

TERRORISM FOCUS

Volume V ■ Issue 29 ■ August 5, 2008

IN THIS ISSUE:

* BRIEFS.....	1
* Lebanese Jihadis Accuse Sunni Shaykhs of Acting as Agents for Shiite Hezbollah.....	3
* Restructuring al-Qaeda's Algerian Insurgency.....	4
* India's Security Agencies Struggle with Probe into Serial Bombings in Gujarat and Karnataka	6
* Istanbul Bombings Suggest PKK Insurgency May Be Entering a More Ruthless Phase	7



PAKISTAN'S FRONTIER CORPS ABANDON COLONIAL-ERA FORT TO TALIBAN

Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps is pulling out of fortified positions in the Taliban hotbed of South Waziristan, including a 1930s-era colonial fort at Ladha that was the center of heavy fighting last January, when it came under attack by 250 to 300 insurgents in the largest of a series of recent assaults by tribesmen on the stronghold (Pakistan Times, January 12). 20 to 30 militants carrying rockets and small arms were killed in that attack, which was repulsed only through the use of artillery and mortars (PakTribune, January 19). Tribesmen have also made a habit of abducting soldiers stationed at the fort. Rumors are now circulating in the region that the pullback is only a preliminary step in a large-scale offensive by NATO or Pakistan government forces (The News [Islamabad], August 1). The Ladha garrison of several hundred soldiers appears to be relocating to the town of Razmak in Northern Waziristan (The News, August 1). Smaller posts in the Saam region of South Waziristan were also being abandoned. Many of these posts were located in areas belonging to the Mahsud tribe, from which local Taliban leader Baitullah Mahsud hails.

Frontier Corps spokesmen cited difficulties in supplying Ladha Fort and a decision to transform the building into a hospital as reasons for pulling out the garrison. The latter reason has left some locals perplexed – a hospital was recently built only ten kilometers away but has never been fitted out with medical equipment or supplies. One elder told journalists that elders from several sections of the Mahsud tribe had been urged by

For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to pubs@jamestown.org, or contact us at:

1111 16th St., NW, Suite #320
Washington, DC 20036
T: (202) 483-8888
F: (202) 483-8337
<http://www.jamestown.org>

The Terrorism Focus is a fortnightly complement to Jamestown's Terrorism Monitor, providing detailed and timely analysis of developments for policymakers and analysts, informing them of the latest trends in the War on Terror.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.

Copyright ©2008



government officials to demand a hospital in Ladha (*The News*, August 1). The Frontier Corps Inspector General, Major General Muhammad Alam Khattak, noted that the fort had lost its strategic importance after local people erected housing outside its walls, pointing out that “a tribal jirga (assembly)” had requested the fort be turned into a hospital (*Daily Times*, August 1). Addressing speculation that the fort was being turned over to the Taliban as part of a negotiated peace settlement with the new government in Islamabad, General Khattak would only say; “The fighting phase is over in this area, and now negotiations are being held with the people” (*Gulf News*, July 31).

In an optimistic vein, General Khattak suggested it would not matter if the Taliban seized the fort after it was turned into a medical facility, as local tribesmen would then rise up to expel the Taliban (*HI Pakistan*, July 28). A spokesman for the Tehrik-i-Taliban of Pakistan declared; “We will definitely capture all those posts vacated by the FC in Ladha and Saam” (*The News*, August 1).

TRAITORS OR POWS? KHARTOUM SENTENCES JEM REBELS TO DEATH

In recent days thirty fighters from Darfur’s rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) have been sentenced to death in special ad-hoc counter-terrorism tribunals created by the Sudanese government. The fighters were taken prisoner during last May’s surprising but ultimately unsuccessful JEM raid on Omdurman (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 15). After being sentenced to hang, the JEM guerrillas responded with cries of “In the name of Darfur, God is Great” and “Thanks be to God” (*Sudan Tribune*, July 31; *Reuters*, July 31).

If not considered POWs, insurgent prisoners are still entitled under international law to protection from torture, confinement in secret prisons and summary execution. They may, however, be tried for treason and sedition. Sudan (unlike the United States) is a ratified signatory to the 1977 Geneva Convention Additional Protocol 1, in which section 1.4 states POW status must be given to prisoners from “armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination.” While some may argue JEM prisoners meet this definition, JEM, like the

Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) of southern Sudan, has always styled itself a “national liberation movement,” rather than a regional separatist movement.

The Government of South Sudan (GoSS) has urged that the JEM prisoners be pardoned. According to Yasir Arman, the SPLM Deputy Secretary General for Northern Sudan, the JEM rebels are clearly prisoners of war (Miraya FM [Khartoum], July 31). In June, the SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum (Cabinet Affairs Minister in the Government of National Unity) also called on the government to treat the rebels as prisoners of war (*Sudan Tribune*, June 23). During its 22 year war with southern rebels, Khartoum routinely explained the absence of SPLA POWs by denying that any rebels had been taken prisoner.

After claiming POW status for its captured fighters, an official JEM statement declared; “Execution of Prisoners of War is a breach of the International Law and considered an act of assassination and another murder in cold blood” (*Sudan Tribune*, July 29). JEM spokesman Ahmad Hussein promised the movement would retaliate “at the appropriate time and place” (*Afrique en Ligne*, July 31). Hussein added; “This is a butchery of justice in Sudan and yet another example of [an] impotent judiciary that is under the influence of the executive branch... This proves there is no genuine judiciary in Sudan to prosecute anyone let alone perpetrators of genocide and war crimes” (*Sudan Tribune*, August 1).

Defense lawyers for the JEM accused, who must mount appeals in the next few days, say that the special courts are unconstitutional. Once the sentences have been ratified by an appeals court, the execution orders must then be signed by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who is himself wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes. The question is whether al-Bashir will commute the death sentences to moderate his image, or fall back on his regime’s customary recourse to quick and decisive punishment of those who challenge its authority. With JEM still operating openly in Darfur and threatening another raid on Khartoum, it will be hard for al-Bashir to resist demonstrating the regime’s willingness to ignore international opinion when it comes to matters of internal security.

Lebanese Jihadis Accuse Sunni Shaykhs of Acting as Agents for Shiite Hezbollah

A Lebanese jihadi forum member posted a letter addressed to Osama Bin Laden entitled “An Open message from Beirut to Osama Bin Laden,” supposedly on behalf of Lebanese Sunnis. The message details the sectarian politics of Lebanon, highlights Hezbollah’s continuing attempts to take over Lebanon and describes the misfortune of the Salafi-Jihadi Fatah al-Islam organization (al-ekhlaas.net, July 21).

The core of Omar al-Bayruti’s message to Bin Laden revolves around Lebanese Shiites and their alleged attempts to undermine Sunni Muslims and take control of Lebanon with the help of Iran and Syria to form a “Shiite Crescent” through the Arab Middle East. Before examining Lebanese political details, al-Bayruti praises al-Qaeda, saying the group became the symbol of defiance for the Sunni Muslim community after 9/11. Al-Bayruti adds that Shiite militias have, for the second time in the last quarter century, invaded and vandalized Beirut, this time with the collaboration of “Sunni agents” in an attempt to hide the “heinous face” of Shiite occupation.

Al-Bayruti asserts that the purpose of the message is to enlighten al-Qaeda, for the organization will have a part in the next phase of confrontation between Sunnis and Shiites in Beirut. According to al-Bayruti, the atmosphere is ripe for al-Qaeda to get involved in Lebanese politics on behalf of the Sunnis; “It’s time to work on inheriting al-Hariri’s [political] stream in Lebanon without a rude entrance or through Iranian and Syrian intelligence networks as did Fatah al-Islam last year in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Barid. Such a wrong approach inflicted a double loss on the Lebanese Sunnis.” During the confrontation between the Lebanese Army and Fatah al-Islam, Sunnis wondered why al-Qaeda did not overtly support Fatah al-Islam, although al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri explained in one of his speeches that al-Qaeda refrained from endorsing Fatah al-Islam to spare the organization embarrassment – at the time Fatah al-Islam was denying any connection with al-Qaeda:

The reason for [speaking indirectly] was that the brothers in Fatah al-Islam were being accused by the agents of America of being a branch of al-Qaida, and the brothers were denying that, so I

feared that if I supported them openly, I would cause difficulties for them at a time when we were unable to extend to them a helping hand. Now, however, I declare that the brothers in Fatah al-Islam are heroes of Islam, and we know nothing but every good thing about them, and they confronted the Crusader-Zionist coalition in Lebanon in the most honorable way, and what happened to them and the Muslims in Nahar al-Barid is a crime which won’t be forgotten.... (Al-Sahab Media, no. 1429-2008).

Fatah al-Islam, explains al-Bayruti, was used as a scapegoat, with all the dirty work and political assassinations committed by others pinned on the mujahideen of Fatah al-Islam. By assassinating the late prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri, the main foe of Syria and the Shiites, and accusing the mujahideen of responsibility, Hezbollah eliminated the Sunni initiative in Lebanon, according to al-Bayruti. By starting a war with Israel, Hezbollah escaped the guilt of having to use heavy weaponry to subdue internal political rivals, since the war led to Hezbollah’s political rivals temporarily forgetting their conflict with Hezbollah.

Al-Bayruti explains the political situation in Lebanon and Shiite attempts to control the Sunni population by recruiting Sunni agents to facilitate a Syrian and Iranian agenda in Lebanon through groups such as the Islamic Scholar’s Assembly. As a result of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Iran hosted a conference for Lebanese Muslim scholars from both the Sunni and Shiite sects in Tehran. The outcome of the conference was the establishment of an assembly comprised of Sunni and Shiite scholars with the blessing of Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini.

Al-Bayruti lists a number of Sunni figures working for the Syrian and Iranian cause in Lebanon:

- Shaykh Fathi Yakan: Head of the Lebanese Islamic Action Front and a well known writer on Islamic topics, Shaykh Yakan was once General Secretary of the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brothers. After being expelled from the movement he became an ally of Hezbollah in its struggle against the Future Movement (Tayyar al-Mustaqbal), a Sunni political movement created by Saad al-Hariri, the younger son of slain ex-Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

- Shaykh Abdul Nasir Jabri: A Syrian-born Salafi preacher who trained in Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Jabri runs the Lebanese Islamic Da'wa Academy, funded by Libya. The shaykh recently spoke out against Lebanon's Sunni Mufti, Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Kabbani; "What Shaykh Kabbani said about the struggle being between Hezbollah and the Sunnis is false. The struggle is political, between a U.S.-Zionist project and forces of resistance extending beyond Lebanon. Some insist on giving this struggle a religious nature to please Washington or some Arab rulers" (Al-Manar TV, May 8).
- Shaykh Maher Hammoud: Shaykh Hammoud, imam of the Sidon al-Quds mosque, developed close ties to Hezbollah after becoming an early advocate of Iranian-style revolutionary political Islam. The shaykh was once a leader of the Islamic Scholar's Assembly, but broke ranks with the group in the 1980s. Despite warning sectarian violence in Lebanon may lead to an increase in support for al-Qaeda, al-Bayruti suggests the shaykh seeks to play a role in unifying the efforts of Hezbollah and al-Qaeda against Israel (The National, [Abu Dhabi], May 15). The shaykh is also believed to have close ties to Asbat al-Ansar, a militant Sunni Salafist group based in the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp.

In his discussion of Fatah al-Islam, al-Bayruti insinuates that Hezbollah instigated the Lebanese Army's attack on the group in the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp. Al-Zawahiri has said previously that last summer's fighting at the camp was a premeditated crime to eliminate the mujahideen; "Lebanon is not one country, but rather many countries at war with each other. Shiites have their state, Maronites have their state and the U.S. spies pretending to belong to the Sunnis have a state. The army can't touch any of them. But because the mujahideen in our Arab world don't have a state to protect them, it was necessary to eliminate any pure Islamic jihadi movement that wouldn't acquiesce to oppression" (Al-Sahab Media, no. 1429-2008).

Finally, al-Bayruti says the objective of his message is to caution Sunnis about Hezbollah's ideological gains in Lebanon, urging the mujahideen not to abandon Lebanon and to apply a "practical strategy," a reference to Fatah al-Islam's failed approach.

Al-Bayruti's message received negative comments from Salafi-Jihadi forum chatters in regards to his notion that al-Hariri and his Future Movement represent Sunnis in Lebanon. Others rejected the assumption that Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated by Hezbollah, though they all agreed to the need for a Salafi-Jihadi amir in Lebanon.

Initiatives to end the intensive ideological conflict between Sunnis and Shiites have failed so far to mend fences between the two sects. The complicated sectarian nature of Lebanese political life, however, means that it will not be easy for al-Qaeda to find enough supporters and adherents of the Salafi-Jihadi ideology to challenge the strength of Hezbollah's well-organized partisans.

Abdul Hameed Bakier is an intelligence expert on counter-terrorism, crisis management and terrorist-hostage negotiations. He is based in Jordan.

Restructuring al-Qaeda's Algerian Insurgency

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the North African branch of al-Qaeda, has been driven to the wall. Despite a new suicide attack that injured 25 on Sunday morning in Tizi Ouzou, Kabylie, the Algerian-based group is facing difficulties that could endanger its very existence (AFP, August 3; for Tizi Ouzou, see Terrorism Focus, April 22). The number of militants is shrinking due to continuous military operations and difficulties in recruiting new volunteers. International anti-terrorism cooperation is also drying up sources of financing.

Since the beginning of 2008, Algerian authorities, with the help of neighboring countries, have arrested or killed more than 200 AQIM members, according to security sources. The great majority of these individuals were affiliated to support networks, while about thirty were active terrorists (*Liberté*, July 28; *L'Expression* [Algiers], July 30).

The strategy of the People's National Army (Armée Nationale Populaire - ANP) to focus mainly on key figures of AQIM has proven largely successful. In February, Halouane Amrane (a.k.a. Handhala) was killed during a military raid

in Si Mustapha, Kabylie (*Le Jour d'Algérie*, February 18). Amrane was AQIM's main expert in explosives and one of the few instructors in the manufacturing of bombs. Amrane was also responsible for assembling the bombs used in the December 2007 suicide attacks in Algiers. In March, Abou Oussama, an Afghan veteran considered the leader of AQIM's faction in southern Algeria, was arrested in Mali (*L'Expression*, March 5). In all, about ten amirs (commanders) have been eliminated since the beginning of the year (*Liberté*, July 28).

Persistent internal fights for power between competing factions partly explain AQIM's current crisis, although internal fights are as old as the organization. Nevertheless, feuds sometimes lead to denunciations with grave consequences, such as in the case of Amrane who was allegedly given up to authorities by Abdelmoumène Rachid (a.k.a. Hodheifa al-Assimi), an AQIM amir from another faction (*Liberté*, July 28).

Militants have been arrested, killed or have surrendered to authorities in growing numbers, and AQIM is said to be encountering difficulties in filling the vacuum. According to Algerian Interior Minister Nouredine Yazid Zerhouni, AQIM is "not able to recruit anymore" (*L'Expression*, July 17). The difficulties in recruiting volunteers for the jihad in Algeria, compared to other fronts such as Iraq or Afghanistan, seem to be confirmed in part by the fact that volunteers from neighboring Morocco are more willing to join the battle in Iraq than join the Algerian insurgents (see *Terrorism Focus*, July 23). There are also indications AQIM has used the Iraqi conflict to attract new recruits who later deserted once they realized that they would fight in Algeria and not in Iraq [1].

It is impossible to estimate the number of Algerian jihadis returning from Iraq at this time. In an interview with the *New York Times*, AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Musab Abdelwadoud), declared "there is a limited and very small number of the mujahedeen brothers who fought in Iraq that came back and joined us" (*New York Times*, July 1). At this point, it has become clear that the number of foreign jihadi fighters entering Iraq is in decline. However, it is still unknown whether North African fighters still present in Iraq will decide to stay, go back to their country and join AQIM, or eventually leave for another jihadi battlefield such as Afghanistan or Somalia.

Today, the number of fighters among the ranks of AQIM is estimated to be between 300 and 400, according to recent declarations of the Algerian Interior Minister (*L'Expression*, July 30). Although some prudence is always necessary with official statistics, these numbers seem to confirm the steady decline of the group, whose strength was estimated at 800 fighters in 2005, and over 500 at the end of 2006.

As a result of its weakening, AQIM has been forced to adapt. First, Abdelmalek Droukdel restructured his organization. Instead of eight geographic zones, he divided Algeria into only four zones: one in the East (including Jijel, Skikda, Constantine, Batna, Khenchela and Tébessa); two in the Center (one including Tipasa, Chlef, Aïn Defla, Berrouaghia and Khemis Miliana, the other including Tizi Ouzou, Boumerdès, Bouira, Béjaïa and M'sila); and a fourth in the Saharan south (*L'Expression*, May 18). This restructuring indicates both AQIM's loss of control in certain areas and Droukdel's search for tighter control of his troops – and more specifically his dissident amirs.

Secondly, Droukdel ordered a redeployment of his fighters. While most activities of the group have traditionally taken place in the Center zones, where the leadership is still thought to hide, Droukdel is attempting to develop a new hub in the East, close to the Tunisian border. According to security sources, AQIM will also redeploy in urban suburbs instead of isolated rural regions (*L'Expression*, May 18; April 23).

Thirdly, AQIM adapted its tactics to its shrinking capacities and its evolving strategy. With a diminishing number of fighters, AQIM cannot conduct its insurgency in the way Algeria's powerful Groupement Islamique Armé (GIA) did in the 1990s. Therefore, fewer firefights are observed, while the use of explosives is increasing. The use of suicide operations has become frequent since the former Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) merged with al-Qaeda in 2007 – despite the fact that suicide operations were nonexistent in Algeria before that time. Although often very effective, suicide operations are more a tactic of terror or "propaganda of the deed", than the work of an insurgent guerrilla group. Moreover, two recent suicide operations, less destructive than planned, demonstrate AQIM's difficulties in recruiting experienced fighters. On June 4, a teenager suicide bomber blew himself up in the military base of Bordj al-Kiffan, injuring

three soldiers, but killing only himself. On July 23, another newly recruited kamikaze drove his motorbike laden with explosives against a military truck, injuring 13, but again killing only himself.

Finally, AQIM seems to be in financial trouble. The U.S. Treasury Department froze the assets of four prominent members of AQIM on July 17 after the UN added the men to the list of Bin Laden associates on July 3 (U.S. Dept. of the Treasury, HP-1085, July 17). Spanish police arrested eight Algerian men on June 10 and four others on July 1, all of whom are accused of providing financial and logistical support to AQIM. Nevertheless, AQIM was quick to respond to its cash crisis. It has made a business of kidnappings for ransom, which are multiplying in the region.

Algerian operations and international collaboration have led to a strong decline in AQIM's budget and fighting strength. However, the group has shown an impressive resilience and capacity to adapt. With Algerian security forces struggling to adapt to AQIM's new structure and tactics, it appears Algeria is entering a new phase of its 16-year-old Islamist insurgency.

Thomas Renard is a consultant and expert on terrorism and insurgencies.

Notes

1. Anneli Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism*, ISS Monograph Series, no.144, June 2008.

India's Security Agencies Struggle with Probe into Serial Bombings in Gujarat and Karnataka

Intelligence and crime investigation units from eight Indian states as well as three federal agencies - the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) - are busy sifting through evidence for clues to the group or groups involved in the terror attacks in Ahmedabad (the capital of Gujarat state) and Bengaluru (or Bangalore, the capital city of Karnataka state) in the last week of July.

The half dozen low-intensity blasts in Bengaluru on July 25, followed the next day by 16 blasts in Ahmedabad and the discovery of 22 live bombs with integrated circuits from the "Diamond City" of Surat, clearly show the involvement of a large network of local people (possibly including women and children) aiding the coalition of terror networks that has carried out attacks in different places in India over the past three years (*Times of India*, August 2). Indian intelligence officials have described for the author the existence of a wide network of supporters, including women, who are assisting the terror groups - one such group even maintains a women's wing called Shaheen Force (Rediff.com, April 24).

What has surprised the intelligence and police agencies is the audacity of the group in launching serial blasts in high-profile areas like Ahmedabad and Bengaluru, which have been under police watch for quite sometime. The bombings were a challenge to security agencies that already had information as early as last March about the possibility of former Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) activists carrying out serial bombings (*Times of India*, March 19).

Two other elements of the attacks which have forced the investigating agencies to rework their strategy are the 14-page "Indian Mujahideen (IM)" manifesto, which was emailed to newspapers and television channels minutes before the Ahmedabad blasts, and the possible signature of the Indonesian al-Qaeda ally Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in the manufacture of the Surat bombs (*The Hindu*, July 27; *The Times of India*, July 31).

Unlike past occasions when emails from terrorist groups were sent from cybercafés, this time the militants sent their manifesto by hacking into the wi-fi router of Keith Haywood, an American national working for a firm teaching call centre employees to speak with an American accent. Although Haywood, a Californian staying in Navi Mumbai, denied any knowledge of the email, he is under investigation by federal investigating agencies after his military service was discovered (*Daily News and Analysis*, [Mumbai], July 31).

The use of Integrated Circuit chips (ICs) in the Surat bombs is another "foreign" link which has worried the investigators (*Economic Times*, New Delhi, August 1). Indonesian-designed ICs are used by Indonesia's

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist group, which has close ties to al-Qaeda. JI has already successfully exported this technology to the Filipino Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. In India, local militants may have obtained training in these techniques from the Bangladesh-based Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami (HuJI), which has had contacts with JI and possibly training in bomb manufacture (UPI, September 26, 2003). The new JI link worries security agencies because of the implication that al-Qaeda may be developing allies or proxies in the Indian terror coalition.

The multi-agency probe is focusing on sifting through a massive collection of interrogation reports and intelligence inputs on former SIMI workers and leaders. Some teams are already revisiting SIMI leaders and their associates lodged in various jails. Known sympathizers and friends of former SIMI leaders and workers have been rounded up for questioning - over 280 in Surat in the first five days after the discovery of the bombs (*The Hindu*, July 31). A record of stolen vehicles in Gujarat and Maharashtra was hastily collated as four cars used in the bombings —two in Ahmedabad and two in Surat - were among the 11 stolen recently from Navi Mumbai, a suburb of Mumbai in Maharashtra state (*Daily News and Analysis*, August 4).

Cyber-security teams from different agencies, including the Cyber Crime Investigation Cell of the Mumbai Police, are trying hard to crack the mystery of the manifesto email and other recent emails, particularly one which was sent to Muslim movie stars demanding they stop performing (*Times of India*, July 28). Hard disks from the two laptops and a desktop computer seized from Kenneth Haywood's Navi Mumbai apartment are being analyzed at the state forensic laboratory. Also joining the investigation is the NTRO, the federal agency responsible for technical intelligence (such as tracking down IP addresses and solving cyber crimes). The success rate in tracking down the authors of such terror emails, however, has been dismal in the past, mainly due to the lax application of cyber laws by private cybercafé owners.

Unraveling the identity of the group or group members of the recent wave of terror attacks has left investigators equally stymied. Although the "Indian Mujahideen" has surfaced twice before the Ahmedabad serial blasts, the security agencies have no clue about its leadership or command structure. IM previously claimed responsibility for the 2007 Uttar Pradesh serial bombings and the May 2008 blasts in Jaipur. Before the latest bombings,

the group was dismissed as a prank. The 14-page manifesto (written in English), the photograph of one of the motorcycles used in the Jaipur bombing pasted on the manifesto cover and the specific nature of the threats within have forced the agencies to review their assessment. It is now believed that IM could be a front used by former SIMI activists working in tandem with terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) and HuJI.

Wilson John is a Senior Fellow with Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, India.

Istanbul Bombings Suggest PKK Insurgency May Be Entering a More Ruthless Phase

The July bombings in Istanbul have raised concerns that the 24 year-old insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) may be entering a new, more ruthless phase.

At around 9:45 PM on July 27, a percussion bomb exploded in a garbage can on Menderes Caddesi, a street in the working class neighborhood of Gungoren in Istanbul. Around ten minutes later, a second, considerably larger improvised explosive device (IED) exploded around 50 meters away from the first. A total of 17 people, including five children, were killed and 154 injured (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 28).

Menderes Caddesi is a pedestrian-only street. At the time of the bombings, it was crowded with people strolling in the relative cool of the summer evening. Turkish media quoted unnamed members of the anti-terrorism branch of the Turkish police as saying that both devices used TNT and were detonated by cell phone rather than a timing device, suggesting that the perpetrators were deliberately trying to cause significant civilian casualties (*Hurriyet*, August 2; *Radikal*, August 2). The difference in the size of the IEDs and the ten minute gap between the explosions would appear to indicate that the first device was primarily intended to attract and concentrate bystanders drawn either by a desire to help those injured in the first blast or by simple curiosity, so as to maximize casualties when the second, larger IED was detonated.

Although numerous militant groups have long been active in Turkey, the Gungoren bombings were the first in recent history to seek solely the death of as many Turkish citizens as possible. Even though the tactic has been frequently employed in other countries, it is also the first time that a militant group in Turkey has used a small IED to attract and concentrate people and then a second, much larger, IED to kill them.

Suspensions immediately focused on the PKK. Since returning to violence in June 2004, the PKK has pursued a two-front strategy, combining a rural insurgency in southeast Turkey with an urban bombing campaign in the west of the country. Although around 35 civilians have been killed in the last four years, the bombing campaign has been primarily directed at the Turkish state and the Turkish tourism industry. The numerous IEDs detonated in public areas have all been relatively small and mainly intended to cause panic and depress public morale rather than cause large-scale casualties among Turkish citizens.

On July 28, Zubeyir Aydar, the head of the PKK's decision-making assembly the Kurdistan People's Congress (KONGRA-GEL), publicly denied that the organization was responsible for the Gungoren bombings, which he attributed to "dark forces" - an apparent claim that they had been the result of a covert operation by elements in the Turkish security forces (Firat News Agency, July 29). He repeated the denial on August 3, asking, in a reference to the international condemnation of the attack: "Why would the Kurdish Freedom Movement do something which would be so damaging to it?" (Firat News Agency, August 4)

This is misleading. Since June 2004, the PKK has attempted to avoid international opprobrium by conducting its urban bombing campaign through a front organization, known as the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK). Unlike the situation in eastern Turkey, the PKK has no permanent organizational hierarchy or cell structure in the west of the country. It has conducted its urban bombing campaign through militants trained in the organization's camps in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq and then sent to western Turkey, where they are provided with explosives brought by courier.

Since Turkey began to launch air raids against the PKK camps in northern Iraq in December 2007, there has been speculation that the organization might attempt to demonstrate its defiance by staging a mass casualty attack in western Turkey - particularly given its continuing failure to make any headway in its rural insurgency in the east of the country (see Terrorism Focus, January 8).

On July 30, the Turkish police detained ten people suspected of involvement in the Gungoren bombings. Two were subsequently released. On August 2, Interior Minister Besir Atalay announced that the other eight had been charged in relation to the bombings. "All of the dimensions of the attack have been revealed," said Atalay, adding that CCTV footage from Istanbul's Mobile Electronic System Integration (MOBESE) tracking and surveillance system had shown two suspects placing plastic bags in the garbage cans in which the IEDs subsequently exploded. Atalay announced that the design of the IEDs was identical to those used in previous PKK attacks. He also claimed that those arrested had been involved in the bombing of a teahouse in the Istanbul suburb of Buyukcekmece on June 15 in which 10 people were injured (NTV, August 2; CNNTurk, August 2).

The Turkish media immediately declared that all of those responsible for the Gungoren bombings were now in custody and identified one of those arrested, Huseyin Tureli, as the person who had planted the bombs. Several quoted unnamed police sources reported that Tuneli was a long-term PKK sympathizer who had been sent from Istanbul for training in the Qandil mountains before returning to the city three months before the attack (*Hurriyet*, August 3; *Zaman*, August 3).

Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler issued a statement on August 5 admitting that not all of those suspected of involvement in the bombings had yet been arrested. It has also emerged that all of those still in custody, including Tureli, have so far only been charged with "membership of a terrorist organization" rather than direct involvement in the bombings (Anadolu Ajansi, August 5).

The PKK has continued to deny responsibility. The pro-PKK Firat News Agency claims that Tuneli is merely an impoverished manual laborer, employed in a local textile workshop, and that his absence from Istanbul can be explained by the fact that he was being treated in a

private hospital for an unspecified medical complaint (Firat News Agency, August 4). Given the low wages in the Turkish textile sector and the high cost of private medical care in the country, this appears unlikely.

Despite the confusion over the arrests and the PKK's continuing denials, there is currently little reason to doubt the Turkish authorities' claim that the organization was responsible for the Gungoren bombing. It is also likely that, if it were responsible, the decision to try to inflict maximum civilian casualties would have been taken very high up in the PKK command chain. There are reports of other would-be bombers having been dispatched by the PKK from northern Iraq to western Turkey. It is currently unclear whether they will also attempt to stage mass casualty attacks or whether, chastened by the international reaction to the carnage in Gungoren, the PKK will direct them towards other targets.

Gareth Jenkins is a writer and journalist resident in Istanbul, where he has been based for the last 20 years.