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Is the U.S.-Pakistan Alliance Against Terrorism Coming to an End?

By Tariq Mahmud Ashraf

Recent events in Pakistan have raised critical issues concerning the continuation of Pakistan's support for the U.S.-led war on terrorism in Afghanistan. Commencing with the enormous backlash in Pakistan in the aftermath of the raid by U.S. Special Forces on Angoori Ada in the tribal area of South Waziristan on September 3; the disclosure by the *New York Times* that President Bush issued secret orders allowing U.S. Special Forces to undertake operations inside Pakistan without prior notice (*New York Times*, September 11); and the aggressive statements of several Pakistani leaders, the entire country has been gripped by a wave of anti-American sentiment which the country's top civilian and military leadership has also been quick to echo.

Although disagreements between Pakistan and the United States have persisted ever since the latter invaded Afghanistan and President Pervez Musharraf engineered the abrupt somersault in Pakistan's policy towards the Taliban to bring it in line with U.S. dictates, these have seldom assumed serious proportions or created apprehensions as they do now. In fact, recent events indicate that a major recalculation might be in the offing in Islamabad vis-a-vis Pakistan's support for the U.S.-led War on Terrorism. Even the terrorists seem to have recognized the weakness of the regime in Islamabad and have conveyed a powerful message to it with the recent attack on the Marriott Hotel located in the heart of Islamabad (*Dawn* [Karachi], September 20; see *Terrorism Focus*, October 1).

A Diverging Alliance

The recent furor over aggressive U.S. unilateralism surfaced immediately after U.S. Special Forces undertook their first-ever operation on Pakistani soil inside South Waziristan. The September 3 “snatch-and-grab” raid by an elite US Navy SEAL team resulted in the death of nine to twenty individuals (*Dawn*, September 13).

While the Pakistan Government lodged an immediate and forceful protest with the United States over this violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty, Pakistan’s chief-of-staff, General Ashfaq Kayani, alluded to the implications of the cross-border raid by saying “such reckless actions only help the militants and further fuel the militancy in the area” (AP, September 11).

What was disturbing about the Special Forces incursion was the failure to provide any advance information by the U.S. military or government to their Pakistani counterparts. This was despite the fact that there were numerous military-to-military meetings in the preceding weeks, including visits by Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen to Pakistan and the secret August 27 “military summit” between Admiral Mullen and General Kayani aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. In addition to these meetings, the regular established channels of communication between NATO / ISAF authorities and the Pakistan military were available to inform each other of any new developments or operations, but these were not brought into use.

General Kayani’s discomfiture over having been kept in the dark even by those U.S. military commanders with whom he has been in regular contact was evident from his statements after the incident. While Admiral Mike Mullen was telling Congress that Pakistan had to be convinced to help “eliminate [the enemy’s] safe havens,” General Kayani was strongly criticizing the U.S. for leading NATO forces on a series of cross-border raids on militants within Pakistani territory, insisting there was no deal allowing foreign troops to conduct operations there. More explicitly, he reiterated that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country would be defended at all costs and that no external force is allowed to conduct operations inside Pakistan (*Daily Times* [Islamabad], September 13; *The News* [Islamabad], September 13).

The national clamor inside Pakistan for the government to respond to this act of overt and unwarranted aggression led to a short-lived decision to stop the movement of

U.S. military supplies through Pakistan en route to Afghanistan. The raids were the major issue discussed at the 111th meeting of the Corps Commanders at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi on September 12-13.

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) began mounting Combat Air Patrols (CAPs) over Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for the first time since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. At the Government level, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani’s National Security Advisor, Major General (retired) Mehmud Durrani, formally wrote to his U.S. counterpart Stephen Hadley on September 5, warning that Pakistan would not allow any foreign forces to operate on its territory. This candid warning was issued to the Bush administration a day before Asif Ali Zardari was elected as the President of Pakistan (*The News*, September 13).

On the same day the United States was remembering the events of 9/11, the Pakistan Army was ordered to retaliate against any action by foreign troops inside the country. The Pakistan ambassador to the United States received assurances that the U.S.-led Coalition forces in Afghanistan would not operate inside Pakistan or launch any strike. However, the same night, Coalition forces launched another missile attack on Miranshah, killing more than 12 people. The escalating attacks by Coalition forces inside Pakistan have forced policymakers in Islamabad to seriously revisit Pakistan’s policy on the war on terror (*The News*, September 12).

An American government official quoted in a U.S. military newspaper described the Pakistani backlash to the September 3 Special Forces raid:

[The raid was] an opportunity to see how the new Pakistani government reacted. If they didn’t do anything, they were just kind of fairly passive, like Musharraf was ... then we felt like, okay, we can slowly up the ante, we can do maybe some more of these ops. But the backlash that happened, and especially the backlash in the diplomatic channels, was pretty severe... Once the Pakistanis started talking about closing down our supply routes, and actually demonstrated they could do it, once they started talking about shooting American helicopters, we obviously had to take seriously that maybe this [approach] was not going to be good enough. We can’t sustain ourselves in Afghanistan without the Pakistani supply routes. At the end of the day, we had to not let our tactics get in the way of our strategy.

... As much as it may be good to get some of these bad guys, we can't do it at the expense of being able to sustain ourselves in Afghanistan, obviously (*Air Force Times*, September 29).

An editorial in Islamabad's *The News* best encapsulated the frustration of Pakistanis:

There is an escalating sense of furious impotence among the ordinary people of Pakistan. Many - perhaps most - of them are strongly opposed to the spread of Talibanization and extremist influence across the country: people who might be described as 'moderates'. Many of them have no sympathy for the mullahs and their burning of girls' schools and their medieval mindset. But if you bomb a moderate sensibility often enough, it has a tendency to lose its sense of objectivity and to feel driven in the direction of extremism. If America bombs moderate sensibilities often enough, you may find that its actions are the best recruiting sergeant that the extremists ever had (*The News*, September 12).

In another development, tribal elders met in Miranshah and announced their whole-hearted support for the Pakistan Government in any action it takes to face up to attacks by U.S./ Coalition forces on Pakistani soil. While welcoming the presence of PAF combat aircraft, which reportedly led to an unmanned U.S. drone withdrawing into Afghanistan territory, these tribal leaders vowed to fight alongside the Pakistani forces against all foreigners. The tribal leaders threatened to go further: "If missile attacks and bombing of our houses and markets do not stop, a tribal lashkar will launch a counter-attack inside Afghanistan" (*Dawn*, September 13).

Other than the combat patrols being undertaken by the PAF to thwart any ingress by American Predator UAVs, Pakistani security forces fired in the air to discourage a group of U.S. soldiers from crossing the Pakistan - Afghanistan border on the night of September 14-15. Seven U.S. helicopter gunships and two troop-carrying Chinook helicopters landed in the Afghan province of Paktika near the Zohba mountain range. U.S. troops from the Chinooks then tried to cross the border. As they did so, Pakistani paramilitary troops fired into the air and the U.S. troops halted their approach. The firing lasted for several hours, local people evacuated their homes and tribesmen took up defensive positions in the mountains (BBC, September 15). The reaction of

the tribesmen indicates the adoption of an aggressive U.S. policy could well widen the insurgency by uniting the tribesmen with the Taliban - something that General Kayani has also alluded to. The Pakistan Government downplayed the event, saying the firing from the Pakistani side was carried out by the local tribesmen and not by Pakistani security forces.

Mutual Suspicions

The checkered history of Pakistan-U.S. relations is well known. The two countries have had the most unstable of ties ever since Pakistan first allied itself with the U.S. by joining the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO, 1955-79) and becoming the recipient of U.S. military hardware. Pakistan's disillusionment with the United States commenced with the imposition of the U.S. arms embargo during the 1965 Indo-Pak war and was further crystallized by the hands-off stance of the United States during the 1971 Indo-Pak war which saw Pakistan dismembered. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan once again brought the two countries together, only to see the United States depart abruptly, leaving Pakistan to clean up the mess. A distrust of the United States and its intentions permeated the Pakistan national psyche, a situation which was played upon by politicians and religious leaders to further their own agendas. President Musharraf's decision to align Pakistan with the U.S.-led war on terrorism once again brought the two countries together. Notwithstanding the imperatives that forced Musharraf to join the U.S. bandwagon, his decision created enormous controversy throughout Pakistan and was one of the factors that precipitated his eventual fall from power.

The uneasiness in the alliance stems from a number of causes: the differing motivations of the United States and Pakistan in waging the war on terrorism; the fact that Afghanistan lies in Pakistan's backyard and has long been considered by its military leadership as bestowing strategic depth on Pakistan; the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, tribal and religious affinities of the Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line; the persistence of the U.S. leadership in forging relations based on individuals who are in power; the growing alienation of the Pakistani populace with U.S. policies and the creeping perception that the war on terrorism is just an excuse for a campaign against Islam with the underlying theme of controlling the resources of mineral rich Central Asia while containing China.

In order for this alliance to survive, both countries need to understand that continuation of the military campaign is in their own national interest. It is vital, therefore, that the United States shed the cloak of unilateralism to wage this war together with Pakistan rather than alienating it by violating the latter's sovereignty.

If the U.S. persists with its aggressive military unilateralism, it might be seen as following in the footsteps of the Soviets, whose ignominious retreat from Afghanistan spelled the demise of the USSR. If this happens, the United States could well be confronted with another Vietnam-like situation with no easy exit available. Interestingly, the aggressive stance of the Pakistan Army has been tempered by a more conciliatory attitude from Islamabad, with Defense Minister Ahmed Mukhtar stressing the need for the issues imperiling U.S.-Pakistan relations to be addressed in a pragmatic manner without bringing the two allies to a state of undesirable military confrontation (*Arab News*, September 14).

Conclusion

The War on Terrorism consists of two separate battles: the first being waged by the United States and Coalition forces against the Taliban inside Afghanistan and the second being waged by the Pakistan military against the extremist militants who have made FATA their base of operations. In order to bring this war to a successful end, the efforts being expended on these two battles need to be coordinated and integrated, taking into consideration the apprehensions of both Pakistan and the United States while satisfying their respective policy objectives. Only then can this troubled, albeit necessary, alliance survive the test of time.

The United States must also take into account the fragility of Pakistan's democratic government in dealing with this situation and endeavor to strengthen rather than weaken it, since the failure of the nascent democratic dispensation in Islamabad could create an opening for the country's military to step in once again. This is completely undesirable since democracy in Pakistan would be put on the shelves for at least another decade if not more, leading to further instability and a possible failure of the country as a viable nation-state.

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Iraq's Baath Party Looks to a Final Showdown with the Baghdad Government

By Pascale Combelles Siegel

The Baathist Supreme Command for Jihad and Liberation (SCJL) has announced that it is preparing to launch the "Battle of Baghdad." The SCJL is a coalition of at least twenty-two insurgent groups headed by Izzat al-Douri, the leader of the banned Iraqi Baath Party (Al-Quds al-Arabi [London], October 4, 2007; albasrah.net, October 7, 2007). The August 9 statement is the third in a series since July from the group's "Sharia fatwa-issuing commission." In these documents, the SCJL looks beyond a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and promises a final showdown with the Iraqi government that will lead to the "liberation" of Iraq and the establishment of a new political system.

The Shift to Conventional Warfare

The recent SCJL statement is concise and to the point: "We have accomplished great achievements that require, in this period, that we change our fighting strategy and establish an army made up of our heroic fighters in order to make this army similar to the regular armies... Regrettably, we cannot explain in greater detail, but the important thing is that we are preparing our ranks to launch the battle of Baghdad against the Quislings of the occupation soon."¹

With this brief statement, the SCJL announced changes in both tactics and targeting. While the insurgency has relied on guerrilla tactics using small-arms in hit-and-run attacks, the SCJL proposes to shift to a more conventional approach with a regular army capable of launching a large-scale attack for a final "liberation" of Baghdad that will rid Iraq of the current regime and political system. It is not that the SCJL disparages the guerrilla tactics adopted by the resistance; on the contrary, it states that those tactics have proved very effective, resulting in "great achievements, negligible losses and limited security breaches." However, it argues that as dynamics on the battlefield have changed, the "time is now right" for a new military approach.

1 Supreme Command for Jihad and Liberation, Sharia fatwa-issuing commission, "The Third Study: The Religious Ruling of Dealing with Infidels Who Have Declared War on Muslims," August 9.

The SCJL also announces it will target the “Quislings of the occupation,” a reference to the Norwegian Prime Minister installed by the Nazis in 1942 whose name has become synonymous with collaboration. The reference to Quisling implies that the SCJL’s target is no longer the “occupation” but those who collaborate with it and carry out its policies, namely the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi Security Force (ISF). The SCJL’s declared ambition is to overthrow the current regime and install a new one, free of ties to the United States. This new statement suggests that the SCJL is looking beyond a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and already relishing the time when it will face a stand-alone Iraqi government, striving to be in a position to send the current regime into oblivion.

Throughout its history, the Baath Party has been accustomed to issuing emphatic statements and using grandiose rhetoric about its capabilities and achievements. Everyone still remembers Saddam Hussein’s 1991 promise to wage a bloody “mother of all battles” against the U.S.-led Coalition to dispirit and crush it.² To an extent, the current promise might again just be built on rhetoric and empty threats. The performance of Saddam’s military during the conventional part of the war (March-April 2003) and the multiple divisions and fractures within the insurgency demonstrate that it is unlikely that the SCJL will be in a position to raise an actual effective conventional army.

A Question of Legitimacy

The declared intention of overthrowing the current regime, on the other hand, should not necessarily be discounted as mere gratuitous gesticulation, as the SCJL promises to take on a government much despised by Sunnis and install what they view as a legitimate governing body instead. This ambition is widely shared by many of the insurgent groups operating in Iraq. Major groups such as the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Iraqi Front for the Islamic Resistance, the 1920 Revolution Brigades and the Mujahideen Army, among others, have declared the current government illegitimate because it stems from the occupation. Accordingly, all of the government’s acts are considered “null and void.”³

2 Saddam Hussein coined this memorable quote in a motivational speech he delivered to Baghdad state radio on the eve of the first Gulf War (17 January 1991). See Kevin C. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein’s Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2008.

3 See, for example, the interview with Dr Ibrahim

These groups also view the Iraqi government as having engaged in sectarian political and physical warfare to the detriment of the Sunnis. Although no group has called for a boycott of the next round of provincial elections (scheduled for this coming fall), several groups have issued strong condemnations of the Western style of democratic governance, describing it as being incompatible with Islamic values.

Meanwhile, current efforts to steer insurgents away from violence and into the post-Saddam political system have yet to satisfy the Sunnis. Their strategy in the past year was predicated upon a *quid pro quo* arrangement. Sunni insurgents turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq and helped the Coalition and the ISF drive it out of Anbar and Baghdad Provinces. In return, the Sunni community would get significant political rewards: the Awakening (Sahwah) councils that guard Sunni neighborhoods from al-Qaeda for a modest stipend would be incorporated into the ISF; Sunnis would be granted more political clout and some of the Iraqi constitution’s dispositions could be renegotiated to address Sunni concerns. The Shia-dominated Baghdad government has shown it is in no hurry to meet any of these conditions. On the contrary, the central government has hardened its stance against the Awakening councils, strongly hinting that it prefers to see them disbanded.

The Baathists might seek to take advantage of this disgruntlement by putting themselves in a position to exploit the growing Sunni disenchantment. To achieve this, the SCJL will need to convince other insurgents that it does not intend to reinstate its lost preeminence at the expense of other groups. In this regard, the Baathist message is mixed at best. In its latest announcement, the SCJL defines itself as the leading insurgent faction, the one around which all other insurgent groups should coalesce. Since its inception, the SCJL has repeatedly called for unity among all insurgent groups. However, in this statement, the SCJL goes beyond calls for unity and aggressively claims a prominent, some might even say domineering, position for itself. The group declares that “the Supreme Command for Jihad and Liberation... is now leading the jihadist brigades and running the faithful battalions in order to liberate the last span of

al-Shemmari, official spokesman of the Islamic Army in Iraq, on the program “Without Borders,” Al-Jazeera, April 9, 2008. See also the Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance’s weekly messages, available at: www.jaami.info. Finally, see Ayad al-Dulaymi, Interview with Nasir-al-Din al-Husayni, spokesman for the Jihad and Change Front (JACF), *Al-Arab Qatari Newspaper*, March 5.

our beloved Iraq.” It further claims that the SCJL is “the only legitimate authority” entitled to deal with “the invading infidels” and asserts, “Nobody else can negotiate with the enemy.”

The Danger in Asserting Leadership

The SCJL’s denial that it is seeking superiority over other groups will do little to assuage its rivals’ fears. Last year, the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) and the Mujahideen Army openly quarreled with the Baath Party over what they perceive as the party’s tendency to inflate its role in the resistance (See *Terrorism Monitor*, April 12, 2007). Indeed, the SCJL’s rationale for claiming the insurgency’s pole position lies with the Baath Party’s historic role in Iraq: “Our brothers, we do not give ourselves superiority over you; yet, we were the legitimate authority before the occupation. We are still the sole legitimate authority after the occupation.”⁴ Most other insurgents are likely to object to the SCJL’s characterization and goals. Since the inception of the war, the insurgents have consistently distanced themselves from the Baath Party and the old regime. In fact, the most common attack used to tarnish another group’s reputation is to label it “Baathist.” Invariably, such attacks prompt public and emphatic denials from the accused party. Further Baath promises to nominate a shura council to organize free and fair elections after the overthrow of the current political system may not be enough to alleviate the apprehensions of other insurgents. In this context, claiming any kind of continuity in legitimacy with the former regime will by itself be unlikely yield the expected results. In fact, it might even backfire, making other groups wary of cooperating with the SCJL.

Conclusion

Despite the emphatic rhetoric, it remains to be seen whether the party has the operational capability to spearhead and lead a unified resistance. The Baath Party is thought to constitute a significant block of the Iraqi insurgency; according to *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, the resistance factions are “comprised of three categories: the militant Islamic resistance, the secular resistance as represented by the Baath Party and the al-Qaeda organization.” However, the overall strength of the Baath military organization remains difficult to determine. Although the Baath Party likes to boast of 200,000 members within the armed resistance factions and 300,000 more

invested in various social and political organizations, these numbers cannot be independently verified (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 13, 2007). Moreover, disputes between the two branches of the movement led by former Iraqi vice-president Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri and former presidential aide Muhammad Yunis al-Ahmad might affect the group’s cohesion and effectiveness. The movement’s strength might, however, reside elsewhere. The party’s strength derives from its ability to embody Iraq’s national identity, a quality that no other party, whether Sunni or Shia, has managed to achieve. Some of the barriers that have prevented other groups from joining the SCJL in the past will in all likelihood continue to hamper current efforts to rally other groups under the SCJL’s banner. Despite this shortcoming, the warning could hardly be any clearer: The Baath Party is looking forward to taking on an Iraqi government deprived of U.S. military support for control of “the new Iraq.”

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The Impact of the Ergenekon Investigation on Turkish Counterterrorism Operations

By Gareth Jenkins

The judicial investigation into a shadowy ultranationalist group known to the Turkish media as Ergenekon has become increasingly characterized by a mixture of incompetence, paranoia, politicization and willful disinformation. Supporters of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - AKP) in the judicial system and the media have jettisoned any attempt to uncover the truth behind the gang in favor of salving their own insecurities and attempting to discredit the government’s hard-line secularist opponents.

Since the investigation was first launched in June 2007, more than 100 anti-AKP activists have been taken into custody on the grounds of their alleged links to the gang. AKP sympathizers in the Turkish media have published a string of stories claiming the investigation has uncovered “evidence” that Ergenekon was responsible for virtually every act of political violence committed in Turkey over the last 20 years. The 2,455 page Ergenekon indictment,

4 Supreme Command for Jihad and Liberation, “The Third Study.”

formally accepted by the Istanbul 13th Serious Crimes Court on July 25, contains an extraordinary mixture of fact, fantasy, rumor, speculation, and blatant invention – much of it self-contradictory (*Turkish Daily News*, July 26; see also *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 29). On September 18, the investigation finally descended into farce when a well-known transsexual concert organizer and one of the country's most famous actresses - both of them opponents of the AKP - were detained on suspicion of belonging to a covert Ergenekon terrorist cell (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 22)

Such absurdities have inevitably raised serious concerns about the efficacy and impartiality of the Turkish judicial system. More dangerously, there are indications that the Ergenekon investigation and the accompanying disinformation campaign in the pro-AKP media have degraded Turkey's ability to counter the activities of terrorist groups in the country and, particularly in the case of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan - PKK), even unwittingly fuelled support for them.

Ergenekon and the Turkish “Deep State”

The Ergenekon investigation was launched following the discovery of a crate of grenades in an Istanbul shantytown on June 12, 2007 (*Turkish Daily News*, June 15, 2007). It soon became clear that the grenades belonged to a group with links to what Turks call the *derin devlet* or “deep state,” a network of individuals and organizations with its roots in the Turkish military which conducts covert operations against perceived enemies of the Turkish state (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 29).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the deep state network was expanded in response to the growing threat from the PKK. The new recruits included ultranationalist members of the Turkish underworld and former PKK militants who conducted a campaign of violence against suspected PKK sympathizers and Kurdish nationalists, including several thousand extrajudicial executions.

Although some elements were in contact with each other, the deep state was always more of an umbrella of judicial immunity for disparate - and often virtually autonomous - groups and individuals pursuing a common goal rather than a single tightly structured and centrally controlled organization. By the end of the 1990s, with the PKK in retreat on the battlefield, the links between many of these groups became increasingly attenuated. Several broke up as their members either

retired or focused exclusively on criminal activities such as narcotics smuggling, protection rackets and the manipulation of state contracts, confident that their past activities on behalf of the state would provide a measure of protection against prosecution by law enforcement authorities.

Ergenekon is a relatively new organization. It was formed, on their own initiative, by a handful of retired former deep state operatives who were alarmed initially by what they regarded as the erosion of Turkish sovereignty - as exemplified by Turkey being named as an official candidate for European Union (EU) accession in December 1999 - and subsequently by the perceived threat to secularism posed by the rise of the AKP. There is little doubt that some members of Ergenekon were prepared to try to destabilize the AKP government through the use of violence. Even though some its founders had received training in covert operations, Ergenekon was poorly organized and badly equipped. By the time it was dismantled it had only managed to conduct a handful of relatively small operations.

The AKP, the Deep State and a Culture of Denial

The AKP and its supporters have long regarded the Turkish military as the main obstacle to their goal of softening the often draconian interpretation of secularism in Turkey (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, January 18). Many Turkish Islamists have long been in denial about Islamist terrorism, allowing their personal abhorrence of the violence that is sometimes conducted in the name of their religion to persuade them that it has been perpetrated by mysterious forces intent on discrediting or provoking pious Muslims.¹ Even before June 2007, it was common for Turkish Islamists to attempt to shift responsibility for any act of Islamist terrorism in Turkey onto someone else; usually non-Muslim foreigners or elements within the Turkish security apparatus (Jamestown interviews, 1995-2007).

As a result, the discovery of Ergenekon was a gift. Not only did the gang's existence appear to confirm all the conspiracy theories, but - in a major embarrassment for the Turkish military - one of those taken into custody in the first wave of arrests last January was Veli Kucuk, a retired Gendarmerie general.

1 See, for example, the reaction of exiled preacher Fethullah Gulen, an outspoken advocate of interfaith dialogue and opponent of violence, to the murder of three Christian missionaries by a gang of Islamist youths in Malatya in April 2007 (*Zaman*, April 22, 2007).

By the end of January, 13 of those detained as part of the Ergenekon investigation had been formally charged with membership of a terrorist organization (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 29). There is considerable reason to believe that some of the arrested were actively involved in Ergenekon. The same could not be said of the majority of the more than 100 people who were detained over the following months. The main criterion for their detention appeared to be an outspoken antipathy to the AKP. Disturbingly, each wave of arrests coincided with the AKP coming under pressure – initially at critical stages in the closure case against the party filed with the Turkish Constitutional Court (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 31) and most recently in response to a string of corruption scandals involving close associates of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 11).

More perniciously, the transparent absurdities of many of the claims in the Ergenekon indictment have been compounded by the pro-AKP media, which has alleged not only that the gang is synonymous with the deep state but that it was ultimately responsible for almost every act of political violence in Turkey over the last 20 years.

Many of the claims in the pro-AKP media are attributed to anonymous sources or vague rumors. Others demonstrate an extraordinary creativity. For example, although few of them had any connection with Ergenekon itself, some of those of those detained during the investigation are active or former deep state operatives who were engaged in the gathering of intelligence on terrorist groups. As a result, when their homes were searched, police recovered documents related to organizations the operatives were targeting. These documents are now being cited by the pro-AKP media as evidence that the organizations were controlled by Ergenekon (*Zaman*, September 25).

On September 22, the pro-AKP *Today's Zaman* informed its readers that “new evidence in the investigation indicates that Ergenekon leaders used terrorist organizations in Turkey from all backgrounds.” It then listed the organizations which it claimed Ergenekon was controlling. They included: “the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the extreme-left Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), the Islamist organization Hizbullah, the ultranationalist Turkish Revenge Brigades (TIT), the Turkish Workers’ and Peasants’ Liberation Army (TIKKO), the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir

(Party of Liberation)” (*Today's Zaman*, September 22). The revelations will probably come as a surprise to the organizations concerned, particularly the PKK. During the 1990s, two of the deep state operatives who later founded Ergenekon were involved in running death squads which killed suspected PKK sympathizers.

The Repercussions for Counterterrorism Operations in Turkey

The counterterrorism department of the Turkish National Police (TNP), which comes under the authority of the Interior Ministry and bears the brunt of counterterrorism operations in the country, is divided into three branches. Two of them focus on leftist and separatist (i.e. Kurdish) organizations respectively. The Turkish authorities have always been reluctant to associate Islam with terrorism. As a result, the third branch of the counter-terrorism department is officially designated as being responsible for “rightist” organizations, which includes both Islamist and Turkish ultranationalist groups. When the Ergenekon investigation was initiated, the Interior Ministry instructed the “rightist” branch to devote as many of its resources as possible to the group, which effectively meant reducing the resources deployed against the much greater threat posed by Islamist organizations (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 10).

Leftist and separatist terrorism in Turkey is dominated by well-established groups, such as the DHKP-C and PKK, which have long been targets for surveillance and penetration. Although there are a small number of established organizations, the main Islamist terrorist threat in Turkey comes from ad hoc groups which have been newly formed for a specific attack. But before they can attempt to thwart the attack, counterterrorism officers must first be aware a group is being formed to carry it out; information usually comes in a tip-off from a member of the same social milieu as the would-be terrorists. Yet potential informants are often reluctant to believe that someone who appears to be a fellow pious Muslim is a potential terrorist (Jamestown interviews with TNP officers, Istanbul, Bingol, November 2003; *Milliyet*, *Radikal*, July 11). It goes without saying that a disinformation campaign which holds Ergenekon ultimately responsible for all the violence previously attributed to Islamist groups is unlikely to encourage those who are best-placed to identify potential Islamist terrorists to be more vigilant.

During its first insurgency in 1983-1999, the PKK often deliberately targeted non-combatants. Since resuming violence in June 2004, it has become reluctant to be associated with causing civilian casualties for fear of losing popular support, but it has also been unwilling to relinquish the political leverage that civilian deaths can bring. As a result, from 2004 to 2007, it conducted an urban bombing campaign in western Turkey under the cover of a completely fictitious organization, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (Teyrebazen Azadiya Kurdistan -TAK) (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 7, 2007). More recently, when civilians have been killed in PKK attacks, the organization has tended either to remain silent or blame the casualties on a “false flag” operation by elements in the Turkish state (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 8). Although few PKK supporters are naïve enough to suppose that the organization is controlled by Ergenekon, the claims published in the pro-AKP media have undoubtedly made them even more willing to believe that elements in the Turkish state are responsible for attacks on civilians which the Turkish authorities blame on the PKK. Many PKK supporters genuinely believe that the organization never targets civilians (Jamestown interviews with PKK supporters, eastern Turkey, August 2008). It is a misperception that the pro-AKP media is now unwittingly helping to reinforce.

It is unclear whether it is a coincidence that the highest ever civilian death toll in a bombing attributed to the PKK - the 17 people killed in Istanbul on July 27, 2008 - occurred at a time when the pro-AKP media was full of allegations of false flag attacks by Ergenekon (see *Terrorism Focus*, August 5). What is clear is that the claims made it easier for PKK supporters to convince themselves that elements in the Turkish state carried out the attack in order to discredit the PKK. Some supporters recently told Jamestown that the Istanbul bombing and other attacks attributed by the pro-AKP media to Ergenekon were further justification for the PKK's own campaign of violence (Jamestown interviews with PKK supporters, eastern Turkey, August 2008).

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Interpreting the Terrorist Threat against Lebanon's Army in the North

By Pete Ajemian

On September 29, Lebanon's northern port city of Tripoli witnessed its second bombing in a month against members of the Lebanese Army (LA). The attack, which targeted LA personnel traveling through the city towards Beirut, came after a similar bus bombing on August 13 in Tripoli, considered to be one of the worst attacks of its kind in years in Lebanon.

These incidents coincided with a number of developments straining the overall security situation in north Lebanon, namely a significant Syrian troop deployment along Lebanon's northern border and recent sectarian fighting between Sunni and Alawite neighborhoods of Tripoli. While these bombings have highlighted the vulnerability of the Lebanese Army, political tensions and agendas may overshadow and undermine any cooperative efforts to combat what appears to be a growing threat.

Previous Recent Attacks against the Army

This latest series of attacks against LA personnel was foreshadowed by smaller-scale strikes on the army. On May 31, a suicide-bombing attempt against an LA checkpoint outside the Ein El-Helweh refugee camp was foiled. That same day witnessed an explosion that killed one soldier at a Lebanese military intelligence outpost near the Nahr el-Bared camp (AP, May 31). When observed in their entirety, the apparent variety of means employed in these attacks may not suggest one clear perpetrator; however, the targeting of transportation used by members of the LA in Tripoli does signal an intensification of efforts by those looking to intimidate and inflict damage upon the force.

Means, Execution, and Targeting

The targeting of Lebanese Army personnel has been a consistent theme over the past year, kicking off with the assassination of General Francois El-Hajj in December of 2007. This high-profile assassination was followed by attacks against the LA's rank and file. The perpetrators of these attacks appear to have identified the vulnerability of LA personnel when traveling.

Both of the recent bus bombings involved the remote detonation of a roadside device, with the second attack involving a smaller-sized charge either placed underneath a car or inside a motorbike (*As-Safir* [Beirut], September 30). The August Tripoli bombing occurred in a busy area frequented by buses carrying both military and civilian passengers (AFP, August 14). While circumstances suggest that the LA was the intended target, the nature of the latest attack leaves no doubt as to its objective since it involved a vehicle with military license plates and occurred in the relatively remote outskirts of Tripoli, away from the city's gathering places. The bus departed from Akroum in the northeastern reaches of the country and was on its way to Beirut via Tripoli. It was subsequently hit as it maneuvered through traffic turning onto a side road to access the main highway leading to Beirut. The bus itself was publicly known to transport military personnel, earning the nickname "the Akroum bus" (*Al-Akhbar* [Beirut], September 30).

Both attacks appear to have targeted soldiers traveling from the northern region of Akkar. The timing and location of the second attack suggests foreknowledge of the route taken by the military bus, which would require some surveillance and preparation by its perpetrators. The fact that the attack was executed only a few hundred meters from an LA checkpoint, as well as the apparent public knowledge of the LA's travel routine, reveal serious security gaps that have left the force vulnerable to terrorist attacks. This has perhaps made it possible for even an upstart organization to strike at the core of Lebanon's primary security force.

The Perpetrators and their Objectives

Two plausible objectives for these attacks come to mind. The first would be to undermine the army's ability to carry out its duties, which would be significant given the fact that the LA is the only relatively apolitical "national" security institution in Lebanon. Some might speculate that the attack is part of a series of reprisals for the army's campaign against Fatah al-Islam militants in the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in the summer of 2007. These two motives, however, are not mutually exclusive. A number of parties have an interest in weakening and intimidating the LA.

Jihadist groups, such as Fatah al-Islam, have in the past directly threatened the army. While a number of Islamist and Salafist groups denounced this latest attack, it remains possible that more militant entities, such as the remnants of Fatah al-Islam, could have undertaken the

attack. While circumstantial, supporters of this theory would also point to the fact that both buses were carrying soldiers traveling from the northern region of Akkar, an area known to have long been a source of army recruits and home to many who fought against Fatah al-Islam (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, June 3, 2007).

Others in Lebanon's anti-Syrian political camp argue that the bombings are part of an intentional destabilization orchestrated by Syria, with the intention of providing a pretext for a Syrian military incursion into Lebanon. Syria has justified the deployment of a reported 10,000 troops in the Abbudiya border region last month as part of an anti-smuggling campaign. The inclusion of tanks and Special Forces in the "anti-smuggling" force has alarmed Lebanese authorities (*Middle East Times*, October 2). Against the backdrop of these and other recent attacks in Tripoli and Damascus, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad declared days ago that north Lebanon has become a base for extremism that constitutes a threat to Syria (AFP, September 30).

Within the context of the Syrian army's activity near the Lebanese border, the motives behind al-Assad's sudden concerns over terrorism have been questioned by those in Lebanon's anti-Syrian "March 14" political bloc (*Al-Mustaqbal* [Beirut], October 2). Despite this, Syria appears to be signaling that it intends to cooperate with Lebanon's security establishment in responding to these threats. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem has called for security cooperation between the two countries along the border (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 1). Muallem stated that current conditions make it impossible to control the border and an arrangement is needed between the two countries.

There are also reports that President al-Assad and Lebanese president Michel Suleiman met to speak about coordinating efforts to combat both terrorism and smuggling (*Al-Hayat*, October 2). According to *Al-Hayat*, al-Assad brought this issue up with Suleiman during a summit in Damascus only days after the first Tripoli bombing in August. Thus, despite the political bantering that these developments have triggered, there appear to be legitimate concerns over a deteriorating situation in north Lebanon, one that would require some level of cooperation between Lebanese and Syrian security forces. Whether Syria ultimately intends to curb or foster these threats remains to be answered and continues to be questioned by both local and international actors.

Conclusions

While there is a great deal of debate being devoted to the greater geo-political aspects of these attacks, they highlight a more immediate concern: the vulnerability of Lebanon's army to terrorism. The perpetrators of these attacks appear to have correctly identified the vulnerability of LA personnel when traveling. Although the LA will likely respond by placing travel restrictions on its personnel, mobile force protection measures do not appear to be a realistic scenario.

The need for such action reveals the dangerous irony of Lebanon's security environment. Rather than being built as a formidable deterrent force, the LA has developed into a de facto internal security entity susceptible to internal threats. The attacks on the Lebanese Army reinforce the need to develop the capacity of Lebanon's national police and security force, the Internal Security Forces/Forces de Sécurité Intérieure (ISF/FSI), so that internal security missions are not completely dependent upon the army.

In terms of the country's overall security sector, joint operations amongst the country's various security services are still in a nascent phase, due to both political and material challenges. These shared operations will at some point need to adopt a preemptive, not just responsive, capacity in order to address the challenges the country will face in the future. Meanwhile, the prospects of Syrian-Lebanese cooperation remain to be tested. Integral issues, such as border demarcation along the northern border, need to be settled before such efforts can be orchestrated in an effective manner. For many, Syria still has yet to prove itself as an honest partner in combating terrorism.

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