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The Next Generation of Radical Islamist Preachers in the UK

By James Brandon

In the last few years the British government has imprisoned, exiled or deported most of Britain's most high-profile jihadist preachers such as Abu Hamza, Omar Bakri and Abdullah Faisal. In 2006, it also passed laws prohibiting the "glorification" of terrorism to prevent new preachers from gaining similar prominence. However, as a range of fresh plots and convictions show, these measures have not yet halted jihadist recruitment. Within the last two years, several groups of would-be terrorists have been convicted of planning to kidnap and behead British Muslim soldiers in Birmingham, join jihadis in Pakistan and carry out terrorist attacks in the UK. Other cases currently being heard by courts or awaiting trial include alleged plots to bomb several trans-Atlantic airliners and set off bombs in restaurants. The growing evidence that many of these plotters have often been radicalized within the last two years suggests that extremists in the UK have adapted to anti-terrorism measures rather than being silenced by them.[1]

Extremists' Changing Rhetoric

The 2006 Terrorism Act—arguably the most significant counter-terrorism measure taken by the British government since 2001—prohibited giving talks or producing and distributing material that might "glorify terrorism" or which

1 This article is largely based on research carried out by the author while writing "Virtual Caliphate: Islamic Extremists and their websites," a report published by the UK-based Centre for Social Cohesion earlier this month.

could encourage others to commit acts of terrorism. This law has badly damaged extremists' operations, leading to a number of successful prosecutions and sharply curtailing extremists' abilities to incite violence. Many radical preachers are now so troubled by this law that they habitually begin and end talks with a (legally useless) disclaimer that they are not "inciting" violence or "glorifying" terrorism. Inevitably, however, some preachers have sought to use the new law as evidence of government plots against Muslims—and to use this to recruit fresh followers. For example, in one recorded talk entitled "Who is the terrorist?" (available on the main extremist website in the UK, Islambase.co.uk), "Abu Mujahidah," a radical preacher apparently based in London, attacks the new law as specifically targeting Muslims, telling listeners that wearing Islamic clothing will soon be made illegal: "Laws will be passed to say anyone who is heard publicly praying for the mujahideen, they will be arrested under the terrorism law … not only will they do that, they will [next] make an issue out of clothing."

But while the law has curbed overt jihadist rhetoric, many extremists have altered their preaching style rather than abandoning their arguments. For instance, many of the new generation of preachers, instead of explicitly calling for terrorist attacks in the UK, tell listeners that Islam is a conquering religion and that Muslims are obliged to strive for global domination. For example, a recent talk available on the sawtulislam.com website, which is apparently run by former members of al-Muhajiroun (an extremist group banned by the 2006 legislation), "Abu Othman" tells listeners that "[Muhammad] wasn't content. His eyes, my dear Muslims, were on the whole world; his eyes, my dear Muslims, were on conquering the Roman empire, the Persian empire, America, Britain, Australia—you name it. That was the vision of the messenger." The speaker also added that "we one day want to see in the UK the black flag of Islam over Ten Downing Street." While extreme, however, these statements do not explicitly contravene the new Terrorism Act or call for terrorist attacks—leaving the government powerless against such rhetoric.

Grassroots Work

In the 1990s and early 2000s, extremist groups openly sought to recruit followers by holding high-profile events in central London and other major cities. The last major extremist rally took place in London in February 2006 to protest against the cartoons of Muhammad published in Denmark. Led by Yassir al-Sirri, a leading member of Egypt's Islamic Jihad group, protestors burnt the Danish flag, chanted in support of Bin Laden and called on Muslims to bomb Denmark and the United States. As a result of the protests, four of the demonstrators were convicted—many of whom were former leading members of al-Muhajiroun (BBC, July 18, 2007).

Since then there have been no comparable protests and radicals have abandoned their former tactic of holding high-profile demonstrations. Instead, extremists now hold smaller-scale talks and run Islamic dawa or outreach stalls in the streets with the aim of appealing to potential recruits without attracting the attention of the security services. Similarly, whereas leading extremists such as Omar Bakri and Abu Izzadeen used to regularly appear on television and radio, the new generation of extremists deliberately shuns publicity and as a result is often successful in escaping detection for long periods of time. A typical example of this occurred when Usman Ali, a prominent former member of al-Muhajiroun, was banned from a mosque in southeast London in January 2007 by its trustees for praising the 9/11 attacks (*The Times*, September 21, 2007). This story was briefly reported by the BBC but Ali refused all media requests for an interview. Soon afterward, Ali was appointed as chaplain to a nearby hospital. The mosque's trustees warned hospital staff but with no effect (BBC, September 21, 2007). Eventually Ali was suspended after Muslim patients and staff complained about his extremist sermons in the hospital's prayer room. The BBC reported the story but Ali again dropped from public view. This case indicates how extremists who avoid the attention of the media and who air their ideas only among potentially sympathetic Muslims are able to continue preaching unhindered until their activities are reported to the authorities by their own co-religionists.

Increasing Localization

In keeping with the radicals' decision to keep a lower profile and avoid the attention of the security services and the media, extremist activity is becoming increasingly localized. Whereas terrorist recruiters formerly operated openly in prominent mosques—such as the Finsbury Park Mosque, London's Regents' Park Mosque (London Central Mosque) and Birmingham Central Mosque, activity has shifted to lower-profile venues around the country. In many cases, extremists now use community centers, gyms and private homes for study circles and pro-jihadist talks, although this is by no means a new development; for example, Muhammad Siddique Khan, the leader of the 2005 London bombings, attended a

gym known as the "Al-Qaeda Gym" (*The Times*, May 12, 2006). The recent discovery of alleged terrorist plots in Bristol, Exeter and High Wycombe also indicate how extremists are now operating not only in large towns with substantial Muslim populations, such as London, Leeds and Birmingham, but also in smaller cities with comparatively small Muslim populations. At the same time, however, such localization does not always imply that any intellectual or logistical fragmentation of extremist networks is taking place. In particular, the internet allows extremists around the UK to coordinate their activities, exchange pro-jihadist texts, videos and audio recordings. Analysis of British jihadist websites shows that the most popular writers are Muhammed al-Maqdisi, the Jordanian Salafi cleric, Yusuf al-Ayyari, a leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia killed in June 2003, and Abdullah Azzam, the Paletinian-born leader of the "Afghan-Arabs" in the 1980s. Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are comparatively rarely mentioned, cited or quoted, while recorded talks by UK-based preachers such as Abdullah Faisal, Abu Hamza, Abu Qatada and Abu Bashir al-Tartusi are notably more popular. The growing importance of the internet partly explains why attending terrorist "training camps" abroad is no longer a necessary step on the road to jihad. In addition to helping radicals distribute Islamic texts and recordings, recent terrorism trials show that many potential terrorists have also used online texts detailing weapons use and explosives manufacture as a substitute for or supplement to receiving training in camps. For example, Sohail Qureshi, convicted of seeking travel to Pakistan to join jihadist groups either there or in Afghanistan, was found to have downloaded U.S. and Canadian army training manuals on guerrilla tactics and urban warfare before attempting to travel abroad (*The Times*, January 8).

Conclusion

The British government's counter-terrorism initiatives have done substantial damage to older terrorism networks based around veterans of jihadist conflicts in Afghanistan, Algeria and Bosnia. However, a new generation of radicals is now arising to take their place. In many cases, these men are brought up in the UK, speak fluent English and are better able to work around counter-terrorism laws and avoid conflict with the police than the older generation of largely foreign-born radicals. These new extremists are not just based in a few prominent mosques but are widely dispersed throughout Muslim communities around the country. Despite this dispersal, the internet allows extremists to remain in contact, to keep abreast of ideological, military and strategic issues affecting the worldwide jihad and to communicate with like-minded radicals around the UK and abroad. The recent arrest of two young white converts to Islam in two separate alleged bombing plots further highlights the continuing and broad appeal of these ideas (see *Terrorism Focus*, June 10). British jihadist networks are rapidly evolving; the British security services must now find ways to evolve to tackle this new and emerging threat.

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Kurdish Activism in Europe: Terrorism versus Europeanization

By Thomas Renard

Two very different forms of Kurdish activism oppose each other in Europe. The largely unnoticed development of opposing forces could be exploited by European diplomats to terminate terrorist activities carried out by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and soften Europe's relationship with Turkey. The "old" form of Kurdish activism consists of terrorist attacks, training and fundraising in Europe by PKK members. The "new" form of activism relies on legal and democratic means. While the former takes advantage of the lack of European counter-terrorism cooperation, the latter finds its force in the new powers implemented by the European Union (EU). The reinforcement of the "new" Kurdish activism, and the weakening of the "old" terrorism, could facilitate the process of Turkish adhesion to the EU.

The Kurdish Human Rights Project

The latest illustration of the new Kurdish activism occurred earlier this month, when the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) filed a lawsuit against Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), in pursuit of compensation for repeated Turkish bombings and attacks in northern Iraq. The ECHR, based in Strasbourg, France, enforces the European Convention

of Human Rights, established in 1950. The KHRP claim was introduced on behalf of Muslim and Chaldean Christian villagers in northern Iraq who say they lost their homes during Turkish air raids last December (*The Guardian*, June 9). Ankara approved cross-border raids in northern Iraq in October 2007, arguing that the Iraqi government and U.S. troops were not doing enough to crack down on Kurdish terrorists. Occasional bombings started in November and intensified in December, followed by a ground incursion on December 16 and a major raid on PKK bases last February. More recently, Turkey launched another raid on June 9, according to Iraqi security officials (Reuters, June 10). In total, Turkish troops have allegedly killed hundreds of Kurdish rebels from the PKK and the Iranian-Kurdish Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK).

The KHRP is a London-based organization defending Kurdish rights. It focuses essentially on international human rights mechanisms but also conducts fact-finding missions and awareness-raising on human rights abuses in the Kurdish regions. Kerim Yildiz, director of the KHRP, participated in two fact-finding missions to the border regions between Turkey and Iraq in November 2007 and January 2008. Yildiz claims:

> Bombardments have caused serious disruption for local people, including displacement and the destruction of property, livestock, arable land and woodland. The psychological effects of such bombardments, particularly on children, are enduring and extremely worrying… KHRP witnessed the aftermath of the recent Turkish air raids: the destruction of mosques, schools, hospitals and farmland, along with the killing and injuring of villagers. More than 50 civilian villages were affected in the opening bombing raid of 16 December alone… Civilians are clearly being targeted in what should be condemned as an act of aggression and a violation of international law (*The Guardian*, January 23).

It is not the first time that lawsuits were filed against Turkey at the ECHR. In fact, the KHRP has a long history of such trials, including many favorable outcomes. There is even a precedent from a 1995 case establishing that Council of Europe members could be held accountable for human rights abuses committed beyond their borders—as occurred in the new case entered by the KHRP. However, the difficulty in this particular case will be to demonstrate Turkish responsibility for alleged civilian deaths—as in the 1995 case where the KHRP failed to prove that Turkish soldiers had killed seven shepherds in northern Iraq.

Adjusting to New Political Realities

The ECHR is a very important institution in Turkish-Kurdish shared history. Indeed, the court took a decision concerning Abdullah Ocalan that modified both Kurdish activities in Europe and the Turkish relationship with the EU. Ocalan, the leader of the PKK, was arrested in 1999 in Kenya and condemned to death by Ankara, although Turkey had maintained a de facto moratorium on executions since 1984. However, European pressures—the EU had accepted Turkey as a potential candidate shortly after Ocalan's arrest—and a decision of the ECHR forced Ankara to delay Ocalan's execution. In 2003, the ECHR stated that Ocalan had not been tried by an "independent and impartial tribunal" and requested that Turkey retry him. This decision was confirmed in 2005. Holding strongly to its European aspirations, Ankara finally abolished the death penalty in 2001 and commuted Ocalan's death sentence to life imprisonment in October 2002.

After the arrest of Ocalan and the major Turkish step toward EU candidacy in 1999, Kurdish activists in exile "modified their structural, organizational, and strategic operations to adjust to a new political reality. Abandoning the original goal of an independent Kurdistan, activists instead pursued national minority rights in Turkey."[1] They quickly realized that Turkish efforts toward attaining the precious European membership could be used in order to advance their own agenda. The new strategy included the targeting of European institutions—instead of focusing exclusively on Turkish and European government officials—and the creation of friction between the EU and Turkey in order to generate social and political reforms in Turkey.

Europeanization of the Kurdish Movement

This new strategy developed by the Kurdish diaspora has sometimes been termed the "Europeanization" of the Kurdish movement.[2] Europeanization consists of the development and use of a Kurdish network in Europe whose aim is to promote Kurdish rights in Turkey through the European supranational system. The

1 Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Political Movement and Leverage Points: Kurdish Activism in the European Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22(1), 2002, p.91

2 See for instance Andreas Blätte, "The Kurdish Movement: Ethnic Mobilization and Europeanization," Paper Presented at the EUSA 8th International Biennale Conference, March 2003.

means available are exclusively democratic: Petitions, demonstrations, lobbying, and political representation. The European power centers targeted include the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Human Rights.

The European Council, where the heads of European governments gather, is the institution charged with the evaluation of the Turkish candidacy file. Therefore, it should constitute a prime target for the Kurdish diaspora. However, it appears that only in a few cases did Kurdish activists interact with the European Council—probably because it is easier to lobby the national governments. In December 2002, for instance, the KHRP sent a 13-page briefing on the Kurdish situation in Turkey to the European Council. The European Commission issues annual reports on Turkey's compliance with the accession criteria—the so-called Copenhagen criteria. However, the bureaucratic style of the European Commission makes it difficult to apply pressure. The Council of the European Union, where the European ministers meet, is the most important decision-making body of the EU. In May 2002, the Council decided to put the PKK on the EU's list of terrorist organizations. As a result, the Kurdish National Congress (KNC), a Brussels-based Kurdish organization, demanded the revision of the decision and filed a case at the European Court of First Instance. In April 2008, the Court of First Instance stated that the decision to blacklist the PKK and freeze their assets was illegal under EU law. The ruling constrains the EU to more transparency in its blacklisting process, but does not require it to remove the PKK from the list or to unfreeze PKK assets (AP, April 3). The European Parliament held several major debates on the Kurdish question, notably due to individual parliamentarians' initiatives, but also due to Kurdish lobbying. Finally, the work of the KHRP at the ECHR has already been detailed previously in this article, although it should be underscored that the Council of Europe is not part of the EU, but is a legal body specialized on human rights that counts 47 members.

The PKK Network in Europe

Not all the actions undertaken by Kurdish activists in Europe are democratic and non-violent, however. The PKK and PJAK—its Iranian offshoot (see Terrorism Monitor, May 15)—control a vast network in Europe. According to the State Department's latest Country Reports on Terrorism, "Germany led Europe in maintaining action against the militant Kurdish separatist group Kongra Gel/Kurdistan Workers' Party (KGK/PKK), which raised funds, often through illicit activity, to fund violence in Turkey, but coordination problems across borders in Europe blunted some successful arrests."[3] PKK activities were observed in Austria, Belgium (media production), Cyprus (fundraising and traffic route), Denmark (media production), France (fundraising and money laundering), Germany (attacks), Italy (fundraising), Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland.

Germany constitutes the hub of the PKK network in Europe with approximately 11,500 members, according to a recent German report (*Turkish Daily News*, April 19). Last year, in Germany, the PKK conducted 15 terrorist operations, most of them arson attacks, against Turkish interests such as travel agencies, banks and mosques. In total, 38 PKK members were arrested in the EU in 2007.[4] PKK activities in Europe also include paramilitary training. In November 2004, Dutch security forces shut down a PKK training camp in Liempde, arresting 38 people who were allegedly training to prepare terrorist attacks in Turkey.

Besides terrorist attacks and paramilitary training, the PKK has developed an extensive network of fundraising across Europe, most of which relies on illegal activities. According to figures presented at a NATO meeting in November 2007, the illicit narcotics industry is the PKK's most profitable criminal activity.[5] Lieutenant General Ergin Saygun, deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff, estimates the PKK's annual revenues at $640 to $800 million, of which 50 to 60 percent is derived from drug trafficking (*Terrorism Monitor*, June 12). Drug revenues from Europe include street sales and "taxation" of non-PKK-produced drugs. Other illegal activities include money laundering, human-trafficking and the prostitution racket.

The PKK has developed an impressive propaganda industry in Europe as well. According to Lieutenant Colonel Abdulkadir Onay, the PKK owns two news agencies (including Firat News Agency based in the Netherlands), four television stations (including Roj TV and MMC TV in Denmark, and Newroz TV in Norway), 13 radio stations (including Denge Mezopotamya radio

3 U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism, April 30, 2008.

4 Europol, TE-SAT 2008 – EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, April 2008.

5 Abdulkadir Onay, "PKK Criminal Networks and Fronts in Europe," The Washington Institute, Policy Watch no.1344, February 21, 2008.

in Belgium), 10 newspapers (including *Yeni Ozgur Politika* in Germany), three publishing houses (including Roj Group in Belgium), and many websites (including Kurdistan Youth Freedom Movement in Denmark, Kurdistan Italia in Italy, and Kongra-Gel in Germany).[6]

Although some measures have been taken to disrupt the PKK network in Europe, most of it remains intact. In 1999, for instance, Britain banned Med TV, a pro-PKK satellite station, and France banned its successor Medya TV in 2004. However, Roj Roj-TV still broadcasts legally in Denmark, although it was recently sentenced to pay a fine of $6 million by the Belgian Ministry of Finance (see *Terrorism Focus*, April 1). Similarly, the German Interior Ministry shut down *Yeni Ozgur Politika* in September 2005, but the Federal Administrative Court overturned the Interior Ministry's decision. Undeterred, the German Interior Ministry announced a ban on Roj TV this month, on the grounds that it encourages PKK violence and serves as an instrument of recruitment for PKK attacks in Turkey (Anatolia, June 24).

Two essential things are missing in Europe in order to eliminate the PKK network. First, a clear line must be drawn between legal Kurdish lobbying activities and the illegal PKK network. As the former replaces the latter, Turkish and European partners will be able to improve their relationship. Second, European counter-terrorism agencies must enhance their regional collaboration in order to bring PKK and PJAK activities in Europe to an end.

Conclusion

There are two contrasting Kurdish movements in Europe. The pan-European "Kurdish movement" saw the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan and the Turkish accession process as an opportunity to improve the situation of Kurdish Turkey through legal and democratic means. Hence, they developed a new lobbying force, using various pressure tools including lawsuits, briefings, petitions or demonstrations. The PKK network, on the other hand, has not changed and continues to exploit European lack of coordination. The PKK still uses and supports terrorism activities both in Turkey and in Europe. Therefore, nothing is more distinct than the use of the EU's strengths by the Kurdish movement, and the use of the EU's weaknesses by the PKK.

Surprisingly, European diplomats and security agencies have failed to notice and capitalize on this evolution. However, the Europeanization of the Kurdish movement offers a formidable avenue to improve the EU-Turkish relationship and eventually lead to the accession of Turkey to the EU. The last report released by the European Parliament was still very critical toward Turkey, although it underscored some improvements, notably the modification of article 301 of the Penal Code (formerly outlawing the "denigration of Turkishness"), which was seen as the biggest restraint on freedom of expression in the country (EurActiv, May 22). France—whose president Nicolas Sarkozy is opposed to Turkish accession to the EU—will take over the EU presidency next month. With Sarkozy in this role the relationship between Turkey and the EU is not likely to improve soon despite efforts to "Europeanize" the Kurdish movement.

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Is There a Nexus between Torture and Radicalization?

By Chris Zambelis

A great deal of debate surrounds the factors driving the brand of radical Islam in the Middle East that inspires some individuals to commit acts of violence. A recurring theme in extremist discourse is opposition to incumbent authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. For radical Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda, unwavering U.S. support for the autocracies that rule Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region tops a list of grievances toward what amounts to pillars of U.S. foreign policy in the region. In addition to al-Qaeda, however, most Muslims in the Middle East also see these regimes as oppressive, corrupt and illegitimate. Authoritarian regimes in the region are also widely viewed as compliant agents of a U.S.-led neo-colonial order as opposed to being accountable to their own people. Ironically, having realized that most of al-Qaeda's leaders and foot soldiers received their start in radical opposition politics in their home countries, including U.S. allies Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the United States identified the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East as a critical factor in the spread of radicalization in its call for greater political liberalization and democratization in the region after the September

6 Ibid

11 attacks.[1]

Radical Islamist discourse highlighting the scourge of authoritarianism in the Middle East takes on many forms. One subject in particular, however, receives a great deal of attention in militant literature, communiqués, and discussions on radical Islamist chat room forums: The practice of systematic torture by the ruling regimes, especially that which occurs in prisons. Brutal and humiliating forms of torture are common instruments of control and coercion by the security services in police states intent on rooting out all forms of dissent. Previously the domain of human rights activists, researchers investigating the many pathways toward radicalization in the Middle East are increasingly considering the impact of torture and other abuses at the hands of the state during periods of incarceration in an effort to better understand the psychology of the radicalization process. Many researchers see these kinds of experiences as formative in the path toward violent radicalization.[2]

There is ample evidence that a number of prominent militants—including al-Qaeda deputy commander Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and the late al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—endured systematic torture at the hands of the Egyptian and Jordanian authorities, respectively (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 4, 2006). Many observers believe that their turn toward extreme radicalism represented as much an attempt to exact revenge against their tormentors and, by extension, the United States, as it was about fulfilling an ideology. Those who knew Zawahiri and can relate to his experience believe that his behavior today is greatly influenced by his pursuit of personal redemption to compensate for divulging information about his associates after breaking down amid brutal torture sessions during his imprisonment in the early 1980s.[3] For radical Islamists and their sympathizers, U.S. economic, military, and diplomatic support for regimes that engage in this kind of activity against their own citizens vindicates al-Qaeda's claims of the existence of a U.S.-led plot to attack Muslims and undermine Islam. In al-Qaeda's view, these circumstances require that Muslims organize and take up arms in self-defense against the United States and its allies in the region.

Torture in Extremist Discourse

Radical Islamist literature and discourse is replete with references to torture. The infamous al-Qaeda training manual "Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants," more commonly referred to as the "Manchester Document," includes references to the oppression and torture endured by Muslims at the hands of "apostate" rulers whose prisons are "equipped with the most modern torture devices."[4] Al-Zawahiri's public statements often contain references to torture by the Egyptian regime and others in the region. In addressing the nature of U.S.-Egyptian relations during a May 2007 statement, Zawahiri criticizes what he labels "American hypocrisy, which calls for democracy even as it considers [Egyptian president] Hosni Mubarak to be one of its closest friends, and which sends detainees to be tortured in Egypt, exports tools of torture to Egypt and spends millions to support the security organs and their executioners in Egypt, even as the American State Department, in its annual report on human rights, criticizes the Egyptian government because it tortures detainees!"[5]

Following the July 11, 2007 suicide bombing claimed by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) against a military barracks in Lakhdaria, Algeria, two members of a radical Islamist chat room forum with seemingly intimate knowledge of Algerian affairs refer to the attack as an act of vengeance and provide insights into the possible motivations of the attackers:

> Revenge has come 13 years after the massacre of Lakhdaria perpetrated by members of the base who kidnapped, tortured, and slaughtered 35 Muslims and strew their torn bodies in the streets. Their blood-thirstiness reached the extent of slaughtering an old sheikh (Muhammed Moutadjer) like a sheep after torturing him. There is also a mansion (a villa) which they use as a center (or laboratory as they call it) for brutal torture. This place is called the "Villa Copawi," established by the French during the period of direct colonialism for the same mission (torture, killing, violation

1 Chris Zambelis, "The Strategic Implications of Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Middle East," *Parameters* 35(3), Autumn 2005, pp. 87-102.

2 Thomas Heghammer, "Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy* 13(4), December 2006, pp. 39-60.

3 Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's experience in an Egyptian prison and the torture endured by his associates is chronicled in Montasser al-Zayat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man*, (London, Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 31-32.

4 See Part I of "Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants" at http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/manualpart1_1.pdf.

5 "Interview with Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri," Al-Sahab Media, May 5, 2007.

> of honor); this place is known to all near and far…
>
> What about the women that were raped inside the barracks in front of their husbands and sons? What about the little girls, no more than ten years old, who were tortured inside the barracks in front of their fathers…? My brother, you have forgotten about all this, but we have not forgotten and will never forget. This is a day of judgment for the Pharaoh of Algeria and his soldiers.[6]

Explicit references to accounts of torture in the region by al-Qaeda and other militants helps sustain the narrative that Muslims and Islam as a whole are under siege by a hostile U.S.-led campaign. These messages also resonate with wide segments of society in U.S.-backed authoritarian regimes in the region.

Torture and Social Control

In the Middle East, the use of torture is not reserved for violent militants. On the contrary, authoritarian regimes regularly resort to draconian measures against moderate democratic reform-minded Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, secular and liberal opposition dissidents, or even student protestors to eliminate challenges to their rule. These measures are often carried out in the name of maintaining stability or protecting national security. In reality, they are about regime survival. Many observers are convinced that this vicious cycle of systematic abuse has the potential to radicalize dissident activists, leading some to join the ranks of violent militants to avenge their ordeal. At the very least, these practices vindicate the claims of extremists regarding the conduct of regional governments.

The accounts of abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq shocked Americans and the international community. In the Middle East, however, the extent of the abuses uncovered at Abu Ghraib was not out of the ordinary. In many ways, the events at Abu Ghraib were emblematic of what many have grown accustomed to in their own countries. Severe beatings, electric shocks, sexual humiliation and abuse, sleep and food deprivation, and threats against family members and associates, among other things, are common tactics used by authoritarian regimes to attack their opponents. By perpetuating a climate of fear, authoritarian regimes are able to engender a kind of tacit obedience among citizens.

Addressing the prevalence of torture, let alone the nexus between torture and radicalization, remains a taboo in the Middle East. Due to fears of reprisals by the authorities, many researchers and journalists in the region practice a form of self-censorship when addressing the topic. As a result, there is a dearth of primary source research on the topic. At the same time, a number of organizations and opposition dissidents are beginning to raise the issue, despite fears of reprisals by the authorities.[7] The disclosure of a graphic video of Egyptian police officers beating and sexually abusing Emad al-Kabir—who was held by police officers at a police station in the Boulaq el-Dakrour section of Giza in Greater Cairo for apparently resisting authorities during a January 2006 incident when he attempted to mediate a dispute between the officers and his cousin—caused outrage in the Middle East. The abusers filmed the ordeal and forwarded the footage to the cell phones of the detainee's friends to humiliate their victim (*Daily Star Egypt*, May 22). Al-Kabir was neither an Islamic militant nor a political dissident. Nevertheless, graphic scenes from the video appeared amid firsthand accounts of similar experiences endured by ordinary citizens and political dissidents in the Middle East during a lengthy videotaped statement by Zawahiri released in July 2007. Zawahiri devoted a segment of his presentation to the issue of torture in the Middle East in a savvy effort to reach out to a mainstream audience.[8]

This controversial subject was also brought to the forefront of debate with the publication of the widely popular Egyptian novel *Imarat Yacoubian* (The Yacoubian Building) by Alaa al-Aswany.[9] The book treats the nexus between torture and radicalization through the character of Taha al-Shazli, a disaffected young man who joins an Islamist opposition group in

6 Quoted in "Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb/The Suicide Bomber Suhaib Pulverizes a Barracks," [Arabic] July 18, 2007 at www.tajdeed.org.uk [no longer accessible].

7 In Egypt groups such as the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) are at the forefront of shedding light on the prevalence of torture by the security services and advocating on behalf of victims. For more details, see ar.eohr.org. For more graphic accounts of torture in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, see www.tortureinegypt.net.

8 See excerpts from Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's July 4, 2007 statement addressing the issue of torture in the Middle East, entitled "The Advice of One Concerned" at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a_K2sxgRKk . The entire video is available at http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7664209432789370243&hl=en .

9 Alaa al-Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building*, (Cairo, American University of Cairo Press, 2004).

Cairo. After being detained for taking part in a public demonstration, Taha is subject to extreme forms of torture by the hands of the Egyptian security officials, including severe beatings and sexual abuse, in an attempt to extract information about his political affiliations and the identities of his associates. Taha, angry and humiliated at his ordeal, is eventually released by his captors but is never the same. Bent on exacting revenge on his tormentors, Taha's disaffection with the Egyptian regime evolves into a visceral hatred that can only be satisfied through violence. Al-Aswany's fictional account of Taha's experience provides a glimpse into one aspect of the radicalization process in the Middle East that is too often ignored.

Conclusion

Based on the discourse of al-Qaeda and other radical Islamist organizations, the current trajectory of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East will continue to serve as a battle cry for militants to take up arms against the United States. The prevalence of systematic torture and the persistence of authoritarianism in countries the United States counts as loyal allies will facilitate this process. These conditions will also provide al-Qaeda's highly-effective media and propaganda wings with ample material to implicate the United States in the activities of regional security services. Regardless of political sensitivities, this subject requires far more attention from serious researchers examining the paths toward political radicalization.

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The Mahdi Army: New Tactics for a New Stage

By Fadhil Ali

Iraqi radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has issued a statement describing a new strategy for attacking Coalition forces (alkufanews.com, June 13). The statement follows a year of intense military pressure against his Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia and a series of confusing and sometimes contradictory decisions. The hard-line cleric, who has not been seen in public for months, issued orders to reorganize his militia into a civilian branch and a small but select armed wing commissioned to fight Coalition forces. Only three months earlier al-Sadr had announced his retirement and admitted failure in his efforts at "liberating Iraq" (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 1).

Muqtada's statement was proclaimed in the mosques by his aides during the weekly prayer of his followers on Friday, June 13 (almanar.com, June 13). A written copy—signed the previous day—was published on a pro-Sadr web site: "Everyone knows that we will not abandon the resistance against the occupiers until liberation or death, but you individuals in Jaysh al-Mahdi should know, and this is an obligation on you, that the resistance will be restricted to a group which will be authorized by a written statement by me soon. Those will be people with experience, management, awareness and sacrifice. They would have a prior permission—firstly from the religious ruler through their appointed command and secondly from the supreme command—through secret and private structures. Hereby weapons will be only for them and they will direct the weapons to the occupiers only, every other usage of weapons will be prohibited. The other part of Jaysh al-Mahdi with its thousands and millions will struggle against western secular ideology and emancipate the heart and minds from domination and globalization. They will be under a cultural, religious and social title and will be prohibited from carrying and using weapons…" (alkufanews.com, June 13).

Since the foundation of the militia shortly after the invasion in 2003, the fighters of JAM have not hesitated to fight in large formations and initiate confrontations in their strongholds. They were involved in severe clashes with the U.S. military in major uprisings inside the poor Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad and southern Iraq in 2003 and 2004. The fighting against Iraqi forces in Basra last March provided a clear example of JAM tactics. JAM also has the ability to recruit thousands when necessary and sometimes shows them in military parades. Until the government intensified its crackdown against JAM starting in late 2007, Iraqi Sunnis were complaining of JAM's coordination with Iraqi security forces to commit acts of sectarian violence. As part of the al-Sadr movement, JAM was a popular organization rather than a secret one, with regional offices in every Shiite neighborhood. These features are about to change in Muqtada's reorganization.

The announcement of the new strategy came after JAM

suffered successive setbacks in the continuing crackdown by the Iraqi government, but al-Sadr had also launched a protest movement against the security pact now under negotiation between the American administration and the Iraqi government. Al-Sadr called his followers to rally against the agreement, which aims to legalize and organize the American military existence in Iraq after its UN mandate ends in 2008. Al-Sadr called on Iraqis to "protest against the deal every week after the Friday prayer until the agreement is called off." He announced in a statement that the protests will continue until the government agrees to hold a public referendum on the American military existence in Iraq. In response to his call, thousands of al-Sadr's followers marched in Baghdad, Basra and other parts of southern Iraq protesting the long-term security agreement. American flags and an effigy of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki were burned (al-Jazeera, May 31).

New Tactics for a New Stage

Dr. Asma'a al-Mossawi, a senior member of al-Sadr's political movement, explained the link between the new tactics and the U.S.-Iraqi security pact. In an interview one day after al-Sadr announced the new plan she said:

> It is not a reaction—Muqtada's new order—but a new strategy to deal with the current situation in Iraq considering the pressures that will lead to the signing of the security agreement with the American forces without the approval of the Iraqi people… We believe that in the coming period of time there will be new moves against the American forces. During the last five years there were painful operations against them while they were among the Iraqi people. [In] the next period the American forces will be in their bases—this requires preparing a trained force from al-Mahdi Army, a force that should be experienced and works secretly guided by intelligence information to execute tasks quickly and return.

Dr. Mossawi did not rule out coordination between other insurgent groups and the new JAM military wing which will be chosen and led by Muqtada (*Asharq al-Awsat*, June 14).

A Way around the Ban

In a sign that they insist on having their own militia, the followers of al-Sadr announced that they would not participate in the regional election that is supposed to be held later this year, but they would support other candidates: "We will not contest [the election] as an independent party but we will coordinate with other parties that serve the same national goals… it will be impossible to bar us from the election, we have plenty of options on how to participate." The Sadrists have been negotiating lately with former Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari, who was expelled from the Dawa Party of current Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki after forming his own National Reform Movement. The Sadrists went further and said that they might even support their old opponent, former secular Prime Minister Iyad Allawi in the upcoming poll (*al-Hayat*, June 16). Last April Nuri al-Maliki offered the Sadrists the choice of disbanding their militia or being denied participation in the election and political life (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 1).

The Beginning of the Campaign

It seems that the propaganda campaign of al-Sadr has started in the province of Babil, south of Baghdad, where leaflets are distributed daily urging people to store weapons and fight the U.S. army. The local police believe that in addition to JAM other insurgent groups are involved. Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party and the extremist Shiite cult of the "Soldiers of Heaven" are among the suspect groups (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 22). The leaflets carry slogans like: "The national resistance is the only choice for the Iraqi people to drive out the occupiers and their agents." They also urge people to store ammunition, follow what is published on the internet about "the armed Iraqi revolution" and get ready for the zero-hour (*al-Hayat*, June 23).

Babil province is one of the areas where the Iraqi forces have not yet launched any major operation against the JAM. Shiites are the majority there, except in the northern part adjacent to Baghdad where there is a concentration of Sunnis. The Sadr movement has grown further from the governing Shiite coalition and looks more open to coordinate with non-sectarian parties. Many former members of the pro-Saddam Fidayeen militia are believed to have infiltrated JAM after the fall of Saddam, providing the possibility of coordination against the common enemy, the Iraqi government.

Conclusion

Iran and many Iraqi Shiites, especially Ayatollah Kadhum al-Ha'iri—an influential pro-Iran cleric and patron of

al-Sadr—have condemned the prospective security deal between Washington and Baghdad (iraqshabab.net, May 21; see also *Terrorism Focus*, June 18). Al-Sadr and his followers will most likely concentrate their efforts against any kind of U.S.-Iraq agreement; after a year of setbacks they will try to gain a new momentum based on the legitimacy of the support of senior Shiite clerics. In this way and by claiming to restrict their attacks on the Coalition forces only they will try to gain national support. To succeed, the long-term security deal must be handled by both the American and Iraqi governments carefully and not overshadow the recent security progress in Iraq. With the Kurds supporting the agreement and the Sunnis saying it is necessary, the big mission is to convince the Shiite majority. Unlike Iranian religious leaders, influential Iraqi Shiite clerics like Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani have not put a veto on the deal in principle. After meeting al-Sistani, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), said that the Grand Ayatollah indicated that the agreement should consider four points:

1. Recognition of the national sovereignty of Iraq
2. Transparency
3. The formation of a national consensus
4. Ratification by the Iraqi parliament (Elaph.com, June 4).

Sistani's blessing for any major political deal has become a must in post-war Iraq, let alone a situation like the current one where Iran and many leading Shiite clerics are openly against the agreement. Sistani's position appears to be negotiable, but the parties involved will need to work to gain his approval. On the other hand, August 22 will mark the renewal date for al-Sadr's six-month suspension of JAM's military activities. This might provide a suitable benchmark for al-Sadr and his reorganized JAM to launch a new page of the insurgency.

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