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NIGER DELTA'S "OSAMA BIN LADEN" SURRENDERS TO NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES

Nigerian president Umaru Yar'Adua declared an amnesty program for armed groups in the Niger Delta on June 25. Those taking advantage of the program must disarm, renounce the use of violence and partake in rehabilitation efforts. The amnesty will be in effect until October 4. The Inspector General of the Nigerian Police, Mike Okiro, denied claims that the federal government introduced the amnesty under pressure from foreign governments to bring a resolution to the crisis in the Niger Delta where attacks continue to reduce oil output and raise global prices (Rhythm FM [Abuja], June 24).

The only local warlord to present himself in person for the amnesty so far is Solomon Ndigbara, better known in the Delta by his nickname; "Osama bin Laden." Ndigbara is a local force in the Ogoni region of Rivers State. On June 26, Ndigbara met federal authorities about 25km east of Port Harcourt to turn in a small quantity of weapons, including two AK-47 assault rifles, five FN Light Automatic Rifles (FN-LAR), three pump-action rifles, a homemade pistol and about 1,000 rounds of ammunition. The disarmament ceremony was largely symbolic as most of Ndigbara's weapons remain with his 60 followers in the creeks of Rivers State (ThisDay Online [Lagos], June 27).

So far the main armed group in the Delta, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has rejected the amnesty as one better suited for



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criminals than political activists. MEND is seeking enhanced federalism for the region, restitution for civilian losses in military operations and the release of MEND leader Henry Okah from detention (Okah was extradited from Angola to face treason charges in Nigeria in 2007). Two days after proclaiming the amnesty, President Yar'Adua announced Henry Okah would be among those eligible to apply.

Despite early reports that four other militant leaders were ready to surrender, Farah Dagogo, Ebikabowei Victor (a.k.a. "General" Boyloaf), Ateke Tom and Soboma George will send proxy representatives to a Port Harcourt meeting with federal officials to discuss what they described as "grey areas" in the amnesty program. (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 24). The militant leaders are wary of the amnesty, recalling the fate of two others, Asari Dokubo and Soboma Jackrich (a.k.a. Egberipapa), who came in for peace talks but were instead arrested (*Vanguard*, June 24). The four declared in a statement:

We see the proclamation of amnesty strictly as an offer of peace; this is because the Niger Delta militants are not criminals, but freedom fighters who have over the years given their time, money, energy, liberty and lives towards ensuring that Niger Delta people receive a fair treatment from the oil companies and the federal government, that the God given resources of Niger Delta people are controlled by them and that the Niger Delta environment is restored and fully protected from further degradation (AllAfrica.com, June 27).

The amnesty has also been rejected by another umbrella group, the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC). A spokesperson condemned the regime in Abuja while acknowledging a degree of local responsibility for the ongoing crisis. "The Yar'Adua junta has failed the people of the Ijaw and Niger Delta region even as we recognize that the people of the region today constitute their own biggest problems. Fifth columnist elements, incompetent political leaders and outright stupidity have corrupted the minds of the people" (ThisDay Online, June 27).

Less than 12 hours after the amnesty was proclaimed, MEND blew up a Shell well head in Delta State in response to what MEND claimed was a Joint Task Force (JTF) "punitive expedition" against the community of Agbeti and retaliation for the destruction of militants'

homes there (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 26; *Times of Nigeria*, June 25). Most security operations in the Niger Delta are carried out by the JTF, composed of representatives from all of Nigeria's security agencies (Afrik.com, June 22). Recent operations by the JTF in Delta State, particularly in the Gbaramatu Kingdom, have displaced thousands of villagers.

The attack on the Shell installation in Delta State followed MEND's destruction of a major pipeline in Rivers State on June 25, an event timed to coincide with the visit to Nigeria of Russian President Dimitri Medvedev to discuss a Russian-Nigerian joint gas venture, the unfortunately named "Nigaz." A MEND letter to Medvedev warned, "This is the fate that awaits the gas pipelines you plan to invest in if justice is not factored into the whole process" (*Daily Sun* [Lagos], June 26).

IRAQI NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR DISCUSSES THE FUTURE OF THE IRANIAN MUJAHIDEN-E KHALQ (MEK)

Former Iraqi National Security Advisor Muwaffaq al-Rubay'i, a true insider to political events in Baghdad since the U.S. invasion of 2003, has started to give a number of lengthy interviews reflecting on his experiences over the last five years, from being the attending physician at the execution of Saddam Hussein to negotiating security agreements with Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

Al-Rubay'i is a British educated Shi'a neurologist and a former close ally of Ahmad Chalabi, the disgraced Iraqi politician and fugitive from Jordan. He returned to Iraq from London in 2003 and was appointed a year later as National Security Advisor by the Coalition Provisional Authority. After being dismissed as National Security Advisor in June, al-Rubay'i formed a new political party, al-Wasat (The Center). Contesting the procedures that led to his dismissal, al-Rubay'i claims he is still the Iraqi National Security Advisor.

Accounting the successes of the post-Saddam Iraqi government, al-Rubay'i cites the creation of a security infrastructure, the introduction of elections and a parliament, and the defeat of al-Qaeda and the militias. At the same time he acknowledges that ordinary citizens are worse off; services are a "catastrophe," agriculture is neglected, food distribution is inefficient compared to the Saddam era and industrial production has

nearly bottomed out. He admits, “We have committed thousands of strategic and tactical mistakes in the political process, on the security level, and in providing services” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 24).

Al-Rubay’i was asked about his role in isolating and disarming the Iranian Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a controversial Iraq-based Iranian opposition group with a U.S. terrorist designation. Efforts have been underway recently to reverse this designation so the MEK can be deployed against the Iranian regime. At the moment, the group is confined to Ashraf Camp in northeastern Iraq. Al-Rubay’i favors removing the group to western Iraq, saying Iran should not be given an excuse to attack Iraq as Turkey did with its offensives against the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan - PKK):

We want to move them [the MEK] so they would not pose a threat to Iranian national security, so they would be beyond the range of Iranian fire, and so we can remove any pretext for the Iranians to interfere in our internal affairs. We have asked the Iranians to step up their security measures on the border to prevent the smuggling of arms to the militias, and they responded positively. In return, we must do something, as a goodwill gesture (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 24).

Al-Rubay’i suggests MEK members have two options: to return to Iran voluntarily, or to return to their countries of origin, mostly in North America or Europe. He claims 250 MEK fighters have already accepted an amnesty in Iran.

Despite his differences with Iran, al-Rubay’i insists that cooperation is the best available path for the rival neighbors. “I do not agree with the Iranians politically, and my relationship with them cannot be described as amicable and friendly. However, I think that we in Iraq must find an equation for coexistence with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this must not be a confrontational formula as under Saddam Hussein” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 24). Deploying MEK’s bombers and assassins would not be part of a policy of coexistence.

Al-Rubay’i insists the MEK has launched a “political, media and public relations campaign” against him, “because I am convinced that Mujahideen Khalq and its members are a terrorist organization - like the Kurdistan Workers Party and al-Qaeda - and they should leave Iraq, but not necessarily go to Iran. What matters is that they should not remain in Iraq. We are not forcing

them to go back to Iran, but they should choose a third country” (Ilaf.com, June 27).

Jihadis Debate Attacks on Western Interests and U.N. Peacekeepers

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Jihadi internet forums recently discussed the religious permissibility of attacking Western interests in the Islamic world. Many jihadi forum members gave their opinions on a posting entitled “Do you endorse attacking Western interests in the Islamic world,” contributed by a forum member nicknamed Abi Mogheera (hanein.info, June 24).

Mogheera asked whether jihadis should attack Western interests and “the Crusader enemies of Islam” present all over the Islamic world in places such as Syria, Lebanon and the Arabian Peninsula, or concentrate jihadi efforts on the Iraqi and Afghan fronts. In Syria, for example, U.N. forces move around freely in the Syrian-held portion of the Golan Heights in their military and civilian vehicles. “Do you endorse striking at U.N. forces in Syria or is it too soon and the priority is for Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine?” asks Mogheera, revealing that he has been contemplating the issue for some time before posting the question in many jihadi forums. [1]

The first response to Mogheera’s poll came from a forum member nicknamed Nimir, who said the strategy of striking the Western and colonial presence in the region has proven successful and desirable because the battlefield is the whole world. Nimir legitimizes his argument by referencing Kuwait’s Abdullah al-Nefisi—a pro-al-Qaeda Islamic ideologue who suggested a suitcase of anthrax carried across the Mexican border to the U.S. could cause hundreds of thousands of casualties—who has expressed his support for attacks on Western targets anywhere in the world (see alnefisi.com). Further, Nimir outlines the war strategy adopted by the mujahideen against Western Crusaders as follows:

- Attack the enemy’s vital and economic domains.
- Attack the enemy’s interests and colonial presence in the Islamic world.
- Strike the enemy at home to elicit media and public support.

- Open up new fronts and quagmires in a war of attrition.

These are the main confrontation tactics the mujahedeen have used successfully for the last seven years according to Nimir, who claims dominance over the enemy and views the peace initiatives U.S. president Barak Obama was “forced” to launch as proof of that dominance. Nimir believes the global jihad is strong, making steady strides in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq. All countries in the way of the jihadi advance are on the verge of explosion. “Toward al-Aqsa [Jerusalem] ... toward al-Aqsa we shall press our ranks. We will not enjoy life until al-Aqsa is liberated,” concludes Nimir. Other forum members support Nimir’s allegations of jihadi victories despite, in their words, the many wounds inflicted on Muslims. Hence, the vast majority of forum members support attacking enemy targets all over the globe.

Regarding the legitimacy of attacking U.N. forces, Mogheera does not see any difference between the U.N. and other Western or non-Western forces, saying they all participate in the war on the Islamic umma [community], whether in Iraq, Palestine or Lebanon. “Haven’t civilians sought refuge with U.N. forces in Palestine many times during [the] Israeli invasion? But what happened? The U.N. refused to help them and allowed Israeli forces to kill them,” says Mogheera, referring to the U.N. school that was bombed during the Israeli assault on Gaza. The January 6 attack killed 40 Palestinian civilians who had gathered at the U.N. facility for protection.

Even though most jihadi forum members support attacking Western and U.N. interests anywhere, a few expressed reservations because of the possibility of killing innocent Muslim bystanders. In response, a forum member nicknamed Hafeed Yousef Bin Tashfeen declared, “Destroying the Ka’aba stone by stone is easier in God’s eyes than unjustly spilling a drop of Muslim’s blood,” changing the Prophet’s original saying, which reads “a drop of innocent human blood,” to suit Salafi-Jihadi beliefs. In addition, Tashfeen provided the Salafi-Jihadi target list created by a prominent Syrian al-Qaeda ideologue, Abu Musab al-Suri (a.k.a. Mustafa Setmariam Nasar). None of the forum chatters questioned al-Suri’s religious jihadi guidelines. Tashfeen describes the permissible jihadi targets as stipulated by al-Suri as the vital targets of Jews and Crusaders, including military bases, embassies, diplomatic missions,

oil facilities, maritime routes, Israeli hotels and private Western security companies.

Mogheera posted his question in other jihadi forums. Forum members from al-Fallujah said the mujahedeen should target military bases in the Land of the Two Holy Places [i.e. Saudi Arabia] and the Gulf States, as well as carry out attacks against the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), because the peacekeeping force blocks jihad and protects Israel (al-faloja1.com, June 24).

After viewing comments from different forums, Mogheera assured those concerned with killing innocents by reiterating the Salafi-Jihadis’ high concern for Muslim blood, accusing the Western media of twisting facts about the mujahedeen.

While almost all the postings on different jihadi forums supported attacking Western interests in Muslim countries and beyond, a very small number opposed targeting U.N. forces and facilities, especially in Palestine. The dissenters argue the U.N. facilities extend badly needed help to Palestinians, insisting that an attack on any American military base has a higher priority than attacking the U.N.

Regardless of all other Salafi-Jihadi ideologues, most pro-jihadi opinions are in concord with Osama bin Laden’s preaching. Bin Laden remains their most reliable source on jihadi issues. On the permissibility of attacking Western targets, the most repeated comment was a quote from one of Bin Laden’s speeches: “Don’t consult with anyone on the issue of striking the Americans - execute with God’s blessing.”

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Notes:

1. Mogheera refers here to the 76 members of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) Observer Group Golan and the 1045 members of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which includes troops from Austria, Canada, Croatia, India, Japan and Poland.

A Profile of the Late Qari Zainuddin Mahsud –Waziristan Militant and Opponent of Baitullah Mahsud

By Mukhtar A. Khan

Pakistan's military is facing tough resistance in its battle against the Taliban in Pakistan's South Waziristan tribal agency along the border with Afghanistan. The military has been pounding Taliban leader Baitullah Mahsud's strongholds with jet fighters and artillery (*Daily Times* [Lahore], June 28). The government claims to have tightened the noose around Baitullah, but so far there seem to be few tangible gains on the part of the military. However, Baitullah Mahsud and his allies in South and North Waziristan have been successfully targeting military convoys and inflicting heavy damage on government installations. The government faced its biggest setback when Baitullah Mahsud successfully plotted to kill the government-sponsored militant leader Qari Zainuddin, who was murdered by his own bodyguard inside his house in Dera Ismail Khan. Qari Zainuddin, leader of the Abdullah Mahsud group (a rival to Baitullah's Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan – TTP), had publicly denounced Baitullah Mahsud just a few weeks earlier for his terrorist activities inside Pakistan, calling the TTP leader an enemy of both Pakistan and Islam who was following the agenda of some foreign countries. Qari Zainuddin actively supported Pakistan's military operation against Baitullah and had also started recruiting a militia to fight against him.

Qari Zainuddin belonged to the same Mahsud tribe in South Waziristan as Baitullah. However, he came from a different sub-clan, the Shaman Khel. Baitullah belongs to the Shobi Khel. Zainuddin was born in the village of Shaho Deeba in the Sarokai subdivision of South Waziristan. He received his early education from Jami'a Speen Mosque and then went to Darul Uloom Faizoo in Lakki Marwat for further studies. He also spent some time in the seminary of Maulana Taqi Usmani in Korangi, Karachi. From there, he went straight to Afghanistan and served in the Taliban regime before returning to Pakistan for treatment of his arthritis (BBC Urdu, June 23).

When Taliban leader Nek Muhammad Wazir was killed in a 2004 U.S. drone attack and Commander Abdullah

Mahsud declared himself to be the new leader of Taliban, his cousin Qari Zainuddin Mahsud also joined him. When Abdullah Mahsud was killed by Pakistani security forces in Baluchistan in July 2007, Qari Zainuddin and other members of the Abdullah Mahsud group suspected Baitullah of informing the government of their leader's whereabouts (BBC Urdu, June 25).

The two competing Taliban groups already had disputes over the issue of leadership. After the death of Abdullah Mahsud, his younger brother Masudur Rahman took the leadership of his group, but soon he too was killed in a bomb blast, again suspected to be masterminded by Baitullah. With Masood's death, the leadership of the group shifted towards Qari Zainuddin Mahsud, who was offered refuge by Mullah Nazir, the head of the Taliban in the Ahmadzai Wazir area. Mullah Nazir had already developed differences with Baitullah when Nazir wanted the stranded Uzbek fighters of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan to leave the South Waziristan agency (see *Terrorism Focus*, April 10, 2007; for Mullah Nazir see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 14, 2007). Mullah Nazir launched aggressive campaigns against the Uzbeks but Baitullah gave them shelter, enraging Mullah Nazir.

By last February Qari Zainuddin had no other option than to leave the Ahmadzai Wazir area of South Waziristan when Mullah Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur created a united front with Baitullah to counter any common enemy or threat. Qari Zainuddin shifted himself and several hundred fighters to Khaisura in the Jandola region of South Waziristan. There he was given refuge in the community of Kari Wam by Qari Turkistan Bhattani, another anti-Baitullah militant leader. During Zainuddin's stay there, he killed some 30 pro-Baitullah militants (including Baitullah's brother) in Bannu, Tank and other nearby areas. The fear of revenge from Baitullah Mahsud forced Qari Zainuddin's entire family to move to Abbottabad in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) (*Dawn* [Karachi], June 23). One of Zainuddin's uncles is still believed to be a very close aide of Baitullah.

Qari Zainuddin rose to prominence when the Pakistani government announced its plan to carry out military operations against Baitullah. He was taken to Islamabad to meet with media representatives and established two offices; one in Tank and the other in the Madina Colony of Dera Ismail Khan. Zainuddin was publicly critical of Baitullah's methods, especially his reliance on suicide bombings, maintaining that 95% of Waziristan's tribesmen had turned against Baitullah

(*Dawn*, June 25; Associated Press of Pakistan, June 17). The fiery Zainuddin, in his mid 20's, was considered by Islamabad to be the best challenger to Baitullah, but he was killed in the Madina Colony by his own bodyguard, Gulbadin Mahsud, who was his close friend for six years (*Daily Times* [Lahore], June 24). Before joining Qari Zainuddin, he had also been a bodyguard of Baitullah Mahsud for some time. Pakistan's Interior Ministry has announced a probe into Zainuddin's death (*The Nation* [Islamabad], June 23).

The killing of Qari Zainuddin and the manner of his burial speaks to the fragility of government influence in the region. Despite the insistence of Qari Zainuddin's family that he be buried in his ancestral graveyard in South Waziristan, he was laid to rest in the Madina Colony of Dera Ismail Khan in a mostly Shi'a graveyard (the Taliban consider the Shi'a to be non-Muslims). The government did not dare to bury him in South Waziristan for the fear of Baitullah's men disinterring and desecrating his body. Soon after the funeral of Qari Zainuddin, his younger brother Misbahuddin Mahsud was appointed as head of the Abdullah Mahsud group. He has vowed to continue the battle against Baitullah Mahsud.

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Lashkar- e-Taiba's Financial Network Targets India from the Gulf States

By Animesh Roul

An impending threat from the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist group has prompted security establishments to raise an alert along India's western sea-coast. According to intelligence sources, the LeT's marine wing is planning a Mumbai-type incursion to target vital installations in the three coastal states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa. The group is also reported to have funneled huge

amounts of money from its Gulf-based networks to fund jihad activities in India (*Times of India*, June 30). This is not an isolated intelligence alert. The threat emanating from the LeT was partially revealed following the recent arrest of Muhammad Omar Madni, a close associate of LeT/Jamaat-ud- Dawa chief Hafeez Muhammad Saeed. The arrest and interrogation of Madni revealed several startling details, including new routes used by terrorists, the location of bases inside and outside India, terrorist finances, and the recruitment strategy of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Muhammad Omar Madni, who also oversees LeT's Nepal operations, was on a mission to recruit youths and send them to Pakistan for training. Madni travelled widely through Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and the Gulf nations, including Saudi Arabia, seeking funding and logistical support. His task was to recruit educated and computer-savvy youths from the major metropolises of India (Press Trust of India, June 7). Indian agencies believe he is not the only LeT recruiter in the sprawling hinterland of India (*Statesman*, [Kolkata], June 5). Madni's brother Hafiz Muhammad Zubair, another Lashkar operative who worked closely with him, is presently based in Qatar (*Telegraph* [Kolkata], June 6).

Besides the usual routes of intrusion in Jammu and Kashmir, LeT has managed to build alternate routes through the porous borders of Nepal and Bangladesh while establishing bases in the Gulf countries. Investigating agencies have now confirmed that LeT is working on a new strategy which involves using Dubai as the center of planning for future strikes against India (*India Today*, June 22). Past and ongoing terror investigations suggest the Gulf countries have been the major hubs for LeT terrorists and many terrorist plots against India are now hatched outside Pakistan's territory.

After groping in the dark for some time, India's intelligence agencies have now confirmed that the Gulf link to terror in India is thriving and there are LeT cells operating in the Gulf that have financed and facilitated terrorist operations in India.

Mumbai's crime branch probe revealed that the November 2008 Mumbai terror events were financed by LeT's Gulf based cells and operatives who masterminded and executed a series of blasts in Indian urban centers (Bangalore, Ahmadabad, Delhi and Surat) in 2008. These operations were carried out in collusion with militants of the Indian Mujahedeen (IM) and the proscribed Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).

While investigating the August 2003 twin blasts in Mumbai (car bombs at the Gateway of India and the Zaveri Bazaar), Mumbai Police unearthed a strong Dubai link. The plot was hatched by LeT's Dubai operatives, who colluded with sleeper cells in Hyderabad, Ernakulum and Chennai. The blasts were claimed by an unknown group—the "Gujarat Muslim Revenge Force" (GMRF)—one of the many groups set up by SIMI and LeT following the 2002 Gujarat communal riots to avenge atrocities perpetrated against the Muslim community (Press Trust of India, October 10, 2003). Hanif, one of the Lashkar militants arrested in connection with the blasts, reportedly told police about the planning, logistics and targets of the LeT's GMRF wing. Since 1993, Hanif worked in Dubai as an electrician and was sent to Mumbai in September 2002 to organize and execute the attacks. Police also interrogated Hanif about his ties to Basheer, a fugitive SIMI figure who fled to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and one Abu Hamza, affiliated to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (*Frontline* [Chennai], September 13-26, 2003).

Another major example of Lashkar's Gulf connections arose in mid-2006, following the serial commuter train blasts in Mumbai. Mumbai's Anti-Terrorist Squad seized approximately 37,000 Saudi Riyals from the residences of the LeT's Mumbai cell chief, Faizal Ataur Rehman Sheikh (*Indian Express*, August 2, 2006). The money reportedly came in two installments from Saudi Arabia via the hawala network operated by Faizal's London-based brother Rahil Sheikh and another Lashkar operative identified as Rizwan Ahmed Davre, an IT professional based in Riyadh. [1] Rizwan acted as a conduit between the unidentified Saudi funder, Pakistan based LeT commander Azam Cheema and Faizal Sheikh. Cheema reportedly designated Davre the 'amir-e-baitulmaal' (chief exchequer) for his able handling of monetary transactions (*Indian Express*, October 1, 2006)

Investigations by India's intelligence agencies into the 2008 urban terrorist attacks uncovered ties to many Gulf hotspots, especially the financial networks in Muscat (Oman). At least four LeT operatives handled India operations from Gulf cities like Muscat and Sharjah. They are identified as Wali (a.k.a Shameem), Muslim Basheer, Sarfaraz Nawaz (a.k.a Hakeem Sarfoor) and Abu Haroon. These four are believed to be of Pakistani origin and to have been deputed in the Gulf to raise funds and monitor operations planned for India. While Wali was involved in fundraising activities and

responsible for coordinating with SIMI and IM militants in India, Muslim Basheer, based in Muscat, was the chief coordinator for the LeT in the Gulf. Funds for the terrorist operations were raised by Wali, who provided the money for the blasts and who sent youths from the southwestern state of Kerala to Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK) for terrorist training (*New Indian Express* [Chennai], March 27). Investigating agencies identified Abu Haroon, a travel agent in Muscat, as the operative who facilitated the movement of money to India from the Gulf region through hawala channels. Abu Haroon also coordinated between the Lashkar leadership in Pakistan and India (Rediff.com, May 27). The fourth terrorist, Sarfaraz Nawaz, another LeT man from Muscat and a former SIMI leader who likely fled to Oman following the countrywide crackdown on SIMI establishments, was brought from Muscat to India in a dramatic secret operation earlier this year by India's external intelligence agency, Research & Analysis Wing (RAW). The swift operation surprised many Indian officials, especially in the absence of any extradition pact between India and Oman (Rediff.com, March 04, 2009).

Three other terrorists involved in the July 2008 Bangalore serial blasts and other incidents have been identified as Saleem and Jaheed from Bangladesh (hawala operators) and Ali Abdul Azeez Hooti of Oman, the chief terrorist financier.

The Gulf's increasing ties to terrorism resurfaced when investigations into the November 2008 Mumbai carnage tracked a similar pattern involving Gulf-based financiers and Lashkar coordinators. The role of Aziz Hooti as one of the financers in this connection is currently under probe. Hooti, the Oman based businessman and key Lashkar operative there, was in touch with Lashkar terrorist Fahim Ansari just before late November's carnage in Mumbai. At present, Fahim Ansari is on trial and Aziz Hooti is in the custody of the Oman police for plotting against Western establishments in Oman. According to the information shared between Oman and Indian police, Aziz Hooti could have had direct ties to the Mumbai attackers. It is now believed in investigating circles that both Aziz Hooti and Nawaz played vital roles in financing terrorist activities in India, especially in providing funds for Indians taking jihadi training in the PAK region (*The Hindu*, May 28; Rediff.com, May 28).

Nawaz's interrogation has revealed many facts about Lashkar's plans in southern India. According to his

statement, he and Ummer Haji, an IM cadre and key figure in the terror network in south India, had hatched a plan to carry out serial bomb blasts in Chennai and Bangalore (*New Indian Express*, June 29). However, Lashkar's Chennai plot was dropped by Wali due to funding issues. Haji is the man who sent Kerala youths to Muzaffarabad in Kashmir for training. Aziz Hooti was also involved in the Bangalore plan while the terrorist triumvirate (Wali, Nawaz and Hooti) met in Sharjah in early 2008. Nawaz's statement also sheds some light on Lashkar's operational strategy in southern India. Bangalore police revealed that Nawaz was in close touch with Abdul Nazar Madhani, leader of the People's Democratic Party (PDP - a left wing Kerala political party) (*New Indian Express* [Chennai], March 28)

SIMI has operational ties with many militant student groups, including the Saudi Arabian Jamayyatul Ansar (JA), whose membership is comprised of former SIMI activists and expatriate Indian Muslims. It should be emphasized that the LeT and its Jamaat ud-Dawah (JuD) subsidiary were born out of the Ahl-e-Hadith (AH) movement with roots in the Middle East and in the Indian subcontinent. LeT largely draws its ideological inspirations from this transnational Islamic puritanical movement that openly propagates the doctrine of jihad in India. AH has been influential in the subcontinent with active ties to Saudi Wahhabis and strong diaspora links. One of the reasons for this could be the AH inspired student movements (e.g. the Mujahid Students Movement) active in Kerala with branches in Gulf countries, along with Indian Islahi centers in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait. [2]

The beginning of this year was marked by Islamabad's crackdown on the LeT and other Pakistan based terror groups in which LeT came under severe pressure from the Pakistan administration to de-escalate its jihadi agenda against India. Despite the crackdown and the detention and subsequent release of LeT leaders in Pakistan, the LeT is reportedly once again looking to strike India by plotting against its vital installations and infrastructure.

The recent spurt of terror activities by the LeT in India has a direct connection to contributions from the Gulf-based cells that have planned and financed most of the group's operations. The LeT's Gulf based networks are becoming the lifeline for LeT/JuD operations in Pakistan and India. With this threat in view, India is now seeking a comprehensive anti-terrorism treaty with the Gulf

nations. For now, Madani and Nawaz's confessions have provided investigating agencies an outline of the shape of things to come regarding the LeT's plans for terrorist operations in India.

Animesh Roul is the Executive Director of Research at the New Delhi-based Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC).

Notes:

1. Hawala is an informal and alternative remittance system which operates outside of 'traditional' banking or financial channels.
2. Indian Islahi centers are Islamic organizations working among Indians (especially Keralites) in the Gulf countries to spread of the true message of Islam and guide Muslims away from the clutches of superstitious traditions, blind faiths, polytheism, etc. Indian Islahi Centers operate in almost all Gulf countries as a subsidiary of the Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen. In some Gulf countries and the northern states of India, this organization is known as Salafi Center. All these associations are working for the propagation of Quran and Sunnah among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Uncertainty Surrounds the Arrest of al-Qaeda Financier in Yemen

By Munir Mawari

Yemeni authorities announced in mid-June that they had arrested a Saudi citizen named Hassan bin Hussein Alwan in the province of Marib, saying that he is the biggest financier of al-Qaeda in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, as well as one of the most dangerous al-Qaeda elements in the Arabian Peninsula (26sep.net [Sana'a], June 14). Three days after this announcement, Yemen said that another Saudi al-Qaeda operative named Naif Dhess Yahia al-Harbi surrendered to Yemeni authorities (*Yemen Observer*, June 15; *yemenembassy.org*, June 18). The Saudi government confirmed the surrender of al-Harbi but denied having any information about the arrest of Alwan (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 15; *Alwatan*, June 19). Al-Harbi is expected to be returned to Saudi Arabia according to bilateral security arrangements with Yemen. The Saudi and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda were united last January to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

According to Yemeni sources, Alwan was moving between two provinces, Mareb in the north and Abyan in the south. Yemeni security sources said that he was arrested after six months of surveillance and monitoring of his movements by the Yemeni National Security Agency (NSA), which is run by Ammar Saleh, a relative of Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh (*Okaz* [Jeddah], June 16). The sources revealed that Alwan was collecting donations outside of Yemen under the guise of building mosques, schools, orphanages and charitable projects in Yemen, and that he has a distinct “ability to deceive the donors and convince them of the legitimacy of their donations” (*Saudi Gazette*, June 29). Alwan has been charged with forming a terrorist group in Yemen and financing its operations.

The NSA, which competes with Yemen’s Political Security Organization (PSO), considers Alwan’s arrest a big achievement and a remarkable example of Yemen’s efforts to track down al-Qaeda elements, including Saudis who escaped to Yemen after Saudi security services defeated them inside the kingdom (*Okaz*, June 16). Yemeni authorities said the Alwan investigation had led to further arrests of al-Qaeda cells in Sana’a and Marib, some of which were allegedly preparing new terrorist attacks in Yemen (*Yemen Times*, June 15). More is expected; “[Alwan] is expected to be an intelligence goldmine for information, which will hopefully result in the capture or killing of al-Qaeda militants” (*Yemen Observer*, June 15).

The NSA points out that there are differences and divisions among the elements of the so-called al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, led by Nasir al-Wuhayshi. The agency refers to disagreements centered on the struggle for leadership of the organization and its strategy. It appears that the surrender of prominent AQAP member Abu Hareth Muhammad al-Awfi (a.k.a. Muhammad Atiq Awayd al-Harbi) to the Yemeni authorities, who in turn handed him over to the Kingdom last February, was one sign of those divisions among various elements of the terrorist organization (*Okaz*, June 16). Al-Awfi was a former inmate of the U.S.-run Guantanamo Bay prison before being released into a Saudi rehabilitation program in November 2007.

Analysts and observers often hesitate to trust Yemeni authorities when they issue their periodic announcements regarding their fight against terrorism. Their often exaggerated or cosmetic claims of their anti-terrorist activities and victories are not as credible as claims made, for instance, by the Saudi authorities, who have a better

history of credibility. The uncertainty surrounding the arrest of Alwan should cause any independent observer or analyst to have two hypotheses on the matter, each supported by evidence from openly available sources:

Hypothesis I: Yemen’s claim is true and reliable

- The announcement of the arrest of Alwan was followed by the al-Harbi surrender. The Yemeni authorities are now expected to hand over two individuals to Saudi security, in order to implement the security agreement between these two countries. It is difficult to imagine that Yemen would knowingly put itself in an embarrassing situation with Saudi Arabia just to achieve a temporary media victory that is not true in reality.

- After the Yemeni authorities announced the arrest of Alwan, nine foreign citizens were abducted in the province of Sa’ada. They were allegedly kidnapped from an area near Jubara military camp, which hosts returnees from Afghanistan (Aleshteraki.net, June 27). Despite the fact that the Yemeni authorities tried to accuse north Yemen’s Houthi insurgents of the kidnapping, the killing of three of those hostages indicates that al-Qaeda is probably behind the crime, which was presumably an act taken in revenge for the arrest of Alwan. Knowing that al-Qaeda had similarly killed three Americans in Jebela in 2002 in almost the same fashion would support this conclusion (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 31, 2002). The Houthi insurgents have no history of killing foreigners.

- Although the name Alwan did not appear on jihadi websites prior to his arrest in Yemen, the fact that the jihadis did not come out with an immediate denial in the media lends credibility to Yemen’s official account. Al-Qaeda can usually be expected to deny any false news suggesting the defeat or arrest of any of its operatives.

- Although the arrest of Alwan was not announced in an official statement issued by the Yemeni Interior Ministry, as is the usual procedure, the 26 September newspaper published the story instead. The newspaper is owned by the Ministry of Defense and supervised by two advisers to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Ali Hassan al-Shater and Abdo Bourji. Reuters News Agency

also published the same story. The Reuters correspondent in Yemen, Muhammad Saddam, is the official translator to President Saleh. He would not send a story out without the approval of the president, who directly oversees the terrorism file.

Hypothesis II: The story of Alwan's arrest has an ulterior political motive.

Because of the unreliable record of the Yemeni authorities in the dissemination of information relating to the war on terrorism, the story of Alwan's arrest is questionable in some respects:

- In comparison to the Alwan case, the Saudi Arabian family of al-Harbi has confirmed his surrender to Yemeni authorities. His brother informed *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* newspaper that al-Harbi's family had provided the Saudi Government with information about the suspect (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 19). However, Alwan, described by the Yemeni authorities as a Saudi national, does not seem to have any trace of family or relatives in Saudi Arabia. No one from Saudi Arabia has said anything about him. Saudi Arabia normally relies heavily on relatives of terrorist suspects to compile information about them. It is strange that there is no information about Alwan from the Saudi side.

- Alwan's name does not appear on the "85 Most Wanted Terrorists" list promulgated by Saudi Arabia. This puts the Yemeni claims about his prominence and danger level in considerable doubt. The Saudi list contains the names of 83 Saudis and two Yemenis. Yemen's Ministry of the Interior maintains its own list of 154 wanted terrorists, 90 of whom are of Saudi origin and include a large number of the 83 Saudi fugitives named on the Saudi list (yemenembassy.org, March 30). Alwan's name does not appear in the Yemeni list of suspects either (*Yemen Observer*, June 15).

- Jihadist websites have ignored the alleged arrest of Alwan, and a few of them even expressed doubt about this news item (*al-Faloja*, June 2009).

- There are several plausible explanations as to why the story of the arrest of Alwan might be spurious. In Yemen, the NSA and the PSO compete in the field of controlling terrorism. According to a Yemeni writer, the NSA, which took credit for Alwan's arrest, has been criticizing the PSO for not doing enough against terrorism and for possibly being infiltrated by terrorists (Aleshteraki.net, January 12). This could, therefore, be a manipulative and suspect claim, especially given the present international pressure on Yemen for anti-terrorism activity.

Conclusion

If, in the near future, Saudi Arabian official sources confirm that Yemen has actually transferred two individuals (Alwan and al-Harbi) to Saudi Arabia, this would prove the first hypothesis. Should they transfer only al-Harbi, this would support acceptance of the second hypothesis and would also place Yemeni claims about Houthi responsibility for the abduction of the nine foreign citizens in Sa'ada into doubt as well.

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