



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

CTC SENTINEL

OBJECTIVE . RELEVANT . RIGOROUS

Contents

FEATURE ARTICLE

1 **AQAP's Growing Security Threat to Saudi Arabia**

By Caryle Murphy

REPORTS

4 **Assessing AQI's Resilience After April's Leadership Decapitations**

By Myriam Benraad

8 **The Return of Moqtada al-Sadr and the Revival of the Mahdi Army**

By Babak Rahimi

11 **Indoctrinating Children: The Making of Pakistan's Suicide Bombers**

By Kalsoom Lakhani

13 **The Third Way: A Paradigm for Influence in the Marketplace of Ideas**

By Scott Helfstein

18 **Still Fighting for Revolution: Greece's New Generation of Terrorists**

By George Kassimeris

20 **Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity**

24 **CTC Sentinel Staff & Contacts**

About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

AQAP's Growing Security Threat to Saudi Arabia

By Caryle Murphy



Prince Nayif reviews security units after AQAP's threat to kidnap Saudi princes and Christians. - Photo by Hamad Olayan/AFP/Getty Images

IN MARCH 2010, a Saudi security sweep netted 113 alleged al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) sympathizers. Among them was Hayla al-Qusayir, an AQAP operative held in high esteem by her fellow militants due to her knowledge of Islam, enthusiasm for fighting Saudi security forces, and for allegedly sending more than \$293,000 to AQAP.¹ Her importance to AQAP was highlighted when the terrorist group's deputy leader, former Guantanamo Bay detainee Said al-Shihri, threatened to kidnap Saudi princes and Christian residents of Saudi Arabia to use in a prisoner swap for al-Qusayir's release.²

1 Personal interview, Saudi security official, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

2 Said al-Shihri issued the threat on an audiotape aired on al-Arabiya television on June 3, 2010.

The episode is a useful indicator of where the battle between Saudi Arabia and its extremist opposition stands. During the past seven years, the government has largely uprooted the clandestine al-Qa`ida network that burst into public view with spectacular suicide bombings at three residential Riyadh compounds in May 2003. Al-Qa`ida's subsequent defeat in Saudi Arabia was due to several factors, including public disgust at its violence. Just as important to its defeat, however, was the government's double-pronged response to the threat. Riyadh launched a tough, well-funded security and police offensive against the al-Qa`ida network in the country, and at the same time developed a multifaceted, long-term ideological campaign against what Saudi officials identified as "deviant" Islamic ideas.³

3 Personal interview, Saudi security official, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

Despite al-Qa`ida's failure in Saudi Arabia, other al-Qa`ida operatives formed AQAP in neighboring Yemen. AQAP has now developed into a serious threat to Saudi Arabia, plotting attacks and infiltrating militants into the kingdom. In August 2009, an AQAP operative nearly succeeded in assassinating Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayif, the country's counterterrorism chief and a deputy interior minister.⁴ In October 2009, two AQAP members wearing explosive vests were killed in a shootout with Saudi police at a traffic stop.⁵ Two months later, an AQAP recruit, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, attempted to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight over Detroit. Most recently, in April 2010 the British ambassador to Yemen escaped injury when a suicide bomber threw himself in front of the diplomat's convoy in Sana`a; AQAP claimed responsibility, describing Britain as "America's closest ally in its war on Islam."⁶

This article examines AQAP's growing threat to Saudi Arabia. It first explains the importance of Hayla al-Qusayir's arrest before reviewing how the Saudi government has responded to the al-Qa`ida challenge.

A Widow's Revenge

Until her arrest in Burayda, the heartland of the kingdom's ultraconservative strain of Islam, Hayla al-Qusayir was a bridge between the old, decimated al-

Qa`ida network and its contemporary namesake, AQAP. Raised by her brother after the death of her father, al-Qusayir's first marriage was to Shaykh Abdul Karim al-Humaid, an eccentric cleric opposed to modern amenities such as electricity and cars.⁷

Al-Qusayir, who is approximately 40-years-old, divorced al-Humaid and then "got the man who filled her life" when she married al-Qa`ida militant Mohammed Sulaiman al-Wakil.⁸ After al-Wakil was killed in a Riyadh shootout with police in December 2004,

"Hayla al-Qusayir was a bridge between the old, decimated al-Qa`ida network and its contemporary namesake, AQAP."

his widow "hated every policeman from that moment," a Saudi security official explained. "She wanted revenge... so any work that hurt the police, she was satisfied to do."⁹ Al-Qusayir, who has one daughter, "took advantage of her situation as a woman," the official added, to hide al-Qa`ida militants. "Because she was knowledgeable about religion," he explained, "she could convince women to give money."¹⁰

At informal gatherings, al-Qusayir was able to persuade women to part with cash and jewelry after telling them that their donations would be used to help poor children in other Muslim countries. In all, the official charged, she sent 1.1 million Saudi riyals (approximately \$293,000) to AQAP contacts in Yemen and Afghanistan.¹¹ Al-Qusayir's

7 Shaykh Abdul Karim al-Humaid has been jailed for several years because of his extremist sympathies. Details were derived from al-Arabiya television on June 3, 2010, in addition to personal interview, Saudi security official, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

8 This information was derived from a Saudi security official who described al-Qusayir's background on condition he was not named.

9 Personal interview, Saudi security official, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.; Al-Oraifij, "Haila Al Qusayyer Funded Al-Qae-

fundraising on behalf of AQAP is not disputed by the group, which noted her contribution in this regard when responding to her detention.

At the time of her arrest, al-Qusayir was allegedly involved in supporting two, six-man cells of suicide bombers supplied and directed by AQAP.¹² Her precise role is unclear, but "she was part of the plot."¹³ Today, AQAP is threatening to kidnap Saudi princes and Christians in the kingdom to effect al-Qusayir's release. To assess whether AQAP can deliver on its threats, it is necessary to examine al-Qa`ida's recent history in Saudi Arabia.

Success, then Defeat

Al-Qa`ida stormed onto the Saudi landscape with high-profile attacks in 2003 and 2004 at a time when Saudi security was totally unprepared. As stated by analyst Thomas Hegghammer in February 2010, al-Qa`ida's early successes stemmed from

a momentary discrepancy between the very high organizational capability of returnees from Afghanistan, and the weakness of the Saudi intelligence apparatus. That gap has since been closed. Today, country-wide, organized political activism of any kind is more difficult than ever before.¹⁴

While it is clearly more difficult, it is not impossible. Continued al-Qa`ida activity in Saudi Arabia is illustrated by al-Qusayir's support to al-Qa`ida—which went undetected for years—and by Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin Abdul Aziz's recent announcement that his security forces had foiled 220 "criminal attempts" by alleged

da, Recruited Women."

12 Personal interview, Saudi security official, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

13 Ibid. *Asharq al-Awsat* reported that two suicide vests found in a car transporting two AQAP members, who were killed in a shootout with Saudi police in October 2009, "were destined for" al-Qusayir and that she had "reportedly recruited two suicide bombers for an attack." It also said that she had sheltered two youths in an abandoned house for at least 20 days. For details, see "90 Minutes with Mrs. Al Qaeda," *Asharq al-Awsat*, June 7, 2010.

14 Thomas Hegghammer, *The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010).

4 Asma Alsharif, "Saudi Royal Survives Attack Claimed by Qaeda," Reuters, August 28, 2009.

5 One of the men killed was Yousef Mohammed al-Shihri, a former Guantanamo Bay detainee whose sister, Wafa, is married to AQAP deputy, Said al-Shihri. Wafa was married twice before, once to an al-Qa`ida extremist killed by police in 2005. She has joined her current husband in Yemen, where she reportedly is appealing to Saudi females to join AQAP's ranks, according to Saudi press reports. There have also been reports that al-Qusayir helped Wafa flee Saudi Arabia with her three children so she could join her husband, who went to Yemen in 2008. For details, see Abdullah al-Oraifij, "Wanted Saudi Militants Seen in Marib Region," *Saudi Gazette*, June 15, 2010; Mshari al-Zaydi, "Al Qaeda's Women in Saudi Arabia," *Asharq al-Awsat*, June 6, 2010; Abdullah al-Oraifij, "Haila Al-Qusayyer Funded Al-Qaeda, Recruited Women," *Saudi Gazette*, June 5, 2010; "Distraught Saudi Father Disowns 'Stupid Son,'" *Arab News*, June 8, 2010.

6 Mohammed Sudam, "Suicide Bomber Targets British Ambassador in Yemen," Reuters, April 26, 2010; "Al-Qaida Group Claims April Attack in Yemen," Associated Press, May 12, 2010.

extremists.¹⁵ Moreover, thousands of suspected sympathizers and militants have been arrested since 2003, and the number still in detention has not been disclosed. In 2008, the government announced that it would put on trial around 1,000 suspects for terrorism-related charges. The only follow-up to that announcement was in mid-2009

“AQAP will attempt to deliver on its kidnapping threat to demonstrate its effectiveness. Targets are abundant. There are thousands of Saudi princes, and with 50,000 American and 30,000 British residents in the kingdom, there are also many Christians.”

when the government stated that 323 defendants had been convicted in secret proceedings and given prison sentences ranging from a few months to 30 years.¹⁶

Alongside the security hammer, the government launched a wide-ranging ideological campaign to delegitimize al-Qa`ida's ideology, often called Salafijihadism by those outside the kingdom but regarded by Saudi officials simply as “deviant.” According to Interior Ministry spokesman General Mansur al-Turki, “That is the real solution: to counter the ideology. If we do not succeed in [this], we will not succeed in defeating terrorism.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Muhammad Humaidan, “Saudi Arabia Foils 220 Terror Acts,” *Arab News*, June 7, 2010. The prince was referring to a time period of several years, dating to 2003. In October 2008, Prince Nayif asserted that 160 “terrorist operations” had been foiled, which means that plots continue. It is not known if the aborted incidents were planned by resident remnants of al-Qa`ida's old network, or by AQAP infiltrators from Yemen.

¹⁶ “Saudi Arabia Convicts 323 Terror Suspects,” press release, Saudi Arabian Embassy, Washington, D.C., July 14, 2009.

¹⁷ Personal interview, General Mansur al-Turki, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

The best-known component of this campaign is the prisoner rehabilitation program run by the Interior Ministry for detained extremists. It has drawn praise from foreign counterterrorism officials for its innovative approach to confronting a problematic ideology, or in this case theology. Using religious reeducation and financial incentives, the program appears to have persuaded scores of former militants to give up their old ways and start a new life. There have, however, been relapses—one of the most significant “graduates” who returned to violence is Said al-Shihri himself. Even Saudi officials caution that the program's long-term effectiveness remains to be seen.¹⁸

Outside prison walls, the government has attempted to mobilize all aspects of Saudi society—schools, mosques, media and family—in a nationwide vigil against extremist thinking. Parents are repeatedly reminded by clerics, security officials and social workers to supervise what their children read on the internet and with whom they associate.

Additionally, the *Saudi Gazette* reported in April 2010 that the Ministry of Education is planning seminars for high school students to discuss “intellectual security” and the “dangers of deviant thought.”¹⁹ Universities have been provided large budgets to hold academic conferences on terrorism and “deviant” trends. In September

¹⁸ In a June 19 press briefing on the ministry's rehabilitation program, Interior Ministry officials said that of the 120 Saudis returned from Guantanamo, 109 completed the program. Eight returned before the program was set up, while three are still in the program. Of the 109 graduates, 11 went to Yemen and rejoined al-Qa`ida. Of those 11, one returned and surrendered to Saudi authorities, while two others were killed in the October 2009 shootout with Saudi police. Nine other graduates were re-arrested for breaking conditions of their release, not for rejoining al-Qa`ida. Of those nine, some are still jailed and others released under tighter conditions. These figures amount to a relapse rate of 18% for Guantanamo returnees. The rehabilitation program has had 180 other graduates, mostly Saudis caught trying to join the Iraqi insurgency and militants who have completed prison sentences. When all 300 graduates are considered, the program's overall relapse rate is 9.5%, the officials said. Hardcore jailed militants who hold fast to extremist views during prison counseling sessions are not eligible for the program.

¹⁹ Saeed al-Bahis, “Program to Save Pupils from Deviant Ideology,” *Saudi Gazette*, April 10, 2010.

2010, Muslim scholars from around the world will gather in Medina to discuss *takfir*, the practice of declaring a Muslim an apostate, which extremists use to justify killing their foes.²⁰ The Ministry of Education has also deleted some controversial passages from religious textbooks seen as promoting intolerance toward non-Muslims.²¹

The government has established stricter banking regulations on money transfers and warned people to give their charitable donations only to officially-sanctioned organizations, moves aimed at preventing the kind of informal money collecting done by al-Qusayir.²² In late April, the country's most senior religious clerics issued a *fatwa* explicitly denouncing terrorism funding.²³

In Saudi Arabia's battle against militants, counterterrorism officials have also used psychological weapons. A few days after al-Shihri declared AQAP's recent kidnapping plans, his father gave interviews to the local press in which he disowned his son for “shaming and humiliating my family, tribe and nation.”²⁴ He added: “I wished I could kill him with my own hands.”²⁵ Saudi columnists have contributed as well, calling attention to the fact that it was AQAP, not security officials, that broadcast al-Qusayir's name and thus brought shame on her family—a significant issue in Saudi society.

The ideological campaign has had an impact. Saudis appear more willing to openly criticize extremist ideas.²⁶ It is certainly true that the burst of enthusiasm for al-Qa`ida among some Saudis after 9/11 has evaporated,

²⁰ Personal interview, Ibrahim al-Maiman, assistant professor in Islamic prudence, Al Imam Mohammed bin Saud University and principal organizer of Takfir Conference, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, May 3, 2010.

²¹ This has been widely reported. See, for example, Kelly McEvers, “Angry Teachers and Empty Libraries,” *Slate*, September 9, 2009.

²² Caryle Murphy, “Saudi Slows Terrorism's Money Taps,” *The National* [Abu Dhabi], November 2, 2009.

²³ Turki al-Saheil, “Asharq al-Awsat Talks to Senior Ulama Council Secretary General Dr. Fahd al-Majid,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 23, 2010.

²⁴ “Distraught Saudi Father Disowns ‘Stupid Son.’”

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ This is an observation made by many Saudis and evident in personal conversations with them over two years, as well as from reading the Saudi press.

although this is more a result of al-Qa`ida's extreme violence than the government's assault on its ideology.²⁷

Yet not everyone is complying as wholeheartedly as the government would like. Interior Minister Prince Nayif has occasionally complained that some imams at the country's 50,000 mosques are not doing enough to counter extremist thinking.²⁸ Most importantly, there is still the internet, where one can easily find violent Islamist thought. Although many extremist forums and websites are blocked by the government, most technologically-savvy Saudi teenagers can find a way around the censors.

Present Danger

AQAP is now a major security threat to Saudi Arabia, having proved its determination to continue its jihad against the kingdom and its allies, principally the United States and the United Kingdom. The group's latest threat came in al-Shihri's audio recording aired by the Saudi-owned satellite television channel, al-Arabiya. In it, al-Shihri called for "kidnapping princes, senior officials, and ministers to exchange them for this Al Qaeda lady who had been assuming the task of recruiting women and collecting funds."²⁹ Addressing al-Qusayir directly, al-Shihri added that "your mujahidin brothers... were hurt by what has happened to you."³⁰ He then urged AQAP's followers in the kingdom to "persist in gathering information, inciting the Muslims, collecting money, and forming practical cells to kidnap the Christians and the princes of Al Saud."³¹

²⁷ This assessment is the author's personal observation, which is consistent with the research of Hegghammer.

²⁸ Prince Nayif was quoted as saying in 2008, "Frankly speaking, I would like to say that the imams of mosques, with the exception of the two holy mosques, have not played their desired role (in the fight against extremism)." For details, see "Imams Fail in Their Desired Role: Naif," *Arab News*, October 17, 2008. In the months since then, Nayif has repeatedly stressed the important role of mosque imams in combating deviant thinking. See "Intellectual Security: Naif briefed on Role of Khateeb," *Saudi Gazette*, May 10, 2010.

²⁹ Said al-Shihri issued the threat on an audiotape aired on al-Arabiya television on June 3, 2010.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

AQAP will attempt to deliver on its kidnapping threat to demonstrate its effectiveness. Targets are abundant. There are thousands of Saudi princes, and with 50,000 American and 30,000 British residents in the kingdom, there are also many Christians.

AQAP's "ambition is evident," said one Saudi-based diplomat. "It's immensely serious. The challenge for the Saudis now is to ensure that its capability to operate inside the kingdom is very low."³² That will not be easy considering the porous nature of the remote, mountainous Saudi-Yemen border and the inability of the Yemeni government, distracted by other concerns such as the southern secessionist movement and a failing economy, to engage AQAP more aggressively.

Interior Ministry spokesman al-Turki said that while al-Qa`ida is no longer "capable of waging a war" as it was in 2003, "the threat now is that it could be capable of planning and carrying out any atrocity—targeting oil facilities, residential compounds or targeting an official as they are threatening... This is their danger."

"We never say we've destroyed Al Qaeda and that we're okay," al-Turki added. "We say we have good control on our security situation. But this doesn't mean that anything [won't] happen. We're fully prepared for that."³³

Caryle Murphy is an independent journalist based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A former reporter for the Washington Post, she was awarded the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. She is the author of Passion For Islam.

³² Personal interview, Saudi diplomat, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

³³ Personal interview, General Mansur al-Turki, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 2010.

Assessing AQI's Resilience After April's Leadership Decapitations

By Myriam Benraad

IN APRIL 2010, the leaders of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) were killed in a joint U.S.-Iraqi raid. Abu Ayyub al-Masri (also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) and Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi died in Tharthar, Salah al-Din Province, marking a major setback for al-Qa`ida.¹ On June 2, U.S. Admiral Michael Mullen declared that AQI had been "devastated" by the killings.² In a related statement, the U.S. commander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, announced that Iraqi and U.S. forces had captured or killed 34 of the 42 known AQI leaders, in what he described as "the most significant blow to Al-Qaeda in Iraq since the beginning of the insurgency."³

In recent years, AQI's capacities have been considerably weakened. The death of its founding leader Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 was the first crucial blow to the jihadist organization, followed by the U.S. "surge" in 2007 and the mobilization of armed Sunni Arab tribes against its fighters. All of these successes deprived AQI from its main bases of support. According to official Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I) statistics, high-profile attacks are now at their lowest levels since the conflict began in 2003, and there has been a significant decrease in casualties among U.S. troops, Iraqi security forces (ISF) and civilians.⁴

Yet despite its recent setbacks, AQI will remain a viable organization for the foreseeable future. In a process that continued under the leadership of Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the terrorist group

¹ Abu Ayyub al-Masri was an Egyptian and the head of al-Qa`ida in Iraq. Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, an Iraqi, was the head of the Islamic State of Iraq, largely considered an AQI front group.

² Robert Burns, "Top US Officer: Al-Qaida in Iraq 'Devastated,'" Associated Press, June 6, 2010.

³ "Al Qaeda in Iraq 'Broken,' Odierno Says," United Press International, June 7, 2010; "Odierno: Iraq Moves Toward Stability, US Drawdown on Track," Voice of America, June 4, 2010.

⁴ "Attacks in Iraq Down, Al-Qaeda Arrests Up: US General," Agence France-Presse, June 4, 2010.