



# Terrorism Monitor

*In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror*

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## YEMEN'S PRESIDENT ACCUSES IRAQ'S SADRISTS OF BACKING THE HOUTHIS INSURGENCY

Offers from the Iranian government and Iraq's militant Shi'ite leader Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr to mediate the ongoing and seemingly intractable struggle between the Sana'a regime and the Zaydi Shi'ite Houthist rebels of northern Yemen have been interpreted by Yemen's government as proof that Iran and the Sadrists are providing guidance and support to the rebel movement.

The issue was raised in a September 11 al-Jazeera interview with Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who said, "We cannot accuse the Iranian official side, but the Iranians are contacting us, saying that they are prepared for a mediation. This means that the Iranians have contacts with them [the Houthists], given that they want to mediate between the Yemeni government and them. Also, Muqtada al-Sadr in al-Najaf in Iraq is asking that he be accepted as a mediator. This means they have a link." President Saleh also said that two Houthist cells had been arrested and the suspects had admitted receiving \$100,000 from Iranian sources. While the accusations of Iranian support for the Shi'ite Houthists are not new, the suggestion that Iraq's Sadrist movement is supporting the rebels came as a surprise to many.

Yemeni authorities say they have seized caches of weapons made in Iran, while the Houthists claim to have captured Yemeni equipment with Saudi Arabian markings, accusing Sana'a of acting as a Saudi proxy. Iran's embassy in Sana'a

rejected claims that Iranian weapons were found in north Yemen and described all claims of material or financial support to the rebels as baseless (NewsYemen, September 8; *Yemen Observer*, September 10).

Iskandar al-Asbahi of Yemen's ruling General People's Congress suggested the rebels had asked for diplomatic intervention from their alleged Shi'ite allies. "Despite [the Houthis'] continued attacks on villages and houses, they are calling for a ceasefire and pleading with Iran and Muqtada al-Sadr, the sides which are helping and financing them, to stop the war on them." Any effort at mediation by al-Sadr or Iran is proof "that the insurgents are agents and serving foreign agendas" (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 11).

In Iraq, Saleh's claims were denounced by Sadrist MP Zaynab al-Kenani, who declared that the Yemeni president's "accusations against Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr are wrong, otherwise the Yemeni leader should provide evidence supporting his claims" (*Aswat al-Iraq*, September 12).

A spokesman for Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the rebel commander in Sa'ada Governate, said the president's allegations of foreign support had a familiar ring. "These remarks are not new for us and the same was said during the previous wars. They are lies by the state. We challenge him to prove what he says" (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 11).

While the Zaydi Shi'ites are one of the three main branches of the Shi'a movement, they have little in common theologically with the Shi'ites of Iran and Iraq and have developed in relative isolation from their fellow Shi'ites in the mountains of northern Yemen. The Zaydis have more in common with the Sunnis and even share a preference for the Sunni Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. In the al-Jazeera interview, President Saleh dismissed claims that the Zaydis were fighting religious oppression. "They accuse the regime of being against the Zaydi community, even though we are Zaydis. I am a Zaydi. Nobody says that the Zaydi books or the Zaydi denominations are wrong at all. All this is intended to deceive the public."

#### DEMOLITION OF INFAMOUS PRISON MARKS LIBYAN REGIME'S RECONCILIATION WITH LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP

In the depths of Tripoli's notorious Abu Salim prison, imprisoned leaders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

(Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya al-Muqatila bi-Libya – LIFG) are ready to release a lengthy refutation of the extreme approach to the Islamic concept of jihad that put them behind bars. Their work, entitled *Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir*, is expected to be published later this month after being reviewed by a number of leading Islamic scholars.

The LIFG leaders already issued a public apology to President Muammar Qadhafi on September 1st, the 40th anniversary of the Libyan revolution that brought Colonel Qadhafi to power (for the LIFG, see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 5, 2005; June 18, 2009; August 6 2009).

With the publication of the *Revisions*, Libya is expected to release 50 LIFG prisoners, with the rest expected to follow soon after. These former militants may be among the last to be kept at Abu Salim, home to a quiet massacre in 1996 that may have taken the lives of as many as 1,200 Islamist prisoners (Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation, July 26, 2008; see also *Terrorism Focus*, July 29, 2008). Run by Libya's Internal Security Agency rather than the Justice Department, Abu Salim has a reputation for torture and summary executions. Libyan authorities have announced their intention to demolish the prison and provide compensation to the families of the victims of the 1996 slaughter following the release of the last LIFG prisoners (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 10). To this end, a judge has been appointed (Muhammad Bashir al-Khaddar), together with six legal assistants.

The decision to open compensation tribunals is reported to have come from the acting Defense Minister, General Abu Bakr Yunus Jabir, after a Benghazi court responded to the law suits brought by family members of missing prisoners by ordering the government to disclose the fate of the missing militants (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 10).

Libya's experiment in rehabilitating former Islamists differs from similar experiments in Saudi Arabia and Yemen (and the mixed results obtained there) in one major way – Libya has the full institutional participation of the LIFG and its leadership in preparing a reconciliation instead of relying on the conversion of militant individuals who may remain drawn (willingly or otherwise) to their former organizations.

## Jihadis Speculate on al-Qaeda's Nuclear Strategy

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Jihadi forums occasionally discuss whether al-Qaeda possesses nuclear bombs and the strategies involved in their deployment. The latest discussion on this topic was triggered by a posting on a jihadi website entitled "Al-Qaeda's nuclear bombings - Where would the battle start?" (muslm.net, August 25).

Jihadi forum members insist the videotaped speeches of al-Qaeda's Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri contain hidden messages for al-Qaeda sleeper cells, instructing them to commence planned terror attacks on pre-selected targets. A forum member nicknamed "Youba" said al-Qaeda attacks lead to retaliatory actions from the West in which the victims are Muslims in both cases. "The Western world is far from the battlefield and in deep sleep, but that will not last long." According to Youba, al-Qaeda operates within a sequential policy in escalating the war with the United States and its allies. Bin Laden offered the West a truce if it pulls out of the Islamic world, otherwise they would face a catastrophe worse than what the United States suffered in Vietnam. Youba claims that terror attacks with conventional weapons have resulted in harassment of Muslims living in the West. This has afforded al Qaeda several strategic advantages:

- Violence and discrimination against Muslims reversed the migration of Muslims to the West. Many Arab Muslims have returned to their home countries since 9/11.
- Terror attacks led to the expulsion of Islamic figures who had sought political asylum in the West. Those shaykhs will have to go back and resume the path of jihad by instigating young Muslims to take up arms.

Evacuating Muslims from Western countries would pave the way for a massive terror attack by al-Qaeda with unconventional weapons without the fear of causing a large number of Muslim casualties, according to al-Youba, who insists that America's concern over al-Qaeda's possible possession of chemical or nuclear weapons indicates that such an attack is only a matter of time.

The logical sequence of al-Qaeda's actions and methods of operation, including the decentralized sleeper cells ready to carry out preplanned terror actions and the secret codes and messages in al-Qaeda video statements supposedly pertinent to unconventional attacks, suggest to jihadis like Youba that al-Qaeda might have bought and stored weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Youba notes that in 1997, the late General Alexander Lebed, former secretary of the Russian national Security Council, claimed on U.S. television that 100 Russian-made nuclear suitcase bombs were missing from Russia's arsenals, though he added these might have been destroyed, stolen, sold or stored without proper records (*Sixty Minutes*, CBS, September 7, 1997). Russian officials denied the existence of such bombs and accused Lebed of spreading false information for his own political gain in the forthcoming presidential elections.

The suitcase bombs were developed in the 1970s for the former Soviet committee of state security- the KGB. There are two types of WMD suitcase bombs, says Youba; the first type has the destructive power of one kiloton of TNT and the second type is radioactive and when detonated, using conventional explosives, releases "nuclear radiation" (in the second type Youba appears to be describing "dirty bombs" rather than nuclear weapons).

In another post in the same forum, Youba contends that the scenario al-Qaeda is considering involves the collapse of the United States and the beginning of the end of its puppet regimes in Islamic countries, paving the way for the gradual return of caliphate rule in the Islamic world. The United States is enduring its worst economic, social and military days, says Youba, adding that the financial crisis is strangling the nation and rich U.S. states are contemplating secession from the union as a consequence. Militarily, a close look at what the U.S. military is suffering in Waziristan, the Hindu Kush Mountains, the Swat valley and Baghdad reaffirms the dilemma of the United States, said Youba, repeating the Jihadi stereotype that any Western or local military activity against Islamic extremists is either led by or instigated by the United States. Even at home, Americans live in fear of a martyr crossing the ocean with a chemical, biological or nuclear bomb with the intention of detonating it on American soil.

On the other hand, alleges Youba, al-Qaeda and other Mujahideen are on the rise. For example, Islamic Shari'a is applied in Somalia by the Mujahideen Youth

Movement (al-Shabaab). Similarly, 80 percent of Afghanistan is ruled by the Taliban. In Iraq the so-called Islamic State of Iraq has forced the occupier out of the cities. The collapse of the United States would result in the return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, in which case Waziristan, the Swat valley, Kashmir, Eastern Turkistan and the Sunni areas of Iran would join the Islamic Caliphate of Afghanistan. On the western side, the Mujahideen Youth Movement will control the whole of Somalia, joined by Djibouti, and would probably march to Khartoum to rid Sudan of its “treacherous ruler.”

“Al-Qaeda’s Nuclear Bombings” was posted in a few other jihadi forums. Although many forum members approved of a nuclear terror attack by al-Qaeda that would rid the Muslim world of U.S. tyranny, some members disputed the religious permissibility of using nuclear weapons (majahden.com, August 29).

Circulating a false impression about al-Qaeda’s possible nuclear capabilities could only help improve its ability to fundraise and recruit extremists longing to join a triumphant Islamic entity capable of restoring the Islamic caliphate. Al-Qaeda has long sought to buy or manufacture bombs of mass destruction and would have likely used them had it succeeded in obtaining them.

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## Al-Qaeda Attempt on Saudi Royal’s Life Signals Tactical and Strategic Changes

*By Murad Batal al-Shishani*

**A**l-Qaeda’s recent attempt on the life of a Saudi royal suggests a change in tactics for an organization which has suffered substantial losses in the past few years. 23-year-old Abdullah Hassan Tali Asiri, a would-be suicide bomber listed on Saudi security’s list of most-wanted jihadis, called his target, Prince Muhammad bin Nayif, beforehand to say he wanted to return from Yemen to surrender (Saudi Press Agency, August 31). Bin Nayif is the Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security Affairs and has been in charge of the Saudi counterterrorism campaign since

clashes between authorities and Saudi jihadis began in 2003.

Asiri called the prince to say that he and some of his colleagues wanted to turn themselves in, as the prince is well-known for his support of efforts to rehabilitate former jihadis. Bin Nayif has previously coordinated with influential Saudi shaykhs, such as Safar al-Hawali, who helped arrange the surrender of a number of wanted Saudi jihadis.

Asiri is believed to have been recruited to al-Qaeda by his brother Ibrahim, who is known by the alias “Abu Saleh” and also appears on the most wanted list (*Saudi Gazette*, August 31). In the evening of August 27, Asiri detonated his explosives moments after he reached the prince’s residence, where the prince was receiving guests at the end of the daily fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan (a Saudi custom). Asiri was killed by the bomb but bin Nayef, sitting just a meter away, suffered only superficial injury. Al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack (al-Fajr Media Center, August 29). Saudi and other Arab media questioned how the assassin, who was supposedly searched four times before the detonation, managed to carry out the attack. Bin Nayif, who is known to have welcomed penitent militants into his home before, reportedly said afterwards that he had ordered his men not to search his would-be assassin in the belief that humaneness and magnanimity were key in reforming ex-terrorists (*Al-Quds al-Arabi*, September 2; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 31).

Asiri’s attack was significant for three reasons:

- It is the first known assassination attempt against a member of the royal family by Salafi-Jihadis
- It indicates the reactivation of al-Qaeda after two or three years of retreat since Saudi security cracked down on them.
- It indicates the increasing role of Yemen as a launch pad for attacks by jihadis against Saudi Arabia.

The attack suggested al-Qaeda may have re-examined the tactical work of Faris Ahmad Jamaan al-Shuwayl al-Zahrani (a.k.a. Abu Jandal al-Azdi), a Salafi-Jihadi ideologist who is currently imprisoned. Before his arrest

in August 2004, al-Zahrani wrote a book entitled *Tahrid al-Mujahideen al-Abtal A'al Ibiya'a Sunnat al-Ighthyal* (Inciting the Heroic Mujahideen to Revive the Practice of Assassination). [1] In his book al-Zahrani presents the jihadist understanding of the importance of assassination as a tactic, giving its definition, providing various means and methods, with the whole illustrated by accounts of the 1981 assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, the 2001 assassination of Afghan mujahideen leader Ahmad Shah Masud and many others. More significantly, al-Zahrani provides a discussion of the legitimacy and feasibility of using such tactics. Al-Zahrani lists those who should be targeted by the tactic; in addition to diplomats, military officers and security agents of foreign enemy countries, he urged jihadis to target the security and military apparatus of those Muslim countries where the government was regarded by Salafi-Jihadis as “tyrants” or “apostates.”

The incident, in light of the existence of such a theoretical rooting in al-Qaeda’s literature, demonstrates the continuity of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia despite its decline over the past few years. However, resorting to such a tactic also demonstrates the inability of al-Qaeda to implement attacks that require major logistical support, such as targeting residential compounds or oil facilities, as the movement has done in the past. Instead, it seems al-Qaeda will rely on its human resources to commit attacks which will reap major media coverage and work to destabilize the regime.

Besides the change at the tactical level, the assassination attempt is also linked to a shift in al-Qaeda’s regional strategy. “Expel the infidels from the Arabian Peninsula” was one of the founding slogans of al-Qaeda, and Saudi Arabia has made it an area of high importance ever since. With the decline in al-Qaeda’s ability to operate in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Saudi jihadis, like those from other countries, have started to search for new “safe havens.” Yemen appears to have been the destination of many Saudi jihadis.

From al-Qaeda’s perspective, Yemen’s proximity to Saudi Arabia has always made it an area of geopolitical importance and a base for mounting attacks against the Kingdom and other Gulf states. Since clashes between jihadis and Saudi authorities began in 2003, the latter have seized shipments of smuggled weapons to Saudi territory from Yemen several times and have signed agreements with Yemen to control the border. Recently, the potential for Yemen to serve as a base for jihadis is increasing due to the growing crisis in the Yemeni

state, as marked by clashes with the Houthi rebels in the north, the revival of the separatist movement in the South, increased jihadi activity and existing socio-economic problems.

By using bases in Yemen, al-Qaeda might be able to mount high profile, low-cost assassinations to destabilize the regime and demonstrate that it is still a strong organization in Saudi Arabia, an essential part of invigorating its recruitment efforts.

Notes:

1. Al-Zahrani’s book is available at: [www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=dh5d8za3](http://www.tawhed.ws/dl?i=dh5d8za3). His other major work advocated the killing of members of the Saudi security forces; *An Inquiry into the Ruling of Death upon Soldiers and Officers of the Security Forces*.

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## Iraqi Insurgents Take the Offensive as Parliamentary Elections Approach

By Ramzy Mardini

Multiple bombings targeting Iraq’s governmental ministries just outside central Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone on August 19 left 95 people killed and over 600 others wounded, marking the single deadliest day in 18 months. The event forced the Iraqi government to reevaluate the country’s security sector, as the attacks demonstrated the inadequacies of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the efficacy insurgents maintain in carrying out high profile and coordinated operations. As Iraqi parliamentary elections approach in January 2010, insurgents and rival political factions will likely mount an aggressive campaign to destabilize the political process and undermine the central government’s credibility in pacifying Iraq sans U.S. military presence.

The Instability of the Election Season

Today, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki’s political strategy concerning the parliamentary election is

directed towards retaining his post as Prime Minister. His campaign is grounded in two critical goals in the eyes of the Iraqi public: 1) Bringing security and stability to Iraq in order to facilitate economic growth and reconstruction; 2) Solidifying his image as the national leader by achieving Iraq's sovereignty and ending the U.S. military occupation.

For much of al-Maliki's tenure, however, these two goals have been posed in zero-sum terms; security was best achieved when U.S. forces engaged the local population and patrolled Iraqi streets. The security improvement resulting from the Awakening Movement and the implementation of the 2007 U.S. counterinsurgency strategy allowed al-Maliki to consolidate and centralize his authority at the expense of rival factions and former political allies, like firebrand Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Al-Maliki's 2008 demonstration of assertiveness towards his U.S. counterparts by demanding explicit deadlines be stipulated in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) reflected his growing autonomy and influence on the domestic scene. His political rationale for requiring U.S. combat forces to disengage from Iraqi cities only six months after the SOFA was implemented was to demonstrate to the Iraqi public his sovereignty bona fides, effectively broadening his popularity in advance of elections.

But the handover of the urban security profile to the ISF comes at the same time as three political proceedings that carry significant security concerns; the parliamentary elections, a national referendum held the same day on the continued implementation of the SOFA, and the first post-Saddam census. If the Iraqi people reject the SOFA in the referendum, U.S. forces may be required to leave Iraq a year earlier than the December 2011 deadline currently specified. Political sensitivity and concerns over destabilization have allowed the census to be continually delayed by Baghdad (*Aswat al-Iraq*, August 31). It is now scheduled to take place after August 2010 – the time when President Barack Obama intends to withdraw all U.S. combat forces. Because of their great potential in shaping the future distribution of power and political structure inside Iraq, all three proceedings will risk the possibility that Iraqi politics may revert back to civil war-politics, when political factions engaged one another via militias.

There are indications that al-Maliki will face-off against the Shi'a political parties in the next round of elections. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, major Shi'a Islamic parties ran on a single powerhouse political list – the

United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) – in order to guarantee their dominant position in Iraq's Council of Representatives. On August 24, in an effort to reconstitute a winning Shi'a coalition for the upcoming election, the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) was announced, consisting of former UIA participants like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Sadrists, and the Badr Organization, among others (al-Jazeera, August 24). Al-Maliki and his Dawa Party have refused to enter into the INA because the alliance refused to guarantee him the office of Prime Minister (Al-Sumaria TV, August 25). Moreover, ISCI had dominated the former Shi'a bloc while advocating a federal administrative structure which is now inconsistent with al-Maliki's political agenda for achieving a strong central government. The Prime Minister has decided instead to build a rival political list, consisting of a broad-based national coalition of Sunni nationalists and southern Shi'a tribes.

These conflicting agendas are concerning in that they may lead to Shi'a on Shi'a violence ahead of the election. Instead of the old ISCI-Sadrism rivalry that characterized southern Iraq, members of the INA may attempt to sabotage al-Maliki's political campaign by undermining his ability to provide security. As suggested by the comments of Abu Hamza al-Masri, a member of Muqtada al-Sadr's staff in Basra; "The party and sectarian behavior of al-Maliki has not ended, but on the contrary, has been renewed" (Niqash.org, August 19).

#### The Insurgent Rationale

Before the U.S. military switched from campaigns focusing on territory to a population-protection counterinsurgency strategy, the goal for many insurgents was to hold and defend territory. But the loss of territorial footing for al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Sunni insurgents, and Shi'a militiamen has altered their strategic engagement vis-à-vis their adversaries from a partly defensive posture to a completely offensive posture. Without the option of defense, the battleground for insurgents becomes less of a resistance based on territorial fronts and more of an asymmetrical engagement that is entirely focused on offensive attacks.

Insurgents hope to undermine the Iraqi political process, reconciliation efforts, and trust in government in order to bring about the anarchical conditions necessary for their organizational survival and the achievement of their objectives. Because of their loss of capability and territory, AQI and others are likely to make better use of

their existing resources and adopt cautious assessments of their operations.

Moreover, because there is no defensive line to hold, insurgents can now decide on their own schedule when to be active members of the insurgency. This was the case during al-Maliki's spring 2008 Mosul offensive called "Lion's Roar." Many Iraqi military commanders were disappointed with the lack of resistance as they had hoped for a decisive battle against the remaining remnants of AQI. As one report indicated, "The lack of significant resistance among the hardened fighters who had been operating in Mosul suggested the insurgency was offering Maliki and his American backers a message of their own: 'We fight on our terms, not yours'" (*Azzaman*, June 14).

With the option of engaging the ISF on an urban battlefield removed, insurgents are forced to operate in a more discrete manner. Political assassinations have remained an efficient tool for them and will likely gain popularity as they adapt their posture in advance of the election (*Azzaman*, June 14). High-profile bombings are also another tool insurgents may come to rely heavily on in the coming months. This has been the primary strategy executed by AQI insurgents in the Mosul area, as recognized by U.S. Major General Robert Caslen. "They recognize what they need to do is the high profile attacks and go after the local nationals in order to entice the sectarian violence." (VOA, August 11).

The upcoming election offers a powerful forum where insurgent attacks could provide the greatest political damage to the Iraq government, especially against al-Maliki's prospects for retaining office. With U.S. combat forces now disengaged from ISF missions in Iraq's urban areas, the trust and confidence the Iraqi people have in their security forces will be challenged by insurgents. Al-Maliki was aware of this challenge to his political credibility after the August 19 bombings, saying: "I would like to assure the Iraqi people that the security forces are still capable of continuing the battle and achieving more victories" (AP, August 22).

### Regional Conflicts of Interest

Another major concern for Iraq in the context of the parliamentary election is the role of the country's neighbors. What happens in Iraq concerns many surrounding political actors, especially when considering the changing dynamics of the regional balance of power. For example, Iraq's maturing military is making advances

in its capabilities and weapons systems through the U.S. foreign military sales program. The Strategic Framework Agreement, signed as a separate document alongside the SOFA, fosters a long-term strategic partnership with the United States – effectively nurturing Baghdad as a future power player in the region.

Some nearby states, however, may feel uneasy about Iraq's increasing military capability. Uncertainty prevails in the region over the direction Baghdad is actually heading - federal and democratic or a consolidated central government. Moreover, Sunni Arab leaders are not sure whether a Shi'a Iraq would ally itself with Iran.

Such security concerns give the results of the upcoming Iraqi election a strategic interest for outside states. Neighboring governments have meddled and backed political lists in the past, as was the case in the 2005 parliamentary elections. Iran may now be concerned about al-Maliki's agenda as he plans to achieve a broad-based national coalition with Sunni Arab nationalists at the expense of closer Iranian allies like the ISCI, the Sadrists, and the Badr Organization. Activity inside Iraq by Iran's Revolutionary Guards appears directed towards ensuring a pro-Iranian Shi'a government in Baghdad.

Recent discoveries of new weapons caches in southern Iraq suggest that Shi'a militias are stockpiling arms in connection with the upcoming parliamentary elections (*Arab Times*, August 31). Many of the manufacturing dates on the weapons (grenade launchers, silencers, sniper rifles, automatic weapons, and explosives) were as recent as 2008, with Persian inscriptions found on the rockets. The findings suggest that many of the weapons arrived in Iraq after al-Maliki's spring 2008 crackdown on the Shi'a militias that uprooted al-Sadr's *Jaysh al-Mahdi* group from its territorial strongholds. According to Iraqi police, investigations now hint that Shi'a militias opposed to al-Maliki are recruiting fighters to undermine his electoral prospects. As one high-ranking police officer described it; "Their aims are to destroy the image of the prime minister and pull the carpet from under his feet by making it impossible for him to claim he has succeeded in improving security" (Reuters, September 1).

Surrounding Sunni Arab states may also feel compelled to undermine al-Maliki's electoral advantages ahead of the parliamentary election, as his rhetoric and consolidation of power has been of some concern to them lately. In reacting to an upsurge of violence targeting low-income

Shi'a neighborhoods in June 2009, al-Maliki pointed the finger toward Arab governments for fueling the instability: "There are states which are silent on fatwas (Islamic decrees) urging killings and branding others [as] infidels." (*Azzaman*, June 27). Although al-Maliki did not mention the states he perceived responsible, it is likely his remarks were at least partly directed toward Saudi Arabia.

Suspected involvement of Syrian intelligence officials for the August 19 bombings in Baghdad has suggested conflicting interests exist between al-Maliki's re-election campaign and some factions in Syria. Iraq believes it has collected evidence that implicates AQI, Syrian intelligence officials and Iraqi Ba'athists based in Syria in the attacks. According to al-Maliki, "Confessions by conductors of this terrorist act revealed that the operation is not internally made but carried out by [foreign] countries" (*Kurdish Globe*, August 29). Both Damascus and Baghdad have recalled their ambassadors in a dispute over the bombings.

#### Conclusion

Regardless of the security gains made in Iraq, the country is still riddled with poor institutions, ethnic and tribal rivalries and an absence of genuine reconciliation efforts. With the gradual disengagement of U.S. combat forces, the ISF will likely be tested on their capability and integrity as a non-sectarian institution that is dedicated to the protection of all Iraqis. The trust and confidence of the Iraqi people in the ISF is essential for continuing a counterinsurgency campaign. Iraqi insurgents and terrorists alike are no longer carrying out operations intended to seize territory inside Iraq. Rather their short-term goals are now concentrated on damaging the central government's credibility, fomenting sectarian strife between the different ethnic segments of society and promoting the perception that the ISF is inadequate to protect Iraqi neighborhoods. If successful, these goals will render any counterinsurgency strategy ineffective, as collaboration and information sharing between the local population and the ISF become increasingly difficult to achieve.

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## At the Center of the Storm: An Interview with Afghanistan's Lieutenant General Hadi Khalid – Part Two

*By Derek Henry Flood*

Lieutenant General Hadi Khalid was the Afghan Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security from May 2006 to June 2008. He lost his post after a dispute with the Karzai administration last year but remains one of Afghanistan's leading thinkers on regional ethno-political dynamics and transnational criminal networks. Jamestown sat down with him at his home in Kabul and discussed Afghanistan's wide range of security challenges. Last week, General Khalid discussed the relation of Pakistan's intelligence agencies with the Taliban, the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban, the development of Afghanistan's security agencies and the situation along Afghanistan's borders with Tajikistan.

JT: Describe the Afghan Interior Ministry's view of its relationship with Uzbekistan?

HK: Uzbekistan is the most important nation in Central Asia. The situation with Uzbekistan's border security is much better than Tajikistan because they have a very short border with Afghanistan combined with very strong security services. During my time in the Ministry of Interior, we had good relations with them [the Uzbeks].

JT: Can you talk about the border with Turkmenistan and the relevant situation of declining security in Afghanistan's Badghis Province?

HK: Our relations with the Turkmen are also good but the circumstances there are not as good as Uzbekistan for a few reasons. They have a much longer border with many fewer police and the region of our shared border there is very lightly populated on both sides of the frontier. This makes the environment conducive to smuggling and other criminal activity.

You may have heard that there is some Taliban resurgence in Badghis similar to what is going on in Konduz. I personally think the ISI [Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence] must be behind these renewed



theaters of insurgency. By creating trouble near the borders with our Central Asian neighbors, Pakistanis can say “Look you see, there is instability all over Afghanistan, not just along the Durand Line. By stirring up instability in formerly stable areas, it may make the new NATO negotiations with CIS countries seem less appealing. Again, Pakistan does not want to lose the revenue from the Western military freight that transits through its territory. It also does not want to seem less of a crucial ally of the United States because Pakistan is deathly afraid of India, as we all know. So now we are having trouble near the border with Turkmenistan and this scares their leaders. Like Uzbekistan, Ashgabad does not want the Taliban to gain a renewed presence in their region.

Now when Ashgabad sees that there is trouble in Badghis Province, Pakistan can say “Look, al-Qaeda and the Taliban are your neighbors now,” enhancing Pakistan’s claims that Kabul’s writ is weak in most of the country. This furthers Pakistan’s pipe dream of regional hegemony. By making Afghanistan look weak, Pakistanis believe this makes them appear strong. They want to be the regional leaders. Pakistan can exploit the fact that Central Asian leaders fear al-Qaeda infiltration. Badghis is now becoming a new front of insecurity.

JT: The Iranian border is a long and dangerous one. How were your relations with the Iranians? Would you describe their modus operandi as one of cooperation, competition or a mix of the two?

HK: Iran does not have a singular, consistent foreign policy for Afghanistan. Though the ANP [Afghan National Police] has a good working relationship with Iran’s border and counter narcotics police, Iran has an interest in weakening America’s position inside Afghanistan and hindering the democratic process in Afghanistan. If Afghanistan could maintain a stable, emerging democracy, what message would that send to the young people in Iran who are restless for change? This is inconvenient for Iran’s government.

Iran has many institutions and these are often in competition with one another, serving Tehran at cross-purposes. Iran’s Afghan policy is fluid and changes rapidly according to interests of the day. Iran is constantly shifting its position here. Some elements of their government are conservative while others can be quite aggressive. Iran’s top police chief came to Kabul and offered to help us build some border and customs infrastructure and asked for assistance with counter

narcotics operations and our meetings were very friendly. In this way Iran tries to play all sides because their strategic position is threatened both here and in Iraq. Iran made a very bad play in temporarily aiding the Talibs. They gave them ammunition to fight Western forces but this also meant that Iran now had the Taliban back along its border for the first time since 2001. Secondly, where Talibs go, NATO forces eventually follow in pursuit of their counter-insurgency goals. So I think the Iranians realized they made a major strategic mistake on this issue. They wanted to keep NATO forces occupied in southern Afghanistan so that they could pursue various foreign policy goals of theirs but the result was now both Talibs and NATO on their border and Jundullah attacking from Zabul Province and from their bases in Pakistani Baluchistan. Iran is now confronted with Sunni extremists and Western military forces on its eastern border. Iran is very nervous.

In 2006, a Taliban informant that we have close contact with told us that he had recently been to Iran on three separate occasions. He claimed that Iran was sending some munitions to the Taliban. But this temporary support of certain Taliban elements in western Afghanistan came to haunt the Iranians. Some of these weapons eventually ended up in the hands of Jundullah [ethnic-Balochi insurgents operating in the Iranian province of Sistan-Balochistan]. Jundullah and the Taliban have some friendly working relations. Then the Iranians realized Jundullah was seeking to destabilize Sistan-Balochistan. Jundullah operates freely in the triple border area of Baluchistan. When Jundullah started making some attacks against Iranian security forces, Iran realized that covert support of the Taliban was not in their interest.

JT: So during your post, you’ve said the MOI [Ministry of the Interior] was able to find some reliable Taliban informants. To your knowledge, has there been any Taliban infiltration in the ANP as an institutional issue?

HK: During my time in the MOI we had four or five incidents of the Taliban penetrating ANP facilities but these were all what I would call low-level incidents. None of these penetrations added up to much for either side. There were some incidents in Farah [Province], Zabol [Province] and the Bala Murghab district of Badghis [Province] but they were not significant. The Taliban do not have any political program that will appeal to educated people in our military and government. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan for years and our educated people understand the difference between the Taliban’s

motives and their actions. Pakistanis have not had to live under Taliban rule, Afghans have had this experience. And unlike the army in Pakistan since Zia ul-Haq's Islamization phase, our army and police have always been secular organizations, which makes it difficult for the Taliban to get much sympathy [from] them.

JT: What can you tell Jamestown about the little known border with China? Does the Afghan government even have a presence along the Afghanistan-China border?

HK: This is a good example of the weaknesses in our security policy. In that area, at the end of the Wakhan [Corridor, a narrow and sparsely populated pass connecting Afghanistan to China], we just have some Pamiri people [Wakhi and Afghan Kyrgyz] that are supportive of Kabul and they watch the border for us. But they are just local people. The people there do not have aviation transportation and our border police have yet to reach this area. As I said we do not have centralization for our border security forces. During the time in my position, I repeatedly called for centralizing our border police.

JT: Does the central government have any representation on the Chinese frontier at all?

HK: We have sent people there weapons and supplies but it is very difficult for us to control the area. I have heard that some of the villages there are even supplied by China. Throughout history we have had this problem with controlling the Wakhan, even during the era of the king [Zahir Shah]. Only in high summer is the area accessible [due to extreme weather conditions].

JT: Is the Wakhan a drug trafficking route to China?

HK: If the Chinese do not control it, yes. The Chinese are afraid of drugs. Drugs always seem to find their routes. Central Badakhshan Province is one of the oldest centers of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Long before poppy growth in Helmand, Badakhshan was the original center of drugs in this region. In my days in the MOI, we had a plane to reach there and institute controls but [the operation] was never realized.

JT: In your tenure as the Deputy Minister of Interior for Security, did you get a chance to survey the Chinese border at the end of the Wakhan Corridor?

HK: No, I have never been to the area. The MOI was not supplied with any helicopters from the international

community to reach there as there are no roads. How can we go there without helicopters? I have been told that our MOI has recently been gifted two helicopters, one from Germany and one from Russia. So now the MOI forces have a total of two helicopters to police the entire country! I had the idea to create a new ministry for internal security to solve some of these issues but it was never realized.

JT: The name Afghan *National* Police would lead one to believe that the ANP is a unified force under federal command.

HK: The problem with the system is that while the overall command of the ANP is centralized now, almost all the police around the country are still recruited from the local population. All over the world, border police are national but in Afghanistan, they are local. In a whole province you will have maybe a few commanders from outside the immediate area. I have tried to say that Afghanistan's most important force should be its border police. If our international allies are right to tell us that Pakistan is the base for so much cross border terrorism, should not we be stopping militant infiltration at the border? Border policing should be our highest priority, especially along the Pakistan border.

JT: Were you able to bring this concept to Karzai's attention?

HK: I mentioned it to him but Karzai is a very busy man. He cannot give these issues the time they deserve. The ANP is very poorly equipped and not prepared to confront a lot of these problems.

JT: Speaking of equipment, what can you tell us about the staffing and financing of the ANP?

HK: After Bonn, it was decided that Afghanistan should have 62,000 national policemen. During my work in the MOI, our international donors wanted the number increased to 82,000 and now there is talk of raising the membership to 96,000, including local militias, which I think is a terrible idea. It is better to have a small, qualified force than a barely outfitted, cumbersome one. But the donors do not listen to us, they make these decisions without consulting us.

We cannot fund the ANP ourselves with our tiny tax base so the international community must pay for it. The ANP are funded in two ways. The first is the police trust fund that was established to pay for food and salaries

and its budget is 14.5 billion Afghanis [approximately \$290 million]. Then there is a separate fund controlled by donors that pays for vehicles, communications gear, building procurement and weapons. We did not know in the MOI what the precise budget is because our international partners did not tell us at the time.

JT: Your final thoughts?

HK: The United States must “Afghanize” the situation here. Afghanization is the only way forward. Afghans want to have an alliance with the United States because without such an ally, we cannot survive. Our neighbors will swallow us up and our internal problems will also swallow us. The U.S. must genuinely empower our army, police and intelligence services to make our forces the frontline in Afghanistan.

JT: Why has the U.S. not done such? Is it an issue of trust?

HK: Yes, I think so. Our armies fight together but when we need military equipment, they do not [budge]. This makes President Karzai crazy. He cries to the Americans “Why, why don’t you give our army and police equipment?” But the Americans still don’t provide [heavy armor]. There is still a lot of mistrust between Americans and Afghans after all these years. But from the Afghan side, we are not completely honest either. The Americans say we need a several hundred thousand strong army but I do not agree. We need a small, highly mobile well-equipped army.

(Nearing the end of our interview, Lt. Gen. Khalid picks up a small Nokia phone and calls a friend to check a fact for me. He learns during the course of the call that a close friend and colleague, Dr. Abdullah Laghmani, deputy head of the National Directorate for Security, has just been assassinated in a suicide attack in Laghman Province, sixty miles west of Kabul, while leaving a mosque with several prominent local officials following a Ramadan prayer service).

HK: I have lost thousands of friends over the last thirty years. Dr. Laghmani was a very good friend of mine. In the beginning, we cried a lot. Now we do not cry anymore.

*Derek Henry Flood is independent journalist focusing on Middle Eastern, Central and South Asian political affairs.*