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IRAQ-BASED KOMALA PARTY DESCRIBES THE STRUGGLE FOR IRANIAN KURDISTAN

The leader of an armed Kurdish-Iranian opposition group recently described his group’s continuing struggle for an autonomous Iranian Kurdistan and his views on the future of the Islamist Shi’a regime in Tehran. Details were provided in an interview with Abdullah Mohtadi, the secretary-general of the Komala Party (the short form for the group’s full name, Komalay Shoreshegeri Zahmatkeshani Kurdistanani Iran - The Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan), who spoke from al-Sulaymaniya in Kurdish northern Iraq (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 1).

The party was formed in 1969 by Ibrahim Alizadeh to promote an autonomous status for the Kurdish community in Iran. The group took up arms in 1979 as one of a number of leftist groups to oppose the Shah. Since then it has focused on creating an autonomous Kurdish region based on the northwestern Iranian provinces of Kurdistan, Ilam, Kermanshan and Western Azerbaijan, all of which have significant Kurdish populations, as well as Assyrian and Armenian minorities. The four provinces roughly cover the area included in the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (1946).

Komala was driven out of Iran and into Iraq in 1983, where they were initially greeted coldly by the Ba’athist regime, though they were later accepted by Baghdad as a card that could be played against Iran. This did not prevent the group from being attacked with artillery and poison gas during Saddam’s anti-



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Kurdish Anfal campaign in 1988-89. Today Komala has split into a smaller Communist faction intent on preserving the group's original Marxist-Leninist orientation and a larger and more moderate socialist faction led by Abdullah Mohtadi.

Inside Iran, the party led a brief rebellion in the largely Kurdish city of Mahabad in 2005 but backed down when it realized the revolt was incapable of toppling the regime and would only bring heavy reprisals (*Jerusalem Post*, August 23, 2007). As a result of this experience, the movement remains an armed force but concentrates on political activities. Estimates of the number of available fighters range from 200 to 1,000. Komala fighters and officials are based in the Kara Dagh mountains outside the Kurdish city of al-Sulaymaniya in northern Iraq.

Secretary General Mohtadi views the creation of a "Greater Kurdistan" or even secession from Iran as "unrealistic," preferring the establishment of a "democratic, secular, federal Iran" (komala.org, July 3, 2007). The party blames Tehran for a host of ills in Iranian Kurdistan, including "the military occupation of Kurdistan, widespread poverty... the suppression of Kurdish culture, drug addiction, religious suppression, forced migration, imprisonment, terror, torture, and the killing of whoever opposes these tyrannical policies" (komala.org).

While Mohtadi urged Komala splinter groups to return to the mainstream party during the al-Sharq al-Aswat interview, he also condemned the activities of the better-known Parti bo Jiyani Azadi la Kurdistan (Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan – PJAK); "PJAK is the other face of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party]. It is not an independent party and was not established by the true Kurdish people in Iran. It does not serve the interests of the Kurdish liberation movement..."

Mohtadi opposes the methods and objectives of his fellow leftists in the PKK:

The problem with the PKK... I mean, the Kurdish toilers have every right to fight for their rights and their freedom. But the PKK as an organization is not reliable. They are very fanatic in their nationalism. They are very undemocratic in nature. They have no principles. I mean, they can deal with Satan. They can fight the Kurds... They have fought the Kurds much more than they have fought the Turks. When you study the history of the

PKK, you find out that they have been against every single Kurdish movement in every part of Kurdistan. At the same time they have had good friendly relations with all the states where the Kurds live, where the oppressed live (komala.org, July 3, 2007).

Komala demanded the overthrow of the Tehran regime in a 2006 manifesto signed by two other Kurdish-Iranian groups, but Mohtadi says the movement no longer wishes to "repeat the Iraqi scenario in Iran by overthrowing the regime." The Komala leader views the Iraqi decision to expel the Iranian opposition group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MeK) with some alarm, not through any common ideology or objectives, but as a possible precursor to the expulsion of the Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups based in northern Iraq. Mohtadi used the interview to remind Baghdad of the strategic importance of these groups; "The Kurdish forces constitute huge pressure cards against Iran. If these cards are lost, the Iraqi government will not have anything with which to bargain with Iran." When the Iranian regime "inevitably" collapses, the Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups will have a strong presence on the ground.

Mohtadi maintains that the Iranian reformers led by former President Mohammad Khatami have little chance of taking power after the coming elections in Iran because of the support the current regime has from the armed forces, the Revolutionary Guards, the Basiji paramilitary and the intelligence and security services.

CHINESE NAVY CONDUCTS INDEPENDENT OPERATIONS AGAINST SOMALI PIRATES

A second Chinese naval taskforce under Rear Admiral Yao Zhilou has arrived in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia to combat piracy in the area (Jiefangjun Bao Online, April 8). The new taskforce replaces the Chinese Navy's earlier taskforce, consisting of the multi-purpose missile destroyer DDG-169 *Wuhan*, the destroyer DDG-171 *Haikou* (equipped with phased-array radar and the latest long-range air defense missiles) and the Qiandaohu class supply ship *Weishanhu* (Xinhua, December 26, 2008; *China Daily*, December 26, 2008). Since their arrival on January 6, the Chinese ships rescued three ships from pirates and drove off more than 100 suspicious vessels while providing naval escorts through the region (Xinhua, April 5).

The second taskforce consists of China's most advanced missile destroyer, the DDG-167 *Shenzhen*, and the

FFG-570 *Huangshan*, the navy's latest model frigate, which has a structural design intended to reduce its radar profile (Xinhua, April 2). The new task force also includes two helicopters and a contingent of navy Special Forces. Like the earlier taskforce, all the ships are modern products of Chinese naval yards. The ships belong to the South China Sea fleet, based in the port of Zhanjiang in Guangdong Province. The supply ship *Weishanhu* will remain in the Gulf to service the newly arrived ships.

More than 1,000 Chinese merchant ships pass through the Gulf of Aden each year. Before the Chinese deployment began, as much as 20% of Chinese shipping in the Gulf was attacked in the previous year. Chinese authorities were no doubt alarmed by the hijacking of a Saudi oil tanker earlier this year off the coast of Somalia. Chinese tankers carry the output of the Chinese oil operations in Sudan from Port Sudan on the Red Sea Coast into the piracy zone in the Gulf of Aden. Chinese oil firms have also signed deals with the autonomous government of Puntland (the base of most pirate activities) to exploit potential oil reserves in Somali waters off the Puntland coast (*Financial Times*, July 13, 2007; AFP December 19, 2007).

According to Rear Admiral Yao Zhilou, the second mission, expected to last six months, may expand its zone of operations in response to adaptations made by the pirates, including greater coordination, upgraded arms and wider areas of operation (*China Daily*, April 18).

Huang Jiayang, political commissar of the South Sea Fleet of the Chinese Navy, outlined the objectives of the Chinese naval deployment;

- Fulfilling international obligations.
- Protecting national interests.
- Demonstrating the “good image of the People’s Army and the Chinese Navy.”
- Raising the navy’s capacity to carry out a variety of assigned duties (Xinhua, April 5).

The Chinese warships operate independently of the 20-nation Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), a UN-authorized anti-piracy naval force. China has pledged to share information with CTF-151 ships and provide

humanitarian help to foreign vessels in danger of attack (Xinhua, December 26, 2008). The main concern of the mission is the protection of Chinese merchant ships as well as any ship from Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan that appeals for protection (Xinhua, March 31; *China Daily*, December 26, 2008). There was initially some political concern in Taiwan after Chinese authorities reported a tanker belonging to Taiwan’s Formosa Plastics Group had requested an escort from the Chinese naval group, but Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council later reported the *Formosa Products Cosmos* was registered in Liberia and no Taiwanese ships had been authorized to seek protection from the Chinese navy (*China Post* [Taiwan], January 14).

The Chinese naval deployment offers the opportunity to train naval crews in real-life conditions, gain familiarity with the operations of the foreign naval forces comprising CTF-151 (including American ships) and increase their knowledge of African coastal waters in an area of increasing strategic importance for Beijing. The latter, combined with Chinese involvement in a number of African peacekeeping missions, is resulting in a steady supply of intelligence on areas of Chinese interest in the region.

The importance of the return of the Chinese Navy to African waters after an absence of 600 years was celebrated in a music video produced by the Chinese Navy’s political art troupe (http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNjE3NjkyMDA=.html). The song, entitled “Make Haste to Somalia,” makes reference to the 15th century Muslim Chinese Admiral Zheng He, who took a Chinese fleet of hundreds of ships to the East African coast:

Make haste to Somalia, cruise the Gulf of Aden
With lofty sentiments, the Chinese navy heads
for the deep blue
Braving wind and waves, the warship’s flag
flutters,
The Chinese navy, a bright sword to harmonize
the ocean.

Chinese warriors, valiant men with iron wills,
Intrepid journey, 600 years after Zheng He.
Heroic sailors, forge bravely ahead,
Bearing heavy responsibility, the motherland
will see our triumphant return.

(Translation by Blackandwhitecat.org, 2008).

Islamic State of Iraq Brings Internet Propaganda to the Streets

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

The Jihadi Media Support Battalion (JMSB), an internet-based jihadi propaganda group, has announced the launch of a new propaganda campaign entitled “ISI: The Gate to Liberate Extorted Palestine.” The goal is to acquaint as many Muslims as possible with the so-called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and the Salafi-Jihadi creed (al-mohagr.com, March 13). The campaign has attracted many positive responses from jihadi forum members.

The JMSB campaign’s objectives and instructions were posted in many jihadi forums and websites by forum members claiming to be JMSB reporters. The posting called upon Salafi-Jihadi adherents to participate in distributing leaflets about the ISI to as many Muslims in the world as possible. The first leaflet to be distributed is a communiqué regarding the establishment of ISI and the appointment of its Amir, Omar al-Baghdadi. The message also encourages Muslims to migrate to the Islamic State of Iraq and deploy there to conduct jihad. The campaign endeavors to counter the anti-jihadi Western and Arab media efforts. JMSB praised other existing jihadi online media outlets, such as al-Sahab Media Productions, al-Fajr, al-Furqan, al-Somod, the Islamic Global Media Front, al-Malahim, the Media Jihadi Battalion and al-Yaqeen Media, for their continuous support of jihad. JMSB urges volunteers to bring to the streets the internet-based jihadi propaganda from the aforementioned media groups. A JMSB reporter claimed that since the setup of JMSB in October 2008, 16,000 leaflets featuring the ISI and its Amir have been distributed. The leaflets urge Muslims to fight the Zionists and Crusaders who “want to wipe out Islam.” JMSB lists the main objectives of jihadi media propaganda. The campaign is intended to:

- Inform as many Muslims as possible about ISI and the state of the jihad, which Muslims are religiously obliged to migrate to and support financially.
- Counter enemy propaganda, especially the Jewish news networks.
- Communicate with the mujahideen through the internet and spread their achievements.

- Encourage jihadi media supporters to move to the next phase: jihad field operations.

The JMSB instructs each campaign volunteer to print 1,000 copies of the leaflets on private, non-color printers and distribute them to randomly selected addresses from different post offices, direct to mail boxes, on walls and utility poles, in schools, universities and marketplaces, and to parked cars or drivers. The post included video clips of armed men stopping cars and handing out leaflets to the drivers.

The volunteers should distribute 1,000 copies each and do the same through the internet in forums, chat rooms and emails. The JMSB warns volunteers to take the following security precautions while handing out the leaflets:

- Avoid places monitored with CCTV networks.
- Avoid public places adjacent to government buildings.
- Volunteers must work individually and never tell anyone about their activities.
- Keep the leaflets in an easily accessible place.
- Distribute the copies immediately after printing.
- Do not hand out the leaflets in residential areas.
- Distribute the leaflets to Muslims only.
- Do not keep copies at home or in the computer after distribution.

Finally, JMSB calls upon graphic designers to design logos for this campaign and future campaigns as this is the biggest jihadi media project ever. “Be it known to you, media jihadist, with this activity you are waging jihad similar to what the mujahideen are doing in the battlefield. Be honest with God and He will facilitate a passage for you to join the Mujahideen in the battlefield,” says a JMSB reporter. He also recommended a number of websites for communicating with the jihadi media and the JMSB for information about mujahideen achievements censored by the international media (katebatnusra.arabform.com).

Many jihadi forum members responded to the JMSB campaign with comments on the wording of the leaflets and questions about security precautions. One forum member, nicknamed Nashid al-Irhab, revealed his participation in the campaign but asked for further security instructions from JMSB concerning printing and distribution procedures (al-mohagr.com March 26). Another forum member said he is very enthusiastic about the campaign and suggested inserting the leaflet between false business advertisement brochures to fend off suspicions and use gloves so as not to leave fingerprints on the leaflets.

Another forum member complained other jihadi outlets were not included in the campaign, but declared that the importance of the campaign had encouraged him to participate, even though he “is not the jihadi type” (almnbr.info, March 18).

Jihadi propaganda materials are a key indication for security forces of terrorist activities. They are usually confiscated and scrutinized for possible intelligence that would lead to the arrest of terrorists exposed by the materials. Compartmentalizing jihadi propaganda activity to an individual level, as recommended by JMBS, would lessen the chance of exposing the jihadis behind the ISI’s propaganda campaign.

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“Stopping the Idols”: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Calls for Boycott of Algerian Elections

By *Chris Zambelis*

Al-Qaeda and radical Islamist groups that look to al-Qaeda as a source of guidance and inspiration boast an impressive record of issuing carefully calculated public statements in an effort to influence key political events in their favor. In addition to relying on violence, the remarkable consistency demonstrated by al-Qaeda and its affiliates in addressing key political events through timely public discourse on the internet and other venues is a testament to their emphasis on mobilizing support for their causes. Public statements by radical Islamists also enable them to communicate their agendas to both allies and adversaries alike. Despite

its history of violence, the occasion of Algeria’s April 9 presidential elections elicited a rhetorical response from al-Qaeda’s North African affiliate, the Algerian-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a response designed to influence Algerian politics through political discourse (al-Jazeera, April 9).

Algeria’s recent elections have been mired in controversy since November 2008, when the Algerian parliament overwhelmingly adopted an amendment of Article 74 of its constitution that abolished presidential term limits, thus allowing incumbent president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to seek a third term (al-Jazeera, November 12, 2008). Mainstream Algerian opposition activists and political parties angered by the decision called for a general boycott of the elections. On April 6, AQIM leader Shaykh Abu Musab Abd al-Wadoud (a.k.a. Abdelmalek Droukdel) joined the fray by issuing an audio statement addressing the Algerian elections entitled “A Statement to the Algerian Muslim People” (almedad.com/vb, April, 6; muslim.net, April 6). In his statement, Wadoud called on Algerians to boycott the elections, a process he deems anathema to Islamic governance. Wadoud described the Algerian electoral process as a ploy designed to provide a sense of false legitimacy to a corrupt and repressive regime whose ultimate aim was to attack Muslims and to further U.S. and Western interests in Algeria; “It is the duty of every Muslim who is devoted to his religion and to his nation to know with certainty that these leaders are apostates and unbelievers...to refrain from helping them in any way, even through participating in elections...[and] to strive [for]...the establishment of an Islamic state...”. Wadoud also called on Algerians to reject what he described as the state’s efforts to destroy Islam in Algeria through social, legal, and violent means; “We take every opportunity to stop the idols [the Bouteflika regime]... to stop the aggressor against the sanctity of Islam and Muslims – to stop his tongue or his pen or his gun...” (almedad.com/vb, April, 6; muslim.net, April 6).

News of AQIM’s latest audio announcement and links to transcripts of the statement circulated widely on radical Islamist chat room forums and websites. The timing of the statement, coupled with AQIM’s history of violence, raised concerns about the potential for a new round of attacks in Algeria during the voting. Some polling stations were the scene of protests and minor disturbances; one polling station east of Algiers was hit by a bomb blast that injured two police officers (al-Jazeera, April 9). There are no indications, however, that AQIM—a group known to claim responsibility

for its attacks against high-profile targets in Algeria — was behind any of the disturbances. Given the weak state of the opposition and Bouteflika's support from his allies in parliament and the powerful military and security services (the main power brokers in Algerian politics), it is no surprise that the incumbent president was re-elected for his third 5-year term. Despite reports of electoral fraud and corruption, Bouteflika claims to have gained over 90 percent of the vote amid high voter turnout (al-Jazeera, April 10).

Wadoud's scathing critique of Bouteflika and the Algerian regime contained the requisite references to Islamic theological discourse typical of such statements. Many observers of radical Islam tend to preoccupy themselves with understanding the theological aspects of extremist discourse and symbolism, an approach that often ignores the most critical aspects underpinning radical Islamist communications. In this regard, AQIM's statement sheds light on a critical aspect of radical Islamist ire that is imbued with pragmatism and also represents a source of resentment among mainstream Arabs and Muslims: the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab and Muslim world and strong U.S. and Western support for authoritarian regimes despite American political rhetoric that emphasizes the virtues of freedom and democracy. Radical Islamists, including al-Qaeda and its regional affiliates such as AQIM, strongly oppose incumbent authoritarian regimes, seeing them essentially as corrupt, illegitimate and beholden to U.S. and foreign interests as opposed to those of their own citizens. Some of the most violent militants in al-Qaeda and related groups got their start by participating in radical opposition politics in their native countries. It is in this context that AQIM sees Bouteflika as a U.S. puppet whose stock has risen in Washington since the September 11, 2001 attacks as a reliable ally alongside other staunch U.S. allies such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Radical Islamists—and many mainstream Muslims—see these regimes as participants in a U.S.-led campaign to destroy Islam.

The subject and timing of AQIM's statement also highlights the group's effort to tap into the growing frustration exhibited by Algerians due to the state of the country's politics. AQIM also appeared keen on tapping into Algerian nationalist sentiment by calling a boycott of the elections a form of national "duty." Algeria's 1954-1962 struggle for independence against France, a struggle that left between 500,000 and upwards of 1 million or more Algerians dead, has played a formative

role in shaping Algerian politics and society, especially when it comes to questions of national identity and independence. While AQIM-led violence in Algeria and beyond remains a serious threat, the group's apparent effort to shape events on the ground through political discourse provides critical insight into its strategy and objectives. The political succession process in Algeria and AQIM's reaction may also shed light on future scenarios in the region during periods of political succession that warrant closer attention. The upcoming political succession in Egypt, for instance, where the incumbent octogenarian leader Hosni Mubarak appears to be paving the way for his son Gamal to succeed him (despite widespread opposition to such a move across Egypt) is sure to elicit a strong rhetorical and possibly even a violent response from al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-inspired militants.

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Pakistan's Most Wanted: A Profile of Tehrik-e-Taliban Leader Baitullah Mahsud

By Mukhtar A. Khan

By threatening to attack the White House and making a bizarre claim of responsibility for the shooting rampage at a U.S. immigration center in Binghamton, New York, the Tehrik-e-Taliban [TTP] chief in Pakistan's restive tribal areas – Baitullah Mahsud – has been making big headlines in global media. Once regarded as a "soldier of peace" by Pakistani military officials and more recently as a "patriotic Pakistani," the hardened militant commander is now considered to be Pakistan's enemy number one (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 9, 2008; *Daily Times* [Lahore], April 6; *Dawn* [Karachi], March 26).

Baitullah is the second Pakistani to carry a U.S. government bounty of \$5 million on his head. The first Pakistani on the U.S. wanted list was Mir Aimal Kasi, who was deported from Pakistan to the United States, where he was tried and executed in 2002 for the murder of two CIA agents outside the agency's headquarters in 1993. Baitullah Mahsud, who is locally referred to as "Amir Sahib," has been designated by the US State Department as a key al-Qaeda facilitator in the South Waziristan tribal region of Pakistan (BBC Urdu, April 8).

From Seminary to Top Taliban Commander

Only five years ago, Baitullah Mahsud was an unknown talib (student). His name first surfaced when he filled the vacuum after the Taliban commander in South Waziristan, Nek Muhammad Wazir, was killed in a 2004 U.S. drone attack. Baitullah shot to prominence as a charismatic Taliban leader when he signed a peace deal, known as the Sararogha agreement, with the Pakistani government in February 2005.

Now in his mid-30's, Baitullah was born in Dawud Shah village of the Bannu district of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), bordering the restive North Waziristan tribal agency. As his name indicates, Baitullah Mahsud belongs to the Shubi Khel branch of the Mahsud tribe. Baitullah's father Maulana Muhammad Haroon Shah was not a well-off man. He was the imam of a small mosque in Dawud Shah where the local people had collectively rented him a house. Baitullah had five brothers – the youngest, Yahya Mahsud, was killed last year by unknown assailants in Bannu. Among the others, Baitullah's elder brother Zahir Shah and a younger brother, Muhammad Ishaq, are both associated with the banned TTP. Baitullah's father died a few years ago and his mother now stays with Baitullah in South Waziristan (BBC Urdu, April 8).

Until recently, Baitullah lived in Bannu. He received his early religious education in a village madrassa (seminary). Baitullah also had some formal/secular education in a government school but dropped out, leaving his education incomplete. He then went to a religious seminary in Miranshah, North Waziristan, headquarters of the militant Haqqani Network. Even here, Baitullah did not complete his grades but nevertheless went back to Bannu and served there as an imam for a short period of time (BBC Urdu, April 8).

Baitullah was soon inspired by the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. He already had an acquaintance with some Taliban leaders from his stay in a seminary close to the Haqqani madrassa. He joined the movement and fought alongside the Taliban against the Northern Alliance in Bagram. Victory there encouraged him to fight on other fronts in Afghanistan as well.

Baitullah fled Afghanistan and settled in the Mahsud area of South Waziristan after the Taliban regime was overthrown by the U.S.-led invasion in late 2001. Baitullah married a few years ago in Bannu, but contracted another marriage last year with the daughter of tribal elder Malik Ikramuddin because he had no children from his first wife.

Baitullah's Links with the Media

Until recently, Baitullah was not as media-savvy as his predecessor Nek Muhammad or other local Taliban leaders like the late Abdullah Mahsud. Baitullah used to shun media appearances but has now realized the importance of both media and media-men. Local tribal journalists say that he is very friendly to them now. In January 2008, he made his first TV appearance on al-Jazeera. Four months later he invited a group of journalists from Islamabad and Peshawar for a feast and his first-ever public press conference in South Waziristan. When a journalist in Swat, Musa Khan Khel, was killed in February 2009, Baitullah issued special directives to his deputies to look into the matter. The journalists based in tribal areas and the frontier province claim to feel more threatened by Pakistani intelligence agencies than Baitullah and his commanders (Geo TV, April 11).

Baitullah has exploited this trust relationship with the journalists to get his message across. Despite his hatred for the West (and the United States especially), he has appeared in interviews on the BBC and even the U.S. Voice of America network (BBC, January 29, 2007; VOA, March 31). Baitullah has avoided having his picture taken by the media, a trait he shares with the Taliban Supreme leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, to whom he has pledged his allegiance.

Baitullah's Military and Political Acumen

Despite the fact he has very little education, Baitullah is known for his political acumen and tactical skills. He has the charisma to unite local fighters and keep his following intact. He has a private militia of more than 20,000 who are skilled in various guerilla tactics.

Baitullah demonstrated his military might in late 2007 when his men arrested some 250 Pakistani soldiers and kept them hostage for more than two months in South Waziristan. They were released in exchange for 25 Taliban militants, among them several who had been trained to carry out suicide bombings (*Dawn* [Karachi], December 31, 2007). Baitullah is believed to have sharpened his guerilla skills under the leadership of veteran jihadi commander Jalaluddin Haqqani – who fought against the Soviet Union and then sided with the Taliban before providing a safe haven in the North Waziristan tribal agency to top al-Qaeda militants after the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan’s Tora Bora Mountains in early 2002.

Baitullah Mahsud has used the terms “shari’a” and “jihad” to consolidate his power-base in South Waziristan before extending it to the rest of the tribal areas and parts of the NWFP. He introduced the tactics of suicide bombing and beheading of anti-Taliban “spies.” More than 200 pro-government tribal elders have been killed on such charges in order to silence any voice of dissent or traditional authority. The phenomenon of suicide bombing was something new for Pakistani society when it was introduced in 2007. Commander Qari Hussain, a close aide to Baitullah, has trained numerous suicide bombers, most of them poor and uneducated boys, some as young as 7 years-old. Qari Hussain was a member of the banned anti-Shi’a outfit, Sipah-e-Sahaba, before joining Baitullah’s TTP. In the last year alone, some 725 people were killed in suicide bombings across Pakistan – mostly police and army officials, along with a significant number of bystanders (*Daily Times* [Lahore], December 31, 2008).

Baitullah has tactfully exploited almost all the “peace deals” and “cease-fire agreements” reached with the government and military officials in his own favor. He struck the first peace deal in February 2005 and the second in February 2008. Both raised his stature and allowed him time and space to raise his militia. These deals, however, were made to be broken, with a huge consequent loss to the government of Pakistan. The peace deals in nearby Swat and Bajaur were also inked after Baitullah gave a green light to his deputies.

After forming the TTP in December 2007, Baitullah Mahsud faced tough resistance from Commander Maulvi Nazir in Wana and Hafiz Gul Bahadur in Miranshah, which he overcame by bringing them under the umbrella of the Shura Ittihad al-Mujahideen (United Mujahideen Council – UMC) in February 2009

(*Daily Khabrain* [Islamabad], March 10). Baitullah still faces a challenge from the local Abdullah Mahsud group, consisting of followers of the late commander led by Qari Zainuddin Mahsud and Turkistan Bitani. On March 26 a TTP suicide bomber killed 11 people in an attack on a restaurant where fighters belonging to Turkistan Bitani’s command were eating. A TTP spokesman said the attack was revenge for the killing of 35 TTP fighters by Bitani’s men last year (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 26).

Baitullah Mahsud is still a suspect in the murder of Pakistan’s former premier, Benazir Bhutto, a case in which he denies any involvement. However, he has accepted responsibility for several suicide and guerilla attacks in various places, including the recent attacks on a police training academy in Lahore, a police station in Islamabad and a suicide attack on a military convoy in Bannu. He has threatened more serious attacks inside Pakistan unless the U.S. drone strikes are halted (*Daily Times* [Lahore], April 3). As a revenge for the drone attacks, he claimed to have engineered the Binghamton shooting on April 3, but such statements have only made him a laughing stock (*The News* [Islamabad], April 5).
Conclusion

Despite Baitullah’s recent boasts, he is still very cautious and calculated. He avoids being photographed and moves with heavy security and special guards. He may think he could still be a strategic asset for the Pakistani security establishment but he also fears the risk to his life from the targeted drone attacks and the U.S. bounty on his head. His claim that he is planning an attack on the White House actually indicates that he has no intention of doing so – if he was planning such an attack he wouldn’t specify the target in advance. Baitullah has the ability to conduct terrorist attacks inside Pakistan and Afghanistan but has not acquired the capacity to engineer transnational operations.

As well as being a regional force with the skills needed to unify the scattered local jihadis, Baitullah Mahsud acts as an al-Qaeda facilitator. He has sufficient acumen to be a player in local politics but plays only a small role in global politics. He can send a young suicide bomber to attack an easy target inside Pakistan or Afghanistan but cannot transport him to a European country or the United States. In his ideology, Baitullah is more impressed by Mullah Omar than Osama bin Laden. Like Mullah Omar he is waging jihad aimed at creating an Islamic government in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He

still has a localized agenda but wants foreign troops to leave Afghanistan. Despite several peace deals with the Pakistani government, he has never stopped his men from attacking U.S. and NATO forces across the border in Afghanistan.

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British Government Debates Engagement with Radical Islam in New Counterterrorism Strategy

By Raffaello Pantucci

Britain's much vaunted "Contest" counterterrorism strategy underwent what has been described as a "refresh" in March 2009. Building on the British government's experiences on the front-line of terrorism both at home and abroad, the re-vamped strategy was referred to as a "reworking rather than a fundamental overhaul" (BBC, March 24). Elsewhere in the British media, the *Guardian* declared the new strategy was "in disarray" even before it had been launched, while the *Times* focused on the elevated emphasis put upon the threat from "dirty bombs" (*Guardian*, March 26; *Times*, March 25). A core ideological debate that has occupied the airwaves and that was deftly avoided in the final text, however, was the question of whether the British government should engage or confront non-violent Islamists in order to effectively prevent terrorism.

Prevent Pursue Protect Prepare

The new strategy paper lays out a detailed presentation of what the British government is hoping to achieve in its counter-terrorism efforts. [1] Built around the widely emulated bureaucratic convention of having four main work streams, *Prevent, Pursue, Protect, Prepare: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism* offers a great deal of historical detail and analysis of the government's development of

a counterterrorism structure. The earliest parts of the paper offer a "strategic context" and focus on how and why the Qaeda threat to the UK (and the rest of the world) has emerged. In fact, while Irish terrorism (which recently resurfaced in the form of a spate of killings in Northern Ireland) receives a mention in the paper, it quite explicitly states that "this counterterrorism strategy is specifically addressed at the recent resurgence in international terrorism" and later says that this strategy "does not address the threat from domestic extremism (such as the threat from animal rights extremists)." The focus is rigidly kept on "al-Qaeda and like-minded groups" and consequently deals primarily with global Islamist extremism.

The Strategy Debate

Within the British security community, a sort of consensus has been reached about the general viability of the counter-terrorism architecture as it has been laid out, with most discussion focused on how it is actually being implemented. Specifically, as time has passed, it has become increasingly clear that it is the "Prevent" element that is most critical if the UK is to ever overcome the menace from international terrorism. As Lord West, the Security Minister put it, "Only our work to prevent people being lured into violent extremism will defeat terrorism in the long term." [2] This has been reflected in the public debate on the strategy, with the "Prevent" element becoming the main ideological battleground amongst security analysts in the UK.

The rubric "Prevent" is defined as "stopping people [from] becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism." The new strategy defines five main goals for the next three years:

- Challenge the ideology behind violent extremism and support mainstream voices.
- Disrupt those who promote violent extremism and support the places where they operate.
- Support individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment, or have already been recruited by violent extremists.
- Increase the resilience of communities to violent extremism.
- Address the grievances which ideologues are exploiting.

While the other three aspects of the strategy (Pursue, Protect, Prepare) might all be defined as tangible and reactive in that they involve practical things like pursuing terrorists using intelligence, hardening buildings and other targets against attack and training first responders and citizens in what to do in the event of an attack, “Prevent” is far harder to grasp. Success in this area is hard to quantify and questions are being raised about who exactly the British government should be engaging to prevent Muslims from being attracted to the al-Qaeda brand.

Publicly, this debate has become increasingly polarized in the UK, with two main schools of thought emerging. On the one hand, there are those who believe that while engagement with individuals who espouse hard-line beliefs may be ideologically distasteful, it can also help address an immediate terrorist threat. Included in this group is the former head of the Metropolitan Police’s Muslim Contact Unit, Robert Lambert, who believes allowing the expression of anti-establishment views in marches advocating an end to the war in Iraq or justice for Palestinians will “persuade Muslim youth to channel their political grievances into local and national democratic processes.” [3] In the current debate, he has come out in support of non-violent Islamists, citing the case of Daud Abdullah, the Deputy Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) (*Guardian*, April 1). Daud Abdullah was recently attacked by the government for endorsing “a Hamas call for attacks on foreign troops, including possibly British troops, if they try to intercept arms smuggled into Gaza” (*Guardian*, March 25).

There have been instances where individuals holding extreme views have been of great assistance in addressing the terrorism threat. The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), a group established by former Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Kamal Helbawy, played a key role in helping reclaim the Finsbury Park Mosque, which had been taken over by extremist followers of militant preacher Abu Hamza.

On the other side there are those who believe that this approach is excessively short-sighted and in fact gives succor to those who are a part of the problem. This perspective is most recently expressed in a Policy Exchange report by Shiraz Maher (a former Hizb-ut-Tahrir member) and Martyn Frampton (of Cambridge University) entitled *Choosing Our Friends Wisely*. [4] The right-leaning Policy Exchange think tank is

widely known in the UK for its work on the subject of government engagement with Islamists.

The Policy Exchange previously published a sensational report by a prominent left-wing journalist entitled, *When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries: The British State’s Flirtation with Radical Islamism*, which focused on the connections between the Muslim Brotherhood, Jama’at Islami and the MCB, at the time the British government’s favoured partner when engaging with British Muslim communities. [5] “We essentially had a hot-line to Sir Iqbal [Sacranie]” (referring to the then-head of the MCB), was how one senior Home Office member described the relationship to the author. [6]

Defining Extremism

Maher and Frampton’s report was released on the eve of the publication of the government’s new strategy paper and is scathing in its criticism of the current Prevent strategy: “The problem is that PVE [Preventing Violent Extremism] – however well intentioned – isn’t working. Not only is it failing to achieve its stated objectives, in many places it is actually making the situation worse: a new generation is being radicalised, sometimes with the very funds that are supposed to be countering radicalisation.” [7] It goes on to lay out a set of ten recommendations for reforming Prevent, and a nine point outline of engagement criteria for the British government’s use with Islamist groups. These range from obvious recommendations (“government must not engage with organisations or individuals that support or condone the deliberate targeting of civilians”) to the more controversial (“government must not engage with people or groups that call for or condone the destruction of UN member states”). [8] The controversy lies in the view that this is a veiled statement that the government can only engage with pro-Israel groups.

Ahead of the official publication of the revised Contest counterterrorism strategy, there was much speculation that the government was going to take an approach similar to the Maher and Frampton Policy Exchange report, when an article in the *Guardian* (based on a leaked draft of the strategy) laid out the criteria used in forming a new definition of extremism. These included advocating a caliphate, promoting Shari’a law, support of jihad anywhere in the world, arguing that Islam bans homosexuality, and failing “to condemn the killing of British soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan” (*Guardian*, February 17). However, in the end the British government chose to sidestep much of the discussion, instead opting

to state that it will support groups and individuals who “challenge those... [who] reject the rights to which we are committed, scorn institutions and values of our parliamentary democracy, dismiss the rule of law and promote intolerance and discrimination on the basis of race, faith, ethnicity, gender or sexuality.” [9]

Conclusion

According to a number of British counter-terrorism experts and Muslim community leaders spoken to by Jamestown, the reason behind this debate is the fact that the British government has clearly begun to feel it has managed to bring the immediate terror threat to the UK under control. Consequently, it now no longer feels that it needs to pander to some extreme views in order to address the immediate terror threat. However, as the recent arrests dubbed “Operation Pathway” demonstrates, the threat as perceived by the British government remains real (*Telegraph*, April 7). It remains an open fact that individuals like Omar Bakri Mohammed acolyte Anjem Choudhary continue to operate openly in the country, holding public meetings which are advertised on islam4uk.com and supporting aggressive public protests in which British soldiers returning from Iraq are called “butchers” (*Independent*, March 12). While it is clear that Choudhary and others around him are very careful to keep what they say within the bounds of free speech, it is still sometimes surprising to hear what he is willing to publicly advocate (such as advocating the assassination of the Pope or encouraging British Muslims not to cooperate with terrorism investigations). The question around the new stance in Contest, however, is not individuals like Choudhary who openly court controversy, but rather whether the British government should engage or disregard Muslim activist groups who may have a dissenting view on Israeli-Palestinian issues or other hot-button Muslim foreign policy topics, while at the same time working to counter radicalization amongst Britain’s Muslim community.

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Notes

1. For the complete strategy, see *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism*, March 2009, http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/general/HO_Contest_strategy.pdf?view=Binary
2. Lord West’s speech at the Govnet conference, July 2008: <http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/Speeches/speech-by-lord-west-govnet>
3. Robert Lambert, “Empowering Salafis and Islamists against Al Qaeda: A London Counterterrorism case study,” *Political Science & Politics*, 41(1), pp.31-35
4. Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, *Choosing Our Friends Wisely*, Policy Exchange, 2009: http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Choosing_Our_Friends_Wisely.pdf
5. Martin Bright, *When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries: The British State’s Flirtation with Radical Islamism*, Policy Exchange, July 2006: <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/publication.cgi?id=13>
6. Author’s interview, September 2007
7. Maher and Frampton, op cit., p.5
8. *Ibid.*, p.8.
9. *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare*, p.87