

Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

Volume III, Issue 5 ♦ March 10, 2005

IN THIS ISSUE:

POST-ELECTION TERRORIST TRENDS IN IRAQ By Mahan Abedin	1
THE U.S. AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM: A TARGET FOR AL-QAEDA? By Peter Chalk.....	4
THE ALGERIAN SALAFIST GROUP FOR CALL AND COMBAT: A DOSSIER By Sara Daly	6
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN WAZIRISTAN By Daan van der Schriek	8



Many fear that the vulnerability of America's food supply makes it a target for al-Qaeda

Post-Election Terrorist Trends in Iraq

By Mahan Abedin

Half-heartedly trumpeted as a potential breakthrough against the insurgency, the Iraqi elections – in the short-term at least – seem to have made the security difficulties even more intractable. Indeed, any wishful thinking by American military and political planners in Iraq and their local allies was summarily dismissed by Air Force General Richard Meyers, who recently predicted that the insurgency could last for more than 10 years.

Tracking the evolution of the Iraqi insurgency from its opening shots in May 2003 to the present yields some interesting generalizations. The most important development revolves around the identity and ultimate objectives of the insurgents. Indeed, what started as a low-key campaign by remnants of the former regime and outraged Iraqi nationalists, in due course evolved into a serious conflict largely dominated by Islamic and jihadist organizations. This is not to ignore or understate the continuing role of Ba'ath remnants and secular Arab/Iraqi nationalists in the insurgency, but to emphasize that the overall character and theme of the resistance is now Islamic.

Moreover, insofar as the Ba'ath/nationalist and Islamic/jihadist dichotomy is concerned, a clear division in operational tactics is evident. While the dominant Islamic insurgent organizations have opted for mass-casualty bombings and the whole-sale slaughter of members of the new Iraqi military and security forces, the Ba'ath network has largely confined its attacks to coalition armies and leaders of prominent Shi'a Islamic organizations. The Ba'ath network also allegedly planned for the post-occupation insurgency, with sabotage of key installations and penetration of the new power structures constituting key priorities. [1]

Terrorism Monitor is a publication of the Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor's Managing Editor is Mahan Abedin, a consultant on financial, political and security affairs related to the Middle East. Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.



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

4516 43rd Street NW
Washington, DC • 20016

Tel: (202) 483-8888

Fax: (202) 483-8337

Copyright ©2004

While there is a proliferation of small insurgent organizations, four groups have emerged as the largest and most active. They all profess to be Islamic and all but one of them can easily be categorized as salafi/jihadi. While all of them share certain core objectives – the most important being the ejection of foreign armies from Iraq – there are important differences amongst them.

Army of Ansar al-Sunna

Jaish Ansar al-Sunna (Army of the Protectors of the Traditions) has emerged as arguably the most active and lethal of the insurgent organizations. It specializes in suicide bombings, spectacular attacks against coalition armies and Iraqi security forces and the seizing and beheading of Iraqi government agents and foreigners.

Ansar al-Sunna officially declared its formation in an internet statement on September 20, 2003. Western analysts have often assumed that Ansar al-Sunna is a splinter group from the largely Kurdish Ansar al-Islam, with Sunni Arabs and foreign al-Qaeda linked militants at its core. Despite the plausibility of these assumptions, there is no real evidence to validate them. The group's activities in the Arab regions of northern Iraq (particularly around Mosul) have been seized upon to hypothesize a link with Ansar al-Islam. But the fact is that Ansar is active throughout the entire Sunni heartland of Iraq – from the lawless areas immediately to the south of Baghdad to the epicenter of the insurgency in the Anbar province.

Ansar al-Sunna has carried out dozens of major suicide bombings, one of the most spectacular being the suicide bombing at a U.S. army base near Mosul on December 21, 2004 that killed 22 people, including 14 U.S. military personnel. In August 2004 the group seized and killed 12 Nepalese hostages. It posted the video of the massacre on its website with the group's emir, Abu Abdullah al-Hassan bin Mahmoud (wrongly identified as a Jordanian) claiming the Nepalese were slaughtered for "fighting the Muslims and serving the Jews and the Christians" and "believing in Buddha as their God."

The group has released dozens of gruesome videos showing the last moments of hostages, with graphic pictures of beheadings and shootings. For instance in early November 2004 Ansar al-Sunna released a video showing the beheading of Iraqi major Hussein Shunun in Mosul, claiming that he had been slaughtered "after confessing to collaborating with the enemy."

The Islamic Army in Iraq

Al-Jaish al-Islami fi Iraq differs from the other jihadist insurgent organizations insofar as it does not belong to the salafist tendency. Broadly speaking, it is an inclusive Islamic organization with Iraqi nationalist tendencies. Despite being overwhelmingly Sunni in composition and ideology there are believed to be some Shi'as in its ranks. The precise circumstances around its emergence are unclear, but it is assumed that the group was established in the summer of 2003.

In terms of operational tactics, the Islamic Army avoids bombings (suicidal or otherwise) and instead specializes in targeted assassinations of Iraqi government agents and low profile attacks on coalition forces. Its operations are predominantly centered on the lawless regions immediately to the south of Baghdad and in the capital itself. The Islamic Army also seizes hostages, but unlike other Islamist organizations it seems to specialize in intensively interrogating its captives. For instance, the group seized an Iranian diplomat in August 2004 on the road from Baghdad to Karbala. It released the diplomat the following month after ascertaining his "piety" and "that the Iranian government did not intend to interfere in Iraqi matters." Previously the group had demanded the Iranian government release 500 Iraqi POW's from the Iran-Iraq war. Also in July 2004, an Egyptian embassy official was seized and held for 3 days by a group calling itself the Lions of Allah Brigade – likely a unit affiliated to the Islamic Army. Like the Iranian diplomat, the Egyptian embassy official was subjected to intensive interrogations – an indicator, perhaps, that the Islamic Army has former Iraqi security agents in its ranks. In late December 2004, the Islamic Army released two French hostages which it had seized in August.

Nonetheless the Islamic Army can be as ruthless as the other insurgent organization when it comes to the ultimate fate of hostages. In late August 2004 the group executed Enzo Baldoni, an Italian journalist and a volunteer for the Red Cross in Iraq, after the Italian government refused to withdraw its forces from Iraq. Moreover on April 15, 2004, the Islamic Army in Iraq assassinated Khalil Naimi, first secretary to the Iranian embassy in Baghdad. Naimi was accused of being a senior Iranian intelligence officer in charge of collecting information on the Iraqi "resistance".

The Islamic Army is also active on the propaganda front. For instance on January 2, 2005 it issued a message to the American people, in which it underlines its principles and credentials thus: "The whole world sees that clearly in the crimes committed by your army, every time they have

imprisoned our sons with no right when compared to the actions of our army, which questions anyone it seizes before they are even charged.”

The Zarqawi Network

The terror group led by the notorious Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi has received most of the attention of the western media. Openly loyal to Bin Laden and operating under the name Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, the Zarqawi network is most likely behind the recent spate of bombings against Shia mosques and other sectarian targets. Another distinctive feature of this organization is that it is the only insurgent group with substantial numbers of non-Iraqi Arabs at its core.

While the Zarqawi network has stepped up its terrorist campaign in the weeks after the elections – probably in the hope of exacerbating the current political stalemate – there are also signs that it could be in serious trouble. The Iraqi Hezbollah Movement has recently reported that Syrian security officials have handed over useful information on the senior operatives and safe houses of the Zarqawi network to Iraqi and American security agents. [2] While the Iraqi media (particularly those run by Shia Islamic parties) generally exaggerate the Syrian connection, it is nonetheless interesting that these allegations coincide with the recent handover of Sabawi Ibrahim al-Hassan by the Syrian government to Iraqi and U.S. officials. It is also worth noting that the Zarqawi network has lost a string of senior operatives in recent months, the latest being the capture of Taleb al-Dulaymi in late February. Whether the Zarqawi network is eclipsed in the near future – in terms of lethality and visibility – by the other insurgent organizations, remains to be seen.

Ansar al-Islam

Ansar al-Islam is the oldest of the Islamic insurgent groups in Iraq (see TM Vol. 2 Iss. 11). The rise of the Army of Ansar al-Sunna was generally viewed as signaling the demise of Ansar al-Islam. Surely enough, little has been heard of the activities of the group since late 2003. Most recent open-source materials on Ansar al-Islam concentrate on its alleged European networks and its trafficking of would-be mujahideen from countries like Italy to Iraq.

However any predictions of the demise of this complex organization are likely to prove premature. While most of its senior and quality members have been killed, detained or dispersed, Kurdish security officials have consistently maintained that the battle against this organization is likely to prove a long-term one. Indeed in the event of deteriorating

relations between regional Kurdish parties and the emerging new central authority in Baghdad, Ansar could stage a full revival and might even be manipulated by forces anxious to suppress Kurdish nationalism.

Conclusion

The Iraqi insurgency deteriorated sharply after the handover of limited power to Iyad Alawi and his government in late June 2004. The catalyst for this was the blunting of the “de-Ba’athification” process and the appointment of former Ba’athists to key positions. The most controversial of these is Alawi’s defense minister, Hazem Shaalan whose chief mission over the past 8 months has been to make statements and allegations that are largely irrelevant to the situation on the ground. Shaalan has routinely blamed Syria and Iran for the insurgency; in addition to implicating Shi’a parties in the violence (an odd allegation given that these organizations have borne the brunt of the relentless terrorist campaign). Shaalan has also repeatedly predicted the capture of Zarqawi, most recently in late February. [3]

The new Iraqi government that will likely form in the next few weeks has one very important advantage over the Alawi government. It is an elected government and can capitalize on all the benefits that this brings. However, whether it can undermine the insurgency and improve the security situation rests on its ability to develop a committed and loyal security and intelligence system. Alawi is widely accused of bringing back former Ba’ath intelligence officers who were not only incompetent as intelligence operatives but whose loyalty to the new Iraq was not beyond dispute.

The largely Shi’a coalition that will likely dominate the next government has promised to re-institute the rigorous “de-Ba’athification” system put in place by Former U.S. Administrator in Iraq, Pual Bremer. But to have a meaningful impact on the insurgency it will have to confront the emerging political representatives of the insurgents. In this respect two organizations are of particular interest. The Association of Muslim Scholars, a grouping that brings together Sunni clergy, has links to several Islamic insurgent groups and has often used its influence to free foreign hostages. However its widespread links with the insurgents is clearly problematic and needs to be addressed accordingly. The Iraqi National Congress recently published an editorial demanding the Association clarify its position on the terrorist campaign. [4] The other organization is the Iraqi Islamic Party led by Muhsin Abdul Hamid. While this Sunni Islamic party’s links with the insurgents has not been established beyond doubt, it nonetheless has an ambiguous stance on the insurgents. While it condemns the more outrageous terrorist incidents,

it refuses to denounce attacks on coalition forces.

Given the proliferation of insurgent organizations and the substantial support these groups enjoy in the Arab Sunni heartlands of Iraq, the most that can be expected of the new government and its western backers is the partial containment of the violence. However there is ample scope for the insurgency to become much worse in the decisive months ahead, especially if the insurgent organizations continue to develop their connections with sympathetic political and religious organizations.

Mahan Abedin is the editor of Jamestown's Terrorism Monitor.

Notes:

1. *Al-Mu'tamar*, 11/10/04. (Baghdad daily belonging to the Iraqi National Congress).
2. *Al-Bayyinah* (Baghdad), 03/05/05.
3. Al-Sharqiyah TV (Baghdad), 02/27/05.
4. *Al-Mu'tamar*, 02/16/05.

* * *

The U.S. Agricultural System: A Target for al-Qaeda?

By Peter Chalk

Last December, the departing Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, used his farewell address to highlight the vulnerability of the U.S. agricultural sector to a biological terrorist strike, remarking: "For the life of me, I cannot understand why the terrorists have not [targeted] our food supply because it is so easy to do." The statement – which some regarded as highly irresponsible – cast into sharp focus the potential specter of agro-terrorism, triggering speculation that this may be precisely the type of attack that al-Qaeda seeks to direct against the American mainland. Exactly how vulnerable is the country's food supply to disruption? Does this sort of attack credibly resonate with the organizational, operational and ideological changes that currently appear to be taking place in al-Qaeda?

The U.S. agricultural sector remains inherently vulnerable to deliberate (and accidental) disruption. Not only does the highly concentrated and intensive nature of farming in the country encourage the rapid spread of contagious pathogens, an inefficient passive disease reporting system

that is hampered by the absence of clearly understood communication channels and protocols between regulators and producers serves to mitigate early and rapid reporting of outbreaks when they occur. Equally as important, the pool of appropriately trained veterinarians who are capable of recognizing and treating exotic diseases is declining as a result of insufficient support for epidemiological research and inadequate monetary incentives for those entering the field of large-scale husbandry. Finally, the scale and size of contemporary American agricultural enterprises has necessarily worked to preclude the option of attending to livestock on an individual basis. This, combined with the dwindling number of accredited state and local veterinarians noted above, has resulted in a situation where more and more animals throughout the country are currently receiving little, if any, comprehensive medical examination; the possibility of emerging diseases being missed has, as a result, become a distinct possibility.

What makes many of these vulnerabilities so potentially worrying is that the capability requirements for exploiting these weaknesses are not significant and are certainly less considerable than those needed for a human-directed bio-attack. Several factors account for this:

- First, there is a large menu of agents from which to choose, with no less than 15 "List A" pathogens listed by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) as having the potential to seriously impact animal health and/or trade.
- Second, many exotic diseases are non-zoonotic in nature, meaning that there is no risk of accidental human infection. As such, there is no requirement on the part of the perpetrator to have an advanced understanding of animal disease science nor is there any requirement for elaborate personal protective equipment and containment procedures.
- Third, animal diseases can be quickly spread over wide geographic areas to affect large numbers of herds – reflecting the intensive and concentrated nature of contemporary farming practices in the United States. There is, in other words, no issue of weaponization that needs to be addressed in agricultural terrorism as the animals themselves are the primary vector of pathogenic transmission. Disease transmission models developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have shown that a virus such as foot and mouth disease (FMD) could be expected to spread to as many as 25 states in as little as five days simply through the regulated movement of animals from farm to market.
- Fourth, if the objective is human deaths, the food chain offers a low-tech but highly conducive mechanism for

disseminating toxins and bacteria such as botulism, e-Coli and salmonella. Developments in the farm-to-table continuum have greatly increased the number of entry points for these agents. These openings for contaminants, combined with the lack of security at many processing and packing plants (most of which are characterized by uneven standards of internal quality control, inadequate bio-surveillance and large, unscreened seasonal workforces), have helped to substantially augment the technical ease of orchestrating a food-borne attack.

The Impact of a Major Act of Bio Agroterrorism

The impact of a major act of agricultural bio-terrorism in the United States would be significant and could quite easily extend beyond the farming/food-producing community to affect other segments of society. Economically the effects could be disastrous. The 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the UK, for instance, is conservatively estimated to have cost the country over £1.3 billion in compensation alone, with losses accruing to tourism as a result of the closure of farms located near to popular destination resorts between £2.7 and £3.2 billion. When one takes into account export, withholding and consequential losses, adverse run-on impacts on agricultural prices, auction markets, abattoirs and processors/haulers and public sector costs, the overall fiscal effects reaches into the tens of billions of pounds. Given the scale of American agriculture, one could expect a similar occurrence in the United States to be even more disruptive. Indeed, one study from California, which presented eight scenarios associated with a theoretical FMD outbreak, concluded that each day of delay in instituting effective eradication and control procedures would cost the state \$1 billion in trade sanctions. [1]

A successful bio-attack against agriculture could also be used to undermine the public's confidence in the government. A large-scale successful release of contagious agents against livestock or the contamination of the farm-to-table continuum through the introduction of toxic or bacterial agents would almost certainly cause people to lose confidence in the general safety of the food supply and could quite easily lead individuals to speculate over the effectiveness of existing contingency planning against weapons of mass destruction in general.

The actual mechanics of dealing with a major act of agroterrorism could also serve to trigger additional public criticism. Large-scale eradication and disposal of livestock is likely to be especially controversial (particularly if directed against susceptible but non-disease showing animals) and liable to elicit protests from various parties, including:

- Affected farmers – who may well “greet” Federal regulators approaching their properties with shotguns;
- Animal rights activists – who would doubtless interpret euthanization as an unjustified assault against animal welfare simply to safeguard economic profits; and
- Environmental organizations – which would likely view large-scale burial and/or incineration operations as an ecologically dysfunctional form of disease management.

Besides these groups, protests could well emanate from the population at large, mainly because most Americans have not been subjected to intensive media coverage of high-volume culling operations and, therefore, do not have any visual points of reference to prepare themselves for such images. [2]

Beyond their economic and political impact, low-tech bio-terrorist assaults against the food chain have the potential to create social panic. Because most processed food is disseminated to catchments areas within a matter of hours, a single case of chemical or biological adulteration could have significant latent on-going effects – particularly if the source of the contamination was not immediately apparent and acute ailments or deaths actually resulted. Terrorists could use this heightened state of public anxiety to create a general atmosphere of fear and alarm, without having to actually engage in the technologically complex process of producing and then disseminating agents such as anthrax and plague.

Al-Qaeda and Agro-Terrorism

Is agro-terrorism an attack modality that fits with the current operational and ideological evolution of al-Qaeda? As a primary form of attack probably not – simply because attacks against the agricultural sector would likely be viewed as too mundane and “dry” in comparison with more traditional terrorist tactics such as bombings and suicide strikes. The impact, while significant is delayed and lacks (at least initially) a single focal point for media attention. Specifically, there would likely be no immediate drama of the sort that would be associated with a September 11-style attack.

That said, al-Qaeda theological leaders have specifically exhorted Islamists to use biological weapons in whatever manner possible against Americans, arguing that this constitutes an obligation for any Muslim that is concerned

with safeguarding the sanctity of his/her faith. In addition, Bin Laden has repeatedly argued that the best way to destroy the United States and the western system that is predicated on Washington's power is by hitting the country's Achilles Heel – its economy. Finally, given its ease of execution and potential to elicit a highly “favorable” cost-benefit ratio, agro-terrorism may be perfectly suited to the type of low-cost but highly disruptive attacks that al-Qaeda has necessarily been forced to adopt in the 9/11 era.

Given this context, agro-terrorism could certainly emerge as a favored secondary form of al-Qaeda attack that is designed to exacerbate the social upheaval caused by random bombings. The mere ability to employ cheap and unsophisticated means to undermine a government's economic base, and possibly overwhelm its public-management resources, gives livestock and food-related attacks an attractive cost-benefit payoff that resonates directly with the type of power projection Bin Laden has repeatedly sought to instigate against the United States.

Peter Chalk is an analyst at RAND specializing in South East Asia, international terrorism and emerging threats.

Notes:

1. Author interview, California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), Sacramento, September 2000.
2. Author interview, USDA, Washington D.C., October 2003.

* * *

The Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat: A Dossier

By Sara Daly

The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) is currently engaged in a violent jihadist insurgency against the Algerian government with the goal of replacing the secular regime with an Islamic state. The GSPC splintered from a rival Algerian organization, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in 1998 over a disagreement on whether civilians constitute legitimate targets. Since its inception in 1992, the GIA has killed thousands of Algerian civilians, including women and children, in targeted massacres. Consequently, the GIA came to be viewed as contaminated and as a result, Hassan Hattab, a former GIA leader and founder of the GSPC, was able to take many GIA defectors with him when he left. The GSPC was also able to attract new members through its stated focus

on attacking exclusively government targets and security forces. The group got an additional boost after Algerian President Bouteflika instituted a widespread amnesty program for Islamic militants in 1998, and the GSPC was one of the few groups that declined to participate.

Al-Qaeda – which maintained a loose relationship with the GIA through individual combatants that had fought in Afghanistan – also separated itself from the GIA over the civilian massacres, and allegedly encouraged Hattab to defect, providing him with funding to establish the GSPC. Since 1998, the GSPC has grown in strength and visibility to become the most effective terrorist group in Algeria, consequently co-opting most of the GIA's well-established overseas networks.

Current Activities

Early in its campaign, the GSPC successfully attacked Algerian security forces and other government targets. However, the group eventually returned to killing civilians – probably when it began suffering more significant losses – but not on the same scale as the GIA. Since 2002, the group has had some major setbacks, primarily due to infighting, the loss of two emirs and the steadily improving skills of the Algerian police and security forces.

Algerian intelligence and security services have become more skilled in recent years, not only at locating and eliminating terrorists and their hideouts, but also at exploiting the fissures in the GSPC and the GIA through propaganda and nationwide programs like the amnesty initiative. Moreover, outside assistance programs such as the Pan-Sahel Initiative provide Algerian forces and other countries support in combating the GSPC through additional training and equipment from the United States. [1] According to an Algerian newspaper article from December 2004, security service members claim that terrorism in Algeria is experiencing its “final moments”. [2] Indeed, the GIA has been reduced to only 30 members, according to one source, following a successful operation carried out by the National People's Army and the security agencies starting in November 2004. [3]

Although it is difficult to determine the precise strength of the insurgents, security officials estimate anywhere from 500-800 Islamic militants are still active. [4] These smaller numbers are in part the result of a more effective counter-insurgency campaign inside Algeria, but also because an unknown number of GSPC members have left Algeria for Europe and Africa. According to some sources, at least 2,800 Algerians trained or fought in Afghanistan.

Hattab's successor, Nabil Sahraoui, who assumed leadership of the group in mid-2003 after Hattab's disappearance, was confirmed killed in June 2004. However, ambiguity has surrounded Hattab's whereabouts since his departure from the group. Hattab has recently been reported in the hands of Algerian authorities as part of the reconciliation process and as a result, remaining GSPC members fear that he will betray information that would lead to their capture and the ultimate demise of the group. [5] In an attempt to solidify his role as the newly minted leader of the GSPC and to prevent future defections, Sahraoui's successor, Abu Musab Abdelouadoud – who took over in mid-2004 – issued a communiqué earlier this month blacklisting Hattab for his cooperation with the authorities, saying “The GSPC dissociates itself from the actions of Hattab, who betrayed God and the Prophet, has strayed from the path of jihad, and sold the blood of the martyrs....”

Following Sahraoui's death, Abdelouadoud officially took over the group's leadership, but the GSPC now appears splintered between two factions. Abdelouadoud is nominally in charge of GSPC cells that are operating throughout northern Algeria and may or may not be coordinating their actions. Another group called the Free Salafist Group (GSL), established in February 2004 and currently run by former GSPC leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar, is operating separately from Abdelouadoud in the southern parts of Algeria. Belmokhtar – known as the “one-eyed” – is leading the charge in that region after Hattab's deputy, Amari Saif, known as Abderrazak the Para, or “El Para”, was detained in March 2004 by the insurgent Chadian organization, Chadian Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJT), while searching for arms along the Chadian border. [6] Amari Saif, a rival of former emir Sahraoui and called “the Para” because he was once a paratrooper in the Algerian army, was extradited by Libyan authorities to Algeria in October 2004 where he is currently being questioned about the group's activities. [7]

Although GSPC cells in northern Algeria still constitute a threat, albeit a lesser one than in recent years, the GSL has emerged as the more serious security challenge to Algerian security. The group's first high profile operation was the February 2003 kidnapping of 32 European tourists in southern Algeria. The hostages were eventually released (one German tourist died of heatstroke) after Germany agreed to pay the GSL \$6 million. The GSL was formed in part because it wanted to separate itself from factions within the GSPC who wanted to turn themselves in as part of the national reconciliation and surrender others in the process. [8] The GSL appears, however, to look more like a criminal organization than a committed terrorist group. Belmokhtar

and his followers apparently spend most of their time trafficking in drugs, arms and cigarettes. [9] Indeed, the head of the Algerian National Security Agency, Ali Tounsi, said in December 2004 that in a post-terrorism Algeria, the most serious security challenges will include organized crime, drugs, cybercrime, high financial crime, and money laundering.

Links with Al-Qaeda

The GSPC attracted al-Qaeda's attention and some sources say its financial and material support, after it refused to support the GIA's brutal tactics. In fact, Bin Laden had always taken a special interest in the Algerian Islamist struggle. The GSPC had a distinct advantage in that many of the combatants that defected to the group from GIA were Afghan war veterans who had ties to Bin Laden's group through their combat experience fighting the Soviet Union. According to one source, Algerians made up one-third of all combatants during the Afghan war and had been among the first recruits in Bin Laden's camps in Sudan in the early 1990s. Bin Laden also reportedly appointed Abu Qatada, an al-Qaeda theologian and propagandist, as the GIA's spiritual advisor.

The GSPC is a well-established player in the broader North African network of Islamic extremists that operate in Europe and elsewhere. Some of the extremists that GSPC members are in contact with have established ties to al-Qaeda, and Algerian authorities claim to have killed a Yemeni al-Qaeda member in Algeria that met with the GSPC.

After 9/11, Hattab reportedly issued a public statement threatening that the GSPC would strike American and European interests if they attacked Muslim states, or disrupted their networks in the UK, France, Belgium, and the United States. Shortly thereafter, the GSPC was designated a foreign terrorist organization by the United States and its assets were blocked by Executive Order 13224. The GSPC has not conducted an anti-U.S. attack as a group, but individual GSPC members may have participated in al-Qaeda attacks against U.S. and Western targets. Other Algerian extremists, whose affiliations are not clear, such as Ahmad Ressay whose plot to bomb LAX airport was disrupted in late 1999, have also shown an inclination to attack the United States. [10]

In addition to helping the GSPC achieve its local goals in Algeria, al-Qaeda clearly also benefits from its relationship with the group by being able to take advantage of the numerous operatives that the GSPC has in the French speaking world and can call upon the support of those

networks when needed. The relationship between al-Qaeda and the GSPC became clearer when several key al-Qaeda leaders – who were also GSPC members – were arrested. For example, Mohammad Bensakhria – believed to be a GSPC leader and al-Qaeda’s most senior representative in Europe – was arrested in Spain in 2001. Despite these ties, the degree of command and control that al-Qaeda has over GSPC networks remains unclear.

On September 11, 2003, the GSPC under Sahraoui’s leadership issued a public statement declaring its support for al-Qaeda. The statement said “We strongly and fully support Osama bin Laden’s jihad against the heretic America...” and claimed that the GSPC was now under the direction of al-Qaeda and Mullah Omar. Another communiqué from the group issued shortly thereafter claimed the GSPC was protecting al-Qaeda members in Algeria. This declaration could signal a confirmation that the GSPC is closely linked with al-Qaeda and plans to participate more fully in attacks against the United States and the West. However, it is unclear where the current leadership under Abdelouadoud stands on the GSPC’s relationship with al-Qaeda. As part of a recent communiqué, Abdelouadoud said that the national reconciliation program in Algeria is “...but another episode in the war against the jihad under the banner of the great American tyrant.”

If still relevant, the latest statement issued by the GSPC is significant in that the group intends to be a full partner in conducting attacks against the United States and the West. It will probably also open the door to whatever funding and resources al-Qaeda has to provide GSPC to aid in its local struggle. Sahraoui and now Abdelouadoud may choose to take the group in this direction because they truly believe in al-Qaeda’s ideology – like Ayman al-Zawahiri did with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) – or may just be seeking to breathe new life into the GSPC with additional resources. Al-Qaeda has made it clear through its propaganda that part of its broader strategy is to assist in the overthrow of “apostate” governments. Moreover formalizing the group’s relationship with al-Qaeda could elevate the GSPC to the same status enjoyed by the EIJ. Although joining al-Qaeda did not help the EIJ achieve its local goals in the end – in fact it undermined them by removing it from the Egyptian scene – a closer relationship with al-Qaeda will propel the GSPC into the forefront of international Islamic terrorism. This will likely accelerate the “de-nationalization” of the GSPC (in the same vein as the EIJ underwent a de-nationalization process) and thus push the Algerian state closer to winning its 13-year bloody struggle against Islamic militants.

Sara Daly is an international policy analyst at RAND.

Her research focuses primarily on international terrorism, insurgency, emerging threats, nuclear terrorism, and intelligence issues.

Notes:

1. B. Takheroubt, “Algerian Daily Notes US Military Presence at Niger Border to Fight Terrorism,” *Algiers L’Expression*, December 15, 2004, FBIS GMP20041215000004.
2. Mohamed Abdoun, “Algerian Daily Reports 90% of Country’s Terrorists Ready to Surrender,” *Algiers L’Expression*, December 12, 2004, FBIS GMP20041212000004.
3. Sofiane Bensalem, “Algiers Daily Report Assesses Impact of End of Terrorist GIA,” *Algiers El Watan*, January 4, 2005, FBIS GMP20050105000001.
4. Nissa Hammadi, “Algerian National Security Agency Head Interviewed on Terrorism, the Disappeared,” *Algiers La Tribune*, December 18, 2004, FBIS GMP200412180000095.
5. Mounir B., “Algerian Terrorist GSPC Blacklists Former Emir Hassan Hattab,” *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, February 12, 2005, FBIS GMP20050212000010.
6. “Chad: Algerian GSPC Threatens to Attack MDJT Over El-Para Detention,” *Ndjamena L’Observateur*, October 20, 2004, FBIS AFP20041102000050.
7. Benchabane A., “Algerian Justice, Intelligence Officials Questioning GSPC’s El Para,” *Algiers El Watan*, January 5, 2005, FBIS GMP20050105000010.
8. R. Kamel, “‘Free Salafist Group,’ New ‘National Emir’ Seen Emerging from GSPC ‘Schism,’” *Algiers El Watan*, February 3, 2004, FBIS GMP20040203000005.
9. N. Nesrouche, “Algerian Army Engaged in Terrorism Search Operations in East,” *Algiers El Watan*, January 11, 2005, FBIS GMP20050111000004.
10. “Algiers Daily Reports European Arrests, Prosecutions of GSPC Members,” *Algiers Le Mat*, FBIS AFP20010929000121, September 29, 2001.

* * *

Recent Developments in Waziristan

By Daan van der Schriek

In early February, the emir of the Taliban in South Waziristan reached a peace deal with the central authorities in Islamabad. Baitullah Mehsud promised not to shelter or support foreign militants nor attack government installations and forces. If the agreement holds, it will help pacify the situation in the

Pakistani tribal areas that have been the staging ground for limited military actions since late 2003. But concerns remain, not least because not all militants have yet to lay down their weapons. And having lost much local support in Waziristan, the militants might choose to relocate to Afghanistan where far fewer troops are available to hunt them down.

A Deal of Sorts

On February 7, Baitullah Mehsud, a top commander of the Pakistani Taliban in South Waziristan, together with up to a hundred of his fighters signed a peace deal with the authorities. About 1,000 people, locals as well as government officials, attended the ceremony near the Sararogha Fort some 80 kilometers from the town of Wana. The proceedings, which were watched by only a handful of soldiers from a distance through binoculars, ended with shouts of “Allah-o-Akbar” (God is great) and “Death to America.” Mehsud might have stopped harassing Pakistani government forces, but his ideas clearly haven’t changed. “We understand fighting against Pakistani security forces did not help the Taliban at all,” he told the assembled press who were not allowed to capture him on photo or film. At the same time, he said: “Pakistan has also realized that fighting tribal people is undermining it. Pakistan’s enemies are India, the Northern Alliance and Russia.” [1]

The 30-year-old commander insisted he had not surrendered to the government and made two important demands of his own: the removal of security checkpoints and the speeding up of development projects in the region. The point that Mehsud was trying to make is that he does not feel defeated. Still, defeated or not, the deal could prove important for Waziristan. As the emir of South Waziristan, he holds great authority in the region. According to one Pakistani newspaper, “top Taliban leadership” urged Mehsud to sign the deal, thus enabling the movement to concentrate on Afghanistan without having to worry about Pakistan. But apparently the senior Taliban leadership was unable to convince another senior militant, Abdullah Mehsud (no relation to Baitullah Mehsud), to sign up to the deal. [2] But given that there is near-universal support for the Taliban in the Pakistani border areas, it is unlikely that rogue elements will defy the movement by staging serious attacks in the area. The Taliban has clearly decided to avoid antagonizing the Pakistani government, in the hope that the government will turn a blind eye to any future non-violent Taliban activities in the area.

However, because Abdullah Mehsud and at least some 100 foreign militants (who are mostly Uzbeks) remain uncommitted to the deal, “attacks on military installations

and convoys might [still] be happening,” according to Behroz Khan, the bureau chief of the Pakistani daily *The News* in Peshawar. [3] The tribe of the Wazirs also rejected the deal. In fact, there was an incident immediately after the signing of the deal: two journalists were killed and a third injured after returning from the ceremony at the Sararogha Fort. Apparently, the journalists were locals belonging to the Wazir tribe who accused them of “joining the enemy.” [4]

Old Presence, New Problem

Religious extremists, both foreign and home-grown, have long been present in the tribal areas of Pakistan – in large measure due to the acquiescence and support of the Pakistani and U.S. governments in the past, who encouraged mujahideen to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The tribal areas were the natural gateway to Afghanistan. This is especially the case with South Waziristan, which was an important supply route for the mujahideen, helped by the fact that the same tribe lives on both sides of the border. After the Taliban regime was toppled in late 2001, Pakistani, Afghan and foreign militants once again ended up in the tribal areas – this time fleeing from U.S. led forces in Afghanistan.

Despite the fact that the area has been historically friendly to Islamic militants, not everyone in the region supported the influx of radicals into the area after the collapse of the Taliban. [5] In fact, in some cases the locals were coerced by the militants to obey them, says Behroz Khan. This type of mild coercion by non-state forces works in the region, because ever since the start of the colonial period in the mid-19th century, central authorities have only had indirect power in the tribal areas and thus could not hinder the militants much. “[Pakistani President Pervez] Musharraf was slow to act,” says Behroz Khan; indeed Musharraf only became serious about the security situation in the region after two assassination attempts against him in December 2003.

However, subduing the militants and the tribes supporting them appeared to be a more difficult task than initially anticipated, especially forcing Pakistani authorities to mobilize 70,000-80,000 paramilitary forces in the region in order to neutralize around 600-700 foreign militants. But it is widely believed that the Pakistani army not only wanted to flush out the foreign extremists but sought – for the first time ever – to bring the tribal areas under central government control. “The War on Terror gave them the opportunity for this” says Behroz Khan. That subduing the area is at least as important as capturing extremists is supported by the fact that no important Taliban or al-Qaeda figures have been captured in Waziristan. Conversely, numerous senior al-Qaeda figures

have been captured in the cities of Pakistan. [6]

Apparently, U.S. forces have supported the Pakistanis in Waziristan, especially by providing helicopters, missiles and reconnaissance drones. But Pakistani officials have been quick to deny reports that the CIA operated a base in Waziristan and that the Pakistani army has helped the U.S. military to aim artillery fire from Afghanistan at rebels on the Pakistani side of the border. These denials are hardly surprising in light of widespread anti-Americanism in Pakistan. “But things seem to point to a lot of American help,” says Behroz Khan.

IMU Remnants

The militants that remain in Waziristan are essentially comprised of Abdullah Mehsud and his fighters and the remnants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), in addition to a small number of Chechens and Arabs. Chechen militants reportedly made use of a training camp in Afghanistan (prior to the ouster of the Taliban), not far from the Pakistani border. However the relationship between the IMU and the Taliban is much better documented.

After the Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996, the Uzbek Islamists Juma Namangani and Tahir Yoldashev held a press conference in the city to announce the formation of the IMU. The Taliban provided the IMU with a safe haven, which was lost with the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001. Apparently, IMU forces suffered heavy losses in intensive American bombing and Namangani was reportedly killed. But Yoldashev led an estimated 250 Central Asian families over the border into South Waziristan. Of the estimated 600-700 foreign militants in Waziristan in September 2003, at least 100-200 were Uzbeks belonging to the IMU. In March 2004, during heavy fighting in which Yoldashev was reportedly wounded, the Pakistani army allegedly intercepted radio transmissions in both Uzbek and Chechen. In clashes since 2003, dozens of militants have been killed and hundreds more apparently left the area for the relative safety of Pakistani urban centers, in small groups. The 100 remaining foreign fighters are alleged to be almost universally Uzbeks – for whom it is very difficult to return to Karimov’s Uzbekistan. Arab fighters would have had less difficulty returning home or blending in Pakistani cities. “Yoldashev is still there” says Khan, but having lost his local Waziri supporters, his network is smashed and he is “on the run.”

Retreat to Afghanistan

Twenty-nine-year-old Pakistani commander Abdullah Mehsud is now also on the run. Earlier, he fought with

the Taliban in Afghanistan where he lost a leg. Captured in Kunduz in December 2001, he was transferred to Guantanamo Bay where he posed as an Afghan and was released after 25 months as a person of little importance. In March 2003, he returned to his native Waziristan to become one of the main leaders of the insurgents, second only to Baitullah Mehsud. Abdullah Mehsud gained country-wide notoriety by kidnapping two Chinese engineers in October 2004. One of these was killed in a subsequent army rescue attempt, thus excluding him from any possible amnesty deal. The Uzbeks, as foreigners, can not count on amnesty either, leaving them with little option but to continue fighting.

Given that the militants have now lost most local support in Waziristan, where they are hunted by up to 80,000 Pakistani forces, Behroz Khan argues that they will try to slip into Afghanistan. However, experts in Afghanistan doubt this: “Given the large coalition and ISAF presence in Afghanistan I find it hard to believe a group would look at relocating here for sanctuary,” says Scott Richards, safety coordinator with the Afghanistan NGO Security Office in Kandahar. [7] But the battered and pressured Taliban remnants in Afghanistan would certainly welcome an influx of seasoned fighters. And unless Abdullah Mehsud and the Uzbeks are offered an amnesty proposal they deem reasonable, they will continue causing trouble – either in Waziristan or Afghanistan.

Daan van der Schriek is a freelance journalist based in Kabul, Afghanistan. He has covered Central Asia and the Caucasus for several years. He holds an MASc in Central Asian Politics from SOAS in London and an MA in Russian and Russian Studies at the University of Amsterdam.

Notes:

1. For the ceremony, see the *Daily Times* and *Dawn*, February 7, 2005.
2. *The Daily Times*, February 12, 2005.
3. These and other quotes of Behroz Khan come from interviews with him in Peshawar on January 24 and February 4, 2005.
4. *The Daily Times*, February 12, 2005.
5. Interview with Nick Downie of the Afghanistan NGO Security Office, October 30, 2004, Kabul.
6. Interview with the Pakistani journalist and Afghanistan expert Rahimullah Yousafzai, November 24, 2004.
7. Interview with Scott Richards, ANSO South Safety Advisor (Kandahar) February 27, 2005.