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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.

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A Fight for the Spoils: The Future Role of Syria's Armed Groups

By Stephen Starr

A Syrian rebel in the city of Aleppo on August 18, 2012. - Bulent Kilic/AFP/Getty Images

On August 6, 2012, President Bashar al-Assad's prime minister defected, dealing another blow to the Syrian leader's efforts to preserve his regime. Since the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, the strong central authority the al-Assad regime built and institutionalized during four decades has been rapidly crumbling. Yet the factors that made Libya's uprising succeed—a united and organized opposition, sparse population patterns and a weak army—are absent in Syria. The country becomes more militarized after each passing week, with various, competing rebel groups gaining more leverage and territory—and even reportedly committing their own massacres.[1] For now, the rebels—habitually termed the Free Syrian Army[2] (FSA)—mostly operate independently on tribal and geographic bases, and interaction between them, violent or cooperative, is for the most part relatively rare.[3] Jihadist groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, have also definitively entered the fray.

The role and future actions of the milieu of armed groups operating in Syria is sure to affect the shape of the country following the seemingly inevitable fall of

1 "Rebels 'Execute' Regime Loyalists in Aleppo," al-Jazira, August 1, 2012.

2 The Free Syrian Army is less an army, and more a series of armed groups operating independently across the country. Although in propaganda videos groups claim to be part of the FSA, in reality their chain of command stops at a local commander.

3 In Aleppo this summer, rebels from all over northern Syria joined in the fight against government forces in one of the only examples of a large-scale coordinated military campaign against the Syrian army. Rebel groups regularly bicker over funding and weapons. See Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Al-Qaida Turns Tide for Rebels in Battle for Eastern Syria," *Guardian*, July 30, 2012.

al-Assad's regime. Rebel units number in the dozens. Some are secular, while others call for an Islamic state in Syria. All are vying for weapons and territory. For now, what unites them is their shared goal of defeating the Syrian regime. This mutual interest will likely change if the regime falls.

Conversely, the future role played by those who fill the ranks of the government's roving *shabiha* gangs is also troubling. Infamous for their brutality mostly upon civilians in dissenting areas, the largely Alawite *shabiha* have been successful in sowing sectarian divisions among Syrians by attacking Sunni civilians.[4] As the central authority controlling the *shabiha* breaks down, the role these government militias play will be significant in the future.

If the al-Assad regime falls, these heavily armed, battle-hardened fighters will likely destabilize the country going forward. As a result, the post-Assad authorities will face a number of challenges. This article will assess the evolution of the FSA and what role the group will serve in a post-Assad Syria. It also addresses the challenges of the *shabiha*, determining whether the pro-Assad militias will return to their mountain villages or attempt to mount a counterinsurgency against a new FSA-organized government in Damascus.

The Evolution of the Free Syrian Army

The FSA is largely a collection of defected Syrian army soldiers and local civilians who have grouped together to fight the Bashar al-Assad government in their immediate neighborhoods and towns. The FSA is not a unified entity, and as a result there will be difficulties restructuring or disbanding these forces in a new political system.[5] Many FSA battalions are clan- and tribe-based, organized around a specific geographical area—such as a town, village or city district. Fighters answer to local commanders—often a respected member of the local community—not to a central command.[6] In many respects, this operational system has worked to their advantage in a guerrilla war against the Syrian army.

At its core, the rebel movement is not manifestly Islamist. Religious rhetoric has been a feature of war rebels seeking inspiration for centuries. Against a far more powerful army, the rebels turn to God for inspiration and to find meaning in continuing their fight under such testing conditions. As the regime upped the ferocity of its attacks on both civilians and armed opposition elements, the rebels have turned more religious in their rhetoric.

Limited public backing from Western states makes the rebel movement often appear a product of, or at least sponsored by, Gulf states Saudi Arabia and Qatar, two conservative and undemocratic countries. Many secular Syrians, particularly in the major cities, fear Gulf influence in the country and believe these states are attempting to destabilize Syria and replace the al-Assad regime with an Islamist government. Indeed, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have openly committed financial support and weapons to the rebels.[7] This is a version of events that also worries Syria's non-Sunni minorities, who compose around a quarter of the country's population.[8]

Violent Islamist elements, however, have attempted to hijack the uprising, and jihadists are beginning to puncture through the rebel movement.[9] Militant groups such as al-Qa`ida and Jabhat al-Nusra are confirmed to be operating in Syria, once a country with an extraordinarily competent security apparatus.[10] The Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that excites significant fear among Syria's minority groups, reportedly now has fighters on the ground.[11]

The capture and consequent release of two Western photographers held by foreign fighters inside the Syrian-Turkish border post of Bab al-Hawa confirms past suspicions about foreign jihadists.[12] Up to 100 fighters had camped inside the Syrian border in July, and evidence of al-Qa`ida activity in other parts of the country grows each week.[13]

"Divisions between rebel leaders and the political opposition—such as the Syrian National Council—are likely to destabilize the political climate post-Assad as neither are united and both feel it is their right to govern the country."

Moreover, foreign fighters have recently been confirmed in Syria fighting government forces. The *Irish Times* reported the presence of a number of Libyan fighters outside the northwestern town of Idlib in July. An Irish-Libyan revolutionary, Mehdi al-Harati, has been operating a militant group in Syria since last spring and has introduced an Islamic undertone to the Syrian revolt.[14] A Syrian fighter working with this Libyan-led brigade, the Liwa al-Umma, said he wanted to

4 Christoph Reuter and Abd al-Kadher Adhun, "Searching for the Truth Behind the Houla Massacre," *Der Spiegel*, July 23, 2012.

5 As of August 4, 2012, 10 FSA military bureaus were operating inside Syria. See Rania Abouzeid, "Going Rogue: Bandits and Criminal Gangs Threaten Syria's Rebellion," *Time Magazine*, July 30, 2012.

6 Although the Syrian National Council signed a memorandum of understanding with the rebel leadership in March 2012, in reality FSA rebels do not take combat orders from the SNC.

7 Justin Vela, "Arab States Arm Rebels as UN Talks of Syrian Civil War," *Independent*, June 13, 2012.

8 Stephen Starr, *Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising* (London/New York: Hurst/Columbia University Press, 2012).

9 See the YouTube video apparently showing al-Qa`ida operatives after taking control of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in northwest Syria, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYfsVOMyAms.

10 Abdul-Ahad; Neil MacFarquhar and Hwaida Saad, "As Syrian War Drags On, Jihadists Take Bigger Role," *New York Times*, July 29, 2012.

11 Ruth Sherlock and Richard Spencer, "Muslim Brotherhood Establishes Militia Inside Syria," *Daily Telegraph*, August 3, 2012.

12 Rod Norland, "Syrian Rebels Free 2 Journalists After Weeklong Ordeal With Islamic Extremists," *New York Times*, July 27, 2012; Rania Abuzeid, "Meet the Islamist Militants Fighting Alongside Syria's Rebels," *Time Magazine*, July 26, 2012.

13 Ibid.

14 Mary Fitzgerald, "Syrian Minds Focused on Likely Outcome at Aleppo," *Irish Times*, July 28, 2012.

take part in their operations because they are "fighting for truth and justice with an Islamic background."[15]

As the violence surges and the regime endures, the growth and spread in jihadist activity will likely expand. Islamists will begin to claim responsibility for military gains against the regime and consequently assert that they have a genuine stake in shaping Syria's future.

What constitutes today's FSA leadership, where it exists, will likely become the central military figures in a new Syrian political system if for no other reason than it is they who fought and died to oust the al-Assad regime (and not the traditional political opposition watching events from the safety of other countries).[16] Divisions between rebel leaders and the political opposition—such as the Syrian National Council (SNC)—are likely to destabilize the political climate post-Assad as neither are united and both feel it is their right to govern the country.

The perfunctory head of the FSA, Riad al-Asaad, is unlikely to hold much sway in a post-Assad Syria since he has spent much of the revolution in Turkey rather than fighting regime troops inside the country. He is a figurehead; few FSA members answer to him today, and they are unlikely to in the future.

The Shabiha

The central kernel in the regime's attempts at maintaining control of power centers is the deployment and actions of the government's militias, the *shabiha*. Originally a small group of men—some from the president's extended family—who operated in trafficking and smuggling in and around the coastal city of Latakia on Syria's northwest coast during the 1980s and 1990s,[17] the *shabiha* today number in the thousands.

Many in the newly rejuvenated gangs are career criminals whose loyalty was bought through a series of "political prisoner amnesties" enacted by the regime over the course of the uprising.[18] The *shabiha* are mostly drawn from the Alawite sect to which President Bashar al-Assad belongs and have roamed town centers and surrounded mosques at prayer time since the uprising's beginning. They have been accused of atrocities in the towns of Houla, Tremseh and Qubeir in May, June and July 2012.

As of December 2011, one respected source claimed that *shabiha* members were reportedly being paid 50,000 Syrian pounds ($800) per month in cash that came from Iran via Hizb Allah in neighboring Lebanon.[19] If true, Iranian meddling in Syria illustrates yet another difficulty facing any post-Assad government. The possible role played by the *shabiha* gangs after the inevitable demise of the al-Assad regime is difficult to quantify and chart. If regional supporters Hizb Allah and Iran provide them with financial backing, however, then they will be a destructive force during the reorganization of the Syrian state. With outside backing, the *shabiha* could mount a counterinsurgency, possibly resulting in a long-term civil conflict.

Until now, direct confrontations between rebel forces and pro-regime militias have been rare. In the absence of a central authority (the Syrian armed forces) controlling important cities, the future may bring many such clashes. As the regime seeks to consolidate its control of urban centers such as Damascus and Aleppo, Syria's open countryside will be free for *shabiha* and rebels to operate and fight each other.

The Syrian government's stockpile of chemical weapons and missiles remains secure. Yet if al-Assad falls, an organized transfer of government weapons and security installations to a new authority appears unlikely.[20] The possibility of these weapons falling into rebel, *shabiha* or Islamist hands is a growing prospect.

Controlling a Multifaceted Powder Keg

The bloodshed and destruction that has engulfed Syria for the past 17 months means that a successful revolution will not bring the stability seen in Egypt or Libya. As such, it will require far more international involvement in peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. A UN-backed monitoring presence to oversee the internal workings and developments of the nascent government will be crucial to maintain law and order. Furthermore, an international peacekeeping force that protects against the possibility of reprisals and sectarian fighting in regions where tensions between Alawite and Sunni towns exist may be necessary. Few international actors want Alawite militias roaming western Syria and Lebanon, destabilizing an already volatile neighborhood.

For Syrians themselves, amnesties and statements that assure the safety of Alawite civilians will be essential in helping eliminate further inter-religious strife. Dialogue between rebel leaders and the political opposition that includes, among others, the SNC, over the makeup and formation of a new Syrian army and government must be fruitful. A nationwide arms dump program that incentivizes rebels and *shabiha* militias to hand in weapons will help Syria on the road to a more peaceful future. Of course, none of these measures are guaranteed to take place. As more Syrians die, piecing the country back together becomes increasingly difficult. As long as the al-Assad regime remains in control of militias and key army divisions—which looks likely for at least several more months—Syria's future looks dark.

Stephen Starr is a freelance journalist and author who lived in Syria from 2007 to February 2012. His writings have appeared in the Los Angeles Times, *the* Washington Post, *ForeignPolicy.com,* USA Today, *the* Guardian *and the* London Times. *His book,* Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising, *was released in North America on August 14, 2012.*

15 Ibid.

16 Joshua Landis, "Syria's Next Leader: Will He Come from the SNC or the Militias?" SyriaComment, February 16, 2012.

17 Ahed al-Hendi, "The Structure of Syria's Repression," *Foreign Affairs*, May 3, 2011.

18 "1,180 Detainees Involved in Events in Syria Released," Syrian Arab News Agency, November 15, 2011; Starr.

19 Personal interview, civilian familiar with their activities, Damascus, Syria, December 2011. This information, however, has not been corroborated by other sources.

20 John Reed, "What's Up with Syria's MANPADS?" *Foreign Policy*, July 27, 2012.

Defining Cyberterrorism: Capturing a Broad Range of Activities in Cyberspace

By Jonalan Brickey

A 1999 STUDY PREPARED for the Defense Intelligence Agency and produced at the Naval Postgraduate School began with a disclaimer stating, "cyberterror is not a threat. At least not yet, and not for a while."[1] Nevertheless, the authors warned, "cyberterror is indeed coming."[2] Around the same time, Richard Clarke, who at that time was the White House special adviser for cyberspace security, preferred use of the term "infowarfare" instead of cyberterrorism. More than a decade later, he still rejected the word cyberterrorism on the basis that it is a red herring that "conjure[s] up images of Bin Ladin waging war from his cave"; he did, however, caution that there may be such a term as cyberterrorism in the future.[3]

Barry Collin first introduced the term cyberterrorism in the 1980s, although just as experts have not formed a consensus definition of terrorism, there is still no unifying definition of cyberterrorism.[4] Cyberterrorism is an even more opaque term than terrorism, adding another layer to an already contentious concept. Cyber[5] events in general are often misunderstood by the public and erroneously reported by the media. People tend to use the terms cyberwar, cyberterrorism, cybercrime, and hacktivism interchangeably, although there are important, sometimes subtle, differences.[6]

The purpose of this article is to propose a comprehensive definition of cyberterrorism that captures the full range of how terrorists have used the internet in the past and how they will likely use more robust cyber capabilities in the future. This article will first look at clusters of cyberterrorism graphed according to methods and targets; it will then describe the clusters in more detail and provide examples. Finally, the article will offer a new definition of cyberterrorism incorporating these clusters.

Three Clusters of Cyberterrorism

Figure 1 depicts the activities associated with the various cyberterrorism terms as described in the literature: online jihad, virtual jihad, electronic jihad, and pure cyberterrorism. While the chart is not a quantitative plotting of the activities, it is a qualitative approximation based on an understanding of the concepts along the x (targets) and y (methods) axes. Also, since terrorists are motivated by the pursuit of political goals, this two-dimensional graph intersects a "motivation" plane characterized by the pursuit of political goals. Some of these same activities may be carried out by other actors with different motivations, but they would appear in a different plane.[7]

The x-axis represents the targets of cyberspace[8] operations, spanning the cognitive, virtual, and physical domains. Cognitive targets are human minds—the cognitive faculties that enable thinking, reasoning, and judgment. Virtual targets are cyber manifestations of physical objects, such as organizations or people.

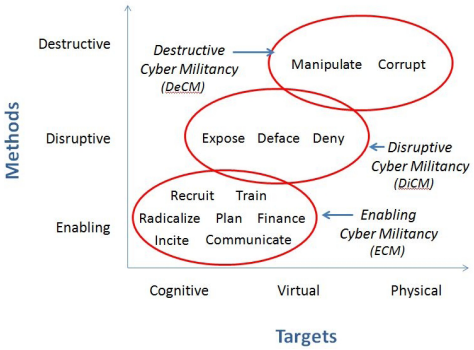

Figure 1. Clusters of cyberterrorism.

This includes individual and organizational websites, which allow virtual interactions. Finally, the physical domain consists of what exists in the natural, physical world (as opposed to the man-made, virtual world).

The y-axis in Figure 1 represents the methods of cyber activity: enabling, disruptive, and destructive. The range of the methods variable is similarly described by General Keith Alexander, National Security Agency director and commander of U.S. Cyber Command, who remarked that cyber attacks against U.S. information networks started as exploitative before becoming disruptive, but now such attacks are moving into the realm of destructive.[9]

The activities in Figure 1 form three clusters that represent different types of cyber militancy at the intersection of cyberspace and terrorism.

Enabling Cyber Militancy

The bottom-left grouping represents activities that are not directly associated with operational acts of traditional terrorism; however, they play a key supporting role in facilitating attacks in the cognitive and virtual domains. Enabling cyber militancy (ECM) activities include recruiting, inciting, radicalizing, financing, training, planning, and communicating. Research on terrorist use of the internet, often described as online jihad or virtual jihad, has revealed the many (similar) benefits that al-Qa`ida and other terrorists seek to achieve through the virtual world, including recruiting, radicalizing,

1 Bill Nelson, Rodney Choi, Michael Iacobucci, Mark Mitchell, and Greg Gagnon, *Cyberterror: Prospects and Implications* (Monterey, CA: Center for Study of Terrorism and Irregular Warfare, 1999).

2 Ibid.

3 Richard Clarke and Robert Knake, *Cyber War: The Next Threat to National Security and What to Do About It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

4 Barry Collin, "The Future of CyberTerrorism," Proceedings of the 11th Annual International Symposium on Criminal Justice Issues, The University of Illinois at Chicago, 1996.

5 The term cyber is commonly used as a synonym for computer, but it could also include other information communication technologies, people, and anything with the ability to interpret and act upon code.

6 The specific types of cyber attacks vary based on the motivation and affiliation of that attacker, as well as the type of target and attack techniques. For example, cyberwar is warfare conducted in the cyberspace domain between nation-states; cybercrime is crime committed by individuals or organizations via cyber tools; and hacktivism is the use of cyber by activists to voice dissent and support for a cause.

7 For example, cybercriminals may communicate with each other and plan operations, but that activity would appear along another plane represented by the motivation to pursue financial gain.

8 Cyberspace is defined in a draft U.S. military document (Joint Publication 3-12) as a global domain within the information environment consisting of the interdependent network of information technology infrastructures and associated data, including the internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers.

9 John T. Bennett, "NSA General on Cyberattacks: 'Probability for a Crisis Is Mounting,'" *U.S. News and World Report*, July 9, 2012.

financing, targeting, operational planning, and communicating.[10]

There are several definitions in the literature that broadly include these activities as acts of cyberterrorism, and some courts agree with this characterization. A key operative associated with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) conducted ECM-like activities in France in 2008 and 2009, leading to his conviction in 2012. Court documents described how Adlene Hicheur provided intellectual and logistical support to AQIM through the internet. His support included uploading pro-jihadist materials online, distributing encryption software to facilitate covert electronic communications, moderating a pro-jihadist website, and establishing virtual payment processes to finance AQIM operations.[11]

"The goal of terrorists using destructive cyber militancy is to manipulate computer code and corrupt information system functions to damage or destroy virtual and physical assets."

Actors committing ECM do not have to be motivated by religious ideals, although to fit in this category they must seek political change. ECM activities may enable terrorists to achieve their goals via traditional means—knives, guns, and bombs—or through cyber means, although they are not disruptive or destructive acts themselves that leverage the full potential of the cyberspace domain.

Disruptive Cyber Militancy

The center cluster includes exposing, defacing, and denying. Disruptive cyber militancy (DiCM) is similar to electronic jihad, a cyberterrorism term described as jihadist hacking designed to take down websites and disrupt the normal (cyber-dependent) lifestyle of Westerners, which relies on critical infrastructure supporting medical, utility, transportation, and especially financial systems. Like ECM, electronic jihad also includes less nefarious, more nuisance-minded activities such as web defacement, denial of service attacks,[12] and unauthorized access and disclosure of confidential (and oftentimes embarrassing) information.

At the outbreak of Syrian unrest in early 2012, Abu Hafs al-Sunni al-Sunni, a senior writer for jihadist websites and supporter of al-Qa`ida and mujahidin everywhere, proposed DiCM acts against the Syrian regime. In a detailed article posted online in February, al-Sunni enumerated several ways the mujahidin could attack the Bashar al-Assad regime.[13] He called on "skilled hackers like Red Virus, Omar OX, and other jihadi hackers" to conduct electronic jihad against the Syrian regime. These hackers have also been active in cyber attacks between Palestinian and Israeli supporters that have disrupted financial, transportation, and other business websites.

Destructive Cyber Militancy

The goal of terrorists using destructive cyber militancy (DeCM) is to manipulate computer code and corrupt information system functions to damage or destroy virtual and physical assets. Manipulating or corrupting information may, at a minimum, provide misinformation and induce confusion and loss of confidence in critical systems. In the worst case, DeCM may cause catastrophic effects on critical infrastructure, possibly resulting in death and destruction. DeCM activities are often described in the literature as pure cyberterrorism, which is the direct use of cyber hardware, software, and networks to create kinetic effects on par with traditional acts of terrorism, as opposed to merely using information communication technology in support of organizational communication and traditional terrorism.[14] Most experts in the field narrowly define cyberterrorism to include only the direct use of cyber capabilities, as opposed to ECM-like activities in support of terrorism.

Although there have been no destructive cyberterrorism attacks to date, terrorists may engage in DeCM to cause massive physical damage and economic disruption to critical infrastructure such as the power grid, fuel distribution and storage systems, public water sanitation systems, air traffic control systems, and financial systems (especially ATM networks). Many of these critical systems are either directly connected to the internet or indirectly accessible via removable media and out-of-band channels.[15] A 2011 al-Qa`ida video called upon cyber-savvy mujahidin to attack U.S. critical information systems by conducting

"One example of a possible DeCM event would be the destruction of a key natural gas pipeline, the flow of which is regulated by electronic industrial control systems."

10 Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2006); Bruce Hoffman, "Using the Web as a Weapon: The Internet as a Tool for Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism," testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment, November 6, 2007; Sajjan M. Gohel, "The Internet and its Role in Terrorist Recruitment and Operational Planning," *CTC Sentinel* 2:12 (2009).

11 "Judgment of 4 May 2012, Case No. 0926639036 of the Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris (14th Chamber/2)," Paris, France, 2012.

12 A denial of service (DoS) attack prevents the exchange of legitimate network data by overwhelming target computers with messages; a DoS attack may cause users to experience loss of connectivity to the internet and other network services.

13 Abu Hafs al-Sunni al-Sunni, "The Electronic Arm of al-Qa'ida Should Work to Topple Bashar," Shumukh al-Islam Network, February 16, 2012.

14 Sarah Gordon and Richard Ford, "Cyberterrorism?" *Computers and Security* 21:7 (2002): pp. 636-647.

15 Removable media, such as flash drives, enable automatic transfer of computer code from one network to another as users plug devices into computers physically connected to those networks, oftentimes inadvertently creating an electronic link between otherwise disconnected systems. An out-of-band channel is a network connection that is not typically used for routine communications; for example, system administrators may establish an out-of-band channel by using a dial-up telephone connection to conduct off-site maintenance.

an "information raid in the manner of the raids of September 11."[16] The video included translated interviews of cyber experts in the United States discussing how DeCM-like attacks may cause extensive damage to life-sustaining critical infrastructure. One example of a possible DeCM event would be the destruction of a key natural gas pipeline, the flow of which is regulated by electronic industrial control systems (ICS). These systems are vulnerable to hacking exploits, which could allow the manipulation of ICS functions such as a sudden increase in pipeline pressure, resulting in a large kinetic explosion.

"Although there have been no destructive cyberterrorism attacks to date, terrorists may engage in DeCM to cause massive physical damage and economic disruption to critical infrastructure."

A New Definition of Cyberterrorism

Bruce Hoffman defines terrorism as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change."[17] If one assumes for a moment that this was the accepted definition of terrorism, then the addition of cyber to this term results in a simple, though circular definition: cyberterrorism is the use of cyber to commit terrorism. Given the range of cyberterrorism activities described in the literature and depicted in the clusters shown in Figure 1, this simple definition can be expanded to: cyberterrorism is the use of cyber capabilities to conduct enabling, disruptive, and destructive militant operations in cyberspace to create and exploit fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change.

Conclusion

Current definitions for cyberterrorism range from narrow to broad, although most experts subscribe to the narrow definition of pure cyberterrorism. The definition proposed here includes three shades of cyberterrorism to capture the full range of cyber activities terrorists use or wish to employ in the pursuit of political goals. Such a definition in the hands of practitioners and academics may engender more granular research, debate, and potentially strategies to counter the threat stemming from the three different shades of cyberterrorism.

More work is needed to understand and assess the risk associated with cyberterrorism—threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences. Computer security experts routinely expose vulnerabilities in cyberspace; however, there is a paucity of research on cyberterrorism threats and potential consequences. The cyberterrorism definition proposed here is broad enough to give researchers a wider lens to study the cyber capabilities of terrorists across the full spectrum of cyberspace.

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16 "Electronic Jihad Video," al-Shabab, 2011, available at www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/?id=483eca14-3c0e-4a30-9038-f4bf4a1fad60.

17 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 40.

Pakistani Taliban Renew Attacks on Punjabi Heartland

By Arif Rafiq

AFTER AN EXTENDED pause, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) resumed attacks in Punjab, Pakistan's most populated, prosperous, and centrally-located province. The boldest attack was a complex operation on August 16, 2012, on Pakistan Air Force Base Minhas (PAF Minhas), located in the northern Punjab city of Kamra.[1] Two additional attacks occurred in July, one of which was a drive-by shooting that killed seven Pakistani soldiers in the central Punjab city of Wazirabad.[2]

Pakistani counterterrorism intelligence and policing have improved in recent years at the federal level as well as in most provinces, including in Punjab. Nevertheless, a number of factors hinder the province's fight against terrorism, including a justice system ill-equipped to handle terrorism cases, poor prison security, aid to militants from a powerful Deobandi religious network, public antipathy toward military operations, and the absence of a clear-cut anti-jihadist strategy.

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province remain the primary targets of domestic terrorists in Pakistan. Yet attacks in Punjab could increase during the next few months due to TTP fear of impending military operations against it in North Waziristan Agency and as Islamabad proceeds in partnering with Washington on Afghanistan.[3] Attacks in Punjab are one of the most effective ways for the TTP to retaliate, sending a direct message to Pakistan's leadership and citizens.

1 "Taliban Carry Out Brazen Attack on Pakistan Base," Associated Press, August 16, 2012.

2 "Gunmen Kill Seven in Attack on Pakistan Military Camp," Reuters, July 9, 2012.

3 U.S.-Pakistan relations have improved since early July following Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's apology for the accidental killing of two dozen Pakistani soldiers in a U.S. raid on November 26, 2011. The Pakistan-based NATO supply route has reopened and high-level meetings between U.S. and Pakistani officials have resumed.

This article explains the significance of the August 16 attack on PAF Minhas as well as the difficulties in combating terrorism in Punjab Province.

A Preemptive Strike by the TTP in Punjab?

On August 16, 2012, nine militants—including six suicide attackers—launched a complex attack on PAF Minhas, located along Punjab's border with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The base, home to dozens of fighter jets and surveillance aircraft, was previously attacked by terrorists in 2009 when a suicide bomber blew himself up at the gate, killing eight people.[4]

The most recent attack lasted nearly six hours, with both the Pakistani military and the TTP stating that all nine terrorists were killed. An unnamed source told Pakistan's *Express Tribune* that the driver of the militants' vehicle escaped, a point that clashes with the official government narrative.[5] The militants were armed with hand and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), mines, and automatic weapons.[6] Local security personnel were aided by commandos from the Special Services Group (SSG) flown in from the Tarbela Ghazi airbase. Two Pakistani soldiers were killed, and RPG fire damaged a Saab-2000 Airborne Early Warning and Control plane.[7] This was the second attack in a year-and-a-half that targeted Pakistani aircraft, which are difficult for the government to replace without foreign financial assistance. On May 22, 2011, for example, the TTP launched a complex attack on the PAF Mehran naval base in Karachi, destroying two P3C Orion surveillance aircraft.[8]

"If Pakistan defers anti-TTP military operations in North Waziristan until next year, it could allow the TTP to conserve strength during the winter."

The TTP's show of strength took place on the 27th of Ramadan, which is the date Muslims believe most likely is Laylatul Qadr (The Night of Power), the holiest night in the month and the most probable night in which the Qur'an is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The importance of this date in the Islamic tradition suggests that the TTP aimed to send a message to its members, sympathizers, and other Pakistanis that the execution of a spectacular attack on this day was demonstration of its "righteousness." Additionally, the TTP likely saw the night as providing an opportunity to exploit security weaknesses. The attacks took place after midnight on a holy night when many Muslims stay awake for much or all of the night to perform extra prayers and supplication. As a result, base personnel were reportedly dispersed praying at the time of the attack.[9]

The TTP stated that the attack was conducted to exact revenge for the killings of former TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud and former al-Qa`ida chief Usama bin Ladin.[10] In another interview, spokesman Ihsanullah described the attack on the airbase as revenge for the aerial bombing of the tribal areas by the Pakistani air force.[11]

Beyond revenge and symbolism, there could be broader strategic objectives behind the TTP's attack. The resumption of attacks against the state in Punjab comes after Pakistan announced the restoration of the NATO supply route from Pakistan to Afghanistan in early July. Additionally, the summer of 2012 is effectively the last fighting season with the "surge" troops present in Afghanistan—perhaps a final opportunity for the United States and Pakistan to strike militants in North Waziristan with a "hammer and anvil" approach. The TTP is possibly retaliating against the Pakistani state for restoring cooperation with the United States and demonstrating that Islamabad will have to pay high costs in its heartland if it expands operations in the North Waziristan tribal area where TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud is believed to be based.[12] If Pakistan defers anti-TTP military operations in North Waziristan until next year, it could allow the TTP to conserve strength during the winter. Indeed, in August, as the NATO supply route reopened, Hakimullah Mehsud reportedly ordered an increase in terrorist attacks in Punjab, focusing on its largest city, Lahore. Mehsud is alleged to have disbursed over $260,000 for attacks on a Pakistan Air Force base and other government installations in Lahore, a considerable distance away from Kamra.[13]

"The TTP is possibly retaliating against the Pakistani state for restoring cooperation with the United States and demonstrating that Islamabad will have to pay high costs in its heartland if it expands operations in the North Waziristan tribal area."

Some observers point toward other TTP-affiliated jihadists as having organized the attack. The most notable suspect is Adnan Rashid, a former technician at PAF Minhas who was arrested in 2004 for alleged involvement in an assassination attempt on then-President Pervez Musharraf.[14] Rashid was freed from prison in the city of Bannu in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in a large, daring escape along with more than

4 "Taliban Claim Attack on Minhas Base; Nine Militants Killed," *Dawn*, August 16, 2012.

5 Irfan Ghauri, "Lingering Questions: Is Something Being Hidden about the Militants' Approach?" *Express Tribune*, August 17, 2012.

6 Shakeel Anjum, "Nine Militants Killed in Raid on Kamra Airbase," *The News International*, August 17, 2012.

7 Hanif Khalid, "Damaged Awacs Aircraft Repairable," *The News International*, August 17, 2012.

8 Faraz Khan, "PNS Mehran: Official Naval Complaint at Odds with Ministry," *Express Tribune*, May 25, 2011.

9 Ibid.

10 Shaheryar Popalzai and Nabil Ansari, "Tehreek-i-Taliban Claim 'Revenge' Attack on Kamra Airbase," *Express Tribune*, August 16, 2012.

11 Anjum.

12 "Targeting Punjab: TTP Chief Wants Increase in Attacks," *Express Tribune*, August 1, 2012.

13 Ibid.

14 "Taliban's Attack on PAF Base Kamra: Pity the Nation Whose Security is in the Hands of Dangerous Duffers," Let Us Build Pakistan, August 17, 2012.

200 other inmates.[15] The raid focused on Rashid, who reportedly used three cell phones, got married, and fathered a child while in one of Pakistan's notoriously lax prisons.[16] During his incarceration, Rashid was also reportedly in contact with Dr. Aqeel, who is accused of plotting the complex attack on the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters in 2009.[17]

"A failing judicial and prison system emboldens militants and either results in their undeserved release from detention or allows them unwarranted access to the public."

In a video released shortly after his escape, Rashid is shown in the North Waziristan cities of Mir Ali and Miran Shah, near where Hakimullah Mehsud is reportedly based.[18]

Pakistani intelligence reports suggested that attacks in the month of August were being planned, but the reports were conflicting and inconclusive. Reports preceding the PAF Minhas attack pointed to two different TTP cells based in Miran Shah, one led by Qari Aslam and the other led by Qari Yasin, and possibly even the Ilyas Kashmiri Group.[19] According to one report, the PAF Minhas attack as well as two other smaller-scale attacks in Punjab, including an August 1 attack on a fruit stall in Lahore, were in response to the killing of militant leader Ghaffar Qaiserani by Punjab police.[20] Qaiserani was killed in an encounter with Multan police on August 1, 2012.[21]

Prior to the killing of Qaiserani, the TTP conducted two major attacks in Punjab in the month of July. On July 9, it executed a drive-by shooting, brazenly killing seven Pakistani soldiers who were camped in the central Punjab city of Wazirabad while on a search and rescue mission.[22] Ironically, a rally of the Lashkar-i-Tayyiba-led Defense of Pakistan Council was close by.[23] It is possible that the perpetrators of these killings hid among the other militants and religious party activists. Separately, on July 12, TTP terrorists stormed a building housing Pakistani police cadets and killed nine people.[24]

The Fight for Punjab

Pakistan's Pashtun belt bordering Afghanistan has borne the brunt of the post-9/11 insurgent and terrorist wave. Yet given the size of the province, the fight in Punjab is almost as important as the one in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

Punjab is home to Lashkar-i-Tayyiba as well as the various Punjabi Taliban groups.[25] The Punjab police have made some important arrests in the past year. In November 2011, the Punjab police arrested 17 suspected TTP commanders.[26] Qari Azmat, the mastermind of many attacks in Lahore, was apprehended in July.[27] In early August, five alleged TTP members were arrested in the southern Punjab city of Multan.[28] Intelligence gathering and police training have improved, but Punjab-based politicians are reluctant to muster public support for the war and instead defer to and even feed into the conservative tendencies of the urban Punjab populace. In 2010, Shahbaz Sharif, the powerful chief minister of Punjab, asked the Taliban for mercy and to spare his province from violence.[29] Sharif said, "If the Taliban are also fighting for the same cause [i.e., opposing Musharraf's policies and foreign interference in Pakistani politics], then they should not carry out acts of terror in Punjab."

A failing judicial and prison system emboldens militants and either results in their undeserved release from detention or allows them unwarranted access to the public. Malik Ishaq, a self-confessed culprit behind the murder of many Shi`a, was acquitted on 34 out of 44 murder counts and released on bail on the remaining 10.[30] He once again openly calls for the murder of Shi`a and rebellion against the government in public speeches. Much like Adnan Rashid, Omar Saeed Sheikh, who was allegedly involved in a number of plots, including the murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, is said to have had access to three mobile phones, six batteries, and 18 SIM cards while in prison.[31] In 2008, he managed to call Pervez Musharraf's personal cell phone and threaten his life.[32]

"Militancy is bolstered by religious, social, and political networks in Punjab—most notably, the spread of Deobandism and conservative nationalist politics."

15 Fida Adeel et al., "Prison Break: Taliban Attack Bannu Jail, Nearly 400 Inmates Escape," *Express Tribune*, April 15, 2012.

16 Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, "Pakistan's New Most Wanted: A Short Sketch of Adnan Rasheed," *Militant Leadership Monitor* 3:5 (2012); "Reforming Pakistan's Prison System," International Crisis Group, October 12, 2011.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Asad Kharal, "Pre-Warned: Attack was Expected," *Express Tribune*, August 17, 2012.

20 Ibid.

21 "Alleged Terrorist Killed in DG Khan," *The News International*, August 2, 2012.

22 "Gunmen Attack Army Camp, Kill Seven," Agence France-Presse, July 9, 2012.

23 Arif Rafiq, "The Emergence of the Difa-e-Pakistan Islamist Coalition," *CTC Sentinel* 5:3 (2012).

24 "Taliban Claim Lahore Attack Killing Nine Personnel," *Dawn*, July 12, 2012.

25 The "Punjabi Taliban" is a generic term that refers to Tehrik-i-Taliban Punjab as well as splinter groups emerging from the anti-Shi`a Lashkar-i-Jhangvi as well as the once Kashmir-focused Jaysh-i-Muhammad and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami.

26 "Punjab Police Arrest 17 Suspected Militants from Various Cities," *Express Tribune*, November 17, 2011.

27 "'Mastermind' of Several Bomb Attacks in Lahore Arrested," Press Trust of India, July 8, 2012.

28 "5 Alleged TTP Men Arrested in Multan," *Express Tribune*, August 4, 2012.

29 Zeeshan Haider, "Punjab Minister Asks for Mercy from Taliban, Earns Woman's Scorn," Reuters, March 17, 2010.

30 Owais Raza, "Sectarian Clashes: LeJ Chief Malik Ishaq Placed Under House Arrest," *Express Tribune*, September 22, 2011.

31 "Plot to Kill Musharraf Unearthed," Geo TV, December 18, 2008.

32 Ibid.

Rather than directing their focus on threats within, many Pakistanis are pointing their fingers outward. Hamid Mir, a popular television talk show host, singled out the *New York Times'* Pakistan bureau chief Declan Walsh for allegedly following the CIA's agenda after he suggested that PAF Minhas stored some of the country's nuclear weapons.[33]

Popular support for counterinsurgency operations is also waning, dropping from 53% in 2009 to 32% in 2012.[34] Only 49% of those polled in Punjab Province see the Taliban as a threat, compared to 94% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.[35] The decline in attacks seems to have reversed public support for the war, but rising anti-American sentiment, growing economic troubles, and overall war fatigue could also be factors.

Conclusion

In September 2012, Pakistan could launch military operations in North Waziristan to target the TTP before the end of the current fighting season this winter.[36] Direct operations against the Haqqani network, based in the same tribal area, appear unlikely. The Pakistani military has restricted counterinsurgency operations to militants that primarily attack the Pakistani state—with reasonable effectiveness. In Malakand Division and much of FATA, the TTP no longer serves as the de-facto government. Moreover, the multiple intelligence reports received about a potential threat to PAF Minhas demonstrate that Pakistani intelligence networks are active and working. The inability of the base attackers to penetrate deep into the base, destroy, and kill large numbers of personnel point toward an improvement in security of high-profile targets—a marked contrast to the military's failure to secure the PNS Mehran naval base in May 2011.

The TTP umbrella organization has splintered into smaller factions that often rival one another.[37] Funding for the organization has reportedly dried up, possibly resulting in less spectacular attacks. Still, the TTP has shown great resilience. It continues to operate in both North and South Waziristan as well as Dir, Chitral, and adjacent safe havens in Afghanistan—and it often reminds Punjab that it still exists through violence.

Pakistan faces a long-term challenge from militancy and terrorism, which is not restricted to the border regions with Afghanistan. Militancy is bolstered by religious, social, and political networks in Punjab—most notably, the spread of Deobandism and conservative nationalist politics. Rather than looking to face the threat within, the urban Punjab populace is directing its support toward anti-war politicians like Imran Khan, who call for a quick, negotiated settlement with Pakistani jihadists. Based on polling data, Punjab's urban middle class is largely averting their eyes from the threat, hoping that terrorism and radicalism in Pakistan were caused by the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and will end when U.S. forces depart the region.[38]

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33 "Capital Talk," Geo TV, August 16, 2012. Hamid Mir said, "Now if any Pakistani journalist expressed an opinion that was according to the line of the ISI or the army, they would say that he is an ISI agent. But if Declan Walsh is following Leon Panetta's line, then we cannot say that he is a CIA agent, because if we were to do so, it would infringe upon his journalistic freedom." This translation was made by the author.

34 "Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S.," Pew Research Center, June 27, 2012.

35 Ibid.

36 "Pakistan Military Plans to Open New Front: Panetta," Associated Press, August 14, 2012.

37 Kathy Gannon, "Expert: Pakistan Taliban are 'Weak and Divided,'" Associated Press, December 4, 2011.

38 "Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S."

The Strategic Limitations of Boko Haram in Southern Nigeria

By Jacob Zenn

ON JULY 30, 2009, Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf was killed while in custody of Nigerian security forces in Maiduguri, Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria.[1] On August 9, Boko Haram's new leader announced in a written statement that Yusuf's ideas would "live on forever" and that Boko Haram would begin a series of bombings in the "evil cities" of Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt, all in southern Nigeria. He stated that Boko Haram's "Islamic revolution" was not limited to the northern states and that the southern states, "especially the Yoruba, Igbo and Ijaw infidels," would become Boko Haram's immediate target.[2]

As Nigeria is split between a predominantly Muslim north, where Boko Haram originates and primarily operates, and a predominantly Christian south, attacks against Christians in southern Nigeria would spread instability to the south. Boko Haram attacks on churches in the religiously mixed Middle Belt in the first half of 2012 have already led to retaliation by Christians against Muslims in that region and heightened the prospects for a religious civil war in the country.[3] In addition, the insecurity caused by Boko Haram attacks in the south, including kidnappings or sabotage, would affect the country's economy because all of Nigeria's oil reserves, which account for more than 90% of the country's export earnings and 80% of government revenues, are in the southern zones.[4]

1 The moments before Yusuf's death were recorded on a cellular phone and posted on YouTube. See "Boko Haram Leader Muhammad Yusuf Interrogation Before his Execution by Nigerian Security Agents," August 3, 2009, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePpUvfTXY7w.

2 "Boko Haram Resurrects, Declares Total Jihad," *Vanguard*, August 14, 2009. The Yorubas, Igbos and Ijaws are the three largest ethnicities in southern Nigeria.

3 "Nigeria Tightens Curfew on 'Middle Belt' Area," al-Jazira, July 9, 2012.

4 Nigeria is unofficially divided into six geopolitical zones, with all 36 of the country's states and Abuja Federal Capital Territory falling into one of these zones. The geopolitical zones do not represent ethnic or religious ho-

An attack in southern Nigeria would also render a psychological victory for Boko Haram because it would show that the group could strike anywhere in the country and that Lagos, Nigeria's economic hub and Africa's most populous city, is in Boko Haram's targeting range.

Following Boko Haram's August 9 threat on the south, the group did not carry out any successful attacks in southern Nigeria. In fact, all of the approximately 500 Boko Haram attacks recorded since 2009 were carried out in the country's northern zones.[5] During this period, Boko Haram expanded its operations from its original bases in Yobe and Borno states in the far northeast to North-Central zone's commercial capital of Kano and North-West zone's traditional capital of Sokoto, and to the Middle Belt states of Plateau, Kaduna and Kogi, but the threats to attack the south were never realized.[6]

A map of Nigeria.

As this article will detail, there is still only speculation about Boko Haram's ability to strike southern Nigeria. There is, however, growing certainty about Boko Haram's infiltration of North-Central zone's Kogi State, which could serve as a "staging point" for operations deeper into southern Nigeria.[7] Interrogations of captured Boko Haram leaders in 2012 have also shed light on internal divisions in Boko Haram that explain some of the group's practical motivations for attacking the south beyond the rhetoric of public statements.

Internal Tensions

Suleiman Mohammed, an ethnic Yoruba, was arrested in Kano on May 11, 2012, with 10 IEDs and thousands of rounds of ammunition in his home.[8] He was a commander for Boko Haram operations in his native South-West zone and confessed to planning attacks at strategic targets in Lagos, including a five-star hotel, Tafawa Balewa Square, churches and markets, and a bank. He revealed that Boko Haram does not want to limit itself to an "ethnic agenda" and be perceived as working for the interests of the Hausas, who are the majority ethnic group in northern Nigeria, or any other ethnic group.[9]

This came less than four months after Abu Qaqa, a Boko Haram spokesman and Shura Council member, was captured in January 2012. Abu Qaqa revealed that ethnic Kanuris, who are the majority ethnic group only in Borno State, have been selling out members of other ethnicities, including Abu Qaqa, an ethnic Ebira from Kogi State.[10] Among the reasons why northern elites, who are mostly Hausas and Fulanis, have rejected Boko Haram is that they perceive Kanuris as the dominant ethnic group within Boko Haram.[11] An attack on southern Nigeria, according to Suleiman Mohammed, would show that Boko Haram is a "national movement" with an "Islamic consciousness" and unite the various Muslim ethnic groups in the country. He also stated that attacks in the south would divert the attention of the security forces in the north and relieve pressure on Boko Haram members there, while also helping Boko Haram prove its worth to southern sponsors.[12]

Another Boko Haram leader from the north, Kabiru Sokoto, masterminded the vehicle bombing of Saint Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, Niger State, on Christmas Day 2011, which killed more than 35 people.[13] He had been on the police intelligence's list of Boko Haram suspects before the attack and was monitored by the police while scouting targets on Snake Island,

mogeneity and are broadly accepted in political discourse by almost all Nigerians. The six geopolitical zones are: North-Central (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and Abuja Federal Capital Territory); North-East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe); North-West (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara); South-East (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo); South-South (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers); South-West (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo). For the purposes of this article, "northern Nigeria" will refer to the country's three northern zones and "southern Nigeria" will refer to the country's three southern zones.

5 See "Terrorist Incidents Attributed to Boko Haram, 2009-2011," Institute for the Study of Violent Groups, 2011. This study records 271 attacks during those three years. Since attacks have escalated in 2011 and 2012, 500 attacks is an appropriate estimate at present. Most attacks have targeted police stations, banks, poker and beer halls, universities and schools, and political leaders and, more recently, media houses and churches. Approximately 1,500 people have been killed in these attacks.

6 Muhammad Bello et al., "Four Killed in First Boko Haram Attack on Sokoto," ThisDayLive, July 31, 2012; Isaac Abrak, "Nigeria Church Bombings Kill 19, Spark Reprisals," Reuters, June 17, 2012. Sokoto, the seat of the traditional caliphate in Nigeria, had enjoyed relative peace despite a threat by Boko Haram to attack the state in 2011. On July 30, 2012, Boko Haram fighters set off twin bomb blasts in the capital city of Sokoto, including a suicide vehicle bombing at the zonal police headquarters, and engaged policemen in a gunfight in which two Boko Haram members were killed. On January 23, 2012, Boko Haram shattered any sense of peace in Kano when it killed more than 200 people in a day-long series of attacks. Among other attacks in the Middle Belt region, on June 17, 2012, Boko Haram suicide vehicle bombers attacked three churches in Zaria, Kaduna State, killing 19 people and sparking reprisals by Christians against Muslims. According to one report, "After the bombings, Christian youths blocked the highway leading south out of Kaduna to the capital Abuja, pulling Muslims out of cars and killing them." On June 10, 2012, Boko Haram attacked one church in Jos, Plateau State, and one church in Biu, Borno State. These church attacks were all carried out on Sunday when services were being held.

7 Kogi is in the North-Central zone and is the only state in the country that borders on three geopolitical zones as well as Abuja: South-South, South-East and South-West. Okene is only 20 miles to the border of South-South zone and 30 miles to the border of South-West zone.

8 Ibrahim Garba, "Nigeria Soldiers Arrest Boko Haram Commander," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 11, 2012; "Captive Ethnic Yoruba Boko Haram Kingpin Says 'We Planned To Invade Lagos, Onitsha, Ibadan, Enugu and Warri Too'; Says 'Terrorists Feeling The Impact Of The Security Crackdown,'" Beegeagle's Blog, May 17, 2012.

9 Ibid.

10 Ike Abonyi and Ibrahim Shuaibu, "Nigeria: Qaqa - Boko Haram is Under Duress, Divided," AllAfrica.com, February 7, 2012.

11 James J.F. Forest, "Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria," JSOU Reports 12-5, May 2012, p. 84.

12 Garba; "Captive Ethnic Yoruba Boko Haram Kingpin Says 'We Planned To Invade Lagos, Onitsha, Ibadan, Enugu and Warri Too'; Says 'Terrorists Feeling The Impact Of The Security Crackdown."

13 "Terror: 40 Killed in Christmas Bombings," *Vanguard*, December 26, 2011.

Lagos, on December 13, 2011. He then disappeared from surveillance monitoring—perhaps due to police ineptitude or collaboration with Boko Haram—until three days before he was captured on January 14, 2012, in Abuja.[14] A source from Nigeria's State Security Service said that Sokoto's presence in Lagos was no "coincidence" and that Boko Haram was planning to attack the southern cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Onitsha and Warri.[15]

Failed Operations and False Attributions

The Nigerian media often assumes that any militant or criminal activity in the south that may be the work of Boko Haram is the work of Boko Haram regardless of the evidence, which inflates the actual threat that the group poses in the region. Nevertheless, the several attempted attacks on churches in the South-West zone, which is the most religiously-mixed of the southern zones, and other symbolically-timed attempted attacks in the region show that either Boko Haram or violent sympathizers are operational in the south. Boko Haram's intent to expand operations in the south, however, has been met with poor results. Boko Haram fighters appear to have failed in all of their attempts to carry out attacks in southern Nigeria or been captured before initiating attacks.

In South-West zone, all suspected Boko Haram operatives have targeted churches. In Ikorodu, Lagos, on April 24, 2012, a man from Taraba State who locals suspected was a member of Boko Haram placed a bomb in an amulet outside of a Methodist church before security officers detected his behavior and seized him.[16] Three months earlier, in January 2012, members of a Boko Haram cell were arrested in Benin City, Edo State, after police were tipped off about their plans to bomb a church symbolically timed for New Year's Eve. The State Security Service director for Edo State, however, later said that the suspects' Boko Haram connections were "not yet established."[17] The earliest reported Boko Haram operation in the South-West zone was in August 2011 when a suspected member was conducting surveillance of churches in Ibadan disguised as a beggar. When he began talking in Hausa, the common language of northern Nigeria, on his smart-phone near a church, locals reported him to police.[18] Like the other incidents in the zone, however, the suspect was not conclusively a Boko Haram operative.

"While Boko Haram activity in the three southern zones is hard to corroborate, Boko Haram has a more verifiable presence in North-Central zone's Kogi State."

In South-South zone, there has only been one reported Boko Haram operation, which was in December 2011 when military intelligence officers arrested three northerners, one Yoruba Muslim and one Muslim convert from Rivers State in Nigeria's top oil-producing city of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The Boko Haram cell was reportedly on a mission to carry out a bomb attack on Christmas Eve at the Nigerian Army's 2nd Brigade Command, a mid-size hotel, and the Shell Oil facility timed to coincide with Kabiru Sokoto's church bombing in Madalla.[19] Hotels and oil facilities, however, have never been the targets of Boko Haram attacks in northern Nigeria or the Middle Belt, and a closer look at the operation shows that the operatives were more likely Niger Delta militants or simply oil "robbers."[20]

In South-East zone, two men from northwestern Nigeria's Zamfara State were arrested in a motor park in Ebonyi State on May 4, 2012, with guns and machetes. They were accused of belonging to Boko Haram, although there was no clear evidence of their membership.[21] In a much larger incident in February 2012, 25 suspected Boko Haram members, also from Zamfara State, were arrested while traveling on a bus in Enugu State. They were reportedly planning to bomb the University of Nigeria campus in Nsukka during its 41st convocation ceremony and were traveling with 27 guns wrapped in fertilizer bags, axes, daggers, and acid. After four weeks of interrogation, however, they were released.[22] Like in the South-South and South-West zones, there was no conclusive evidence that the suspects in South-East zone were Boko Haram members.

Kogi State Exception

While Boko Haram activity in the three southern zones is hard to corroborate, Boko Haram has a more verifiable presence in North-Central zone's Kogi State, which borders Abuja and all three southern zones. Boko Haram's first operation in the state was in February 2012 when it raided the Koton Karfe Prison and freed 119 inmates, including seven Boko Haram members. Unlike the attacks attributed to Boko Haram in the southern zones, Boko Haram claimed the attack, with its spokesperson saying, "We staged the operation in Kogi to rescue seven of our members incarcerated there and Allah made it possible for the operation to be successful."[23]

14 Kabiru Sokoto was arrested on January 14, 2012, but escaped from police custody within 24 hours with the help of Zakaria Biu, the police commissioner in charge of criminal investigations, and local youths organized by Biu. Sokoto was rearrested on February 10 in Mutum-Biu Village in Taraba State by a joint team of State Security Service and army operatives. See Mitaire Ikpen, "Kabiru Sokoto's Escape – Zakaria Biu Dismissed," *Vanguard*, February 22, 2012.

15 "Security Agencies Uncover Boko Haram Plot to Attack South," *Punch*, March 10, 2012.

16 Steve Ogwu-Chinuwa, "Attempt to Bomb Lagos Church Fails," *The Moment*, April 25, 2012.

17 Mike Osarogiagbon, "SSS Confirms Arrests of Boko Haram Suspects," *Nigerian Observer*, January 3, 2012.

18 Ola Ajayi, "Suspected Boko Haram Member Nabbed in Ibadan," *Vanguard*, August 1, 2011.

19 Fidelis Soriwei and Chukwudi Akasike, "Five Boko Haram Bombers Arrested in Port Harcourt - Army Puts Formations on the Red Alert," *Punch*, January 22, 2012.

20 "Port Harcourt Blasts: Nigerian 'Robbers' Killed," BBC, May 17, 2012. That article stated, "Boko Haram has staged numerous attacks across northern Nigeria but has not targeted the country's oil industry, based in the south. Other militant groups used to carry out frequent attacks on the oil industry in Port Harcourt and the surrounding region but many have now joined a government amnesty and the area has been relatively calm recently."

21 Nnamdi Akpa, "Ebonyi Police Arrest 2 Suspected Terrorists," *Daily Times*, May 4, 2012.

22 Tony Edike, "25 Boko Haram Members Nabbed in Enugu," *Vanguard*, January 28, 2012; Abdulkadir Badsha Mukhtar, "Nigeria: Boko Haram - Police Free 25 Hunters in Enugu," *Daily Trust*, February 22, 2012.

23 Hamza Idris and Aliyu M. Hamagam, "Boko Haram: Why We Attacked Kogi Prison...Niger Police Arrest 9 Escapees," *Weekly Trust*, February 18, 2012.

Following the prison break, the State Security Service uncovered a series of hideouts and bomb factories in Kogi State, several of which were suspected of belonging to Boko Haram. A bomb-making factory was uncovered on March 26 in Kabba; then, on April 1, the State Security Service raided a cell's hideout in Okene, killing nine suspected Boko Haram fighters.[24] On April 9, another bomb factory was uncovered in Ogaminana.[25] On April 23, the Nigerian Air Force attacked a suspected bomb-making factory in a forest in Usomi.[26] On July 16, 2012, the day after a vehicle bomb attributed to Boko Haram exploded outside of a church in Okene, the state police uncovered another bomb-making factory in Okehi.[27] On August 22, 2012, Nigerian police uncovered two more bomb factories, one in Okene and one in Okehi, and a car loaded with ammunition, two rocket launchers and explosives, and arrested five suspected Boko Haram fighters.[28]

"Since most of Boko Haram's rank-and-file fighters come from the poorly educated Qur'anic schools of northern Nigeria, they would struggle to blend in with the population in southern Nigeria."

The level of violence in Kogi State escalated to new levels on August 6, 2012, when suspected Boko Haram fighters chanting Islamic slogans surrounded a church in Okene during the middle of a service and opened fire on the worshippers with AK-47 assault rifles, killing 20 people.[29] The following day, a bomb was detected at a church in Kogi's capital, Lokoja, before it detonated.[30] As evidence of the toll that these attacks are having on Nigerians' faith in the government and the ability for the country to remain united, the reverend of the church publicly blamed the government for not carrying out its responsibility to protect its citizens, while also calling for Boko Haram and those who want Islamic laws to form their own country.[31]

There is now talk of a "Kogi Boko Haram" faction, which may be distinct from "Kanuri" and "Hausa" Boko Haram factions in the north, but whose operational capabilities may be derived from interacting with Boko Haram operatives, weapons traffickers and criminal networks in the north.[32] It remains to be seen whether Kogi State becomes Boko Haram's "staging point" for launching attacks further south, but Boko Haram cells and weapons hideouts in the state would facilitate Boko Haram's southward expansion.

Misperceptions vs. Reality

The rhetoric about Boko Haram in the south continues to mislead southerners about the threat that the group actually poses in the region. In a few examples of overreaction, the Southeast chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria announced in June 2012 that more than 6,000 Boko Haram members have infiltrated the three southern zones, even though most estimates place Boko Haram's total cadre between 1,000 and 4,000 people.[33] In the same month, the Yoruba ethno-nationalist youth group Apapo Oodua Koya stated publicly that it is "almost inevitable" that Boko Haram will conduct suicide bombing attacks in Lagos and Ibadan by July 2012, a prediction that proved false.[34] In March 2012, in response to reports from the anti-terror Rapid Response Squad (RRS) that Boko Haram might use religious sanctuaries as cover for attacks, the state government of Lagos demolished mosques in "strategic locations," such as commercial hubs and areas near government offices.[35]

These fatalistic predictions about Boko Haram overlook two important reasons why the group is unable to gain a foothold in the south. First, since most of Boko Haram's rank-and-file fighters come from the poorly educated Qur'anic schools of northern Nigeria, they would struggle to blend in with the population in southern Nigeria, such as in the oil-producing states, where northern languages are not spoken and Christianity is the religion of more than 95% of the population.[36] In fact, the dozens, or even hundreds, of Boko Haram fighters who have traveled northwards to Gao, Mali, to join the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa and other insurgent groups in the newly proclaimed State of Azawad have integrated more smoothly into the human terrain there than northern Nigerian Boko Haram fighters would in southern Nigeria.[37]

"As in any insurgency, Boko Haram depends on some level of local support and collaboration to carry out attacks."

As in any insurgency, Boko Haram depends on some level of local support and collaboration to carry out attacks. In the Middle Belt, for example, some Muslim Fulani communities embroiled in land conflicts with Christian ethnic

24 Shola Oyeyipo, Ibrahim Shuaibu, and Sherrif Bologu, "Victorious Weekend for Military, Police, as they Bomb Boko Haram Hideout," ThisDayLive, April 23, 2012.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Boluwaji Obahopo, "Car Bomb Explodes in Kogi, Suspect Arrested," *Vanguard*, July 16, 2012; Usman A. Bello, "Nigeria: Another Bomb Factory Uncovered in Kogi," *Daily Trust*, July 18, 2012.

28 "Police Raid Bomb Factories in Central Nigeria State," Reuters, August 23, 2012.

29 Shola Oyeyipo, Yemi Akinsuyi and Chiemelie Ezeobi, "Kogi Death Toll Rises to 20," *This Day*, August 8, 2012.

30 "Bomb Found in Kogi," *Business Day*, August 8, 2012.

31 "Kogi Church Attack: Primate Condemns Killings," August 7, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=eaHyVd1R2wo.

32 Forest, p. 3.

33 Tony Edike, "Boko Haram Plans Jihad on Christians, S-East CAN Alleges," *Vanguard*, June 19, 2012; David Cook, "Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* 5:4 (2012).

34 "Boko Haram 'Likely' To Attack Lagos and Ibadan in Next Few Weeks, Pan Yoruba Group Warns," Sahara Reporters, June 18, 2012.

35 Emmanuel Mayah, "Boko Haram Scare Forces Lagos to Demolish Five Mosques," *Africa Review*, March 23, 2012.

36 Abimbola Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State," *Africa Today* 57:4 (2011): pp. 99-119.

37 "Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali's Rebel Seize Gao," *Vanguard*, April 9, 2012.

groups have overlapping objectives with Boko Haram to drive out the Christians, so the Fulani communities may have formed a temporary alliance with Boko Haram.[38] Nigeria is plagued by a tradition in which local community leaders support local gangs to attack rival communities. In the case of the Middle Belt, a group like "Kogi Boko Haram" may be a local gang which is funded by Fulanis to strike fear in the Christian population, while in other parts of the country, even in Christian majority areas, militias like the Yoruba Oodua Peoples Congress, the Igbo Bakassi Boys, the Ijaw Egbesu Boys, and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra pursue agendas targeting their rival ethnic groups. All of these militias would be out of place anywhere except their indigenous lands, and the same is true of Boko Haram in the southern zones.

"As long as the Muslim ethnic groups of southern Nigeria, especially the Yorubas, continue to deny Boko Haram a foothold in the southern zones, Boko Haram's attempts to strike the south will likely remain isolated, infrequent and ineffectual."

Second, the Yorubas, who form more than 20% of Nigeria's population and are indigenous to the South-West zone, have stood united against Boko Haram. Leading Yoruba Muslims, for example, "disowned" commander Suleiman Mohammed after his arrest and have stated publicly that "nobody can fight for God."[39] The Yorubas recognize that they would suffer from inter-religious conflict more than any other ethnic group in the country since they are religiously mixed, while two other large ethnic groups, the Igbos and the Hausas, are almost uniformly Christian and Muslim. If the country were to fissure along religious lines, the Yorubas would become a minority in a Hausa-dominated north and Igbo-dominated south and face the prospect of internal fratricide if Yoruba Muslims and Christians fought each other.

Conclusion

As long as the Muslim ethnic groups of southern Nigeria, especially the Yorubas, continue to deny Boko Haram a foothold in the southern zones, Boko Haram's attempts to strike the south will likely remain isolated, infrequent and ineffectual. Nonetheless, just as Boko Haram struck the UN Headquarters in Abuja on August 26, 2011, in a suicide vehicle bombing after having never targeted an international institution before, Boko Haram could succeed in carrying out a powerful attack in Lagos or another major city in the south. This would add credibility to the alarmist predictions that already exist about Boko Haram's capabilities in the south. Unless the attack originates from Kogi State, where Boko Haram has demonstrated that it has bases and weapons caches, and from where it is capable of carrying out a series of attacks, any single operation in the south would likely be an anomaly rather than part of a sustained offensive.

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38 Yinka Ibukun, "Sect Attack Claim Complicates Nigeria Crisis," Associated Press, July 13, 2012.

39 Garba; "Captive Ethnic Yoruba Boko Haram Kingpin Says 'We Planned To Invade Lagos, Onitsha, Ibadan, Enugu and Warri Too'; Says 'Terrorists Feeling The Impact Of The Security Crackdown." A Muslim community leader in Lagos said, "The southern Muslims have value for human lives; they know that nobody can fight for God. They are not inconsiderate. The Muslim leadership in the south are putting their members on the alert; imams are already doing that."

Yemen's Huthi Movement in the Wake of the Arab Spring

By Lucas Winter

SINCE FEBRUARY 2011, the Huthi movement has played an important though largely overlooked role in Yemen's political transition. The group has responded to the "Arab Spring" and in particular to the slow, negotiated toppling of Ali Abdullah Salih in Yemen. Since protests began in Yemen, the Huthi positions have aligned with those of the "revolutionary youth," calling for the downfall of the regime and justice for its victims.[1] As the central government's focus turned toward the capital, state authority in Sa`da Province crumbled, allowing the Huthis to consolidate control over the administration of a province they had been contesting for over a decade. At the same time, the group has attempted to seize administrative control in areas where it only had a foothold, with mixed results.

This article provides a brief background of the Huthi movement, and then looks at the activities of the Huthis since the start of the Arab Spring in early 2011 on three different levels: local, national and regional. It highlights significant developments in the Huthi stronghold of Sa`da Province and its environs during the past year. In addition, it looks at the Huthi stance toward Yemen's Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-backed transitional process as well as how regional developments may begin to play a stronger role in driving the conflict. The future of the movement will depend on the complex interaction of political dynamics at all three levels.

Brief Background of the Huthi Movement

The Huthis (who officially refer to themselves as "Ansar Allah") are named after their former leader, Husayn al-Huthi, who was killed by Yemeni government forces in 2004 after refusing to turn himself in for questioning.[2] Basing himself in the mountainous west of Sa`da Province

1 The fact that the positions align does not imply shared motivations or coordination.

2 For details on this incident, see Iris Glosemeyer, "Local Conflict, Global Spin: An Uprising in the Yemeni Highlands," *Middle East Report* 232 (2004).

in Yemen's northwest corner, Husayn al-Huthi combined Zaydi revivalism with sharp political criticism of both local and international actors, crafting a historically rooted discourse of justice and empowerment that resonated throughout the region.[3] Zaydism is a branch of Shi`a Islam that arose around the figure of Zayd ibn Ali,[4] who was killed in battle in 740 AD in an attempted uprising against the ruling Umayyad dynasty. Departing from what would become the dominant Shi`a narrative (as followed in contemporary Iran, Lebanon, Iraq and parts of the Arabian Peninsula), Zayd's followers held that the rightful imam must fulfill certain conditions, including descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his grandsons Hassan and Husayn, possession of superior skills both as a warrior and a scholar, and a willingness to rise up against injustice and oppression.

Husayn al-Huthi was able to create a strong network of devoted followers in Yemen's north, where Zaydism remained strong despite the overthrow of Yemen's Zaydi Imamate in 1962, in part due to the political liberalization that accompanied the unification of Yemen in 1990 as well as the crisis within Zaydism precipitated by the growth of Salafist influence in the region. Al-Huthi's growing influence in the late 1990s was accompanied by increasingly contentious behavior on the part of his followers, which in turn prompted the government, acting partly in response to shifting international dynamics, to overreact.[5] The manhunt that eventually killed al-Huthi unleashed a spiral of violence beginning in 2004 that became known as the six "Sa`da Wars." The group transformed from a grassroots Zaydi revivalist network under Husayn al-Huthi's leadership to a strong insurgent fighting force under the

A map of Yemen.

leadership of Husayn's younger half-brother, Abdul Malik.[6] By the sixth war in 2009, an aura of invincibility surrounded Huthi fighters as they pushed the fighting beyond Yemen's borders. In November 2009, the Saudi Arabian military intervened to support the Yemeni government in its fight with the Huthis.[7] Three months later, the Huthis accepted a Qatari-negotiated cease-fire that teetered along during the following year.[8]

In the wake of the Arab Spring, the Huthis have managed to seize control of parts of Sa`da Province. The Huthis' increasingly authoritarian conduct, however, may have dented their discourse of justice and resistance. As they go from being victim to aggressor, the Huthis may find their "self-defense" justifications ringing hollow to many in Yemen. This may not matter: the Huthis have seized power in Sa`da Province and appear to be extending their influence outward, specifically in the provinces of al-Jawf to the east of Sa`da and Hajjah to its southwest. Political power, however, is particularly opaque and regularly contested in Yemen's tribal areas. The country itself is a patchwork of influence over which the central government exerts varying degrees of authority and through a variety of methods. This context needs to be taken into account when speaking of Huthi "control" over certain areas. In Sa`da Province, the Huthis are believed to have replaced the government as the main power-brokers in several parts of the province, most importantly the provincial capital.[9] The important question is not whether they will play a role in Yemen's future, but rather what that role will be.

Local Level

In January 2011, heavy fighting broke out on the outskirts of Sa`da city between the Huthis and the al-Abdin tribe, whose leader, Othman Mujalli, was a vocal Huthi critic.[10] He was also a parliamentary representative from Sa`da Province for the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party. A few weeks after the clashes started, the student protest movement that began in the capital Sana`a spread to other parts of the country, including Sa`da. Meanwhile, the Huthis began laying siege to Mujalli and his followers. As protests grew, Sa`da's provincial government came under increasing pressure. On March 18, government snipers fired on a mass protest in the Yemeni capital Sana`a (the "Karama Massacre") prompting national outrage and a flood of defections from the regime. Protests flared throughout the country, and over the following days Sa`da's provincial governor fled to the capital Sana`a in the face of popular outrage at the regime.[11] Bereft of government support, Othman Mujalli and his followers were chased out of town and the Huthis seized or destroyed most

3 For a useful exposition of Husayn al-Huthi's thought, see Abdullah Lux, "Yemen's Last Zaydi Imam: The Shabab al-Mu'min, the Malazim, and Hizb Allah in the Thought of Husayn Badr al-Din al-Huthi," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 2:3 (2009).

4 Zayd was the grandson of Husayn ibn Ali, himself the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima.

5 Ayman Hamidi, "Inscriptions of Violence in Northern Yemen: Haunting Histories, Unstable Moral Spaces," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45:2 (2009).

6 The group was initially known as the "Shabab al-Mumin" (Believing Youth).

7 Kristen Chick, "Yemen's Houthi Rebels Get Iran Assurance, Ask Saudis to Stop Strikes," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 11, 2009.

8 Good overviews of the conflict include: "Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb," International Crisis Group, 2009; Lucas Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances," *Middle East Policy* 18 (2011). A recent analysis of the conflict weaving politics and sectarianism is Sami Dorlian, "The Sa'da War in Yemen: Between Politics and Sectarianism," *Muslim World* 101:2 (2011). The most comprehensive account is the excellent Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010).

9 The opacity of political power has increased since the forced resignation of Ali Abdullah Salih. Sa`da Province is nominally controlled by governor Faris Mana`a. Reports, however, indicate that Huthi commander Abu Ali al-Hakim is the provincial capital's ultimate power-broker. This, of course, does not mean that Huthi power is uncontested. See: "What is Happening in Sa`da's 'Houthi Kingdom'?" *al-Masdar*, November 30, 2011.

10 "Violent Clashes Between Tribes and Houthi Fighters in Sa`da," *al-Masdar*, January 17, 2011.

11 "Houthi Group Appoints Arms Dealer as Governor of Sa'ada Province," *Yemen Post*, March 27, 2011.

of his properties. Not long after this a group of Sa`da notables, with Huthi backing, appointed Faris Mana`a as the region's unofficial governor, a post he continues to hold.[12]

The neighboring province of al-Jawf proved less amenable to Huthi control. When protests broke out in February 2011, Huthi influence in the province—as compared to that of Islah, the main opposition party—was limited.[13] After failed government efforts to contain the protests (promising more resources, replacing the governor, firing on protesters), locals overran provincial government installations, including the base of the Yemeni Army's 115th Division.[14] Control of the province fell to members of the al-Islah Party, Yemen's main opposition party which draws its support largely from the Hashid tribal confederation and various Sunni organizations (most prominent among them, groups affiliated with noted cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani). Although the Huthis and Islah both opposed the Salih administration, this shared objective did not extend to the local level in al-Jawf, where Sunni tribesmen have historically resisted Huthi influence.[15] Fighting between Huthi and Islah adherents for control of government installations, particularly military and security facilities, broke out immediately and continued for several months until they negotiated a truce. In August 2011, the groups agreed to appoint a new provincial governor affiliated with Islah.[16] It is unclear, though, whether a balance has been reached in the province, particularly given al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) increased targeting of Huthis in the area.[17]

"In the wake of the Arab Spring, the Huthis have managed to seize control of parts of Sa`da Province."

Most recently, Huthi focus has turned to the impoverished province of Hajjah, southwest of Sa`da.[18] In Hajjah, the Huthis initially used "soft power" methods to enter the area and establish alliances in the province's northern districts. Their use of "hard power" began in the spring of 2011, when Yusuf al-Madani, a key Huthi field commander who is married to one of Husayn al-Huthi's daughters, moved into a family property in the Abu Dawar area. This settlement is along the border of Kushar and Mustabah districts and overlooks the market town of Ahim, famous in Yemen for its weapons and all other types of goods from and for Saudi Arabian markets. According to local accounts, al-Madani and as many as 200 armed followers began aggressively proselytizing and setting up checkpoints in the area. The Huthis claim that al-Madani and his followers were harassed from the moment they arrived and that their use of violence was in "self-defense." The Hajoor tribe of Kushar district, likely with support from Sunni sympathizers, has been engaged in fierce battles with the Huthis for months. The violence in Hajjah has become severe, with nearly 50,000 residents displaced from the three most heavily affected districts (Washhah, Kushar and Mustabah).[19] The Huthis have been held responsible for the outbreak and the escalation, and are accused of laying landmines in several parts of Kushar district.[20] Control of this province is at present highly fragmented and uncertain, as neither side is willing to yield even though violence has increased.

"With the government largely absent from the area, a common refrain has been that the Huthis aim to reach Hajjah's small Red Sea port of Midi."

With the government largely absent from the area, a common refrain has been that the Huthis aim to reach Hajjah's small Red Sea port of Midi. Their critics accuse the Huthis of expansionist designs, specifically the creation of a "Zaydi State" or "Huthi Imamate" in Yemen's northern provinces (Sa`da, Hajjah, 'Amran, al-Jawf and Marib), which the Huthis themselves deny.[21]

12 Mana`a, who is from the region, is a notorious arms dealer who fell out of favor with the regime after being accused of helping arm the Huthis. He appears to be a respected consensus figure and has thus far been able to help stabilize Sa`da Province. He has been involved in mediation efforts between the Huthis and other groups.

13 On Huthi presence in al-Jawf and its impact on al-Qa`ida, see Gabriel Koehler-Derrick ed., *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011), pp. 59-62.

14 "115th Infantry Division in al-Jawf without a Commander, Revolutionary Youth Guard Government Installations," *al-Masdar*, March 21, 2011.

15 Part of this was due to aggressive Huthi proselytism, which like other aspects of Huthi doctrine and practice may be viewed as a response to the incursion of Wahhabism and Salafism into Yemen's northwest provinces. The best account of the origins of this dynamic can be found in Shelagh Weir, "A Clash of Fundamentalisms: Wahhabism in Yemen," *Middle East Report* 204 (1997). Among other elements, Huthi proselytism revolves around disseminating the thoughts of Husayn al-Huthi as well as the regular chanting of the Huthi slogan ("Allahu Akbar! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse the Jews! Victory for Islam!").

16 "Sunni-Shiites War in Al-Jawf," *Yemen Times*, October 3, 2011.

17 The most notable AQAP attack was in November 2010. On November 24, a suicide bombing in al-Jawf killed Husayn al-Huthi's elderly father Badr al-Din al-Huthi. An attack on the funeral procession in Sa`da Province two days later took the lives of several more. Other attacks against the Huthis claimed by AQAP include a suicide attack against a meeting of Huthi leaders in al-Jawf Province on August 15, 2011, and a bomb at another gathering of Huthis in al-Jawf's capital on May 25, 2012.

18 The description given here of events in Hajjah Province is based on a comprehensive account written by a member of the Yemeni media and human rights delegation that visited the area, and which was simultaneously published in two of Yemen's main opposition publications (*al-Ahale* and *Marib Press*). See "Hajjah's Deathmill... Where the Houthis' Route to Midi Begins," *al-Ahale*, March 21, 2012. By most, if not all, neutral accounts, the Huthis are seen as the aggressor in Hajjah.

19 An illustrated map and factsheet are available at www.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/New_idps_accessHajjah_2703122.pdf.

20 On the landmines, see for instance: "Yemen: Rising Landmine Death Toll in Hajjah Governorate," IRIN, April 18, 2012.

21 A report by a Yemeni think-tank (Abaad Studies and Research Center), for instance, sees the aim of Huthi militarism as the creation of a state-within-a-state composed of the five provinces mentioned above plus parts of three other ones. See "Houthis Look to Establish Shiite State along Saudi Border," *Yemen Times*, February 11, 2011. For a summary of the Abaad Center report, see "Abaad Report: Houthi Military Movements Driven by Emotion

Assuming that the Huthis are acting with expansionist purposes, the limits and goals of this behavior might also be more modest. National politics provide some insight.

National Level

Although the exact start date of Yemen's Arab Spring is disputed, mass nationwide protests began in February 2012 and eventually toppled longtime president Ali Abdullah Salih. The Huthis, unlike the opposition al-Islah Party, were quick to publicly support the protest movement and openly call for the downfall of the regime.[22] Large anti-regime protests sprouted early in areas of Huthi influence, and the group's youth delegation set up a presence in the tent city of Sana`a's Sahat al-Tagheer ("Change Square"), under the banner of Shabab al-Sumud (The Steadfast Movement). In a testament to the importance of the group's political stance, the Huthi protesters were, for the most part, young, educated sympathizers from urban areas like Taiz and Sana`a who found in the Huthi ideology "one among many new outlets to express disenchantment with the regime's repressive apparatus."[23]

"Yet it is likely that instability, rather than Huthi control over Sa`da Province, is Saudi Arabia's principal security concern in this area."

The Huthi movement has taken positions that largely mirror those of the revolutionary youth. When the GCC unveiled its plan to transition from the rule of Ali Abdullah Salih, both the Huthis and the youth rejected its legitimacy. Furthermore, they refused to recognize the agreement that Salih finally signed on November 23, 2011. The Huthis, along with revolutionary youth groups and the Southern Movement (Hiraak), boycotted the one-man elections for Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi. The Huthis' rejection of the GCC initiative has opened them up to direct criticism from the main political opposition front (the Islah-dominated Joint Meeting Parties, JMP). As the transitional process begins creating its own legitimacy, the Huthis are accused of acting opportunistically and lacking a constructive vision.[24] Regardless of the purity of their motives, the Huthis' alignment with both the revolutionary youth and the Southern Movement creates a strong informal opposition bloc that helps legitimize Huthi reluctance to fully endorse the transitional process.

In fact, despite their public rejection of the transitional process, the Huthis appear to have some interest in playing politics. Several prominent Zaydi figures, including defectors from the main Zaydi political party (Hizb al-Haqq), recently formed a political party (Hizb al-Umma) which, despite denials of formal links by Huthi leaders in Sa`da, looks like a Huthi party.[25] Whatever form the Huthis' entry into politics takes, it will be cautious and laden with preconditions.

The GCC agreement calls for a national dialogue that includes all political forces and actors, explicitly mentioning the Huthis. They have been ambivalent about participating, although this is a change given their initial rejection of the agreement itself.[26] While it is unclear whether they will participate and what their expectations are, at the national level the Huthis appear to be showing a willingness to take part in the transitional process.[27] Whether and how their gains on the ground translate into a stake in national politics remains a major question looming over Yemen's transition.

Regional Level

The GCC, and Saudi Arabia in particular, has played an important role in Yemen's transition away from Ali Abdullah Salih. The Huthis could be of concern to Saudi Arabia for reasons that include fears of Iranian influence, enmity from Huthi cross-border raids and Saudi Arabia's military response in 2009, and general concern with having a religiously motivated non-state actor in control of areas across the border from a province that has not fit comfortably in the Saudi Kingdom.[28] Yet it is likely that instability, rather than Huthi control over Sa`da Province, is Saudi Arabia's principal security concern in this area.[29]

"The Huthis themselves suffer from accusations from Saudi Arabian and Yemeni opposition media of ideological and material support from Iran."

and Based on a Misreading of Changing Conditions," *al-Masdar*, February 21, 2011.

22 See Laurent Bonnefoy, "Yemen's Islamists and the Revolution," The Middle East Channel, *Foreign Policy*, February 9, 2012.

23 Madeleine Wells, "Yemen's Houthi Movement and the Revolution," Middle East Channel, *Foreign Policy*, February 27, 2012.

24 For instance, accusations of Huthi collusion with the beleaguered head of the Republican Guard and erstwhile inheritor of the presidency Ahmad Ali Abdullah Salih (the former president's son). It should be emphasized that the charge of opportunism is also made against most other opposition groups in Yemen and is not unique to the Huthis.

25 For more on Hizb al-Umma see: "A New Political Party 'Deranged by the Foreign Devil': The Birth of al-Ummah Party," *al-Masdar*, January 5, 2012.

26 In May 2012, the Huthis said they did not in principle reject the talks but were undecided on participation, setting as a preliminary condition that the national dialogue be held under United Nations auspices, rather than those of a particular country (specifically, the United States and Saudi Arabia). See: "Houthis: Final Position on National Dialogue not yet Determined," *National Yemen*, May 11, 2012.

27 On May 31, 2012, the Huthis officially expressed their willingness to participate in the national dialogue. It is, however, difficult to predict whether or not this position will be maintained.

28 The Saudi Arabian border province of Najran is a historical component of Yemen that was annexed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1934. It has a large Ismaili (Shi`a) population whose relations with the Sunni rulers in Riyadh have at times been contentious.

29 Sarah Phillips contends that when it comes to Saudi Arabia's policy toward Yemen, the "overriding objective is to contain Yemen's problems within Yemen and to prevent them from spilling over the border," or as one diplomat put it, "We don't care what they do, as long as it's stable." Sarah Phillips, "Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, Chapter Five: The Regime," *Adelphi Series* 51:420 (2011): p. 76. Saudi Arabia has previously noted its view of the Huthis as "a mild threat to regional security – unless they are seen as part of a three-way alliance with Al-Qaeda and Iran." See Zuhair al-Harithi, "Understanding Yemen's Troubles: A Saudi Perspec-

The Huthis accuse Saudi Arabia of meddling, although these attacks are often to justify actions driven by events on the ground. In early May 2012, for instance, Abdul Malik al-Huthi explained the fortification of positions in Hajjah as a defensive measure to confront a looming attack by Saudi Arabian mercenaries.[30] Huthi ire is not limited to Saudi Arabia, and the group has been consistent in keeping its slogan (which includes "Death to America, Death to Israel") relevant by constantly referring to U.S. and Israeli plots in Yemen.[31]

"The Huthis appear to be in a position of relative strength and are unlikely to give up their gains easily; they may find themselves in a situation of stability in an increasingly chaotic Yemen."

The Huthis themselves suffer from accusations from Saudi Arabian and Yemeni opposition media of ideological and material support from Iran. These charges are ongoing since at least the early 2000s. The charge of ideological links to the Iranian Shi`a is sensitive, as it undermines a basic tenet of the Huthis' ideological project, namely the idea that they represent an indigenous form of Islam.[32] The Zaydi revival of the 1990s, which paved the way for the rise of the Huthis, was largely a reaction to the influx of Wahhabism into Yemen's Zaydi heartland. Because arguments of tradition and indigeneity were central to Husayn al-Huthi's critique of Wahhabism, the charge that the roots of Huthi doctrine are deeper in Tehran than in Sa`da is an attempt to undermine the very foundation of this critique.

The growing sectarian discourse, in particular between Salafists and Huthis, has created the potential for regional or international events to play a greater role in shaping the conflict. Sectarian tensions based on domestic factors have already escalated. In late 2011 and early 2012, the Huthi blockade of a Salafist religious school (Dar al-Hadith) located near Sa`da city, part of the group's steps to consolidate control over the province, threatened to explode into sectarian war. Similar spikes in violence have occurred against the backdrop of an ongoing "soft war" for influence in the region, pitting the militant egalitarian puritanism of Salafism against Husayn al-Huthi's message of nationalism, political justice and divine rights.[33] More recently, the AQAP-aligned Ansar al-Shari`a appears to be taking their sectarian fight to areas of Huthi control, threatening to engulf those provinces in sectarian conflict.[34]

Conclusion

The Huthis appear to be in a position of relative strength and are unlikely to give up their gains easily. They may find themselves in a situation of stability in an increasingly chaotic Yemen. Developments in northern Yemen will continue to be mostly driven by events on the ground, with shifts in the national political landscape exercising an important pull. It is likely that sectarianism will continue and perhaps increase, with the consequence that broader regional phenomena are likely to exert even greater influence on this part of Yemen.

The Huthis continue fighting to establish control over areas they see as in their natural sphere of influence. At the same time, they continue to send mixed signals about their willingness to participate in national politics. Whether a nationally negotiated solution can halt the continued fighting depends on how well the local dynamics of Yemen's north can be mapped onto the national political negotiations in a way that satisfies both the Huthis and the other parties (primarily Islah). Assuming the Huthis have no secessionist aspirations, what do they consider their sphere of influence? Do they hope to seize control of Marib Province and its oil facilities as part of the future "Huthi Imamate"? Or are they simply taking precautions against renewed attacks by a new Saudi-sponsored, Sunni-dominated Yemeni state? Clear answers to these questions will be crucial in determining the role of the Huthi movement in post-Salih Yemen.

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tive," *Arab Insight* 2:7 (2010): p. 80.

30 "Houthi Says Saudi Arabia Prepares to Attack Yemen Area," *Yemen Post*, May 6, 2012. The reference is to local tribes that are seen as receiving Saudi backing.

31 See any of a number of articles (in Arabic) on the Huthi website at www.ansaruallah.net.

32 The spread of Huthi Zaydi revivalism, which they call "spreading Qur'anic culture," has in part succeeded through its appeals to Yemeni tradition. Zaydism is endemic to Yemen and the charge that the Huthis are actually spreading a foreign ideology deeply undermines their religious and nationalist credentials. Their detractors point to several Huthi practices—not to mention the wording of their slogan—as proof of the influence of Twelver Shi'ism on "Huthism." For more on this, see Lucas Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances," *Middle East Policy* 18 (2011): pp. 107-109.

33 On the origins of this clash, see Bernard Haykel, "A Zaydi Revival?" *Yemen Update* 36 (1995); Shelagh Weir, "A Clash of Fundamentalisms: Wahhabism in Yemen," *Middle East Report* 204 (1997). As Weir notes, Salafism found willing adherents in the 1990s among Yemeni tribesmen partly due to its language of egalitarianism, which contrasted sharply with the exceptionalism of sayyids (descendants of Hassan and Husayn) in Zaydi doctrine.

34 For more on this, see Koehler-Derrick. The most recent attack was a suicide vehicle bomb in al-Jawf: "Suicide Bombing Kills 14 Houthis in al-Jawf," *Yemen Times*, May 28, 2012.

Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of al-Shabab and Somali Youth

By Muhsin Hassan

ON JUNE 20, 2012, U.S. Representative Peter King convened a fifth hearing on the radicalization of Muslim Americans. Although the hearings covered radicalization of Muslim Americans in general, special emphasis was placed on al-Shabab's recruitment of more than 40 young Americans.

This article provides clarity on the driving factors that attract youth to al-Shabab. It argues that identity as manipulated by ideology in the trappings of religion, as well as the perceptions of neglect, combine to drive youth to join the Somali group. This conclusion is based on an extensive review of literature on al-Shabab, including U.S. government documents, and field research in Nairobi, Kenya. The latter included focus group discussions with 15 former al-Shabab members between the ages of 19 and 27 living in Eastleigh—a predominantly Somali suburb of Nairobi.[1] Their membership in al-Shabab ranged from six months to two years.

Due to the small sample size, the argument presented cannot be generalized to all al-Shabab members. The findings, however, offer valuable insight into the reasoning of an important subset of Somali youth in joining violent extremism. Given the porous border between Somalia and Kenya, the large presence of Somali refugee youth in Eastleigh facing dire conditions (almost identical to those in Somalia with the exception of war), and the growth of al-Shabab recruitment in Eastleigh, the voices of the interviewed youth are relevant to this debate.

The article will look at two driving factors for recruitment, examining both "push" and "pull."[2] Push factors are the negative social, cultural, and political features of one's societal environment that aid in "pushing" vulnerable individuals onto the path of violent extremism. Push factors are what are commonly known as "underlying/root causes" such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and political/economical marginalization. Pull factors, on the other hand, are the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organization that "pull" vulnerable individuals to join. These include the group's ideology (e.g., emphasis on changing one's condition through violence rather than "apathetic" and "passive" democratic means), strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame or glory, and other socialization benefits.

The participants unanimously stated that it was a confluence of factors that led them to join al-Shabab, as the group presented a "package" deal in its recruitment propaganda. The following provides brief explanations of the factors listed, as understood and explained by the participants.

Push Factors

Unemployment

Five of the 15 youth said that al-Shabab was a form of employment. According to them, joining al-Shabab paid well, from $50-$150 monthly, depending on the work, yet required little effort. "All one had to do was carry around a gun and patrol the streets," explained a participant. "It was an easy job compared to other jobs such as construction work." Therefore, for some of these youth, a significant reason for joining al-Shabab was because it enabled them to provide for themselves and their families.

Although personal poverty is not a reason for joining violent extremism, the cases of these youth show that the effects of poverty, such as idleness and low self-esteem, cannot be ignored in this discussion. The fact that many Somali youth are unemployed and rely on relatives for sustenance, either in Somalia or in the diaspora, dampens their self-worth such that when an opportunity to fend for oneself arises, they are quick to take advantage.

"Those who joined al-Shabab, especially in towns where the group had a large presence, were seen as heroes for defending the country and the religion."

Fear of Victimization

Some of those interviewed feared being victimized for not joining al-Shabab. They also worried about being seen as weak by family and society at large and thus had to "man up" and join. This was especially the case for those youth who lived in al-Shabab controlled areas. If an able-bodied youth did not join, one could be suspected of supporting the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Since some of them would move between al-Shabab and TFG controlled areas regularly, they had to pick a side. As one youth put it, "You have to make a choice. You are either on one side or the other."

AMISOM Bombardment

Some explained that the bombing of Somali towns by the mostly Ugandan and Burundian UN peacekeeping force, AMISOM, built intense hatred toward this group. The destruction of property and life was a great cause of distress. They stated that they joined al-Shabab to seek revenge as well as to "protect themselves and their families."

Revenge

Some participants mentioned they sought revenge against TFG soldiers. Their urge for revenge was due to harassment, particularly of female relatives at checkpoints. The youth who listed "revenge" described TFG

1 As part of his undergraduate thesis, the author conducted these interviews as focus group discussions in Kenya on January 5, 2012. The dataset included 15 Somali youth, aged from 19 to 27. They came from different areas in Somalia, such as Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo, while others came from Dadaab and Ifo refugee camps in Kenya. All of the quotes and data in this article are drawn from these interviews.

2 Although the author offers expanded definitions, this dichotomization of factors into push and pull was drawn from Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, "Guide to the Drivers of Extremism," Management Systems International, publication produced for USAID review. This terminology appears to have been borrowed from migration literature. They are used to categorize the various push and pull factors that either "push" one to move out of a bad neighborhood and "pull" them to a better one.

soldiers as "animals" who "would touch our women inappropriately at the checkpoints. Imagine when you see this being done to your mother or your sister…it is humiliating and infuriating."

Lack of Education

Only two participants mentioned lack of education. When asked to clarify, they stated that this entailed a lack of education in general and not religious education. According to them, they were not able to pursue different avenues in life and they did not see a bright future ahead. As a result, it was easier to join al-Shabab rather than languish in poverty with no chance to "pursue something greater."

Pull Factors

Reputation (hero for defending country and religion)

The participants mentioned that al-Shabab uses reputation to attract youth. An al-Shabab recruiter would first identify a group of youth who seemed to consistently socialize in or frequent a specific location. He would then approach one of the youth and offer to make him an "*amir*" of his own "men" if he could get three or more of his friends to also join. This was the most popular reason cited. In the words of one respondent, "Walking the city with a gun as a member of al-Shabab ensured everybody feared and respected you. Girls also liked you." Those who joined al-Shabab, especially in towns where the group had a large presence, were seen as heroes for defending the country and the religion.

In the case of most youth, the reputation that one earns by joining al-Shabab is attractive for two main reasons. First, it delivers them from irrelevance to prominence. In a society that places great emphasis on age, the economically dependent youth command little respect and are seen as powerless. By becoming a member of al-Shabab, youth are able to gain immediate respect and access to power, thereby strengthening their sense of self-worth. Second, it strengthens a particular identity: in this case, "defender of country and religion." This is important for two reasons. It highlights the centrality of Islam in Somalis' sense of identity. The role of religion is especially magnified in the identity of youth for whom clan politics has brought nothing but chaos and destruction. That is why when asked whether they were Somali or Muslim first, a great majority of the respondents answered they were Muslim first. This does not necessarily indicate religious zealousness, but rather the intertwined nature of religion and nationality in their sense of identity. More importantly, though, it echoes Seth Schwartz's argument that terrorism represents a confluence of cultural, social, and personal identity.[3] It particularly underlines the role of a cultural identity strongly rooted in collectivism—prioritizing the group over oneself—in accepting terrorism. In this case, collectivism is evinced by the youth's willingness to sacrifice their ambitions, relationships, and lives (what generally constitute a personal identity) for the sake of religion or country.

Mental Manipulation and Fighting Islam's Enemies

When asked to define what they meant by "mental manipulation," the two respondents who chose these words explained: "Mental manipulation through religion. They convince you that joining al-Shabab is your religious duty and that is what Islam requires of someone in your position." Framing it as manipulation indicates that these youth may never have fully believed that it was a religious duty to join al-Shabab. The firm opposition by those who chose to use "manipulation" also hints at the power of disillusionment and betrayal, since they have come to see it as manipulation after the fact.

It is especially distinct from the six who opted to use "fighting Islam's enemies." These six, albeit not al-Shabab supporters anymore, still think that Ethiopian and AMISOM forces are anti-Muslim—a testament to the power of al-Shabab's ideological indoctrination.

Obtain Paradise

Obtaining paradise as a reason for joining al-Shabab stems from the belief that al-Shabab was conducting valid jihad in defense of God's religion. All schools within orthodox Islam, both Shi`a and Sunni, accept that paradise is a reward for those who die as martyrs. It is one of the surest paths that guarantee meeting God. The disagreements arise as to what exactly constitutes valid jihad. Thus, to convince a Muslim that paradise is waiting, al-Shabab must justify that one's struggle is indeed valid jihad. In the case of these youth, who admitted to not being well versed in religion, the task was not particularly challenging.

Recruitment Processes

The following explanations were given in response to how they found out about joining.

Encouraged by Family Members and Peers

In the words of one respondent: "My father bought me a gun and brought it home. He said that if he were me, young and healthy, he would be at the front line of the battle and not at home." While al-Shabab targets marginalized youth and orphans, even those who do not fit in those categories are not immune from recruitment. The fact that close relatives encourage youth to join demonstrates that some in society see al-Shabab's fight as "their fight." It is not because society is radicalized and has fully embraced jihadist ideology and certainly not due to the debilitating poverty that has riddled Somalia for decades; rather, it is a fight to maintain their culture, language, religion and way of life—it is a fight to safeguard their identity and its important features from foreign "invaders" such as Ethiopia and AMISOM.

Encouraged by Religious Leaders

Religious leaders would deliver fiery sermons about jihad and urge the populace to join al-Shabab.

Encouraged by Businessmen Seeking Protection

Businessmen in Somalia benefit from security and order. Thus, they often support al-Shabab in areas where the group is dominant (and other groups elsewhere).[4] These businessmen encourage youth to join al-Shabab to ensure ranks are well filled. This also functions as an alternative career for idle youth who would otherwise turn to petty crime and hooliganism.

3 Seth J. Schwartz et al., "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32:6 (2009): pp. 552-553.

4 This can be seen in the history of the Islamic courts. Each side of the conflict had a benefactor, and even today al-Shabab receives its funds from major businessmen with interests in Somalia.

Offered Guns and Money as Gifts
Some youth were enticed by money, especially those who were more impoverished than others in society. Others were attracted to the power and influence that al-Shabab affords to its members, as recruiters offered them guns for joining.

Reasons for Disengagement with Al-Shabab
There were multiple reasons why those interviewed decided to quit al-Shabab.

Seeking Peace
The three youth who listed this as one of the main reasons they left al-Shabab expressed that they had grown tired of fighting. They stated that the deteriorating environment in Somalia had become unbearable and that is why they fled to Kenya. Once again, the quality of life is germane to the decision making process of these youth.

Seeking Education
Four youth provided this response. They explained that there were no opportunities to go to school in Somalia, and they wanted to further their education so as to be able to earn a good living for themselves and their families.

Medical Attention
Only one youth mentioned this. Due to a severe injury, he left Somalia to receive treatment in Kenya.

Family/Clan Ties
These were listed by various youth. One youth phrased it as looking for "group identity" but explained that his relatives, who had fled to Kenya, persuaded him to join them and leave Somalia. Another respondent cited "clan coalitions" and explained that his clan had severed ties with al-Shabab, which forced him to quit the group. He also fled to Kenya where he could live among close relatives. Other respondents cited "advice from parents." This was the most cited reason (6 out of 15). They explained that this had to do with either clan politics or prospects for a better life. Some also explained that their parents would try to get them to leave al-Shabab for Kenya, as they wanted their children out of danger.

Going Abroad
This was the second most cited response. As was explained, this entails getting a chance to pursue a life free from violence and war outside Somalia. Many youth expressed frustration with the situation and claimed that when their parents or close relatives found a way for them to go to either South Africa or the West, they chose to leave Somalia.

Al-Shabab Became Powerless
One respondent mentioned this as a reason. According to him, the benefits that came with being an al-Shabab member disappeared with their defeat in his town, thus rendering it pointless to continue aligning with the group. This attests to the point that in many cases people switch sides due to convenience in Somalia. Experts have noted that in Somalia, Islamists have historically been flexible and have switched sides several times[5]—which points to the lack of an ideological core in many Somalis who join al-Shabab.

Injustice and Inequality
Injustice was mentioned once while inequality came up twice. The youth explained that they came to realize that al-Shabab was oppressive. One participant explained that al-Shabab did not live by its professed belief of transcending clan politics. He saw that most youth from minority clans were given the most dangerous jobs and used as pawns while those from powerful clans were given leadership positions.

Implications
The argument presented—identity, as manipulated by ideology in the trappings of religion, coupled with perceptions of neglect plays a central role in driving Somali youth to al-Shabab—aims to give nuance to the understanding of radicalization that leads to violent extremism. In this case, this applies to Somali youth who have fled al-Shabab in Somalia. This argument should neither be mistaken for a version of "poverty causes terrorism" theory nor others that undermine the role of religious ideology. The main reasons these youth cite for joining al-Shabab are not deeply held religious beliefs, but rather factors that revolve around their sense of identity and perceptions of neglect that stem from their frustration with clan politics, lack of opportunities to improve the quality of their lives, and other difficulties that come with war. A testament to this is the fact that most of them gave up violent extremism when given the chance of a better life, especially when trusted relatives were the ones presenting such opportunities.

Although the youth interviewed are currently in Kenya, their motivation to both join and leave al-Shabab developed in Somalia. Their desire for "peace" or "education" had nothing to do with being in Kenya; these goals were merely suppressed or put on hold while fighting for al-Shabab. As their frustration with the situation in Somalia increased, it became harder to justify why they had delayed their ambitions for al-Shabab, and they finally put themselves first. In other words, the personal identity—and not the social and cultural—came to the forefront in their decision-making.

In the case of such youth, typical programs that merely address some of the push and pull factors will not suffice. The challenge is to develop programs centered on bolstering the personal identities of vulnerable youth while also addressing the relevant push and pull factors driving them into militancy.

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5 Roland Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia," Center for Scientific Research at Sciences-Po., Paris, 2011, p. 12.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

July 1, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): An Afghan policeman shot and killed three British soldiers in Helmand Province. The Taliban claimed responsibility. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Afghan officials identified the shooter as a member of the Afghan National Civil Order Police, a special unit set up under U.S. auspices to help keep insurgents at bay and enforce the law in towns and villages. Its members undergo a more selective recruitment process and more rigorous training than regular Afghan police, adding to the disquiet surrounding the attack." – *Los Angeles Times, July 2*

July 1, 2012 (KENYA): Masked assailants launched a coordinated gun and grenade attack on two churches in Garissa, a northern Kenyan town. At least 17 people were killed. It was the most deadly attack in Kenya since it deployed troops into neighboring Somalia to fight al-Shabab eight months ago. There was no claim of responsibility. – *Reuters, July 2*

July 2, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed seven people near the gates of a university in Kandahar city. The bomber reportedly targeted a vehicle carrying workers from a nearby U.S. military base. – *Reuters, July 2; RTTNews, July 2*

July 2, 2012 (SOMALIA): A joint operation by Kenyan and Somali military forces inside Somalia resulted in the rescue of four international aid workers, who had been kidnapped three days earlier in Kenya. – *Voice of America, July 2*

July 2, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group militants killed nine construction workers in Maiduguri, Borno State. – *AllAfrica.com, July 3*

July 3, 2012 (FRANCE): French authorities arrested the alleged administrator of an extremist website—a Tunisian national—accused of helping al-Qa`ida and related terrorist groups recruit new members and finance operations. – *Voice of America, July 3*

July 3, 2012 (YEMEN): Two suspected U.S. airstrikes killed at least four alleged al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants in Shabwa Province. Yemen's Defense Ministry identified two of the dead as senior AQAP figures Fahd Salah al-Anjaf al-Harithi and Hassan Ali al-Ishaqi. – *Reuters, July 3*

July 3, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Islamabad agreed to reopen NATO's supply routes in Pakistan, which have been closed since NATO troops mistakenly killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011. According to CNN, "The Pakistani routes offer a shorter and more direct route than the one NATO has been using since November that went through Russia and other nations, avoiding Pakistan altogether. It has cost the U.S. $100 million more a month to use the alternative northern routes." – *CNN, July 24*

July 5, 2012 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on two Eritrean government officials on charges of assisting Islamist militants, including al-Shabab, in Somalia. – *Reuters, July 5*

July 5, 2012 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated explosives in a barber's shop frequented by police in Mosul, Ninawa Province, killing at least three people. – *Reuters, July 5*

July 5, 2012 (SYRIA): Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said that the Iraqi government has "solid information and intelligence that members of al-Qa`ida terrorist networks have gone in the other direction, to Syria, to help, to liaise, to carry out terrorist attacks." Zebari said that al-Qa`ida "operational officers" were moving into Syria through old smuggling routes. – *Reuters, July 5*

July 5, 2012 (NIGERIA): A Nigerian court charged two men—Olaniyi Lawal and Lukman Babatunde—with having links to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The two Nigerians are accused of receiving more than $6,000 from AQAP to recruit new members and send them to Yemen. – *Voice of America, July 5; Reuters, July 6*

July 6, 2012 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle near the home of an anti-al-Qa`ida militiaman in Ramadi, killing six people. – *AFP, July 6*

July 6, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A U.S. drone killed at least 15 suspected Taliban militants in Zoi Narai village in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to the *New York Times*, "A drone fired four missiles at a compound owned by a Taliban commander named Rahimullah, said a local resident who was reached by telephone. The commander, who apparently was not present at the time of the strike, is thought to be a close aide of a local warlord, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, who controls a vast part of North Waziristan…" – *New York Times, July 6*

July 6, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen on motorcycles killed 18 people at a roadside restaurant in Baluchistan Province. A government official told the *New York Times* that Pakistanis attempting to travel to Europe with smugglers were the targets of the attack. – *New York Times, July 6*

July 7, 2012 (MAURITANIA): Abu Hafs al-Mauritani, who previously served as an adviser to Usama bin Ladin, was released from a prison in Mauritania. Reports suggested that his freedom came after he renounced his ties to al-Qa`ida and condemned the 9/11 attacks. As stated by the Associated Press, "He spent years in custody in Iran before being extradited to Mauritania in April." – *AP, July 9*

July 8, 2012 (UNITED KINGDOM): British authorities arrested an al-Qa`ida suspect after he traveled near the venue for the upcoming London Olympics five times in one day. The suspect, who is originally from Somalia, has only been identified as "CF." – *al-Arabiya, July 8*

July 8, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed six U.S. soldiers in Wardak Province. – *Fox News, July 8; CBS/AP, July 9*

July 8, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed five Afghan police officers in Bamyan Province. – *New York Times, July 9*

July 9, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Militants attacked a Pakistani army camp in Gujrat, Punjab Province, killing seven soldiers and police. – *Voice of America, July 12*

July 10, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): According to NATO, "An Afghan and coalition security force conducted an operation to detain the leader of a Taliban attack cell in Chimtal district, Balkh Province, today. During the operation a group of insurgents attacked the combined force. The force returned fire killing all of the attackers. As the force continued their mission, another armed individual approached and threatened them with his weapon. He was consequently engaged and killed by the security force. The operation resulted in the detention of one suspected insurgent and the seizure of multiple weapons." – *ISAF, July 10*

July 10, 2012 (SUDAN): The U.S. government released Ibrahim al-Qosi from Guantanamo Bay and repatriated him to Sudan. – *Miami Herald, July 10*

July 11, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber suspected of belonging to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula killed at least 10 Yemeni police cadets as they were leaving an academy in Sana`a. Some reports placed the death toll at 22. – *AP, July 11; Telegraph, July 11*

July 12, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Taliban militants opened fire on a police compound in Lahore, Punjab Province, killing nine officers. The militants escaped on motorbikes and in a vehicle. – *New York Daily News, July 12; Voice of America, July 12*

July 13, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber killed five people at the central mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State. – *Reuters, July 13*

July 14, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked a wedding reception in Samangan Province, killing prominent lawmaker Ahmad Khan Samangani and 22 other guests. General Mohammed Khan, the province's national security director, was also killed in the blast. The Taliban denied responsibility. – *Reuters, July 14; Voice of America, July 14*

July 14, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and coalition forces killed two Taliban militants in Wardak Province. According to ISAF, "both Qari Ziauddin, a senior Taliban leader, and Tor Gul, a weapons smuggler, were killed along with several other insurgents during the operation... Qari Ziauddin, also known as Ikram Jan, was the senior Taliban leader for Maidan Shahr district. He armed insurgent fighters, transported suicide bombers, coordinated the emplacement of improvised explosive devices, and personally led numerous attacks throughout the district." – *ISAF, July 16*

July 14, 2012 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle in the town of Muhrada, killing four people. The bomber apparently targeted the local military security headquarters. – *CBS/AP, July 14*

July 16, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban militants attacked a police station in Bannu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing one officer. Two of the militants were disguised in burqas. – *CNN, July 16*

July 16, 2012 (NIGER): The European Union approved a new mission to send experts to Niger to train its security forces to fight al-Qa`ida. "Increased terrorist activity and the consequences of the conflict in Libya have dramatically heightened insecurity in the Sahel," explained EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. According to Reuters, "About 50 international staff and 30 staff hired locally will be based in the mission's headquarters in Niamey, with liaison officers in Bamako, the capital of neighboring Mali, and Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania." – *Reuters, July 16*

July 18, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb destroyed 22 NATO supply trucks that were parked in Aibak, the capital of Samangan Province. Afghan authorities blamed the Taliban. – *Reuters, July 18*

July 18, 2012 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber attacked a national security building in Damascus, killing Syrian Defense Minister Daoud Rajha and Deputy Defense Minister Assef Shawkat. There were a number of other casualties. – *AFP, July 18*

July 18, 2012 (BULGARIA): A suicide bomber attacked an Israeli tourist bus at Burgas airport in eastern Bulgaria, killing at least six people. The bomber carried a fake driver's license from the state of Michigan in the United States. Israel blamed Lebanese Hizb Allah for the operation. – *BBC, July 19; CNN, July 19*

July 19, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to resume regular discussions on Afghanistan's peace process. – *Reuters, July 19*

July 19, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemeni Colonel Abdullah al-Maouzaei was killed by a car bomb outside his home in Aden. Al-Maouzaei, who survived three previous assassination attempts, was tasked with finding members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. – *AP, July 19*

July 21, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked the home of a militant commander in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing nine people. The commander, Mullah Nabi, is apparently part of a rival, pro-government militant group. Nabi was not injured. Some reports placed the location of Nabi's home in Kurram Agency. – *CNN, July 21; BBC, July 21; New York Times, July 21*

July 22, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan authorities said that six Afghans returning home from work at a NATO base in Wardak Province were captured by Taliban militants. The Taliban then executed five of the men and booby-trapped their bodies with explosives. The sixth man managed to escape. – *AFP, July 22*

July 22, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): An Afghan police commander and 12 junior officers defected to the Taliban in Farah Province. The commander, identified as Mirwais, was in charge of a 20-man checkpoint. Seven other officers who refused to defect were poisoned. According to reports, the

men took with them heavy weapons, radios and at least one U.S.-made armored Humvee. – *BBC, July 24; Reuters, July 24*

July 22, 2012 (IRAQ): Two car bombs exploded minutes apart in Mahmudiyya, 18 miles south of Baghdad. The blasts killed at least 10 people. – *AFP, July 21*

July 22, 2012 (IRAQ): Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), purportedly released a new audio message saying that the militant group was "starting a new stage." He said, "The first priority in this is releasing Muslim prisoners everywhere, and chasing and eliminating judges and investigators and their guards." Al-Baghdadi became head of the ISI in 2010. – *AFP, July 21*

July 23, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): According to ISAF, "An Afghan National Army soldier turned his weapon against International Security Assistance Force service members in northern Afghanistan today. ISAF troops returned fire killing the shooter. There were no ISAF fatalities. Afghan and coalition officials are investigating the incident." – *ISAF, July 23*

July 23, 2012 (IRAQ): A series of coordinated bombings and shootings occurred in more than a dozen Iraqi cities, killing more than 100 people. The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) later claimed responsibility. The violence marked the deadliest day in Iraq in more than two years. The attacks occurred one day after the ISI warned of a "new stage" of operations. As described by the Associated Press, "Many of Monday's attacks were stunning in their scope and boldness. They bore the hallmarks of al-Qaida, happening within a few hours of each other and striking mainly at security forces, government officials and Shiite neighborhoods. In one brazen assault, three carloads of gunmen pulled up at an Iraqi army base near the northeastern town of Udaim and opened fire, killing 13 soldiers before escaping…" – *AP, July 23; Voice of America, July 25*

July 24, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen fired on a convoy of NATO supply trucks in Khyber Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing two people. It was the first attack on NATO supply trucks since the Pakistan supply routes were reopened earlier in July. – *CNN, July 24*

July 25, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group gunmen stormed a factory and killed two Indian nationals in Maiduguri, Borno State. – *Reuters, July 26*

July 26, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO forces uncovered a large cache of drugs in Deh Rawud district, Uruzgan Province. According to ISAF, "During the operation, the security force seized 40,000 kilograms (18,181 pounds) of hashish seed and 425 kilograms (193 pounds) of processed hashish. The security force destroyed the seeds and drugs." – *ISAF, July 27*

July 26, 2012 (NORTH AFRICA): U.S. General Carter Ham, the head of Africa Command (AFRICOM), said that al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is likely "al Qaeda's best funded, wealthiest affiliate." According to Ham, "AQIM gained strength, they gained a lot of money through kidnapping for ransoms and they became a stronger and stronger organization." – *Reuters, July 26*

July 28, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants killed two NATO service members in eastern Afghanistan. The exact location of the attack, or the nationalities of the dead, was not immediately disclosed. – *Los Angeles Times, July 28*

July 28, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): NATO forces killed the Haqqani network militant Abdullah, also known as Tufan, in Paktia Province. According to ISAF, Tufan "was directly involved in the planning and execution of the June 20 suicide attack in the Khost capital that killed more than a dozen Afghan civilians." – *ISAF, July 31*

July 28, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and coalition forces arrested an explosives expert belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Kunduz Province. According to ISAF, "The arrested explosives expert managed the construction and placement of explosive devices and directed improvised explosive device attacks in northern Kunduz." – *ISAF, July 31*

July 28, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and coalition security forces killed Taliban financier Maulawi Abdul Rahman in Chimtal district, Balkh Province. Rahman facilitated the transfer of money, weapons and explosives to other insurgents. - *ISAF, July 28*

July 28, 2012 (PHILIPPINES): Philippine authorities arrested Ustadz Ahmadsali Asmad Badron, a founding member of the Abu Sayyaf Group. He was apprehended in the remote Tawi-Tawi islands in the southern Philippines. – *AFP, July 30*

July 28, 2012 (THAILAND): Thirteen armed militants attacked an army patrol in Pattani Province in southern Thailand, killing four soldiers. – *Bangkok Post, July 30*

July 29, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan security forces arrested several suspected Haqqani network members in Sabari district, Khost Province. – *ISAF, July 29*

July 29, 2012 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded in Karma, near Falluja. Fifteen minutes later, a group of gunmen opened fire on the Karma police station, killing four people. – *AP, July 29*

July 30, 2012 (SYRIA): A new report in the *Guardian* newspaper said that "scores of foreign jihadists have crossed into Syria from Turkey in the past two weeks." The report quoted a smuggler who said, "There have been Tunisians, men from Uzbekistan too and from Pakistan." – *Guardian, July 30*

July 30, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Shaker Masri, a 28-year-old U.S.-born citizen of Syrian descent, pleaded guilty to planning to travel to Somalia to fight with al-Shabab. Masri was arrested in August 2010 while preparing to leave for Somalia. The Chicago man faces nearly 10 years in prison. – *Chicago Tribune, July 30*

July 30, 2012 (NIGERIA): Two suicide bombers attacked police posts in Sokoto, killing two people. The Boko Haram group claimed responsibility. – *ANP/AFP, August 1*

July 31, 2012 (IRAQ): Twin car bombs exploded minutes apart in central Baghdad, killing at least 19 people. Once first responders rushed to the scene, at least two suicide bombers disguised as police officers entered a nearby police station and tried to free two al-Qa`ida prisoners. The suicide bombers were killed by police. – *Reuters, July 31*

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