terror," Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2001.
8. For more details about JAM's links to Libya, see Selwyn Ryan, *The Muslimeen Grab for Power: Race, Religion, and Revolution in Trinidad and Tobago* (Port of Spain: Imprint Caribbean Ltd., 1991), pgs. 252–66.
9. Author's conversation with senior ranking member of JAM, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, October 2007.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.