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Indonesia's Densus-88 Counterterrorism Police

AL-QAEDA USURPS YEMEN'S ADEN-ABYAN ARMY

In an effort to create insecurity in Yemen's south in anticipation of a major Gulf region sporting event to be held in the area, the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has announced the creation of its own Aden-Abyan Army, even though the name has been used by a separate militant organization since the early 1990s (al-Malahim, October 11; *al-Watan* [Sana'a], October 15). The announcement was made in an audiotape issued by Qasim al-Rimi (a.k.a. Abu-Hurayrah al-San'ani), AQAP's military commander.

Al-Rimi, a former associate of Osama bin Laden, was one of 23 convicted militants who escaped in February 2006 from the Political Security Organization's (PSO) high security prison in Sana'a (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 7, 2006). Authorities announced his death three separate times, in August 2007, December 2009 and January 2010.

Yemen's existing Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA) was established in the early 1990s by Abu Hasan Zayn al-Abadin al-Mihdhar. After al-Mihdhar's execution in 1998, the leadership of the movement passed to Shaykh Khalid Abd al-Nabi (a.k.a. Khalid Abdulrab al-Nabi al-Yazidi), but the militant movement has been relatively quiet since Shaykh Khalid obtained a pardon from the government in 2005 (*al-Hayat*, October 11, 2005; see also *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, August 5). In a recent interview Shaykh Khalid was guarded on the question of AAIA's current status, stating, "I cannot say definitively whether [the AAIA] actually exists and is effective or anything else" (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, July 9).

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The AAIA and the new Aden-Abyan Army take their name from an apocryphal prophecy by the Prophet Muhammad that predicts an army will arise from Aden-Abyan in the last days to fight for victory in God's name. According to the AAIA leader, "No one can say he represents the army of Aden; when God wills, the army will inevitably emerge. As to when this will happen, only God knows" (*Asharq al-Awsat*, September 26).

The stated aim of AQAP's new Aden-Abyan Army is to liberate the holy places of the Arabian Peninsula and "purge its land from the Crusaders and their apostate agents [i.e. the Saudi royal family and the Saleh regime in Yemen]" (*Yemen Post*, October 14). More specifically, the announcement is regarded as a threat to an upcoming international football tournament.

The Gulf 20 Football Championship is scheduled to be held in the volatile Aden-Abyan region between November 22 and December 5. President Ali Abdullah Saleh has pledged 30,000 soldiers and police will form "three belts of security around Aden, Abyan and [the neighboring governorate of] Lahij" (*Arab News*, October 12; *Saba Net*, October 23). AAIA's Shaykh Khalid Abd al-Nabi has denied reports that he was paid by the governor of Abyan to mediate with local jihadi groups to ensure calm during the Gulf 20 championship (*Asharq al-Awsat*, September 26).

In what may have been a demonstration of AQAP's seriousness, two bombs killed three people at Aden's al-Wahda sports center on the same day al-Rimi's statement was released (*Arab News*, October 12). No official claim of responsibility was made, but authorities arrested 19 suspects, some of whom are thought to have ties to AQAP.

The AQAP commander cited mujahideen victories in Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Iraq and Somalia in his statement, but also boasted of AQAP's failed operations, including the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Prince Muhammad bin Nayif and the failed Christmas Day airliner attack by inept "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (for Bin Nayif, see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 17, 2009). Al-Rimi also described American airstrikes in Yemen (such as the July attack that killed the deputy governor of Ma'rib) as "counterproductive to the Americans and in favor of the Servants of Allah, the mujahideen" (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 16; *Yemen Observer*, October 14).

In his statement, al-Rimi described the formation of two wings in AQAP: one to carry out operations outside of Yemen and another that will engage Yemeni forces in an internal "war of attrition and exhaustion" (Ilaf.com, October 18; *Yemen Post*, October 14). According to al-Rimi, AQAP's financial restraints prevent the organization from accepting all "the brothers who arrived to join us." He urges them instead to prepare for an eventual role by pursuing studies of Shari'a and technical fields such as chemistry, physics and electronics. Al-Rimi's description of difficulties in accepting recruits was at odds with a July 29 statement from AQAP field commander Muhammad Sa'id al-Umdah Gharib al-T'aizzi who claimed "an army of 12,000 fighters is being prepared in Aden and Abyan" (al-Malahim, July 29).

MALI-MAURITANIAN JOINT COUNTERTERRORIST PATROLS BEGIN IN SAHARA/SAHEL

Malian troops rendezvoused with Mauritanian forces roughly 50 miles north of Timbuktu last week as the two nations began joint counterterrorism patrols in northern Mali designed to eliminate the presence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's southern command. It is the first time Malian troops have joined their Mauritanian counterparts, who conducted operations with French military support in northern Mali in July and September of this year. The new patrols are expected to cover both sides of the common border in the Sahara/Sahel region.

According to a Malian officer attached to the new force, "Today we are in the Malian desert. Tomorrow, together we can, we will go into the Mauritanian desert. The problems of Mali are the problems of Mauritania and the problems of Mauritania are those of Mali" (AFP, November 4).

Mali's army chief of staff, General Gabriel Poudiougou, arrived in Mauritania on November 4 to discuss military cooperation between the two nations, which have had serious differences in the last two years over the appropriate response to AQIM's growing operations in the Sahara/Sahel region (Sahara Media, November 5; AFP, November 4). Mauritania has been criticized in some quarters for acting as a Western proxy, especially on behalf of France and the United States, both of which have been involved in training Mauritanian troops. Mauritanian President Mohammed Ould Abdel Aziz denounced those who "have been echoing the propaganda of the enemies, accusing us of waging war by proxy... All these rumors, all this false propaganda,

will only reinforce our determination to defend our country and preserve its independence and sovereignty” (*Ennahar* [Algiers], October 24).

The patrols start as four AQIM members were reported killed in an attack carried out by Arab tribesmen from the Timbuktu area, allegedly a well-planned response to the AQIM assassination of Lieutenant Colonel Lamana Ould Bou, a Malian intelligence officer and a leader of Mali’s Berabiche Arabs (AFP, November 4; for Ould Bou, see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 25, 2009). The clash would mark an important setback for AQIM, which has worked hard to establish links with the Berabiche community, though Malian security forces deny the encounter took place. Mauritanian troops have been trying to win over the loyalty of local tribes through the distribution of tea, sugar and medicines (AFP, November 7).

France’s Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE – French external intelligence) and various French Special Forces and Air Force units are deeply involved in the ongoing search for five French nationals and two African employees kidnapped from the French uranium works at Arlit in northern Niger. The men were taken by AQIM in mid-September and are believed to be held at AQIM bases in northern Mali. Though the French are ready to act once the hostages are located, Paris also hopes to avoid a direct military confrontation with AQIM. According to French armed forces chief-of-staff Admiral Edouard Guillaud, France, the region’s former colonial power, “should be careful not to provide AQIM with the enemy it needs to exist and prosper” (*Le Monde*, November 4).

Between Baghdad and Ankara: The Kurdistan Regional Government’s Delicate Balance

By Michael M. Gunter

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has maintained a cautiously optimistic but delicate balance to secure its existence amidst perilous surroundings.

The first and most immediate dimension of this balancing act is the KRG’s precarious relationship with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad. These relations have been frozen due to the inconclusive Iraqi national elections of March 7, 2010 and the resulting hung parliament. However, even if the Kurds eventually prove to be the kingmaker in this electoral imbroglio, once a new central government emerges in Baghdad, the inherently more powerful Arab majority will again begin pressuring the Kurds for concessions. [1]

The second factor is the KRG’s relationship with Turkey, a situation that has improved dramatically since the initial days following Saddam Hussein’s fall when Turkey drew “red lines” against so-called Kurdish warlords. Thriving economic relations between the two, however, gradually led to better political relations. [2] In May 2009 the new Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, announced his state’s innovative foreign policy of “zero problems with its neighbors.” [3] Among many other issues, this means that instead of viewing the Iraqi Kurds as an existential enemy threatening its territorial integrity, Turkey now views the KRG through less hostile, potentially cooperative lenses. In October 2009, Davutoglu brought this new policy home by actually visiting Irbil. Then, in March 2010, Turkey opened a high-powered consulate in Irbil that serves as a de facto embassy (*Today’s Zaman*, February 17). Finally in June 2010, KRG president Massoud Barzani successfully returned Davutoglu’s earlier visit by journeying to Ankara, where he was most significantly received with his official title of KRG president (*Today’s Zaman*, July 6). Although the issues of Kirkuk and the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK – Kurdistan Workers’ Party) still remain to cloud relations, it is now practical to envision Turkey as a possible friend, or even protector, if the KRG’s relationship with Baghdad deteriorates. [4]

The third aspect of the KRG's delicate balance concerns its relationship with the United States, the KRG's creator and ultimate protector. However, as the United States begins to wind down its mission in Iraq and assume a non-combat, background role, one wonders what this means for the KRG in the long-term. [5] Many Kurds hope that a residual U.S. presence in the form of American troops training Iraqi soldiers and shepherding joint Iraqi-KRG troop patrols (so-called Combined Security Mechanisms) on the dividing line in the internally disputed areas will be capable of successfully maintaining this delicate balance. [6] Barzani visited Washington last January and met with U.S. president Barack Obama and other senior officials, receiving assurances of continued U.S. support. [7] The KRG maintains a liaison office just nine blocks north of the White House. Qubad Talabani, the son of the Iraqi president, continues as the young and dynamic head of this office as the KRG representative in the United States. In May, the U.S. House of Representatives approved Resolution 873 calling for a U.S. consulate in Irbil. At the end of August, Fuad Hussein, chief-of-staff to President Barzani, conducted a week of meetings with U.S. officials, members of Congress, and the staffs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee. [8]

The fourth dimension concerns the KRG's own internal situation. The KRG has been ruled by the so-called Kurdistan List, an alliance of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), since the fall of Saddam Hussein after settling their own civil war, which raged from 1994 to 1998. Although this alliance was necessary to avoid further internal strife, the Kurdistan List is reminiscent of the Grand Coalitions that ruled Germany during 1966 to 1969 and then again from 2005 to 2009. Both times these coalitions performed adequately, but ultimately impaired German democracy because they left only small parties to oppose and criticize. Thus, they made citizens feel that no one could seriously criticize the government, that politics was a game manipulated by the powerful and that democracy was simply a facade. A good democracy requires a lively interplay between the "ins" and the "outs," rather than complicity between them.

Thus, the rise of Nawshirwan Mustafa's Gorran (Change) Party at the expense of the PUK creates novel possibilities and uncertainties for the KRG, giving it for the first time real opposition in the 111-seat parliament.

Rancor and even shootouts between PUK and Gorran supporters, however, serve as an ominous reminder of bloody past intra-Kurdish struggles (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 10, 2007). This new party won an impressive 25 seats in the July 25 KRG parliamentary elections, but only a disappointing eight in the March Iraqi national elections (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 2). To maintain a united Kurdish front against Baghdad, Gorran subsequently agreed to cooperate with the Kurdistan List.

An aging Jalal Talabani (born in 1933) might either continue as president of Iraq and secretary-general of the PUK or depart from the political scene. Either way, however, it is clear that he will not remain in politics much longer. Does this mean that Massoud Barzani's KDP will gain dominance over the KRG? It is difficult to see how the PUK can regain its former equal position. Aside from Talabani, the rest of the PUK leadership is in a state of flux. Nawshirwan Mustafa quit the PUK to head the Gorran Party and Kosrat Rasul has long been ailing. Barham Salih, the current KRG prime minister and PUK politburo member, is bright and capable, but lacks deep roots within the party as he was only brought from abroad and installed by Talabani in 2001. Recently Salih vouched how closely he has been able to work with Massoud Barzani (ekurd.net, October 18). Last February, however, when Barzani journeyed to Washington to visit President Obama and other U.S. officials, some Americans criticized Barzani for leaving out Barham Salih but bringing along his nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, and son, Masrouf Barzani (ekurd.net, February 14).

What does all this mean for the already existing problems regarding corruption, nepotism, transparency and civil liberties? [9] These problems can only grow worse unless the KRG authorities manifest a renewed determination to follow the rule of law. In May, for example, Sardasht Osman, a 23-year-old journalist who had been critical of the KRG, KDP and Barzani family, was kidnapped in broad daylight in Irbil and then murdered. After a few months, the KDP lamely announced that its secret investigation found that Osman had been killed by an insurgent group because he had refused to work with them. According to one Kurdish media source, this finding has "seriously undermined the authority of the KRG" by illustrating how it is willing to cover up crime and operate outside of the purview of any independent judiciary. [10]

In addition, the continued existence of the PKK and the allied Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistan (PJAK - Party of Free Life of Iranian Kurdistan) in the Kandil Mountains is a situation that leads to constant threats of Turkish and Iranian cross-border shelling and military intervention. Although this state of affairs will remain an irritant, the PKK and PJAK presence in Iraqi Kurdistan is not likely to escalate into KRG-threatening scenarios, as none of those involved would benefit from the collapse of the KRG. Turkey and Iran seek to balance each other in the region; neither would accept the other becoming dominant over the KRG. For its part, the KRG will never flagrantly support these insurgent groups enough to draw in Turkey and/or Iran fully because to do so would threaten the KRG's existence. As long as the KRG remains part of Iraq, that state's internationally recognized borders will prevent Turkey and/or Iran from seeking to permanently incorporate the KRG. Of course, if Iraq collapses, all bets are off.

The future of Kirkuk is another crucial internal threat to the KRG's existence, as is the future role of the Islamist elements in the KRG. In the parliamentary elections of July 2009, the Kurdistan Islamic Union, led by Salahaddin Bahauddin, won 5 seats in the 111-seat parliament, while Ali Bapir's Kurdistan Islamic Group garnered 4 seats. Although Islamic groups will continue to exist, they seem too splintered and weak at the moment to constitute a major threat. [11]

Finally, other threats to the KRG's balance concern its position in the regional Middle Eastern arena, where a potentially hostile Arab world still regards the KRG's existence as a threat to the regional Arab patrimony. The larger Arab region, however, is too divided and consumed by its own problems to threaten the KRG in any major way. In addition, so long as the KRG remains a federal state within Iraq, that state's territorial integrity offers the KRG protection. Finally, both the EU and UN look favorably upon the KRG, but are unlikely to disturb its equilibrium in any meaningful way because both are not immediately involved with the situation and have many more important problems with which to deal.

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Historical Dictionary, 2004; The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis, 1999; and The Kurds and the Future of Turkey, 1997.

Notes:

1. See, for example, the recent report that the United States has proposed selling \$4.2 billion worth of arms to Iraq to strengthen its military. The package includes 18 Lockheed Martin F-16 strike jets, Raytheon AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air heat-seeking missiles, laser-guided bombs and reconnaissance equipment. The KRG would have nothing to match this (UPI, October 1). For the KRG's military inferiority, see Terrorism Monitor, March 26, 2010.
2. See Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), pp. 41-42.
3. See Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey* 10(1), 2008, pp. 77-96.
4. See Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk: The Ethnopolitics of Conflict and Compromise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
5. Anthony H. Cordesman and Charles Loi, *Iraq: The Realities of U.S. 'Withdrawal of Combat Forces' and the Challenges of Strategic Partnership* (Washington, D. C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010). <http://csis.org/publication/iraq-realities-us-withdrawal-combat-forces-and-challenges-strategic-partnership-o>.
6. Colin H. Kahl, "Breaking Dawn: Building a Long-Term Strategic Partnership with Iraq," *Foreign Policy*, August 31, 2010.
7. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), "Statement on President Barzani's Meeting with President Obama," January 25, 2010. <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?smap=02010100&Ingr=12&rn=223&anr=33539>.
8. Kurdistan Regional Government, "Top KRG Officials Visit U.S.," [KRG] *U.S. Liaison Office Newsletter*, September 2010. www.knowkurdistan.com.
9. For background, see Daily Star (Beirut), November 18, 2005 and Michael Rubin, "Dissident Watch: Kamal Sayid Qadir," *Middle East Quarterly* 13 (Spring 2006), pp. 95-96.
10. Rebwar Fatah, "The Quest for Civil Society in Kurdistan: Sardasht Osman's Enquiry," *Kurdishmedia.com*, October 18, 2010. www.kurdishmedia.com/article.aspx?id=16511.
11. For background, see David Romano, "An Outline of Kurdish Islamist Groups in Iraq." Jamestown Foundation Occasional Papers Series, September 17,

2007. http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Jamestown-RomanoIraqiKurds_01.pdf. However, see also Michael Rubin, “The Islamist Threat from Iraqi Kurdistan,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001. <http://www.michaelrubin.org/1208/the-islamist-threat-from-iraqi-kurdistan>.

erupted within the organization since 2004. The pro-al-Qaeda “Hambali wing” of JI proposed a policy of attacking the “far enemy,” in particular Western interests and Indonesia’s tourism industry. In 2007, this faction, headed by the Malaysian Noordin Mohammed Top, re-branded itself as “al-Qaeda in the Malay Archipelago” (Reuters, September 19, 2009).

The other wing – what is often referred to as “mainstream JI” – believed attacking Western venues and soft targets was tactically counter-productive and had resulted in mass arrests. This group articulated a strategy based on returning to JI’s pre-Bali *modus operandi* of engaging in sectarian attacks in Indonesia’s outer islands (especially Sulawesi and the Malukus), creating pure Islamist communities before emanating outward.

By late 2008, a debate had emerged within the ranks of JI over targeting and the types of future operations. There was criticism of Noordin’s obsession with suicide bombings and his narcissistic, Zarqawi-esque video diatribes. Very simply, the annual attacks he could muster had done little to weaken the Indonesian state. If anything, the government had not only weathered JI’s attacks since 2002, but had become stronger because of them. However, there was also significant criticism of “mainstream JI” for achieving so little. By 2007, Indonesian counterterrorism officials had redoubled their conflict prevention efforts in the sectarian conflict zones and neutralized JI’s operations.

In February 2009, Ba’asyir organized the training camp in Aceh with senior JI members, including Dulmatin, one of the bomb-makers in the 2002 Bali bombing who spent years in the southern Philippines before slipping back into Indonesia in early 2009, Abu Tholut, a former JI trainer in Mindanao, Ubeid, a JI operative arrested in 2004 but freed in 2007, and Abdullah Sonata. Between early 2009 and early 2010, the JAT allocated over \$28,000 for the training camp (AFP, October 28; *Tempo* [Jakarta], August 18-24). Other funds came primarily from robberies; the group stole more than \$81,000 in four robberies in late 2009-early 2010 alone (*Jakarta Post*, September 25).

The September 2009 killing of Noordin Top by Densus-88 forces led many of his followers to the new organization, which called itself al-Qaeda in Aceh. This group included members of KOMPAK, a violence-prone Islamist charity, members of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and other JI militants who hoped to regroup (*Jakarta Post*, October 30; Reuters, April 30).

New Directions for Indonesian Militants after Successful Counterterrorist Operations

By Zachary Abuza

Since a terrorist training camp was discovered in the northwestern Indonesian province of Aceh last February, Indonesia’s Densus-88 counterterrorism police have arrested over 100 people and killed 13, significantly damaging the efforts of Indonesian militants to regroup and stage a new round of attacks. Significantly, the follow-up operations also led to the arrest of the fiery cleric Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, the head of the Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) and the spiritual leader of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) and its metastasized body, the self-styled “al-Qaeda in Aceh” (Reuters, August 11; *Jakarta Globe*, August 11).

Jamaah Islamiyah executed suicide bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005, in Jakarta in 2003, 2004 and 2009, and came extremely close to a 2009 attack in Sumatra. Nonetheless, since 2003, JI has been hit hard by counterterrorist operations, with more than 450 arrests and over 250 convictions. As a result, real schisms have

The new group engaged in military training in order to conduct Mumbai-style attacks with ten-person teams, including an alleged assassination attempt of the Indonesian president (*Jakarta Globe*, May 15). National Police chief General Bambang Hendarso Danuri explained their new tactics: “They intended to launch urban warfare as in Iraq and Afghanistan and to bring in mujahideen from the two countries.” To that end, three police officers were killed in a pre-dawn attack on a police station in North Sumatra province in an attempt to procure more small arms (*Jakarta Post*, September 25). Another operative, Taufik Marzuki, was arrested in September in Malaysia, where he had been sent to procure weapons, and a former police official who joined the militants was arrested for providing firearms and ammunition to the terrorist group (*Jakarta Post*, October 30).

An important factor in all of this was that Ba’asyir was not just an organizing force but the group’s amir and spiritual leader. JI had floundered after his 2003 arrest and incarceration until 2006. He was replaced by Abu Rusdan who was quickly arrested. Although he has been freed and remains JI’s amir, Rusdan is reviled by more militant members of the organization. In a telling 75-minute recruitment video found online, the narrator stated, “To all those in JI, I tell you, you don’t fight jihad with the pen or in a prayer cap and sarong. No, you fight jihad with weapons. Before your hair goes gray with age, join us!” The narrator explicitly said Rusdan should not be trusted because all he does now is sit in an office (AP, October 22).

It is a sign of growing confidence that Indonesian authorities arrested Ba’asyir. To date, the government has been timid in arresting anyone not directly linked to a terrorist incident. Unlike in the past when he was convicted only of a broad conspiracy, Indonesian authorities are confident that they have direct evidence linking him to violence. “Our investigators found evidence that Ba’asyir had been actively involved in terror plots and activities including training,” national police spokesman Edward Aritonang said. Ba’asyir “knew all the connections, training and plans that happened in Aceh because he routinely received reports from managers in the field” (*Bangkok Post*, August 10).

Ba’asyir brushed off his detention, saying, “My imprisonment will not have the slightest impact on the movement. There are a lot of mujahideen who are continuing my struggle without having to depend on me. They still have the spirit alive and are even

more militant than me” (*Jakarta Post*, October 1). Nonetheless, the neutralization of some 115 operatives, at a time when the organization was regrouping and preparing to embark on a new tactical direction, has set the organization back.

However, Indonesian counterterrorism units will still have their work cut out for them. In particular, two of the leaders of the Aceh cell, Ubeid and Abdullah Sonata, who had previously been arrested “successfully completed” the government’s disengagement program (*Global Post*, July 5). They are not the only recidivists in recent years. Likewise, Densus-88 officials have come under fire for being too aggressive lately and killing too many of their suspects (AP, June 17). Human rights concerns have increased with the September 2010 announcement that the military’s Special Forces unit, Kopassus (much criticized for its abuses) will now have a legal counterterrorism role (*Jakarta Globe*, October 22; November 4).

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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New Light on the Accuracy of the CIA's Predator Drone Campaign in Pakistan

By Matthew Fricker, Avery Plaw and Brian Glyn Williams

Widely-cited reports of the inaccuracy and disproportionality of civilian to militant deaths in the CIA's ongoing Predator drone campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan are grossly misleading. The most detailed database compiled to date, assembled by the authors of this article, indicates (among other important findings) that the strikes have not only been impressively accurate, but have achieved and maintained a greater proportionality than either ground operations in the area or targeting campaigns elsewhere. [1]

This finding is striking because highly critical reports over the last year, emanating in particular from the Pakistani press, have impugned both the accuracy of the CIA's drone strikes in the tribal areas of that country and the proportionality of the civilian collateral damage they cause. In April 2009, for example, the Pakistani daily *The News* published an article by terrorism expert Amir Mir reporting Predator strikes had killed only 14 high value al-Qaeda targets but were responsible for 687 civilian fatalities – a 1:49 ratio of terrorist to civilians (*The News* [Islamabad], April 10, 2009; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, February 19). To put it another way, Mir's report suggested that 98.14% of fatalities associated with the Predator strikes were civilians. On February 1 of this year, Mir added that in January 2010 alone 123 Pakistani civilians had been killed in ten errant CIA drone strikes, while only three al-Qaeda targets had been eliminated (*The News*, February 1). These shocking statistics were picked up and widely reported in the Western press (*New York Times*, May 16). Along similar lines another Pakistani daily, *Dawn*, reported in January 2010 that “of the 44 Predator strikes carried out by U.S. drones in the tribal areas of Pakistan over the past 12 months, only five were able to hit their actual targets, killing five key al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, but at the cost of over 700 innocent lives. For each al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorist killed by the American drones, 140 civilian Pakistanis also had to die” (*Dawn* [Karachi], January 2). Such reports have reinforced the notion that drone strikes are not only inaccurate, but seem to kill

innocent civilians in wildly disproportionate numbers. However, even a cursory investigation of *The News* and *Dawn*'s own reports of Predator strikes on a case by case basis reveals that the great majority of fatalities are reported as “militants” or “suspected militants.” These discrepancies highlight the need for a thorough, independent and verifiable investigation of the reported toll of the U.S. drone campaign.

Methodology

The authors of this article have compiled a database over the last year that draws extensively on Pakistani newspapers (in their English language versions), and Western newspapers of record (primarily the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*). Only cases in which it was possible to compare multiple independent reports of drone strikes have been included. Where reported numbers of fatalities differed, we have favored the most detailed and updated account, always using low-end estimates of suspected militants slain. [2] All children under 13 and women were assumed to be civilian, along with all of those specifically identified as civilians, bystanders or locals uninvolved in the fighting. Where it was impossible to determine whether a person killed was properly categorized as a suspected militant or civilian, we assigned them to the category of “unknowns.” By systematically applying these simple rules to the universe of available information, we have assembled what we believe to be the most comprehensive and credible database of Predator drone strikes in this operational region currently available.

The Findings

According to our database, as of June 19, 2010, there have been a total of 144 confirmed CIA drone strikes in Pakistan, killing a total of 1,372 people. Of those killed, only 68 (or 4.95%) could be clearly identified as civilians, while 1,098 (or 80%) were reported to be “militants” or “suspected militants” (see Figure 4). As these terms are used somewhat interchangeably by the Pakistani press, we simply classified all of them as “suspected militants.” This category of suspected militants includes 50 high value targets – that is, al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, whether local commanders or senior militant chiefs. The status of the remaining 206 (or 15% of) individuals killed in drone strikes could not be ascertained, and consequently they were assigned to the category “unknown.” The inclusion of

this indeterminate category is admittedly frustrating but unavoidable given the limited and sometimes contradictory reports emanating from the inaccessible tribal areas. It is important to stress, however, that even if every single “unknown” is assumed to in fact be a civilian, the vast majority of fatalities would remain suspected militants rather than civilians – indeed, by more than a 4:1 ratio. [3] On the more precise count of civilians (leaving “unknowns” aside), we found an even more imbalanced ratio of approximately 16.5 suspected militant fatalities for each civilian death. [4] Equally striking, we found a 1.36 to 1 (or close to 1 to 1) ratio of civilians to high value target fatalities (in stark contrast with Mir’s 49 to 1 report). Finally, in contrast to Mir’s report of 123 civilian casualties in January 2010 (with only 3 al-Qaeda targets killed), we found 0 civilians, 85 suspected militants and 16 unknowns killed in that month.

We also wanted to be careful to address any concerns that Western papers, including those of record like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, might be underreporting civilian casualties, and that by relying at times on their stories we were introducing a downward bias into that element of our data. We therefore ran a second analysis, applying the same categories and criteria solely to the Pakistani news sources (specifically, *Dawn*, *The Daily Times* and *The News*). The results were even more striking. We found reports of 1,061 suspected militants killed, 48 civilians, and 251 unknowns, for a ratio of 22.1:1:5.2. Although some ambiguity is suggested by the slightly higher number of unknowns, the lower absolute number of civilians in the Pakistani data along with the higher proportion of suspected militants to civilians indicates that, if anything, leading Western news sources are leaning towards over-reporting the number of civilian casualties and underreporting suspected militants killed, at least in relation to representative local news sources. At any rate, we take this result based solely on Pakistani data to reinforce our main finding of a surprisingly high reported rate of suspected militant fatalities to civilians, particularly in the light of a number of widely circulated stories sharply to the contrary.

Indeed, even our main finding of a 16.5:1 suspected militant to civilian fatality ratio significantly exceeds that recently reported on CNN for the period of 2006 to 2009 by Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, who suggested that around two-thirds of those killed in the campaign were suspected militants. [5] Some

(although not all) of the variance here can be accounted for in a difference of methodology: where Bergen and Tiedemann appear to assume that all of those who are not clearly reported as suspected militants must be civilians, we allowed that in some cases the available data is insufficient to be confident one way or the other. We also focused on the most updated and credible reports, while Bergen and Tiedemann simply compiled all reports into loose ranges of possible fatality levels. The result of our more rigorous and comprehensive approach is a substantially more lopsided ratio in favor of suspected militant fatalities.

Our data also revealed that despite a substantial intensification of the Predator strikes starting in 2008 and accelerating through 2009 into 2010, and the broadening of target categories to include low level Pakistani Taliban, the ratio of suspected militant to civilian fatalities has remained steadily high and has gradually (if unevenly) improved. [6] After incremental increases in attacks from one in 2004 and three in 2005, 2006 and 2007, strikes escalated drastically to 33 in 2008, 54 in 2009 and 30 in the first three months of 2010 alone (See Figure 3). Still, far from showing a reduction of accuracy as the campaign has accelerated, our data shows that the ratio of suspected militant to civilian deaths has improved from the approximate 6:1 and 7.8:1 ratios that characterized 2004 and 2006 respectively, to 13:1 in 2005 and 14.067:1 in 2008, peaking in 2007 and 2010 (up to June 19) when no confirmed civilian deaths were reported (see Figure 2). [7]

Moreover, the campaign’s overall ratio of suspected militant to civilian fatalities appears to be substantially better than both that of ground operations in the region undertaken by the Pakistani Army and of non-drone operations executed in the area by U.S. forces, as indicated in Figure 1 below (columns 1-4). It has also greatly exceeded the efficiency of the Israeli targeted-killing campaign conducted in the West Bank and Gaza in response to the second Intifada, according to figures collected by B’Tselem, a well-established human rights organization active in the area (column 5). [8] Not surprisingly in light of the foregoing, the CIA drone campaign has also bettered the most oft-cited proportionality statistic for armed conflict in general at the end of the twentieth century (column 6). Indeed, as Figure 1 suggests, the closest contender in terms of militant to civilian proportionality is the reported impact of the Pakistani Army’s Swat offensive in 2007, which

was just over one quarter the ratio in terms of suspected militant to civilian deaths. At the other extreme, the most often cited statistic for armed conflict in general at the end of the twentieth century is less than 1/150th the ratio.

Conclusion

One conclusion that can be confidently drawn from this brief analysis of our database is that the available evidence on the CIA's Predator campaign suggests that it is neither inefficient nor disproportionate in terms of civilian casualties, at least in relation to alternative means of conducting hostilities and/or other recent targeting campaigns for which credible numbers are available. This conclusion does not, of course, resolve the ongoing debate over the use of Predator drones. Other objections are certainly being raised, perhaps most interestingly that their use may make going to war too easy, and thus result in a proliferation of armed conflict. [9] We hope, however, that it does move the debate forward by shedding a more balanced light on the numbers of civilian casualties reported by the Pakistani media.

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Notes:

1. The database is a comprised of news stories available at the time of its compilation and is subject to ongoing amendment as new information becomes available.
2. So, for example, if a story says most of the dead were suspected militants, we have counted only half plus one; if a story says three to four militants were killed, we have counted three.

3. The exact ration is 3.6981132:1.

4. The exact ratio is 19.215682745:1.

5. Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "Pakistan Drone War Takes a Toll on Militants," CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/OPINION/10/29/bergen.drone.war/>. Bergen and Tiedemann estimate 615 militants and 292 civilians; for Bergen and Tiedemann's full dataset, see <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones>.

6. Adam Entous, "CIA Drones Hit Wider Range of Targets in Pakistan," ABC News, May 5, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=10568439>.

7. The ratios here do not include "unknowns."

8. It must be cautioned that B'Tselem uses the categories of "target" and "non-target" fatalities, as indicated in the cells of Figure 1. We are assuming, for the purposes of comparison, that the "targets" category gives at least a baseline account of suspected militants, while the "non-target" category represents a high estimate of civilian casualties. It is of course possible that some "non-targets" are in fact "suspected militants," in which case the Israeli targeting campaign has been more accurate than our ratio suggests. It is impossible, based on the data gathered by B'Tselem to determine exactly how significant this distortion is, and our policy is to resolve grey areas in favor of higher accounts of civilian casualties. It seems extremely unlikely, however, that any distortion would be significant enough to raise a 1.529:1 ratio into the area of a 19.21:1 ratio. Our finding that the CIA campaign appears to be more accurate therefore remains secure.

9. For example, Peter W. Singer, *Wired for War: the Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), p. 316.

Figure 1: Comparative Proportionality in Armed Conflict

	Enemy Soldiers/ Militants	Civilians	Unknowns	State's Soldiers
US Predator Drone Strikes in Pakistan 2004-10*	19.21	1	4.19	0
Non-Drone US Operations in Pakistan*	.375	1	2.375	0
Pakistan SWAT Offensive 2007*	4.1	1	0.95	0.31
Pakistani Army Operations in FATA, 2002-7 ^[1]	2.9	1	0	0.76
Israeli Targeted Killings 2000-9 ^[2]	1.529 ("targets")	1 ("non-targets")	0	0
Estimated World Armed Combat Average, 2000 ^[3]	0.125	1	-----	-----

*Fricker/Plaw/Williams Drone Campaign Database

1. Based on data gathered by the Institute for Conflict Management (<http://www.satp.org/>).

2. Based on B'Tselem Statistics (<http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp>).

3. See, for example, Mark Osiel, *The End of Reciprocity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 143; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 8. A recent data set, offering an avowedly conservative assessment of civilian deaths in armed conflict around the world, gives a significantly different assessment. Taking Lacina and Gleditsch's (2005) dataset for battle-deaths as a basis for comparison, Kristina Eck and Lisa Hultman (2007) find that over the 1989-2004 period, battle deaths exceeded deaths from one-sided violence (a rough indicator of civilian casualties) by a ratio of two to one – Kristine Eck and Lisa Hultman, "One-Sided Violence Against Civilians in War: Insights from new Fatality Data," *Journal of Peace Research* 44(2), 2007, p. 241; and Bethany Lacina and Nils Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths," *European Journal of Population* 21 (2/3), p. 145-165. Still, even on Eck and Hultman's conservative estimate, the apparent proportionality of Predator drone strikes exceeds the norm for combatant to civilian proportionality for 1989-2004 by a factor of more than ten to one.

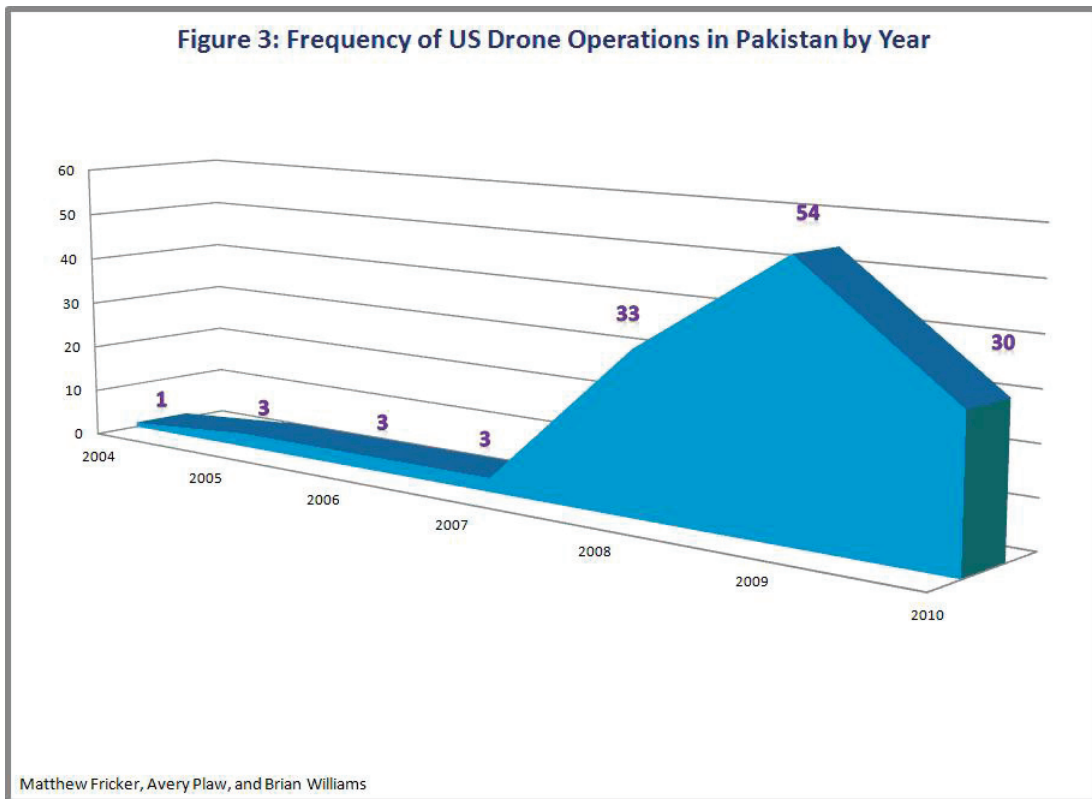
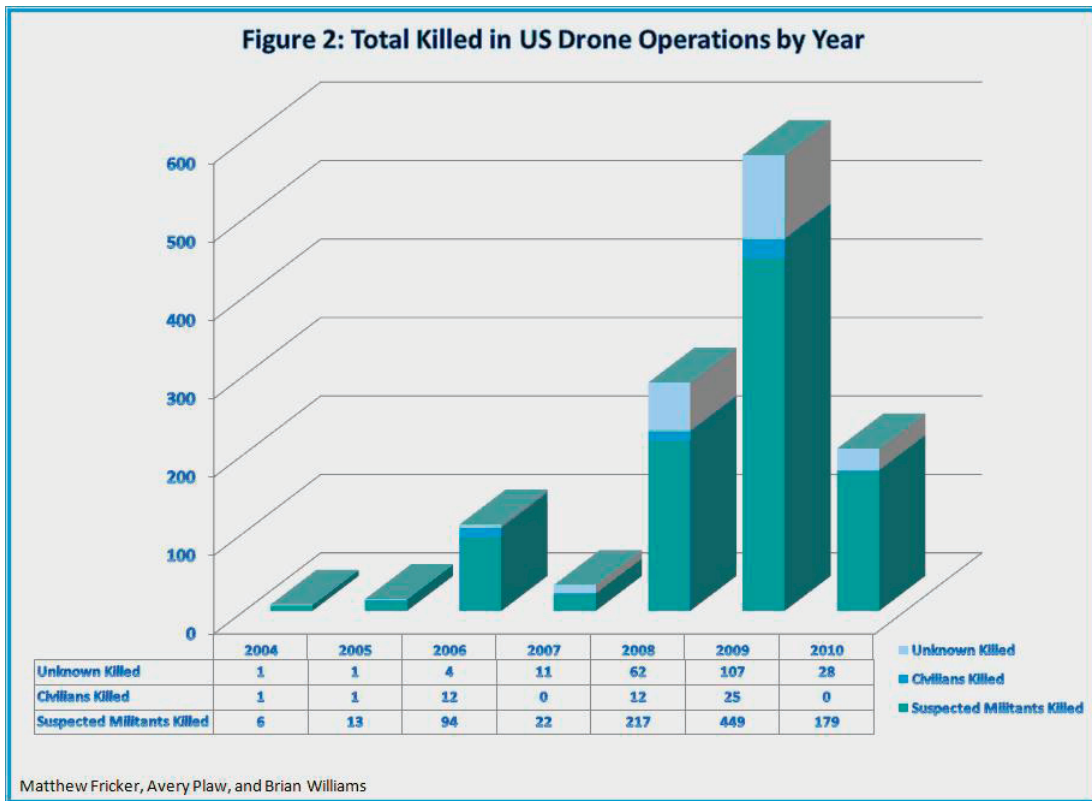
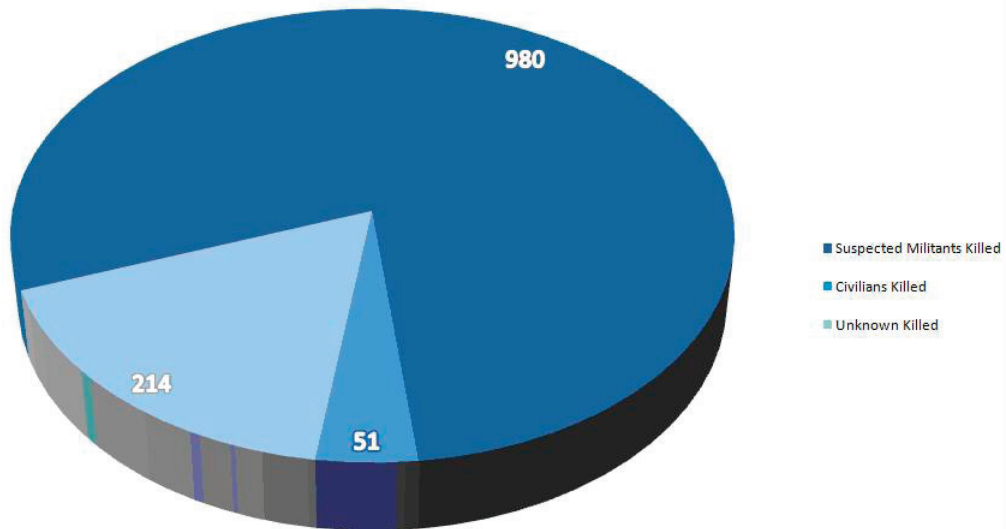
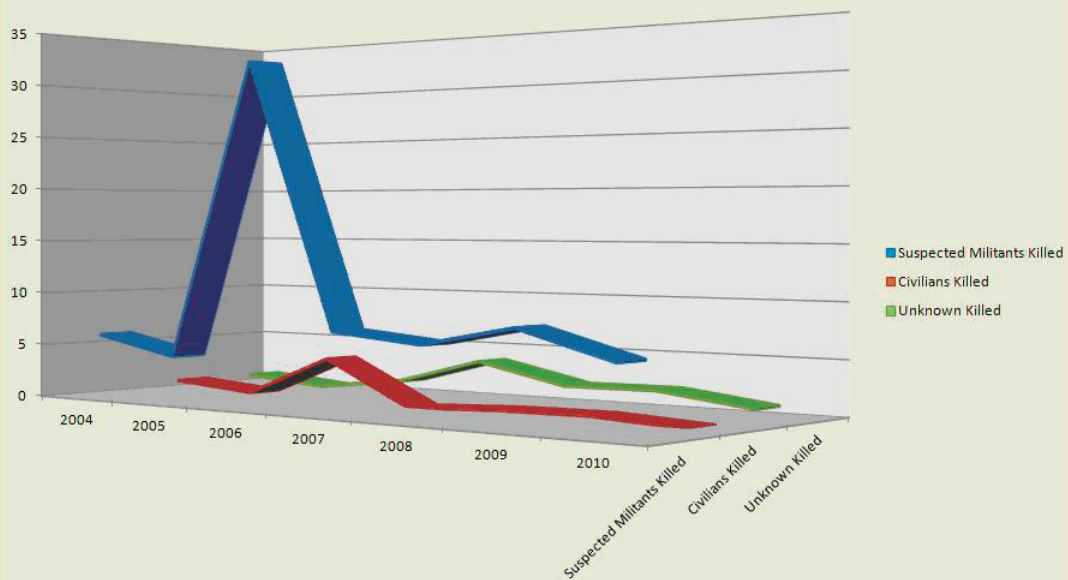


Figure 4: Casualty Split of US Drone Operations in Pakistan



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Figure 5: Average Killed per Strike



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