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 Washington, DC • 20036  
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**DEFIANT AQIM CHALLENGES NEW REGIONAL COUNTERTERRORIST COMMAND WITH DEADLY CROSS-BORDER RAID**

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) answered the formation of a multinational counterterrorism center in the southern Algerian town of Tamanrasset by ambushing a patrol of Algerian border gendarmes close to Tin Zaouatine, roughly 40 km from the border with Mali and 2000 km south of Algiers (*El Watan* [Algiers], July 1). At least 13 gendarmes were killed in the June 30 ambush, the worst Islamist violence in Algeria since the July 29, 2009 attack by militants belonging to the Protectors of the Islamist Call that killed up to 14 soldiers in the Mediterranean town of Tipaza (*El Khabar* [Algiers], July 30; *El Watan*, July 30).

Security officials in the Malian capital of Bamako said two gendarmes were taken prisoner, one of whom was released to describe the fate of his comrades (al-Jazeera, July 1). AQIM followed up by releasing leaflets in the border region claiming responsibility for the ambush (*Ennahar* [Algiers], July 3). The leaflets said the attack was designed to mark AQIM’s “determination to fight against the regime of Algiers” and promised the movement would continue attacks “until final victory.” Only a day before the attack, Major-General Ahmad Gaid Salah, chief-of-staff of Algeria’s Armée Nationale Populaire (ANP), announced that the militants could surrender under the terms of the 2005 reconciliation accord or await their “certain death” (AFP, June 30).

The ill-fated patrol was composed of members of the Groupement des Gardes Frontières (GGF). The GGF fall under the command of the ANP and have been recently outfitted with new all-terrain vehicles and sophisticated monitoring and surveillance equipment. Though quantities of arms and ammunition were removed by the attackers, the two armored 4x4 GGF vehicles were surprisingly burned rather than taken away. The attackers are believed to have slipped back across the border into northern Mali.

In a first sign of the regional cooperation promised by Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania through the April formation of a Tamanrasset-based Joint Operational Military Committee, designed to provide a joint response to border security and terrorism issues, there are reports Mali has invited Algerian forces to pursue the militants on Malian territory (Reuters, July 1; see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 23). The cross-border AQIM attack seems intended, at least in part, to test the political resolve of the new joint operations mechanism. Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika recently took Mali to task at the G-8 summit in Huntsville, Canada for breaching an agreement not to exchange imprisoned terrorists for hostages, as Bamako did last February to free a French hostage. Bouteflika described the exchange as "direct support of terrorism" (*Echorouk*, June 26; *al-Jazeera*, March 2).

The dawn ambush is believed to have been the work of Abu Zaid, a militant AQIM commander sent south by AQIM Amir Abdel Musab Abdelwadoud to reinvigorate the Southern Command, which appeared for a while to be devoting more effort to cigarette smuggling than jihad.

#### SEPARATISTS SAY YEMENI REGIME WILL DESTROY SOUTH YEMEN TO MAINTAIN NATIONAL UNITY

A series of interviews conducted by the pan-Arab newspaper *Asharq al-Awsat* have revealed a number of perspectives from leaders of the South Yemen separatist movement. One such was provided by Abd al-Hamid Talib, a member of the Central Committee of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP - al-Hizb al-Ishtiraki al-Yamani). The YSP was founded in 1978 as an umbrella group for an array of various southern political parties and movements and formed the ruling party in South Yemen before unification in 1990. The party has struggled since the central government emerged victorious from

the 1994 civil war, confiscating the party's facilities and resources. In opposition, the party has adhered to its platform of secular socialism and pan-Arab nationalism.

Contrasting the current breakdown of law and order in Yemen with the rule of law that existed in South Yemen prior to unification, Abd al-Hamid says Yemen could be described as a "failed unity state," except that "Yemen is not a state, as this concept [in Yemen] usually means but a gang ruling Yemen, with the full meaning of the word 'gang'" (*Asharq al-Awsat*, June 21).

Abd al-Hamid traces most of the South's misfortunes to its loss in the 1994 Civil War. Of particular importance was the decision to disband the Southern Army rather than integrate it with national forces, leading to wide unemployment and dissatisfaction with the regime:

They [the regime] could have, for instance, reinstated the army of the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen to military service. In one of his interviews, the brother president [i.e. President Ali Abdullah Saleh] gracefully called for Saddam's army to be reinstated to military service following the U.S. invasion of Iraq. For that matter, he should have reinstated the army of the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen to service following his invasion of the South! Moreover, as he advised the Palestinians to open the door for dialogue between Palestinian factions, he should have engaged in a dialogue with the southerners, specifically with the YSP (*Asharq al-Awsat*, June 21).

The YSP leader claims the regime is doing everything in its power, including infiltration, to draw the YSP into an armed conflict, knowing its superiority in arms and numbers will allow it to destroy the movement; "They are prepared to destroy the South completely to remain in power" (*Asharq al-Awsat*, June 21). Yet Abd al-Hamid believes that time is on the side of the secessionists, as the power of the authorities will inevitably deteriorate as the beleaguered economy begins to collapse. While international support for the separatist movement has yet to materialize, the international community is still able to see that there is no progress being made by Saleh's government to stabilize the domestic situation in Yemen.

Abd al-Hamid was recently released from detention after having been charged with supporting the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM), a new separatist umbrella

group that appears to have supplanted the YSP as the leading separatist movement. However, Abd al-Hamid suggests the party is as relevant as ever, claiming more than 80% of the members of the SMM were originally in the YSP.

Though clashes have occurred between pro-independence protesters and security forces at several rallies in the South, the SMM maintains it is a peaceful rather than armed political movement. Authorities routinely describe the SMM as a “terrorist militia” in the pro-regime press and accuse it of armed attacks on government institutions and military facilities (Naba News Online, June 21; June 22). Many SMM activists are demobilized members of the former army of the Democratic People’s Republic of Yemen [i.e. the old socialist regime in the South]. The movement is strongest in the governorates of al-Lahij, al-Dali and Abyan, while support in the largest urban center, Aden, has diminished due to the more cosmopolitan makeup of the population in the port city (*Asharq al-Awsat*, July 2).

## Jihadi Views on General McChrystal’s Resignation

By *Abdul Hameed Bakier*

Jihadists are quick to take heed of any strategic or policy changes taking place in the United States or any state with forces fighting terrorism. Recently, the resignation of the U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, was seen as a victorious sign for the Afghan Taliban. Jihadis posted opinions on the resignation entitled, “The Dark Episodes of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan” (muslm.net, June 24). Jihadi forum postings regarding General McChrystal’s resignation also renewed discussions of an earlier topic on U.S. strategic policy in Afghanistan entitled, “Obama’s Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Jihadi reading and a wakeup call” (muslm.net, June 18).

Reacting to the resignation of General McChrystal, a jihadi forum member nicknamed Mullah Talibani said the rising casualties of the Coalition forces are evidence of the dark series of NATO failures in Afghanistan that

have raised tensions in the White House. The rift between the commander of the Coalition forces in Afghanistan and the White House coupled with the premature departure of Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the British special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, indicates the imminent collapse of the Coalition in Afghanistan. Cowper-Coles had clashed with U.S. and NATO officials over his insistence that talks with the Taliban should be prioritized over the military campaign (*Guardian*, June 21). Other forum members corroborated the deteriorating situation of the Coalition, evident from the assignment of David Petraeus, McChrystal’s superior officer, to a lower position as head of Coalition operations in Afghanistan. “That is normal because the Taliban lions headed by Mullah Omar drove the Coalition out of their norms [i.e. caused them to make mistakes in routine operations],” said another chatter. Above all, the forum members perceive the resignation of any Coalition commander as a sign of an impending military collapse followed by total withdrawal.

Another jihadi forum posted the Taliban reaction to the resignation of General McChrystal. Taliban spokesman Qari Yusuf Ahmadi said it is a logical conclusion of the war in Afghanistan and that the new commander will face the same fate (hanein.info, June 24). Ahmadi claims Obama’s strategy in Afghanistan has been defeated, adding “We don’t care who the commander is, be it McChrystal or Petraeus. Our position is clear. We will fight until the occupiers withdraw” (sunni-news.net, June 24).

Ahmadi’s criticism of President Obama’s strategy renewed jihadi forum discussions on U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan (muslm.net, June 18). The discussion started with rude remarks about President Obama’s race. A forum member nicknamed Abu Muhammad al-Othmani enumerated five major points in Obama’s national security plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan:

- Disrupt terrorist networks in Afghanistan
- Sever terrorists’ supply routes from Pakistan to Afghanistan
- Strengthen the Afghan government’s management quality
- Develop security forces’ capabilities to enable them to counter terrorists and insurgency and support the civil authorities and the constitutional government of Pakistan

- Effectively engage the international community to help achieve these objectives.

To secure these goals, forum members believe the United States will implement a civilian-military strategy to fight insurgency, support Pakistan in the fight against fundamentalists, and strengthen Afghani-Pakistani cooperation. One forum member repeated an insult once used by al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri in suggesting there was little to distinguish the current president from his predecessor:

We put before those who think the slave of the house – the White House - is different than his predecessor Obama’s new strategy in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in which he said the terrorists that planned 9/11 are still plotting to kill as many as they can of our civilians... Brothers in faith, I write this, hoping believers would open their eyes and not be deceived by the Islamic greetings of our enemy nor by the Quranic verses they cite.

The strongest reaction and criticism of the replacement of General McChrystal was made during Friday prayer in London by Egyptian Salafi-Jihadi ideologue and director of the al-Maqreze Center for Historical Studies, Hani al-Siba’i. In the Friday sermon, al-Siba’i said the tyrant American administration is stumbling, evident from the criticism directed at it by one of its top generals. In the sermon, al-Siba’i said:

McChrystal is not stupid as they describe him. He gave an interview to a major American newspaper [actually *Rolling Stone* magazine] fully aware of the consequences. McChrystal knew he would be sacked and held accountable for his actions. He simply wants to get ahead of events because he was struggling with the criminal ambassador of the U.S. in Kabul who runs networks like the security company Blackwater [Xe Services LLC], and other security entities that control and kill people in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places. McChrystal had a new theory to approach the Afghan problem. He wanted a bigger budget to spend more money on the Afghan people in the south, bribe them and buy their loyalty. The U.S. ambassador refused McChrystal’s theory and insisted on military tactics, killing women that raise possible Taliban fighters and small children that would grow up to become Taliban. McChrystal tried to explain to the ambassador that in order to win the war the Coalition has to

neutralize the public. The ambassador insisted on killing women and children in conformity with the policy of President Obama. The ambassador complained McChrystal should order more raids on Taliban regardless of civilian casualties. McChrystal is not better, but he is ahead of them. He knows the Coalition will eventually lose the war in Afghanistan and the leaders will be held accountable for war crimes and misconduct. When that time comes, McChrystal will be considered the wise man. He will tell everyone he tried to put sense into the current leaders.

Siba’i went on to claim that McChrystal knows much about American plans for Afghanistan that he has yet to reveal, such as a proposal to turn Kabul over to private security companies like Blackwater. According to Siba’i, such a proposal would result in private firms carrying out random killings and assassinations, with heavy repercussions for the United States (almaqreze.net, June 25).

Forum members also posted the biography of the new military commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus (muslm.net, June 25). Forum comments on the biography were largely of the opinion that Petraeus will not be able to pull the United States back from being engulfed in a quagmire and defeat in Afghanistan.

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

## PKK Intensifies Violence to Bring Turkey into Confrontation with the European Union

By Emrullah Uslu

Since the Turkish Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) determined to address the Kurdish question through what is called the “democratic initiative,” there has been hope that political violence would finally come to

an end after 25 years. Despite its shortcomings, the democratic initiative created a positive environment and many Kurdish intellectuals openly supported the process. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Minister of the Interior Besir Atalay have held many meetings with intellectuals, opinion leaders, and leaders of non-governmental organizations. Pro-Kurdish non-governmental organizations have also held conferences to discuss possible ways to end the violence (<http://www.demokratikacilimayurttaskatkisi.org>, May 10).

Yet the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan - PKK) has recently stepped up its attacks once again. The intensified PKK violence prompted the army to carry out at least two air raids and a small-scale ground incursion on rebel bases in northern Iraq. In the last two months the PKK has killed more than 60 soldiers. According to the Turkish military, 130 PKK militants lost their lives in that same time period (*Anadolu Ajansi*, June 18, 2010).

The call to intensify the war this summer was given back in January. Cemil Bayik, deputy head of the PKK and deputy chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (Koma Civaken Kurdistan – KCK, a Kurdish militant umbrella organization), laid out the PKK's strategy as following: “There is no reason to maintain the ceasefire [declared in March 2009]. The Justice and Development Party government is the last resort in the hand of the Turkish state. If we remove the AKP from power the state has to sit down with the PKK and negotiate with the PKK” ([gundem-online.net](http://gundem-online.net), January 6). The PKK's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, also thinks that the AKP's Kurdish initiative aims to eliminate the PKK and its affiliates ([gundem-online.net](http://gundem-online.net), May 28). In one of his weekly meetings with his lawyers, Ocalan stated that he would withdraw from being a peacemaker between the Kurds and Turkish state on May 31. From that time on it has been up to the PKK leaders in the field to decide whether or not to intensify the war (Firat News Agency, May 27).

The real reason behind the PKK's recent attacks is related to the police crackdown on the PKK's support bases in the city centers. Since April 2009, police have regularly launched operations against the KCK network. In those operations, hundreds of alleged PKK supporters were arrested, including elected mayors and heads of the local chapters of the pro-PKK Peace and Democratic Party (Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi - BDP). The arrests were not welcomed by the local people. KCK operations temporarily limited the PKK's activities in the city centers

until a new KCK appointee could take over. The PKK's self-perceived role as the guardian of Kurdish political institutions and municipalities against the operations of Turkish security forces created pressure on the group to take revenge.

According to Cemil Bayik, the AKP-ordered operations closed all doors and removed all opportunities for Kurdish political participation ([rojaciwan.com](http://rojaciwan.com), June 24). In a written statement, the KCK claims “Our leader, Abdullah Ocalan, is not responsible for the removal of the unilateral ceasefire. The AKP government, which is responsible for the intensification of war and loss of lives, is obscuring the reality through demagoguery... Holding our leader responsible for this process is a conscious distortion. This attempt is the indication of a new process of oppression and pressure on Ocalan” (Firat News Agency, June 25).

The PKK hopes to introduce a new political model in the Kurdish region, described as “democratic autonomy.” Abdullah Ocalan created the model based on the example of Northern Cyprus, where Turkish Cypriots have their own government, parliament, president, and other institutions ([gundem-online.net](http://gundem-online.net), May 24). Cemil Bayik described it as “a model that aims to mobilize the Kurdish people to make their own decisions and have their own governing institutions. It is a model that aims to organize Kurdish people in the political, social, cultural, economic, and security areas and solve their own problems through their free will.” Bayik thinks that this model will lessen the influence of the Turkish state on the Kurds (ANF News Agency, January 24).

At the same time as Bayik's endorsement of “democratic autonomy,” BDP mayors organized a meeting in Diyarbakir to declare that they will launch a political campaign in support of democratic autonomy. According to the statement, the mayors referred to the European Charter Of Local Self-Government (ECLSG), which Turkey signed in 1988 and with certain conditions adopted in its law in 1991 (Taraf, June 24). Indeed, the protocol allows local municipalities to function as semiautonomous governments, but because of the conditions placed on it by the Turkish government they are not able to exercise as much freedom as they wish. [1]

Bayik claims that the PKK is fighting this time to protect “democratic autonomy” from Turkish state suppression ([gundem-online.net](http://gundem-online.net), January 24). It seems that the PKK is developing a strategy to bring Turkey

into confrontation with the EU. Pro-PKK institutions and politicians hope that the ECLSG protocol provides them enough room to establish some level of autonomy in which they can escape from the central government's Turkish nationalist policies. Yet, they first need to highlight the conditions that Ankara put in place when it adapted the agreement for its domestic law and bring Turkey into confrontation with the EU to seek removal of these conditions. The PKK calculates that Turkey will not want to remove the conditions. Therefore, it justifies its violence and presents Turkey as a violator of international agreements.

Despite the PKK's new strategy, the leaders of Turkey imply that intensified PKK attacks are somehow related to Israel. Prime Minister Erdogan, for instance, sparked domestic controversy when he argued that the PKK is a "subcontractor" of foreign powers. In response, the opposition Republican Peoples Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP) asked Erdogan to reveal the power behind the PKK (*Dogan Haber Ajansi*, June 21). What is interesting about the theory of Israeli involvement in the PKK's recent attacks is that even military generals believe that Israel is supporting the PKK. Three renowned journalists in Ankara confirmed that Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Aslan Guner, an Ankara veteran known for his expertise in the intelligence world, had invited journalists to his office directly following a December 2009 PKK attack in Resadiye (Tokat province) to inform them of a link between Israel and the attacks (*Today's Zaman*, June 8). A TSK spokesman later denied the journalists' claims (*Today's Zaman*, June 21).

Given the fact that conspiracy theories sometimes run rampant in Ankara, it is likely that even high ranking generals may buy into the conspiracy theories. However, a journalist revealed (under the condition of anonymity) that when he visited Minister of Interior Besir Atalay, the minister informed him that Chief of the General Staff Ilker Basbug also thinks that Israel was behind the PKK's attack on Resadiye that killed seven soldiers. [2] There are similar concerns in Turkey over possible Israeli involvement in the May 31 PKK attack on Iskenderun Naval Base that killed seven servicemen (see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 12).

In response to allegations concerning PKK-Israeli ties, the KCK issued a statement citing Ankara's purchase of Heron unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Israel, which went unaffected by the recent flotilla incident. The KCK says the UAVs will be used against them

and that Erdogan and Turkish president Abdullah Gul "have openly made an agreement with Israel in order to annihilate our movement, which totally exposes the insincerity and hypocrisy in the face of our peoples and the whole Islamic world" (Firat News Agency, January 24).

It seems that in the last 25 years nothing has changed in Ankara. Instead of examining the causes of the problem and trying to understand what motivates the PKK to increase its use of violence, leaders in Ankara develop conspiracy theories and blame foreign states. In the 1990s it was Syria, European countries, Russia and even the United States who were to blame, but now, soured Turkish-Israeli relations provide a perfect reason to point the finger at Israel. The blame-games of Turkish leaders, civilian and military alike, are usually related to domestic politics and are used to find an easy escape from responsibilities. This time, however, the Turkish public is asking its leaders to do something to end the violence, which leaves the Erdogan government on shaky ground.

*Emrullah Uslu is a Turkish terrorism expert and currently a PhD candidate at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Utah.*

#### Notes

1. Hüsamettin Inac and Feyzullah Unal, "Avrupa Yerel Yonetimler Ozerklik Sartı Ve Türkiye'de Belediyeler," <http://sbe.dpu.edu.tr/17/1-24.pdf>.
2. Authors' interview, Istanbul, January 16, 2010.

## Salafi-Jihadis and the North Caucasus: Is There a New Phase of the War in the Making?

*By Murad Batal al-Shishani*

Several Jordanian newspapers and websites published details in early June about 24-year-old Jordanian Anas Khalil Khadir, stating that he was killed in Chechnya after joining the jihad there. Khadir's family members, who live in Zarqa (a city located east

of Jordan's capital city of Amman), told journalists that Khadir was very attached to the Chechen cause, leading him to abandon his medical engineering studies at Zarqa's Hashemite University and depart for Chechnya a week before his final exams (*Khaberni* [Amman], June 7; *al-Sabeel* [Amman], June 3; *Bab al-Arab*, June 7).

A few days after the news of Khadir was reported, newspapers announced the death of another Jordanian in Chechnya, Yasser Ammara. Described as "a prominent Jordanian-born warlord," Ammara was one of nine militants killed during a battle in the mountainous forests of the Vedeno region during the government's "Operation Vengeance" (Interfax, June 11). The author's sources confirmed that unlike Khadir, Ammara had been in Chechnya since early 2000.

The story of Khadir was more alarming than that of Ammara in terms of developments in the North Caucasus because Khadir first travelled to Chechnya on December 21, 2008, long after the 2003 to 2004 decline of the Arab fighters in Chechnya phenomenon. The timing was also significant because it coincided with increasing interest in the North Caucasus and Chechnya on Salafi-Jihadis websites and internet forums and a period of rare postings on the topic.

The revival of Salafi-Jihadi interest in the North Caucasus comes in the context of two strategies that al-Qaeda and affiliated Salafi-Jihadist groups are implementing: seeking safe havens and creating a local, grass-roots jihad that will sustain such safe havens.

#### Background: Arab fighters in Chechnya

The presence of Arab Salafi-Jihadis in the North Caucasus goes back to the mid-1990s. Since then, Arab fighters have passed through three phases:

- The first phase coincided with the beginning of the First Chechen War in 1995, as Arab fighters began to move to Chechnya from Afghanistan and Tajikistan. At the time, many of these fighters were seeking a new jihadi battlefield after the Afghanistan campaign had come to an end with the Soviet withdrawal, while others had been in Tajikistan assisting Islamists in the 1992-1994 civil war. During Chechnya's first war, Arab fighters did not create a separate movement but instead acted under the nationalist banner of President Dzhokar Dudayev.
- The second stage of the Arab fighters' presence in Chechnya started after the assassination of Dudayev, as they created alliances with the temporary president Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who, in common with other hard-line nationalists, was showing a new inclination towards political Islam. Well-funded jihadis helped local Islamists to develop their presence in Chechnya by attracting youngsters to the movement from both Chechnya and the neighboring republics, building Shari'a courts, Islamizing the society and, more significantly, opening training camps which attracted new Arab fighters from various countries.

The number of Arab fighters increased between 1997 and 1999 with 45% of Arab fighters going to Chechnya during that period. Their composition break down was as follows: 59% Saudis, 14% Yemenis, 10% Egyptians, 6% Kuwaitis and the remaining percentage from various Arab countries. [1]

The alliance between Arab fighters under Saudi Arabia's Ibn al-Khattab (a.k.a. Samir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem) and the Chechen hard-line nationalists led by Shamil Basayev was based on a mutually beneficial exchange, but proved a catalyst for the re-invasion of Chechnya in 1999 after this alliance tried to assist Islamists in the neighboring republic of Dagestan when Russian forces tried to prevent their establishment of an Islamic state. Chechnya's second war erupted as federal forces invaded Chechnya in response.

- The Second Chechen War marked the last major phase of jihadi activity in the North Caucasus region, being the fall of the Salafi-Jihadis presence. Five factors contributed to this decline and played a major role in alienating jihadis inside Chechnya; 1) the increase of opposition to the Islamization policies they implemented among Chechen society, which people considered a distortion of their national culture; 2) the tightened grip on fundraising for armed groups that followed the September 2001 attacks; 3) the assassinations of many prominent jihadi leaders (it was the policy of the Russians to target both jihadi and nationalist leaders); 4) closing the borders of Chechnya; and 5) the growing differences in the agendas of the Arab fighters and the independence movement in Chechnya.

The Arab fighters started to leave Chechnya, some heading to Iraq, where a new jihadi battlefield was in the making. However, the ideology based on a unification of the North Caucasus remained and later played a significant role in the creation of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus, which serves as an umbrella group for all emerging North Caucasus armed Islamist groups.

Although the pro-Russian government led by Ramzan Kadyrov has announced the normalization of the situation in Chechnya, the neighboring republics (Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria in particular) have witnessed an increase in armed activities.

### The Re-Emergence of Salafist Interest in the North Caucasus

Salafi-Jihadis consider the North Caucasus region to be an important strategic spot. Since the late days of 2007, they have shown a renewed interest in the region after their earlier role in the area diminished several years ago. This re-emergence in interest has various forms, most notably the remarkable cyber re-activation, after a lengthy period without such postings on jihadi websites. Jihadist web-forums have circulated numerous items on Chechnya since early 2008, criticizing Muslims for “forgetting” Chechnya and dedicating pages to the jihad in Chechnya, including fatwas, videos and articles praising the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus and its leader Doku Umarov. These items have appeared on significant websites and forums such as the Minbar al-Jihad wa'l-Tawhid website of the well known Jordanian jihadi ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (a website that was personally recommended by Osama Bin Laden) and the influential al-Faloja web-forum (al-faloja.info, January 14). An integral part of this cyber re-activation is the emphasis given to translating jihadi materials into Russian, specifically on the aforementioned websites. This activity is significant, as many local North Caucasus jihadis cannot read Arabic.

Another manifestation of the re-emerging interest in the North Caucasus is seen in attempts of jihadis in other theaters to link the Islamic Emirates of the Caucasus to the global jihad movement. For instance, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the late Amir of the Islamic State of Iraq (i.e. al-Qaeda in Iraq), directed a November 2008 open letter to Barack Obama immediately after he was elected President of the United States on behalf of Salafi-Jihadis in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Caucasus, urging him to withdraw American troops from Iraq (muslm.net/vb, November 9, 2008).

Another indication of the ongoing effort to link the Caucasian armed groups to the global jihad movement was seen in the exchange of letters between Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Anzor Astemirov (a.k.a. Amir Sayfullah), the late leader of Yarmuk Jama'at in Kabardino-Balkaria and an ideologue of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus, who was killed by security forces in March. The letters concerned Astemirov's translation of al-Maqdisi's books into Russian. Astemirov also sent al-Maqdisi the Emirates' ruling against the London-based Prime Minister of the nationalist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI), Ahmed Zakayev, declaring him an apostate. The ruling was approved by al-Maqdisi (Tawhed.ws, March 26). Astemirov also asked al-Maqdisi about the Shari'a ruling on participating in the Olympics (Tawhed.ws, March 26). The 2014 Winter Olympics are scheduled to be held in Sochi, a city in present day Krasnodar Krai that was formerly home to the Muslim Circassians, driven out of the region with enormous losses by Russian imperial troops in the 19th century. Al-Maqdisi ruled that participation is prohibited. Seeking direct advice from jihad ideologues such as al-Maqdisi demonstrates the increasing attempts to tie the Caucasian armed groups, which are still driven by local grievances, to the global jihad.

### Conclusion

These developments in the evolution of the Salafist jihad in the Caucasus coincide with new strategies that al-Qaeda and its affiliates are currently implementing: seeking the creation of safe havens in various geographical areas, and building a localized jihad by convincing local elements to absorb the Salafi-Jihadi ideology rather than just allying the movement with local militant groups. This strategy has shown degrees of success in areas such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. The adaptation of such a strategy by al-Qaeda and affiliated groups comes in the context of the lessons learned from their experiences in Iraq and Chechnya, the most important lesson that when they lost the support of the local people, they also lost their local bases.

In this context, the North Caucasus has recently generated its own local jihadis, such as Astemirov and the two Daghestani female suicide bombers who attacked the Moscow Metro on March 28. Maryam Sharipova and Dzhanet Abdurakhmanova, unlike most of the female suicide bombers from the region, were not directly linked to the war-torn situation in Chechnya, but acted instead for ideological reasons. This would appear to demonstrate the attraction of jihadi ideology in some



quarters. Some observers think that the pressure applied by local and federal authorities against the people in Dagestan make jihadi ideologies more attractive.

Although it remains unconfirmed whether the young Jordanian Anas Khalil Khadir was linked directly to al-Qaeda and affiliated Salafi-Jihadis, his departure to Chechnya at a time when the interest of jihadis in the region was re-emerging raises questions about whether the North Caucasus will become a new hotbed of jihadis from various countries as the Salafi-Jihadi ideology renews its efforts to take root there.

*Murad Batal al-Shishani is an Islamic groups and terrorism issues analyst based in London.*

#### Notes

1. Author's paper presented at the Jamestown Foundation conference September 14, 2006 entitled "The Rise and Fall of Arab Fighters in Chechnya." The figures were compiled by the author.