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Members of the Haqqani Network

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RUSSIAN OPERATIONS IN TATARSTAN ELIMINATE MILITANT ISLAMIST CELL

Russian security forces conducted a special operation in the Tatarstan village of Novoye Almetyevo against a group of three Islamist militants. The gunmen attracted the attention of security forces after firing on a wildlife enforcement officer who thought they were poachers and shooting at the car of a private security firm in the Nurlatsky district (Itar-Tass, November 25).

The security forces arrived in strength, deploying armored vehicles, an Mi-8 helicopter, and 500 members of the FSB (Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti – Federal Security Service) and the Interior Ministry's OMON (Otryad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniya - Special Purpose Police Units) (Islamic News, December 2). The three insurgents were killed after a gunfight lasting two hours.

The militant cell included 26-year-old Almaz Davletshin, described as a “radical cleric” who had previously served four years in prison for the theft of scrap metal, Ruslan Spirodonov, wanted for an unsuccessful November 11 bombing of a police car in Chistopol, and Albert Khusnutdinov. The men were each armed with an assault rifle and a grenade launcher.

A day after the gun-battle, security forces discovered a dugout in the nearby village of Butaikha. The dugout was believed to belong to the three insurgents and contained clothing, a pistol silencer, mobile communications gear, bomb-making equipment and a USB stick which contained bomb-making instructions and “rules of conduct for a young mujahid” (Interfax, November 30).

Tatarstan is a highly industrialized autonomous republic that produces much of Russia's arms, chemicals and automobiles. Though official Islam in the republic has been known for its opposition to Salafism, the former Mufti of Tatarstan and current leader of the Center for Research on the Koran and the Sunna, Farid-Hazrat Salman, claims that radical Wahhabists have infiltrated the traditionally moderate Spiritual Board of Muslims of Tatarstan (DUM), becoming the dominant trend in that institution with the financial support of Saudi Arabia (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Moscow], December 6). Nevertheless, current Mufti Gusman Iskhakov (accused by Salman of being a Wahhabist) warned Tatarstan Muslims in the aftermath of the raid not to "succumb to provocations," warning that "certain political forces in our country do not want our peace and tranquility, and seek all ways to sow discord and confusion among us" (Islamic News, December 2).

The Tatars of the Volga-Ural region of Russia converted to Islam in the 10th century and today form the largest minority group in Russia. The arrival of radical conservative Salafism in recent years poses a major challenge to Tatar Islam, which is based on both traditional Sufism and the indigenous modernizing trend of Jadidism (a reformist and pan-Turkic attempt to reconcile Eastern Islam with Western thought and science) since the 19th century. Like most parts of Islamic Russia, Tatarstan was significantly secularized during Soviet rule, but is now enjoying an Islamic revival, though this has involved several competing trends. The entry of Salafism to the region in the 1990s has been aided by the relatively poor knowledge of Islamic theology held by many Tatar imams.

A recent conference of Islamic scholars in the Tatarstan capital of Kazan warned that growing extremism in the republic could lead to the development of an "Ingush-Dagestani scenario," referring to the growth of religiously inspired armed militant groups carrying out attacks in previously stable regions of the Russian Federation.

ALGERIAN COUNTERTERRORISM OFFENSIVE HUNTS AQIM LEADERSHIP IN THE KABYLE MOUNTAINS

While the Sahel/Sahara Command of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has dominated reports of the movement's activities over the last year, Algeria's military continues to combat AQIM's northern command, based in the largely Berber Kabyle Mountains.

A major Algerian military offensive involving some 4,000 to 5,000 troops was launched on December 9 with the participation of Special Forces units and aerial support from helicopter gunships. Operations have focused on the North-Central wilayas (provinces) of Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdès and Bouira, mountainous strongholds of the Islamist insurgency since the 1990s. Operations in the latter regions were designed to prevent reinforcements from coming to the relief of the militants in Tizi Ouzou. The offensive was launched on the basis of information obtained through the interrogation of captured AQIM militants regarding a major meeting of AQIM amirs at Sidi Ali Bounab (70 miles east of Algiers), to be presided over by AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadoud) (*El-Khabar* [Algiers], December 12; *Tout sur l'Algérie* [Algiers], December 13).

According to sources in the Algerian security establishment, the meeting was intended to organize a group to be sent south to fend off a planned coup by the Sahel/Sahara command of AQIM designed to depose Droukdel as overall commander and establish an independent emirate in the Sahel/Sahara (*El-Khabar*, December 12).

The army jammed mobile telephone networks in the operational region to prevent AQIM cells from communicating or detonating prepared explosives with cell phones. Only days before the offensive, Algerian defense official Abdelmalik Guenaizia asked visiting AFRICOM commander General David Hogg for the latest jamming equipment to prevent remote cell phone detonation of improvised explosive devices (CNN, December 7; *Ennahar* [Algiers], December 6).

By December 12, as many as 20 AQIM terrorists were reported to have been killed. Algerian authorities have obtained DNA samples from relatives of AQIM commander Abdelmalek Droukdel and Amir Abou Derar in an effort to confirm their deaths in the operation (*Tout sur l'Algérie*, December 13). The offensive was also reported to have disrupted a major plot to use cell phone-detonated explosives in a bombing campaign in Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdès and Bouira (*El-Khabar*, December 12). The deaths of Droukdel and Derar remain unconfirmed at the time of publication while a reported 2,000 additional troops were reported to be joining the offensive as some militants remain under siege by Algerian forces (*al-Fadjar* [Algiers], December 12).

Haqqani Network Shifting from North Waziristan to Pakistan's Kurram Agency

By Arif Jamal

Residents in the Kurram Agency of tribal northwest Pakistan believe that the Pakistani military has once again postponed military operations in North Waziristan Agency after its plan to shift the so-called “moderate Taliban” (including the notorious Haqqani Network) was exposed and severely criticized by some elements of the Pakistani press in November. According to a Kurram Agency Shi'a leader, “the military seems to have put its plans to launch a military operation in the North Waziristan Agency on hold for now as it is no longer trying to shift their strategic assets from North Waziristan to Kurram Agency with the same vigor in anticipation of an operation in North Waziristan under US pressure. We are not sure if it is because of the criticism of this policy in the Pakistani press or the WikiLeaks revelations.” [1] The northern part of Kurram is dominated by Shi'a tribes (particularly the Bangash and Turi), while the southern half is dominated by Sunnis.

It is not only the press that has opposed the shift of Taliban fighters to new bases. When the local population in the Shalozan area of Kurram successfully resisted Taliban infiltration, there were reports of army gunships intervening to protect their “jihadist partners” (*Daily Times* [Lahore], November 4). There have been a number of recent attacks by gunmen in the Kurram Agency on members of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), including one in November that killed militant commander Hikmat Shah Khoedadkhel (*Nawa-e Waqt* [Rawalpindi], November 9; *The News* [Islamabad], November 8. For background information on the Shi'a-Taliban struggle for Kurram see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 17).

From the Pakistani military's viewpoint, Kurram Agency is important for two reasons. First, this agency can become a new sanctuary for the pro-military Taliban, such as the Haqqani Network. However, the second reason is more important. The Kurram Agency has served the route to Afghanistan for the mujahideen since 1980. The Kurram Agency would have fallen long ago to Taliban militants, as have other tribal agencies,

if it had not been for the courage of the local Shi'a population, which has been fighting against the Taliban since 2007.

NATO targeted the Taliban sanctuaries in Kurram with helicopter strikes in September, which resulted in the death of some Pakistani soldiers and created a diplomatic storm between Pakistan and NATO nations. It is now clear that the Haqqani Network was using the village of Mata Sangar in Kurram to carry out attacks on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) posts in Khost, Afghanistan. Network leader Sirajuddin Haqqani was reported to be in the area at the time of the NATO attack (*Daily Times*, November 4). Another local Shi'a leader in Kurram said that “the slowdown in moving more Taliban from North Waziristan and elsewhere to Kurram is temporary, no matter what the reasons are. They would soon resume this in view of the strategic importance of the Kurram Agency, particularly if or when the Americans withdraw from Afghanistan.” [2]

Officials and analysts in Islamabad believe that the postponement of the military operation in North Waziristan is more likely a reaction to the Wikileaks revelations of Pakistani support for the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other groups, than the press revelations of military support for a transfer of militants from North Waziristan to Kurram. According to a senior official:

The Pakistani army cares little about the revelations in the press. The Wikileaks disclosures are more damaging to the army's image than to the politicians' images. Politicians are always under attack in Pakistan. However, it is the first time that the dirty linen of the Pakistan army has been washed in the open in such a way. They are very angry. The army will evaluate the impact of the Wikileaks and rethink its strategy before it acts in North Waziristan. [3]

The Parachinar-Thall road, the Kurram Agency's link to Pakistan, has remained effectively closed to the Shi'a population of Kurram by Army-supported blockades by the local Sunni Taliban since the sectarian battles of 2007. In a recent statement, the Pakistan military's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced that the Parachinar-Thall road had been opened for traffic. However, Sajid Hussain Turi, an MNA from Kurram Agency, said that the road still remains unsafe and only

convoys with security can travel on the road (*Dawn* [Karachi] December 5). At the end of October, the Pakistani military announced its plans to close down the Parachinar-Gardez-Kabul road, the only other route out of the Kurram Agency. This virtually trapped the people of Kurram in their homeland with a pair of blockades (*Daily Times*, November 4). Some local analysts believe the closure of the remaining border crossings to Afghanistan is intended to compel the Shi'a tribes of Kurram to welcome the Haqqani Network. In return for allowing their presence, the Haqqanis would convince the TTP militants to allow Shi'a access to the road from Kurram to Peshawar (*The News*, December 12). A leading daily reported unsuccessful secret meetings in Islamabad between Haqqani Network commanders (including Qari Taj), TTP leaders (including Karim Mushtaq) and elders of the Shi'a tribes of Kurram Agency designed to reopen the Parachinar-Thall road, which would be used for the movement of TTP fighters as well as local Shi'as (*Dawn*, November 30).

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Notes:

1. Interview with a Shi'a leader through a research assistant, Kurram Agency, December 3, 2010.
2. Interview with a Shi'a politician through a research assistant, Kurram Agency, December 6, 2010.
3. Interview with a Pakistani official through a research assistant, Islamabad, December 5, 2010.

Abdullah Azzam Brigades Claim to be Defenders of Sunnis in Lebanon

By Murad Batal al-Shishani

The Saudi leader of a Lebanese militant group has urged Sunni Muslims to refuse cooperation with institutions of the Lebanese state, which he claims are infiltrated and dominated by the Shiite Hezbollah movement. The criticism of Lebanon's security structure was contained in a November 24 statement released by Al-Fajr Media Center entitled "A Message from the Mujahid Shaykh, Salih bin Abdullah al-Qar'awi, to the Sunnis in the Levant" (Shamikh1.net/vb, November 24). [1] Al-Qar'awi is the leader of Lebanon's Abdullah Azzam Brigades, an active militant Islamist group.

The role of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades in the Levant region has grown since 2005, with the group claiming responsibility for several attacks on northern Israel, Elat, and the Jordanian port of Aqaba. This role may not be limited to the Levant, as an unverified statement claiming responsibility for a July attack on a Japanese oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz was issued in the group's name. It seems that al-Qar'awi, who is on the Saudi list of the Kingdom's 85 most-wanted individuals, was essential in forming the Abdullah Azzam Brigades after he was designated by the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, to take charge of the triangle between Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in order to facilitate the flow of fighters joining jihad in Iraq (see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, April 2010; *Terrorism Monitor Briefs*, April 17).

In his latest statement, al-Qar'awi presents the Brigades as the best force to defend Sunnis in the region, aiming to benefit from the weakness of the Sunnis in Lebanon compared to the increasing influence of Shiite Hezbollah: "I remind our people that we in the Abdullah Azzam Brigades are not aligned with any political camp against another, and we are not concerned with the dirty political game being played in Lebanon. We disavow it, and do not call on the Sunnis to align themselves with this group or that. What we are concerned with is the Sunnis and their religious, political, and economic interests."

Al-Qar'awi strongly criticized Hezbollah in Lebanon and the "Alawite" regime in Syria for "oppressing, plundering and spoiling the wealth" of Sunnis. He suggests that "there has been no accounting" for the

crimes they committed, such as killing Sunni people on May 7, 2008 (when Hezbollah clashed with Sunnis in Beirut), the Alawite massacre of Sunnis in Hama in Syria in 1982 following a revolt by the Muslim Brotherhood, and other examples. [2]

Al-Qar’awi accused Hezbollah of dominating the political institutions and the army in Lebanon as well as infiltrating the secret services: “Do the Sunni people know who covers up the crimes [against Sunni youth] by the military courts, which are a Shiite tool of subjugation, and who protect the officers of the intelligence services, [who are] in reality subjects of the Shiites, as are those who preside over the harshest forms of torture of your sons that continues to this day?”

To confront this situation, al-Qar’awi urges Sunnis in Lebanon “to boycott the institutions that oppress you and squander your rights, regardless of their affiliation, especially the intelligence services of the army and military. Refuse cooperation with their checkpoints, and call for a rejection of compliance with their demands.”

Al-Qar’awi goes on to ask: “Why does the army intelligence only launch raids against the villages of the Sunni people? Why are there no security checkpoints except in your villages and your neighborhoods? Why do we not see a checkpoint of the army or another of the security institutions in Shiite areas, such as Al-Dahiyah [a Shiite-dominated southern suburb of Beirut], for example?”

Furthermore, al-Qar’awi criticized Sunni figures supporting Hezbollah and named Mustafa Hamdan (a Lebanese general imprisoned from 2005 to 2009 in connection with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri) as someone used by Hezbollah to infiltrate the Sunni community. He also warned Sunnis against cooperating with Hezbollah: “Hezbollah continues to use military intelligence and its officers to assault the Sunnis. It is no secret to us that it uses those Salafis who falsely claim to be Sunnis to sow chaos and unrest in the Sunni regions [in order to] divide Sunnis.”

Saudi sources have repeatedly claimed that al-Qar’awi is based in Iran rather than Lebanon and received training there, though such claims are typically used to suggest that there is cooperation between Iran and al-Qaeda. [3]

As if to prove these allegations false, al-Qar’awi devoted space in his latest statement to condemn Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s visit to Lebanon last October:

“As for the patron of the secretive sects and the general leader of Safavid Iran’s occupation project, the entire world saw their president, who was elected by the force of arms, perform his lowly, oft-repeated, boring play on his visit to South Lebanon, repeating his empty threats against the Jews.”

Al-Qar’awi describes Hezbollah leader Shaykh Hassan Nasrullah as the “Dahiyah Liar,” saying that he served Iranian interests in the region. Al-Qar’awi warned that “Hezbollah has stockpiled weapons to be used in domestic conflicts to slaughter the Sunni people.”

Al-Qar’awi, who uses the Lebanese political terminology as if he is based inside Lebanon or has access to its daily political debates, presents the jihadis of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades as defenders of Sunnis in Lebanon, “who are among the greatest sects of the oppressed and [are] made miserable in this time.”

The leader of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades appears to be seeking to incite a revolt by the Sunnis inside Lebanon with the support of Sunnis in Syria. “[I would remind] our people in imprisoned Syria that their role in the coming days is very important in steering the state of the Sunnis throughout the greater Levant toward either glory and dignity, or more humility and ignominy,” stated al-Qar’awi.

This assertion is similar to the decade-old appeal of well-known jihadi ideologue Abu Mus’ab al-Suri for jihadis to benefit from the dissatisfaction of Syrian Sunnis who suffer from the prejudice of the minority Alawites. Al-Suri called for the Syrian Sunnis to revolt and ally themselves to the global jihad, or what he termed “the Call for a Global Islamic Resistance.” Al-Suri’s vision was described in several books on Syria which are widely read by jihadis “to avoid the mistakes of the Syrian jihad experience,” referring to the confrontation between Sunni Islamists and the regime in Syria. [4]

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Notes:

1. All quotes in this article from the statement unless stated otherwise.
2. When the Lebanese government aimed to shut down Hezbollah’s telecommunication network on May 7, 2008

and remove Beirut Airport's security chief over alleged ties to Hezbollah, Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah considered it a "declaration of war" and his fighters stormed and controlled parts of several West Beirut neighborhoods. Street battles left 11 dead and 30 wounded.

3. <http://www.alriyadh.com/2010/11/02/article573520.html>.

4 .See for example: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *Ahlul Sunnah fi al-Sham fi Mwjaht al-Nussyria w al-Salibiya w'al-Yahood* (The Sunni People in the Levant Confronting the Nusayris, the Crusaders and the Jews), al-Gurba's for Islamic Studies, Kabul, 2000. See also *Al-Thorat al-Islamiyah fi Soria*, (The Islamic Revolution in Syria), downloaded from <http://www.tawhed>.

The Triangle of Death: Central Africa's New Hub of Regional Instability

By Andrew McGregor

As peacekeepers pull out of a notorious and remote corner of Africa known as the "Triangle of Death," bands of gunmen are pouring in to fill the void in security. At the core of this problem is a former French colony that became a nation-state despite a lack of viability and is now rapidly collapsing, offering guerrillas, terrorists and outlaws a relatively risk-free haven to conduct their operations.

Background

A land-locked nation of 4.4 million people, the Central African Republic is one of the poorest countries on earth. As Oubangui-Chari, it was part of the French African Empire from the late 19th century to 1960, when it gained independence as the Central African Republic (CAR). The region's pre-independence leader, Barthelmy Boganda, did not believe the CAR could become a viable independent state and instead sought to make it part of an envisioned "United States of Latin Africa," uniting the former Central African colonies of Belgium, France, Portugal and Spain. Boganda and his dream of a united Central Africa died shortly before independence when his plane exploded in 1959. Agriculture dominates the local economy, though there are a number of unexploited resource reserves. Forestry and diamond mining account for most of the CAR's slim export revenue. France protects its interests and citizens in Bangui with an infantry company of 200 legionnaires belonging to the 2e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie.

The CAR is best known in the West for the antics and atrocities of its former ruler, "Emperor" Jean-Bédél Bokassa, a former captain in the French Colonial Army who squandered the nation's meager wealth in ruling the re-named "Central African Empire" in an imperial style from 1966 to 1979. In recent years the political violence in the CAR has become closely tied to violence in neighboring Chad and Darfur.

Battle for Birao

On November 24, rebels belonging to the Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix (Convention of Patriots for Peace and Justice - CPJP), supported

by fighters formerly belonging to Chadian rebel movements, took the strategically important town of Birao and captured its military commander after a short battle with troops of the Forces armées Centrafricaines (Central African Armed Forces - FACA) (AFP, November 24). The rebels had previously attacked Birao in July. The CPJP began operations in 2009 and since then has seized a number of towns and villages in the CAR's northeast (BBC, November 27, 2009). Rebels claimed the defeated FACA troops belonged to the Presidential Guard, the only CAR military unit of any real worth (AFP, November 25).

Heavy rains prevented CAR forces from returning to the town after it was seized, though most of the country's best troops were busy in the capital of Bangui preparing for the December 1 military parade commemorating the 50th anniversary of the independence of the CAR. On taking Birao, CPJP head of operations Abdoulaye Issene declared, "We have seized 48 prisoners and recovered a big stock of weapons. Birao is taken, but our target is Bangui" (Reuters, November 24).

Units of Chad's military based in Abéché crossed the border with the CAR in late November on their way to Birao. A CPJP statement described a Chadian force including tanks and helicopters that began to bomb Birao, forcing the evacuation of the rebels on November 30. Chad's army chief-of-staff, General Alain Mbaidodenande Djionadji, told reporters, "We affirm that the Chadian Army has exercised its right of pursuit by destroying the remaining mercenaries who have involved themselves with unidentified adventurers who were holed up in Birao" (AFP, November 30; Reuters, December 1). The town's population of 8,000 was forced to spend a week in the bush without water, food or shelter. Food stocks kept in the town were looted during the fighting, leaving nothing for returnees (IRIN, December 7).

In a belated attempt to assert sovereignty in the area, CAR government spokesmen were quick to claim the retaking of Birao as a victory for the FACA, saying 65 rebels had been killed in the battle. According to CAR spokesman Fidele Ngouandjika, CAR troops had retaken the town without the help of foreign forces, "contrary to the mendacious allegations" broadcast by foreign media sources (AFP, December 2). This declaration ran contrary to statements from both the Chadian military and the CPJP.

The former leader of the CPJP was Charles Massi, the minister of mines and agriculture in the government of President Ange-Félix Patassé, who was supported by Libyan troops and 300 Congolese rebels under Jean-Pierre Bemba, who is currently on trial for war crimes in The Hague. Massi took to the bush after Patassé's government was overthrown in 2003 by General François Bozizé, the current ruler of the CAR. After being arrested by Chadian authorities, Massi is believed to have died in January 2010 after extensive torture at the Central African prison of Bossembélé (for Massi's arrest, see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, June 26, 2009). President Bozizé has close ties with the Chadian regime of Idriss Déby and came to power with Chadian military assistance. Chad supplies many members of the Presidential Guard, the best-equipped element of the CAR armed forces.

The Peacekeepers Depart

A UN peacekeeping mission, the Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine et au Tchad (MINURCAT), has provided security along the borders of Chad, Darfur and the CAR since 2007. The severely underfunded and undermanned mission has roughly 1,500 uniformed military and police personnel drawn from 35 nations under the military command of Senegal's Major-General Elhadji Mouhamedou Kandji. The military component of the force was authorized to succeed operations of the European Union's EUFOR Tchad/RCA, a peacekeeping force of 3,700 troops under the command of Ireland's Lieutenant General Patrick Nash. The majority of the force came from France, with Ireland and Poland also making major contributions. EUFOR Tchad/RCA ended operations in March 2009. Birao was the site of a small EUFOR Tchad/RCA base during the EU deployment.

The decision to withdraw MINURCAT came in May after Chad said it would assume responsibility for security in its territory after criticizing MINURCAT's slow deployment and apparent inability to provide security for civilians. Though the peacekeepers had little effect in the northeastern CAR due to small numbers and a limited mandate that prevented them from tackling local bandits, their full withdrawal (scheduled for December 31, though operations ended on October 15) will leave security in the region solely in the hands of the CAR armed forces, which has very little presence in the area. Most of the army, including its best-equipped troops, is kept in the capital of Bangui as protection for the regime against coups, insurrections or civil unrest.

President Bozizé is also believed to oppose the presence of international peacekeepers in the CAR, preferring instead to seek financial support for the expansion of the CAR's armed forces. At the moment, the president cannot count on the complete loyalty of his poorly-equipped army. There are reports of disobedience and refusals by some troops to deploy to dangerous areas of the country, leading to purges of disloyal soldiers (Centrafrique Presse, March 24, March 29; Radio Ndeke Luka [Bangui], March 26).

In the absence of MINURCAT, a military protocol was signed between Bangui and Khartoum to create a joint border patrol to monitor the movements of Chadian and Sudanese rebels in the region. The Sudanese component includes former Darfur rebels of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) under the command of Minni Minawi, who joined the government in 2006 (SUNA, September 26; *Sudan Tribune*, September 27).

The "Triangle of Death"

Between 1850 and 1910 most of what is today the northeastern part of the CAR was largely depopulated by immense slave raids carried out by the Sultans of Dar Kuti, Dar Wadai and Dar Baguirmi. Though it was no longer called slavery, French colonial forces continued the tradition of forced labor in the 20th century. Birao remains highly isolated from the rest of the CAR (which has less than 500 km of paved roads) and has even been used as a place of internal exile. The town changed hands several times in 2006-2007 in fighting between the rebel Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity - UFDR) and CAR troops backed by French forces stationed in Bangui. After the negotiation of a peace agreement with the UFDR, Birao was occupied by EUFOR Tchad/RCA troops, succeeded by a MINURCAT detachment, which turned the town over to the FACA on November 15.

Today, nearly three million displaced people live in the triangle formed by the borders of Sudan, Chad and the CAR. Without government control, civilians of the region have suffered widespread abuses at the hands of roving gangs of gunmen with or without political pretensions who replenish their ranks, labor force and harems by abducting children. Development of the CAR's northeast has been ignored by successive CAR governments, most of which have concerned themselves solely with enriching members of the regime and their tribal supporters. The government has attempted to

farm out security by raising and backing local vigilante groups, but even these have posed a threat to local security. An estimated 30,000 refugees from Sudan and the DRC are present in the CAR, many dwelling in the bush far from humanitarian relief.

The collapse of the Chadian insurgency after its Sudanese sponsors negotiated a peace agreement with N'Djamena left a large number of well-armed fighters looking for new bases in the CAR rather than returning to Chad to take advantage of an amnesty (see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, October 29). After most of the leaders of the Darfur-based Chadian insurgent groups were expelled by Khartoum to Doha, these groups quickly deteriorated into undisciplined and leaderless gangs. Among those believed to be heading to the CAR are fighters from the Union des Forces de Résistance (UFR) under the command of Adam Yacoub (*Sudan Tribune*, September 27).

The Lord's Resistance Army

An ongoing and seemingly irresolvable security threat in the region is posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a decades-old insurgent group that has gradually morphed into a loosely organized terror-spreading group that has no other ideology other than ensuring its continued existence through rape, murder, kidnapping, looting and torture. The Acholi-based LRA has its roots in the 1986 overthrow of Uganda's Acholi ruler, General Tito Okello, by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA), but has long ceased any pretense of representing the Acholi community (for the LRA, see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, November 13, 2009; *Terrorism Monitor*, April 16, 2008).

Since the failure of the U.S. supported Ugandan military operation "Lightning Thunder" in December 2008 (which split the LRA into a number of different groups rather than eliminate it), the movement has continued its depredations in southwest Sudan, the CAR and the northeastern DRC. In the last two years the LRA has killed over 2,000 people in the CAR's northeast and abducted thousands more. Though LRA leader Joseph Kony no longer has effective control of his scattered fighters, his divided movement continues to carry out atrocities and abductions under various sub-commanders. Units of the LRA attacked Birao in October, looting shops and abducting women (AFP, November 24).

CAR Defense Minister Jean-François Bozizé, nephew of President François Bozizé, has denounced LRA atrocities in the nation, including “incursions, pillage, massacres, rapes, hostage takings and villages that are systematically burned down,” while insisting that “the LRA is now a terrorist organization like al-Qaeda” (AFP, October 14).

The CAR has also joined in forming a joint military brigade with forces from Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Sudan, intended to complete the elimination of the LRA (*Daily Monitor* [Kampala], October 19). However, with South Sudanese independence looking like the sure result of next month’s independence referendum, Khartoum may choose to continue using the LRA as a regional proxy to threaten the security of those nations choosing to support the separation of South Sudan.

A new U.S. strategy designed to eliminate the threats posed by the LRA to civilians and regional stability has four stated objectives:

- Increase protection of civilians.
- Apprehend or remove Joseph Kony and his sub-commanders.
- Promote the defection, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the remaining LRA fighters.
- Increase humanitarian access and provide relief to affected communities. [1]

Conclusion

Lying outside of any effective government control, Birao and the rest of the CAR’s northeast region offer insurgent groups, bandits, deserters and renegades an appealing mix of isolation from the CAR state infrastructure and proximity to the borders with Chad and Sudan.

Presidential elections, which have been postponed four times this year, are now set to take place on January 23, 2011, only weeks after neighboring South Sudan’s independence referendum, an event with profound implications for regional security. With the two leading candidates being Bozizé and his ousted predecessor Patassé, there appears to be little chance for substantial change in the CAR. A third possible candidate, former

prime minister Martin Ziguéle, has been accused by government spokesmen of being a terrorist and the “new de facto president of the CPJP,” though no evidence was produced to support this charge (AFP, September 24).

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Note:

1. “Letter from the President on the Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord’s Resistance Army,” November 24, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/24/letter-president-strategy-support-disarmament-lords-resistance-army>.