



# Terrorism Monitor

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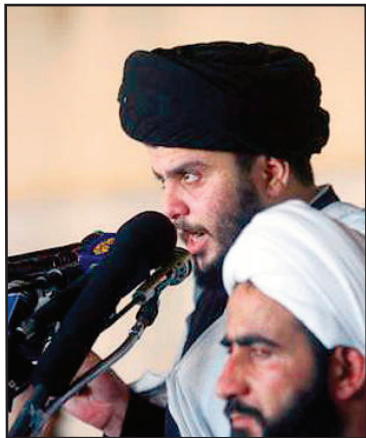
## IN THIS ISSUE:

THE MUMAHIDUN: MUQTADA AL-SADR'S NEW MILITIA  
By Babak Rahimi.....1

ATTACKS IN YEMEN REFLECT AL-QAEDA'S GLOBAL OIL STRATEGY  
By Chris Zambelis.....4

PAKISTAN'S ARMY AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM IN THE POST-MUSHARRAF ERA  
By Tariq Mahmud Ashraf.....7

MURKY PAST OF TURKEY'S GENDARMERIE INTELLIGENCE EMERGES IN ERGENEKON INVESTIGATION  
By Gareth Jenkins.....10



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## The Mumahidun: Muqtada Al-Sadr's New Militia

By Babak Rahimi

The Mahdi Army, the Shia militia loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, has recently undergone a significant transformation. On August 28, al-Sadr suspended the armed operations of the Mahdi Army (al-Jazeera, August 28). Al-Sadr's latest statement on the Mahdi militia follows a similar call in early August when he announced new plans to reorganize the Mahdi Army into "a cultural and religious force," charged with the responsibility of leading an intellectual jihad (IRNA, August 8). As outlined in that statement, such changes primarily involve the centralization of the command structure into a small, tight unit of loyalists, coupled with vigorous religious training for the militiamen. The new militia is called the "Mumahidun" ("those who pave the path"). The name was coined in reference to the devout followers of the Hidden Imam, who prepare the way for the Mahdi's return, believed by Shias to culminate in the establishment of divine justice on earth.

### Origin of the Reforms

The origin of the plan to remold the Mahdi militia into a cultural body dates back to August 2007, when clashes between the Badr Organization, representing the rival Shia Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and the Mahdi Army led to the death of several Shia pilgrims in Karbala. With the intervention of Najaf and Tehran, al-Sadr agreed to a truce and issued a decree to freeze the activities of the Mahdi Army, a ruling that was renewed in February 2008 to assure his Shia critics that he is sincere in bringing the unruly militia under his control. Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's spring 2008 military offensive to drive the Mahdi



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Army from the city of Basra, and later from Sadr City, ended in a ceasefire agreement on May 10 (al-Awsat al-Iraq, May 11). Yet despite the truce, the Iraqi security offensive expanded into other cities like Amara and Diwanya as supporters of al-Sadr followed their leader's call for restraint, showing no sign of major resistance (al-Jazeera, June 16; July 21).

Although there have been previous plans to reorganize the militia, al-Sadr's latest repackaging of the Mahdi Army into a "cultural organization" is an indication of a major internal transformation (Aftab News [Iran], June 13). First, the change of the militia's name from "Jaysh al-Mahdi" to "Mumahidun" reveals how the Sadrist movement is changing on the ideological level. Unlike its earlier form, the new militants are no longer the immediate, charismatic soldiers of the Hidden Imam, but a regular unit of organized fighters who merely anticipate the return of their savior. For the most part, al-Sadr seems no longer to consider his movement as the immediate embodiment of the Mahdi manifested in a perceived and present sacred time, but rather a mere prelude to what can be realized in a distant messianic future. The symbolic distinction between immediacy and anticipation is crucial here, since it brings to light how al-Sadr is slowly detaching himself and his movement from the earlier apocalyptic traits seen in the post-war period and moving toward a more standardized, institutionalized Shia-based millenarian position.

### Structure and Strategy of the Mumahidun

In an organizational sense, the new Mumahidun militia signals a transition from a paramilitary unit, with a political and social presence on the street level, to a private "special force," with specific military operational tasks. While the former Mahdi Army represented a united citizen militia of grass-roots background, the new elite force is divided into two operational factions: one elite unit of combatants and another unit to provide public service to the community (al-Jazeera, August 8). The latter force, designed for cultural activities, is yet to be formed (Etemad, August 13). As a former Mahdi Army militant explains, "the new army will be only loyal to Muqtada. You will not see any dissent in this new group" (Author's Interview, Qom, August 10). Such renewed confidence underlines a self-promotional strategy designed to create a restored military unit operating on par with the Hizbullah of Lebanon (Etemad, August 13). But it also shows how in recent months al-Sadr has seriously sought to extricate himself from unruly elements within his movement.

The causes behind this organizational strategy are several, but one major factor is the likely influence of the Iranian regime, particularly the Revolutionary Guard, in taming al-Sadr's militia. The early spring detention of al-Sadr at a residential house in Qom by the Revolutionary Guard highlights a major rift between the Sadrists and the hard-line establishment in Tehran (Tabnak News, May 17). Although the purpose of the arrest remains unclear, there seems to be a steady attempt by the Iranian regime to diminish the influence of al-Sadr in Iraqi politics in a way that will strengthen the Maliki government. This was probably done to ensure that Baghdad would thwart any American attempt to use Iraq as launch pad for military attacks against Iran. Likewise, just two weeks prior to al-Sadr's arrest, Iranian officials accepted a request from Iraqi parliamentary delegates, led by Abdul Aziz Hakim, to exclude al-Sadr from participation in a joint Iran-Iraq meeting in Tehran to discuss the militia problem in Iraq (Tabnak News, May 4). The move signaled a shift in the Iranian strategy to give full support to the Maliki government, partly in order to show the Americans Tehran can play a major role in the stability of Iraq - a central issue in the ongoing nuclear talks.

### The Growing Influence of Najaf

It is important to note that al-Sadr's recent restructuring of his militia is also linked to the growing influence of Najaf in Iraqi Shia politics. As the power of the Maliki government expanded after the Basra offensive (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 16), so did the influence of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani over the Shia factions, which had considerably declined after the February 2006 Samarra bombing that led to the escalation of Sunni-Shia violence. Since the March Basra offensive, Sistani and his representatives have discreetly moved to play a more active role to support the Maliki government in order to limit the al-Sadrism influence in Baghdad and the southern regions. In one of his more explicit political statements in recent months, Sistani directly challenged Shia militant factions by urging the Maliki government to maintain a military monopoly and disarm the militias loyal to factions outside of the government (al-Arabiyah TV, May 22). Sistani's staunch opposition to the U.S.-Iraq security deal is a reminder of how the Grand Ayatollah still continues to wield major influence in Iraqi politics, especially over Maliki who continues to seek Sistani's counsel (and at times approval) in major legal and political issues (Hamshahronline, August 28)

Since the 2007 Karbala tragedy, al-Sadr has become increasingly dependent on Najaf for protection against former followers who oppose his decision to become an established figure in the Najaf clerical establishment. The origin of this shift goes back to a major meeting between al-Sadr and Sistani, when the young cleric expressed fear of death threats from his own militia. Sistani is reported to have advised Sadr: “You have two options: bear the consequences, on you and the Shias in general, or withdraw into a corner” (Newsweek, March 12). Following Sistani’s advice to leave the country and seek a scholarly path, al-Sadr traveled to Iran, where he was reported to be staying at his cousin’s house in Qom (al-Arabiyah TV, February 19, 2007). This meeting highlighted the initial dependence of al-Sadr on Sistani’s religious authority. For now, Sistani appears to have successfully tamed al-Sadr, especially by helping him become an active member of the Najaf-Qom clerical establishment. This intriguing development underlines how al-Sadr is gradually moving toward the traditional Shia authority based in Najaf, especially in his opposition toward the security pact (Hamshahrionline, August 28).

#### Sistani and Iran

The recent developments in Sistani-Tehran relations may have played a role in al-Sadr’s change of strategy. Since 2006 Sistani and Shahrestani, his representative in Qom, have increasingly grown closer to Tehran, especially toward certain conservative factions within Iran’s political establishment. The main reason for making such an unlikely alliance is that Sistani’s financial center is based in Qom, where Tehran has considerable control over the activities of religious centers run by high-ranking clerics. Sistani is fully aware of what the Iranian regime is capable of doing to those competing religious marjas (high-ranking scholars) who oppose Tehran’s policies. After the 1979 Iranian revolution, for instance, Ayatollah Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari (1904-1985), a senior Shia cleric, publicly opposed Ayatollah Khomeini, who saw in his radical movement a deviation from true Shi’ism. In response, the regime immediately stripped Shariatmadari of his religious authority and placed him under house-arrest, a major affront to a clerical establishment that had never before seen a high-ranking jurist deposed by another cleric.

Although Sistani refused to give an audience to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during his March visit to Iraq, he welcomed the Iranian Speaker of the House, Ali Larijani, to his office in Najaf (Mehr News

Agency, April 1). The meeting was a significant political event, since it provided a direct link of communication between Sistani and the pragmatic conservatives led by Larijani, who have grown weary of the hard-liners’ support for the Mahdi Army in recent years. Sistani and Tehran continue to grow closer through various formal events and family ties, such as the recent marriage between Sistani’s granddaughter and the grandson of the late Ayatollah Khomeini (*Shahrvand*, May 31).

The late July string of attacks in central Baghdad and Kirkuk and the deadly August 8 bombings in the northern town of Tal Afar are grim reminders of the still unstable situation in Iraq (IRNA, July 28; al-Jazeera, August 9). Despite the presence of U.S. troops and a stronger Iraqi security force, post-Baathist Iraq continues to face the possibility of renewed violence on both inter-sectarian and intra-sectarian levels. It remains unclear what role the Mumahidun militia will play in a renewed conflict. What remains certain is that al-Sadr will continue to lead his dedicated followers and seek to expand his movement in order to consolidate power within the Iraqi Shia community.

#### Conclusion

In opposition to the long-term security agreement with the United States, al-Sadr can use the nationalist opposition to enhance his popularity and hence his legitimacy as a political leader, demonstrated by the fact that he demanded the Iraqi government reject the security agreement with Washington and stage demonstrations across Iraqi cities (Aswat al-Iraq, August 1; August 22). While retaining fierce support among impoverished Shias in southern regions and Baghdad, al-Sadr may use the U.S.-Iraq “Status of Forces” agreement to reignite his charismatic authority and reconstitute the Mahdi Army.

However, the most ominous implication in the transformation of the Mahdi Army lies in the proliferation of splinter groups that may appeal to the disgruntled followers of al-Sadr as an alternative Shia anti-occupation movement. Nevertheless, the point to observe here is how al-Sadr is seeking to shape himself into a political figure in light of the delays in the provincial elections and the latest frictions between centralist (led by Dawa and Sunni Arab nationalists) and federalist factions (Kurds and the ISCI) within the parliament. As tensions over the provincial election laws increase, Iraq may begin to see a new conflict between the Sadrists and the Kurdish peshmerga militia, who recently called the



Mahdi Army an “outlaw” militia and challenged Iraqi forces over control of major governmental buildings in Kurdish territories (*Azzaman* [Baghdad], August 26). The main question is how al-Sadr’s followers will perceive the new Mumahidun Army and respond to the latest changes designed to shape the al-Sadr movement into a purely political force confined to the electoral process of Iraq’s fledgling democratic order.

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## Attacks in Yemen Reflect al-Qaeda’s Global Oil Strategy

By Chris Zambelis

Recent attacks by al-Qaeda’s Yemeni branch, Kataeb Jund al-Yemen (Soldiers of Yemen Brigades), against oil facilities across Yemen indicate that al-Qaeda’s larger strategy to strike oil targets remains a top priority. On June 30 the group took credit for rocket attacks against an oil refinery in Safir, located east of the capital Sanaa, in Maarib province. The group later posted video footage of attack on a radical Islamist website.<sup>1</sup> The attack represented the latest in a series of strikes against oil infrastructure and personnel in Yemen over the last year by militants tied to al-Qaeda, including a May 30 attack against an oil refinery in the port city of Aden (see *Terrorism Focus*, June 3). In a related incident, the group threatened to escalate its campaign of violence against oil infrastructure and foreign interests in Yemen unless the state released members of its group currently detained by Yemeni authorities (*Yemen Post*, August 11).

Oil’s significance figures prominently in Osama bin Laden’s strategic thinking, especially as this summer’s record-high oil prices continue to impact the U.S. and global economies. Although the primary factors that determine oil prices are market forces that reflect supply and demand, other intangibles also help dictate the price of oil. Geopolitical events such as war and political instability in and around oil-producing countries

1 Video still shots of the footage released by Jund al-Yemen and related links can be accessed at <http://clearinghouse.infolad.net/showthread.php?t=15362> (accessed September 2008).

and regions can create uncertainty about the future availability of oil supplies. This uncertainty causes traders to add a security premium to oil prices that can range, depending on the circumstances, between \$1 and \$25 per barrel, or higher. Adverse weather that threatens oil infrastructure and transport routes can also drive the price of oil up. Steady global demand for oil — led by record-high demand from Asia — is also responsible for an increase in oil prices.

According to a recent essay titled “Al-Qaeda and the Battle for Oil” that has been circulating on radical Islamist websites since June, militants are well aware of the economics of oil. The author of the essay goes as far as to claim that al-Qaeda’s strategy to defeat the United States rests on bankrupting America by driving up oil prices by any means necessary.<sup>2</sup> The author also mentions that the recent attacks against oil infrastructure in Yemen, along with attacks in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, have been critical to al-Qaeda’s success so far.

Based on its actions and discourse, it is apparent that al-Qaeda operates a dynamic oil strategy that contains political, economic, and military aspects. While the recent attacks in Yemen reflect the military aspects of al-Qaeda’s oil strategy, it is worth examining the evolution of al-Qaeda’s oil strategy over the years.

### Oil and Political Opposition

Any discussion of oil’s significance for al-Qaeda must begin with Saudi Arabia and bin Laden’s opposition to the Saudi monarchy. Bin Laden’s criticism of the royal family dates back to the emergence of the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC), a London-based opposition group bin Laden helped found in 1994 that sought to unify Saudi opposition elements and to encourage the reform of the kingdom from within. The ARC illustrated the political aspects of al-Qaeda’s oil strategy, with bin Laden accusing Saudi leaders of, among other things, corruption, mismanagement, and squandering oil revenues to maintain the ostentatious lifestyles of the royal family.<sup>3</sup> Bin Laden also accused Saudi Arabia of

2 Zadi al-Taqwa, “Al-Qaeda and the Battle for Oil,” <http://www.alqimmah.net/showthread.php?t=1226> (accessed September 2008).

3 For more background on the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC), see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 178-194. For details on the ARC and other domestic Saudi opposition groups operating at the time, see Daryl Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and*

using its preeminent position within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to provide the United States with oil at artificially low prices at the expense of Muslim interests. He condemned the royal family for using oil revenues to purchase expensive U.S. weapons systems that would prove useless in defending the kingdom. Instead, bin Laden saw Saudi purchases of U.S. arms as a move designed to curry favor with Washington.<sup>4</sup> Despite its support for the 1973 Arab oil embargo to protest U.S. support for Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur/Ramadan War, Saudi Arabia secretly permitted the sale of oil to the United States military to sustain U.S. forces in Vietnam and elsewhere. Saudi Arabia also deposited billions of dollars of revenue earned during the oil crisis into the U.S. economy to mitigate the effects of the embargo.

Bin Laden's criticism of the Saudi royal family throughout the 1990s must be seen in the context of Saudi Arabia's self-declared role as the Guardian of the Two Holy Mosques of Mecca and Medina. The kingdom considers its oil wealth to be a gift from God, a gift it believes bestows a claim of special legitimacy upon the ruling family.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, bin Laden's direct criticism of the royal family challenged the monarchy's claim of religious legitimacy and its right to preside over Mecca and Medina. Despite its disdain for Saudi Arabia, however, al-Qaeda initially opposed attacks against oil targets in the kingdom and elsewhere in the region. The group's position is outlined in the following excerpt from bin Laden's August 23, 1996, "Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places":

I would like here to alert my brothers, the mujahideen, the sons of the nation, to protect this [oil] wealth and not to include it in the battle, as it is a great Islamic wealth and a large economic power essential for the soon-to-be-established Islamic state, by God's permission and grace.<sup>6</sup>

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*the Momentum of Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 216-308.

4 For more details, see As'ad Abukhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), p. 97.

5 Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), p. 149.

6 For a full transcript of Osama bin Laden's August 23, 1996 "Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," see Robert O.

It appears that al-Qaeda was concerned about the possibility that attacks against Saudi oil facilities - and oil targets elsewhere on Arab soil - would alienate Muslim opinion, even if that resource was being squandered by a corrupt dictatorship widely detested by its own people and Muslims throughout the Middle East.

#### Oil and Economic Warfare

Researchers tracking al-Qaeda tend to focus on assessing the group's ability to commit spectacular acts of violence. At the same time, al-Qaeda's ability to launch (or inspire) attacks must be seen in the context of the group's long-term strategy, a strategy which aims to bankrupt the United States by engaging it through an economic war of attrition. The following excerpt from bin Laden's October 29, 2004 public statement illustrates this aspect of al-Qaeda's strategy:

Al-Qaeda spent \$500,000 on the September 11 attacks, while America lost more than \$500 billion, at the lowest estimate, in the event and its aftermath. That makes a million American dollars for every al-Qaeda dollar, by the grace of God Almighty. This is in addition to the fact that it lost an enormous amount of jobs - and as for the federal deficit, it made record losses, estimated at over a trillion dollars. Still more serious for America was the fact that the mujahideen forced Bush to resort to an emergency budget in order to continue fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. This shows the success of our plan to bleed America to the point of bankruptcy....<sup>7</sup>

Here lies the economic aspect of al-Qaeda's oil strategy. While al-Qaeda had previously opposed targeting oil, bin Laden's December 16, 2004, statement would mark a major shift in the group's strategy:

Targeting America in Iraq in terms of economy and losses in life is a golden and unique opportunity. Do not waste it only to regret it later. One of the most important reasons that led our enemies to control our land is the theft of our oil. Do everything you can to stop the biggest plundering operation in history - the

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Marlin IV, *What Does al-Qaeda Want?: Unedited Communications* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), pp. 1-17.

7 For a full transcript of Osama bin Laden's October 29, 2004 "Statement to the American People," see Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 237-244.

plundering of the resources of the present and future generations in collusion with the agents and the aliens... Be active and prevent them from reaching the oil, and mount your operations accordingly, particularly in Iraq and the Gulf [Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Gulf monarchies, etc.], for this is their fate (BBC, December 16, 2004).

It is difficult to discern the precise reason behind al-Qaeda's shift in strategy at this juncture. One likely possibility is that bin Laden was inspired by the Iraqi insurgency, especially its nationalist strain, which targeted oil infrastructure to great effect in order to undermine the U.S.-led Coalition's efforts to control the country. Although most of the damage against the Iraqi oil infrastructure, especially oil pipelines, was easily repairable, the ongoing violence and instability coupled with the deliberate targeting of oil-related sites by the insurgents undermined investor confidence and raised concerns about Iraq's potential to regain its place as a major oil producer. These factors, along with a host of others, contributed to a steady increase in oil prices during this volatile period. In keeping with al-Qaeda's long-term goal of bankrupting the United States, it is likely that bin Laden identified an opportunity to up the ante against the United States and its allies in the region by making oil fair game.

### Oil and Military Operations

Bin Laden's explicit call for attacks against oil installations to harm the U.S. economy resulted in a spike in security premiums and raised concerns about a new round of terrorist attacks. For al-Qaeda's oil strategy to have any hopes of succeeding in the long-term, however, the group would have to back up its words with action. Al-Qaeda's Saudi affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, rose to the occasion by mounting an ambitious attack against Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil facility on February 24, 2006 (Middle East Online, February 24, 2006; Arab News, February 26, 2006). Abqaiq is the world's largest oil complex. The attackers failed to breach the first cordon of the facility's security perimeter with their explosives-laden vehicles, resulting in a firefight between the militants and Saudi security forces outside the facility. The militants ultimately detonated their explosives prematurely in what proved to be a botched operation. Despite the operation's failure, oil prices immediately jumped \$2

per barrel amid already record-high prices due to fear of future attacks on oil facilities in the kingdom and other parts of the region.<sup>8</sup>

Even if the militants had succeeded in detonating their explosives inside Abqaiq, they did not have anywhere near the amount of explosives required to destroy the massive complex. The underlying message behind the attack was clear: the military aspect of al-Qaeda's oil strategy had become operational. Although from an operational perspective, an attack against a more accessible target may have yielded a better result, ultimately, the decision to strike Abqaiq was also meant to inspire al-Qaeda's sympathizers to attempt similar attacks in their own countries. Furthermore, in February 2007, al-Qaeda's *Sawt al-Jihad* magazine called for attacks against U.S. oil interests in the Western Hemisphere, specifically attacks against oil infrastructure in Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela (three key sources of U.S. energy) to further damage the U.S. economy (*Sawt al-Jihad*, January 2007).

### Conclusion

Despite al-Qaeda's explicit call for attacks against oil infrastructure, radical Islamists and their sympathizers continue to debate the utility of such tactics. Members of a popular radical Islamist chat room forum recently debated the legitimacy of such attacks on a thread discussing the June 30 attacks on Yemen's Safir oil refinery, entitled "Is Attacking the Oil Fields of Maarib in Yemen Considered Jihad or Sabotage?" The crux of the debate revolved around whether the oil derived from Safir benefits Yemen or the United States. One respondent expressed his opposition to the attacks, based on his belief that the oil was not destined for the West; "If the petroleum coming out of the wells is not going to the West and the nations of heresy, why should they be attacked?" (www.muslim.net, June 30-July 6).

In response, another forum member agreed in principle that oil facilities should not be targeted, presumably due to their role in sustaining regional economies. At the same time, he added that the recent attacks in Yemen were justified due to the Yemeni regime's close ties to the United States, especially in the military arena. Radical Islamists detest the Yemeni government, much like

<sup>8</sup> For more background on the implications of the February 26, 2006 Abqaiq attacks, see "Saudi Arabian Oil Facilities: The Achilles Heel of the Western Economy," Jamestown Foundation, May 2006, <http://www.jamestown.org/docs/Jamestown-SaudiOil.pdf>

they do the Saudi royal family and other U.S.-backed autocracies in the region. These sentiments are illustrated in the author's response:

My dear brother, I'm with you. I see no need to bombard the oil refineries...but I believe the brothers in the Yemeni Qaeda when they said it, considering that these refineries are used by the tyrant of Yemen [Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh] to provide fuel to the Crusaders in their war against Islam. Everyone knows that Yemen supplies the American navy with fuel, and this is what motivated the men of tawheed [declaring the oneness of God] to shed blood for the sake of "there is no god but God" by wrecking the American destroyer [USS *Cole*] in Aden (www.muslm.net, June 26-July 6).

Despite the apparent doubts expressed above about the utility of attacking oil installations, by all accounts, the experience of Abqaiq and the recent incidents in Yemen indicate that al-Qaeda's call for an all-out war against oil should remain cause for serious concern in the Middle East and beyond.

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## Pakistan's Army and the War on Terrorism in the Post-Musharraf Era

By Tariq Mahmud Ashraf

The sudden departure of President Musharraf from the helm of affairs in troubled Pakistan has created numerous doubts and uncertainties; most prominent are the stability of the shaky coalition in Islamabad and its expected stance towards support for the U.S.-led War on Terrorism in Afghanistan.

Although Musharraf was facing intense opposition at home because of his pro-U.S. posture, he stood firm in his support for the United States and the West right

until his last day in power. This is despite the fact that his popularity plummeted continuously ever since he orchestrated the radical shift in Pakistan's policy towards the Taliban and brought Islamabad in line with U.S. goals, objectives, and ambitions in the region. His failure to motivate the Pakistani populace towards supporting the West in its military endeavors inside Afghanistan manifested in a sharp increase in incidents of wanton terrorism throughout Pakistan and also in the ignominious and embarrassing defeat of his political supporters in the February 2008 general elections.

The newly elected democratic government of Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani has been beset with a plethora of problems right from the outset, leading Pakistan to collapse into a state of almost stagnant governance. Confronted with the issues of a shaky coalition in Islamabad, the restoration of the judiciary, rampant inflation, increased terrorist activity, and a crippling energy shortage, the new government has not been able to stabilize after almost six months in power.

### Domestic Political Instability

With Nawaz Sharif's party having decided to leave the coalition and field a candidate for the President's post in opposition to Asif Ali Zardari, the domestic political scenario in Pakistan is, to say the least, uncertain and unpredictable. Since Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) has the second largest presence in the Parliament after Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the latter could now be forced to rely more on smaller and regional (provincial) rather than national-level political entities such as Altaf Hussain's Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Asfandyar Wali Khan's Awami National Party (ANP), and Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI), as well as the independent members of the federal legislature (*Daily Jang* [Karachi], August 24). Bringing so many disparate political groups on board is a difficult job in itself, while holding them together for any appreciable period of time would be even more problematic.

The internal discord that is expected to characterize such a coalition is bound to lead to an unstable and weak federal legislature that would be inhibited from taking major decisions. This might put the central government at odds with the provincial legislatures, especially in the troubled provinces of Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), and could also divert its attention from more important issues confronting Pakistan.



## Increased Involvement of Pakistan Army

While General Ashfaq Kayani has tended to stay away from getting embroiled in Pakistan's political quagmire, it must be considered that Musharraf's presence as President was a major factor in inhibiting greater involvement of the Army in affairs of state. With his departure and the weak nature of the coalition in Islamabad, it is likely that the Pakistan Army could start playing a more assertive role in areas that it previously stayed away from, including matters pertaining to foreign policy. As such, it is possible that Pakistan's continuing support for the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan would now be decided at the General Headquarters rather than elsewhere. Needless to say, a more prominent role for the Pakistan Army would also translate into an enhanced involvement of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

If the Pakistan Army does take the dominant decision-making role vis-à-vis Pakistan's posture towards the war in Afghanistan, the following aspects would influence any decision regarding Pakistan's involvement in the war in Afghanistan:

- The Pakistan Army has been the prime beneficiary of the massive amount of U.S. aid that has flowed into Pakistan since October 2001. The Army would obviously desire to maintain close relations with the United States in order to prevent this aid channel drying up.
- General Kayani and most of the top leadership of the Pakistan Army have had tenures in the United States and other Western countries and still maintain their links with the senior military leadership in these countries. Having been exposed to Western lifestyles and cultures, most of these Generals have a liberal and progressive outlook towards life and are secular in thinking.
- Pakistan's Army, being India-centric and eastwards-focused in its operational strategy and doctrine, does not prefer any direct involvement in the military operations being undertaken against the radical elements inside the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for a variety of reasons. Being a trained field army, its personnel are neither adequately trained nor equipped for counter-insurgency operations; it does not want to become embroiled in a civil war situation in the country since a substantial portion of its active-duty personnel hail from the NWFP; it has a sizeable number of religiously inclined individuals who would be loath to pick up weapons against fellow co-religionists and their own countrymen; and any significant deployment of the Pakistan Army in the north-west of the country would weaken its defensive posture against a resurgent and revitalized India. The Army's reluctance to get seriously involved inside FATA would lead to a greater reliance on the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC), which is not only woefully under-equipped but also untrained for this critical assignment (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 25; August 11).
- Afghanistan has been touted as bestowing an element of geographic strategic depth to Pakistan, and this aspect necessitates the presence of a pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul. While a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan might be enough to fulfill this requirement, the current pro-India Karzai government or any regime dominated by the Northern Alliance would not be acceptable to the Pakistan Army. This could well be the reason for the continued involvement of Pakistan's ISI inside Afghanistan and its continued links with the Taliban. It can be expected, therefore, that the Pakistan Army and ISI would continue to maintain links with the Taliban while simultaneously contesting the rising Indian influence in Kabul. Such a posture might go against the policy of supporting Coalition forces fighting inside Afghanistan. The alleged involvement of the ISI in the recent terrorist attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul is a case in point (*The Hindu*, August 5; NDTV.com, August 4; AFP, August 5)
- The Army's motivation for supporting the Coalition war effort in Afghanistan also stems from the possibility of increased US involvement in re-equipping and retraining the FC paramilitary. A revitalized and potent FC would obviate the need for Pakistan's regular army to be deployed in the border areas and permit them to focus on safeguarding the eastern frontier with India.
- While Musharraf was seen as duplicitous in supporting the United States while simultaneously pursuing peace negotiations with the extremist elements inside FATA, the Pakistan Army has likely realized that the continuation of such a policy is further harming its image and will not bear any fruit. This is possibly why the recent offensive in Bajaur, Kurram, Swat, and areas of South Waziristan appears to be a concerted and focused military campaign,



which has led to the militants suing for peace for the first time. Interestingly, the same government which was earlier contemplating holding peace negotiations responded not only by banning Baitullah Mahsud's Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan but also by dismissing the request for a ceasefire outright (*Dawn* [Karachi], August 25; August 26).

#### Civil-Military Relations in Post-Musharraf Pakistan

While Musharraf's departure has reduced the visible level of involvement of the Pakistan Army in affairs of state, it has by no means reduced its stature as a major domestic force and one of the key pillars of governance in the country. It can safely be expected that the weakness and instability of the political coalition will bestow greater significance on the domestic role of the Pakistan Army and could even see the coalition in Islamabad acceding to all "requests" of the Pakistan Army. The chance that any reluctance on the part of the elected politicians to digress from the path desired by the Pakistan Army may lead to yet another military coup in Pakistan is likely to figure prominently in the thinking of the elected leaders and could well force them to acquiesce to the desires of the Pakistan Army. In some ways, this would highlight a paradox that has continued to figure in Pakistani politics – the departure of a strong albeit despised military ruler from the corridors of power has once again presented the all-powerful Pakistan Army with yet another opportunity for calling the shots in Islamabad. The power and influence that the Pakistan Army continues to enjoy became fairly evident when Prime Minister Gillani's government had to revoke an order placing the powerful ISI under the Ministry of Interior within six hours of its issuance, primarily due to pressure from the Army (*Times of India*, August 6).

Nawaz Sharif is considered by some to be the most conservative and religious-minded amongst the key political leaders, but with Sharif leaving the coalition government, those in support of a negotiated settlement in FATA have definitely been weakened. This is not to say, however, that those in favor of continuing negotiations with the extremist militants do not still exist in sizeable numbers amongst the elected politicians. During the election campaign, most of the political parties harped on the theme that Musharraf had been waging a war on his own people; these parties instead promised to seek a non-military solution to the problems being encountered in FATA. As such, at least initially, the politicians might attempt to open channels with Baitullah Mahsud and

other key leaders of the extremist groups. Such steps, however, might not go down well with the U.S. (or the West) or with the Army leadership, which would be keen on keeping the United States happy. Differences over the approach to be adopted towards the extremist elements in FATA could thus emerge as the first bone of contention between the Pakistan Army and the political government.

#### U.S. Policy towards Post-Musharraf Pakistan

The United States will have to maintain a careful balance in its relations with the Pakistan Army on one hand and the government of Prime Minister Gillani on the other. While the tottering Gillani regime may look to the United States for support to strengthen its domestic standing, the powerful Army will be looking for the flow of military aid and equipment to continue unabated. Since Coalition military operations in Afghanistan are contingent to a great extent on the availability of secure supply routes through Pakistan, the United States will have to try to balance the interests of both.

In an attempt to rope in the ISI, the United States may bring its influence to bear upon India and the Karzai government in an attempt to alleviate Pakistani concerns over the increasing influence that the Indians are perceived to be wielding in Kabul. U.S. efforts at assuaging Pakistan's security concerns about being sandwiched between arch-rival India on the east and a hostile Afghanistan on the west would not only satisfy the security concerns of Pakistan's civilian and military leadership but would also encourage Pakistan to support U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan more zealously.

In what appears to be an acceptance of the key role of the Pakistan Army in Pakistan's continuing support for the War on Terrorism, the normally irregular interaction between the senior military leadership of the US and Pakistan has been significantly enhanced in the past few weeks, culminating in a sort of a secret "military summit" between the top American and Pakistani military leaders on board the USS Abraham Lincoln (*Dawn*, August 28, *Daily Times* [Lahore], August 29) The most interesting aspect of this meeting was the statement of U.S. chief-of-staff Admiral Michael Mullen that he believed "Pakistan's focus in the war on terror was where it should have been." This is in sharp contrast to Condoleezza Rice and other State Department officials who have been harping on the theme that Pakistan "is not doing enough." Speaking

of how Pakistan was performing in the War on Terror, one U.S. defense official said, “They are doing more and becoming more effective, but there is still a long way to go” in the tribal areas. (*The News* [Islamabad], August 29)

In its efforts to prevent the cross-border movement of extremist elements between Afghanistan and Pakistan and also to eliminate those extremists who have found shelter within FATA, the current U.S. plan to implement a two-pronged strategy of revitalizing the FC and creating Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) for the socio-economic development of FATA promises to deliver effective results. Being a long-term project, however, this process will be time consuming and drawn out, necessitating uninterrupted and continuous funding with adequate supervision of the implementation process at the grass-roots level. It must, however, be kept in mind that the proposal for creating ROZs in the FATA must be undertaken in unison with the proposed socio-economic development plans that Prime Minister Gillani’s government is envisaging for FATA, including scrapping the century-old Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR).

### Conclusion

Every challenge also presents an opportunity, and the challenges posed by the current political situation in Pakistan are no different. In order for these to be tackled, however, it must be ensured that the views as well as the compulsions of the involved stake-holders are fully taken into account.

Committed to combating the threat posed by the extremist elements currently operating inside Afghanistan from safe havens inside FATA, the United States needs Pakistan. President Musharraf’s sudden departure from the decision-making scene in Pakistan has created a void in the country’s hierarchy which will be filled over time by the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Gillani and the Pakistan Army led by General Kayani. In order to ensure that both these power nodes within Pakistan remain committed to supporting Coalition military operations in Afghanistan, the West in general and the United States in particular must continue a state of balanced interaction with both. This interaction should be aimed at soliciting their unstinting support for the War on Terrorism while simultaneously addressing the security and economic concerns of the Pakistani leadership.

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## Murky Past of Turkey’s Gendarmerie Intelligence Emerges in Ergenekon Investigation

By Gareth Jenkins

In late August, the Turkish media reported that retired Colonel Arif Dogan had confessed to being the founder of the intelligence wing of the Turkish Gendarmerie, known in Turkish as the Jandarma Istihbarat ve Terorle Mucadele (JITEM - Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Terror), a controversial security organization whose very existence has been officially denied for many years (*Milliyet*, August 16; *Sabah*, August 25; *Zaman*, August 27).

Dogan’s claim was alleged to have come during investigations into the so-called Ergenekon ultranationalist gang, which was established by a handful of radical secularists – many of them retired covert operatives - who planned to stage a violent campaign to try to destabilize the moderate Islamist government of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 29).

Although it is based around a kernel of truth, the Ergenekon investigation has become highly politicized. The AKP sympathizers in the lower echelons of the judiciary who are responsible for the investigation have tried to claim that Ergenekon is synonymous with – rather than being established by former members of – the web of covert networks and organizations, many of them with links to elements in the Turkish military, commonly referred to in Turkish as the *derin devlet* or “deep state”. The 2,455 page indictment in the Ergenekon case, which was presented to the 13th Serious Crimes Court in Istanbul on July 25, contains a potpourri of fact, hearsay and blatant invention; including claims that the Ergenekon gang was directly or indirectly responsible for almost every act of terrorism and political assassination in Turkey over the last 20 years (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 29).

The indictment has reinforced suspicions that the main aim of the Ergenekon investigation is not to uncover the truth behind Turkey's deep state but to discredit the staunchly secularist military, whom most AKP supporters rightly regard as the main obstacle to the party's efforts to ease some of current restrictions on the expression of a religious identity in Turkey, such as the ban which prevents women wearing traditional headscarves from attending university. The Ergenekon indictment also attributes numerous acts of terrorism previously blamed on Islamist militants either to groups established by Ergenekon or to false flag operations by the organization itself, thus providing psychological reassurance to the vast majority of the AKP's supporters, whose genuine horror at the violence sometimes perpetrated in the name of their religion has created a culture of denial and improbably complex conspiracy theories.

As a result, any information which makes its way into the Turkish media in relation to the Ergenekon investigation needs to be treated with considerable caution. This is frustrating not only because the deep state is a reality of modern Turkish history, but because many deep state operations are known to have included elements from JITEM.

The Turkish Gendarmerie is responsible for the maintenance of law and order outside urban areas, which are the responsibility of the Turkish National Police (TNP). In peacetime, the Gendarmerie is under the theoretical command of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) rather than the Turkish General Staff (TGS), which only assumes direct control of the Gendarmerie in time of war. Nevertheless, even in peacetime, the Gendarmerie is attached to the TGS for training and special duties and to the Land Forces for weaponry and equipment. It draws its officer corps from cadets at military academies. Almost all officer-recruits will remain in the Gendarmerie for the rest of their careers. It is very rare for there to be any exchange of personnel with the other services. The one exception is the commander of the Gendarmerie, who is traditionally a four star general on secondment from the Land Forces.

#### The Gendarmerie Creates an Intelligence Department

In practice, the Gendarmerie has thus enjoyed a somewhat ambivalent status, feeling closer to the regular military than the TNP, but under the complete control of neither the MIA nor the TGS. As a result,

when the Gendarmerie began to establish a counter-terrorism capability in response to the first insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), it was able to run covert operations virtually free of any oversight.

Prior to the PKK launching its insurgency in 1984, the Gendarmerie's intelligence gathering activities were conducted by uniformed officers working with local Gendarmerie units. However, as the PKK began to step up its campaign of violence, the decision was taken – it is unclear when or by whom – to establish specialized units who would not only gather intelligence but also use it to conduct covert counter-terrorism operations.

Dogan is reported to have told Ergenekon investigators that he founded in the mid-1980s what was then known as the Gendarmerie Intelligence Group Command (Jandarma Istihbarat Grup Komutanligi - JIGK), which later became known as JITEM. He added that he handed over the command of JIGK in 1990 to Colonel Veli Kucuk (*Milliyet*, August 16; *Sabah*, August 25; *Zaman*, August 27). Kucuk was later promoted to the rank of general. He is currently in prison awaiting trial on charges of being one of the leaders of Ergenekon. Although he has admitted to serving in JITEM, Dogan has denied any knowledge of, or connection with, Ergenekon (*Milliyet*, August 16; *Sabah*, August 25; *Zaman*, August 27).

The claim that Dogan founded JITEM is currently impossible to confirm. However, it is known that, by the early 1990s, JITEM units were playing a leading role in the fight against the PKK. The structure and chain of command of JITEM both remain obscure. However, individual units appear to have enjoyed a large degree of operational autonomy and almost complete immunity from prosecution (Author's interviews, southeast Turkey, 1991-99). Indeed, throughout the 1990s, the Gendarmerie high command consistently denied that JITEM even existed.

#### Recruiting from the PKK

Although JITEM units were usually led by career Gendarmerie officers, from the late 1980s onwards they also recruited heavily from former members of the PKK. Known as "confessors," most had been captured and agreed to switch sides in return for immunity from prosecution or reduced jail sentences. In addition to gathering intelligence, JITEM units would detain, interrogate, and frequently torture and

execute suspected PKK members.<sup>1</sup> JITEM units also targeted those who were believed to be merely Kurdish nationalists, assassinating journalists and intellectuals and bombing the offices of publishers and NGOs. No reliable figures are available for the number of people killed by JITEM in the 1980s and 1990s, although the number is estimated to be at least several thousand.<sup>2</sup> Most of the killings occurred in the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey, where self-censorship and pressure from the authorities ensured that they received little or no coverage in the mainstream national press. Those that were reported tended to be erroneously attributed to “an internal settling of accounts” between rival PKK factions. Although witnesses were frequently able to describe – and sometimes even name – the perpetrators, it was very rare for Turkish authorities even to go through the motions of launching an investigation (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 1).

Inevitably, some members of JITEM also used their de facto immunity from prosecution for self-enrichment; this usually occurred through extortion or involvement in the trade in heroin trafficked through eastern Turkey from Afghanistan to markets in Europe. Rivalries between different groups involved in the same activities frequently led to tensions and even violence.

### False Flag Operations

During the late 1990s, with the PKK in retreat on the battlefield, the number of extrajudicial executions declined. By the end of the decade, the majority of JITEM operatives responsible for the worst of the abuses had either retired or been killed in turf wars with rival groups. JITEM returned to focusing primarily on intelligence gathering.

However, the resurgence in PKK violence from 2004 onwards led to an increase in accusations of JITEM involvement in “false flag” bombings and shootings of suspected PKK sympathizers, albeit at nowhere near the level of the 1990s. Most notably, on November 9, 2005,

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1 For a graphic firsthand account of the activities of one such confessor who worked for JITEM during this period, see Timur Sahin and Ugur Balik, *Itirafci: Bir JITEM'ci Anlati*, Aram Yayincilik, 2004.

2 Human rights activists claim that elements in the deep state, most of them with links to JITEM, carried out 17,500 political murders in the 1980s and 1990s (Author's interviews, Van, August 2008). The real number was probably considerably less.

one person was killed and six injured when a bomb exploded in a bookshop run by an alleged former member of the PKK in the town of Semdinli in southeast Turkey. The Gendarmerie subsequently issued a report claiming that the bombing had been the work of the PKK. This was contradicted by eye witnesses, who identified three members of the Gendarmerie – including two former PKK “confessors” – as being responsible for the attack. Unlike the 1990s, this time the local prosecutors were prepared to prosecute. But, as has happened with the Ergenekon investigation, the case soon fell victim to the ideological struggle between the AKP and the TGS.

Through early 2006, AKP sympathizers conducted a defamation campaign against the then commander of the Land Forces, General Yasar Buyukanit, who was due to take over as chief of the TGS in August 2006. Buyukanit was a noted hard-line secularist and was expected to be much more assertive in his dealings with the AKP government than the then chief-of-staff, General Hilmi Ozkok. When Buyukanit publicly commented that he had once worked with one of those accused of the Semdinli bombings, a pro-AKP public prosecutor named him in the indictment. Under pressure from the TGS, the public prosecutor was summarily dismissed and Buyukanit's name removed, triggering a war of words between supporters of the AKP and the military, each accusing the other of abusing the judicial system for their own ends. Although the accused Gendarmerie members were subsequently convicted of carrying out the bombings, the furor over Buyukanit's inclusion in the indictment meant that critical questions about the attack - not least who in the Gendarmerie command chain was ultimately responsible for authorizing it – still remain unanswered.

### Conclusion

Regretfully, the politicization of the Ergenekon investigation suggests that any more information that emerges about JITEM, whether from Dogan or any of the other former JITEM operatives who are currently in custody, is likely to meet the same fate — AKP supporters believing every detail and their opponents dismissing it all as ideologically motivated invention. Yet the truth, as so often happens, lies somewhere in between.

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