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Pro-Khalistan Parade

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India's Sikh Militants Forming Ties with Lashkar-e-Taiba and Pakistani Intelligence

By Mukhtar A. Khan

The recent Mumbai attacks have once again embittered relations between the two nuclear-armed rivals of South Asia - Pakistan and India. India has given Pakistan a list of “handlers” who are believed to be based in Pakistan and were in touch with the terrorists during the attacks in Mumbai in November last year. The names (or aliases), like Wasi Zarar, Jundal, Buzurg and Kafa, were specified in the dossier that India gave to Pakistan on January 5 (*India Today* [New Delhi], January 6). After evidence emerged of the involvement of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), India has brought up the list again, making it a test case for the Pakistan establishment to prove its much-vaunted anti-terror credentials. The list carries the names of 20 individuals India wants Pakistan to extradite. Apart from some known leaders of LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), the list also carries the names of five Indian Sikhs belonging to the separatist Khalistani movement (the name Khalistan, “Land of the Pure,” refers to the would-be independent Sikh state). At the top of the list is Lakhbir Singh Rode, who heads the pro-Khalistan International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) and is wanted in relation to cases of arms smuggling and conspiracy to attack government and political leaders in Delhi, as well as inciting religious hatred in Punjab. The Sikh militant leader lives in and operates out of Lahore, Pakistan (BBC; December 2, 2008; *India Today*, December 2, 2008). There are indications that the ISYF has developed strong links with LeT and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) over the last two decades.

With the partition and independence of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, India went to the Hindu majority and Pakistan to the Muslim minority. Until 1984, Sikhs remained mostly peaceful in India, though they felt a degree of deprivation of their rights. It was after “Operation Blue Star,” Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s ill-fated 1984 attempt to drive Sikh separatists from Amritsar’s Golden Temple, that an active struggle for an independent Punjab, or Khalistan, began. It was, no doubt, the Indian military operation inside this most sacred of Sikh sites that triggered a violent Sikh reaction, culminating in the October 1984 assassination of Prime Minister Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. During this struggle several Sikh separatist groups came onto the scene, including the ISYF (*The Asian Age*, Mumbai, December 17, 2004).

The ISYF aims to promote Sikh philosophy and the establishment of an independent Sikh nation. Since the Amritsar attack in 1984, its members have been engaged in violent attacks, assassinations, and bombings, mostly targeting Indian political figures (*The Economic Times* [New Delhi], February 13, 2004). Leaders of the ISYF believe India’s mainstream politicians are responsible for the plight of the Sikh nation. Sikh terrorism has been sponsored by expatriate and Indian Sikh groups who want to carve out an independent Sikh state from Indian territory.

Following a decade of violence, the Sikh separatist movement grew calm after 1993. That may be changing - Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who himself belongs to the Sikh community, recently suggested that Sikh separatists based outside India are trying to revive militancy in the state of Punjab. Prime Minister Singh has said that there is “credible information” to show that the remnants of separatist groups in Canada, the UK, Germany, and Pakistan are regrouping (BBC, New Delhi, March 6, 2008). In recent years, active groups included the ISYF, the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), Dal Khalsa, and the Bhindranwala Tiger Force.

Pakistani Intelligence and the Sikh Separatist Movement

India has accused Pakistan of providing sanctuary to the leaders of various Sikh militant groups. Besides Lakhbir Singh Rode of the ISYF, these include Wadhawan Singh Babbar (Chief of the BKI), Ranjith Singh Neeta (Chief of the Khalistan Zindabad Force), Paramjeet Singh Panjavar (Chief of the Khalistan Commando force) and Gajinder Singh (leader of Dal Khalsa) (*Rediff India Abroad*, October 15, 2007).

Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence has long been accused by Delhi of supporting armed separatists in Indian-administered Kashmir and the country’s north-east. The ISI has also been concentrating on India’s Punjab region, especially after the terrorism inspired by Golden Temple militant Jamail Singh Bhindranwale was quashed by the head of the Punjab police, KPS Gill, and his band of “supercops,” as they became known in India. The ISI was tasked with doing what Pakistan’s army could not - under Operation Topac, conceived by Pakistan’s President Zia-ul-Haq, the ISI was given the task of balkanizing India to avenge the defeat of 1971 (*The Pioneer* [New Delhi], June 30, 1999). Since then, the ISI has promoted various militant groups like Lakhbir Singh Rode’s ISYF, the Khalistan Commando Force, Babbar Khalsa International, and the Khalistan Liberation Force of Pritam Singh Sekhon.

The ISYF, banned in India under the Prevention of Terrorism Act on March 22, 2002, is believed to be the most active Sikh militant group based in Pakistan. It was founded in the United Kingdom in 1984 after Operation Blue Star by Amrik Singh and Jasbir Singh Rode, Lakhbir’s brother. The movement has offices at various places in the UK, Germany, Canada, and the United States. The head of the movement has resided in Pakistan’s main city of Lahore since 1991. The ISYF and Babbar Khalsa International were designated terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department in 2004 (*Chandigarh Tribune*, May 1, 2004).

The ISI has supported the ISYF by providing training camps, funds, arms, and ammunition to its members as well as to other Khalistani separatist groups. In 2005, India’s Intelligence Bureau released a report that warned of the revival of Sikh militancy in Punjab (*Rediff India Abroad*, October 15, 2007). The report shows that the LeT and five other groups were chosen by the ISI and entrusted with the job of training men from the ISYF and Babbar Khalsa International. Training was imparted in the use of weapons and methods of infiltration into India through the Jammu and Kashmir valley. The first signs of the revival of Sikh militancy came to light in 2001, when they underwent a month-long training program in Pakistan (*Rediff India Abroad*, October 15, 2007).

The ISI has been looking to rebuild their network in the state and now they are trying to instigate Punjab’s unemployed youth. According to an Indian intelligence report, the ISI is planning to target sensitive areas like religious places as well as residential areas in the state. The report also concluded that firearms and

ammunitions seized in the state hint that the militants are planning an attack (Zee TV [New Delhi], December 16, 2008).

ISYF Linkages with Pan-Islamist Groups

The Pakistan-based Chief of the ISYF, Lakhbir Singh Rode, is regarded as the leading Punjab militant. India believes that the ISI has given him responsibility for conducting militant acts inside India. The ISI also wants to create a common front between the Khalistani militants and Kashmiri jihadi groups. The ISYF's links with pan-Islamist militant groups, and more prominently with the LeT, date back to the mid-1990s. The ISYF was reportedly the first Sikh militant group to have interacted with ideologues of the Markaze-Dawat-Wal-Irshad, the Salafist parent body of the LeT. The LeT has now set up a common office with the ISYF outside Nankana Sahib, a small town in the West Punjab region of Pakistan. There are reports that the ISI provided the militant groups with bungalows and plenty of space to undertake training activities (Zee TV News, October 8, 2006). The ISYF was allowed to hold a meeting-cum-photo exhibition in Lahore on June 6, 1999, to mark the 15th anniversary of Operation Blue Star. Among those allowed by the Pakistan government to attend the function was Satnam Singh of the ISYF's Germany Chapter. Satnam Singh is the son-in-law of Wadhava Singh, one of the five Pakistan-based Sikh militants wanted by India (South Asian Analysis Group, South Asia Terrorism Portal, New Delhi, September 2, 1999).

The ISI's Control over Sikh Temples in Pakistan

The Sikh population in Pakistan is about 200,000, though the exact figure is unknown. The size of the Sikh community grew as a result of the large influx from Afghanistan during the long civil war. The majority of Pakistan's Sikhs are natives who decided to stay on the Pakistani side of the border during the partition of British India. Sikhs were attracted to Pakistan for two reasons: 1) Pakistan was the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith, and 2) Pakistan supported the Khalistan issue.

There are around 150 Sikh temples and historical sites under the supervision of the Pakistan Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PGPC), formed in 1999 to administer Sikh shrines and festivals in Pakistan. The appointment of Lieutenant General (retired) Javed Nasir, a former Director-General of the ISI, as the chief of the newly formed PGPC, was a significant move

on the part of Pakistan's government. Under the new set up, it was made a rule that only a Pakistani Sikh could become the leader of PGPC, whereas previously the chief administrator of Pakistan's Gurdwara (Sikh temples) could be an Indian Sikh. With the formation of the PGPC, the former ISI commander aimed to stop Indian Sikhs from exerting any sort of influence inside Pakistan. This was seen as a subtle move by the ISI to achieve a long term goal. Since the formation of the PGPC, the interaction between pro-Khalistani Sikhs and Pakistan has substantially increased and the Pakistan government has also liberalized visas for such persons (*The Asian Age*, December 27, 2002). The former ISI chief claimed he enjoyed a "Sikh friendly" reputation, saying the community gave him a "next-to-Guru" status (*The Hindu* [New Delhi], December 26, 2002).

ISYF's Militancy in India

The ISYF is believed to have engaged in terrorist acts, including murders, bombings, and abductions in India. Referring to the 2007 bombings in two cinema halls in the Punjabi city of Ludhiana, India's National Security Advisor, M.K. Narayanan, noted that "There has been a manifest attempt in Pakistan to build up a radical Sikh environment" (*Dawn* [Karachi], October 18, 2007). Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has also pointed towards Pakistan: "The two people who planned [the attack] were induced to carry out the attack on a visit to Pakistan with funding from extremist elements in the U.S." (BBC, March 6, 2008).

Preliminary investigations into the deadly Ludhiana blasts show that the act of terror could have been carried out by Pakistan-based militants with the help of Sikh militants. The Jalandhar Police arrested Paramjith Singh Dhadi and Amolak Singh of the ISYF. The explosives recovered were reportedly meant for disrupting the 2007 Assembly elections in Punjab (Rediff India Abroad, October 15, 2007).

Apart from Pakistan, some of ISYF's militant activities have been planned from the United States, Canada, and European countries. The ISYF, the LeT, and the BKI met in 2007 in Berlin, where it was decided that financial support would be extended to the LeT and logistical support to the other Sikh groups to carry out attacks in India (Rediff India Abroad, June 24, 2008; India News Online [New Delhi] March 17, 2008).

Conclusion

There are reports further attacks are being planned all across India for which a huge number of terrorists of the so-called “Khalistan Army” will be travelling to India through river routes. The Khalistan Army has been reinitiated by the ISI, and the operatives are living in bunkers situated close the Indo-Pak border with the full support of the Pakistan government (Zee TV News, October 3, 2008).

The evidence reveals signs of the revival of the Khalistan secessionist movement, which was subdued in 1993 and once considered to be a spent force. The movement, to some extent, has lost its base support in the Indian Punjab, but it still maintains support in the Sikh diaspora, where it has been aided by the collusion of Pakistan's ISI and encouragement from multiple militant groups active in violence-afflicted South Asia.

Mukhtar A. Khan is a Pashtun journalist based in Washington, D.C., covering the issues of Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions.

NATO's Khyber Lifeline

By Imtiaz Ali

The recent spate of attacks on NATO's supply convoys in Pakistan's northern city of Peshawar and the adjacent Khyber Tribal Agency has not only tested Pakistan's much-touted performance in the global war on terror, but has also compelled U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan to dispense with what some Western officials call the “dependency syndrome” of using only Pakistan as a major supply route for NATO and ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Previously, most of the supply convoys came under attack somewhere in the remote parts of the Khyber agency of the tribal belt - the lawless region that straddles Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is disturbing, however, that the latest spike of attacks happened at depots and terminals in the city of Peshawar, the capital of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), where militants razed to ashes hundred of trucks and containers in recent weeks. All these vehicles and containers loaded with goods were destined for NATO forces based in Afghanistan.

The attacks on NATO convoys have put enormous pressure on Pakistan, and thus its security forces began an operation in early January to root out militants and Taliban fighters in the suburbs of Peshawar and parts of the Khyber Tribal Agency. These militants, according to local officials, have attacked NATO supply convoys and supply depots in recent months with rockets and missiles. As part of the Pakistani military offensive code-named “Daraghalam” (“Here I come”), authorities temporarily closed the main road connecting Pakistan with Afghanistan. Security forces arrested dozens of people and demolished the homes of influential tribal elders for allegedly providing shelter to Taliban militants involved in the attacks. Tribal authorities have claimed 80 percent success in the current military operation conducted jointly by the Pakistan army and local paramilitary troops (*The News* [Islamabad], December 31, 2008; *Daily Times* [Lahore], January 2, 2008). At the same time, while considering these attacks as a symptom of a bigger problem in the War on Terrorism, Washington and its Western allies have started exploring ways to replace Pakistan as a transit country by re-routing the supply lines and lines of communication. Besides Russia, Afghanistan's immediate neighbors, like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, seem to be potential partners in establishing new routes for NATO supplies (*Daily Times*, November 14, 2008).

The issue is gaining an explosive political dimension because the region's religious parties have for the first time opposed the use of Pakistan's soil as a major route for supplies headed to Western forces based in Afghanistan. Addressing thousands of angry protesters in Peshawar two weeks ago, leaders of the radical religious party Jammāt-e-Islami said, “It is a shame for an Islamic country to provide logistics to the U.S. forces, which are working against the interests of Muslims all over the world.” The rally demanded the government abandon its role as an ally in the U.S.-led war on terror, and warned if logistical support came through Pakistan soil, Jamma-e-Islami leaders would mobilize the masses to rise up and drive U.S. and NATO forces from their land. Amid the chanting of slogans like “Death to America” and “No supplies to NATO,” one of the religious leaders urged the gathering, “You, the brave people of the Frontier province and Tribal Areas, should at least show your hate against supply to United States and NATO forces in Afghanistan by displaying black flags on the routes through which the vehicles pass” (*Daily Statesman* [Peshawar], December 19, 2008).

Important but Dangerous: The Khyber Pass

The famous Khyber Pass is a vital and important route connecting Central Asia to the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent via Afghanistan. For centuries it has been the key trade route between Central Asia and South Asia. Similarly, the historic Khyber Pass is no stranger to wars and conflicts, as it was used for centuries by different invaders to enter India. During the 19th century Afghan Wars, the Khyber Pass was a battleground for numerous clashes between Anglo-Indian soldiers and native Afghans. This mountainous pass through craggy hills was again the focus of global attention during the 1980s, when the Afghans fought against Soviet aggression with the help of the United States, Pakistan, and the Arab countries.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in late 2001, the Khyber Pass once again gained critical importance, as the bulk of the supplies and equipment required by US-led forces battling the Taliban insurgency started shipping equipment through it. According to a Coalition forces official in Kabul, more than 70 percent of their supplies go through Peshawar and the Khyber tribal agency, while the remaining 30 percent go by air or use other roads. Flying in supplies is very expensive and does not allow large amounts of equipment to be brought in at once, while the main alternate land route through Pakistan, from Karachi to Quetta and on to Kandahar city, runs through a Taliban stronghold. Alternatives to Coalition forces are limited and consequently they remain heavily dependent on the Karachi-Khyber Pass route (*The Nation*, [Islamabad] December 12, 2008).

This route was considered to be insecure from day one of the intervention because of the fragile security situation in the tribal belt and the ever-growing anti-Americanism in the region since the U.S invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. However, apart from occasional attacks, the route was safe for several years despite that the pro-Taliban six-party religious alliance, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), was in power in the North West Frontier Province from 2002 to 2007. Many believe the MMA government was taken into confidence by Pakistan's then-President Pervez Musharraf at the time agreements were signed and later renewed with the United States and NATO for providing transit facilities to their forces in Afghanistan (*Daily Statesman* [Peshawar] December 20). The situation worsened due to the increase in militant activities in the Khyber Tribal Agency (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 29, 2008).

Taliban militants, who have controlled large parts of the North and South Waziristan agencies for the last few years have long had their eyes on the Khyber Agency because of its importance as a vital logistical life-line for the U.S-led NATO forces in Afghanistan. Baitullah Mehsud, head of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan - an umbrella organization of Pakistani Taliban - told media local media in early 2007 that he would "cut off" supply lines for Coalition forces through the Khyber Pass by the end of 2008 (*Daily Times*, December 9, 2008).

At the time, this claim looked like a far-fetched dream. However, the ground realities show that local Taliban forces have been trying to fulfill their leader's objective. The last few months of 2008 were the worst for NATO convoys as Taliban gunmen have destroyed, stolen, or looted hundred of trucks and containers destined for Afghanistan. The killing of around 80 drivers from NATO convoys by militants, mostly in the last year, speaks volumes about the insecurity of the route (*Daily Times*, December 15, 2008). Besides conducting raids on militants and conducting low-level military operations in the region, Islamabad has also tried to use local tribal chiefs for the protection of the convoys. As a result, many tribal elders from the Khyber Agency signed agreements with the authorities promising to provide protection to vehicles bound for foreign troops in Afghanistan (*Daily Times*, June 3, 2008).

None of these measures worked as the Taliban went ahead with brazen attacks on the NATO supply lines. In November 2008, Taliban militants loyal to Baitullah Mahsud snatched and plundered 13 containers at three different places on the Peshawar-Torkham Road in the Jamrud area of Khyber Tribal Agency. Besides goods meant for NATO troops, the militants also captured two Humvees. The highjacking of NATO convoys on the main Khyber Pass route was disturbing, but more worrisome was the impression given to the local population by militants posing for photographs and showing their booty to the media (*Daily Dawn* [Islamabad], November 12, 2008; *The News*, December 9, 2008). This situation compelled thousands of vehicle owners and truck drivers to stop running supplies to Afghanistan (*The News*, December 15, 2008).

Pakistan's Options

At a time when President-elect Barack Obama is talking about a troop surge in Afghanistan, Pakistan seems to dominate the foreign policy agenda of the next administration. In such a situation, Pakistan needs to

use its strategic location and the leverage created by the landlocked situation of Afghanistan wisely. There are many in Pakistan who believe that if they were to stop this flow of resources, the U.S.-led military operation would come to a grinding halt. Such people, particularly some TV anchors on popular private TV channels, have strongly urged the government to take a tough stand by using what they call this “awesome leverage” in dealing with the United States and NATO (*Daily Dawn*, August 1, 2008). The example, they say, should be Islamabad’s decision to temporarily cut off NATO supplies last September as retaliation against the U.S. drone attacks in the NWFP.

Pakistan’s Minister of Defense, Chaudry Ahmad Mukhtar, has been quoted as saying that his country is serious about safeguarding its territorial integrity - a reference to the U.S. drone attacks inside Pakistan’s tribal belt (*Daily Times*, September 7, 2008). But there are those who think that transporting material for the Coalition forces in Afghanistan has for many years been a hugely profitable business, not only for the long-distance shippers of Pakistan - transporters, drivers, loaders, and ancillary staff, but also for the government of Pakistan, which receives a huge reimbursement of economic and military aid for providing these logistical facilities. The search for alternative routes by the United States and its NATO allies indicates they are trying hard to get rid of the “dependency syndrome” of reliance on routing their supplies through Pakistan. If the search for an alternative route is successful, Pakistan will not lose its much talked about role as a “front line state” in the War on Terrorism, but it will suffer heavy economic losses, as will thousands of local transporters involved in shipping NATO supplies to Afghanistan.

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Islamist Movements Recruiting in the West for the Somali Jihad

By James Brandon

Last month, U.S. media reported that up to 20 American citizens of Somali origin recently travelled from Minnesota to Somalia to join al-Shabaab, a hardline jihadist group that presently controls more than half of Somalia. One of the recruits is believed to have died while taking part in a suicide bomb attack (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 8, 2008). Such reports should not be surprising. During the last three years, substantial numbers of Muslims have travelled to Somalia from a variety of western countries (including the United States and Canada) to fight against the country’s secular, internationally recognised government and its allies.

North American Volunteers in Somalia

Reports continue to emerge of young Somalis, many college-educated, who have disappeared from the Minnesota area and are believed to have travelled to Somalia to join al-Shabaab or other jihadist groups there (*USA Today*, December 18, 2008; *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, November 25, 2008; KSTP-TV [St. Paul], November 29, 2008; WCCO-TV [Minneapolis-St. Paul], November 26, 2008; AP, November 26, 2008). A U.S. citizen from the area, 19-year old Shirwa Ahmed, is believed to have died taking part in a suicide bomb attack on targets in Somaliland, a secular, break-away democracy in northwest Somalia. Other Muslim Americans are also known to have travelled to Somalia during the last three years to carry out jihadist attacks. In July 2007, Daniel Joseph Maldonado, a Muslim convert from Massachusetts, was convicted by a court in Texas of travelling to Somalia in December 2006 to receive weapons training at an ICU camp (AP, July 22, 2007). He was arrested by Kenyan troops in January 2007 as he fled Somalia following the ICU’s retreat from Mogadishu.

There is additional evidence that other American jihadists are active in Somalia. Al-Jazeera has broadcast interviews with American members of al-Shabaab – in one such interview, aired in September 2007, a former American resident using the name Abu Mansur al-Amriki, blamed “American-backed warlords” for

Somalia's ruinous state and said that the Islamists were "fighting to establish peace and justice in this land" (Al-Jazeera TV, September 30, 2007). In August 2008, an English-language statement – purportedly from al-Amriki – was widely posted on jihadi websites. The message called on Muslims worldwide to support al-Shabaab, which al-Amriki defined as being more radical than the ICU, writing that "while the Courts had a goal limited to the boundaries placed by the Taaghoot [un-believers], the Shabaab had a global goal including the establishment of the Islamic Khilafah in all parts of the world."¹ In a video released in October 2008, an al-Shabaab member with an American accent told viewers that the group had a "global mission" and urged supporters "to make hijrah and come join us and defend the religion of Allah."²

There are also reports that Somalis from Canada have joined jihadi groups in Somalia. For example, in late 2006, a Canadian daily reported that "a number of young Somali-Canadians" had joined the ICU (*National Post* [Toronto], October 14, 2006). In October 2006, the paper interviewed Abdullahi Ali Afrah, a Somali-Canadian who had become a deputy-chairman of the ICU. When asked if there were other Canadian citizens involved in the group, he ambiguously replied, "No, no, not really" (*National Post*, July 2, 2008). In 2008 Afrah was reportedly killed in a clash with Ethiopian troops. In 2006, several Canadian citizens of Somali origin were arrested by Kenyan and Ethiopian troops as they fled the country. Although arrested on suspicions of supporting the ICU, none have so far been charged. The most prominent of these prisoners is Bashir Ahmed Mektal, who was arrested on the Kenya-Somalia border in December 2006. An Ethnic Somali who was born in Ethiopia, Mektal emigrated to Canada in his early 20s, returning to East Africa in 2004.³ He is presently being held in Ethiopia, reportedly on suspicion of being involved with Somali separatist movements in Ethiopia's Ogaden region (*Toronto Star*, June 6, 2008).

European Volunteers

There are numerous instances of European Muslims joining al-Shabaab and the ICU.

Many of them come from Scandinavian countries, which are home to large numbers of Somali refugees and their families. In early 2007, the Somali government reported that several Swedish citizens had been killed or captured during attacks on retreating ICU forces (*The Local* [Stockholm], January 30, 2007). Later, in June 2007, the government of the semi-autonomous province of Puntland said that another militant with Swedish citizenship had been killed in US airstrikes on an Islamist militant group (*The Local*, June 3, 2007). A further three Swedish citizens were reportedly arrested by Ethiopian forces in Somalia in early 2007 on suspicion of aiding the ICU (*Sunday Times*, June 10, 2007). Although most of these Swedish citizens were of Somali origin, non-Somali Swedish Muslims also became involved in the Somali jihad. One example is Youssef Qomer, a 23-year-old Swedish Muslim of Arab origin, who briefly fought with the ICU in 2006 before fleeing the Ethiopian invasion (Islamonline.net, February 2, 2008). Travelling to Yemen by boat from Somalia, he continued to Saudi Arabia where the Swedish embassy gave him a new passport and helped him return home. He was arrested by French police when he went to Paris to visit his brother. Norway has also investigated a number of Muslim citizens on suspicion of raising funds for Somali jihadist groups - although none have been charged (*Aftenposten* [Oslo], June 13, 2008).

Inevitably, the UK – which currently produces far more jihadis than any other Western country – has also seen some of its Muslim citizens join the Somali militants. Last year, a reporter for *The Independent* wrote that, while in Mogadishu in 2007, he interviewed two Somali brothers from London who had acted as bodyguards to a man described as "Sheik Yusuf, one of the main Islamist commanders" (this may refer to Shaykh Yusuf Muhammad Siad "Indha Adde," who was then the head of the ICU's military wing). The newspaper quoted one of these British-Somalis as saying, "We are doing our duty by fighting for the cause of Islam, which is above all countries" (*Independent*, November 28, 2008). In early 2007, at least seven British Muslims were reportedly arrested by Ethiopian forces on suspicion of aiding the ICU (*The Times*, January 10, 2007). British-Somalis have also been involved in terrorist attacks in Europe. The most notable example of a Somali connection to jihadi violence in the UK is the July 21, 2007 London bombing, in which four of the participants were from

1 <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/showthread.php?t=9704>.

2 <http://www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-prop.html>.

3 Amnesty International report: *Horn of Africa: Unlawful Transfers in the "War on Terror"* (June 2007), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/006/2007/en/dom-AFR250062007en.pdf>.

the Horn of Africa region (two were Somalis, one was from Eritrea and the other was an ethnic Somali from Ethiopia). Support for Somali Islamists is reportedly widespread among British Somalis. One Somali youth worker in London told the Jamestown Foundation last month that support for the ICU/al-Shabaab was almost universal among young British-Somalis— even among those born and brought up in the UK.⁴ He said people mainly supported the Islamists because they were explicitly “Islamic,” but also because it was believed that their success would lead to peace and stability in Somalia.

Islamist Support for the Somali Jihad

Many prominent Islamist groups and pro-jihadist individuals worldwide have expressed support for al-Shabaab and the ICU. In some cases, they have openly called on Muslims to travel to Somalia to carry out attacks. For example, Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen of Yemeni origin who is one of the most prominent English-speaking jihadist preachers, wrote on his website in December that al-Shabaab “have succeeded in implementing the sharia and giving us a living example of how we as Muslims should proceed to change our situation. The ballot has failed us but the bullet has not.” He also told Muslims that “their success depends on your support. It is the responsibility of the ummah to help them with men and money” (anwar-alawlaki.com, December 21, 2008). The Muslim Brothers worldwide have also been largely supportive— even though Islah, the Brotherhood’s Somali branch, has often been in conflict with these groups, which view Islah as a competitor and rival. In the UK, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), a group founded by leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood, has explicitly backed and aided recruiting and fund-raising efforts of the ICU.

For example, in late 2006, MAB reportedly allowed a visiting delegation from the ICU to hold a meeting with supporters at the MAB’s Finsbury Park Mosque (*Guardian*, January 13, 2007). MAB was asked to take over the mosque from the control of extremist preacher Abu Hamza by local police and government officials in 2005 (BBC, February 7, 2006). Leading MAB members have also publicly defended the ICU; Azzam al-Tamimi, for example, has referred to the ICU as “pious men of religion,” saying that their “only ambition was to restore order and enable the Somalis to live their lives as they wished” (*Guardian*, January 10, 2007).

4 Author’s interview with a Somali youth worker in London, December 2008.

Conclusion

The gradual withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia in January 2009 will leave only a few thousand poorly equipped African Union troops and Somalia’s increasingly fragile government forces standing between al-Shabaab and the capture of Mogadishu and most of southern and central Somalia. Barring unexpected developments, al-Shabaab’s takeover of all Somalia (with the possible exceptions of the breakaway territories of Somaliland and Puntland) is therefore probably only a matter of time. When the ICU captured Mogadishu in late 2006, it quickly established militant training camps, threatened to invade Ethiopia and appealed for foreign jihadists to come to Somalia for military training. A similar takeover by al-Shabaab, a far more hardline organisation than the old ICU, makes it likely that this scenario will be repeated to some extent. Al-Shabaab already has pretensions for global influence. For example, in an October 2008 propaganda video, an al-Shabaab fighter cursed the “filthy dogs of Denmark” in broken English, adding, “we will never forget their mockery of the best of mankind and the last Messenger [i.e. the Prophet Muhammad]. So, sleep with the thoughts of our swords dripping with your blood.”⁵ He also told Muslims to “stand up and resist the oppression of the kuffar [infidels] ... fight the kuffar and their apostate puppets.” At present, however, it is hard to determine to what degree such statements are rhetorical hyperbole and how reflective they are of al-Shabaab’s philosophy and worldview.

An al-Shabaab victory in Somalia in 2009 will certainly have consequences far beyond the Horn of Africa but much will depend on how al-Shabaab behaves once it is in power: Will al-Shabaab use its victory to rebuild a country shattered by 15 years of civil war? Or will it reach out to jihadists around the world and seek to use its new-found power to attack the “kuffar and their apostate puppets” wherever they may be found?

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5 <http://www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-prop.html>.

The Changing Face of the Jihadist Movement in Libya

By Camille Tawil

The Libyan jihadis who tried to but failed in their attempt to topple Colonel Qaddafi's regime in the 1990's have now largely been replaced with a new generation of young men, many of whom, though still opposed to the Libyan regime, have also embraced a wider goal, a goal associated with that of al-Qaeda's worldwide struggle against the West.

The Jihadis of the 1990s

An organized jihadist movement appeared in Libya in the early 1990s, though this does not mean that jihadis did not exist in Libya before that time. In fact, they did exist for a long time under Colonel Qaddafi's regime, but they operated as small groups, with little or no cooperation. And when they did try to do something, they were heavily crushed by the government. The jihadi movement was led by Libyans who had joined the Afghan jihad against the Soviets in the 1980s. When that jihad ended with the Soviets defeated and forced to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989, many of the Arabs who had joined the Afghan jihad started looking into how they could benefit from the experience they gained in Afghanistan to advance their goal of overthrowing the regimes which the jihadis considered apostate because they did not apply the Shari'a (Islamic law).

For that reason, the Algerian "Afghans" established their own group – The Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé - GIA). The Egyptians re-launched the Jihad Group and the Islamic Group, two organizations which were crushed in the early 1980s after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. The Libyan "Afghans" formed their own group – The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). And, of course, Osama bin Laden had just launched his own group – al-Qaeda.

The LIFG began operations in the early 1990s, but it did not seem to have rushed into getting involved in attacks against the Libyan regime. Its priority is thought to have been building cells inside Libya. That does not seem to have been an easy job for the LIFG. Under Colonel Qaddafi, Libya was (and still is) ruled as a police state. To complicate matters more, the LIFG was soon to lose its leader when the Egyptian authorities arrested Abdul-

Ghaffar al-Douadi and handed him over to Libya in 1992.

While the Libyans were still building this jihadist group, an insurgency started in Algeria. In 1992, the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut - FIS) was on the verge of winning the election, and the Algerian authorities cancelled the election results, igniting a bloody civil war. The LIFG was drawn to this conflict for a number of reasons. First was a religious reason: the Algerian Islamists were launching a jihad against their government, and the Libyan jihadis wanted to offer them "a helping hand." It should be remembered that the Libyan and the Algerian jihadis knew each other very well because of the time they spent together along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border during the Afghan jihad (*al-Hayat*, September 15, 2005). But in addition to this "religious duty," the LIFG seems to have also been interested in Algeria for political reasons. Toppling the regime in Algeria would also help the aim of toppling the regime in Libya, as the LIFG must have concluded. The movement was hoping to launch a war against the Qaddafi regime from the Libyan borders with Algeria, instead of overseeing it from a distant place like Afghanistan.

For these reasons, the LIFG decided to send some of its best fighters from Afghanistan to Algeria, where they joined the GIA, which was quickly becoming the largest jihadi group inside Algeria.¹ These fighters started coming in 1993, with their numbers growing steadily through 1994 and 1995. However, these Libyan fighters were soon to clash with the leaders of the GIA. They had ideological differences, and the Libyans informed their leadership, based in Sudan and Britain at the time, of its situation – in fact, they were telling their leaders outside Algeria of their clashes with the GIA in secret letters written with invisible ink. Osama bin Laden, who was then still based in Sudan, sent a delegation to Algeria to see how this problem between the Libyans and the Algerians could be resolved. This delegation included three Libyans – two from the LIFG and one from al-Qaeda. The latter delegate was Attiya Abd al-Rahman, a Libyan al-Qaeda leader who now operates from the Waziristan tribal agency in Pakistan.² The GIA was not

1 See Camille Tawil, *The Armed Islamic Movement in Algeria: From the FIS to the GIA* (Al-Haraka Al-Islamiyya Al-Musalaha fi Al-Jazair: Min "Al-Inqadth" ila "Al-Jama'a"), Beirut, 1998.

2 See Attiya's letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, dated December 11, 2005. Attiya speaks in that letter about what he saw during his presence in Algeria and about the ex-

happy with this delegation and arrested its members, but they managed to flee from their captors in 1996.

As if having these problems on the “Algerian front” was not enough, the LIFG found itself being dragged into a conflict with Colonel Qaddafi’s regime – a conflict it was not yet ready for. Things started to go wrong in the spring of 1995 - a local cell attacked a hospital in Benghazi (eastern Libya) to free an Islamist who was arrested earlier (*al-Hayat*, September 16, 2005). That attack led the security forces to go after the attackers and the dismantling soon led to the dismantling of other cells in succession. Seeing the cells it has been trying to build in Libya being crushed one after the other, the LIFG publicly revealed its existence in June 1995 and promised to fight until the Libyan regime was toppled. Clashes erupted in different parts of Libya, especially in the eastern regions, but the LIFG was jumping into a losing battle and was soon routed by the security forces between 1996 and 1997.

This defeat was not unique to the Libyan jihadis. By 1996-97, the Algerian and the Egyptian jihadis were to suffer a similar fate – their jihad ended in total failure. This prompted a rethinking among the jihadis to identify the reasons behind the failure of the three main attempts they launched in the 1990’s in Algeria, Egypt and Libya. That rethinking led Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri’s Egyptian Jihad, and part of the Egyptian Islamic Group to conclude that support from the West in general and America in particular was the reason why the “apostate” regimes in the Middle East did not fall when the jihadis attacked them. So, instead of fighting the local, “near enemy,” bin Laden and his allies directed their attention to the United States. In February 1998, bin Laden announced the creation of the Worldwide Islamic Front to Fight the Jews and the Crusaders. It is now known that he was lobbying various jihadi groups to join him in that front, but the LIFG does not seem to have done so.

The leaders of the LIFG moved to Afghanistan in 1999, a year after the creation of bin Laden’s new front. Their priority was to start a process of rebuilding their defeated organization. In order to concentrate on this mission, they agreed to cease any operations inside Libya. They also became very close to the Taliban leadership – the religious guide of the LIFG, Sheikh Abu al-Mudhir al-Sa’di (a.k.a. Sami Al-Sa’di) was much

admired by Mullah Omar, who called him the “Shaykh of the Arab Jihadists.”³ The LIFG took the line that the Arabs who were in Afghanistan had an obligation to obey the orders of the Taliban government; they were not supposed to behave as though they were “a state within a state.” It was clear that some Arabs were doing exactly that - Osama bin Laden was engaged in his war against America, as was clear from the bombing of the two embassies in East Africa, the Millennium Plot and the USS Cole bombing in 2000. In fact, the leaders of the LIFG told bin Laden in 2000 that they opposed his attacks against the Americans, not because they liked America, but because they feared that these attacks would undermine the Taliban government. Bin Laden’s response, according to a person who was present in the Kandahar meeting, was that he was now in the middle of a “big operation” against the Americans which could not be stopped, but after that he was ready to stop his attacks.⁴ That “big operation” turned out to be the 9/11 attacks on American soil. These attacks and the American response of a “Global War on Terror” seem to have taken the LIFG by surprise. Most of its leaders fled Kabul ahead of the advancing American and Northern Alliance forces, eventually finding their way into Iran. One of the LIFG leaders, Abu Laith al-Libi, decided to stay in Afghanistan and fight the Americans.

Libya’s Jihadis in the Post 9/11 Environment

The LIFG’s first priority after the mayhem of 9/11 was to reconnect with its members who had fled Afghanistan. Its “amir,” Abdullah al-Sadeq (a.k.a. Abd al-Hakim Belhaj) and its religious leader, Abu al-Mundhir, were allowed to leave Iran and find another place to hide. They first fled to Thailand and then to Hong Kong, but both were arrested there and handed in to the Libyan government in 2004.⁵ Other top leaders of the LIFG were imprisoned in Iran, as well as in other countries (including European nations). With the disappearance of most of the known leadership, those who survived from the LIFG top ranks became confined to Afghanistan.

3 See Abd al-Nasir Al-Jarrari’s interview with Al-Hayat, January 8, 2004. Al-Jarrari is Mr. Saadi’s brother-in-law.

4 See the full story of the Kandahar meeting with bin Laden in Camille Tawil, *Al-Qaida and its Sisters* (Al-Qaeda wa Akhawatuha: Kissat Al-Jihadyieen Al-Arab), Saqi Publishers, London, pages 334-336.

5 Al-Jarrari’s interview, al-Hayat, January 8, 2004. Al-Jarrari alleges that his brother-in-law and Abdullah al-Sadeq were handed in to Libya by American agents.

Abu Laith became the organization's most prominent face until his death in Pakistan in Jan 2008 (*Dawn* [Karachi], February 1, 2008; al-Jazeera, January 31, 2008).⁶

Meanwhile, the 2003 war in Iraq saw the Americans turning their attention away from Afghanistan, allowing al-Qaeda to regain its balance a bit through decentralization, with franchises popping up in different places around the world. First an al-Qaeda franchise appeared in the Arabian Peninsula, then another franchise appeared in Iraq with the name of al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and later al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was established. Iraq became the centre stage of the war against the Americans and many Libyans found their way there. The "Sinjar records," which show that the Libyan fighters in Iraq only came second in number to the Saudis, also give an indication of the strong appeal among Libyan youth to join the jihad in Iraq— a jihad which was now led by al-Qaeda.⁷ The LIFG, with most of its leadership in prisons or hiding, does not seem to have played a prominent role in the Iraqi jihad.

The Libyan jihadis were left without a leadership. In fact, LIFG leaders in Libyan prisons started to talk to the authorities about a possible deal that would ensure no violence was carried out by the jihadis inside Libya; in return the government would free those who renounced violence and might allow them more freedom to preach, as long as they clearly said that their ideology does not consider the state or its employees to be apostates. The LIFG's leaders have come very close to doing exactly what the government was expecting out of them since the start of the talks in December 2006. A six member committee of the LIFG Shura Council led the talks. They were: the "amir," Abdullah al-Sadeq (a.k.a. Abd al-Hakim Belhaj), his deputy Abu Hazem (a.k.a. Khalid

al-Sharif), the religious leader Abu Al-Mundhir (a.k.a. Sami al-Sa'di), the military commander Azzoubair (a.k.a. Mustapha Qounaifid), the first amir, Abdul Ghaffar al-Douadi, and Idris (a.k.a. Abd al-Wahab al-Qaid, the brother of Afghanistan-based Abu Yahya al-Libi) (al-Hayat, June 30, 2008; Al-Sharq al-Awsat, July 6, 2008).

These Shura Council members agreed in principal on a review of the group's ideology. They agreed on the following:

- Violence does not help the cause of Islam, and therefore it should not be resorted to.
- The LIFG would distance itself from the "takfir" ideology of identifying Muslims as apostates, particularly the Libyan government and those who work for it.
- The LIFG would say that it has no relationship with al-Qaeda and that it is not part of what al-Qaeda does.
- The Libyan group would also confirm that it opposes attacks that are carried out in the name of jihad – whether they were done by al-Qaeda or any other group.

As is clear, this list of principles included a clear message to please the government - that the LIFG rejects any violence against the state, and rejects the claim that it was part of al-Qaeda. The latter clearly contradicts the 2007 announcement of Abu al- Laith al-Libi proclaiming the merger of the LIFG with bin Laden's organization. However, the Libyan authorities do not seem to have been satisfied with that position. It is possible they still do not trust the LIFG, or they think it is dead and buried and therefore there is no need to bring it back to life.

Conclusion

While talks regarding the existence and aims of the LIFG continue inside the prisons, the young jihadis in Libya seem to have become more and more active inside the country – they no longer seek to reach Iraq to fight the Americans. A number of cells have been broken up recently, especially in the eastern region (*al-Hayat*, June 30, 2008). Most of those arrested are said to have only been influenced by al-Qaeda's ideology. Very few had a direct link with bin Laden's franchise in the Islamic Maghreb. Only recently a group of Libyans who were

⁶ Another prominent Libyan in Afghanistan is Abu Yahya al-Libi, whose name came to prominence after he managed to flee the American detention facility at the Bagram air base near Kabul. Another name is Abdullah Said, who is considered the leader of the LIFG in Iran. He is now believed to be operating on the Afghanistan – Pakistan border.

⁷ The "Sinjar records" are a trove of jihadi documents recovered by American forces in the Sinjar district of Iraq in September 2007. The documents included the personnel records of over 700 foreign jihadis. The Saudis listed in the Sinjar records numbered 244, while the Libyans were 122 in number (52 of them came from one town, Darna, east of Libya).

thought to have been training with Al-Qaeda in Algeria were intercepted on the Algerian-Libyan border. These were said to have been planning an attack during a visit by a U.S. official to Libya, in October. Whatever their true target was, with the number of youths being drawn to the jihadist ideology, it seems only a matter of time before one of these cells manages to slip the government's attention and carry out an attack inside Libya.

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