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Abu Qatada's Comfortable British Jihad

By Raffaello Pantucci

On June 17, amidst much furor, a British Special Immigration Appeals Committee (SIAC) allowed the release on bail of Abu Qatada al-Filistini, a radical preacher described by Spanish counter-terror judge Baltasar Garzon as “al-Qaeda’s spiritual ambassador to Europe.” Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said she was “extremely disappointed” by the ruling, adding that she would appeal it. In the meantime, Abu Qatada was released from Long Lartin prison to join his family at a £800,000 home in West London, where he is under virtual house arrest. Only allowed out for two hours a day, Qatada wears an electronic tag, is not allowed to use the internet, computers or mobile telephones. He is also forbidden to visit mosques, lead prayers or give religious instruction. Police have powers to search his home at their discretion, and he has a rather comical list of individuals who he is banned from meeting with, including Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and imprisoned preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri. Aside from his solicitors and family, all other visitors must be approved by the Home Secretary (BBC, June 18; *Times*, June 19).

This entire process would appear to be a vindication of Qatada’s own boast to his followers after his first arrest in 2002 when he claimed Britain’s “ponderous extradition laws meant that it was far from certain he would ever be expelled.”¹ To the horror of observers, the entire process was repeated on July 3, 2008, when the same court released an Algerian man the British press can only identify as “U,” though it has been revealed in the foreign press that the suspect is likely to be Abu Doha (*New York Times*, July 4). While he is to have equally rigid

¹ Sean O’Neill and Daniel McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, (London: HarperCollins, 2006) p.109

bail conditions, the release of this individual—who is suspected of being involved in the LAX bombing attempt in December 1999 and the plot to attack the Christmas market in Strasbourg in December 2000—is seen as a further blow to British counter-terrorism efforts (*Telegraph*, July 3).

The release of these two individuals may soon be followed by more, as the British judicial system contends with a double problem in these terrorist cases. First is the inability of British prosecutors to produce evidence that will stand up in court—something which is, in part, the result of the inadmissibility in court of wiretap evidence, a reality that is currently under review—and secondly, the inability of Britain to deport individuals such as these back to their home countries due to EU and UK laws stating that individuals cannot be deported to nations where they may be tortured (Jordan in Abu Qatada’s case, and Algeria in “U’s”). While such concerns were meant to have been addressed with “memorandums of understanding” that the British government signed with Libya, Jordan and Lebanon concerning the treatment of such returnees, British courts decided that other concerns remain—in Abu Qatada’s case there were fears that evidence used in his Jordanian conviction may have been obtained through torture (*Sunday Mirror*, June 22).

The Life and Times of Abu Qatada

Born in Bethlehem when it was still part of Jordan in 1960, Abu Qatada first came to the UK in September 1993 on a forged passport from the United Arab Emirates. While it remains unclear exactly where he was coming from, he was apparently in Peshawar in 1990, where he attracted many followers before going into Afghanistan in 1992 after fighting had ended in Kabul (CNN, November 3, 2001). Upon arriving in the UK and gaining asylum in June 1994, Qatada started to get involved in the London Islamist scene, eventually becoming one of “Londonistan’s unholy trinity” (the other two being Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri Mohammed).² He quickly adopted the Algerian jihad as his focus, and became editor of the *al-Ansar Newsletter* while preaching and writing from London in support of the Groupe Islamique Armé’s (GIA) actions.³

This continued until mid-1996, when, in the face of widespread condemnation throughout the Arab world

of the GIA’s brutal targeting of civilians, Abu Qatada denounced the group as “innovators” and formally cut his ties.⁴ His work was not, however, solely focused on Algeria and he raised thousands of pounds for Islamist groups around the world. When he was questioned in February 2001, he was found to have £170,000 in cash, including an envelope with £805 in it labeled “for the mujahideen in Chechnya” (BBC, February 26, 2007). He also acted as a mentor for another London preacher, Abu Hamza, reportedly calling him “the best student he ever had” and being “very impressed [at] how quickly Abu Hamza memorized the Koran and Hadith” under his tutelage.⁵

While in London it is alleged that Abu Qatada was directly involved in plots abroad, with the Jordanian government trying and sentencing him to life imprisonment *in absentia* for a bombing plot timed to coincide with the Millennium and investigators connecting him with terrorism cells in Spain, France, Italy and Belgium (*Washington Post*, July 10, 2005; *Guardian*, August 11, 2005). Both 9/11’s “20th hijacker” Zacarias Moussaoui and “shoe bomber” Richard Reid sought religious advice from him and he was a known figure at the infamous Finsbury Park Mosque in London (BBC, February 26, 2007). Most ominously, tapes of his sermons were found in the Hamburg flat used by Muhammad Atta and others before the 9/11 attacks.

At various points, it has been claimed that Abu Qatada was an informant for Britain’s Security Service MI5, something that is sometimes pointed to as the reason for why Britain’s services failed to interdict him in the face of an apparent litany of allegations by continental European intelligence services.⁶ It is also claimed that during the mid-1990s, he met with MI5 agents and offered to help ensure that terrorist attacks would not take place in the UK (BBC, February 26, 2007). The final piece of evidence that is offered is the fact that he disappeared from MI5’s surveillance just before he was due to be arrested in December 2001, even though he was finally found elsewhere in London 10 months later, “a few minutes’ walk from MI5’s headquarters.”⁷ While on the run he remained in close contact with jihadists around the globe through the internet—apparently including Abu Musab al Zarqawi—as well as issuing a legal ruling justifying the 9/11 attacks.

4 Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Global Jihad*, (London: Hurst, 2006), p.272

5 O’Neill and McGrory, p.29

6 *Ibid.*, p.151

7 *Ibid.*, p.108

2 *Ibid.*, p.106

3 Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, (London: Hurst, 2007), p.188

The Wit and Wisdom of Abu Qatada

Amongst Britain's radical preachers, Abu Qatada usually distinguished himself as the most erudite and productive in literary terms of "Londonistan's unholy trinity." Omar Nasiri, who worked undercover in London for British and French intelligence and attended a number of his lectures, identified him as "very intelligent [and] very learned," speaking a language of jihad that Nasiri noted as "almost identical" to that used in the Afghan training camp he had attended.⁸ Qatada's writing advocates the separation between the Muslim and non-Muslim world; his most cited text, *Islamic Movements and Contemporary Alliances*, details the dangerous development of Muslim "involvement in alliances with modern non-Islamic powers," providing an analysis of numerous instances across the Muslim world where this has not worked.⁹

He further expounds in his sermons on the concept of a "covenant of security" (*aqd al-amaan*), explaining that "the land of kufr is considered as a land of war. The exception is if the land has a contract with the Muslims." However, he qualifies this by citing that "some scholars limit it to 10 years, and the reason they say this is in order for the Muslims to not abandon the jihad against the kuffar."¹⁰ In other words, he offers a possible time limit for the covenant of security between Muslims and non-Muslims that was often offered as the justification for the lack of attacks in the UK before 7/7. From his new perch in Beirut, Omar Bakri Muhammad recently stated that he left the UK in August 2005 because he felt "the government had violated the 'covenant of security' that had hitherto guaranteed peace between Muslims and the British state" (*Asia Times*, June 12).

In a lengthy series of sermons entitled *Sil silatul Iman* (the Belief Series), Qatada lays out much of his belief structure. He opens by detailing the presence of three circles of Muslims within the Umma, beginning with "The Muslims," in other words the 1 billion or so community around the globe, who have within them the more selective "Saved Sect" and finally within this sub-group, the "Victorious Sect."¹¹ He then goes on in great detail to answer a vast number of theological

questions and definitions, before turning to the topic of jihad. In response to the question "What is required in order to establish an Islamic state?" Abu Qatada replied that "dignity is only established through jihad."¹² After a long series of detailed explanations, Abu Qatada justifies the use of jihad:

It is jihad that breaths life into the ummah [Muslim community]. It is the jihad that distinguished the Muslim from the hypocrite. We must be proud that we are the tool that Allah uses against the kuffar to punish them. What is this life that's so precious to us? It is worse than that of a dog, this humiliated and submissive life where the ummah is subjected to the worst of crimes, and groups still insist that Muslims should use peaceful measures in order to bring change. How ignorant!¹³

Some have accused Abu Qatada of making permissible "the killing of women and children... [and] using other people's money by any means, claiming that such monies were the spoils of war."¹⁴ In the context of his Iman sermons, this does not seem too far off, as he concludes that the blood of both apostates and their women is *halal* (permissible) and "that the wealth that belongs to the group is permissible. Therefore you are permitted to steal it from them, and even assassinate its members."¹⁵ To support this process of justification, Abu Qatada cites the 9th-10th century Persian Sunni historian Imam Tabari and 13th-14th century Islamic scholar Ibn Taimiyah, a frequently cited authority for today's Islamists.

Conclusion

In his ruling on the decision to release Abu Qatada, Justice Mitting stated: "The appellant represents a continuing and significant risk to national security," and the Home Secretary has declared the government will fight this decision.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Abu Qatada now rests comfortably in West London in an £800,000 house, living with his family on welfare from the British government amounting to more than £50,000 a year (*Daily Mail*, June 23). For some this is merely a reflection

8 Nasiri, p.267

9 William McCants ed., *Militant Ideology Atlas*, (Combating Terrorism Center USMA, November 2006) www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/Atlas-ResearchCompendium.pdf, p.119

10 Quoted here from a lengthy translation found at a number of online sources by unidentified individuals entitled "Iman Series," http://rapidshare.com/files/123839081/Iman_series.pdf.html, p.64

11 *Ibid.*, p.12

12 *Ibid.*, p.55

13 *Ibid.*, p.69

14 Shaykh Abdul Maalik ibn Ahmad ibn Mubaarak ar-Ramadaanee al-Jazaa'iree, *The Savage Barbarism of Aboo Qataadah*, www.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhajQataadah.pdf, p.11

15 "Iman Series," p.82

16 Special Immigration Appeal Commission ruling, http://www.siac.tribunals.gov.uk/Documents/outcomes/Othman_O_Bail-Ruling_WebCopy.pdf

of the “fair play” in the British legal system, however, it has left many counter-terrorism experts exasperated and raises concerns over how the UK will manage to deal with the 2,000 dangerous individuals currently under surveillance by the Security Services.

With the recent collapse of cases against “lyrical terrorist” Samina Malik and the so-called “Bradford Five,” the British legal system has shown it has a real problem in convicting individuals it alleges are domestic terrorists (*Times*, June 18; *Guardian*, February 14). The release to house arrest of Abu Qatada, one of the more infamous names in extremist literature around the globe, has merely reinforced the fact that this problem extends to foreigners in the UK as well. While an argument could be made that such rulings deflate Muslim perceptions of xenophobia in the British legal system, the reality is that very real security concerns are not going away and a quick read of many of the chatrooms or webpages frequented by British Muslims would indicate that British “fair play” is not filtering through to the community. The surprising release of Abu Qatada makes it clear that many fissures existing in the current system of dealing with domestic terrorist threats remain in need of repair.

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Fueling the Taliban: Poppies, Guns and Insurgents

By Muhammad Tahir

Afghanistan has rarely been absent recently from the international press, but developments in the country have once more brought it to the world’s attention. According to tallies based on military statements, June was the second month in a row in which casualties of foreign troops in Afghanistan exceeded those in Iraq, with the loss of 49 soldiers in combat, attacks or accidents. Meanwhile, a report released by the UN’s Office on Drug and Crimes (UNODC) on June 26 indicated that in 2007 Afghanistan broke all of its previous records for the production of opium—

the raw material for heroin—since the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2001.

What was alarming in this report was the connection between the increasing insurgency and massive poppy cultivation—Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UNODC, estimated the total income of the 2007 opium harvest at around \$4 billion, more than half of Afghanistan’s national annual income (*Dawn* [Karachi], June 30).

The UN’s World Drug Report for 2008 also indicates that more than 80 percent of the total 8,200-ton opium harvest was produced in an area controlled by the Taliban, which helps smugglers and farmers protect their laboratories, trade opium up to the borders and fight back against anti-drug campaigners. This, some sources say, brings millions of dollars in additional income for the Taliban.

As a result, the Taliban has made areas under their control virtual no-go zones for local security agencies as well as for international counter-narcotics forces. They thus provide a safe haven and source of funding not only for themselves, but also for the farmers who, by cultivating opium, usually earn tens of times more than they would by planting wheat or cotton (*Daily Cheragh*, February 15).

Background of Opium Production in Afghanistan

Opium has always been grown in the southern and eastern belts of Afghanistan, but the region did not become the world’s main exporter of heroin until after the Soviet invasion of 1979, which led to near-anarchy in Afghanistan. Production and refining exploded as the Afghan mujahideen began trading in drugs to finance their war against Russia. Narcotics, guns and criminality took a terrible toll on the region.

When in 1989 the Red Army was forced to withdraw, and following the collapse of Dr. Najibullah’s government in 1992, a power vacuum was created in the country and various mujahideen factions started vying with each other for power. In the absence of western support, they increasingly financed their military operations through poppy cultivation.

Opium, therefore, cultivated in 1990 on only 41,000 hectares of land, showed a sharp increase during the following years of instability, reaching 71,000 hectares in 1994, the year the Taliban emerged as a strong force

and easily overran the already war-weary mujahideen groups (UNODC, 2008). Despite capturing almost the entire country, the Taliban could garner no international recognition; their isolated regime therefore remained dependent on the opium-based economy to finance their day-to-day administrative work.

In July 2000, the Taliban prohibited its cultivation, reportedly to gain international credibility, bringing the amount of opium-producing land down from 82,000 hectares in 2000 to 8,000 in 2001 (*Daily Mashriq* [Peshawar], June 28). This move proved of little help to the Taliban, as following the events of 9/11 they were the first group to be targeted and brought down, accused by Washington of sponsoring terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda.

The revitalization of the Taliban movement once more created conditions which helped anti-government forces to emerge and as a result opium cultivation once again flourished side-by-side with the insurgency. Today the total amount of opium-cultivated land in Afghanistan has increased from the 2001 level of 8,000 hectares to 193,000 hectares. Afghanistan produces 93 percent of the world's opium, while May and June became the deadliest months for foreign forces since the fall of Taliban (*Daily Hewad* [Kabul], March 11; AFP, July 1; UNODC, 2008).

Terrorism and Drugs

The history of Afghanistan shows that poppy production has always had a very close connection with instability and insecurity. When, for example, Afghanistan emerged for the first time as an opium-exporting country in 1980, thousands of mujahideen were engaged in fighting against the invading Red Army. As fighting intensified, opium production flourished, since by then it was one of the main sources of income for rebel groups.

While fighting continues in Afghanistan today, the Taliban is in opposition and uses the same opium money as a source of finance, leading some sources to suggest that these two elements have an inevitable link with each other's survival (*Daily Afghanistan* [Kabul], March 27). Meanwhile, the director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, clarified this link by suggesting that the Taliban earned around \$100 million through a 10 percent tax on farmers in 2007 alone.

If this amount is augmented by additional services

provided to smugglers by Taliban fighters, such as protection of laboratories and convoys to the borders, it reaches somewhere between \$200-400 million (*Daily Afghanistan*, June 26; *Washington Post*, June 26). This amount not only addresses their financial needs in continuing resistance against the government, but also helps them find new recruits, buy weaponry, increase their influence in the region and make government ineffective.

For example, the central government recently failed to destroy poppy lands in the Marja province of Helmand because when police forces arrived, the Taliban mounted their own campaign by distributing guns to the farmers, who voluntarily took the Taliban's side rather than lose their crops, while the poorly-paid and badly-equipped police forces returned empty-handed (IWPR, May 19).

Local sources suggest that in many cases when police forces cannot touch a Taliban-control area, in order to be able to demonstrate some kind of success, police forces eradicate crops on lands where the Taliban has less influence, pushing the farmers of those areas closer to the Taliban, who are ready to protect them (*Arman-e-Milli* [Kabul], February 27).

Is the Situation Out of Control?

As the Taliban's connection with the narco-business is more deeply analyzed, serious security challenges are revealed. A local newspaper, *Weesa*, recently suggested that the list of beneficiaries from opium goes beyond the Taliban and Helmand, all the way from Kabul to neighboring countries:

It's a multi-dimensional game involving all the authorities from Helmand to the Russian border in one way or other. The Taliban are promoting poppy cultivation in the south because it's their major source of income and if the foreign forces aren't involved in this game, they are at least indifferent to it. Then the question is: who helps the convoys of narcotics reach to Tajikistan from Helmand? Who enjoys power in Badaghshan and Kunduz, where the notorious trade in heroin and arms takes place between Russian smugglers and the Taliban? (*Weesa*, May 7).

Not so long ago, Assadullah Wafa, the governor of Helmand—the province responsible for half of the world's current opium production—was quoted as

saying that some officials not only collect taxes from opium growers together with the Taliban, but also help them to smuggle the opium to the border in their own vehicles. There is no accountability for officials who are found to be involved in this business. In his comment, Wafa claims that he personally gave a list of smugglers to high level officials in Kabul but the government took no action against them (*Daily Hewad*, September 3, 2007).

There is no evidence that those people were arrested later, but following his comment it was not long before the government removed Wafa from his position as governor of Helmand and appointed him director of the Complaints Department, a position with no practical role (Afghan Islamic Press, February 29).

This situation raises many questions about the ability of the government to tackle this problem, as it seems that those who are supposed to be implementing the law are somehow, directly or indirectly, benefiting from the business of narcotics, which poses a serious challenge not only to the future of Afghan government, but to the entire region (IWPR, June 30).

Conclusion

In the midst of this bad news is the good news brought by the effect of commodity prices on the opium cultivation forecast for next year. According to the former commander of British forces in Helmand province, Brigadier Andrew MacKay, production is expected to shrink because farmers in the southern province are switching from poppies to legal crops. According to MacKay, the reason is “a lot of farmers have calculated that, with wheat prices being what they are, they can make money out of planting it” (*Financial Times*, June 24). A growing grain shortage in Afghanistan and a drop in the market value of opium due to Afghan overproduction will also encourage farmers to switch crops.

However, this forecast cannot be expected to be repeated every year, leaving a need for a permanent solution to the problem. At this stage there are relatively few options remaining, particularly with the current administration in Kabul, which is not only weak, but harbors tens of thousands of administrators who are part of the problem.

While the situation requires urgent and tough action to defeat the insurgency and eradicate opium cultivation,

it also requires a strong leadership capable of carrying through the decision to bring to justice those officials involved in the business. Afghanistan’s leaders need strong backing from the international community, who need to commit themselves to defeating the insurgents and helping clean up the administration. Unless this “mafia”—limited not only to the Taliban, but including warlords, some tribal chiefs and corrupt officials—is crushed, it is unlikely that any sort of strategy will work in the country which could benefit ordinary people and bring law and order and peace and stability.

Besides military options, poverty eradication is a key step in eliminating the narcotics trade. Since Afghanistan has an agricultural economy, farmers could be supported by providing them seeds, by regulating irrigation canals and most importantly by purchasing their harvest at favorable prices. Helmand, for example, produces top-quality agricultural commodities including cotton, but at present the Cotton Enterprises Department reportedly purchases cotton from the farmers at 17 Afghans (\$0.30) per kilogram, selling it at 67 Afghans (\$1.25) (*Daily Hewad*, September 3, 2007). Other elements of economic reform include the creation of an employment-rich industrial base and an environment open to private investment.

The continuation of the current chaotic situation not only helps insurgents to increase their influence and warlords to maintain their forces, but also extends an open invitation to criminally minded people from around the world, giving serious reason to believe that Afghanistan could turn into the headquarters of the world’s narcotics trade.

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Nigeria’s Navy Struggles with Attacks on Offshore Oil Facilities

By John C.K. Daly

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) militants reportedly attacked Royal Dutch Shell’s Bonga platform and its attendant Floating, Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel 75 miles off the Nigerian coast in the Gulf

of Guinea on June 19. The assault shut down the vessel's 225,000 barrel per day production and the following day Royal Dutch Shell declared *force majeure*¹ on its June and July oil exports from the facility—which was only lifted on July 9—while *force majeure* on another Royal Dutch Shell site, Bonny Light, remains in place (Tradingmarkets.com, July 9). Given its distance from the coast, the Nigerian government had before the attack considered the facility beyond the reach of militant groups. Two days after the assault the Nigerian government dispatched two naval vessels to the site, including the Nigerian Navy's sole frigate, NNS *Aradu*, but analysts noted that they would only have a dissuasive effect, as the warships were not sufficiently mobile to catch the MEND speedboats, which are capable of outmaneuvering the Nigerian warships (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 26). The office of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua issued a statement noting: "The President has further directed that security be beefed up at all oil facilities and installations in the Niger Delta to forestall further acts of terrorism by criminal elements in the region" (*Saturday Tribune* [Ibadan], June 26).

While Nigeria's onshore oil facilities have been subjected to attacks since 2004, the Bonga attack is the first significant assault on a Nigerian offshore oil site, and represents an ominous escalation in Nigeria's ongoing battle with militants. The attack is also part of a larger pattern of increasing maritime attacks against shipping and oil facilities from Somalia to the Persian Gulf, producing a security problem for which regional navies have yet to develop coordinated responses.

Cause of the Bonga Attack Disputed

What happened at Bonga remains unclear; while MEND claimed responsibility for the attack, other reports claim that the FPSO was the victim of internal sabotage carried out by a naval retired officer, as related by "authoritative sources" to a leading Nigerian newspaper, one of whom said: "It was not a militant action at all" (*Vanguard*, June 28). According to the source, the incident occurred when 55 security personnel, members of a private security outfit operated by a retired senior naval captain, deliberately shut down the FPSO to protest Shell's treatment of Nigerian workers and the non-payment of salaries. In the same journal a MEND commander disputed the claim, asserting that his group carried out the attack.

¹ Literally "greater force." A clause in contracts that releases a party from obligation or liability due to extraordinary events or circumstances.

Whatever the truth of the disruption, Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa, the world's 11th largest producer of crude oil, a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the fifth largest exporter to the United States, but since December 2005 onshore pipeline attacks and the kidnapping of oil workers in Nigeria's delta oil facilities have cut production by nearly a quarter. Of Nigeria's 2.3 million bpd production, the Bonga attack, combined with others, cut Nigerian production by 900,000 bpd, causing analysts to comment that the assaults were a major factor in pushing crude prices above \$145 a barrel. Besides the loss of Bonga's 220,000 bpd, other 2008 shutdowns include Brass River Eni (45,000 bpd) Bonny Light Shell (164,000 bpd), Forcados Shell (160,000 bpd), EA Shell (115,000 bpd), Escravos Chevron (120,000 bpd) and Pennington Chevron (50,000 bpd) (*Dallas Morning News*, July 8).

Nigeria's Bonga oilfield is located in Nigeria's offshore OPL 212 block at depths of more than 3,200 feet. Bonga, Nigeria's first deep-water oil discovery and estimated to hold recoverable oil reserves of 600 million barrels, began production at the end of 2005, with output rising to 225,000 bpd in April 2006. Oil from the Bonga field is stored in a FPSO unit with a capacity of two million barrels.

In an ironic twist, the Bonga field was the first of a number of deepwater projects planned to boost Nigerian oil production by allowing multinational oil companies to avoid the rising security risks in the unstable Niger Delta region. The Nigerian government held its first licensing round of offshore sites in March 2005, offering a total of 77 deepwater and inland blocks. Two years later the Nigerian government offered an additional 44 blocks for development.

As of January 2007, Nigeria had 36.2 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, and the government plans to expand its proven reserves to 40 billion barrels by 2010. The Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on the oil sector, which accounts for 95 percent of the country's total export revenues (U.S. Energy Information Administration, www.eia.doe.gov).

Whatever solution to the attack that Royal Dutch Shell develops, it will shortly be needed beyond the Bonga site, as in August Royal Dutch Shell plans to bring online its Gbaran-Ubie field, located offshore of the eastern delta. Gbaran-Ubie's projected production capacity of 220,000 bpd rivals that of Bonga.

Capabilities of the Nigerian Navy

Constant patrols of both Bonga and Gbaran-Ubie would severely strain the Nigerian Navy's resources, which currently consist of the NNS *Aradu* frigate, the NNS *Enymiri* corvette (F 83), the NNS *Ohue* and *Marabai* coastal minesweepers, the NNS *Siri*, *Ayam*, and *Ekun* missile boats and four *Balsam* ocean patrol craft.² The Nigerian Navy is already overstretched, as the country's coastal waters extend over 500 miles from the eastern Cameroonian border to Nigeria's frontier with Benin, a few miles west of Lagos. The Niger Delta, bisecting the country's southeastern and southwestern coastline, is a nightmarish "brownwater" thicket of more than 3,000 rivers, rivulets, swamps and lakes.

What seems inevitable is that the United States, currently Nigeria's biggest oil importer, will be drawn into the fray, as Washington expects its oil imports from the Gulf of Guinea to increase to more than 25 percent by 2015. On February 6, 2007, the Pentagon established its AFRICOM military command to oversee the deployment of U.S. forces in the area and supervise the distribution of money, material and military training to regional militaries and client states.

On June 28 Nigerian Vice President Goodluck Jonathan received a delegation of six United States Congressmen in Abuja led by Howard Berman, chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Relations and solicited Washington's assistance in pacifying the volatile Delta region, saying: "It will therefore be welcomed if the U.S. Government will assist Nigeria in curbing the criminalities within the area, since the U.S. has its security installations in the Gulf of Guinea, protecting its investments situated there" (*The Tide* [Port Harcourt], June 30). Nor is possible U.S. assistance all—British Prime Minister Gordon Brown will meet President Yar'Adua in London on July 17, with British press reporting that oilfield security will head the agenda.

MEND has stated that it is willing to negotiate an end to hostilities if the Nigerian government frees its leader, Henry Okah, but that seems currently unlikely, as on July 7 Nigeria's Federal High Court reserved until July 18 a ruling on a motion by the prosecution to increase the treason and gunrunning charges against Okah from 55 to 62, even though President Yar'Adua is trying to broker a negotiated settlement (*Vanguard*, July 8). In

May MEND's leadership called on former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to mediate peace talks between MEND and the government.

Other Threats to Offshore Oil Production

Nor is MEND Nigeria's only maritime threat—piracy is now on the increase. From January to March, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) logged 10 incidents in Nigerian waters, more than 20 percent of the world's total. The IMB warned three months ago that violence, fueled by increasing MEND attacks, was "spiraling out of control."

British Prime Minister Brown has already proffered assistance; at Saudi Arabia's oil summit last month Brown said that Britain would "support Nigeria, Iraq and others seeking to overcome security constraints on increased production."

The end result of the rising unrest is that Washington's AFRICOM, currently orphaned in Stuttgart, might finally acquire a home on the Dark Continent. American maritime firepower in Africa to protect rising American oil imports would dovetail neatly with current administration policy; in his 2006 State of the Union address President George W. Bush announced his intention "to replace more than 75 percent of our oil imports from the Middle East by 2025." It is not as if Nigeria can allow its oil industry to deteriorate, as it currently provides 20 percent of the nation's GDP, 95 percent of its foreign exchange earnings and 80 percent of budgetary revenues.

Conclusion

MEND has dismissed AFRICOM, saying it typifies American braggadocio "which has no place in the realism of living in today's world." After meeting President Bush in the White House on December 13, Yar'Adua announced that Nigeria had resolved to partner with AFRICOM "to actualize its peace initiatives and security on the continent." The comment ignited a political firestorm in Nigeria, with the opposition Action Congress chastising Yar'Adua for "elevating expediency over Nigeria's sovereignty" by endorsing AFRICOM in return for U.S. recognition of his government, causing Yar'Adua to clarify his remarks by stating that he did not endorse AFRICOM's presence in Nigeria. Next month however, when Gbaran-Ubie comes online, Abuja may be unable to resist the Pentagon's blandishments if it does not want to risk having 425,000 offshore bpd

² *Military Balance 2007*, International Institute of Strategic Studies, London.

production off-lined by further militant attacks.

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Tackling the PKK: New Directions for Turkey's Special Forces

By Emrullah Uslu

Recent counter-insurgency operations of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in northern Iraq have once again brought to the forefront its highly trained Ozel Kuvvetler Komutanligi (OKK - Special Forces Command). The OKK deployment comes as Turkey reorganizes its large conscript army to create a smaller, more professional force in which Special Forces and commando groups will play a large role in tackling threats from terrorists and insurgents. Turkish special forces were first formed in 1952 under the name of National Hunter Brigades. These units' equipment and training support came from the United States. The purpose of the formation was to have forces available to carry out operations behind enemy lines, including intelligence gathering and commando operations. Due to the growing threat posed by terrorism, the National Hunter Brigades were reorganized and renamed in 1992 as the Special Forces Command (*Zaman*, September 18, 2006). Since 1992, Special Forces units have been assigned to carry out counter-terrorism and rescue operations as well as conducting domestic security duties and guarding high-ranking military leaders. They report directly to the TSK Deputy Chief of General Staff.

Training of the Special Forces

The OKK members are selected from professional military officers assigned to the 1st and 2nd Commando Brigades, namely the Bolu Mountain Command Brigade and Midyat 3rd Commando Brigade. After selection, they are taken to training programs at Foca Gendarmerie School where they are expected to complete a three and a half year physical and mental training course.

Training programs include language education, ideological training, physical exercise, asymmetric warfare, and regular combat training. The ideological training includes the doctrines of Kemalism, the political history of Turkey and additional courses that are considered necessary to instill core values of the Turkish Republic. The physical and combat training has

two sections—the first section, also the major section, is held in Turkey, covering general and advanced training. General training includes parachute jumping, survival ability, underwater and land combat training, fitness training, interrogation techniques, psychological warfare, asymmetric warfare, winter warfare and public relations. The advanced training includes landmines, demolition techniques, advanced weapons training, intelligence methods, combat expertise and psychological warfare. The second part of this course, which is held abroad—usually in the United States—includes specialization in Special Forces and Ranger training.

The Special Forces participate in joint NATO exercises as well as organizing joint exercises with Turkey's close allies, including Central Asian Turkic countries and some Balkan countries. For instance, the 1st Anadolu-2007 Special Forces Exercise, hosted by Turkey, was conducted with the participation of Special Forces teams from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Mongolia in October/November 2007. Turkmenistan participated in the same exercise as an observer. The aim of Anadolu-2007 was to enhance the relations among the Special Forces of the participating countries, to exchange experiences and knowledge and to increase interoperability capabilities (tsk.mil.tr, November 2007).

OKK Operations against the PKK

Starting from 1992, OKK operations helped reduce activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) significantly. OKK units took major roles as frontier forces when the TSK conducted cross-border operations into northern Iraq. At the invitation of Iraqi Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani in 1995, the Turkish military opened new bases in the region. While regular forces were deployed to the bases in Bamerni, Batufa, and Kaimasi, the OKK forces opened offices in the cities of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil where Talabani and Barzani's headquarters, respectively, are located (*Milliyet*, June 3, 2007). Due to the destabilization of northern Iraq, the Turkish troops were expected to "observe the developments, including the PKK's activities, which may endanger Turkey's security and report to Ankara" (*Milliyet*, March 8).

One of the best known OKK operations was the kidnapping of Semdin Sakik, one of the leaders of the PKK. This operation was conducted in 1998 in Dohuk province of northern Iraq. The Peshmerga (Kurdish militia) was cooperative in that operation, which brought a degree of fame to the OKK forces in

Turkey. The most spectacular and politically significant operation was carried out with the help of CIA—the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, founder and leader of the PKK, in Nairobi in 1999.

Conflict with the United States

Activities of Turkish Special Forces in northern Iraq caused two major crises between Turkey and the United States. The first crisis developed when U.S. troops detained a dozen OKK troops in April 2003. The U.S. brigade commander, Col. Bill Mayville, accused the Turkish Special Forces of using the pretext of accompanying humanitarian aid to arm Turkmen in the city of Kirkuk, creating a destabilized environment that could be used as a pretext by Turkey to send a large peacekeeping force into Kirkuk. The OKK commandos were escorted back over the border (*Time*, April 24, 2003).

The second major crisis, which is known as the “hood incident” (*cuval olayi*) erupted when U.S. soldiers raided an OKK compound in Sulaymaniyah in July 2003. The Special Forces men were hooded, detained and interrogated for 60 hours. A senior American official accused the Turkish soldiers of having been involved in a plot being planned against municipal officials in the region (*Hurriyet*, October 24, 2003). The “hood incident” became a symbol of deteriorating bilateral relations for some and an expression of U.S. dominance over Turkey for others. In the following years, three generals who were in charge of Special Forces were forced to retire as a consequence of the event (*Radikal*, August 3, 2006). The incident later became the opening scene of “Valley of the Wolves: Iraq,” a 2006 Turkish film which became a sensation at the box office with over 4.2 million viewers and a record revenue of nearly \$20 million. The movie was regarded as a “virtual revenge” against the United States, as the hero in the deeply nationalistic and largely fictional movie took vengeance on corrupt U.S. commanders (*Turkish Daily News*, January 6, 2007).

The incident led to the reshuffling of the OKK in 2006. The OKK’s leadership status was upgraded from major general to lieutenant general. The number of personnel was slated to be increased. Moreover, under the OKK, two new brigades—1st and 2nd brigades—were formed. Whereas before the personnel increase the OKK had 7,000 soldiers, that number is expected to double by the year 2009 (*Radikal*, August 8, 2006).

A Role in Northern Iraq

Since 2006 the Special Forces have been involved actively in cross-border operations against the PKK. For instance, in April 2006, Turkish troops using infrared cameras spotted PKK terrorists crossing the border near the town of Cukurca, after which a Special Forces team of around 100 soldiers proceeded to cross the border into Iraqi territory. The go-ahead to send in the Special Forces team was reportedly given from Ankara (*Journal of Turkish Weekly*, April 30, 2006). When PKK members organized an attack on the Daglica border brigade in October 2007, killing 12 and kidnapping eight soldiers, the Special Forces once again crossed the border to rescue the kidnapped soldiers (*Hurriyet*, October 25, 2007).

Since December 2007, the Special Forces’ operations have taken a new direction. It seems that the quarrel between the U.S. military and the OKK is over, with the former antagonists now sharing information on the PKK’s activities in northern Iraq. The first Special Forces operation based on American intelligence sharing was carried out in December 2007 (*Hurriyet*, December 2, 2007). As of January 2008, additional Special Forces troops were sent to the Turkish military bases in northern Iraq to intensify counter-terror activities against the PKK (*Sabah*, January 10).

Since the United States and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) disapprove of large-scale Turkish military operations in northern Iraq, it would be very difficult for Turkish authorities to send thousands of troops to chase the PKK. The last large-scale military operation, Operation Sun, conducted in February 2008, received harsh criticism from the United States and the Kurds of northern Iraq, compelling the Turkish military to finish the operation in a short span of time. Yet Turkish cross-border operations against the PKK have continued since then. The PKK’s casualties—as given by the TSK—indicate that Operation Sun, by killing 266 PKK militants, delivered a major blow to the PKK. It is also true that smaller-scale cross-border operations—air strikes followed by Special Forces operations—have also caused significant losses for the PKK. For instance, in January, the 53 PKK were killed; in February when Operation Sun was conducted the loss was 266; in March, 74; in April 70; in May, 218; and in June, 36 (*Aksam*, July 5). If this information—claimed to be based on military intelligence—is correct, it shows that TSK operations supported by effective and actionable intelligence, air strikes and follow-up Special

Forces strikes are as effective as large-scale military operations.

Given that the international community may not tolerate large-scale military operations in northern Iraq, and large troop deployments on the Iraqi border harm the military's image in the eyes of Kurdish communities on both sides of the border, the military leadership may consider frequent small-scale military operations. Under the current conditions, they might be as successful as large scale operations. This reasoning may lead to increasing the Turkish Special Forces' involvement in cross-border operations. Such operations would direct Turkish strategy away from larger operations to smaller, tactical, and high-tech supported operations. In fact, Land Forces Commander Gen. Ilker Basbug has made it clear that starting from 2009, six TSK commando brigades will consist of professional soldiers rather than conscripts.

Conclusion

In addition to Turkey's attempts to reorganize its Special Forces, the PKK's recent decision to move its militants to camps that are close to the Turkish border would make the Special Forces more important than ever. Sources claim that 700-750 militants moved to Harkuk camp 10 miles from the Turkish border; 175-200 militants moved to Basyan region, also 10 miles from the border; 600-650 militants moved to the Metina-Zap camps six miles from the border; and 250-300 militants moved to the Sinath-Haftanin camps three miles from the border (*Aksam*, July 5)

It is not yet clear what might have led the PKK leadership to make such a decision. Nonetheless, recent developments indicate clearly that the fight between the PKK and Turkish forces will intensify on the border. If the United States continues to provide actionable intelligence, it means that Turkish forces will continue conducting small scale cross-border incursions into the above-mentioned camps. In this case, the technologically upgraded Special Forces will be the leading forces conducting those operations.

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