



Terrorism Monitor

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AL-QAEDA'S ABU YAHYA AL-LIBI ATTACKS PAKISTAN'S "CRIMINAL ARMY" IN NEW BOOK

A 29-page Arabic-language book entitled *Sharpening the Blades in the Battle Against the Government and Army of Pakistan* was released by al-Fajr Media Center on April 30. The author is Abu Yahya al-Libi, a leading al-Qaeda ideologue and Pakistan-based member of al-Qaeda's core leadership.

Most of Abu Yahya's work is dedicated to vilification of Pakistan's security services, and condemning the army, intelligence agencies and police as collaborators in "the non-believer alliance that is waging war on the religion of Islam", saying "They have established military bases and private air spaces for the various types of aircrafts of the disbelievers. They have facilitated and protected their supply lines and set up prisons to detain the monotheist believers...There is no doubt after this that this criminal army is an accomplice to the Christian armies in the crimes they carry out. They are their accomplices, and the punishment will be jihad against them."

Abu Yahya calls on scholars of religion to promote jihad in preparation for a decisive battle against the disbelievers. "This is an invitation for the virtuous scholars of Pakistan and their righteous proselytizers to recognize the responsibility they have in inciting the believers to fight, and that the day of epic and dire meeting is coming, regardless of how hard we try to postpone or avoid it."

The al-Qaeda leader outlines three reasons to fight the Pakistani military and “the rest of the institutions that are considered the pillars of their tyranny”:

1. Islamic scholars are agreed that non-believing rulers must be removed from power. “The non-believer (whether he is a non-believer to begin with or an apostate) is an object of humiliation and contempt, inferiority and lowliness.” Abu Yahya insists that Salafists have always taken the lead in preventing non-believers from assuming power in Muslim communities. Abu Yahya takes care to present the arguments made by famous religious scholars in support of overthrowing non-believers, relying heavily on the works of Hanafi scholars (the dominant school of Islamic jurisprudence in Pakistan) such as Abu Bakr al-Jassas al-Hanafi (d.961), Imam Ja’afar Al-Tahawi (d.935) and Ali ibn Sultan al-Qari (d.1605).

According to Abu Yahya, the president of Pakistan is just another in the line of non-believers, arguing, “If Muslims in Pakistan are ordered by the Shari’a to remove those non-believing and corrupt rulers, it will be achieved only through fighting their army and intelligence services that defend and protect them, strengthen their power, stand in the path of Muslims, and prevent them from fulfilling their duty.” Abu Yahya dismisses the idea that the army provides collective security to the Muslim community and should not be fought as contradictory. “How would [Shari’a] order us to disavow a non-believer’s rule over us and at the same time forbid us from that because the non-believing ruler’s group that defends him pretends to be Muslim, or is Muslim?” Abu Yahya notes the Pakistani armed forces are a volunteer force and thus their members are legitimate targets for the mujahideen.

2. The Pakistan Army rejects Islamic law. Abu Yahya says the army and intelligence services do not abide by most Islamic teachings and use all their power to prevent the implementation of Shari’a.

Abu Yahya makes numerous appeals for believers to attack NATO supply lines running through Pakistan. “[The government] opened the doors of supplies to the occupying enemy so that now more than 80 percent of its military, logistics and other supplies come through Pakistan, under the protection of the Pakistani army... These forces guarded their convoys, military bases, and secret prisons, and were used to pursue the mujahideen wherever they are- directly handing them over to Christian America to violate their honor and desecrate the book of God before their eyes to spite them.”

3. The Pakistan Army is an enemy that assaults Islam and must be fought. Abu Yahya accuses the military and the security services of Pakistan of invading homes, demolishing houses and torturing men and women. “It is needless to wait for them to launch a new assault. I want to emphasize that it is imperative for people to be compelled to fight these sects [i.e. the security services]. The fight is not limited to Waziristan, Peshawar, Suhat or other places, but extends to every speck of Pakistani territory.” Abu Yahya sees no difference between the current situation and that encountered at the time of the “apostate communist Russian occupation of Afghanistan.” With Pakistani forces clearly allying themselves with the “Christian Crusaders and their helpers,” the al-Qaeda ideologue concludes there is no law that would prevent Muslims from fighting them.

Condemning the government’s decision to allow Shari’a rule in Swat, Abu Yahya insists this is nothing less than an admission that the rest of Pakistan is not ruled by Shari’a and that the armed forces were fighting Muslims in Swat with the intention of preventing the implementation of Islamic law. Pakistan’s army “was established and founded not to implement Shari’a, as they claim, but to prevent it; not to help those seeking to implement it, but to fight them and not remove non-Islamic rulers, but to strengthen them and fight with them.”

FORMER ISI CHIEF HAMID GUL CLAIMS U.S. SUPPLIES ARMS AND MONEY TO PAKISTANI TALIBAN

Hamid Gul, the former chief of Pakistan’s controversial Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, claimed the United States was supplying arms and cash to Pakistan’s Taliban movement in a recent interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (April 25).

Gul also claimed ISI support for the Taliban ended in 1989, but says he maintains social relations with Afghan al-Qaeda elements: “They are old friends... But it is not true at all to say that Pakistani intelligence officials are now supporting the Taliban movement and that this is their policy. This is incorrect.” One of Hamid Gul’s “old friends” is the leader of the Haqqani Network, best known for its suicide attacks on U.S., Coalition and diplomatic targets. “Jalalludin Haqqani is a personal friend of mine. When I sent my two sons to Afghanistan to wage jihad against the Soviet forces they fought alongside Jalalludin Haqqani’s men. He is a very, very good man.”

Gul described four types of fighters active in the tribal regions of Pakistan:

- Fighters who are dedicated to avenging Pakistani military operations, especially the 2007 assault on Islamabad's Lal Masjid (Red Mosque)
- "Criminal elements" that fled Pakistan's cities and have taken refuge in the tribal regions. These are not provided any support by the other mujahideen.
- U.S. Intelligence has established 50 mujahideen units in the tribal areas. These are formed from local and foreign elements and supported by Indian intelligence agencies.
- Mujahideen who want to fight in Afghanistan but are forced instead to defend themselves from attacks by Pakistan's military. "This is what the Americans want. They want to see these mujahideen fighting against the Pakistani army and not crossing the borders to fight the Americans and the international forces." The former ISI chief maintains the United States is supplying the Pakistani Taliban with arms, equipment and money to fight the Pakistani army. The Americans "want the national Pakistani youths to fight against the Pakistani army and they have succeeded in this." Gul adds that volunteers from the Punjab region are now joining the tribal mujahideen in Afghanistan.

According to Gul, the Pakistani Taliban movement remains loosely organized. "Each tribe is fighting in its region and no tribe crosses to the region of the other tribe. Each tribe has its command structure." The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed to improve cooperation, but does not yet control all the various Taliban groups in the region.

Regarding the possibility of al-Qaeda procuring weapons of mass destruction, Gul describes this as "sheer U.S. propaganda" designed to destroy Pakistan's status as a nuclear power, saying, "The Pakistani nuclear program is the main goal of the Americans."

Gul predicts that the American presence in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region will not be long-lived: "If the Americans are wise, they will leave Afghanistan within one year. If they are not wise, Pakistan will witness a revolution as a result of the U.S. presence in

Afghanistan. They will be defeated in Afghanistan and they will have to leave Afghanistan in 2010 or 2011."

Latest Surge of Violence in Iraq Tests al-Maliki's Government

By Babak Rahimi

These are challenging times for Nuri al-Maliki. Despite the victory of his coalition, the Dawlat al-Qanun (State of Law) in the provincial elections, al-Maliki's government is facing major security threats and political unrest that could undermine his political authority before December's general elections.

On the security front, Iraq has seen an outburst of violence with a series of at least 18 attacks in April. The twin bombing in the Shi'a shrine-city of Kazemayn was the deadliest of all, adding 60 people to a death toll of more than 150 in merely a week (al-Jazeera, April 24; *Etemad*, April 26). The recent string of attacks is reminiscent of the February 2006 Samarra shrine bombings that unleashed a wave of sectarian hostilities, bringing the country to the brink of civil war. With responsibility for the attacks being claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq—a coalition of Sunni militants with many foreign fighters—it may well be that a new wave of sectarian violence is about to overtake Iraq (al-Arabiya, April 24).

However, the insurgents' strategy for carrying out the attacks is mostly political rather than sectarian. The violent incidents, mostly targeted at the Shi'a (including a failed attempt to assassinate Ayatollah Sistani), have also included attacks on members of the Awakening Council, a coalition of Sunni tribes receiving money from the government for fighting against al-Qaeda insurgents (Tabnak [Tehran], April 27; al-Jazeera, April 7, April 11). The Sunni insurgency also continues its assault against U.S. forces, which under the terms of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) are required to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011. The first phase of the withdrawal from Iraqi cities is scheduled to be completed by June 30, 2009 (Tabnak, April 22). All in all, the attacks signal an all-out military assault by the insurgency to weaken the state ahead of the U.S. withdrawal.

On the political front, al-Maliki faces two other major challenges. The first is the rise of a loose coalition of pro-federalist and Sunni factions, known as the "153"

bloc, which seeks to reverse al-Maliki's political gains in the January provincial elections. The bloc challenges al-Maliki's centralist policies which, according to some, recall the days of Ba'athist rule (*Etemad*, April 21). The election of the new speaker of parliament Iyad Samarrai, a major figure in the Sunni Islamic Party of Iraq with the backing of the pro-federalist Kurdish and ISCI (Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) parties underlines the successful coalition-building which the anti-Maliki factions have carried out in recent weeks (*Etemad*, April 21).

Although much of their success should be credited to Maliki's own failure to muster enough support after his provincial election victory, the 153 bloc was primarily formed in response to Baghdad's increasing centralization policies, seen as a major threat by pro-federalist Kurds and the ISCI. The political struggle between the pro-federalist and centralist factions, which includes diverse groups like the secular Iraqiyya and the Shiite Sadrists, should also be viewed in parallel with al-Maliki's attempt to limit the activities of the Awakening movement by arresting some of its leaders and fighters under the pretext that al-Qaeda has infiltrated the Sunni group (*Azzaman*, April 3; *al-Jazeera*, April 6). Al-Maliki's anti-Awakening strategy has angered many Sunni members of parliament, who see this move as another attempt by the government to monopolize power (*Azzaman*, April 9).

More important opposition has come from al-Maliki's own Shi'a constituency, groups that see his softer stance on Ba'athism as a sign of appeasement that will allow a revival of Sunni power (*Etemad*, April 21). Many Shi'a factions objected to al-Maliki's earlier attempts to include the Ba'athists in the national reconciliation project. Even Ayatollah Sistani, a major backer of al-Maliki's government, has indirectly criticized the Prime Minister for his failure to denounce Ba'athism (*Tabnak*, March 30). It is this opposition that has recently forced al-Maliki to shift his position and wage a new set of verbal attacks against the Ba'athists, accusing them of masterminding the latest string of violence (*IRNA*, April 8, 27).

Finally, there is Washington, where the new Obama administration has been less focused on Iraq due to its preoccupation with domestic concerns and an increase in security since late last year. The new administration's perceived lack of involvement in Iraq has opened the political field in Baghdad to new contenders from many sides and factions, who perceive al-Maliki's political

power as being in jeopardy with the much anticipated departure of U.S. troops.

One positive observation can be made here. The unfolding political rivalry could open up a new chapter for the post-Ba'athist era—the formation of an autonomous Iraqi government that would need to undergo self-adjustment through internal conflict and cross-sectarian alliances between factions seeking to gain influence over the constituencies they represent. As a transitional stage in Iraq's democratization (and a move away from sectarian politics), the latest political turmoil, therefore, should not be seen as a setback for Iraq, but as progress toward non-sectarian party politics.

The problem of security on the ground, however, could render such a transition incomplete. In the coming months leading to the elections, the key for al-Maliki's regime is to contain the bloodshed by showing the government's military strength against the insurgency while bringing to his side both pro-Awakening Sunni and pro-Sadr Shi'a factions that maintain considerable support in the eastern and south-central provinces. Amidst the unrest on the ground, the anti-Maliki parliamentary factions could continue to keep al-Maliki in check in order to curtail the total centralization of power prompted by an obvious response to concerns over security ahead of the American withdrawal. Of course, the success of such political tactics would depend on whether al-Maliki could maintain reasonable distance from Washington and appear self-reliant to Iraqis, who overwhelmingly support the U.S. withdrawal (*al-Jazeera*, April 10).

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Taliban Leader Mullah Nazir Defends Jihad in South Waziristan

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Jihadi internet forums carried a recent interview with the Amir of the Taliban mujahideen in South Waziristan, Mullah Nazir Ahmad. Mullah Nazir

answered questions about the past and current situation of jihad in Afghanistan in the interview, which was conducted in Urdu by jihadi media source al-Sahab and translated to Arabic by jihadi forum members. The posting also contained a short biography of Mullah Nazir (al-Boraq.info, April 12).

According to al-Sahab, Mullah Nazir was born in Bermel, in South Waziristan, in 1975. Upon completing primary school, Mullah Nazir joined a religious school in Wana. He fought in the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 1995-96 and remained in their ranks until the U.S. invasion in 2001. After the fall of the Taliban, Mullah Nazir led the mujahideen in South Waziristan against the U.S.-led Coalition forces. Currently, Mullah Nazir is the Amir of the South Waziristan tribal mujahideen and a member of the United Mujahideen Shura council (the central committee of the Taliban alliance in Pakistan). On the history of jihad, Mullah Nazir claims the tribal provinces in North and South Waziristan were the last regions to fall to British occupation and continued their resistance until the exhausted British withdrew. During the Soviet era, resistance against the Soviet army sprang from Waziristan, where the mujahideen gathered before defeating the occupiers.

Initially, the Afghan mujahideen weren't confident in their ability to repel U.S. and ISAF Coalition forces until they joined the Waziristan mujahideen in a joint assault against a U.S. base. The outcome of the attack encouraged more Afghans to join the Waziristan mujahideen, said Mullah Nazir, adding that the mujahideen were only targeting U.S. and Coalition forces at the time.

Not until Pakistan started helping the Americans did they attack the Pakistani army. Mullah Nazir asserted that the Waziristan mujahideen are part of the Islamic Amirate of Afghanistan under Mullah Omar, with whom they are in close contact. Concerning foreign mujahideen from Arab countries, Maulvi Nazir said they are always welcome and the Waziristan mujahideen would protect them as brothers in Islam and never hand them over to any country. Maulvi Nazir's mujahideen have formed an alliance with other tribes and the Taliban of Afghanistan and Pakistan, countering previously successful efforts by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to cultivate animosity between the tribes and the Taliban.

Pakistan is terrified by this alliance and is plotting to disrupt it by any means available. The alliance was achieved after reconciliatory meetings between Mullah

Nazir and the two principal leaders of the Pakistani Taliban, Baitullah Mahsud and Hafiz Gul Bahadur (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 10). With this alliance, Maulvi Nazir is confident the tribes will help the mujahideen repel any future aggression on North or South Waziristan by U.S. or Pakistani forces. In accordance with global Salafi-Jihadi objectives, Maulvi Nazir does not recognize borders between Muslim countries, insisting on continuing jihad after the withdrawal of US and ISAF forces from Afghanistan until Islamic Shari'a is implemented in all Muslim countries and beyond.

When asked why the mujahideen fight the democratic and Islamic government of Pakistan, Maulvi Nazir said Pakistan is run by an infidel government equivalent to Christian and Jewish governments, corroborating his claim by quoting a verse from the Quran that forbids Muslims from allying themselves with Christians and Jews. In typical Salafi fashion, Maulvi Nazir considers democracy a defective and mundane system devised by Western infidels. "Any system resulting from counting the votes of Shiites, Christians and alcoholic electors is a blasphemous and defunct system." On the legitimacy of the mujahideen drive to implement Shari'a, Mullah Nazir said the religious scholars and shaykhs that support Shari'a had either been arrested or killed by the regime. The mujahideen consider Islamabad's approval of Shari'a in some areas in Pakistan a hoax to manipulate the Mujahideen into laying down their arms. The mujahideen will only do this when Shari'a is applied across all of Pakistan.

Mullah Nazir is sure the rocket attacks that have killed many mujahideen are perpetrated by the Pakistani army with the help of U.S. forces and not solely by the Americans, as the Islamabad government claims. According to the Mullah, Pakistani spies use SIM tracking systems to pinpoint mujahideen locations for attack. Mullah Nazir promised no amnesty for government agents captured by the mujahideen, threatening to kill them immediately. He also pledged to shoot down Pakistani spy planes, such as the two planes shot down by anti-aircraft guns near the city of Angur Adda a few months ago. On suicide bombings, Mullah Nazir denied mujahideen involvement in the bombings of mosques and crowded places and accused the ISI of carrying out the attacks to undermine the mujahideen. In spite of the war waged by the Pakistani government against the mujahideen, Mullah Nazir claims that mujahideen morale is very high and they will continue their jihad until they reach Islamabad.

Jihad in Kashmir has not achieved the desired goals, says Mullah Nazir, who claims the Kashmir jihad was administered by the ISI. Such jihad is not favorable to the mujahideen because Pakistan will not implement Shari'a law after liberating Kashmir. Nazir instead calls for the Kashmir mujahideen to join the jihad in Waziristan.

Mullah Nazir claims the U.S. forces in Afghanistan are confined to their barracks and no longer dare to move around because the mujahideen control many parts of the country. He predicts the complete liberation of Afghanistan in the near future. The imminent defeat of the United States in Afghanistan will accelerate its collapse, similar to the fate of the Soviet Union. The Israeli state will face the same fate very soon after that. Finally, Mullah Nazir is not optimistic about the new American president's policies on Afghanistan or Pakistan; in that regard Mullah Nazir says, "The white idiot left and the black idiot took over."

The interview was posted in almost all jihadi forums and received many positive comments. One forum member commented on the interview by posting an old study about Waziristan prepared by an Arab jihadi in Afghanistan, Hamid al-Saied, one of Abu Yahya al-Libi's subordinates in Waziristan (muslm.net, April 13). In his paper, al-Saied explains the geography of Pakistani regions, the names of the Waziristani tribes and the tribal weight of each one. Al-Saied attributes the transformation of the people of Waziristan from drug lords and murderers to true Islamic mujahideen back to the influence of the Afghan mujahideen who fled to Waziristan after the fall of Taliban Amirate in Afghanistan.

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Europol Report Describes Afghanistan-Pakistan Connection to Trends in European Terrorism

By Thomas Renard

Terrorist activities within the European Union (EU) declined in 2008 as compared to the previous year, according to the annual report

published by Europol, the European Union's criminal intelligence agency. [1] The report lists 515 failed, foiled or successful attacks reported by EU member states, a decrease from 583 attacks in 2007 but still higher than the 2006 total. The decline in terrorist activities was also observed geographically, with only seven member states reporting attacks, two less than in 2007 and four less than in 2006. There were 1009 individuals arrested last year in relation to terrorism activities, a several percent decline in comparison to 2007. Nevertheless, despite an undisputable decline, the threat of terrorism to the EU "remains high," according to Europol deputy director Mariano Simancas (AFP, April 17).

The Varieties of Terrorism

The terrorist threat to Europe encompasses many different forms of terrorism, from left-wing to right-wing extremism, jihadi activities, ethno-separatism, and single issue terrorism. Each form of political violence saw a decline in 2008, with the notable exception of left-wing terrorism, which increased by 25 percent. Left-wing and anarchist extremists remained operational in Greece, Spain and Italy. In addition, French intelligence warned of a "resurgence" of left-wing terrorism which was confirmed by 37 arrests in 2008, significantly more than in any other European country over the last three years (*Nouvel Observateur*, November 25, 2008).

Separatist terrorists remained by far the most active in Europe. They carried out a total of 397 attacks in 2008, of which 98 percent took place in France and Spain, causing the deaths of four people. The number of attacks decreased by 25 percent in comparison to 2007, mainly due to a relative lull in activity by the Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale di a Corsica (FLNC). In Spain, the Basque separatist organization Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) is thought to be encountering difficulties. The group was weakened by the arrests of three successive military leaders in the last six months, the latest being the arrest of Jurdan Martitegi (*El País* [Madrid], April 18). The Europol report notes that the growing use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by the ETA, a trend that started in 2007, indicates that it is "encountering increasing difficulties in the acquisition of commercial explosives."

The Islamist Threat to Europe

In most European countries, however, Islamist terrorism continues to be seen as the biggest threat to security because it attempts to cause mass casualties whereas

ethno-separatist terrorism generally targets material symbols rather than individuals or groups. EU counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove recently said; “The [European] intelligence community considers that the al-Qaeda related threat is still severe and that it is still the main threat to Europe and its internal security” (EuroparlTV, February 2).

There was only one attack in Europe attributable to Islamist terrorism in 2008, when 22-year old Muslim convert Nicky Reilly attempted to detonate a homemade bomb in a shopping mall restaurant in Exeter, South-West England, but injured only himself. Reilly is mentally ill and highly vulnerable. He apparently self-radicalized through the internet, although he had also been in contact with radical Muslims. He was jailed for life in January 2009 (*Times*, January 31).

In 2008, excluding the United Kingdom, 187 individuals were arrested on suspicion of involvement in Islamist terrorism, mainly in France and Spain. [2] This represents a decrease of 7 percent as compared to 2007, and an even greater decrease as compared to 2006. This continuous decrease in the number of arrests seems to indicate a relative diminution of jihadi activities in Europe, although including statistics from the UK would likely lead to a slightly less optimistic conclusion. The number of member states which reported arrests related to Islamist terrorism also decreased from 14 in 2007 to 10 in 2008. The majority of these arrested individuals came from North African countries.

For its part, the UK indicated to Europol that it arrested 256 people in relation to terrorism without providing specific details relative to the distribution of these arrests among the different forms of terrorism. However, given the level of jihadi activism in Great Britain, it can be assumed that a significant share of these arrests was related to Islamist terrorism. The 256 arrests in the UK was an increase in comparison to 2007 (201) and 2006 (156).

Two thirds of arrested individuals could not be linked to organizations known by the authorities and belonged instead to small autonomous cells. This fact seems to confirm the growing threat of self-radicalization and homegrown terrorism that Europe is facing. Part of the explanation for this shift in the radicalization pattern lies in the increasing quantity and quality of Islamist propaganda in Europe. Indeed, there is an increasing number of radical Islamist websites and forums in European languages indicating, according

to Europol, an expansion of jihadi propaganda efforts to reach specific audiences. This phenomenon has been observed in Germany, for instance, with messages and videos, including calls for attacks and instructions for the building of bombs, posted directly in German or in Arabic with German subtitles (see *Terrorism Focus*, February 20, 2008).

Terrorist Recruitment in Europe

In its report, Europol states that “Islamist recruitment activities have largely been driven underground. Radicalization activities are noted to have moved from mosques and other public places into private spaces.” Jihadi forums constitute the archetype of such “underground” and “private spaces”. The internet can also be used as a resource-tool for jihadi training, as in the case of Britain’s Nicky Reilly.

Nevertheless, the internet has not yet replaced real-life interactions regarding radicalization, recruitment and military training, but should rather be seen as a complement or a substitute. A very good illustration of this was provided by the December 11, 2008 arrests in Belgium. [3] While some members of the cell entered into contact with Malika el-Aroud (the wife of the cell’s leader, Moez Garsallaoui), through her French-language jihadi website, “SOS Minbar,” Garsallaoui was recruiting young Muslims in person in the streets and mosques of Brussels. Through the website, a “dialogue” was established with some subscribers which could lead to a meeting with Garsallaoui. Once recruited, members were sent to the tribal areas in Pakistan, where they received religious and military training, followed by a “jihadi exposure,” i.e. following fighters to the warzone without having the authorization to take part in the fight. Eventually, members of the cell were ordered to return to Belgium to establish a sleeper cell.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Connection

The Belgian cell illustrates another major problem, which is the connection between the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and the terrorist threat in Europe. Indeed, as the report states, “Afghanistan and Pakistan seem to have replaced Iraq as preferred destinations for volunteers wishing to engage in armed conflicts.” These recruits pose a threat to European troops deployed in Afghanistan. Germany, for instance, is particularly worried about the presence of several of its citizens (most notably Eric Breininger) in the region who are allegedly plotting operations against German troops (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 28).

When fighters return – such as members of the Belgian cell, or members of the Sauerland cell in Germany – they pose a direct threat to European security. As expressed by U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair, “the primary threat from Europe-based extremists stems from al-Qaeda and Sunni affiliates who return from training in Pakistan to conduct attacks in Europe or the United States.” [4]

Although most European countries recognize that Afghanistan and Pakistan constitute a threat to their security, they generally tend to see the military operations in Afghanistan more as a part of the problem than as a part of the solution. Mirroring this point of view, the Europol report states that “a number of member states judge that they continue to face a high-level threat from Islamist terrorism for reasons that include [a] military presence in Iraq or Afghanistan,” but nowhere does the report mention the fact that European military and civilian missions in conflict zones could help strengthen EU homeland security.

Last month, however, the European Commission, the executive branch of the EU, announced a new three-year, €225 million program aimed at combating terrorism and the trafficking of WMDs (AFP, April 17). This program will focus on Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are described as “bases for radicalization and terrorist training,” as well as the Sahel region where the threat is “growing”. In both regions, the program proposes to support the establishment of anti-terrorism structures, the formation of competent authorities, and the development of regional cooperation. Nevertheless, with only a few details of the plan available, it is not yet possible to assess whether this program inextricably links stability in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region with European security, or whether it is more a program destined to compensate for European lack of commitment to the mission or prepare for a future disengagement from Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The terrorist threat in Europe remains high, although statistics show a certain decline in terrorist activities. One should be careful, however, when interpreting these statistics because the lack of details from the UK data could be misleading and also because the year 2007 saw a dramatic increase in terrorist activities, meaning that last year’s decline could merely be a return to “normality.” Although separatist terrorism is statistically much more significant, Islamist terrorists

are still seen as the biggest threat to Europe given that most of their plots involve mass-killings. Today’s threat is tightly related to the situation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Nevertheless, most EU member states believe their presence in Afghanistan is more a cause of terrorism in Europe than a remedy for it.

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Notes:

1. “TE-SAT 2009 – EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report”, Europol, April 2009.
2. The statistics given to Europol by the UK contained for the first time numbers from Northern Ireland and are therefore not comparable with previous years. Moreover, the UK sends only one global number for attacks and arrests, but does not provide the specific distribution among the different forms of terrorism, rendering it harder to draw conclusions based on statistics.
3. Paul Cruickshank, “The 2008 Belgium Cell and FATA’s Terrorist Pipeline,” CTC Sentinel, April 2009.
4. Dennis C. Blair, “Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009.

Mokhtar Belmokhtar: The Algerian Jihad’s Southern Amir

By Andrew Black

Suspected of a leading role in the kidnapping of the two Canadian and two European hostages released on April 21, the enigmatic Mokhtar Belmokhtar has yet again come to the fore as the dominant jihadi personality in the Sahara. Dubbed the “Uncatchable” by French intelligence in 2002, Belmokhtar has operated as a critical facilitator and amir of the Sahara and Sahel regions for Algerian groups including the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). With eighteen years of involvement in jihadism, Belmokhtar has continually eluded government efforts to marginalize him while becoming a gravitational force in the North African arena and at times a key node in al-Qaeda’s international network. Falsely reported to have been killed by

Algerian forces in 1999 (Al-Majallah, March 14, 1999), rumored to be in amnesty negotiations for over two years, and at odds with AQIM amir Abdelmalek Droukdel, Mokhtar Belmokhtar has become detached from the Algerian jihad and is pursuing his own vision of jihad in the Sahara.

Entrée into Jihadism

Born on 1 June 1972 in Ghardaïa, central Algeria, Belmokhtar claims to have entered into jihadism at the age of 19. [1] In an interview posted online in late 2005, Belmokhtar (a.k.a. Khaled Abou al-Abbas and Lâaouar - 'one-eyed') - professes to have been enamored by the Afghan jihad throughout his secondary schooling. He points to the killing of Jordanian-Palestinian jihad ideologue Abdullah Azzam in 1989 as a seminal point in his development. Within two years of Azzam's death, Belmokhtar traveled to Afghanistan at the age of 19 where he underwent training at Khalden, Jihad Wal, and al-Qaeda's Jalalabad camp. While there, Belmokhtar claims to have made connections with jihadis from around the world, including luminaries such as Abu Qatada, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and Abu Talal al-Masri. Moreover, Belmokhtar claims to have been to battlefronts "from Qardiz to Jalalabad to Kabul." While little is known of Belmokhtar's time in Afghanistan aside from his own account, the training and experience Belmokhtar acquired there would later serve as an essential foundation for his activities in Algeria.

Departing Afghanistan in late 1992 and returning to Ghardaïa in 1993, Belmokhtar soon joined the ranks of the budding jihadi movement in Algeria. His return to Algeria came roughly one year after the Algerian military nullified the 1992 election victory by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which served as the beginning of Algeria's bloody civil war. Soon after his return, Belmokhtar established the first cell of the Shahada Katibat [Martyrs' Battalion] in Ghardaïa, which would later expand its operational scope to the Sahara region and become integrated into the GIA as the group's ninth zone of operations (Al-Majallah, March 14, 1999).

As the GIA grew increasingly violent under the leadership of Jamal Zitouni and Antar Zouabri, Belmokhtar followed Hassan Hattab in forming the GSPC (Le Quotidien d'Oran, November 13, 2002). In the new organization, Belmokhtar continued in his leadership of the southern zone, with an increasing focus on the procurement of weapons and material. Throughout

this period, Belmokhtar and those under his command became a dependable supplier of weapons and material to GSPC elements in the north (Le Quotidien d'Oran, November 13, 2002). Nevertheless, Belmokhtar and his el-Moulathamine (Masked) Brigade still conducted periodic attacks against the Algerian security services and even private companies, projecting sufficient force to have a significant influence on the Sahara and Sahel regions. For example, Belmokhtar's cadre forced the diversion of the 1999 Paris-Dakar rally to avoid the Niger stage (Le Quotidien d'Oran, November 13, 2002). In later years, Belmokhtar would turn his attention to Mauritania, where an estimated 100 to 150 militants under his command would attack Mauritania's Lemgheity barracks, killing 15 Mauritanian soldiers and wounding another 17 (see *Terrorism Focus*, June 13, 2005).

Belmokhtar Becomes Detached

A turning point for Belmokhtar and his role in the Algerian jihad would come in 2003 with the replacement of Hassan Hattab as the leader of the GSPC. From this point forward, Belmokhtar appears to have become steadily detached from the mainstream GSPC, turning his attention toward consolidating his powerbase in the southern regions and strengthening his connections with local networks. In 2003, although a senior member of the GSPC and possessing strong militant and leadership credentials, Belmokhtar was not selected to become the GSPC's next amir. The role was filled instead by Nabil Sahraoui, who would later be killed in a shootout with Algerian security services in June 2004. Although Hassan Hattab would publicly assert his control over the GSPC, leadership of the group passed from Sahraoui to the little known and inexperienced Abdelmalek Droukdel (see *Terrorism Focus*, November 14, 2005).

According to Abdelkader Benmessaoud, the former leader of AQIM's Zone 9 who surrendered to authorities in 2007, Belmokhtar split with Droukdel over the latter's ascent to the leadership of the GSPC (El Watan [Algiers], August 15, 2007). According to Benmessaoud, Droukdel was only expected to be a temporary replacement for Sahraoui, but when it became clear that Droukdel would not step down, Belmokhtar removed himself from the organization (El Watan, August 15, 2007). In so doing, Belmokhtar appears to have become a counterbalance to Droukdel's leadership, even going so far as to criticize Droukdel's leadership of the organization (Liberté [Algiers], April 1, 2009).

Al-Qaeda's Bridge to Algeria

After returning from Afghanistan in 1993, Belmokhtar became a key channel for communications between core al-Qaeda and the Algerian jihadi groups. According to his 2005 interview, Belmokhtar claimed to have initiated correspondence with al-Qaeda while the latter was residing in Sudan in the early 1990s. Belmokhtar goes so far as to say that he was tasked with reaching out to al-Qaeda to generate financial and training support for the burgeoning Algerian jihad in late 1994. While al-Qaeda was known to have provided support to other North African groups during this time, it is unclear to what degree al-Qaeda actually supported Belmokhtar (see Jamestown's *Spotlight on Terror*, March 21, 2005).

Belmokhtar's contact with core al-Qaeda would continue through his move from the GIA to the GSPC. In 2002, Pierre de Bousquet de Florian, the director of France's Territorial Surveillance Directorate (Direction de la surveillance du territoire - DST), noted that al-Qaeda maintained direct lines of communication with Belmokhtar (*Le Monde* [Paris], September 12, 2002). In his statement, de Florian highlighted French concern over the potential for al-Qaeda to use the GSPC to tap disaffected French citizens of Maghrabi extraction (*Le Monde*, September 12, 2002). Indeed, core al-Qaeda appears to have also maintained links with the senior GSPC leadership through European networks. One report claimed that in the late 1990s when Hassan Hattab was forming the GSPC, bin Laden assisted Hattab in connecting with the GIA's European networks through an intermediary in Germany named Mustapha Ait el-Hadi, reported to be a supporter of Belmokhtar (*El Watan*, October 7, 2002).

Years later, Belmokhtar became the contact for al-Qaeda emissaries to the Algerian arena, starting at least as early as 2002 with Abu Mohamed al-Yemeni (a.k.a. Imad Abdelwahab Ahmed Alwan), a 37-year old Yemeni killed by Algerian troops in the Batna area in September 2002 (*Liberté*, October 23, 2003). He was reported to have been sent by core al-Qaeda to oversee the development and expansion of the GSPC's activities (*Le Matin* [Algiers], November 28, 2002). Following al-Yemeni's death, al-Qaeda reportedly sent additional emissaries, including Abd-al-Raqib, to liaise with the GSPC's leadership by way of Belmokhtar (*L'Expression* [Algiers], January 6, 2003).

The Kingpin in the Sahara

In addition to serving as a key facilitator between Algerian jihadi groups and al-Qaeda, Belmokhtar also became the key supplier of weapons and material in the Sahara region. His ability to supply jihadi elements in northern Algeria reliably has been critical to the ability for these groups to sustain their activities. Over the years that he has operated in this capacity, Belmokhtar has become increasingly integrated into the fabric of the Sahara and Sahel.

To raise funds for his group, Belmokhtar has reportedly engaged in a range of activities, from smuggling cigarettes to levying protection tax on other traffickers traversing the region (*Le Quotidien d'Oran*, November 13, 2002). These activities earned Belmokhtar distinction and notoriety in counterterrorism communities and several monikers among the local population, including "Mister Marlboro," reflecting his cigarette smuggling activities (*L'Expression*, May 19, 2003). As Belmokhtar expanded his activities, detractors argued that his interests had shifted from the Algerian jihad to a focus on self-aggrandizement and profit (*Jeune Afrique-L'Intelligent*, November 11, 2006).

Key to Belmokhtar's Saharan activities has been his strong connections with local Tuareg communities. While reporting on these links is scant, Belmokhtar is reported to have married four wives from local Arab and Tuareg communities (*L'Aube*, April 9, 2009; *Le Soir d'Algerie*, April 14, 2008). Mali's Colonel El-Hadj Gamou, an ethnic Tuareg, stated in 2003 that Belmokhtar was granted safe haven by the Tuaregs provided he did not conduct hostilities on Tuareg lands (*Le Figaro* [Paris], March 19, 2007). Despite these links, Belmokhtar's cabal has at times engaged in hostilities with Tuareg factions, including Ibrahim Ag Bahanga's Alliance Démocratique du 23 mai pour le Changement (ADC). For instance, the two sides engaged in a series of skirmishes and targeted killings in October 2006 after Tuareg leaders in the ADC protested GSPC activities in their area (*Quotidien d'Oran*, October 2006; Reuters, November 2, 2006).

Important to note is that despite his detachment from the GSPC and later AQIM, Belmokhtar appears to remain a critical supplier for the group. In early April 2009, there were reports that Algerian security services skirmished with an el-Moulathamine unit that included Belmokhtar. The cadre were said to have been entering Algeria from Libya on their way to an arms purchase

with a Nigerien trafficker named “al-Hadj” (*Liberté*, April 1).

Hostages and Influence

Perhaps Belmokhtar’s most publicized activities have been his involvement in the 2003 kidnapping of 32 European tourists, the 2008 negotiations for the release of two Austrian hostages, and the 2009 negotiations for the release of two Canadian hostages (*El Khabar* [Algiers], February 23, 2009). While Belmokhtar played only a secondary role in the 2003 hostage crisis led by Amari Saifi, he was central to the release of the Austrian and Canadian hostages. In all three cases, Belmokhtar was not thought to have taken part in the initial kidnapping, only becoming involved once the hostages had been taken and negotiations initiated.

His role in the negotiations for the release of the Austrians and Canadians indicates Belmokhtar’s formidable position and breadth of interests in the Sahara. For example, in September 2008 Belmokhtar reportedly proposed to swap the Austrian hostages for ransom payment and the release of two Mauritanian prisoners (*Kurier* [Vienna], September 12, 2008). In 2009, after negotiations for the release of the Canadian hostages had begun, Belmokhtar made a similar suggestion (*Liberté*, February 8). After acquiring control of the Canadian hostages, Belmokhtar was then in a position to negotiate directly for the Mauritanians’ release (*Le Courrier d’Algerie*, March 4, 2009).

In the end, Belmokhtar was reportedly able to secure a €5 million ransom payment (from parties that remain undetermined) and the release of a number of militants, including Oussama el-Merdaci (*Ennahar*, April 28). El-Merdaci is a veteran of Afghanistan who was arrested in 2008 by the Malian security services in Timbuktu as he was heading toward Somalia (*Liberté*, February 8, 2009; *La Nouvelle Patrie*, February 16, 2009). Interestingly, el-Merdaci is thought to have been close with Abdelmalek Droukdel (*El Watan*, March 2, 2008). The fact that in each of these cases the hostages were brought into Mali for negotiations has led to speculation that Belmokhtar maintains senior contacts in the Malian government and military (*Liberté*, February 8; *Ennahar*, April 28).

Belmokhtar’s Future

Belmokhtar has been a fundamental element of the Algerian jihad stretching back to 1993, fulfilling key positions as amir for the southern zone, a key supplier

of resources, and a point of contact for al-Qaeda. While relations between Belmokhtar and the mainstream AQIM leadership appear frayed, reports of his ongoing efforts to supply elements in the north with weapons and material as well as his sustained contacts with Abdelhamid Abou Zaid Essoufi and Yahia Djouadi indicate Belmokhtar remains connected with AQIM’s ongoing operations.

His future, though, is a source of much speculation. The Algerian government recently claimed to have issued Belmokhtar his final warning to accept their amnesty offer or else he would be eliminated (*El-Khabar*, April 25). This would not be the first time that the Algerian government has made such threats or claimed to have killed Belmokhtar (*Al-Majallah*, March 14, 1999). Amnesty negotiations have been rumored to be ongoing for several years through Tamanrasset businessman El-Hadj Bettou (Magharebia, April 28, 2008). In April 2008, Algerian media reported Belmokhtar and 15 of his men had surrendered to authorities, a claim which appears to have been false (*Le Courrier d’Algerie*, April 9, 2008).

The potential for such an outcome however appears remote. Belmokhtar’s ongoing involvement in weapons trafficking and the 2008 and 2009 hostage crises indicates Belmokhtar is committed to maintaining his current capacity in the Sahara and Sahel regions. As his Tuareg tribal connections appear to remain warm and he reportedly maintains allies in the Malian government, Belmokhtar appears to have successfully woven himself into the fabric of the region.

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Notes:

[1] The biographical information presented here of Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s early life is largely taken from an interview posted to jihadi forums on November 7, 2007.